



# English 5387: Studies in American Literature, 1920-Present Fall 2017, CRN 82990

**Professor:** Robert Donahoo  
Office: 408 Evans Complex  
Office Hours: 9-11 a.m. Tuesday/Thursday in Huntsville and by appointment  
1:00-3:00 Wednesday in The Woodlands Center and by appointment  
Office Phone: 936-294-1421  
Cell Phone: 713-823-3992  
Office E-mail: eng\_rxd@shsu.edu  
Home Phone: 281-298-1442 (no calls after 10 p.m.)

**Classroom:** Room 240 at the Woodlands Center

**Textbooks:**

Bishop: *The Complete Poems of Elizabeth Bishop*, Farrar Straus  
Cather: *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Vintage  
Eliot: *The Waste Land* Norton Critical Edition  
Faulkner: *The Sound and the Fury*, Vintage  
Foote: *Talking Pictures*, Dramatists Play Service  
Frost: *Robert Frost's Poetry Collection: A Boy's Will, North of Boston, Mountain Interval*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform **OR** *Poems by Robert Frost: A Boy's Will and North of Boston*, Signet  
Hughes: *The Big Sea*, Hill and Wang  
McDermott, *Someone*, Picador  
O'Connor: *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Farrar Straus  
O'Neill: *Four Plays by Eugene O'Neill*, Signet  
Pynchon: *The Crying of Lot 49*, Harper Perennial  
Gibaldi and Franklin: *MLA Handbook* (8<sup>th</sup> edition)

### Introductory Thoughts:

The purpose of this course is to give students an introduction to writers and ideas of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century America at a depth that goes beyond the undergraduate survey while also filling gaps in student knowledge left by their undergraduate study. To do this in one brief semester requires that we read widely in a variety of authors and genres—not all of which will be to anyone's liking. Thus, we begin by discarding the whole issue of "liking" what we read and concentrate instead on the many concepts of "significance"—certainly a loaded term. I've tried to use the term in the broadest possible way by having it suggest works that have a rich scholarly tradition as well as works that have been meaningful to my idiosyncratic research and life. At the

same time, I have made sure that the readings cover the two broad historical literary periods important to American literature during the scope of this course: Modernism and Postmodernism. I have also included assignments that allow students to explore their own peculiar interests connected to this period.

The method we'll use to deal with these writers will **primarily** involve close readings of the primary texts, but it will also ask students to come to terms with the changing reception of these works within the literary academy as well as how these texts respond to various literary theories that have arisen in the century in which the works themselves emerged. Therefore, students will be consistently asked both what *they* think about a text, and how the academy has and does think about them. My intention is not to spoon-feed students critical thought but to ask students to explore and evaluate that thought themselves. The goal is to improve students' research skills even in the rushed and crowded schedule we have this semester. Everyone should end the course feeling he or she has been challenged but also knowing that a clearer understanding has been gained of the trends of 20<sup>th</sup> century American literature and of the skills needed to explore those trends further.

### Course Description and Prerequisites

The weekly approach to the material assigned for the course will be largely historical in nature, moving from early manifestations of new developments in literature to more classic examples of those developments and then to works that show the instability of the developments. In doing so, we'll jump between three genres: poetry, fiction (both novels and short stories), and drama.

Students are expected to engage each other and me during the class sessions. None of us can manage all the research alone; none of us has the same knowledge of theory or literary traditions. At the same time, this is not a psychological support group whose goal is have students feel better (or worse!) about themselves. Instead, it is about learning and teaching. Both are mistake-burdened experiences. The classroom is the place to make mistakes and learn from them, a place where a person will be judged negatively only if that person is silent. So plan on speaking up! Come prepared to have something to say that doesn't start with the words, "I feel."

While there are no official prerequisites for this course beyond the requirements for admission to the graduate program in English, students will have the greatest success if they have:

- Successfully completed ENGL 5330 (Research Methods).
- Taken an undergraduate survey course that includes American literature post-1900.
- Have taken an undergraduate or graduate literary theory course.

Students lacking any of these need to be aware that they may need to discuss issues related to research, theory, and broad American literary history with the professor.



**Course Objectives:** As Mrs. Browning might say, let me count the objectives:

1. To gain a working definition of Modernism and Postmodernism as literary periods by understanding typical traits of the literature of each period.
2. To increase students' knowledge of specific and often central works of American literature during the periods of Modernism and Postmodernism.
3. To become aware of the scholarship that has shaped understandings of this literature.
4. To practice research and writing about American literature of these periods.



### Course Grades:

Because the amount of material we have to cover is large, we will have only three sources of grades. A fourth of the course grade (25%) will be determined equally by **short midterm and final exams** that will give student a comprehensive exam-style prompt and expect an essay response. (see the prompts included with the syllabus). Another fourth (25%) will be determined by a **brief summaries and evaluations of readings on the syllabus** that will enable students to get a lot of information without being overwhelmed by reading (see the essay summaries assignment included with this syllabus). Half of the course grade (50%) will be determined by a **seminar paper** (see assignment included in this

syllabus).

The only other factor that may affect a student's grade for this class is attendance. Students should plan to attend every class, but anyone missing more than two class session will see a detrimental impact on his or her course grade. Because emergencies can occur, please be sure that no classes are missed for frivolous reasons.

### Missed Exams / Late Paper Policy

Students who miss an exam for any reason should contact the instructor immediately. In cases involving illness or family crises, I will ask the student to have the reason for the absence verified by the Dean of Student Life Office before rescheduling an exam. In other cases—weather, car problems, stupidity, etc.—I will do my best to accommodate students, but all such cases are matters of grace and mercy, not right.

My general policy is not to accept late papers unless encouraged to do so by the Dean of Student Life Office. However, I define late as any time after 11:59 p.m. on the day the paper is due, and students may e-mail me a Microsoft Word attachment of their work before that deadline—with a hard copy available if needed—in order to meet the deadline. Again, students are always welcome to discuss specific issues with me, but they need to realize I will refer all rulings of the validity of excuses to the Dean of Student Life Office.

**Please note: any student who has major problems fulfilling the requirements of the course (family crisis; unexpected health issues; severe emotional turmoil) should contact the office of John Yarabeck, Dean of Students. That office is located in Suite 215 of the Lowman Student Center. The phone number is 936-294-1785. Students may also check out their website, especially this page: [http://www.shsu.edu/~slo www/absence.html](http://www.shsu.edu/~slo/www/absence.html). This office will help you deal with all your instructors and makes it unnecessary for you to bring me documentation concerning such crises.**

### Classroom Manners/Department

It may seem strange to have a section on a syllabus about manners and classroom behavior, but my experience in the classroom suggests otherwise. Students need to remember that a class is a community, and a community requires recognition of the need for each of us to limit our claims of “our rights” in order to make the best possible experience for everyone. In *Talk to the Hand*, Lynne Truss writes,

Manners are based on an idea of empathy, of imagining the impact of one's own actions on others. They involve doing something for the sake of other people that is not obligatory and attracts no reward. In the current climate of unrestrained solipsistic and aggressive self-interest, you can equate good manners not only with virtue but with positive heroism. (14)

I don't offer here a list a rules but a call to be heroic. Avoid such things as keeping your cell phone's ringer on, neglecting to bathe for a week, or eating food while the rest of the class feels their stomachs rumbling. Conduct private conversations in a low tone of voice or save them for outside the classroom. Don't put me or anyone else in the class on e-mail lists that send out cute pictures and jokes unless you are asked to do so. Be open to good-natured teasing but be willing to confront privately anyone—me or another student—if the line is crossed into insult. Most of all be respectful of others' time. Here's another piece of advice from Truss that addresses this point and is relevant to this class: "The writer who neglects spelling and punctuation is quite arrogantly dumping a lot of avoidable work onto the reader, who deserves to be treated with more respect" (23).

### **Legal Matters the University Requires Me to Include:**

These are policies that cover the University as a whole. For a more detailed discussion of the five items below, go to this link: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>.

- **Academic Dishonesty:** All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

In this course, students are encouraged to work together to increase their understanding and insight. However, two particular forms of academic dishonesty will result in a student earning a grade of "F" on the projects involved. These two forms are: (1) cheating on exams by taking answers from notes or other students; (2) plagiarism. This involves taking the writing—either words and/or ideas—of another person—fellow student, published author, or paper seller--and passing them off as one's own. Students should carefully read the section in the *MLA Handbook* on plagiarism and how to avoid it.

- **Americans with Disabilities Act:** It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired. SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers

- with the Counseling Center. All requests for accommodation must be initiated by the student.
- **Religious Holidays:** Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. "Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.
  - **Visitors in the Classroom:** Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom. This policy is not intended to discourage the occasional visiting of classes by responsible persons. Obviously, however, the visiting of a particular class should be occasional and not regular, and it should in no way constitute interference with registered members of the class or the educational process.
  - **Instructor Evaluations:** Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester.
  - **Classroom Rules of Conduct:** The Code of Student Conduct and Discipline is found at the following link: <https://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html>. I expect students to show respect for everyone in the classroom—the instructor, students, guests—through both words and actions. I ask students not to do other work during class, to place cell phones on silent mode, and to put away other distractions: ipods, newspapers, etc. If something else needs your attention during class time, don't come to class.
  - **Study Tips:** The best way to succeed in this course is to attend regularly having read the assigned work for that day. Ask questions—particularly about terminology and approaches that are unclear. Schedule a time to meet with the professor at some point in the term—preferably early in order to get a better sense of his personality. If you need help with reading, writing, or other study assistance, you may want to take advantage the resources listed below:

### **The SAM Center**

The Student Advising and Mentoring Center, also known as the SAM Center, offers a wide variety of services for the students of Sam Houston State University. We offer academic advisement and enrichment services to all undergraduate and graduate students. The SAM Center is a resource dedicated to helping students adjust to academic life at Sam Houston State University. Services available include career testing, aid with time management, and study skills. The center has grown rapidly since we've been open and with new programs being offered, our students are taking more advantage of our resources. With a great faculty and staff, all students are encouraged to look into any of the programs we have available. The SAM Center is located in Academic Building 4 (AB4) on the second floor, room 210. AB4 is located on the corner of Bowers Blvd. and Ave. I. For more information, go to <http://www.shsu.edu/~sam> [www/index.html](http://www.shsu.edu/~sam/www/index.html). Or call one of the numbers listed below:

**Toll Free: (866) 364-5211**

**Houston Area: (281) 657-6432**

**Phone: (936) 294-4444**

**Fax: (936) 294-1149**

### The Academic Success Center

You may know this better as either the SHSU Writing Center or the SHSU Reading Center, but these have been merged to form a comprehensive, one-stop source for aid. The Academic Success Center offers a variety of academic support including peer tutoring programs for writing, math/statistics, and reading skills. There is also an online writing lab and a supplemental instruction program. It is open 8 am to 7 pm, Monday-Thursday, 8 am to 3pm on Friday, and 2 to 7 pm on Sunday. Appointments are made by calling 936-294-3680. Further information is on our website, [www.shsu.edu/asc](http://www.shsu.edu/asc). Be aware that there is an Academic Success Center located on the Woodlands campus. See the Woodlands Center website for more information about its hours and about how to schedule a meeting.

#### Be forewarned:

I like to think of myself as high-strung, fairly anal about details that matter to me, but easy to get along with. However, like everyone else I have a few pet peeves that you want to avoid awakening. These include:

- I'm a stickler for students following MLA style and format. If you don't own a copy of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, I strongly encourage you to invest in one. Follow its rules about how your pages should be set up for papers you submit and about documentation.
- I don't like late papers, but, with advance warning, I can accept them. However, I am unfashionably absolute about giving grades of "X" or "incomplete" unless a student is involved in trauma beyond their control, usually something involving spilled blood. When the course ends, I want it to be over. Students as well as this faculty member have complicated lives that generally consume all our time in the present without having to clean up the past. Avoid asking me to make an exception for you.
- I enjoy meeting with students, though our limited hours don't always seem to encourage that. However, feel free to be in touch through e-mail and to call about times for me to meet with you—especially about your seminar papers.
- Class participation is crucial in a graduate English course. It's my job to be sure no one person takes over the class, and I promise I have no trouble cutting people off. But it is difficult to make a person talk who wants to hide—especially since my water board was taken away. It is your responsibility to contribute your voice to the class—to teach yourself by having your comments and questions explored and also to teach others. Never be alarmed about saying something wrong. Be alarmed about being silent. Make questions and comments part of your notes. An academic classroom should be a place where ideas are challenged. So long as this does not lead to excessive screaming and weapon-waving, I encourage disagreement, questioning, and challenges. Keep sarcasm and mockery to a minimum, and take feelings off of sleeves. It also helps to remember a motto I once saw on the wall of my children's kindergarten: Everyone makes mistakes. The corollary to that motto is: Everyone says something stupid now and again. I promise to prove both of these claims during the semester; don't be afraid to join me in doing so.



# Class Reading and Assignment Schedule



- Monday, 8/28** Introduction to the Course: a first look at Modernism
- Monday, 9/4** **Labor Day Holiday—no class**
- Monday, 9/11** Frost's *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston* (1913/1914)
- Pound, Rev. of *A Boy's Will* **Blackboard**
  - Monroe, "Editorial Comment" **Blackboard**
  - Pound, Rev. of *North of Boston* **Blackboard**
  - Lowell, Rev. of *North of Boston* **Blackboard**
  - Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism."  
**Use JSTOR to obtain a PDF**
  - Pound, "A Retrospect" **Blackboard**
- Monday, 9/18** Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922)
- Preface
  - A Note on the Text
  - The Text of *The Waste Land*
  - Eliot's Notes to *The Waste Land*
  - The material under "Sources" for Frazer, Weston, Gotama Buddha, King James Bible, *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*
  - Gordon, "The Composition of *The Waste Land*"
  - Gardner, "*The Waste Land*: Paris 1922"
  - Rainey, "The Price of Modernism: Publishing *The Waste Land*"
  - Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"
  - Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets"
  - Brooks, "*The Waste Land*: An Analysis"
  - Donoghue, "The Word Within a Word"
- Monday, 9/25** Eliot after *The Waste Land*
- "Journey of the Magi," 1927  
<https://www.poetryarchive.org/poem/journey-magi>
  - "Song of Simeon," 1928 <https://www.poeticous.com/t-s-eliot/a-song-for-simeon>
  - "Religion and Literature" 1935 **Blackboard**
  - "Little Gidding," 1941-42 **Blackboard**
- Prospectus due for major paper**
- Monday, 10/2** Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927)
- Cather, "Prefatory Note" **Blackboard**
  - Woolf, "Modern Novels" **Blackboard**

- Monday, 10/9** Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929)
- Read the first two sections
- Monday, 10/16** Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*
- Read sections three and four
  - Read the Appendix Faulkner wrote for the novel
- Monday, 10/23** O'Neill's early plays
- *Beyond the Horizon*, 1918 - Pulitzer Prize, 1920
  - *Anna Christie*, 1920 - Pulitzer Prize, 1922
  - *The Emperor Jones*, 1920
  - Krasner, "Eugene O'Neill: American Drama and American Modernism" **Blackboard**
- Midterm exam due**
- Monday, 10/30** Hughes and African American Modernism
- *The Weary Blues* **Blackboard**
  - "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" located at [http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/g\\_l/hughes/mountain.htm](http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/g_l/hughes/mountain.htm)
  - *The Big Sea*
- Monday, 11/6** O'Connor, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*
- "Introduction to *A Memoir of Mary Ann*" **Blackboard**
  - "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South" **On Blackboard**
  - LeMay, "God's Back: Tattoos, Theology, and the Postmodern Pantocrator in 'Parker's Back'" **Download using MLA Bibliography database**
- Monday, 11/13** Bishop and the Postmodern Turn
- *North and South*
  - *Geography III*
  - Longenbach, "What Was Postmodern Poetry" **Blackboard**
- Monday, 11/20** Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*
- McHale, chapter one from *Constructing Postmodernism*  
**Link on Blackboard**
- Monday, 11/27** Foote, *Talking Pictures*  
McDermott, *Someone*
- Friday, 12/1** **Major Paper Due**
- Monday, 12/7** **Final Exam due by 9 p.m.**



Our usual approaches have by now an impressive history of fruitlessness, as we would notice if we were at all a reflective people. – Marilynne Robinson



## Assignments for Exams: Midterm and Final

The purpose of these exams is twofold:

- To prod students to keep up with the reading and the ideas being covered in class.
- To prepare for the Comprehensive Exams – particularly an exam related to this period.

To accomplish those goals, students are asked to write brief essays in response to two separate prompts:

### Midterm Exam Prompt:

Modernism, as a literary movement, played a key role in the development of literary art in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, despite the fact that those years present a wide variety of artists and artistic styles. At the same time, it was never monolithic. Different writers display some traits of Modernism more than others, and some writers actively write against some Modernist ideas.

In a brief but coherent essay, begin by writing an explanation of what traits – techniques, themes, and philosophical ideas – define Modernism, especially in America. Then examine three of the authors we have read for the first portion of the course (Frost through Hughes), being sure to use writers who work in different literary genres, explain how each artist reveals his/her connection to Modernism as you have defined and explained it as well as any ways in which each artist fails to show or rejects some aspect of Modernism. You are strongly encouraged to bring in the non-literary texts we examined to help you define Modernism as well any outside reading in books or journals that you have done on Modernism. Attach a Works Cited page (something you would NOT do for a comp exam). Aim for at least four and no more than seven typed pages.

Anxiety is the hand maiden of creativity. – T. S. Eliot

### Final Exam Prompt:

Postmodernism, as a literary movement, played a key role in the development of literary art in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, despite the fact that those years present a wide variety of artists and artistic styles. At the same time, it was never monolithic. Different writers display some traits of Postmodernism more than others, and some writers actively write against some Postmodernist ideas.

In a brief but coherent essay, begin by writing an explanation of what traits—techniques, themes, and philosophical ideas—define Postmodernism, especially in America. Then examine three of the authors we have read for the first portion of the course (O'Connor through McDermott). Being sure to use writers who work in different literary genres, explain how each artist reveals his/her connection to Postmodernism as you have defined and explained it as well as any ways in which each artist fails to show or rejects some aspect of Postmodernism. You are strongly encouraged to bring in the non-literary texts we examined to help you define Postmodernism as well any outside reading in books or journals that you have done on Postmodernism. Attach a Works Cited page (something you would NOT do for a comp exam). Aim for at least four and no more than seven typed pages.



The reality is in *this* head.  
 Mine. I'm the projector at the  
 planetarium, all the closed little  
 universe visible in the circle of  
 that stage is coming out of my  
 mouth, eyes, and sometimes  
 other orifices also. – Randolph  
 Dribblete in Thomas  
 Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot*  
 49

# Seminar Paper Assignment



Each student is required to write one 12-15 page paper for this course. Such a task may seem daunting when you are at the starting line of the course; indeed, the starter's pistol may well seem to be aimed at your head. To help take fingers off of triggers, I offer three things:

- ❖ You are free to write about any author or significant work that falls within the confines of this period and has been the subject of scholarly commentary and attention. My advice is that do not attempt to write about one of the major masterpieces of Modernism/Postmodernism. Rather, aim at the margins. For instance, if you love Fitzgerald because you got all hot and bothered by *Gatsby/Daisy* in a film adaptation, you might consider writing about one of Fitzgerald's short story collections rather than his big little novel. Still, the choice is yours. Just remember I will expect thorough research, and I would MUCH appreciate you checking with me so that you don't select the one author/work I've never read (OK, there are two).
- ❖ I require that you write a prospectus for your paper that is due the week of September 25. This will not be a long document—approximately one typed page (500-750 words) plus a bibliography. A more complete assignment for the prospectus is included in this syllabus.
- ❖ Feel free to use one of the research ideas listed below, though if you do, you need to alert me immediately as I don't want more than two people working on any of these projects:

**Project One:** In the last years of his life, F. Scott Fitzgerald worked in Hollywood and wrote a series of 17 short stories about a luckless screenwriter named Pat Hobby. Take a look at these short stories, learn as much as you can about their publication history and their critical reception to have some sense of whether or not you feel the stories stand up as works of art. Using your research, write a paper focusing on the stories connection to Modernism. Do they, for instance, work to popularize Modernist ideas and techniques for a mass audience? Do they show a rejection of Modernism in a way that suggests the hostile relationship between Modernism and commercial writing? What do they suggest about Fitzgerald's sense of the connection of Modernism to film or the Hollywood film industry? Read autobiographically, what do the stories reveal about the fate of Modernism in American culture? As a side idea, be aware that there are other possible Fitzgerald story groups to consider that could be used to raise similar questions—especially Fitzgerald's stories set in or about the American South.

**Project Two:** Rita Dove's collection, *Thomas and Beulah*, uses a series of poems to tell the individual stories/experiences of an African American couple based, so it is said, on Dove's grandparents. Students attracted by this material could consider what is accomplished by creating a fictional simulacra in terms of communicating African American experience both in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the postmodern age when the poems were written and published. A student selecting this topic might well research Jean Beaudrillard's theoretical text, *Simulacra and Simulation*, to see if or how Dove's text falls within the scope of his idea and what seeing the poems in Beaudrillardian terms reveals about them. Additionally, the student could use this study to argue the appropriateness or inappropriateness for applying Beaudrillard's ideas to African American experience—especially in light of theories about racial fiction.

**Project Three:** The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) is often remembered in history as the warm up to World War II, but in literature it is noted by the number of Modernist artists who took an active part in

supporting the Republicans against Franco's Nationalist forces. Among the major American writers connected to the Civil War were Ernest Hemingway, Langston Hughes, and John Dos Passos. Students interested in this period could, for instance, identify via scholarship the short stories by Hemingway associated with the Spanish Civil War or the poems by Hughes connected to it or Dos Passos's essay "The Villages are the Heart of Spain." With whatever writer, the student could argue how this writing with a political tinge differs from the author's other works of the time or how it fits with the Modernism that the writer practiced. In particular, it would be interesting to explore how the writer's work reflects or responds to one of the great works of Modernist art that also comes out of the war: Picasso's painting "Guernica." These ideas should also give the student the opportunity to reflect how this Civil War writing alters perceptions of Modernism's politics.

**Project Four:** Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* raises questions about the role of religious faith/belief in postmodern fiction. The work of an author who has written about her own religious beliefs and framed as a manuscript being written by the novel's major character, a Christian pastor, *Gilead* has earned both praise and criticism for the type of faith it represents. A student interested in this subject can examine this novel in search of its picture of faith in the Postmodern age and/or the challenges that religious belief makes to theories of the Postmodern. In particular, since race is also a key component of this novel by a white author, the student might want to explore the role that thoughts about race and racial conflict in this Postmodern-religion stew.

**Project Five:** Few works in the American theater have had as much as impact as Tony Kushner's two-part *Angels in America* which mixes American history, the AIDS crisis of the Reagan era, and the Mormonism in ways that have to be seen or read to imagine. A student interested in this project could well ask the question, what makes AIDS such a powerful theme/metaphor for postmodern writing? Possibly looking at disability theory for a guide, the student could explore why this particular disease fits well into a postmodern ideology or framework or why it meshes with the politics and religion seen in Kushner's plays.

**Project Six:** The "Little Magazine" movement of the early Modernist era was hugely important in launching a number of major poetic careers, with no magazine playing a more important role than *Poetry*, edited by Harriet Monroe out of Chicago. Today, thanks to the website <http://www.modjournal.org/> (The Modernist Journals Project sponsored by Brown University and the University of Tulsa), a student can examine the early issues of that journal to see the context in which these major writers emerged. No writer in this situation is more interesting than Wallace Stevens who frequently published in *Poetry*, including his early masterpiece "Sunday Morning," which Monroe significantly edited with Stevens accepting the changes until he published the poem in his first collection, *Harmonium*, in 1923. For this project, a student would need to examine all the issues of *Poetry*, from its founding until 1923 to find all Stevens' poems published there and then read them against the context of the poems that appear around them—most of which are long forgotten in obscurity. What makes Stevens' work different from those obscure poems? How is it the same? Adding research into Stevens' life/work and into the magazine, this project would seek to learn how Stevens' distinguished himself from the pack to be, as one recent reviewer of a new Stevens biography calls him, "among the twentieth-century poets who are both most powerful and most refined in their eloquence, along with Rilke, Yeats, and Neruda."

For students interested in less specific ideas, I offer the following fairly typical approaches you might consider for your paper.

- Reception histories are always useful to increasing your understanding of a literary work. Consider writing a reception history of the text you select, beginning with reviews of its first publication/performance and coming up to the present, noting shifts and variations in the overall understanding of your selected

text and speculating about future areas needing research.

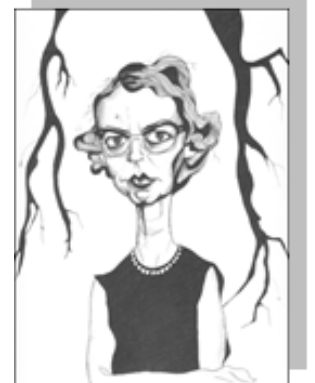
- How does the work you've selected accept or adapt the genre it represents? In other words, consider writing a paper that suggests the importance of your chosen work for its genre. This will entail learning something about novel/short story/drama/ poetic forms, but it can be useful in expanding your theoretical knowledge of those forms and of a particular work's place in it.
- To what extent does your selected work open up through or receive criticism from particular theoretical approaches such as feminism, post-colonial, Marxist, or gender studies? Do one of these theories force/encourage a re-evaluation of the status of your selected work for ideological reasons? Put another way, would a theory attach a warning label or a gold medal to your text?
- Does the work you've selected offer insight into particular social groups? Does Faulkner's *The Reivers*, for instance, offer insights into aging authors or the mentally challenged or the role of the automobile in the lives of Southerners? Similarly, does the literary text shed a spotlight on some forgotten corner of history which, when revealed, changes readings of the text?

These suggested approaches are not meant to be exhaustive but simply encouraging.

As for the paper's technical aspects, these can be covered briefly:

- ❖ It should fit closely to the length requirements (12-15 pages).
- ❖ It should rigorously follow MLA bibliographic style and format.
- ❖ It should be interesting to you and to the academic reader concerned with American literature (one kind way to describe me).
- ❖ It should have a clear thesis. If I have to wonder and search for your thesis amid the glories of your prose, the outcome will not be pleasant.
- ❖ Think creatively; write traditionally.
- ❖ The paper is due by **Friday, December 1**. Because this is not a class date, the paper may be submitted electronically to me by using e-mail and having the paper as a Microsoft word attachment. It may also be turned in at the English Department Office on the Huntsville campus or at the One-Stop Office at the Woodlands Center—however, I need to be notified by you if the paper is left in either of these last two locations. And, of course, students may always turn in the paper early.

The truth does not change  
according to our ability to stomach  
it. – Flannery O'Connor



## Prospectus Assignment

The major paper for this course can be daunting, and every student's major enemy is delay in getting started. Producing this prospectus is way to encourage you to defeat that devil. It forces students to decide on what their project will be and it gets them started collecting research for the work.

Specifically, here is what your prospectus should consist of:

1. A paragraph that states the question the student believes his or her final paper will answer as well as thesis—a working hypothesis, really-- that supplies what the student thinks the answer will be. This need not be long, but it should be clear that the student has some awareness of what he or she is getting into.
2. A paragraph that states the major methods and resources to be used in getting to an answer. Do you plan to draw on random quotations from the literary work to support your claim or do you have a specific literary theory or set of literary tools in mind that will form the foundation for your argument? Hint: a specific theory is better than random quotations.

All of this should fit into 500-750 words.

In addition, supply a working bibliography that should have that title. At this point, a student can have no idea what texts will appear in the final Works Cited, but I need to see that each student has collected books, articles, etc., that will guide them. I also need to be able to look at some of your potential sources and encourage you to use them or steer you from them. There is no length requirement for the working bibliography, but the more the merrier!

On the next few pages is a sample Prospectus and working bibliography in case you find that kind of thing useful.

This prospectus is due sometime during the week that begins on Monday, September 25. If you can't hand it to me in class on that Monday, send it to me as a Microsoft word attachment via email.

The grade for this is merely a pass/fail, but a failing prospectus is one I will ask you to redo. To be honest, you don't have time for that. Give your best shot on the first effort.



*I'm a failed poet. Maybe every novelist wants to write poetry first, finds he can't and then tries the short story which is the most demanding form after poetry. And failing at that, only then does he take up novel writing. -*

W. Faulkner





Robert Donahoo  
English Department  
Sam Houston State University  
Huntsville, TX 77341  
[eng\\_rxd@shsu.edu](mailto:eng_rxd@shsu.edu)

O'Connor Stirs Her Coffey: Debating Catholic Art and the Catholic Artist

Readers of Flannery O'Connor's nonfiction are aware that she frequently addressed the subject of Catholic art and Catholic writers. With essays bearing titles such as "The Church and the Fiction Writer," "Novelist and Believer," and "Catholic Novelists and Their Readers," her interest in Catholic art and Catholic writers is hard to miss. Yet often overlooked is the way that her ideas circulated inside a circle of discourse outside of the academic community of fiction and contemporary authors. Nevertheless, a 1959 letter to Betty Hester points to just such a discussion when O'Connor writes, "Thanks for sending me the Coffee article. I am going to talk at Spring Hill in April (Jesuit college in Mobile) so I have to be thinking of something to say to them and I may reuse some of the Coffee grounds—like Father McCown's mother who uses them over and over until they turn white and then serves them for grits. Happens all the time in the Cathlick [sic] press" (*HB* 363). O'Connor's capitalization of the "C" in "Coffee" and her mention of the "Cathlick press" using her dismissive spelling of the key term suggests she is making a reference to a largely forgotten commentator on Catholic art: Thomas P. Coffey. When O'Connor wrote her letter and was preparing the Spring Hill lecture that would form the basis for her essay "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South," Coffey published several articles on the subject of Catholic art. Examining these essays makes clear that O'Connor's ideas formed part of a forgotten debate that clarifies her views of the artist in ways that are particularly relevant to understanding her fiction, especially the one story that includes a character referred to only as an artist: the tattooist in "Parker's Back."

My method here is not an influence study but rather a discourse analysis familiar from the theories of Michel Foucault. Using both O'Connor's texts and essays by Coffee, I will establish how they form a discourse community that I will clearly define and then how that community shapes one particular work of O'Connor's fiction.

## Working Bibliography

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Sheerin, John B. C.S.P. "'The Ugly American Catholic'?" *The Catholic World*, Nov. 1959, pp. 76-79.

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## Essay Summary Assignment

Each week, along with the main reading, the syllabus lists what I want to term “enhancement readings.” There are 21 in all. Assuming our enrollment holds at 10 students, that means that each student should plan on working with a minimum of two of these readings. You should select the readings you desire to work with ASAP, based on what you feel you need to learn more about and what your schedule allows.

For each reading they do, students must write a brief response that does two things:

- Lay out what you find to be the most important claims or the most important offerings from each reading. For critical articles, this should be nothing new, but for something such as the readings of Eliot’s sources for *The Waste Land* it will mean discovering what you see as the relevant link to Eliot’s poem.
- Make a brief observation about how this can help yourself and other students better understand the appropriate literary historical period associated with the reading (either Modernism or Postmodernism).

I cannot give you an exact length of your comments. They simply need to fit the reading, but err on the side of brevity.

Students will post their comments on Blackboard, clicking on the “Essay comments from students” link on the left hand side of the page following the format given. To help with this, I have written a satisfactory response to one of our first enhancement readings, Pound’s review of Frost’s first book of poems, *A Boy’s Will*. Please follow my model in terms of title and paragraphing. Be sure your comments are posted by the Saturday prior to the class where the relevant literary text will be discussed. I encourage everyone to read the posts before coming to class. Let your peers help you through the readings.

In terms of grading, I will give students an “A” for this assignment IF it is posted on time AND it makes general sense. There are no good grades for stupidity or clearly failing to read the enhanced reading carefully. This easy “A” should form one-fourth of your course grade and offer some defense from my otherwise picky grading.

My goal here is to expand all of our knowledge in as painless a way as possible, exposing students to lots of material that generally exceeds what they would be able to read otherwise.

To make things a bit easier, below is a list of the individual “enhanced” readings students may sign up for:

1. Monroe, “Editorial Comment” **Blackboard**
2. Pound, Rev. of *North of Boston* **Blackboard**
3. Lowell, Rev. of *North of Boston* **Blackboard**
4. Singal, “Towards a Definition of American Modernism.” **Use JSTOR to obtain a PDF**
5. Pound, “A Retrospect” **Blackboard**
6. The material under “Sources” for Frazer, Weston, Gotama Buddha, King James Bible, *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*
7. Gordon, “The Composition of *The Waste Land*” Gardner, “*The Waste Land*: Paris 1922”
8. Rainey, “The Price of Modernism: Publishing *The Waste Land*”
9. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent”



10. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets"
11. Brooks, "*The Waste Land*: An Analysis"
12. Donoghue, "The Word Within a Word"
13. Eliot, "Religion and Literature" **Blackboard**
14. Cather, "Prefatory Note" **Blackboard** and Woolf, "Modern Novels" **Blackboard**
15. Krasner, "Eugene O'Neill: American Drama and American Modernism" **Blackboard**
16. Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" located at  
[http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/g\\_l/hughes/mountain.htm](http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/g_l/hughes/mountain.htm)
17. O'Connor, "Introduction to *A Memoir of Mary Ann*" **Blackboard**
18. O'Connor, "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South" **On Blackboard**
19. LeMay, "God's Back: Tattoos, Theology, and the Postmodern Pantocrator in 'Parker's Back'" **Download using MLA Bibliography database**
20. Longenbach, "What Was Postmodern Poetry" **Blackboard**
21. McHale, chapter one from *Constructing Postmodernism* **Link on Blackboard**

I thought American Lit was easy. Now look at me!

