



A polyvocal narrative that's part Faulkner à la midcentury Manhattan's jazz epicenters, part early 90's avant-pop crossed with Black Mountain poetics, and part ghost, Joe Milazzo's genre-bending *Crepuscule W/ Nellie* boldly re-imagines the relationship between fact and fiction.

-CLAIRE DONATO, author of *Burial*

TEACHING GUIDE

CREPUSCULE W/ NELLIE

by Joe Milazzo

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Recommended Classes:

- Creative Writing
- American/Contemporary Literature
- Experimental Fiction / Writing
- Historical Fiction / Speculative Fiction
- Narrative Studies
- Gender Studies / Women's Studies
- African-American Studies
- The Novel

Keywords:

Narrative / New Novel / Modernism / Experimental / Prosody / Jazz / Stream-of-consciousness / History / Historical Fiction / Double consciousness / Addiction / Marriage / Domestic Fiction / Melodrama / Aesthetics / Metafiction / Psychological Narrative / Point of View / Voice / The 50s / Race / White Privilege / Gender / Literary / Epistolary

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Following from E.M. Forster's definition of flat versus round characters, would you describe the characters in this books as the former or the latter? Do such distinctions even make sense within the space of this book? Do you feel the characters in this *Crepuscule W/ Nellie* change (or grow) over the course of their own narratives, or that your relationship to them alters as you spend more time witnessing their behaviors?
2. Who — or what — is Frank? What is his position with respect to the novel's narrative (its sequence of events, its drama, even its suspense)?
3. How is this novel simultaneously "speculative" and "historical"? Alternately, if you had to categorize this novel by genre, how would you do so?
4. Do the page headings that frame each of the novel's sections help or hinder your appreciation of the novel's structure?

5. How is race most present in this novel? Where do you feel race exerting pressure upon the narrative, or influencing (perhaps even determining) the choices being made within the novel — choices being made by both its characters and its author?
6. How is gender most present in this novel? Where do you feel gender exerting pressure upon the narrative, or influencing (perhaps even determining) the choices being made within the novel — choices being made by both its characters and its author?
7. Read several passages from the novel aloud, making sure to read examples of the novel's various prosodic modes: dialogic exchanges, epistolary forms, stream-of-consciousness narration, etc. How do these voiced/embody readings alter your understanding of the book, if at all?
8. Does *Crepuscule W/ Nellie* have a narrator? How would you describe the novel's engagement with issues of point of view?
9. Why do you think Nellie remains loyal to Monk? Does Monk deserve her loyalty (and love)?
10. Why does the novel never provide the reader access to Thelonious Monk's consciousness? Or does it? If so, how, and under what circumstances?
11. What does The Baroness desire?
12. How important is it that readers of *Crepuscule W/ Nellie* have some preexisting knowledge of jazz and/or the life stories of the actual people on whom these fictional characters are based?

Possible Assignments:

- At one point in the novel, Nellie muses to herself: "You had to know those closest to yourself not all to yourself, but through other people." Describe a situation in which a (relative) stranger helped you to better understand someone very close to you.
- Write your own fan fiction about an artist you love who you feel is worthy of greater recognition.
- Identify something within or about *Crepuscule W/ Nellie* that made you uncomfortable. Write through that discomfort. Describe it as thoroughly as possible, holding the novel accountable for creating that discomfort. Ask "Why?"
- Ekphrasis. Write something while listening to Monk's music.
- Write a scene or story in which someone who is typically silenced makes himself / herself heard, or in which someone who typically talks and talks and talks is silenced.
- Write a scene or a story that consists of nothing but dialog, with no attributions, no description, no stage directions; only what it said providing any sense of how it is said.