

American Literature and the Return of Nationalism

ENGL 2316.01, Fall 2016 | MWF 2:10pm-3pm | Garland Hall 119D

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With Donald Trump as the Republican nominee for U.S. President and Britain voting to leave the European Union, 2016 has been something of a banner year for the return of nationalism. While they are different phenomena, Trump and Brexit remind us that nationalism is a set of political imperatives, perhaps, masquerading as a patriotism otherwise assumed to be apolitical. From this vantage point, the upcoming presidential election can be seen as a struggle over various symbolic representations of the United States of America. This course is a survey of a national literature and, with the developments in nationalism under which it is being taught, our discussions will pay particular attention to how American Literature contributes to and challenges definitions of the nation from the Civil War to World War II. In doing so, we will discuss literature's capacity to define and critique aesthetic form, capitalism, racism, settler-colonialism, and sexism, among many other issues. We will read for these concerns by thinking not just about novels, short stories, essays, and poems on their own, but rather in their larger literary, historical, political, and philosophical contexts. There will be a rigorous reading schedule, in addition to two formal papers, and a number of informal writing assignments to support this inquiry. Writers include Harriet Jacobs, Herman Melville, W.E.B. Du Bois, Djuna Barnes, and Gwendolyn Brooks. These texts suggest possibilities and limits for the definition of the U.S. and its place in the world.

Required Texts

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Dover Thrift, 1995) ISBN: 978-0486284996

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Dover Thrift, 2001) ISBN: 978-0486419312

Henry James, *Daisy Miller* (Penguin, 2007) ISBN: 978-0141441344

W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Norton, 1999) ISBN: 978-0393973938

Jean Toomer, *Cane* (Norton, 2011) ISBN: 978-0-393-93168-6

Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (New Directions, 2006) ISBN: 978-0811216715

Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha* (Third World Press, 1992) ISBN: 978-0883780619

These books are available for purchase at the Vanderbilt Bookstore. You can also buy these books elsewhere, but make sure you're buying the editions listed above. They are also on reserve at the Central Library.

All other course readings will be posted on our course website. Unless instructed otherwise, print out a hard copy of assigned electronic readings to bring to class.

REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Presentation	15%
Midterm paper	20%
Final paper	25%
Responses	20%
Participation	20%

Presentation

Each student will sign up to give one 5-7 minute presentation at the beginning of a class of her choosing. You can approach the presentation in a number of ways, but the general purpose should remain the same: to provoke and invite a robust class discussion. You may want to walk us through a possible reading of the text, provide context about historical events that the text engages, or discuss how this work fits in with other works by the same author. All of these approaches should lead to at least one or two open-ended questions that we can discuss as a class. In addition to giving the presentation, you are required to turn in a one-page précis of your presentation the evening before you are to present. In this précis, you should provide a summary of your remarks, write out your discussion questions, and cite any sources you used while crafting your presentation. Do not forget to do the précis!

Responses

You will write seven responses of 250-500 words over the course of the semester. There are fifteen weeks in the semester, so you should be turning in a response every other week. Your response should engage with one of the texts we are reading for that week either on its own or in conversation with other works we have read. You should always be referencing particular passages of texts in your responses and should cite those references parenthetically in the text.

For the first six weeks of the course, I will provide a few questions that you may want to consider in your responses, though you are welcome to write on whatever you'd like. My questions, I hope, will provide a model for the types of questions you will learn to ask of American literature. Your responses should be turned in at the end of class in hard copy. I will grade responses on a check, check plus, check minus scale. I encourage you to reference your responses during class discussion.

Midterm Paper

Near the middle of the semester you will write a formal paper of 5-7 pages that either takes up a topic of your own choosing or responds to one of several prompts I will provide. Either way, the midterm paper requires you to analyze intensively one or two course texts. I will provide more details about this assignment as it approaches. For now, know that you will be graded on your ability to develop a coherent argument that is related to course texts and topics. By coherent argument, I mean that your major claims are well supported with textual evidence and that your writing is easily understood.

Final Paper

The course will culminate with a formal paper of 5-7 pages on a topic of your own design. Most broadly, the paper should consider an aesthetic, historical, and/or political relationship between several literary works related to the course. You are encouraged to be in conversation with scholarly sources in your paper.

We will discuss the paper assignment in greater depth after midterm. In the meantime, you may want to consider using your responses and presentation to help lead you toward a topic, or to be fluent in the area that you would like to write on.

Participation

This is a discussion-based course, so come to class prepared to be an active member of the discussion. To be an active member of discussion, you'll need a firm grasp of the assigned readings, questions you have about the material, and respect for the comments and questions of your classmates.

Conferences

You are required to meet with me one-on-one once this semester to discuss the course or your writing. I strongly encourage you, however, to meet with me more often. Drop in during my office hours or, make an appointment with me.

POLICIES

Attendance

Come to every class on time with the assigned readings and note-taking materials. More than three unexcused absences will adversely affect your overall course grade. Arriving late or not bringing your text to class will also count against you. If you know you will be absent in advance for a university sanctioned reason, contact me ahead of time.

Deadlines

All assignments must be turned in by announced deadlines. If this does not seem possible for a particular assignment, you should contact me well in advance so we can come up with a solution.

Screens

I ask that you not use computers, tablets, cell phones, or any other electronic devices during class. Since you won't be using these items, they should be put away during class time. You will be notified of occasional exceptions to this policy.

Email

Email is the best way to schedule an appointment with me or to ask me questions about the course material. Sometimes – especially near paper deadlines – it may take me more than 24 hours to get back to you, so plan accordingly. I prefer you to use professional email etiquette,

meaning that you use salutations, punctuation, and complete sentences. An emoji every now and again won't hurt anyone, though.

The Writing Studio

Your writing will benefit from a visit to the Writing Studio. Writing Studio consultants can help you with all aspects of academic writing at any stage of the writing process. I know, because I take my writing there. Make an appointment at one of their two locations – in 1801 Edgehill or the Ingram Commons – by using their online scheduler. (vanderbilt.edu/writing)

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious transgression and, as such, cases of plagiarism will be handed over to the Honor Council. That said, plagiarism can be difficult to define. Be rigorous about citing any sources you consult while working on assignments for this class. If you have questions about what is and isn't plagiarism, please don't hesitate to ask me. For more about academic integrity at Vanderbilt visit vanderbilt.edu/academicintegrity.

SCHEDULE

Week 1	<u>Getting Acquainted</u>
W, 8/24:	Introductions
F, 8/26:	Toni Morrison, excerpt from <i>Playing in the Dark</i> [online]
Week 2	<u>The Slave Narrative</u>
M, 8/29:	Frederick Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>
W, 8/31:	<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>
F, 9/2:	<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>
Week 3	<u>The Insurrection</u>
M, 9/5:	Herman Melville, <i>Benito Cereno</i> [online]
W, 9/7:	<i>Benito Cereno</i>
F, 9/9:	Harriet Jacobs, <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i>
Week 4	<u>(Im)possibilities of Personhood</u>
M, 9/12:	<i>Incidents in the Life</i>
W, 9/14:	<i>Incidents in the Life</i>
F, 9/16:	Harriet Beecher Stowe, excerpt from <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> [online]
Week 5	<u>Poetic Labor</u>
M, 9/19:	Walt Whitman, selected poems [online]
W, 9/21:	Emily Dickinson, selected poems [online]
F, 9/23:	Rebecca Harding Davis, "Life in the Iron Mills" [online]

- Week 6 The New Woman and Realism
M, 9/26: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper" [online]
W, 9/28: Writing Workshop
F, 9/30: Henry James, *Daisy Miller*
- Week 7
M, 10/3: *Daisy Miller*; James, excerpts from "The Art of Fiction" [online]
W, 10/5: Class Cancelled
F, 10/7: Class Cancelled – **Midterm Paper Due**
- Week 8:
M, 10/10: Sui Sin Far, "In the Land of the Free" [online]
W, 10/12: Zitkala Sa, "Impressions of an Indian Childhood" and "The Soft-Hearted Sioux" [online]
F, 10/14: Classes Cancelled – Fall Break
- Week 9:
M, 10/17: Colonial Education - II
W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*; Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* [online]
W, 10/19: *The Souls of Black Folk*
F, 10/21: *The Souls of Black Folk*
- Week 10:
M, 10/24: The New Negro Renaissance - I
Alain Locke, "The New Negro"; James Weldon Johnson, "Preface" to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*; Hughes, selected poems; Countee Cullen, selected poems; Claude McKay, selected poems [online]
W, 10/26: Hughes, Cullen, and McKay continued
F, 10/28: *FIRE!!* [online]
- Week 11:
M, 10/31: The New Negro Renaissance - II
Class Cancelled
W, 11/2: Jean Toomer, *Cane*
F, 11/4: *Cane*
- Week 12
M, 11/7: Modernism - I
VOTE TOMORROW; Gertrude Stein, "Objects"; H.D., "Oread"; Ezra Pound, "In a Station in the Metro"; T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"; Marianne Moore, "Poetry" [online]
W, 11/9: William Faulkner, "The Bear" [online]
F, 11/11: Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*; T.S. Eliot's Introduction
- Week 13:
M, 11/14: Modernism - II
Nightwood

W, 11/16: *Nightwood*
F, 11/18: *Nightwood*

Thanksgiving Break

Week 14: Moving Forward
M, 11/28: Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha*
W, 11/30: *Maud Martha*
F, 12/2: *Maud Martha*

Week 15: Wrapping Up
M, 12/5: Conferences/Writing Workshop
W, 12/7: Paper Due