



English 442: American Literature, 1920 to the Present: American Decadence
Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1:00-1:50
Mark Taper Hall of Humanities 121

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Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 2:00-3:00
Mark Taper Hall of Humanities 442

Decadence is a falling, a sinking, a decline. As a literary movement, Decadence began in France in the late nineteenth century, and can be regarded as the second stage of Romanticism, proclaiming the exhaustion of Romanticism's naturalism and optimism. Decadence proclaimed both the natural and the social to be worked-out mines; they may once have provided satisfaction and meaning, but not any more; the present generation has been born too late. The only hope now is through transgression and perversion, questing for meaning in new, negative directions, in search of unprecedented, dangerous experiences and sensations, hoping to "break on through to the other side." We will look at the theory of decadence, as it developed in France, and its adoption and transformation by American writers. What happens when old-world decadence is adopted by such a new and officially optimistic culture? What is the Decadent looking for: "my only friend, the end"?

Texts:

J. K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*
Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*
T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*
Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood*
Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*
Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters*
Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*
Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club*
Pattie Smith, *Just Kids*

Schedule:

January

M	11	Introduction: Romanticism and Decadence
W	13	<i>Against Nature</i>
F	15	
M	18	Martin Luther King Day: no class
W	20	<i>The Great Gatsby</i>
F	22	
M	25	<i>Nightwood</i>
W	27	

F	29	
February		
M	1	
W	3	
F	5	
M	8	<i>The Waste Land</i>
W	10	
F	12	
M	15	Presidents' Day: no class
W	17	
F	19	
M	22	
W	24	
F	26	
M	29	<i>Wise Blood</i>
March		
W	2	
F	4	
M	7	
W	9	
F	11	
M	14	Spring Recess
W	16	Spring Recess
F	18	Spring Recess
M	21	<i>On the Road</i>
W	23	
F	25	
M	28	<i>Minor Characters</i>
W	30	
April		
F	1	
M	4	<i>The Crying of Lot 49</i>
W	6	
F	8	
M	11	
W	13	
F	15	
M	18	<i>Fight Club</i>
W	20	
F	22	
M	25	
W	27	<i>Just Kids</i>
F	29	
W	4	Final Examination 2:00-4:00

This syllabus is subject to revision, particularly in matters of schedule. The reading list will be supplemented by handouts. There will be two papers (5 pages minimum each; some students choose to write papers of 10-20 pages), and midterm and final examinations, each piece of written work accounting for 25% of the final grade. Papers should conform to the written instructions that will be provided to each student. Examinations are objective and test knowledge of the texts and of the concepts presented in class. Students need to attend every class meeting, unless excused by exceptional circumstances. No student may anticipate or omit the final examination.

Illustrations:

Illustration: Gustave Moreau, *Salomé Dancing before Herod*, Los Angeles, Hammer Museum (though hanging in Des Esseintes' house in Huysmans' *Against Nature*).

Student Behavior, Disability, and Integrity

Student Behavior

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action. These strictures may extend to behaviors outside the classroom that are related to the course.

Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.--5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A:

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>.

Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at:

<http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.