Required Texts

Course Description
The literature of the 20th century depicts the modern world as a place of shifting perspectives and uncertain values. Many writers and critics refer to our time as one of dislocation. This description can be seen as positive or negative. On the one hand, the modern world is a place where the creativity of the artistic and technological imagination has brought us delight and comfort, along with considerable ethical and moral puzzlements. On the other hand, the modern world is a place of conflict and homelessness (from traditions, families, values and familiar narrative forms), a situation that can result in exhilaration and terror both. In the twentieth century, our capacity for genocidal warfare is precariously balanced against our awareness of the integrity of others different from ourselves and our responsibility for the world. These are the perspectives that define this course. Students will be expected to participate in discussion and practice critical and thoughtful reading and writing. Instructors will chose readings from 1900 to the end of the century, giving balanced attention to each quarter of the century. Some sections require attendance at films or dramatic production outside of regular class sessions.

Course Focus
I have structured this class around the idea of “The 20th Century Protagonist.” Each major work that we will be analyzing is built around a single character, a character who embodies some important aspect of each writer’s particular viewpoint on the 20th century. Through these major characters – Stevens in *Remains of the Day*, Vlad and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, Briony Tallis in *Atonement*, Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*, and Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* – writers have commented on life in the 20th century. The 20th century was a period of intense, furious change, as World Wars erupted and weapons were created that could obliterate our planet, as people in the post-war generations were left wondering what to do next, as technology allowed us to accomplish things that we would have never thought possible at speeds faster than we ever imagined, as “writing” grew to incorporate new media such as movies, television, and the internet, as life – with all its complexities and contradictions – continued to churn on despite our attempts to understand it through modernism or deconstruct it through postmodernism, as generation upon generation succeeded in finding new ways to battle the growing sense of desperation and hopelessness at the heart of existence.

Thus we are forced to ask questions such as – how do we carry on in the wake of everything that came before us? How do we confront the past when our viewpoints have been exposed as flawed and biased, when the past is shown to be nothing more than a construction? How can we piece together a fruitful existence when we know that the puzzle can never be completed, when we realize that, as W.B. Yeats wrote, “the center cannot hold”? These are the questions that confronted writers in the 20th century and that still confront us today. In the five novels we will be reading for this course, we
will meet five characters through which five writers posit their individualized responses to such questions, through which they filter their unique perspectives on what it is like living in the 20th century. For example, in the mannered, controlled narrative of Stevens, the proper English butler who narrates *The Remains of the Day*, Kazuo Ishiguro comments on the gradual death of traditional 19th century British society. On the opposite end of the spectrum, in the fractured, disintegrating narrative of Patrick Bateman, Bret Easton Ellis comments on the chaotic, superficial world of young corporate America in the 1980s. In addition to the primary readings, we will also be looking at other important 20th century protagonists. We will discuss a wide variety of characters – from Tony Soprano to Luke Skywalker to Mickey Mouse – as we try to identify what makes them memorable, what makes them lasting, and, most importantly perhaps, what they have to tell us about life in the 20th century.

Student Learning Objectives

Students should be able to: (a) use appropriate literary-critical vocabulary; (b) identify, analyze, and discuss key themes of modern literature; and (c) support interpretive readings with appropriate, coherently presented textual evidence.

Course Requirements

Keeping up with the daily reading
Daily study questions
Participating in class discussions
2 Essays (4-6 pages each)
1 In-Class Presentation
Mid-term exam
Final Exam (a two-hour in-class writing)

Essays

For this class, you will be writing two 4-6 page essays. At some point during the first month of class I will give you a number of possible topics. These will be fairly broad and open-ended, and will allow you some freedom to put your own spin on them. In addition, I am open to alternative ideas (one long paper instead of two short papers, collaborative writing, etc.) – so if you have a good one, don’t hesitate to approach me about it.

I am willing to read and respond to drafts at any point before the due date, though I do not require them and do not plan to collect them. Also I will conference with you anytime before your essay is due to discuss your progress or your problems. However, papers will not be accepted late – you will immediately receive a zero – and I do not allow revision once the essay has been graded.

Study Questions

25% of your grade will be based on the completion of daily study questions that are designed to make sure that you read and digest the material that we will be discussing each day.

- Study questions cannot be made up if you miss class or fail to do them – and in case you only read things in italics, no makeups or excuses for these.
- I expect responses to study questions to be between 1-2 pages. I don’t expect every response to be 2 full pages, but I also don’t want 1 page and a line every time. Also, don’t screw with the font or the margins. I’ll probably just give you a low grade out of annoyance and not even bother to read your answer.
- For most daily assignments, you will be answering either 1 or 2 questions – if you are only answering 1 question, I expect your entire 1-2 page response to be about that question. However, if you have 2 questions, you should address them both separately in the 1-2 pages. (In other words, I wouldn’t expect 4 pages just because on a particular night I ask you to answer 2 study questions.) That took a lot of sentences to explain.
We will likely do between 25-30 sets of study questions – which means that you are going to be doing a lot of writing in this class.

While I don’t require that your answers be typed, I would of course prefer it. Also, I understand that 2 written pages and 2 typed pages are not equal amounts of writing, so I will tend to be more lenient towards short typewritten responses than short handwritten responses.

Be sure to use specific passages in your answers whenever possible – these will facilitate discussion and strengthen your claims. Include page numbers for easy reference during class, where I will often ask you either to read your answers aloud or to summarize them. During discussions, you should be prepared to discuss all the study questions, not just the one(s) you answered.

I will usually check to make sure you have your responses finished before class. If this seems like something that would happen in high school, I apologize, but I know how often I used to write my responses to daily assignments during the same class that they were due. My point is that you need to do these before class, not during.

Exams
The mid-term and final will be essay exams designed to test your knowledge of the readings and their relationship to the larger themes we will be discussing in class. You will be allowed to use your books during the exams, and you will write your answers in blue books that I will provide to you on the day of the exam. I will likely ask you to answer 2-3 essay questions that require you to use several of the books in your responses.

In-Class Presentations
In addition to the five protagonists we will be discussing in relation to the primary texts, we will also be familiarizing ourselves with other important 20th century protagonists. Throughout the semester we will devote some time each week to the discussion of characters not found in the novels we will be reading. In order to do this, each of you will be responsible for preparing a presentation about an important 20th century protagonist that I will choose. Each of you will be responsible for preparing a brief essay (approximately 2 pages) in which you analyze your character and demonstrate why he or she is an important 20th century protagonist, being sure to think about what the characters represent and why their creators construct them and present them in the ways that they do.

You will then be responsible for leading a 15-20 minute in-class discussion about your character, providing background and possibly showing video clips to help support your claims. I certainly do not expect you to speak the entire time, and I plan to help as much as possible (we will be discussing each character in relation to a larger thematic issue), but you should be prepared during this time to be the authority on your character and on the thematic issue. Of course, it is up to your classmates whether the discussion goes well and whether you are the only one talking – so, uh, be nice to each other, and participate as much as you can whenever possible to make this all go smoother.

Grading Breakdown
I will assign grades using a 1000-point-system, broken down into the following individual grades:

- 25% Study Questions
- 15% Essay # 1
- 15% Essay # 2
- 15% Mid-term Exam
- 15% Final Exam
- 10% In-class presentation
- 5% Participation

Total = 100%
Late Work
All essays must be typed and submitted at the beginning of class on the due date. Any essay turned in after class begins on the due date will be considered late and will not be accepted – you will receive no credit for it. While I reserve the right to suspend this policy for extreme circumstances, I would not count on it. Study questions will be accepted only in class on the day they are due – if you miss the class when study questions are due, you cannot receive credit for them – NO EXCEPTIONS TO THIS. Students may not submit essays or study questions to the English office, to my mailbox or via e-mail instead of attending class; that is, I will not accept work from a student who does not attend class on the day the work is due. Students who miss class due to a pre-arranged excused absence must make plans ahead of time with me concerning the submission of missed work.

Attendance
You are required to attend all class meetings. Your final course grade will be lowered by a letter grade (10%) for each unexcused absence after the third one. For example, if you have five unexcused absences, your grade will drop by 20%, two full letter grades. Although you are “allowed” three unexcused absences, those absences may influence your participation grade. Excused absences, which must be requested in writing, may be granted for religious holidays, officially organized and documented university events, or documented illness/family emergency. In the case of religious holidays and university events, students must notify me two class periods in advance and complete the required work ahead of time. In the case of illness or family emergency, students must make arrangements to make up missed work. Excused or unexcused, anyone who misses class is liable for any missed work or work not turned in on time.

Plagiarism
Each student will receive and is expected to abide by the English Department’s official policy statement on and description of plagiarism, which can be found on the Internet at http://www.siu.edu/departments/english/writing/plagiarism.html. Essentially, plagiarism is the use of someone else’s words or ideas as your own without giving the appropriate credit or without the person’s consent to use his or her words or ideas without acknowledgment. The consequences of plagiarism can be serious. In the work world, it can result in legal action. For student writers, it can result in a failing grade, disciplinary reprimand, censure, probation, and even suspension or dismissal from the University.

I have a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism. Anyone caught plagiarizing will automatically fail the course.

Sexual Harassment
Sexual harassment of any kind under any circumstances will not be tolerated.

Confidentiality Statement
In compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 and, consequently, the University’s policy of maintaining confidentiality of student educational records, I cannot post your grades on my office door or via email, leave your papers in a box outside my office door, or talk with your parents, spouse, children, or others about your work in this class.

Miscellaneous Rules
If you are having trouble with the writing assignments at any point during the semester, I encourage you to visit the Writing Center, located in Faner Hall, Room 2281. They will help you with proofreading, organization, or anything else that you need help with on your papers.

I have heard and used every excuse you could possibly come up with for late papers and missing class. Feel free to try anyway – I know I would, and I’m sure you will – but prepare for me to be pretty unsympathetic.
Just because your spellchecker doesn’t underline something for you, that doesn’t mean it’s correct. Read through your papers before turning them in.

On days when study questions are due, I don’t want people bringing in their grocery lists. Manage your time so that your answers are not rushed and so that you have plenty of time to do the assigned reading.

If you’re having problems, or if you have questions, at any point in the semester, please come talk to me during office hours or after class. I’m not nearly as mean as all my ex-girlfriends say I am.

I have spaced out the reading as much as possible, but really try to stay ahead of the schedule so that you don’t fall behind. Feel free to work on study questions ahead of time, but be prepared to add to them based on our discussions.

Papers must be typed, printed in Times New Roman 12-point font, with standard margins and text spacing. None of this please.

No matter how nice the weather is, we won’t be having class outside… unless it’s really nice, and you really beg me.

Course Calendar (Subject to change):
Be prepared to discuss the reading on the day it is listed. For example, on August 26 we will be discussing “Love Song” and the study question you were assigned.

Aug 24: Introduction to the course; Pass out syllabus; Ridiculous first-day activity
Aug 26: “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (Handout) – SQ 1 Due

Aug 31: Remains of the Day pages 1-70 – SQ 2
Sept 2: ROTD pages 70-126 – SQ 3

Sept 7: ROTD pages 127-201 – SQ 4
Sept 9: ROTD 202-245 – SQ 5

Sept 14: “The Legacy” (Handout) – SQ 6
Sept 16 Lecture / Presentations

Sept 21: Waiting for Godot Act 1 – SQ 7
Sept 23: Waiting for Godot Act 2 – SQ 8

Sept 28: Excerpt from Molloy (Handout) – SQ 9 / Prepare for Midterm
Sept 30: Midterm Exam

Oct 5 Atonement 1-116 – SQ 10
Oct 7 Atonement 117-175 – SQ 11

Oct 12 Atonement 177-250 – SQ 12
Oct 14 Atonement 253-297 – SQ 13

Oct 19 Atonement 297-351 – SQ 14
Oct 21 Class Cancelled for Conferences on Essay
Oct 26 *American Psycho* 1-59 / Peer Editing – SQ 15
Oct 28 Essay 1 Due

Nov 2 *American Psycho* 60-175 – SQ 16
Nov 4 *American Psycho* 177-250 – SQ 17

Nov 9 *American Psycho* 253-297 – SQ 18
Nov 11 *American Psycho* 297-351 – SQ 19

Nov 16 *Lolita* 1-97 – SQ 20
Nov 18 *Lolita* 97-142 – SQ 21

Nov 23 Thanksgiving Break
Nov 25 Thanksgiving Break

Nov 30 *Lolita* 143-238 – SQ 22
Dec 2 Class Cancelled for Conferences on Essay 2

Dec 7 *Lolita* 238-317 / Peer Editing
Dec 9 Review for Final / Essay 2 Due

*** Somewhere in this schedule I hope to find time to view 2 films as a class. You will answer SQ 24 and SQ 25 about the films, and we will devote some classtime to discussing the films.

Finals Week Dec 13-17: Final Essay Exam