

Text and Context

Professor: Jason Richards
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Course: ENGL 285.01 & 02
 Time: 8:00-9:15 & 9:30-10:45 TR
 Semester: Fall 2015
 Room: 304 Clough

Course Description

This course emphasizes the close reading of literary texts in relation to their cultural contexts. In order to expose students to a variety of texts/contexts, our readings will cover a wide range of American literature and literary genres. We'll begin by analyzing how Edgar Allan Poe's short stories as well as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* record the horrors of historical haunting, antebellum racial anxieties, and aristocratic decline. Then we'll read Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*—the first novel published by an African American woman—which exposes the brutalities of indentured servitude in the North. Next we'll consider how the poetry of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson reflects the gendering of the national body before turning to Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*, an icy meditation on primitive life and environmental determinism. We'll then read Edith Wharton's *Summer*, a gripping story of female isolation and paternalism, and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, a devastating critique of the American Dream. After that, we'll tackle Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God*, a tale of depravity and violence in rural Tennessee, and Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*, a fast-paced portrait of decadence in 1980s New York. A few other texts will be sprinkled in along the way. Note: This course assists prospective majors and minors in acquiring the necessary tools for middle- and upper-division classes in English.

Required Texts

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (Penguin)
 Harriet Wilson, *Our Nig* (Penguin)
 Jack London, *The Call of the Wild* (Dover)
 Edith Wharton, *Summer* (Signet)
 Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (Penguin)
 Cormac McCarthy, *Child of God* (Random House)
 Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (Random House)
Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory (Penguin)

Grading

Participation/Professionalism	15%
Short Paper 1 (4-5 pages)	25%
Short Paper 2 (4-5 pages)	25%
Research Paper (8-10 pages)	35%

A = 100-94; **A-** = 93-90; **B+** = 89-87; **B** = 86-84; **B-** = 83-80; **C+** = 79-77; **C** = 76-74;
C- = 73-70; **D+** = 69-67; **D** = 66-64; **D-** = 63-60; **F** < 60

Participation/Professionalism: While I will often begin class with a lecture, this course relies heavily on discussion. You are expected to have all the readings done for the day they are assigned and come prepared to discuss them, and you must always bring the text(s) we are discussing to class. Participation will be evaluated in terms of quantity and quality. Part of your participation grade includes quizzes, which are **unannounced** and given at the beginning of class. **If you are late or absent on a quiz day, you cannot make up the quiz. If you miss or perform poorly on a quiz, you can compensate for it by participating more in class.** Quizzes must be done on paper with clean edges. Finally, a lack of professionalism (e.g., not following course policies, rude behavior, and so on) will negatively affect this portion of your grade.

Email Policy: **The best way to address questions about our class is by meeting in person.** I am always happy to talk with you during my office hours, by appointment, or after class. That said, I am available by email for **simple and succinct** queries. I typically respond to email once a day between 9am-5pm Monday-Friday. If you do need to email, here are some rules to follow:

- Email is not the place to discuss grade concerns or negotiate any kind of special request
- Email is not the place to seek feedback on your writing or ideas; that must be done in person
- Do not email at the last minute (e.g., the night before an assignment is due) asking for help
- Do not email if you plan to visit during office hours; I'll be there, unless otherwise stated
- Do not email about your absences, unless you are missing two or more classes in a row

Appointments: If you cannot meet with me during my office hours or after class, we can set up an appointment at a time that is mutually convenient. If you need to make an appointment, please plan to do so **at least 24 hours in advance.**

Electronic Devices: No laptops, tablets, cell phones, etc. allowed in the classroom. **Texting is expressly forbidden.**

Attendance: While I expect you to attend every class, you are allowed two absences during the semester. After two absences, every additional absence will lower your final grade by one percentage point (e.g., 80% becomes 79%, and so on). If you miss more than six classes, you will fail the course. **Note: If you do miss class, please don't contact me to ask what you missed. Instead, you should exchange contact information with other classmates and ask them what we covered in class.**

Tardiness: Please do not come late to class. Tardiness disrupts the flow of class and distracts other students. If you have a scheduling conflict, you are advised to drop the class. Tardiness will lower your participation/professionalism grade.

Papers: You will write two short papers and one research paper for this course. You will receive a handout for each paper.

Mode of Submission: Papers are due at the beginning of class. All papers must be in 12-point Times New Roman font, double spaced, with 1-inch margins on the top and bottom and **1.25-inch margins on the sides.** Please use printer ink that produces a copy dark enough to be easily legible. Place your name, instructor's name, course number, and date in the upper left-hand

corner of the first page. Your last name and page number should appear in the upper right-hand corner of all pages. Do not include a title page. Place your title above the text on page one and double space above and beneath it. Your title should not be underlined. Be sure to staple your paper. You may lose points for not following these guidelines. **Note: I do not accept papers by email.**

Submission of All Work: All major assignments are integral to the goals of the course. Failure to complete any major assignment will result in a grade of F for the course.

Intellectual Honesty: All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without the instructor's prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Students are advised against posting their work on the internet since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. Students are advised to maintain drafts of their work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Clear evidence of plagiarism (failure to use quotation marks around verbatim or copied language, failure to adequately paraphrase, and failure to cite the source of quoted, paraphrased, or borrowed text and ideas), regardless of the Council hearing outcome, may likewise result in failure of the course. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult me.

Disability Issues: Students with documented disabilities should meet with me at the beginning of the semester to discuss appropriate accommodations. Please contact the office of Student Disability Services for more information. In all cases, it is your responsibility to provide me with an official letter from SDS.

Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1

Aug 27: Introduction

Week 2

Sept 1: Poe, "Ms. Found in a Bottle" (handout)

Sept 3: Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher" (handout)

Week 3

Sept 8: Poe, "The Black Cat" (handout)

Sept 10: Poe, "Hop-Frog" (handout)

Week 4

Sept 15: Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, Preface & Chapters 1-5 (pages 1-85)

Sept 17: *The House of the Seven Gables*, Chapters 6-10 (pages 86-158)

Week 5

Sept 22: *The House of the Seven Gables*, Chapters 11-16 (pages 159-252)

Sept 24: *The House of the Seven Gables*, Chapters 17-21 (pages 253-319)

Week 6

Sept 29: Wilson, *Our Nig*, Preface and Chapters 1-7 (pages 1-43)

Oct 1: Wilson, *Our Nig*, Chapters 8-12 (pages 44-72)

Week 7

Oct 6: Dickinson, Poems (handout)

Oct 8: Whitman, Poems (handout); **Paper 1 Due**

Week 8

Oct 13: London, *The Call of the Wild*, Chapters 1-4 (pages 1-31)

Oct 15: *The Call of the Wild*, Chapters 5-7 (pages 31-62)

Week 9

Oct 20: **Fall Break**

Oct 22: Wharton, *Summer*, Chapters 1-7 (pages 1-69)

Week 10

Oct 27: *Summer*, Chapters 8-12 (pages 70-125)

Oct 29: *Summer*, Chapters 13-18 (pages 126-94)

Week 11

Nov 3: Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, Act 1 (pages 1-51)

Nov 5: *Death of a Salesman*, Act 2 & Requiem (pages 52-112)

Week 12

Nov 10: Plath and Sexton, Poems (handout)

Nov 12: Hayden and Lorde Poems (handout); **Paper 2 Due**

Week 13

Nov 17: McCarthy, *Child of God*, Chapters 1-21 (pages 1-67)

Nov 19: *Child of God*, Chapters 22-38 (pages 68-135)

Week 14

Nov 24: *Child of God*, Chapters 39-52 (pages 136-97)

Nov 26: **Thanksgiving**

Week 15

Dec 1: McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, Chapters 1-3 (pages 1-53)

Dec 3: *Bright Lights, Big City*, Chapters 4-7 (pages 54-118)

Week 16

Dec 8: *Bright Lights, Big City*, Chapters 8-12 (pages 119-82)

Dec 10: **Research Paper Due by Noon (leave in my office mailbox: 311 Palmer)**