ENG130
Guidelines & Instructions for Essay 4: Defining Postmodernism Using Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*

**Length:** 5-6 pages

**Due Dates:**
- Wednesday, 15 April: Draft 1 due for in-class peer review
- Wednesday, 22 April: Revised Draft 2 due

*Failure to report to class on 4/15 with an acceptable draft (all components of the assignment completed) to exchange will result in your being marked absent for the class. You will still need to have your draft peer edited. Failure to meet the 4/15 deadline will result in grade deductions on the final assessment (a grade-level deduction for each DAY, not CLASS that the submission is late). No late paper after the 4/22 deadline will be accepted. Both drafts must be uploaded to Turnitin.*

**What:** The final essay is an extended definition of postmodernism, using Pynchon’s novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, to frame and demonstrate your definition of what constitutes postmodernism. Besides looking closely at the novel for specific examples to prove your assertions, you will need to compare and contrast Pynchon’s novel with our three previous cultural movements—Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Modernism—and specifically the key works from each period—*Candide*, *Frankenstein*, and *Waiting for Godot*. You will need to demonstrate how *Crying of Lot 49* compares to each in terms of its cultural assumptions and artistic methods. Additionally, you will need to integrate key quotations from at least TWO of the critical sources listed below. The quotations should be relevant to your analysis and cited properly (in-text and works cited).

**Why:** This assignment is an exercise in 1) close critical analysis and 2) synthesis, in which your knowledge of each of the four cultural movements examined in our course will be tested. Analysis and synthesis are crucial skills that you will draw on throughout your academic career and beyond, so this assignment will help you develop your skills in these two important areas.

**How:** To write this assignment, begin with a close reading of Pynchon’s novel, assisted by the notes I have provided in the Week 12 Lecture folder. As you go through the novel, look for key elements that characterize modernism derived from your reading of the Norton Introduction to Postmodern American Fiction. Work out a list of comparisons between the cultural values (understanding the world and human nature) and methods in Pynchon’s work and those expressed in *Candide*, *Frankenstein*, and *Waiting for Godot*. Consult several of the sources below to assist your understanding and for relevant quotations to back up your assertions. Organize your essay as follows:

**Introduction:** Your introduction should preview the topic of your essay: how you intend to use Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* to arrive at your definition of the key principles of postmodernism that can be shown in comparison to other important works in previous
cultural movements. Your thesis should state clearly what the key differences between *Crying*/postmodernism are in relation to the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Modernism.

**Body paragraphs:** These should be your major claims in support of your thesis: a single claim per paragraph with sufficient evidence to prove. Make sure that ALL assertions are fully backed up with evidence and examples. Make sure you provide clear transitions linking your paragraphs and establishing connections with your thesis.

Draw on the evidence of the novel to support your claims. **Paraphrase, however, should be the exception; direct quotation the rule,** and remember that every quotation—whether direct or indirect—needs an appropriate signal phrase to introduce and a proper parenthetical indicating page number. **Never simply drop quotations into your text.** ALWAYS introduce them with signal phrases and offer some context on the quote pointing out how the quote helps advance the argument or addresses the thesis.

*The success of your critical analysis will be measured by how well you back up all assertions with supporting evidence. Your job is not just to make general claims but to prove those claims with convincing evidence.*

**Note on Your Secondary Source:** You will need to integrate at least two relevant quotations from the critical essays listed below. Make sure you introduce your quotations with appropriate signal phrase that names the source and establishes credentials and authority. Your in-text citation should include the page number of the quote in the parenthetical if available, in the MLA prescribed method. See *Rules for Writers* to review.

Make sure that each paragraph has a clear topic that is sufficiently supported. Transitions need to be supplied to signal the logical connections of ideas within each paragraph and between paragraphs.

**Conclusion:** The conclusion allows you to re-present your thesis, explaining what you have tried to prove and why it is important. Do not simply repeat your thesis.

**Works Cited page:** You will need to provide a Works Cited page as prescribed by MLA. See *Rules for Writers* to review. You will need to cite Pynchon and your edition of *Crying of Lot 49* as well as the authors of your critical essays. See *Rules for Writers* for handling book sources (print or electronic) and articles from online databases. You may also rely on online citation creators, such as EasyBib or those that accompany the online database, but make sure you don’t just cut and paste and assume that all is well: double check spacing, indents, capitalization, etc.

**Revision and editing:** Take time to revise and edit your work to eliminate all mechanical and grammatical errors. Typos, grammatical and mechanical errors will negatively affect your final assessment.
This essay will be graded as follows:

**Superior (A–B+).** Awarded to essays that meet the minimum criteria listed above but goes beyond by offering particularly thoughtful, original, and innovative observations or insights. A Superior response supports all claims with evidence and shows a superior understanding of the work and the relevant issues. The thesis of the essay should be more than just competent but original and surprising: offering the reader much more than the obvious. The essay needs to be in perfect MLA format with sufficient direct quotations (cited properly) to support assertions. A Superior essay will not contain more than two basic writing errors.

**Adequate (B–B-).** Shows a high level of thoroughness, correctness, and understanding, but lacks the overall presentation, quality, and effectiveness of the Superior work. Understanding of the source material and issues, and is able to analyze and synthesize the source, though in a more general, less nuanced way. There may be areas in the essay where the logical connections between ideas are not clearly shown and in which borrowed ideas are not properly credited and cited. There are some, but not many errors (4-5) of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.

**Succeeds in Some Areas but Needs Improvement (C+–C-).** Shows an acceptable response to the minimum standards of the assignment with some mechanical errors and lack of enough support for assertions and logical connections among ideas. The author may not thoroughly understand the source well enough to restate key ideas adequately or effectively enough. Ideas need more development and sometimes are not attributed to the source and/or improperly cited with missing signal phrases. There are many errors (more than 2-3 per page) of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.

**Seriously Deficient. (D–F).** Assignment marred by errors in syntax, mechanics, and grammar that seriously distract the reader. The author fails to demonstrate an adequate level of reading comprehension and, as a result, does not summarize logically or effectively. Use of the source is marred by failure to attribute ideas to the source, lack of proper signal phrases, and proper citations. Assertions lack sufficient support, and there is little coherence and unity within or between paragraphs. There is little evidence that the author revised or proofread the essay, and the author may have not understood or adhered to the instructions for the assignment. There are excessive errors (more than 3-4 per page) of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.
Outside Critical Sources

You need to integrate into your essay relevant quotations from at least two of the following sources. Seek the aid of Wentworth’s reference librarians in locating these works. Make sure that you cite them correctly.

Cooper, Peter L. *Signs and Symptoms: Thomas Pynchon and the Contemporary World.* (1983)
Hite, Molly. *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon.* (1983)
Madsen, Deborah L. *The Postmodern Allegories of Thomas Pynchon.* (1991)
Newman, Robert D. *Understanding Thomas Pynchon.* (1986)

You may also use any relevant scholarly article on Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49,* and postmodern literature from one of Wentworth’s online subscription databases or ebooks.