

English 362
Winter 2018, Mason Hall 2306
MW 11:30am - 1:00pm
Office number: 734-647-2843

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Office hours: T 1:00-3:00
(and by appointment)

Mid-Century Malaise: The Novel after World War II

After the Second World War, many observers of American culture claimed that a “malaise” had descended upon the country. Sociologists like David Riesman and journalists like William H. Whyte wrote bestselling books about this malaise. Philosophers waxed extensively, calling it an “existential crisis.” Even Hollywood found angst to be a marketable thematic in films like *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), *Rear Window* (1954), and other productions in the mystery, suspense, and sci-fi genres. It’s not surprising that the historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. dubbed the period the “age of anxiety,” which is also the title of W. H. Auden’s Pulitzer Prize-winning collection of poetry in 1947.

This diagnosis of anxiety, malaise, loneliness, and crisis was in sharp contrast with the political rhetoric of the mid-century decades. For example, the publicist Henry Luce called for the United States to exert its economic and political strength globally, thus inaugurating what he termed the “American Century.” President Harry Truman would similarly characterize the U.S. as “the most powerful nation, perhaps, in all history.” Middle-class white America enjoyed unprecedented rates of high wages, home ownership, and for the first time had access to amenities like television sets and affordable sedans. So why was there so much anxiety? What assumptions were implicit in the diagnostic term “malaise”? What was occluded or overlooked in this diagnosis? And how might the postwar decades help us better understand the intellectual vocabulary and political culture of our present moment?

This course approaches these questions in American cultural history by looking to novels by Ralph Ellison, Vladimir Nabokov, Gwendolyn Brooks, Shirley Jackson, John Okada, and Patricia Highsmith, among others. The course lectures will also discuss thinkers who were influential in the postwar period, including Freud, Sartre, King, and Hannah Arendt.

Required texts:

- Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha* (ISBN 0-88378-061-5)
- Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (ISBN 0-679-73276-4)
- Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (ISBN 978-0-393-33214-8)
- Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (ISBN 978-0-14-303998-3)
- Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (ISBN 0-679-72316-1)
- John Okada, *No-No Boy* (ISBN 978-0-295-99404-8)
- J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* (ISBN 9780316769020)

Course Assignments	%
Creative / professional collaboration	15
Paper #1	10
Paper #2	20
Participation	20
Final Paper	35

Accommodations:

If you have a disability and need an accommodation to participate in this class or to complete course requirements, please ask Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to provide documentation of the accommodations that you need. Then, please share this documentation with me as soon as possible, preferably within the first few weeks of class.

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. If you must miss class, let me know in advance. With few exceptions, I will deduct ten percent from your Participation grade for every absence after the second. So, if you miss three classes, the highest you could earn for your Participation grade would be 90%, four classes would be 80%, and so on. It would be wise to attend every class from the beginning of the semester in the event that emergencies arise or you need to be gone for college events.

Electronic technology:

Laptops, cell phones, smart phones, tablets, and all other electronic devices should not be used during class meetings. Please print out the readings for January 8 and March 14; do not read these short stories on a tablet, etc. If this policy creates hardship, please speak with me.

Participation:

Your participation grade will be determined according to the following criteria:

- Conversation during office hours.
- Quality and quantity of contributions to class discussion.
- Attendance (per Attendance Policy).
- The short “homework” writing assignments.

The following will negatively affect your participation grade:

- Being unengaged or displaying an apathetic attitude about the course material.
- Showing disrespect or indifference toward your peers.
- Not reading an assignment in its entirety.

Assignment 1 (due January 24):

This paper should “close read” a scene or passage from Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. Papers should be 1½ to 2 pages, double-spaced, in length. This is not a thesis-driven paper, and there shouldn’t be an introduction or summary. Jump immediately into the analysis of the text. Let your topic sentences state claims that are then supported or unpacked by “close reading.” You can assume that your reader knows the plot of the novel and comprehends its “surface” meaning. Your task is to unpack the language of the text to show what’s meaningful but not obvious about the passage. I’ll grade this assignment according to the rubric at the end of the syllabus.

Assignment 2 (due February 12):

This paper should advance a thesis and support that argument through “close reading.” Your argument must be about Brooks’ *Maud Martha* or Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*. Papers should be 4 pages, double-spaced, in length. Unlike the first essay, this assignment is a thesis-driven paper. Introduce the significance of your thesis and then move into providing textual evidence for that thesis through “close reading.” Like the first essay, you can assume that your reader knows the plot of the novel and comprehends its “surface” meaning. I’ll grade this assignment according to the rubric at the end of the syllabus.

Creative or Professional Collaboration (due March 19):

Students in literary studies go on to work in many different creative and professional fields. I want you to use this project to do work that interests you. I also want you to work collaboratively in groups of two to four. Students in previous semesters have used this collaborative project to create dialogues through fiction or non-fiction; they've made a visual or digital project, which was later used for job applications and internships; they've created art that brings awareness to a problem related to our semester's readings. You get to decide how to be a creative and critical thinker in this project. It also needs to be clear to me how each student in the group contributed. For evaluation standards, see the rubric at the end of the syllabus.

Your group will need to schedule a 10-minute meeting with me to talk through your plans during the week of February 12-16 or 19-23. Your group is responsible for setting up the meeting. During our conversation, I'll give you feedback on your initial plans. Here are some ideas:

- Visual art: Each student in the group should create three or four works of visual art and then exhibit them, preferably on campus. The exhibition would need to be open to the public before the due date, well-documented by the artists, and then images or originals of the art would need to be available for evaluation by the due date.
- Podcast: A group of four produces a ten-minute podcast that analyzes a present-day cultural artifact or phenomenon by reference to one of the books discussed this semester. You might include sounds from campus, interviews with faculty or students, etc.
- Digital project: Use neatline.org or some other digital technology to map, chronicle, and/or publicize a literary, intellectual, or cultural problem.
- Flash fiction sequence: Each student writes a first-person narrative that touches on the same content or problem from the semester. (The same could be done via non-fiction.) Each student's contribution should be 800-1000 words.
- A short documentary film: Produce a short, low-tech documentary on a form of "malaise" afflicting some segment of campus. Why's it there? Are there problems with the way students, administrators, or faculty think about the problem?
- Collaborative poetry collection: Two students respond to one another in a poetry collection (five poems each writer).
- A philosophical dialogue: After the pattern of Plato and Berkeley, write a dialogue between two to five characters. Topic should relate to issues raised by our course. Each student should contribute 800-1000 words.

Final Essay (due April 16):

Choose two or more of the assigned readings from the course schedule and write a thesis-driven research paper that is approximately 10 pages in length. You may not use material from assignment 1 or 2. You should (a) formulate a clear thesis or arguable interpretation about the novels. You should (b) support that thesis by analyzing salient ideas, images, language, and the artistic form of the texts. Finally, you should (c) situate your thesis and close reading in peer-reviewed scholarship and/or wider conversations (e.g., philosophy, environmental science, media studies, literary theory). I will evaluate final papers based on the following criteria: sophistication of the thesis (30%); "close reading" or textual support for the argument (30%); prose and paper structure (20%); incorporation of scholarly material and/or a "wider conversation" (20%). I will be happy to serve as a sounding board, recommend secondary sources, and read drafts of your papers in my office hours.

Day-by-Day Schedule:

	Monday	Wednesday
Week 1	January 1	January 3 Syllabus, introductions, etc.
Week 2	January 8 John Cheever, “The Enormous Radio” (Canvas) Lecture: Malaise and the “American Century”	January 10 Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> , Prologue-ch.4 (pp.3-108). Lecture: American Existentialism
Week 3	January 15 <i>No class – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day</i>	January 17 Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> , chs.5-11 (pp.109-250) <i>Assignment: What confuses you about this section? What passages are in need of close reading? Type out 2-3 questions and also identify 2-3 passages for in-class analysis. You’ll hand the printed document in at the end of class.</i>
Week 4	January 22 Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> , chs.12-20 (pp.251-444). Lecture: MLK & the Civil Rights Movement	January 24 Ellison, chs.21-Epilogue (pp.445-581). <i>Essay 1 due at the start of class</i>
Week 5	January 29 Jackson, <i>The Haunting of Hill House</i> , sections 1-4 (pp.1-99).	January 31 Jackson, <i>The Haunting of Hill House</i> , sections 5-9 (pp.100-182).
Week 6	February 5 Brooks, <i>Maud Martha</i> , chs.1-21 (pp.1-101).	February 7 Brooks, <i>Maud Martha</i> , chs. 22-34 (pp.102-180). <i>Assignment: What’s notable about the prose or form of the writing in Maud Martha? Hazard a tentative answer to this vague question in a paragraph. To be handed in at the end of class.</i>
Week 7	February 12 <i>Essay 2 due at the start of class</i>	February 14 Nabokov, <i>Lolita</i> , Foreword-ch.24 in Part I (pp.3-105).
Week 8	February 19 Nabokov, <i>Lolita</i> , chs.25 in Part I – ch.15 in Part II (pp.105-209).	February 21 Nabokov, <i>Lolita</i> , ch.16 in Part II – “On a Book Entitled <i>Lolita</i> ” (pp.209-317).
Winter Break	February 26 <i>No class</i>	February 28 <i>No class</i>
Week 9	March 5 Okada, <i>No-No Boy</i> , Preface-ch.4 (pp.xxiii-p.93). In-class viewing, from <i>Unfinished Business: The Japanese-American Internment Cases</i> (1986)	March 7 Okada, <i>No-No Boy</i> , chs.5-8 (pp.94-167). In-class lecture: Arendt’s <i>The Origins of Totalitarianism</i> (1951)
Week 10	March 12 Okada, <i>No-No Boy</i> , chs.9-11 (pp.168-221)	March 14 Flannery O’Connor, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” and “Good Country People” (Canvas)
Week 11	March 19 <i>Creative Collaboration due at the start of class</i>	March 21 Highsmith, <i>The Talented Mr. Ripley</i> , chs.1-11 (pp.9-93)

<p>Week 12</p>	<p>March 26 Highsmith, <i>The Talented Mr. Ripley</i>, chs.12-22 (pp.93-199).</p> <p>Assignment: <i>What confuses you about this novel? About Ripley's character? About Highsmith's representation of Ripley's character? Type out three questions. You will hand these in (must be printed) at the end of class.</i></p>	<p>March 28 Highsmith, <i>The Talented Mr. Ripley</i>, chs.23-30 (pp.199-273).</p> <p>Assignment: <i>Compare Ripley and Ellison's invisible man. What's noteworthy about their differences or similarities? Don't write a 20-page paper. Instead, stay focused and write only one paragraph to be turned in at the end of class.</i></p>
<p>Week 13</p>	<p>April 2 Salinger, <i>Franny and Zooey</i>, "Franny" (pp.1-44).</p> <p>Assignment: <i>Hazard a tentative comparison between the mysticism in "Franny" and the Gothic supernatural in Jackson. Why do these writers invoke mysticism? What's notable here? What's lost or gained? One-paragraph.</i></p>	<p>April 4 Salinger, <i>Franny and Zooey</i>, "Zooey" (pp.47-202).</p>
<p>Week 14</p>	<p>April 9 <i>No class – Writing Day</i></p>	<p>April 11 <i>Final paper workshop</i></p>
<p>Week 15</p>	<p>April 16 <i>Final paper due</i>; course evaluations</p>	

Rubric for Assignment 1

	F	D	C	B	A	Score
Analysis and Close Reading 50%	Does not evaluate “close” textual evidence. The paper relies heavily on summary, restatement, and value judgments. Or, the paper makes claims without textual support.		The paper analyzes the text to make claims, but the analysis is cursory at times. Includes some unnecessary summary as “evidence.” The analysis is not always compelling.		The paper conducts a “close reading” of the text. It makes interpretive claims based on analysis. The paper avoids cursory claims and unsupported opinions or impressions.	
Prose 35%	Excessive mechanical, syntactical, citational, or grammatical errors. Tone and level of formality are completely inappropriate. The prose is unclear or convoluted.		Largely free of errors (no more than three) , but at times may fail to be clear or fluid. Or, the tone / formality may be inappropriate at times. Minor citational errors.		Free of mechanical, syntactical, citational, and grammatical errors. Tone and level of formality are appropriate. Not only correct, but eloquent.	
Topic Sentences 15%	The paragraphs rarely, if ever, have clear topic sentences. The paragraphs include unrelated, disorganized, or irrelevant material.		Every paragraph includes a topic sentence but some of these “mini-theses” may be unclear. Some material in the paragraphs may veer from the topic sentence.		Each paragraph includes a strong topic sentence that governs its claims and the material that’s included. The sequence of ideas is well-organized.	
Total						

Rubric for Assignment 2

	1	2	3	4	5	Your Score
Thesis 20 points	There may not be a thesis stated in the paper. Or, the thesis may not be a debatable claim. The thesis may be a subjective claim, value judgment, abstract observation, a platitude, cliché, etc.		The thesis is a debatable claim, although the argument may be imprecise or unclear. The statement of the argument needs more development, or precision. Or, the thesis needs clarity regarding its significance.		The thesis states a clear argument that is debatable, significant, and requires critical interpretation. There is a clear “conversation” behind the thesis. The analysis refers back and supports this thesis.	
Introductory paragraph 15 points	The intro may funnel, include irrelevant material, or generalizations. The intro does not set up the argument of the paper or context of that argument.		The intro stays focused on the subject of the paper but does not give a clear sense for the significance, audience, or direction of the argument. However, there is NO “funneling” or generalizing.		The intro sets up the argument in a compelling and clear way. It includes NO irrelevant material. It establishes the context or conversation of the thesis.	
Analysis and Close Reading 40 points	Does not use “close” textual evidence to support its claims, or does so sparsely. The paper relies heavily on summary, restatement, and value judgments. Or, the paper makes claims with little support.		The paper uses the text to support its claims, although the analysis is often cursory. Includes some unnecessary summary as “evidence.” The evidence provided is not always compelling.		The paper conducts a “close reading” of the text(s) and uses this evidence in a compelling way to prove its thesis and supporting claims. All material presented is relevant “evidence.”	
Prose 15 points	Excessive mechanical, syntactical, citational, or grammatical errors. Tone and level of formality are completely inappropriate. The prose is unclear or convoluted.		Largely free of errors (no more than three) , but at times may fail to be clear or fluid. Or, the tone / formality may be inappropriate at times. Minor citational errors.		Free of mechanical, syntactical, citational, and grammatical errors. Tone and level of formality are appropriate. Not only correct, but eloquent.	
Topic Sentences 10 points	The paper rarely if ever has clear topic sentences. The paragraphs include unrelated, disorganized, or irrelevant claims.		Every paragraph includes a topic sentence but some of these “mini-theses” may be unclear. Some material in the paragraphs may veer from the topic sentence.		Each paragraph includes a strong topic sentence that governs its claims/material. The paper is well-organized and follows a logical sequence.	
Total Score						

5	100%
4	80%
3	60%
2	30%
1	0%

Out of...	40	25	20	15	10
5	40	25	20	15	10
4	32	20	16	12	8
3	24	15	12	9	6
2	12	7.5	6	4.5	3

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Rubric for Creative or Professional Collaboration

Student: _____

Assignment: _____

Grading Rubric:

- **Creative Engagement (33%)** – Your project should engage creatively with the ideas, themes, language, and problems we’ve explored this semester. “Engagement” can be loose, and it doesn’t mean imitation. However, you want to participate in one or more of the conversations we’ve had this semester, perhaps by indirect reference to the details (specific images, word choices, and claims) of a text or through invoking and exploring a problem. With this criterion, I will evaluate your success with brining our course’s readings together and then “thinking” critically and creatively about them.
- **Substantial thought and sophistication (33%)** – Does the collaboration have a compelling focus? Is it doing too much, or nothing at all (bad things)? Or, does it create literary, poetic, critical, theoretical, or artistic meaning with sophistication (good things)? Does the collaboration oversimplify the complex, or perhaps present stereotypes and hasty ideas (bad things)? Or, does it represent the substantial and multi-faceted complexity of its chosen focus (good thing)? With this criterion, I will evaluate the sophistication and complicated stakes of your group’s collaboration.
- **Writing, Production, and/or Intellectual Scripting (34%)** – The language, artistry, or production quality of your collaboration should aspire to be the best and most creative you can produce in college. If it’s textual, the project should be clear, concise, grammatically correct (or grammatically innovative), and compelling. If you’re producing an audio, artistic, or digital project, the production or scripting will have expectations equivalent to high-quality writing.

Evaluation:

- **Creative Engagement:** _____
- **Sophistication:** _____
- **Writing:** _____

Additional Comments:

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Final Paper Rubric

Student Name: _____

Did the student take advantage of office hours, the Sweetland Center, and/or the in-class writing workshop in preparation for this paper? Yes / No

Thesis and its sophistication (30%)

Textual analysis & “close reading” support for the argument (30%)

Prose and paper structure (20%)

Incorporation of scholarly material and/or a “wider conversation” (20%)

Grade total: _____