

English 426: Modern English Literature Anthony Kemp



Fall 2023

32741R

MWF 1-1:50

Room: THH 205

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Course Description

British and Anglo-American literature of the twentieth century, with particular emphasis on Decadence; Modernism; sexual, religious, and class transgression; world wars; retreat from empire; and return to myth. Major writers to be considered: W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, Radclyffe Hall, T. S. Eliot, Djuna Barnes, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, C. S. Lewis, W. H. Auden, John LeCarré, Ian McEwan. The goal of the course is that students will understand the authors and works studied in relation to the key cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic movements of the period: Romanticism, Decadence, Symbolism, Modernism. These are some of the most profound, transcendent, beautiful, disturbing, unsettling literary works of the English language.

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. 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 some of the most profound and innovative forms of human expression: romantic, symbolist, and modernist poetry, the modernist, experimental novel, fantasy literature and spy fiction, metafiction.
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, and the literary genres in number two, above.
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

W. B. Yeats, *Yeats' Poetry, Drama and Prose*, Norton 0393974979
James Joyce, *Dubliners*, Norton 0393978516
Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*, Anchor 9780385416092
T. S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*, Norton 0393974995
Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, New Directions 9780811216715
Penguin Book of First World War Poetry, Penguin 0141181907
C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, Harcourt 0156904365
W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems*, Vintage 0307278085
John LeCarré, *The Little Drummer Girl*, Penguin 0143119745
Ian McEwan, *Atonement*, Anchor 038572179X

Schedule

August
M 21: Introduction
W 23: Yeats
F 25:
M 26:
W 30:
September

F 1: Joyce, *Dubliners*
M 4: Labor Day
W 6:
F 8:
M 11:
W 13:
F 15:
M 18: Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*
W 20:
F 22:
M 25: Eliot, *The Wasteland* (and much more)
W 27:
F 29:
October
M 2:
W 4:
F 6: Barnes, *Nightwood*
M 9:
W 11:
F 13: Fall Recess
M 16: War Poetry
W 18:
F 20:
M 23: Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*
W 25:
F 27:
M 30:
November
W 1: Auden
F 3:
M 6:
W 8:
F 10: Veterans Day
M 13: LeCarré, *The Little Drummer Girl*
W 15:
F 17:
M 20:
W 22: Thanksgiving
F 24: Thanksgiving
M 27: McEwan, *Atonement*
W 29:
December
F 1:
W 13: Final Exam 11-1

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 take early 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