

Fall 2013
ENGLISH 4560-101 / 5560-101
THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD IN AMERICAN LITERATURE
Thematic Title: *Postmodern American Fiction*
TTh 3:30-4:45
Cudahy Hall 120

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Office Hours: MW 11:00 AM-1:00 PM or by appointment

“Postmodernism,” writes Gilbert Adair, “is, almost by definition, a transitional cusp of social, cultural, economic and ideological history when modernism’s high-minded principles and preoccupations have ceased to function, but before they have been replaced with a totally new system of values. It represents a moment of suspension before the batteries are recharged for the new millennium, an acknowledgment that preceding the future is a strange and hybrid interregnum that might be called the last gasp of the past.” This course traces the rise of “postmodernism” in postwar American literature and culture, as registered in several seminal novels of the period. We will investigate the various meanings and uses of this strange, seemingly oxymoronic concept—what can it mean to find oneself living *after* the present?—as well as investigate literary and critical resistance to postmodern aesthetics.

LEARNING GOALS

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and understand various formal characteristics of major texts in the postmodern American canon;
- Demonstrate understanding of the cultural, historical, and political contexts in which various works of literature have been produced;
- Apply techniques of critical analysis as appropriate to diverse literary forms and genres;
- Use literary study to develop skills for careful reading and clear writing;
- Read and discuss literature on the levels of both form and content.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (ISBN 978-0679723424)

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (ISBN 978-0307264886)

Octavia Butler, *Dawn* (ISBN 978-0446603775)

Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (ISBN 978-0375703768)

Additional readings and course materials will occasionally be made available via ARES and D2L.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Participation	25%
D2L Forum Posts	15%
First Paper (4-6 pages)	20%
Second Paper (4-6 pages)	20%
Final Paper (6-8 pages)	20%

Detailed descriptions of the three papers will be distributed in class well in advance of the due dates.

GRADING

Grades will follow the following rubric:

* To earn a **C**, you must clearly restate the meaning or project of a text in your own terms. A **C** essay may volunteer an original argument, but will likely lack evidence or analysis of its sources. **C** essays are clearly written, though they might display some grammatical weakness.

* To earn a **B**, you must begin to raise important questions about the text under consideration and to use those questions to drive your own interpretive agenda. A **B** essay typically advances an original argument and provides solid analysis of the text(s) under consideration. **B** essays are clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors.

* To earn an **A**, you must construct an essay that does more than simply comment on the work of others; you must forward, counter, or transform what they have to say. An **A** essay advances an original argument that builds toward a climax and makes a persuasive case for its own significance. **A** essays are clearly written, and often eloquent.

* A **D** means that you have not written in clear prose or that you seem to have deeply misunderstood the text. An **F** means that you did not fully or seriously engage the assignment.

* **AB, BC, and CD** grades fall squarely in the gaps between the above categories.

FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK

Written work must be typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, saved in a format Microsoft Word can open. Your filename should contain *your name* in it, for example, yourlastname-firstpaper.docx.

I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work, even D2L forum posts. Drafts that contain excessive typos or grammar mistakes may be returned to the author for correction before I offer comments.

Please give each piece of writing an original title, and include your name, assignment, and due date in a header on the first page. Insert page numbers if your work spans more than one page.

All sources relied upon for the writing of your paper, including the primary text, must be appropriately cited.

PAPER SUBMISSION

All written work should be submitted via D2L's Dropbox by class time on the due date. **Late papers will be penalized a full grade for each day that it is late; late final papers will not be accepted at all.** Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class discussion is an essential component of this seminar. It is important that you come to class every day having read the required material and prepared to discuss it. **Consequently, attendance in this class is mandatory.** You should plan on attending every class. Please talk to me (in advance if possible) if you ever find you will need to miss a class meeting.

The course adheres to Marquette University's attendance policy, which can be found on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#attendance>.

You are allowed **three absences** over the course of the fall semester. **After that, your class participation will drop by a letter grade for each additional unexcused absence.** Upon the seventh unexcused absence, you will receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.

Merely being present in class is insufficient to earn an “A” for class participation. Each student is expected to *participate in* and *contribute to* our discussions. Just being in the room is not enough.

D2L FORUMS

This course will make extensive use of the D2L forums at <http://d2l.mu.edu/>. In addition to being a place where you can find electronic copies of the syllabus and other course handouts, D2L also features an online forum where you can express your response to the material before class begins and where we can continue our discussions after class is over.

The D2L discussion forums are an excellent place for people who may feel inhibited by in-class discussion to share their opinions with the class. I will be reading the discussion forum regularly and I recommend you do the same. I encourage you to think of your D2L posts as “seeds” for the longer papers; feel free to begin to develop your thoughts there. You may choose either to begin a discussion thread on a new topic or to respond to a post composed by one of your classmates.

Before class on Thursday, every student is required to upload a picture of their face to their D2L profile.

Before class *next* Thursday, every student is required to have written a post responding to Atwood, Barthelme, Barth, and/or Lyotard.

After that, students must write **four short posts** responding to **any four** texts across the remainder of the course. These posts should be completed either by midnight before one of the class discussions devoted to that text or by the midnight before the following class.

Additional posts beyond the requirement, and posts that respond substantively to other students' arguments, will be looked upon very favorably when I calculate your final grade.

EMAIL

Students in this class are required to check their official Marquette email account—whatever account D2L and CheckMarq sends their emails to—at least once a day, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

LAPTOP POLICY

In-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. is permitted for access to electronic versions of our texts, for notetaking, and for in-class research. However, students *must* refrain from non-class-related computer use, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and the like. I reserve the right to ban individual technological devices if this becomes a problem. No use of cell phones will be permitted during class time; please set your phones to silent and put them out of sight.

CONFERENCES

All students are required to meet with me in a short one-on-one conference at my office at least once during the semester to discuss the course and your work within it. Please know I am very happy to meet with you individually to discuss either graded work or work-in-progress in excess of this requirement as many times as you like. Simply come to my weekly office hours, or see or email me to set up an appointment.

WRITING CENTER

Students are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Center, located in Raynor Library Room 240, at any stage of the writing process. Please visit the Writing Center website at <http://www.marquette.edu/english/writingcenter/> to find out how to schedule an appointment and to access the studio's online resources.

FLEXIBILITY

If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to the above.

ACCOMODATIONS

Students with disabilities who believe they will require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met. Per university policy, you are required to provide documentation of your disability to the Office of Disability Services.

If you are unsure of what you need to do to qualify for services, you can begin by visiting the Office of Disability Services in Marquette Hall, Lower Level, Room 05, or by visiting their website at <http://www.marquette.edu/disability-services.index.shtml>.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students are expected to abide by the academic honesty policy outlined in your undergraduate bulletin. I urge you all to examine this material and consult me with any questions you may have about plagiarism or academic integrity *before* it becomes an issue.

Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.** No exceptions or special dispensations will be made.

Full details of Marquette's academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#academichonestypolicy>.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

We all enter this classroom with preexisting political, ethical, philosophical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely *not* required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss, or with me, in whole or in part.

RESPECT

This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here.

Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will **severely** negatively impact your class participation grade.

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class as they become necessary.

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the listed texts or chapters.

Tuesday, August 27	INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE
Thursday, August 29	Jean-François Lyotard, “Defining the Postmodern” [ARES] Margaret Atwood, “Happy Endings” [ARES]
Tuesday, September 3	Donald Barthelme, “The Joker’s Greatest Triumph” [ARES] LAST DAY OF DROP/ADD
Thursday, September 5	John Barth, “The Literature of Exhaustion” (excerpt) [ARES] John Barth, “Frame Tale” and “Lost in the Funhouse” [ARES]
Tuesday, September 10	Vladimir Nabokov, <i>Pale Fire</i> , Foreword and “Pale Fire”
Thursday, September 12	<i>Pale Fire</i> , Commentary (first third)
Tuesday, September 17	<i>Pale Fire</i> , Commentary (second third)
Thursday, September 19	<i>Pale Fire</i> , Commentary (third third)
Tuesday, September 24	<i>Pale Fire</i> (whole book) Assignment: <i>Find or develop a “reading” of the whole novel and come to class ready to discuss it.</i>
Thursday, September 26	bell hooks, “Postmodern Blackness” [ARES] Barbara Christian, “The Race for Theory” [optional] [ARES]
Tuesday, October 1	Toni Morrison, “Recitatif” [ARES] FIRST PAPER DUE
Thursday, October 3	Toni Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> , Part One (first half)
Tuesday, October 8	<i>Beloved</i> , Part One (second half)
Thursday, October 10	<i>Beloved</i> , Part Two (first half)

Tuesday, October 15	<i>Beloved</i> , Part Two (second half)
Thursday, October 17	FALL BREAK—NO CLASS
Tuesday, October 22	Octavia Butler, <i>Dawn</i> , Part One
Thursday, October 24	<i>Dawn</i> , Part Two
Tuesday, October 29	<i>Dawn</i> , Part Three
Thursday, October 31	<i>Dawn</i> , Part Four
Tuesday, November 5	Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” [ARES]
Thursday, November 7	Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” [ARES] David Foster Wallace, “A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life” [ARES]
Tuesday, November 12	David Foster Wallace, “Octet” [ARES] SECOND PAPER DUE
Thursday, November 14	Mark Z. Danielewski, <i>House of Leaves</i> LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW
Tuesday, November 19	<i>House of Leaves</i>
Thursday, November 21	<i>House of Leaves</i>
<i>Tuesday, November 26</i>	THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS
<i>Thursday, November 28</i>	THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS
Tuesday, December 3	<i>House of Leaves</i> (whole book)
Thursday, December 5	<i>House of Leaves</i> (whole book)
Friday, December 13	FINAL PAPERS DUE BY 3 PM