



English 442: American Literature, 1920 to the Present: American Decadence
Monday, Wednesday 3:30-4:50
Mark Taper Hall of Humanities 115
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Office Hours: MWF 1:00-2:30
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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*
T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*
Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*
Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man's Hard to Find," "Good Country People"
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 13 Introduction: Romanticism and Decadence
W 15 *Against Nature*
M 18 Martin Luther King Day: no class
W 22 *The Waste Land*
M 27
W 29
February
M 3 *The Great Gatsby*
W 5
M 10
W 12 *Nightwood*

M 17 Presidents' Day: no class
W 19
M 24
W 26
March
M 3 *Wise Blood*
W 5
M 10
W 12
M 17 Spring Recess
W 19 Spring Recess
M 24 *On the Road*
W 26
M 31 *Minor Characters*
April
W 2
M 7 *The Crying of Lot 49*
W 9
M 14
W 16
M 21 *Fight Club*
W 23
M 28
W 30 *Just Kids*
May
F 9 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*).

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/student/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>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking, and harassment are prohibited by the university. You are encouraged to report all incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity/Title IX Office* <http://equity.usc.edu> and/or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://dps.usc.edu>. This is important for the health and safety of the whole USC community. Faculty and staff must report any information regarding an incident to the Title IX Coordinator who will provide outreach and information to the affected party. The sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> fully describes reporting options. Relationship and Sexual Violence Services <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp> provides 24/7 confidential support.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://ali.usc.edu>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* <http://dsp.usc.edu> provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Dornsife provides a full range of mental health resources, which can be found at <https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling/>

COVID Safety

Students are expected to comply with all aspects of USC's COVID-19 policy. Failure to do so may result in removal from the class and referral to Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards.