

## **ENGLISH 253--SEMINAR IN PERIODS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE**

Spring 2016: San Jose State University  
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Hours: W 3:00-4:00 PM (and by appointment)

**Course Title:** "Modernism and/as Postmodernism"

**Code:** 29371

### **Course Description:**

Labels for literary periods often have murky origins, and then confound us by metamorphosing and even inverting their meanings. "Modernism" in literary study has meant the period mainly between the two World Wars, foreshadowed in Symbolism, Imagism, Cubism, Futurism, Vorticism, and Dadaism. Modernism was a revolt against realism and Naturalism. It was experimental, *avant-garde*, and difficult. It embraced the energies of modern technology and urban culture, while often reviling the deadness of modern life. Modernist poetics drew from the nascent science of psychology to create prose and poetry that emulated the flow of human consciousness (Joyce, Woolf, Eliot). American Modernists found kinship with French, Greek, Italian, Irish, and English writers, and often considered themselves part of an international movement that was "cosmopolitan." But in the 1950s and 1960s, Modernism was redefined by writers of Beat Literature, Magic Realism, and Theater of the Absurd, who cast their iconoclastic Modernist predecessors as cultural conservatives. "Postmodern" writers undercut Modernism's elitism and its (supposedly) naïve belief in unmediated meaning. After the 1980s, "Modernism" was also sometimes redefined as a literature of the clash between high and low culture, often characterized by misogyny, anti-Semitism, and racism. When did Modernism end? Has Postmodernism ended? What do the terms "Modernism" and "Postmodernism" mean—and to whom? Authors to be considered include Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound, Sherwood Anderson, e.e. cummings, W.C. Williams, H.D., Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, Jean Toomer, William Faulkner, Langston Hughes, John Steinbeck, Allen Ginsberg, Ursula K. Le Guin, John Barth, Jennifer Egan, and Anne Carson.

### **Texts:**

Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio*.  
Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse*.  
Blaisdell, *Imagist Poetry: An Anthology*.  
Carson, *Autobiography of Red*.  
cummings, *Selected Poems*.  
Egan, *A Visit From the Goon Squad*.  
Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems*.

Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*.  
Ginsberg, *Howl*.  
Le Guin, *Lathe of Heaven*.  
Malae, *Our Frail Blood*.  
Pound, *Selected Cantos*.  
Stein, *Tender Buttons*.  
Steinbeck, *The Pastures of Heaven*.  
Toomer, *Cane*.

### **Selected Useful Texts and Websites:**

Douglass, Paul. *Bergson, Eliot, and American Literature*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1986.  
Gillies, Mary Ann. *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1996.

——, and Aurelea Mahood. *Modernist Literature: An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007.

Hoffman, Michael J., and Patrick D. Murphy, eds. *Critical Essays on American Modernism*. New York: G.K. Hall, 1992.

Levenson, Michael. *A Genealogy of Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.

Miller, Tyrus. *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999.

[The Modernism Lab at Yale](#)

[The Virtual Classroom Glossary of Literary Terms \(Cambridge U\)](#)

[Glossary of Literary Theory \(U of Toronto\)](#)

### **Grading and Written Work:**

The purposes of assigned reading and writing in English 253 is to help you think creatively and improve your understanding, writing skills, and oral abilities. The MA Program have student learning outcomes (SLOs), which are related to the assignments below ([view SLOs](#)). Your course grade will be weighted in this manner:

Exercise in Criticism	20%	[SLOs 1, 3, 4]
Report ( <i>Includes Oral Presentation and Handout</i> )	20%	[SLO 6]
Reading Responses & Participation	20%	[SLOs 3, 7]
Seminar Paper (14-18 pp.) ( <i>Prospectus and Draft Required</i> )	40%	[SLOs 2, 3, 4]

I will certainly work with you when you have a schedule problem, but please make arrangements in advance. Late work may be lowered one full grade. See University [Policy on Academic Integrity](#) (strictures against cheating, copying, submitting work done in previous courses, and plagiarizing).

### **Description of Assignments:**

1. **Exercise in Criticism:** A 2-4 page report assessing a significant book, book chapter, or journal article that deals with the course theme.
2. **Introductory Report:** Make a presentation on one of the works assigned, offering a critical perspective supported by secondary source(s). The presentation is meant to serve as a prompt for discussion. Prepare a bibliography and any other appropriate items: chronology, pictures, charts, family trees, outlines, quotations, key terms, CD or cassette recordings, transparencies. Oral Report Length: 10-15 minutes. *Please* observe the time limit. If your handouts are extensive, you will not be able to cover everything in detail. *Please avoid simply reading what is on your handout*. Describe it, explain it, walk us through it quickly, but don't simply read it out loud. The oral report should be a demonstration of your mastery of the material through extemporaneous (however thoroughly planned) speech. Sign up for a date to make your presentation.
3. **Reading Responses & Participation:** Each week, on or before Tuesday—that is, the day *before* class—submit by email to the instructor a response to the reading for the next class session, including any pertinent questions. In class, find opportunities to contribute to the discussion and demonstrate understanding of the text. Try to find a way to make one original contribution to the course (in class or via the website) during the semester.
4. **Seminar Paper:** on a topic relating to Modernism and/or Postmodernism in American

literature. You must address one or more significant literary texts in 14-20 pages, with an appropriate bibliography (normally, at least ten items). Follow the *MLA Handbook*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. *Written prospectus, including bibliography, and rough draft required.*

**Extraordinary Spring Circumstance:**

The California Faculty Association is in the midst of a difficult contract dispute with management over salary issues. Higher pay for faculty is crucial to attracting and keeping better professors and improving the quality of your education. It is possible that the faculty union will picket, hold rallies, or perform other job actions during this semester, up to and including a strike. If the faculty are forced into any of these activities, we will try to keep you apprised and to minimize any disruption to your education. Students showing support for the faculty will be a very helpful factor in getting a quick settlement that benefits everybody. For more current information you can visit the California Faculty Association website at <http://www.calfac.org/>

**ENGLISH 253: SPRING 2016 CALENDAR**

- Feb. 3: Introduction to the Course: Bergson, Humanism, and Modernist Poetics.
- Feb. 10: Stein, *Tender Buttons* (1914). Blaisdell, *Imagist Poetry* (**foci**: Aldington, H.D., Hulme, Joyce, Lowell, Pound, Stevens, Williams)
- Feb. 17: Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems*.
- Feb. 24: Pound, *Selected Cantos*.
- \*\*Seminar Paper Prospectus (Proposal) Due\*\***
- Mar. 2: Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919).
- Mar. 9: Toomer, *Cane* (1923).
- Mar. 16: Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929).
- Mar. 23: Steinbeck, *Pastures of Heaven* (1932).
- \*\*Exercise in Criticism Due\*\***
- Mar. 30: **Spring Recess.**
- Apr. 6: Ginsberg, *Howl*. cummings, *Selected Poems*.
- Apr. 13: Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968).
- Apr. 20: Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971).
- \*\*Draft of Seminar Paper Due\*\***
- Apr. 27: Carson, *Autobiography of Red* (1998).
- May 4: Egan, *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (2010).
- May 11: Malae, *Our Frail Blood* (2013).
- May 19: **\*\*Seminar Paper Due\*\***