

Postmodernism

ENGL 604B

Professor Jessica Pressman
Spring 2019

Course Description

“Postmodernism” is a term of startling ambiguity. It indicates a temporal period of belatedness, after modernism, but also suggests the continuation of that earlier artistic movement into the second half of the twentieth century. Postmodernism cuts across disciplines—architecture to art, literature to philosophy— and leaves its mark on contemporary literature in formal attributes (intertextuality and reflexive meta-commentary) as well as affective and attitudinal tone (skepticism, disbelief, and irony). This class provides an introduction to British and American postmodernism through a survey of key texts, both literary and theoretical. Writers include Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, Joan Didion, and Samuel Beckett as well as Jacques Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson, Hélène Cixous, and more.

Learning Outcomes

In this class, you will

- acquire understanding of seminal texts and concepts of postmodernist literature and literary criticism
- gain familiarity with postmodernism as a cultural concept and pivotal period in literary history
- hone your skills as a critical thinker, listener, and writer by focusing on the development of a thesis statement and the ability to prove it through textual explication

Administrative Information

Email: jpressman@sdsu.edu *Do not expect a response within 24 hours	Course Website: spring2019-eng604.jessicapressman.com
Office: AL 261 Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 11-12 or by appointment	Course Meeting: T 4-6:40 Room: EBA 260
English Subject Librarian: Markel Tumlin	mtumlin@rohan.sdsu.edu

ASSIGNMENTS

Participation and Presentation 20%

Weekly Blog Posts 25%

Midterm Short Thesis & Close Reading Assignment 20%

Proposal and Annotated Bibliography for Final Essay 5%

Final Essay 30%

Participation 20%

This is *your* class, and your active participation is vital to its success.

- You must attend *all* class meetings in order to receive full credit for participation.
- You must also engage—*talk* and listen—in class. Come to class prepared to discuss the text in depth; this means having read the *entire* text *before* class. I expect you to speak and listen.
- **Your participation grade includes engaging in dialogue in class.** This means speaking and listening actively, attentively, and respectfully. (If you have fear of speaking in public, this seminar is a good place to learn to address that fear. Please come see me early in the term to discuss strategies for dealing with this fear).
- **Your participation grade includes an in-person meeting with the professor.**
- **You will give a 5-minute presentation on one of the texts.** This presentation should serve to start the class's conversation for the day. You will point us to a question from the day's reading and to the specific passage in the text that sparked that inquiry for you. You will get the discussion rolling. You should be able to direct the class to a passage for close reading and/or a series of questions for discussion.

Weekly Blog Posts (25%)

You will write (**500 words**) **blog responses to the reading and each provide a comment on a peer's blog each week**, before the next week's class meeting. The goal of the blog posts is to extend the conversation and coverage of the course by allowing you to 1) express, share, and comment upon interests, questions, and concerns related to the readings and also to 2) enable the professor to address and incorporate these topics in that week's meeting. It is also a place to draft ideas and text for use in your essays.

--Blog posts are due *on Monday at 6pm* weekly; **late posts will not receive credit.**

-You will be given an *overall* grade for blog posts, based on completion and content, not a grade for each post. Rubric for grading is available on our website and below.

Your Blog Grade is based on 2-parts: 1) a completion grade, and 2) a content grade.

The completion component of the blog grade requires you to have the following number of posts:	The content component of the blog grade is based on the following grading rubric
A= 11-13 posts	A= Post contains a focused thesis or

B= 8-10 posts C= 6-7 posts D= 4-5 posts F= 3 or less	question and close reading of a passage, B= Post contains a close reading of content but no focused question or thesis C= Post contains no analysis of text (no close reading), just summary and undirected ideas D=Post contains little substantive thinking as content
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Short Thesis & Close Reading Assignment (20%)

This short (3-4 page) assignment is intended to provide *a benchmark* for your writing (and grade), a place to test your thesis and explication skills before the final essay. You will revise one of your blog posts or write new content that demonstrates your ability to

1) develop a thesis about a text

2) use a single passage from the text to support your argument through careful textual explication/analysis/close reading of that passage

***Late essays are docked 1/3 of a grade for each day late*

Proposal/Annotated Bibliography (5%)

In preparation for your final essay project, you will write a short proposal (500-words) that includes a *thesis statement* and an *annotated bibliography* of 8-10 centrally relevant sources for the essay. Information of proposal and bibliography are available on our website.

***Late assignment are docked 1/3 of a grade for each day late*

Final Essay (30%)

In this **20 page analytical essay**, you will explore in-depth one research question raised by our course. You will propose your own essay topic and determine the best way to present, your argument and research. You will conduct and implement scholarly research, **secondary sources (at least 2)** not included on our syllabus, in your essay.

-Your essay must include a **thesis** that guides the analysis and **textual explication** (close reading) to support it. (We will discuss and practice these analytical skills throughout the semester; informative guides to thesis writing and explication are also available on our website).

-You must *meet with the professor* to discuss your plans for the final essay

-You will *briefly present* your research during the final week of class.

***Late essays are docked 1/3 of a grade for each day late*

Extra Credit (Total of 1%)

There are multiple ways to earn extra credit in this class, all of which will be listed on our website.

READINGS

Required Reading (all readings available in SDSU bookstore)

Paul Auster, *City of Glass*

Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Familiar*, Vol. 1: *One Rainy Day in May*

Don DeLillo, *White Noise*

Phillip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Joan Didion, *Play it as it Lays*

Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

Ishamel Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*

Salman Rushdie, *East, West stories*

Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*

READING SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction

January 29: Introduction

Week 2: Modernist Roots

February 5: Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (1922)

Week 3: Pomo Theory

February 12: excerpt from Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (1979):

“1. The Field: Knowledge in Computerised Societies”

-Jorge Luis Borges, “On Exactitude in Science” (1946) [PDF]

-Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra” in *Simulations* (1983)

Week 4: Classic American Pomo

February 19: Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985)

Week 5: Existentialism, Time, and Purpose

February 26: Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (1953)

-excerpt from Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* [PDF]

Week 6: Semiotics and Cities

March 5: Paul Auster, *City of Glass*

-Robert Duncan, “Often I am Permitted to Return” (1960)

Week 7: MZD—Postmodernism Today

March 12: Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Familiar*, Vol. 1 *One Rainy Day in May* (2015)

****March 13: MZD talk @ 2pm in DH Center***

Week 8: Short but Big Stories

March 19: Donald Bartheleme, selections from *Sixty Stories* (1981): “The Balloon,” “The School,” “Views of My Father Weeping” [PDF]

Salman Rushdie, *East, West* (1994): especially “The Free Radio,” “At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers,” “The Courter”

--Midterm Essay Due, Sunday 3/24 at midnight-- posted to the blog

Week 9: Gender and Journalism

March 26: Joan Didion, *Play it As it Lays* (1970)

- Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975) [PDF]

****Spring Break****

Week 10: Postmodern Archives

April 9: Special Collections Visit: Larry McCaffery archives

-excerpt from Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television* [PDF]

Week 11: Paranoia

April 16: Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973)

Week 12: Identity Politics

April 23: Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972)

-Audre Lorde, “Coal” (1976)

-excerpt from Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987): “La Conciencia de la Mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness” (pps. 99-113) [PDF]

--Final Essay Proposal Due: Sunday, April 28 at midnight-- posted to the blog

Week 13: Human and/or Posthuman

April 30: Phillip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)

Week 14: Conclusions

May 7: Frank O’Hara, “The Day Lady Died”

Concluding Conversation

-- Final Essay Due, Wednesday 5/15 at midnight—posted to the blog

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

***NOTE:** This syllabus is subject to change.*

SDSU as “safe space”

The CSU has affirmed its commitment to ‘protecting access, affordability, intellectual freedom, inclusivity, and diversity for all students . . . including supporting DACA students.’ Discrimination, harassment, or retaliation against students, faculty, and staff on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, immigration status and other categories of identity is prohibited. If you have concerns about your status at the university, please visit <http://studentaffairs.sdsu.edu/EOP/> for information or contact the Dean of Students or the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs in your College.”

ACADEMIC HONESTY

I take teaching seriously, and I expect you to take seriously your work as a student. That means that academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonest includes, but is not limited to: (a) using assignments that you wrote for another class, (b) representing work done by someone else as your own (i.e., plagiarism), and (c) copying someone else’s work on an assignment, basic cheating. Plagiarism and Cheating of any kind will result at least in an "F" for that assignment (and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the entire course) and may be referred to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities for further action. If you have questions at all, you should consult me immediately.

DISABILITY STATEMENT

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at [\(619\) 594-6473](tel:6195946473). To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.