

## English 337: Study of a Major Author—William Faulkner

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Section 001            10:30-11:20 MWF            200 Clark Hall

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### Introduction:

This course examines the life and work of William Faulkner during the most prolific period of his artistic career. Beginning with short stories published in *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Scribner's* that comprise the bulk of *The Unvanquished* (1938) and ending with *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), this course explores the historical narratives, artistic influences, and personal struggles that shaped the texts that form the heart of Faulkner's oeuvre.

In addition to the aforementioned novels and pertinent examples of Faulkner's private correspondence, public comments, and paid work as a Hollywood screenwriter, class participants will read *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* [*The Wild Palms*] (1939), *The Hamlet* (1940), and *Go Down, Moses* (1942).

### Required Materials:

- *The Unvanquished*
- *Absalom, Absalom!*
- *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* [*The Wild Palms*]
- *The Hamlet*
- *Go Down, Moses*
- *Intruder in the Dust*

All of the above texts can be purchased at the WVU Bookstore. Important note: we will be using and referring to the Vintage International editions of these texts in this course. If you choose to order your books from an online retailer, please be sure to order these editions.

### Course Objectives:

- To explore the primary influences, formal characteristics, major themes, and socio-cultural significance of William Faulkner's long fiction
- To practice finding, evaluating, incorporating, and responding critically to scholarly sources on the life and work of William Faulkner
- To become familiar with the argumentative threads that shape Faulkner studies

- To construct incisive arguments about Faulkner’s writing that engage with this critical discourse
- To support these arguments with well integrated and properly cited quotations from and paraphrases of pertinent primary and secondary sources

### **Assignments:**

#### Overview:

Each student enrolled in this course will complete three short “*précis and response*” papers of 500+ words in response to self-selected essays by Faulkner scholars, compose a 10-15-page final research essay that explores one or more of the primary course texts in critical and cultural context, and compile a portfolio of new and revised writing that will determine 80% of his or her final grade. **Failure to complete any one of these assignments will constitute failure of the course.** All assignments must be printed, not handwritten, in 12-point Times or Times New Roman, double-spaced, and properly documented in either MLA or Chicago style. **Late work will not be accepted unless prior arrangements have been made and approved by Dr. Germana. Emailed assignments will not be accepted at all.**

#### Précis and Response Papers:

During the semester you will complete three “*précis and response*” papers of 500 words or more. To complete these papers you must use the MLA bibliography in conjunction with online resources like JSTOR, Project MUSE, and/or EBSCOHost to find, read, summarize, and analyze a single work of substantial, peer-reviewed scholarship **on a topic pertaining to either one of the two texts we will have covered since the previous “*précis and response*” paper was due** (e.g., the first “*précis and response*” paper will be on either *The Unvanquished* or *Absalom, Absalom!*, the second on either *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]* or *The Hamlet*, and the third on either *Go Down, Moses* or *Intruder in the Dust*). Nota bene: your “*précis and response*” papers must summarize and respond critically to *a substantial work of literary criticism*, meaning an article in a peer-reviewed academic journal or an essay in a published collection, not a biographical sketch, encyclopedia entry, or the like.

Your paper should begin with a lucid characterization and summary of the argument made by the scholar or scholars whose work you found. This *précis* must then be followed by a critical response from you that engages with and responds to the author of the secondary source. Remember, you’re working toward constructing an argument of your own, so trashing the scholar for his or her writing style isn’t going to get you very far. Consider instead how you might respond as a scholar of equal caliber by asking and answering critical questions like: How has this scholar’s argument influenced your reading of the text? What has he or she overlooked, in your opinion? Etc. The goal in the response is to *demonstrate* how the scholarly source influences your interpretation of the primary text. Finally, you must provide a bibliographic citation of the article you found in either MLA or Chicago format. Tentative grades and suggestions for revision and/or further inquiry will be provided in response to each paper.

You are encouraged but not required to organize your research around developing theme over the course of the semester.

Possible topics of inquiry include but are by no means limited to:

- **Faulkner in Hollywood**—Faulkner first began working as a contract writer and scene doctor for MGM in May of 1932, and he would work on and off for MGM, Universal Studios, Twentieth-Century Fox, RKO, and Warner Bros. through April of 1954. Even though he despised the film industry (he once referred to Hollywood as “the only place on earth where you can get stabbed in the back while you’re climbing a ladder” (qtd. in Blotner 320)), the work he did in Hollywood influenced his fiction in several ways. What do scholars say about this influence, and how is it manifested in the text(s) you read?
- **Faulkner in Translation**—Faulkner’s fiction has been translated into many languages over the years, often by noted authors in their own right (for example, did you know that *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* [*The Wild Palms*] was translated into Spanish by Jorge Luis Borges in 1940?) What does the scholarship on translations of Faulkner’s fiction reveal?
- **Faulkner’s Primary Influences**—Faulkner once told students enrolled in a freshman English class at the University of Mississippi in Oxford that the four greatest influences on his fiction were the Old Testament, Herman Melville, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Joseph Conrad. However, this does not exhaust the list of Faulkner’s many influences, which include such diverse sources as Sir James Frazer’s study of mythology and religion, *The Golden Bough*, and the recently discovered plantation diary of Francis Terry Leak that inspired the climax of *Go Down, Moses*. According to his critics, to what ends does Faulkner deploy and re-imagine these sources?
- **Faulkner and the Environment**—Although Faulkner’s exploration of environmental issues is most apparent in *Go Down, Moses*, it is not the only place in his fiction where they play a significant role. What do contemporary scholars of literature and the environment say about Faulkner’s fiction, and why does it matter?
- **Faulkner and the Magazines**—Faulkner may have considered his magazine fiction “trash,” but the periodical context in which many of Faulkner’s stories appeared would have encouraged his readers to interpret these stories in certain ways. How does the periodical context inform these texts, and what do Faulkner scholars say about the relationship between Faulkner’s “potboilers” and his literary pursuits?

### Final Research Essay:

The final research essay (10-15 pages) should be your crowning achievement in this course. A detailed description of this assignment will be provided around midterm, but the gist is pretty straightforward. You must develop a thesis that is informed by your secondary research and support this thesis with evidence from the primary source or sources you choose to examine. **No fewer than three secondary sources are required.** You may use any of the articles you analyzed in your “précis and response” papers, but be forewarned: simply plunking your analysis of the secondary source(s) from these documents into your paper whole cloth is ill advised if not reckless. As you might expect, the revision process is necessary here. Also, you will more likely than not need to supplement your research with additional secondary sources depending upon the topic you choose. I will be happy to assist you in this process, just so long as you ask me for help sooner rather than later.

The final research essay offers you a chance to develop one or more of the topics you explored in the “précis and response” papers. So, for example, a “précis and response” paper on Faulkner’s Hollywood years might turn into a broader exploration of Faulkner’s commentary on American popular culture and/or incorporation of cinematic conventions in *Intruder in the Dust*. The options are almost limitless, so you are encouraged to meet with me at any point in the semester to discuss your argument and possible methodology.

Don’t worry about possible overlap with the “précis and response” papers. Building a usable archive is what doing research is all about, so you shouldn’t feel guilty about tapping into your own archive for the final research essay.

#### Portfolio:

Final grades will be primarily determined by portfolio. The portfolio you hand in at the end of the semester will contain a brief critical introduction to the portfolio (1-2 pages), **revised** copies of the three “précis and response” papers, and the final draft of the required 10-15-page final research essay. What matters most, in the end, is the quality of the work contained in the portfolio. In other words, if you received a tentative grade of 75% on one of your “précis and response” papers, but you then clearly revised and improved upon the content and delivery of this essay in your portfolio, then your portfolio grade will reflect the improvement. **Note: you are strongly advised to make revisions to your research reports as the semester progresses.** It is much easier to make minor changes along the way than wait until the last minute to make major changes at that time.

#### Participation:

You are expected and required to keep up with the reading and come to class prepared to discuss the reading due for each class meeting. To make it through all the course material we have to maintain a steady but not unreasonable average of 60 pages of reading per class meeting or 180 pages a week. Be forewarned: some of the course material is quite challenging and will test your limits, if not try your patience. Expect to be challenged, but expect also to rise to the challenge and reap the rewards. Just be sure to give yourself enough time to wade through the material before coming to class.

Venturesome claims and critical observations about Faulkner’s writing are always welcome, but participation in the class discussions may also mean asking questions about the form, content, or significance of what you’ve read on any given day. If you found a passage confusing or a narrative technique obfuscating, undoubtedly others will have shared your experience and will appreciate any questions you ask about them. After all, Faulkner’s narrators will often mislead their audiences by withholding information and/or obscuring the truth (as they have defined it), and thus the reader’s confusion plays an integral role in the dramatic action. A similar complexity characterizes Faulkner’s approach to social constructions like race, which he often approaches by way of racist characters. Here, a question about where the performative critique ends and Faulkner’s opinion begins or how (and whether) the ends justify the means would be most welcome.

#### **Grading System:**

Final portfolio consisting of critical introduction, revised “précis and response” papers, and final research paper:	80%
Participation:	20%

All assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale with grade ranges as follows:

+	100-98	+	89-88	+	79-78	+	69-68		
A	97-92	B	87-82	C	77-72	D	67-62	F	59-0
-	91-90	-	81-80	-	71-70	-	61-60		

Evaluation Criteria for Portfolio:

**A (90-100):** Each of the documents contained in the portfolio demonstrates perceptive and thoughtful responses to the assignments. They are well organized with excellent development of ideas, and they reflect the writer’s command of appropriate rhetorical strategies. The prose is vigorous and fresh, and the writer is clearly in control of the standard conventions of academic writing.

**B (80-89):** Each of the documents contained in the portfolio fulfills the assignment and shows evidence of clear thought and good planning. Each essay is well organized with good supporting details. The writing is fluent, and there are only minor errors in the mechanics that do not interfere with reading.

**C (70-79):** Each of the documents contained in the portfolio fulfills the assignment. The writing of each essay is adequately developed, clear, and coherent with relatively few errors in usage and mechanics, but the writer fails to demonstrate any particular strength which would distinguish above-average work.

**D (60-69):** Each of the documents contained in the portfolio fulfills its respective assignment but exhibits major problems in writing. Each essay may have difficulty with the presentation of ideas (e.g., lack of a clear thesis, weak organization, poor development of ideas, or inappropriate diction, poor spelling) or be marred by enough errors in the mechanics of writing to seriously distract the reader.

**F (59 or below):** Each of the documents contained in the portfolio is so poorly presented that it fails to fulfill the assignment. Each essay fails to present basic ideas, either because of poor organization and lack of clarity or because the writing reflects a lack of control over the basic conventions of standard academic usage.

**0:** Any one of the documents contained in the portfolio represents dishonest work by the student, principally the use of ideas or writing that are clearly not one’s own work. Refer to the West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog for the University policy on Academic Dishonesty.

**Attendance Policy:**

Because participation counts for 20% of your grade you have to show up and contribute. After all, you can't participate in the discussion if you aren't here. Also bear in mind that some days (e.g., workshop days) count more than other days since your classmates will depend on you more to help them fulfill their assignments. You can miss up to five non-workshop, non-assignment-due dates without penalty. Choose your five days judiciously. Subsequent absences will drop your attendance and participation grade one letter grade per day. A failing grade for the course will be recorded for any student with ten or more absences.

**If you are more than five minutes late for class, you will be counted absent.**

**Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism is the (mis)representation of someone else's work as your own. It may be direct (e.g., not documenting a quoted source) or indirect (paraphrasing ideas, thoughts, etc. without due credit). In either case, neglecting to acknowledge sources for outside material is a serious offence and may result in failure for the assignment and possibly the course. Please see me if you are not sure about how to use or acknowledge certain materials.

**Social Justice Statement:**

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veterans' status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Disability Services (293-6700).

**Additional Resources:**

The WVU Writing Center is committed to helping students become better writers. For more information about the Writing Center, including its hours, how to make appointments, and additional resources, visit their webpage at <http://english.wvu.edu/centers-projects/writing-center>.

The Downtown Library also hosts a term paper clinic throughout the semester. Scheduling details TBA.

## Contact Information:

If you have questions about the course or concerns you would like to share privately with me, please contact me via email at Michael.Germana@mail.wvu.edu. **But please do not write to ask me for lecture notes or to request a summary of what you missed on any given day.** If you miss class and need class notes, ask one of your classmates.

You are also invited and encouraged—but not required—to follow me on Twitter at @michael\_germana. If you already have a Twitter account but want to keep your personal account private, you can always create a second one solely for academic use. **When I tweet about this course, I will use the hashtag #ENGL337. You can and should do likewise if you would like to share something with the class.**

## Course Calendar:

### January:

- 14 M Introduction/s
- 16 W Faulkner's Nobel Prize Award Speech (handout) + assignment overview
- 18 F *The Unvanquished*, "Ambuscade" and "Retreat"
- 23 W *The Unvanquished*, "Raid"
- 25 F **library instruction session—class meets in room 136 of the Downtown Library**
- 28 M *The Unvanquished*, "Riposte in Tertio" and "Vendée"
- 30 W *The Unvanquished*, "Skirmish at Sartoris" and "An Odor of Verbena"

### February:

- 1 F *Absalom, Absalom!*, chapters 1-2
- 4 M *Absalom, Absalom!*, chapters 3-4
- 6 W *Absalom, Absalom!*, chapters 5-6
- 8 F *Absalom, Absalom!*, chapter 7
- 11 M *Absalom, Absalom!*, chapters 8-9
- 13 W **précis and response one due**
- 15 F *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]*, pages 3-68
- 18 M *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]*, pages 69-120
- 20 W *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]*, pages 121-191
- 22 F *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]*, pages 192-233
- 25 M *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]*, pages 234-end
- 27 W *The Hamlet*, "Flem," chapters 1-2

### March:

- 1 F *The Hamlet*, "Flem," chapter 3
- 4 M *The Hamlet*, "Eula," chapters 1-2
- 6 W *The Hamlet*, "The Long Summer," chapter 1
- 8 F *The Hamlet*, "The Long Summer," chapter 2
- 11 M *The Hamlet*, "The Peasants," chapter 1
- 13 W *The Hamlet*, "The Peasants," chapter 2
- 15 F **précis and response two due**
- 18 M *Go Down, Moses*, "Was"

20 W *Go Down, Moses*, “The Fire and the Hearth”

22 F **student conferences—class does not meet**

---Spring Recess---

April:

1 M *Go Down, Moses*, “Pantaloon in Black” and “The Old People”

3 W *Go Down, Moses*, “The Bear,” chapters 1-3

5 F *Go Down, Moses*, “The Bear,” chapter 4-5

8 M *Go Down, Moses*, “Delta Autumn” and “Go Down, Moses”

10 W *Intruder in the Dust*, chapters 1-3

12 F *Intruder in the Dust*, chapters 4-6

15 M *Intruder in the Dust*, chapters 7-9

17 W *Intruder in the Dust*, chapters 10-11

19 F **précis and response three due** + screening of 1949 MGM film *Intruder in the Dust*

22 M screening of *Intruder in the Dust* continued

24 W **research day—class meets in the Downtown Library**

26 F **final research essay peer workshop one: draft of introduction and thesis due**

29 M **final research essay peer workshop two: complete paper draft due**

May:

1 W **final research essay peer workshop three: revised draft and complete bibliography due**

3 F **final portfolio (critical introduction + revised précis and response papers + completed final research essay) due** + course evaluations