

## THE POSTMODERN AMERICAN NOVEL

**ENGL 4020S, American Literature Seminar**, is an intensive study of major figures and ideas in a select period of American Literature. This particular instance of the course will focus on a particular group of American novels written after World War II. We will attempt to understand what makes these works *postmodern* and what, exactly, the label *postmodern* means. (3)

By the end of this course, you will be able to do the following:

- Identify and explain the ideas and methods most common to postmodern literature.
- Recognize the socio-historical influences that bear on the development of postmodern literature.
- Evaluate postmodern texts for their literary and cultural merits.
- Analyze contemporary literature through the lens of postmodernism.
- Convincingly write and speak about postmodernism and postmodern literature.

### COURSE TEXTS

- Nabokov, *Pale Fire*. ISBN 978-0-679-72342-4.
- Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*. ISBN 978-0-06-091307-6.
- Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*. ISBN 978-0-440-18029-6.
- Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*. ISBN 978-0-684-82477-2.
- Barthelme, *The Dead Father*. ISBN 978-0-374-52925-3.
- Morrison, *Beloved*. ISBN 978-1-4000-3341-6.
- *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. ISBN 978-1-60329-024-1.

### ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

- *Participation* (10%): A daily grade based on engagement with the class.
- *Novel reflections* (20%): 500-word informal responses to the assigned novels.
- *Article critiques* (20%): 500-word formal critiques of scholarly articles.
- *Term paper* (25%): 8-10-page researched argumentative analysis of one course text. Due 11/26.
- *Final Exam* (25%): Comprehensive essay exam. 12/13.

You must successfully complete *all of the above* to pass this class. Unless otherwise noted, work written outside of class and submitted for a grade should conform to academic standards. Assignments should be cleanly typed and free of spelling, mechanical, and grammatical errors. Papers suffering from excessive problems will be returned without a grade.

EXCELLENT			A	93-100%	A-	90-92%
GOOD	B+	87-89%	B	83-86%	B-	80-82%
ADEQUATE	C+	77-79%	C	73-76%	C-	70-72%
POOR	D+	67-69%	D	63-66%	D-	60-62%
UNACCEPTABLE			F	0-59%		

Please note that simply meeting the basic requirements for any assignment will never earn you better than an *adequate* grade. **Good** and **excellent** work go well beyond the expectations.

**Midterm grades** will be posted to Banner by **10/23** and calculated using the following percentages:

Reflections (40%) + Critiques (40%) + Participation (20%)

**Final grades** will be posted to Banner by **12/17** and calculated using the following percentages:

Reflections (20%) + Critiques (20%) + Term paper (25%) + Final exam (25%) + Participation (10%)

## CLASS PREPARATION

This is a reading intensive course. You will be reading a complex novel every two weeks, as well as assigned articles. You will need to plan accordingly to allow yourself sufficient time to thoroughly and actively read every text before class. This is not a lecture class; it is a seminar in which we all will discuss the texts we've read to further explore them and to help one another develop a deeper understanding of them. As with any college course, *for every 1 hour you spend in class, you should expect to spend 2 to 3 hours studying for the class outside the classroom*, even when you do not have a major assignment due.

## ATTENDANCE

Enrollment in this class implies a commitment to attend regularly and punctually and to participate fully. Your active engagement in this class is critical to its success and your learning. By participating, rather than simply listening, you add to what the class as a whole learns and you enhance your own learning. *This course requires all members of the class to participate in open discussions of the texts we read.* You should always come to class prepared to share your opinion, listen to the opinions of others, and to ask questions relevant to the topic of discussion.

## LATE & INCOMPLETE WORK

In-class writing and other participatory work cannot be made up, regardless the excuse. Assigned work is due by the beginning of the class on the designated due date, unless otherwise indicated. Talk to me if you anticipate difficulty meeting any deadline. *Do not presume to turn in an assignment late without my consent.* Novel reflections and article critiques may be turned in up to one week late for a reduced grade.

## REVISIONS

You are permitted and encouraged to revise any of the major assignments as often as you wish: the more you revise, the better your semester grade will be and the better writer you will become. *To revise an assignment, you must meet with me outside of class to discuss it first, and you must work on it with someone in the Writing Center for at least one session.* If you effectively and substantively improve the assignment, I will award the revision a grade and average the two grades together. Even though I will never lower the original grade, your submission of a revision in no way guarantees an improved grade. *Assignments that originally received a 0 for any reason or that were turned in late may not be revised.* Revisions of novel reflections and article critiques must be turned in within one week after receiving a grade. Revisions of the term paper must be turned in by **Monday, December 10**.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

As students of Xavier University, you are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. Behavior that violates the standards described on page 15 of the University Catalog is not acceptable and shall be grounds for disciplinary action. Plagiarizing and cheating will not be tolerated. See the *College of Arts and Sciences Academic Integrity Policy* and the *English Department Plagiarism Statement* on Blackboard for details. All written work will be checked using [TurnItIn.com](https://turnitin.com), an originality checking system. The consequences for plagiarism will be determined on a case by case basis but will range from the student having to rewrite the assignment to the student receiving a F for the course. All violations of academic integrity will be reported to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

## WRITING CENTER

You are strongly encouraged to make use of the services provided by the Writing Center, located in the St. Joseph Student Center, where tutors offer individual assistance on a full range of writing strategies and concepts. Students with particular writing difficulties may be required to attend the Writing Center.

## DECORUM

Free discussion and inquiry are encouraged in this class. Classroom behavior is unacceptable when it interferes with my ability to instruct or students' ability to learn from that instruction. Unacceptable behavior in class includes but is not limited to entering late or departing early, using phones (smart or otherwise) or other devices, texting, bringing guests, talking while another person holds the floor, and

arguing in an uncivil way. Students whose behavior disrupts the class will be removed. Gentlemen will remove their hats before entering the classroom.

### **BLACKBOARD**

For this course we will use Blackboard, Xavier's e-learning system, to share ideas, information, and documents. Students enrolled in this course automatically have access to its Blackboard site at <http://blackboard.xula.edu>. You will be able to track your grades, follow the schedule, download reading materials, and submit written assignments as specified. You are responsible for checking this site regularly and following any directives provided. If you cannot access Blackboard, contact the Helpdesk.

### **EMERGENCY PLAN**

*In the event of an emergency closure of campus or an evacuation of the city, once you have reached a safe and secure location, send an email to [j.todd.la@gmail.com](mailto:j.todd.la@gmail.com) to let me know your location and your status. As per University policy, the closure of campus does not necessarily mean the cancellation of classes. If the campus is to be closed for more than 3 days, we will resume our class online, if possible. Be sure to take all course materials with you if you evacuate. Official emergency information can be obtained at **800-520-XULA** and <http://www.xulaemergency.com>.*

### **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Students requiring special assistance or consideration in order to meet academic requirements should advise the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences to the nature of their disability upon admission to Xavier or as soon as the need for assistance is known to exist. Students should also contact the Office of Disability Services to arrange access to services available.

### **OFFICE HOURS**

During my scheduled office hours, I am available in my office to meet with any student who wishes to do so. *I encourage you to speak with me about any concern or question you have about this class or other classes.* I do my best not to allow other commitments to interfere with my office hours; however, there will be times when I must attend a meeting during office hours. If I am not available when you need to speak with me, please try to see me whenever you are available. If I am in my office and not overly occupied by something else, I will be glad to speak with you. If meeting in person, for whatever reason, is not possible for you, please email me and I will respond as soon as I can.

### **EXPECTATIONS**

While the last two pages have explained what I expect of you for this class, you have a right to expect the following from me as your professor:

- To teach useful and effective ideas and concepts in an interesting and compelling way;
- To be open to questions and discussion in and out of class;
- To provide useful and timely grades and feedback on all coursework.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

This schedule is an approximation and subject to change as needed.

DATE	ASSIGNMENTS DUE	CLASS TOPICS
Mon 08/27	Barth & Borges.	Introductions.
Mon 09/03		<b>NO CLASS</b>
Mon 09/10	Nabokov. Reflection #1.	Nabokov, <i>Pale Fire</i> .
Mon 09/17	Hassan & Roth. Critique #1.	Nabokov, <i>Pale Fire</i> . Hassan, "Toward a Concept of PM"; Roth, "Writing American Fiction".
Mon 09/24	Pynchon. Reflection #2.	Pynchon, <i>The Crying of Lot 49</i> .
Mon 10/01	Leland. Critique #2.	Pynchon, <i>The Crying of Lot 49</i> . Leland, "Pynchon's Linguistic Demon".
Mon 10/08	Essays on Blackboard. Term paper topic.	What is postmodernism?
Mon 10/15	Vonnegut. Reflection #3.	Vonnegut, <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> .
Mon 10/22	Brown. Critique #3.	Vonnegut, <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> . Brown, "A Launching Pad of Belief".
Mon 10/29	Reed. Reflection #4.	Reed, <i>Mumbo Jumbo</i> .
Mon 11/05	Harde. Critique #4.	Reed, <i>Mumbo Jumbo</i> . Harde, "We Will Make Our Own Future Text".
Mon 11/12	Barthelme. Reflection #5.	Barthelme, <i>The Dead Father</i> .
Mon 11/19	McVicker. Critique #5.	Barthelme, <i>The Dead Father</i> . McVicker, "Donald Barthelme's The Dead Father".
Mon 11/26	Morrison. Term paper.	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> .
Mon 12/03	Davis.	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> . Review.
Thu 12/13	1:30 pm – 3:30 pm	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>

### IMPORTANT DATES

- Wed 08/29: Last day to add or change a course or section
- Fri 10/05: Last day to remove an "I"
- Tue 10/23: Mid-Semester Evaluations Due
- Fri 11/02: Last day to petition a "W" in a course
- Sat 11/10: Comprehensive Examinations for Seniors
- Fri 11/16: Last day to officially withdraw from the university
- Sat 12/08: Quiet Day
- Mon 12/17: Final Grades Due

## CLASS PARTICIPATION

10% of your grade for this class is based on your participation in discussion. Participating in discussion does not necessarily mean talking a lot or showing everyone else that you know or have studied a lot. Good discussion participation involves people trying to build on, and synthesize, comments from others, and on showing appreciation for others' contributions. It also involves inviting others to say more about what they are thinking. Some of the most helpful things you can do are call for a quiet interlude, bring a new resource to the classroom, or post an observation on-line. So there are multiple ways quieter learners can participate. Below are some specific behavioral examples of good participation in discussion.

- Ask a question or make a comment that shows you are interested in what another person says.
- Ask a question or make a comment that encourages another person to elaborate on something they have already said.
- Bring in a resource (a reading, web link, video) not covered in the syllabus but adds new information/perspectives to our learning.
- Make a comment that underscores the link between two people's contributions & make this link explicit in your comment.
- Use body language (in only a slightly exaggerated way) to show interest in what different speakers are saying.
- Summarize the conversation so far and/or suggest new directions and questions to be explored.
- Make a comment indicating that you found another person's ideas interesting or useful. Be specific as to why this was the case.
- Contribute something that builds on, or springs from, what someone else has said. Be explicit about the way you are building on the other person's thoughts.
- Make a comment on your CIQ that prompts us to examine discussion dynamics.
- When you think it's appropriate, ask the group for a moment's silence to slow the pace of conversation to give you, and others, time to think.
- Make a comment that at least partly paraphrases a point someone has already made.
- Make a summary observation that takes into account several people's contributions & that touches on a recurring theme in the discussion.
- Ask a cause and effect question; for example, "Can you explain why you think it's true that if these things are in place such and such a thing will occur?"
- Find a way to express appreciation for the enlightenment you have gained from the discussion. Try to be specific about what it was that helped you understand something better. Again this can be done online if this suits you better.

**Source:** Brookfield, Stephen. *Workshop Materials*. 11 Feb. 2012. Web. 12 Aug. 2012.

## ASSESSMENT

For each class session, you will receive a participation grade as follows:

✓+	<b>3pts.</b>	In class on time with good engagement.
✓	<b>2pts.</b>	In class on time with adequate engagement.
✓-	<b>1 pt.</b>	In class on time with no participation; or in class late; or in class but playing with phone or other device.
×	<b>0 pts.</b>	Not in class.

## NOVEL REFLECTIONS

For the first five novels we read for this class, you will write a 500-word informal reflection on your reading of the novel. These reflections are not to be summaries, nor are they to be literary analyses; rather, they are to be descriptions of your unique response to the story.

Such a response can take many forms. The suggestions that follow are only a few of the ways you can approach this assignment. You can also use one of the questions posed on the reading guides.

- Discuss how you felt as you were reading the novel. Were you confused? If so, try to figure out what confused you. Trace your steps back through the novel to find where you started to get lost. Consider if the author did this intentionally and, if so, why. Were you enrapt? If so, what pulled you in? What about the story kept you so engaged?
- Discuss how the novel or some part of it stirred up an old memory. What led you to make the connection between what happens in the book and what happened in your life. How did that connection affect your reading of the novel?
- Draw a connection between some part of the novel and something entirely outside of the novel. This might be something you've learned in another class or something you heard on the news or another book you're read or movie you've seen. Investigate the connection. What causes it and how does it affect your understanding of the novel?
- Pose a question about something in the novel and try to answer the question. This should not be a formal literary analysis, though. Don't analyze the theme or some symbol. Instead, ask yourself, why did the author chose to do X?

## ASSESSMENT

Each reflection will be worth up to 10 points and will be assessed using the rubric below.

	ENGAGEMENT	WRITING
<b>5</b>	The student demonstrates interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the book through original and insightful thinking.	The writing is clear and precise. No grammatical, mechanical, or spelling errors are present.
<b>4</b>	The student demonstrates interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the book but is not as original/insightful as above.	The writing is clear. A few grammatical, mechanical, or spelling errors may be present.
<b>3</b>	The student demonstrates interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the topic but fails to do so effectively.	The writing is sometimes vague or confusing. A number of grammatical, mechanical, or spelling errors are present.
<b>2</b>	The student shows little interest in gaining understanding of the topic, or the student simply summarizes the story.	The writing is sloppy. Many grammatical, mechanical, or spelling errors are present.
<b>1</b>	The student actively resists the possibility of gaining understanding of the topic.	The writing shows little, if any, control over Standard Edited English.

## SCHEDULE

Reflections must be posted to Blackboard before class on the day they are due.

- Mon 9/10:** Nabokov, *Pale Fire*
- Mon 9/24:** Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*
- Mon 10/15:** Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*
- Mon 10/29:** Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*
- Mon 11/12:** Barthelme, *The Dead Father*

## ARTICLE CRITIQUES

For most of the novels we read this semester, we will also look at some of the scholarly work on those novels. When one of these articles is assigned, you will write a 500-word formal critique of the article.

In a critique such as this, you need to follow a specific pattern. Your critique should have three parts: a properly formatted MLA-style bibliographic citation for the article; an objective summary; and a subjective evaluation. You needn't structure these critiques like an essay; instead, you should simply offer your summary and then your evaluation.

**Citation:** Provide an MLA-style bibliographic citation for the article. All necessary information should be available on the handout. Refer to the *MLA Handbook* for formatting instructions.

**Summary:** Although your summary should be as concise as possible, you need to describe the whole of the article. This should not be the kind of summary in which you simply step through the article ("He says this... Then he says this..."). It must be more analytical than that. You need to demonstrate that you understand not only what argument the author is making but how the author is making that argument. An effective way to begin your critique is like this: "In his essay 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,' Jacques Derrida argues...".

**Evaluation:** Your evaluation should make up the most of your critique. Here you consider what you've described objectively in the summary and offer your opinion on the argument and evidence given by the author. You needn't go through the article piece by piece here ("I agree with what she says in this paragraph... But I don't agree with what she says in the next paragraph..."). Your evaluation should be more holistic than that. You should begin with your overall evaluation of the author's argument and then provide your own argument in support of that evaluation.

## ASSESSMENT

Each critique will be worth up to 15 points and will be assessed using the rubric below.

	SUMMARY	EVALUATION	WRITING
<b>5</b>	Offers an objective and insightful analytical description of the argument. Demonstrates a strong understanding of the work.	Offers a clever and insightful assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the argument.	Writing is clear and precise. No errors are present.
<b>4</b>	Offers an objective and analytical description of the argument. Demonstrates a reasonable understanding of the work.	Offers an insightful assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the argument.	Writing is clear. A few errors may be present.
<b>3</b>	Offers an objective but non-analytical description of the argument. Demonstrates a surface level understanding of the work.	Offers an assessment of the argument that offers little original insight.	Writing is vague or confusing. A number of errors are present.
<b>2</b>	Offers a literal and cursory description of the argument. Demonstrates little understanding of the work in its entirety.	Offers no real insight into the argument or focuses evaluation on only part of the argument.	Writing is sloppy. Many errors are present.
<b>1</b>	Offers an incomplete or inaccurate description of the argument. Demonstrates no understanding of the work as a whole.	Fails offer any assessment of the argument or offers assessments that are illogical or invalid.	Writing shows little, if any, control over Standard Edited English.

## SCHEDULE

Reflections must be posted to Blackboard before class on the day they are due.

**Mon 9/17:** Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism"

**Mon 10/1:** Leland, "Pynchon's Linguistic Demon: *The Crying of Lot 49*"

**Mon 10/22:** Brown, "'A Launching Pad of Belief': Kurt Vonnegut and Postmodern Humor"

**Mon 11/5:** Harde, "Allegory, Iconoclasm, and Reverence in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*"

**Mon 11/19:** McVicker, "'Girls Talk' and the Displacement of the Logos"

## TERM PAPER

You will produce a term paper to demonstrate what you have learned about postmodern literature this semester. An assignment such as this should not be seen as just another task; it is meant to be the culmination of the knowledge and experience you have developed through this class. Your paper will need to be argumentative, thesis-driven, and research based. In addition to at least one primary text (selected from one of the novels we read this semester), you will need to incorporate an appropriate number of secondary sources (the work of other literary scholars).

### TOPICS

Your paper should follow one of these prompts:

- Investigate some historical component of one of our novels. Consider the factuality of the historical element. Consider how it is represented by the author. Consider the significance of this (mis)representation.
- Compare and contrast how two of our novels deal with the same theme, concept, issue.
- Analyze the narrative structure of one of our novels. What conventions does the author employ? What conventions does the author defy? To what effect? For what purpose?
- Analyze the use of some postmodern device in one of our novels.
- Other possibilities may be suggested for consideration.

### REQUIREMENTS

Your final paper must meet the following expectations:

- Begin with an interesting and original title;
- Have a strong, argumentative, and clearly understood thesis;
- Defend its central claim through insightful analysis of the primary text;
- Be effectively organized and well written;
- Be 8-10 typed pages (double-spaced with 1" margins; not including Works Cited);
- Be formatted according to MLA standards (document, citations, Works Cited page);
- Must be submitted to Blackboard by 11:59 pm on **Monday, November 26**.

*Please note that simply meeting the basic requirements for any assignment will never earn you better than an adequate grade. Good and excellent work go well beyond the expectations.*

### ASSESSMENT

Your essay will be worth 25% of your final course grade, assessed using the rubric summarized below, and given a grade based on a possible 100 points. A full version of the rubric can be found on Blackboard.

CRITERION	DESCRIPTION
<b>THESIS</b>	How identifiable, plausible, novel, sophisticated, insightful, clear is the thesis? How fully does the paper address the assignment requirements?
<b>EVIDENCE</b>	How well is evidence used to support each main idea? How effectively does the paper integrate quoted/paraphrased material? How critically does the author respond to those ideas in an analytical, persuasive manner?
<b>ANALYSIS</b>	Does the analysis pose new ways to think about the material? Does the work display critical thinking and avoid simplistic description or summaries of information? How deep an understanding of the ideas in the text(s) does the paper reflect?
<b>ARGUMENT</b>	Do all ideas in the paper flow logically? Is the argument identifiable, reasonable, and sound? How well does the author make connections to outside material to illuminate the thesis? Does the paper have an appropriate academic tone?
<b>MECHANICS</b>	How effective are syntax, grammar, and diction? Does the paper have the correct use of citation style? Are there spelling errors? Is the structure evident, understandable, appropriate for the thesis? How effective are the transitions?