

## AML 2410: Irony and Authenticity in the Writing of David Foster Wallace

**Instructor:** Robert Short

**Section:** 3698

**Schedule:** MWF 8

**Classroom:** MAT 0115

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**Hours:** MWF 9 & by appt.

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#### Course Description:

When David Foster Wallace committed suicide in 2008, he left his most difficult and personally-significant project unfinished: a novel possessed of a seemingly naïve conviction. Wallace believed that fiction not only remains relevant but that it occupies a unique position in American lived experience: it could connect human beings in a meaningful capacity.

Reacting to postmodern fiction's dire proclamations—the death of authenticity and of the “universal”—Wallace's writing represents an unabashed attempt to engage with the contemporary American subject afflicted by ironic disaffection and psychic isolation. This course examines the assumptions of Wallace's writing and evaluates its challenge to the postmillennial reader.

#### Goals and Objectives, Expectations, and a Word on Methodology:

Students are advised that keeping pace with the assigned readings for this course will require a sustained effort throughout the entire semester but that the reading load is by no means unmanageable. With regard to the writing assignments, several of our meetings—especially those immediately preceding an essay's deadline—will focus on the grammatical and rhetorical aspects of composition. Additionally, I am always available for assistance during my office hours and via email. I will also provide exhaustingly prolix commentary on your returned work. *Your* end of the bargain will be to complete the assigned readings by their due dates, be prepared to discuss that material thoughtfully and in detail, and to submit competent writing about what you've read. (“Competently” should be understood here as both “mechanically clear, concise, and consistent with the conventions of Standard Written English and MLA style” and “in such a way that makes a coherent, logical argument supported by convincing evidence from the text.”)

You'll write three papers for this course. The first two are literary analyses or close readings, each with a required length of five pages. The third is an 8- to 10-page research essay on a topic of your choice. You are encouraged to incorporate elements of the literary analysis essays into your final research paper; however, different from your first papers, your final essay will require additional outside sources. If you've never written these types of papers before, don't panic; there will be ample class time dedicated to their formal requirements.

#### Required Texts:

Boswell, Marshall. *Understanding David Foster Wallace*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2003. Print.  
Burn, Stephen J., ed. *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2012. Print.  
Wallace, David Foster. *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. New York: Little, Brown, 1999. Print.  
---. *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays*. New York: Little, Brown, 2005. Print.  
---. *The Pale King*. New York: Little, Brown, 2011. Print.

## Assignments and Grading:

**Required Assignments/Essays:** Your final grade consists of the sum of your weighted scores on five assignments: two “Literary Analysis” (or “Close Reading”) essays, a five- to ten-minute presentation of your final project, the final Research Project itself, and a class-participation grade. NB: If it becomes clear at any point during the semester that the reading assignments have been neglected (eg the class is unprepared to answer basic questions about the reading for that day’s discussion), I reserve the right to institute quizzes that will replace the class participation component in the calculation of your final grade. The weight of each assignment is as follows:

Literary Analysis Essay #1	20%
Literary Analysis Essay #2	20%
Presentation of Research	10%
Final Research Project (Essay #3)	40%
Participation in Class Discussion	10%
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	100%

**Paper Specifics:** As noted above, you’ll write three papers for this course. The focus of your first two essays should be on a thorough explication of a short passage in one of the assigned readings. **This means that the strength of the argument you construct about the significance of that passage in the larger work will largely determine your grade.** The research paper will be graded similarly but will additionally consider how well your argument incorporates and is supported by the scholarship of others. Again, the specifics of these papers will be thoroughly explained as you receive their respective prompts. As regards the 6000-word requirement for this course: the first paper will meet or exceed 1500 words; the second, 2000; the final, 2500.

One final note about the Research project: you must turn in a proposal for this project to me **no later than November 7<sup>th</sup>. Without a proposal in my hand by November 7<sup>th</sup>, I will not accept the essay.**

### General Essay Rubric:

**A:** This essay is excellent. This essay presents a strong, well-structured, logical and engaging argument that is thoroughly supported by specific, thoughtful details and examples. This essay is free of grammatical mistakes and misspellings. In this essay, the author shows a deep engagement with the subject matter and expresses a desire to continue his or her argument.

**B:** This essay is good. This essay makes an argument that is supported by details and examples. This essay contains few, if any, grammatical and spelling errors. In this essay the author engages with the topic and expresses a desire to continue the argument.

**C:** This essay is average. This essay makes a claim (in other words, it has a thesis), but this essay does not support the claim with details or examples or fully elaborate on this claim. This essay may contain

a significant number of spelling and grammatical mistakes. The structure of this argument may interfere with the effectiveness of the claim.

**D:** This essay is below average. This essay does not make an argument. This essay may contain a significant number of spelling and grammatical mistakes that interfere with the author's meaning.

**E (an F at most other institutions):** This essay is poor. It fails to make an argument. It does not address the assignment for the essay. This essay contains a significant number of spelling and grammatical mistakes. This essay contains significant structural issues that interfere with a reader's comprehension.

**Grading Scale:**

A	4.0	93-100	930-1000		C	2.0	73-76	730-769
A-	3.67	90-92	900-929		C-	1.67	70-72	700-729
B+	3.33	87-89	870-899		D+	1.33	67-69	670-699
B	3.0	83-86	830-869		D	1.0	63-66	630-669
B-	2.67	80-82	800-829		D-	0.67	60-62	600-629
C+	2.33	77-79	770-799		E	0.00	0-59	0-599

## Course Policies:

**Attendance:** You are allowed five unexcused absences without penalty. Beyond that, your grade drops one letter for each day absent. If you are absent in the course of representing the university in an official capacity (eg a sporting event), follow your organization's procedure for communicating the details of this absence to me. Prolonged absences, even for medical reasons, will not be excused. The discussion of reading and writing assignments is a key part of the course content.

**Mode of Submission:** All papers are to follow MLA conventions. **Staple your papers before submitting them.** Your final drafts should be polished and presented in a professional manner.

**Plagiarism Policy:** Plagiarism is a serious violation of the Student Honor Code. The Honor Code prohibits and defines plagiarism as follows:

Plagiarism: A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to):

- a. Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution.
- b. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student. (University of Florida, Student Honor Code, 15 Aug. 2007 <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honorcode.php>)

University of Florida students are responsible for reading, understanding, and abiding by the entire Student Honor Code. All acts of plagiarism will result in failure of the assignment and may result in failure of the entire course. Plagiarism can occur even without any intention to deceive if the student fails to know and employ proper documentation techniques. Unless otherwise indicated by the instructor for class group work, all work must be your own. Nothing written for another course will be accepted.

**Academic Honesty:** As a University of Florida student, your performance is governed by the UF Honor Code, available in its full form at <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/students.html>. The Honor Code requires Florida students to neither give nor receive unauthorized aid in completing all assignments. Violations include cheating, plagiarism, bribery, and misrepresentation. Visit <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/procedures/academicguide.php> for more details.

**Graded Materials:** Students are responsible for maintaining duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course and retaining all returned, graded work until the semester is over. Should the need arise for a re-submission of papers or a review of graded papers, it is the student's responsibility to have and to make available this material.

**Classroom Behavior:** Please keep in mind that students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. Diverse student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you

demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own. The bottom line: I will not tolerate any behavior that compromises our classroom learning environment. Use your head. Be respectful. If you have questions about what that means, come see me.

**Students with Disabilities:** The University of Florida complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students requesting accommodation should contact the Students with Disabilities Office, Peabody 202. That office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

**Final Grade Appeals:** if you wish to contest your final grade in this course, you may file an appeal by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant. Be aware that grade appeals can result in a higher, unchanged, or *lower* final grade.

**Language Required by the University:** This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For information, see:  
<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/advisinggened.html>.

“Your instructor has high standards for the written work you turn in. Take another close look at [the course description] section of the syllabus. I know that many professors say this kind of hard-ass stuff at the beginning of the term but don’t actually mean it or enforce it as the course wears on. I, however, do mean it, and I will enforce it—feel free to verify this with students who’ve taken other classes with me. If you want to improve your academic writing and are willing to put extra time and effort into it, I am a good teacher to have. But if you’re used to whipping off papers the night before they’re due, running them quickly through the computer’s Spellchecker, handing them in full of high-school errors and sentences that make no sense, and having the professor accept them ‘because the ideas are good’ or something, please be informed that I draw no distinction between the quality of one’s ideas and the quality of those ideas’ verbal expression, and that I will not accept sloppy, rough-draftish, or semiliterate college writing. Again, I am absolutely not kidding. If you won’t or can’t devote significant time and attention to your written work, I urge you to drop [AML 2410] and save us both a lot of grief.”

—From David Foster Wallace’s Syllabus for his “English 67” course at Pomona College  
**Course Schedule:**

Week 1:

8/22: Introduction to class. Syllabus distribution. Wallace: “‘100-word Statement’ on the ‘millennium.’”

8/24: Boswell: “Cynicism and Naïveté: Modernism’s Third Wave,” Burn: “Chronology,” “David Foster Wallace: A Profile” (Katovsky), “Interview with David Foster Wallace” (Jacob).

Week 2:

8/27: Wallace [CTL]: “Big Red Son.” **Drop/add ends.** Kim: “Postmodernism in a Nutshell (haha).”

8/29: McLaughlin: “Post-Postmodern Discontent: Contemporary Fiction and the Social World,”

Wallace [CTL]: “Certainly the End of *Something* or Other, One Would Sort of Have to Think,” “Some Remarks on Kafka’s Funniness from Which Probably Not Enough Has Been Removed.”

8/31: Wallace [CTL]: “Authority and American Usage,” In-class listening: Garner/Wallace NPR Interview.

Week 3:

9/3: **Holiday. No class.**

9/5: Wallace [CTL]: “The View from Mrs. Thompson’s,” “How Tracy Austin Broke My Heart.”

9/7: Wallace [CTL]: “Consider the Lobster,” “Joseph Frank’s Dostoevsky.”

Week 4:

9/10: Wallace: “Just Asking<sup>4</sup>,” [CTL]: “Up, Simba.”

9/12: Wallace [CTL]: “Host” (pp. 275-312). **Peer review: First essay—bring draft to class.**

9/14: Wallace [CTL]: “Host” (pp. 312-343).

Week 5:

9/17: Wallace: “Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young<sup>4</sup>.” **Peer review: First essay—bring FINISHED draft to class.**

9/19: Burn: “David Foster Wallace: In the Company of Creeps” (Stein), Boswell: “*Brief Interviews with Hideous Men: Interrogations and Consolidations.*” **First essay due.**

9/21: Wallace [BI]: “A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life,” “Death Is Not the End,” “Forever Overhead,” “Brief Interviews with Hideous Men [I].”

Week 6:

9/24: Wallace [BI]: “Yet Another Example of the Porousness of Certain Borders (XI),” “The Depressed Person,” “The Devil Is a Busy Man [I].”

9/26: Wallace [BI]: “Think,” “Signifying Nothing,” “Brief Interviews with Hideous Men [II].”

9/28: Wallace [BI]: “*Datum Centurio*,” “Octet.”

Week 7:

10/1: Wallace [BI]: “Adult World (I),” “Adult World (II),” “The Devil Is a Busy Man [II].”

10/3: Wallace [BI]: “Church Not Made with Hands,” “Yet Another Example of the Porousness of Certain Borders (VI),” “Brief Interviews with Hideous Men [III].”

10/5: Wallace [BI]: “Tri-Stan: I Sold Sisse Nar to Ecko,” “On His Deathbed, Holding Your Hand, the Acclaimed New Young Off-Broadway Playwright’s Father Begs a Boon.”

Week 8:

10/8: Wallace [BI]: “Suicide as a Sort of Present,” “Brief Interviews with Hideous Men [IV],” “Yet Another Example of the Porousness of Certain Borders (XXIV).”

10/10: Burn: “David Foster Wallace Winces at the Suggestion That His Book Is Sloppy in Any Sense” (Donahue), “An Expanded Interview with David Foster Wallace” (McCaffery), “Young Writers and the TV Reality” (Fry).

10/12: Burn: “The Lost Years and Last Days of David Foster Wallace” (Lipsky), In-class watching: Wallace interview.

Week 9:

10/15: Wallace [TPK]: "Editor's Note," §§1-5.

10/17: Wallace [TPK]: §§6-8. **Peer review: Second essay—bring draft to class.**

10/19: Wallace [TPK]: §§9-14.

Week 10:

10/22: **Peer review: Second essay—bring FINISHED draft to class.**

10/24: Wallace [TPK]: §§15-21.

10/26: Wallace [TPK]: §§22 (through p. 200). **Second essay due.**

Week 11:

10/29: Wallace [TPK]: §§22-23.

10/31: Wallace [TPK]: §24.

11/2: Wallace [TPK]: §§25-28. **Proposal workshop—bring proposal draft to class.**

Week 12:

11/5: Wallace [TPK]: §§29-33.

11/7: Wallace [TPK]: §§34-40. **Final paper proposals due.**

11/9: **Homecoming. No class.**

Week 13:

11/12: **Holiday. No class.**

11/14: Presentation of materials from the Wallace Archives at UT Austin's Harry Ransom Center.

**Presentation workshop—bring your research results to class.**

11/16: Wallace [TPK]: §§41-45.

Week 14:

11/19: Wallace [TPK]: §§46-50.

11/14: **Holiday. No class.**

11/16: **Holiday. No class.**

Week 15:

11/26: Discussion: *The Pale King*.

11/28: **Presentation of research.**

11/30: **Peer review: Final essay—bring draft to class.**

Week 16:

12/3: Wallace: "This Is Water."

12/5: **Final papers due.**

*"Esse quam videri."* –Cicero

"One cannot both be sincere and seem so." –André Gide