

ENGLISH 205: LITERATURE AND CULTURE
†THE UNDEAD SOUTH†
Coastal Carolina University • Fall 2013

*There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are Dreamt of in your philosophy.*

William Shakespeare, Hamlet

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Office Hours: TR 12:15-3:00 p.m., 4:30-4:45 p.m., and *by appointment*

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COURSE DESCRIPTION (from the University Catalog):

English 205: Literature and Culture. (3 credit hours) (Prerequisites: ENGL 101 and 102 with a **C or better**). This course is designed to provoke and cultivate students' imaginative and critical understanding of literature in various cultural contexts. Texts (in poetry, drama, fiction, and/or creative nonfiction) will vary by section. Each section will examine compelling themes, styles, and cultural arguments within their literary, historical, and philosophical contexts.

COURSE INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will be able to write effectively in formal and informal situations for a variety of audiences. They will be able to use research skills in a paper. Assessment: out of class research and composition of an essay that incorporates secondary sources into the student's thesis
2. Students will be able to analyze texts orally on a variety of texts. Assessment: the participation on panels or in groups where oral analysis of a text or a literary theme is demonstrated; in-class and out-of-class compositions.
3. Students will be able to analyze a text's historical and cultural contexts, and to explain the historical development of genres beings studied.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

The student who successfully completes English 205 should be able to:

1. Read and analyze literature in terms of what it says about the importance of cultural issues, such as race, class, and gender;
2. Read literary criticism and compose a research paper that reflects an understanding of criticism and incorporates ideas from that criticism into the student's own ideas;
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the course concepts through successful completion of quizzes, a research paper, as well as midterm and final exams.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Yusef Komunyakaa, *Dien Cai Dau* (Wesleyan University Press)

Natasha Trethewey, *Native Guard* (Mariner)

Judy Jordan, *Carolina Ghost Woods* (Louisiana State University Press)

Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (Vintage)

Ron Rash, *Serena* (Ecco)

RECOMMENDED DVDs:

Tim Burton, *Big Fish*

David Fincher, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*

COURSE OVERVIEW AND SPECIFIC TOPIC: "THE UNDEAD SOUTH"

English 205 is a multi-genre course that focuses on learning how to conduct detailed analysis of a variety of literary works in connection with an understanding of their cultural "situatedness." In what ways do cultural contexts influence literary texts, and vice versa? By reading, thinking, and writing about a diversity of literary texts, you will sharpen your skills as a critical thinker and writer. You will engage with the principal stylistic and thematic elements of a range of literary genres, including fiction, poetry, and film. English 205 will improve your ability to communicate

with clarity and purpose, in both informal and formal terms, and the skills you master will help you throughout your personal and professional lives.

More specifically, our course will focus on figures of the “undead” in literature and other media of the American South, with emphasis on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When William Faulkner wrote that “The past is never dead. It’s not even past,” he probably wasn’t thinking about zombies. But Faulkner’s famous sentiment calls to mind diverse, pervasive forms of undeadness—ethnic, political, economic, historical—in the literatures and cultures of the American South. “**THE UNDEAD SOUTH**” considers regional and transregional representations of death and deathways, from funeral and mourning rites, to the terrifying affect of posttraumatic flashbacks, to figures returned from beyond the grave. We see dead people...ghosts, vampire, zombies, among others, who materialize in the South’s complex stories and histories. We’ll also examine corpses unburied, decayed, desecrated, dismembered, yet still filled with life, be it with the mass of microorganisms drawing sustenance from decomposing bodies or the psychical afterlife of remembering the dead. How does the changing nature of the undead South speak to national and global transformations? How do new media alter our perception of death and the possibilities of immortality? Our syllabus includes fiction, poetry, folklore, film/television, and other cultural artifacts: popular music, photographs, paintings, blogs, architectures, and monuments. By examining a variety of undead forms, we will investigate the following questions...and more: Why and how do these fictional or poetic or cinematic undead unsettle us? Do undead figures in literary works reflect the underlying fears and tensions of the surrounding culture? That is, how does history (especially conflicts over race, class/economics, gender, sexuality, and regional or national identity) haunt these undead narratives and images? In the wake of widespread scientific skepticism, why do modern and contemporary societies *still* seem so haunted by the presence of the undead?

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE:

+NOTE: You will be required to watch the assigned films **on your own time** at some point **before** we begin discussing a given movie in class. Your “homework” for these classes will include viewing closely the assigned film outside of class. When possible, I will place copies of our films on reserve at the Circulation Desk in Kimbel Library, but you may well want to rent or purchase your own copy so that you can see this on your own schedule and in your own setting. I recommend the rent/purchase option especially if you plan to write on one or more of our assigned movies for your research essay.

***WEEK 1:**

T 8/20: COURSE INTRODUCTION

R 8/22: **THE AFTERLIVES OF EDGAR ALLAN POE POE POE POE POE POE**
Poe, “The Black Cat” (1843); Christopher K. Coleman, “The ‘Most Haunted’ Myrtles” from *Dixie Spirits* (2002)

***WEEK 2:**

T 8/27: Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839)

R 8/29: Poe, “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” (1845)

***WEEK 3:** GULLAH LORE: DEAD/NOT DEAD

T 9/3: “Daid Aaron, I,” “Daid Aaron, II,” and “The Army of the Dead,” from John Bennett, *The Doctor to the Dead* (1946)

*R 9/5: *Class visit by Dr. Matthew White (Assistant Professor of Music, Coastal Carolina University) to talk about his work on the St. Helena Gullah Spirituals Project

***WEEK 4:** DEVILISH DELTA BLUES

T 9/10: Robert Johnson, “Cross Road Blues” (1936), “Hellhound on My Trail” (1936), and “Me and the Devil Blues” (1937)

R 9/12: Johnson, blues lyrics

***WEEK 5:** UNDEAD POETICS I: NATASHA TRETHERWEY

T 9/17: Natasha Trethewey, *Native Guard* (2006)

- R 9/19: Trethewey
- *WEEK 6:** **UNDEAD POETICS II: YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA**
 T 9/24: Yusef Komunyakaa, *Dien Cai Dau* (1988)
 R 9/26: Komunyakaa
- *WEEK 7:**
 T 10/1: Trethewey + Komunyakaa
 R 10/3: **MIDTERM EXAM (25%)**
- *WEEK 8:** **UNDEAD POETICS III: JUDY JORDAN**
 T 10/8: Judy Jordan, *Carolina Ghost Woods* (2000)
 R 10/10: Jordan
- *WEEK 9:** **MAGIC REALISM AND THE MYTHIC SOUTH**
 T 10/15: Daniel Wallace, *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions* (1998)
 +Tim Burton (director), *Big Fish* (2003)
 R 10/17: Wallace / Burton
- *WEEK 10:** **GRAPHIC STORIES: UNDEAD COMICS**
 T 10/22: *Haunted Tank* (1975) and *The Walking Dead* (2003)
 *R 10/24: *Guest Lecture: "The South and New Media" by Southern Studies expert Dr. Taylor Hagood (Associate Professor of English, Florida Atlantic University)
- *WEEK 11:** **LIVING HELL: THE END(LESSNESS) OF THE ROAD**
 T 10/29: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (2006)
 R 10/31: McCarthy
- *WEEK 12:**
 T 11/5: McCarthy
 R 11/7: **BLOOD MEMORY: THE SCOTS-IRISH TRAGEDY**
 Ron Rash, *Serena* (2008)
- *WEEK 13:**
 T 11/12: Rash
 R 11/14: Rash
- *WEEK 14:** **FLIPPING THE SCRIPT: ADAPTING TO THE PROCESS OF UN-DYING**
 T 11/19: F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" (1922)
 +David Fincher (director), *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008)
 R 11/21: Fitzgerald + Fincher
- T 11/26: **THANKSGIVING BREAK**
 R 11/28: **THANKSGIVING BREAK**
- *WEEK 15:**
 †T 12/3: Fitzgerald + Fincher
FORMAL RESEARCH ESSAY (7-8 pages; 30%)
- †**Official Exam Period: FINAL EXAM (25%)**