

English 364: The Modern Novel Anthony Kemp



Spring 2020

Tuesday, Thursday 3:30-4:50

Room: VKC 252

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Course Description

When does the “modern” novel begin? One answer might be that the first modern, psychological novel is Madame de La Fayette’s *La Princesse de Cleves* of 1678. For the purpose of this course, I’m going to define the modern sensibility as beginning in the nineteenth century with the three intertwined artistic movements of Modernism, Decadence and Symbolism. Writers and visual artists became convinced that humanity was entering an experience of self and culture that was qualitatively different from what it had been throughout the historical past, and was perhaps entering a post-humanity or inhumanity. The human, as we were accustomed to thinking of it, was over, replaced by an unknown something else. Paul Verlaine wrote of the principal originator of Modernism, Decadence and Symbolism, “the profound originality of Charles

Baudelaire is to represent powerfully and essentially modern man . . . modern man, made what he is by the refinements of excessive civilization, modern man with his sharpened and vibrant senses, his painfully subtle mind, his brain saturated with tobacco, and his blood poisoned by alcohol.” In the words of Joyce’s protagonist in “The Dead,” the world was entering “a thought-tormented age.” We will trace this crisis of humanity from the *fin de siècle*, with its sense of exhaustion and foreboding, into the calamitous twentieth century, the cruelest in all of history. Throughout this period of unprecedented dislocations, writers sought new subjects, new feelings, new formal experiments, with which to interpret and challenge their unfamiliar and vertiginous new world. These novels are all adventures into strangeness, efforts to break with conventional worlds that are no longer tenable, to break through into some alternative intensity, knowledge, love, redemption.

Learning Objectives

1. Reflect on what it means to be human through close study of human experience throughout time and across diverse cultures. In the period we will be studying, writers, artists, philosophers thought that the very idea of the human was in jeopardy. All of the established certainties of the human seemingly no longer worked. People no longer *felt* them, and then the new century, the twentieth, was to be the century of inhumanity. What does it mean to be human after the world wars, after the extermination camps and the gulag? The writers we will be studying are each struggling to find new ways of being human. So should you.
2. Cultivate a critical appreciation for one of the most profound and innovative forms of human expression: the long fictional prose narrative.
3. Understand and engage critically with the cultural and intellectual movements that these novels propose, examine, oppose. Thought, like matter, is clumpy. As matter tends to constellate into planets, stars, solar systems, galaxies, so ideas tend to constellate into movements. By the end of the course, students should understand the following intellectual and artist movements and concepts: Romanticism, Romantic Epiphany, Romantic Quest, Aestheticism, Decadence, Derangement of the Senses, Symbolism, Modernism, Anti-Semitism, Cosmopolitanism, Post-Modernism.
4. Learn to read and interpret actively and analytically, to think critically and creatively, and to write and speak persuasively. With this in mind, we will write two substantial long-form papers. I will give extensive written instructions on what works and what does not. The goal is to learn from the first paper, in order to improve your thinking and writing substantially in the writing of the second. Every student should budget at least one hour to go over your first paper with me.

Required Reading

Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature (À rebours)* (1884), Penguin 0140447636

Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), Norton 039395904X

James Joyce, “The Dead” in *Dubliners* (1914), Norton 0393978513

Franz Kafka, *The Trial (Der Prozess)* (1925), Schocken 0805204164

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Scribner 0743273567

Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Anchor 0385416091

Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (1936), New Directions 0811216713

C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (1956), Harcourt 0156904365

Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), Harper 006091307X

John LeCarré, *The Little Drummer Girl* (1983), Penguin 0143119745
Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* (1996), Norton 0393327348
Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (2001), Anchor 038572179X

Schedule

January

T 14: Introduction

Th 16: Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature (À rebours)*

T 21:

Th 23:

T 28: Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*

Th 30:

February

T 4:

Th 6: James Joyce, "The Dead" in *Dubliners*

T 11:

Th 13: Franz Kafka, *The Trial (Der Process)*

T 18:

Th 20: F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

T 25:

Th 27:

March

T 3: Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*

Th 5:

T 10:

Th 12: Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

T 17: Spring Recess

Th 19: Spring Recess

T 24:

Th 26: C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*

T 31:

April

Th 2: Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*

T 7:

Th 9: John LeCarré, *The Little Drummer Girl*

T 14:

Th 16:

T 21: Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club*

Th 23:

T 28: Ian McEwan, *Atonement*

Th 30:

May

T 12: Final Exam, 2-4

Evaluation

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

Left: Diego Velázquez, *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1650, Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome

Right: Francis Bacon, *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1953, Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct: Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems: Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

<https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255 Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX compliance – (213) 740-5086 Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

Student Support & Advocacy – (213) 821-4710 Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC – <https://diversity.usc.edu/> Tabs for Events, Programs and Training, Task Force (including representatives for each school), Chronology, Participate, Resources for Students