

AMERICAN POSTMODERNISM AND THE POETICS OF JOY

COURSE INFORMATION

Course ID:	LIT 2081	Instructor:	Nick Sturm
Semester:	2013 Fall	Office:	WMS 327
Classroom:	WMS 317	Office Hours:	T 12-3pm OBA
Time:	12:20-1:10pm	Contact:	ns12b@fsu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

"Nothing great," Emerson claims in 1841 in the midst of articulating a vision for the future of American literature, "was ever achieved without enthusiasm. The way of life is wonderful; it is by abandonment." So why are descriptions like "sad," "depressing," and "dark" the most common assessments of books read in literature classes? What does a literature arising from happiness, enthusiasm, and ecstasy look like? Instead of postmodern malaise, can we describe a postmodern joy?

This course in contemporary literature intends to be both an introduction to and an investigation of something called "Postmodern Literature" and how a broad range of poets and writers, from post-WWII to post-9/11 America, have interacted with these contexts to articulate a poetics of joy. We will begin with the assumption that "Postmodern Literature" is a suspect category, rather than an accepted designation, which has been used in various ways to describe certain characteristics of late 20th century/early 21st century literature that tends to question the legitimacy and/or efficacy of both the Enlightenment ideas implicit in Modernist literature as well as the Realist elements of 19th century literature. Through close readings of various creative and critical texts, we will endeavor to familiarize ourselves with this field in a way that highlights both its aesthetic and philosophic aspects, in order to provide a sense of social, cultural, and intellectual context.

COURSE OUTCOMES

Students leaving this course can expect to have achieved a general understanding of postmodern literature as well as the key critical debates surrounding this literature. In turn, this should provide students with a greater understanding of important aesthetic and ethical issues related to contemporary American literature and culture.

Students will also gain an appreciation for the diversity of voices that have often tended to be marginalized by literary tradition, which will allow students to develop the ability to read texts in relation to their historical and cultural contexts, in order to gain a richer understanding of both text and context, and to become more aware of themselves as situated historically and culturally.

Students will also be able to generate an in-depth analysis of a work of literature, as well as write critical responses to secondary sources. Additionally, through creative exercises and engagements, students will be able to situate their own aesthetic concerns in relation to literary texts.

Feedback designed to foster students' writing proficiency will be provided.

COURSE TEXTS

Padgett Powell – *The Interrogative Mood: A Novel?* (2009)

Wendy Xu – *You Are Not Dead* (2013)

Ben Lerner – *Leaving the Atocha Station* (2011)

Ana Bozicevic – *Rise in the Fall* (2013)

Maggie Nelson – *Bluets* (2009)

Paul Violi – *In Baltic Circles* (1973/2011) [pdf]

Paul Hoover, ed. – *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology, second edition* (2013)

*Various supplementary materials in the form of hyperlinks or PDFs found on Blackboard

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Complete all assigned readings.
- Complete all Tests.
- Complete & Present Short Critical Paper (Roundtable Discussion)
- Complete Final Critical Paper
- Participate actively and relevantly in class discussion.

GRADING DISTRIBUTION

25% Tests	100 Points (25 each)
25% 2 Short Critical Papers (Roundtable Discussion)	100 Points (50 each)
25% Experiment / Experience Notebook	100 Points
25% Final Critical Paper	100 Points

A = Outstanding achievement. Student performance demonstrates full command of the course materials and evinces a high level of originality and/or creativity that far surpasses course expectations.

A- = Excellent achievement. Student performance demonstrates thorough knowledge of the course materials and exceeds course expectations by completing all requirements in a superior manner.

B+ = Very good work. Student performance demonstrates above-average comprehension of the course materials and exceeds course expectations on all tasks as defined in the course syllabus.

B = Good work. Student performance meets designated course expectations and demonstrates understanding of the course materials at an acceptable level.

B- = Marginal work. Student performance demonstrates incomplete understanding of course materials.

C = Unsatisfactory work. Student performance demonstrates incomplete and inadequate understanding of course materials.

D = Unacceptable work.

F = Failure to complete work.

EXPERIMENT/EXPERIENCE NOTEBOOK

The words “experiment” and “experience” share the root word *experiri* “to try, test.” All learning is an overlapping of experiment and experience. This class will encourage you to think of experiments and experience as synonyms, especially in relation to how you encounter the texts we read. Confusion and understanding, the results of both experiments and experience, are often thought of as opposing states; however, and fortunately for us, this is not true. Both are active terms, implying participation with and curiosity of the world. Your experiment/experience notebook will be an informal accumulation of writings, sketches, collages, poems, stories, scribbles, erasures, paintings, and any other productive responses to this class. This notebook should be only for this class and will be turned in and returned at the end of the semester. We are reading six books, one anthology, nineteen secondary theoretical/aesthetic essays, and a variety of other “texts” – your experiment/experience notebook should include, at minimum, the following:

- creative/critical responses to all 6 books
- creative/critical responses to at least 10 secondary materials
- creative response pieces to 5 individual poems from the Norton anthology
- creative/critical responses to 5 cultural/art events: poetry readings, gallery openings, concerts, etc.
- you may include your notes from class but it is not required
- any and all other joys and confusions that demand you take action

TESTS

There will be FOUR scheduled tests given over the semester, which will check both reading comprehension and command of the critical concepts we’ll be developing throughout the semester. Each test will ask you to respond in short answer format to questions arising from our study of the primary and secondary texts as well as the accompanying critical concepts. In order to take the test you must be in class. The only way to “make-up” a test is if you have contacted me before class about your impending absence, or if your absence is excused.

CRITICAL PAPERS

You will write three papers this semester: two Short Critical Paper (2-3 pages) and the Final Critical Paper (8-10 pages), each to be double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman, 1-inch margins, and thoroughly proofread. The work is due as noted; plan accordingly. Notwithstanding documented emergency, if you fail to attend your scheduled Short Paper presentation day, you still must turn in the paper but you will not receive full credit. In terms of the Long Paper, if your grade matters to you I highly recommend you meet with me in my office hours to discuss your ideas well in advance of the due date.

SHORT CRITICAL PAPERS (FOR ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION)

Each student is required to select and sign up for two of the roundtable discussions, for which it will be required that s/he write a short critical paper (2-3 pages) on one of the secondary course materials, and then present this paper to the class. A sign-up sheet will be circulated on the second day of class. You are required to sign-up for two roundtable discussions. If you miss the second day of class, it is your responsibility to get in touch with me as soon as possible to sign-up for one of the readings.

Your grade for these papers will be predicated on the following expectations:

I expect this short paper to be a critical analysis of the secondary material, which means that your main thesis and supporting claims should arise from a detailed consideration of the secondary material using the five analytical moves. The purpose of this paper is NOT to summarize the material, but rather to analyze it and argue with it. Therefore, you should focus on making an argument that demonstrates (i) What the text is doing (ii) How the text is doing it (iii) Why this is important. Your goal should be to help your classmates understand the material, as well as prompt a fruitful class discussion.

LONG CRITICAL PAPER

Your final paper for the class will be considerably longer (8-10 pages). **It will be due at Noon on Wednesday December 11 in my office.**

Your grade for this paper will be predicated on the following expectations:

I expect this long paper to be a critical engagement with one of the primary course texts of your choosing. You may also choose the angle of your engagement, so long as it intersects with some aspect of Postmodernism. You must use at least three relevant secondary sources, but feel free to use more if it suits your project. I highly recommend that you meet with me during my office hours to discuss your ideas well before the paper is due.

In addition to the grading rubric (found on this syllabus), you may find it most beneficial to consider the following questions whilst composing your final paper:

- 1) Thesis: Does your argument take up a clear position and is that position provocative? Does it show a creative or thoughtful strategy for reading the primary text in a fresh way, or does it effectively point out problems many people don't recognize? In a word, is your argument compelling?
- 2) Claims: Were your claims clear and distinct from one another? Were they logical and did they actually support your thesis? Did they show a clear understanding of the primary and secondary texts you used to support your ideas?
- 3) Evidence: Did you draw resourcefully and creatively from a variety of materials – read, observed, overheard, speculated or hypothesized – to support your claims? Or did you just repeat the same assertion again and again? Does the evidence you enlist actually corroborate your claims, or is the relationship between your claims and evidence ambiguous or wholly arbitrary?
- 4) Organization: Did you use the expository form sensibly and flexibly as a means to help you generate and arrange your ideas for clarity of communication? Or, did you allow the expository form to become a straitjacket which hindered your thought and cramped your style, or did you jettison formality altogether and produce a loose and baggy argument?
- 5) Expression: Did you write in simple and clear sentences which conveyed your point accurately and persuasively, or did your language instead put up a barrier between yourself and your reader? Was your voice mature, relaxed and natural, or was it

excessively formal and pompous or excessively flippant and vulgar? Was your use of vocabulary and phrasing precise or sloppy?

ATTENDANCE

Attendance in this course is integral to your success and education. Failure to attend deprives you of a chance of developing fundamental skills of reading, writing, and critical thinking. If you accrue more than four unexcused absences you risk failing the course. Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. Note: being hungover or "having the flu" does not constitute an excused absence, as it is not an emergency situation. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

Also note: no electronic devices are to be used in the classroom: no cell phones, no computers, etc., unless I have granted you specific permission.

ACADEMIC HONOR POLICY

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to ". . . be honest and truthful and . . . [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at <http://dof.fsu.edu/honorpolicy.htm>.)

GORDON RULE

In order to fulfill FSU's Gordon Rule "W" Designation (writing) credit, the student must earn a "C-" or better in the course, and in order to receive a "C-" or better in the course, the student must earn at least a "C-" on the required writing assignments for the course. If the student does not earn a "C-" or better on the required writing assignments for the course, the student will not earn an overall grade of "C-" or better in the course, no matter how well the student performs in the remaining portion of the course.

ADA STATEMENT

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Student Disability Resource Center 874 Traditions Way 108 Student Services Building Florida State University Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167 (850) 644-9566 (voice) (850) 644-8504 (TDD) sdr@admin.fsu.edu <http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/>

READING WRITING CENTER

The RWC offers one-on-one help for students with their writing, whether they need help with a writing problem, understanding what their teacher wants, or just want to do better on their writing assignments. The Center is staffed by teaching assistants who are trained in writing and teaching. Make an appointment by calling ahead (644-6495) or stopping in – room 222C of the Williams Building.

Standardized Essay Grading Rubric for Gordon Rule, Y, and X courses

BASIC CRITERIA
THESIS and CONTENT (Development) The essay has a thesis—a single, central point that is interesting, original, striking and substantial. The central idea is developed in the essay through well-chosen, appropriate, concrete details that show originality and freshness. Author shows rather than merely tells. Generalizations and assertions are defended. Arguments are logical.
ORGANIZATION The essay is organized and well structured (there is a beginning, a body, and a conclusion). The essay exhibits a clear strategy for persuasion and development. The organization works with the thesis so that the thesis and the organization serve the purpose of the essay. Essay does not digress from central point. Transitions help the paper flow smoothly. Introductory paragraph(s) is (are) interesting and appropriate. Concluding paragraph is clear and convincing.
PARAGRAPHS Paragraphs are organized, unified and coherent. Each supporting paragraph has a controlling idea. In supporting paragraphs, topic idea helps further the thesis.
STYLE Sentences are well constructed. Writer avoids modifier problems. Sentences show variety of pattern and are rhetorically effective. The essay is written in a style and tone appropriate to the audience, topic and purpose. Words are appropriate and well chosen. Writer avoids jargon and sexist language.
GRAMMAR, SPELLING, MECHANICS Writer avoids errors in grammar, spelling, and mechanics.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

WEEK ONE – August 26 - 30

- M Introduction + Read Five Analytical Moves essay [pdf] and Whitman and Dickinson selections [pdf]
- W Modernism
- F Test #1

WEEK TWO – September 2 - 6

- M No Class – Labor Day
- W **Roundtable:** *Postmodern Anthology* Introduction and “Projective Verse”
- F *Postmodern Anthology* Charles Olson, Barbara Guest, Frank O’Hara

WEEK THREE – September 9 - 13

- M **Roundtable:** “A Reason for Poetics” and “Personism: A Manifesto” [anthology]
- W **Roundtable:** “Structure, Sign and Play...” [pdf]
- F **Roundtable:** “Theorizing the Postmodern: Toward a Poetics” [pdf]

WEEK FOUR – September 16 - 20

- M *Postmodern Anthology* John Ashbery
- W **Roundtable:** “Rejection of Closure” [anthology] and “Translation Wounds” [pdf]
- F No Class

WEEK FIVE – September 23 - 27

- M *Leaving the Atocha Station* pg 1-78
- W *Leaving the Atocha Station* pg 81-128
- F *Leaving the Atocha Station* pg 128-181

WEEK SIX – September 30 – October 4

- M Test #2
- W **Roundtable:** “There are Not Leaves Enough” and “from Bewilderment” [anthology]
- F Rise in the Fall pg 1-42

WEEK SEVEN -- October 7 - 11

- M *Rise in the Fall* pg 47-74
- W **Roundtable:** “My Interior Vita” and “Note on My Writing” [anthology]
- F **Roundtable:** “Uses of the Erotic” and “selections from *Guilty*” [pdf]

WEEKS EIGHT – October 14 - 18

- M *Bluets* pg 1-47
- W *Bluets* pg 48-95
- F Kenneth Koch “The Circus” and “The Circus” [pdf]

WEEK NINE – October 21 - 25

- M *In Baltic Circles*
- W *In Baltic Circles*
- F *In Baltic Circles*

WEEK TEN – October 28 – November 1

- M Test #3
- W *Postmodern Anthology* Lyn Hejinian, Alice Notely, and Ron Padgett, and “from Sound and Sentiment, Sound and Symbol” and “Language Writing: from Productive to Libindinal Economy [anthology]
- F No Class

WEEK ELEVEN – November 4 - 8

- M *Postmodern Anthology* Myung Mi Kim and Peter Gizzi
- W *You Are Not Dead* pg 1-33
- F *You Are Not Dead* pg 37-67

WEEK TWELVE – November 11 - 15

M No Class – Veteran’s Day

W *Interrogative Mood*

F *Interrogative Mood*

WEEK THIRTEEN – November 18 - 22

M *Interrogative Mood*

W *Postmodern Anthology* Lisa Jarnot and Noelle Kocot

F *Postmodern Anthology* Noah Eli Gordon and Ben Lerner

WEEK FOURTEEN – November 25 - 29

M Test #4

W No Class – Thanksgiving Break

F No Class – Thanksgiving Break

WEEK FIFTEEN – December 2 - 6

M *Postmodern Anthology* Kenneth Goldsmith, K. Silem Mohammed, Drew Gardner, and Vanessa Place

W “Excessivism,” “Conceptual Poetics,” and “Why Flarf is Better Than Conceptualism” [anthology]

F Discuss Final Papers