

# Cultures of American Modernism Syllabus, 2014

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Wednesday 10-1

This course aims to examine the various and multiform nature of American modernism from 1910 to 1935. US Modernism developed in dialogue with several phenomena of modernity: newly national forms of social and economic integration, instead of the 'island communities' of an earlier era; new models of perspective and experience emerging from psychology, philosophy, and the European visual arts; changes in urban cultural institutions; mass immigration and the large-scale movement of African Americans northward in the Great Migration; a fruitful ambivalence towards a technologically and economically innovative mass culture; and new sexological and political discourses that were rapidly altering the social understanding of sex and gender. We will pursue an interdisciplinary study of this moment of cultural ferment, by looking at literary modernism's relationship with visual culture, popular literature, and little magazines, as well as some of the more familiar literary texts of US Modernism. The course will also introduce students to some of the key features and scholarship of the new modernist studies that have developed over the past fifteen ten years, including the new interest in the interrelation between technologies of visual culture and literature; the cultural economy of the modernist magazine and book; discourses of race in American modernism and its relation to the Harlem Renaissance; how transatlantic and cosmopolitan approaches have altered traditional understandings of modernist exile and expatriation; and how the category of the "middlebrow" was crucial in the long-term institutionalization of modernism.

## **Course reading:**

It is required that you complete all the essential reading listed for each seminar, and come prepared to discuss it. I expect the volume of reading on this course to be challenging but not overwhelming.

## **Assignments and grading:**

Class participation 10%; presentation 10%; little magazine project and presentation 30%; final 10-12 page paper 50%.

- Class participation: I will reward students who approach discussion in an enthusiastic, informed, and collegiate way. Informed opinions, critical insight, and respect for others are essentials for good classwork.
- Presentation: Students will work in pairs to deliver a short presentation together to introduce a text or issue. There will be one presentation every week, which should be no longer than ten minutes in length.
- Little magazine project and presentation. Students will work in threes to prepare a short talk on a little magazine of their choice, which will focus on one issue and one text piece in particular. This will also form the basis of a short paper (4-5 pages approx); both elements will contribute

to the grade for this assignment. We will devote an entire class to this in week 5; papers are due in week 6. More information and guidance for this task is available on blackboard.

- Final 10-12 page paper: I will provide essay prompts for this. A 750-word prospectus for this paper is due in on Monday of week 8; I will provide feedback to you before Thanksgiving. I expect you to pursue independent research and wider critical reading in producing your paper.

**SCHEDULE:** I will assign introductory presentations in our first meeting.

Little magazine presentations are due in week 5, and little magazine short papers are due in week 6.

A 750-word prospectus for your long research paper is due in week 8; a final version is due on Monday of week 11.

**Attendance:**

At the beginning of each class you should sign the attendance register. Missing more than two classes without adequate excuse and documentation (such as a doctor's note) will result in your overall grade being lowered by a letter grade; exceeding three such absences will render you ineligible for a grade in this class.

**Plagiarism:**

I expect you to abide by university regulations on the proper acknowledgement of source material, and to follow accepted conventions for the correct scholarly presentation of research papers. I advise you to check on the university's student conduct code (<http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/StudentConductCode/tabid/69/Default.aspx>) for information about this; I recommend MLA style for the presentation of your research papers. Information about how to prepare bibliographies and citations in MLA style can be found at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>, and at the Knightcite MLA citation application (<http://www.calvin.edu/library/knightcite/>).

**Late papers/undelivered presentations:**

Papers should be handed in on the day of the seminar listed. I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade for each day a paper is late. I will not accept any paper that is more than a week late. Failure to deliver any assigned presentation will result in a 2/3 letter grade deduction from your final grade. Any request for extensions will be carefully considered, but should be made as far in advance of the due date as possible.

**Accessibility:**

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. For more information or assistance, you are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center, 164 Oregon Hall, 346-1155; website: <http://aec.uoregon.edu/>

**Sexual Violence and Survivor Support Statement:**

The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), know that you are not alone. UO has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware that all UO employees are required reporters. This means that if you tell me about a situation, I may have to report the information to my supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO's 24-hour hotline, to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options. You can also visit the SAFE website at [safe.uoregon.edu](http://safe.uoregon.edu).

**Texts to purchase:**

Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio*, ed. Charles Modlin. New York: Norton, 1995: 978-0-393-96795-1.

Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1997: 978-0-486-29897-9.

John Dos Passos, *1919*. Mariner Books, 2005: 0618056823.

Jean Toomer, *Cane*. Norton Critical edition (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Ed. Henry Louis Gates and Rudolph P. Byrd. New York: Norton, 2011: 0393931684

Mary Borden, *The Forbidden Zone*. Hesperus Press, 2008: 1843914433. [The bookstore is having problems stocking this; an alternative is its online version, available at <http://www.ourstory.info/library/2-ww1/Borden2/fz.html>].

Claude McKay, *Selected Poems*. Dover Thrift Editions: 0486408760.

Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. New York: Norton, 1998.

[If these editions are unavailable please go ahead and buy alternate ones].

There will also be readings available on Blackboard in support of most of our meetings.

## READING SCHEDULE

### Week One: 10/2/14. Introductory reading

Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies." PMLA 123.3 (May 2008): 737-748.

Max Brzezinski's "The New Modernist Studies: What's Left of Political Formalism?" Minnesota Review 76 (2011): 109-125.

Michael Whitworth, "Introduction," Modernism, ed. Michael Whitworth. London: Blackwell, 2007.

All on blackboard.

### Additional reading:

Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, "Introduction: Bad Modernisms," Bad Modernisms, ed. Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, Duke UP, 2006.

Daniel Joseph Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," American Quarterly 39 (Spring 1987), 7-26. On JSTOR.

A quite different account of methodologies of studying modernism is offered by Charles Altieri, in his essay "The Sensuous Dimension of Literary Experience: An Alternative to Materialist Theory." As the title suggests, Altieri faults the current predominance of materialist theory in literary criticism of modernism for its failure to adequately address authorial agency, the purposive deployment of the imagination—and therefore cannot adequately address the sensory uniqueness of the affective artwork. This can be found at <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~altieri/manuscripts/Sensuous.html>

Another essay expressing caution about the 'expansiveness' of the New Modernist Studies, and the continuing need for formalist definitions of modernism, is "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution," David James and Urmila Seshagiri, PMLA 129.1 (2014): 87-100. Susan Stanford Friedman offers valuable perspectives in her two field defining essays, "Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism," Modernism/modernity 8.3 (2001): 493-513, and "Planetary: Musing Modernist Studies," Modernism/modernity 17.3 (2010): 471-499. Heather Love has suggested the inherent queerness of modernism—and especially the modernism of the New Modernist Studies—in her "Modernism at Night," PMLA 124.3 (2009): 744-48; and Rita Felski talks about the strengths and weaknesses of recent theoretical approaches to modernism in "Modernist Studies and Cultural Studies: Reflections on Method," Modernism/Modernity 10 (2003), 501-517. For an influential—if a little dated—overview of key ideas in modernist criticism, see James

McFarlane and Malcolm Bradbury's collection *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1880-1930*, London: Penguin, 1978. One of the most succinct and impressive synopses of the various conceptualisations and critical receptions of modernism is Ástráður Eysteinnsson's *The Concept of Modernism*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992.

## **Week Two: 10/9/2014. Regional Modernism, National Advertising**

### **Essential reading**

Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio, ed. Charles Modlin. New York: Norton, 1995.

"Sherwood Anderson: Looking for the White Spot." In The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History, ed. T.J. Jackson Lears and Richard Wrightman Fox. U of Chicago P, 1993. On Blackboard.

"Regional Modernism: A Reintroduction." Scott Herring. Modern Fiction Studies 55.1 (2009). On Blackboard.

### **Wider reading:**

Robert Dorman, Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920-1945. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2003.

Marjorie Pryse and Judith Fetterley. Writing out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture. Urbana-Champaign: U of Illinois P, 2005.

## **Week Three: 10/16/2014. Visual Modernism, Left Modernism: John Dos Passos, 1919**

### **Essential Reading:**

John Dos Passos, *1919*. Mariner Books, 2005: 0618056823.

"Visual Culture." Michael North. In The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism. Ed. Walter Kalaidjian. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005. 177-194.

"'An Eyeminded People: Spectatorship in Dos Passos's U.S.A." Michael North, Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word. New York: Oxford UP, 2005: 140-163. Both on Blackboard.

### **Recommended Reading:**

"The Decline and Fall of the Lincoln Republic: Dos Passos's U.S.A."  
Michael Denning, The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century. London: Verso, 1997: 163-199.

"The Collective Novel." Barbara Foley, Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941. Durham: Duke UP, 1993: 398-442.

"Network Narration in John dos Passos's U.S.A. Trilogy." Wesley Beal. Digital Humanities Quarterly 5.2 (2011).

Frederic Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism." In The Modernist Papers, London: Verso, 2007.

#### **Week Four: 10/23/2014. Modernist Poetics.**

##### **Essential reading:**

Ezra Pound: New Selected Poems and Translations. Ed. Richard Sieburth. New York: New Directions, 2010. "Portrait D'Une Femme" (pp.28-9); poems 1913-15 (pp.35-52); Cathay (pp.55-68); "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" (pp.111-123). On Blackboard.

Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect," available at [http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/m\\_r/pound/retrospect.htm](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/m_r/pound/retrospect.htm)

Gertrude Stein, Tender Buttons, (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1997).

Gertrude Stein, "Poetry and Grammar," Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946, Library of America 1998, pp.313-336. On Blackboard.

##### **Recommended reading:**

"Unlikely Modernism, Unlikely Postmodernism: Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons." Nicola Pitchford, American Literary History 11(1999): 642-667. Available on JSTOR.

"The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry," available in Modernism: An Anthology, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005: pp. 99-112. Available on Google Books.

Hugh Kenner, "Imagism," "The Invention of China," "The Persistent East," in The Pound Era, Berkeley: U of California P 1971, pp.173-231. On Blackboard.

Barry Ahearn, "Cathay: What Sort of Translation?" in Ezra Pound and China, ed. Zhaoming Qian. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2003. On Blackboard.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "Corpses of Poetry: Modern Poets Consider some Gender Ideologies of Lyric," in Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in

Modern American Poetry 1908-1934, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. On Blackboard.

Karen J. Ford, *Gender and the Poetics of Excess: Moments of Brocade*. Jackson: U P of Mississippi, 1997.

### **Week Five: 10/30/2014. Material Modernisms and the Little Magazine Project**

#### **ASSESSED LITTLE MAGAZINE PRESENTATIONS TO OCCUR**

##### **Essential Reading:**

Mark Morrison, "Youth in Public: The Little Review and Commercial Culture in Chicago," The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines and their Audiences, 1905-1920, U of Wisconsin P, 2001, 133-166. On Blackboard.

George Bornstein, "How to Read a Page: Modernism and Material Textuality," Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page, U of Cambridge P, 2001, 5-31. On Blackboard.

Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman, "How to Study a Modern Magazine." In Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction. New Haven: Yale UP, 2010. On Blackboard.

Jeremy Braddock, "Collections Mediation Modernism." In Collecting as Modernist Practice. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2012: 1-28. On Blackboard.

##### **Additional reading:**

Lawrence Rainey, "The Cultural Economy of Modernism," The Cambridge Companion to Modernism, ed. Michael Levenson, Cambridge 1999, 33-69.

Ezra Pound, "Small Magazines." The English Journal 19.9 (1930): 689-704.

### **Week Six: 11/6/2014. The Harlem Renaissance: Jean Toomer's *Cane***

#### **LITTLE MAGAZINE PAPERS DUE, 5-6PP**

##### **Essential Reading:**

Jean Toomer, *Cane*, ed. Carla Kaplan. New York: Norton, 2008.

“The Disinterested and Fine: New Negro Renaissance Poetry and the Racial Formation of Modernist Studies.” Michael Bibby. Modernism/Modernity 20.3 (2013): 485-501. From special issue on the Harlem Renaissance and Modernist Studies. On Blackboard.

**Wider reading:**

“The Negro in Art: How Shall He be Portrayed”? symposium, *The Crisis* 1926. On Blackboard.

“Introduction.” The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White, George Hutchinson. Cambridge MA: Harvard-Belknap, 1995.

**Week Seven: 11/13/2014. Transnational modernism**

Claude McKay, Selected Poems. Dover Thrift Editions: 0486408760.

Jahan Ramazani, “Poetry, Modernity, and Globalization,” and “A Transnational Poetics,” in A Transnational Poetics, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009, pp.1-49.

William J. Maxwell, “Global Poetics and State-Sponsored Transnationalism: A Reply to Jahan Ramazani.” American Literary History 18.2 (2006): 360-364. All on Blackboard.

**Wider reading:**

William J. Maxwell, “Introduction,” *The Collected Poems of Claude McKay*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2004. On Blackboard.

Simon Gikandi, “Preface: Modernism in the World,” Modernism/modernity 13.3 (2006): 419-424. Introduction to special issue of Modernism/Modernity special issue on modernism and transnationalisms. On Blackboard.

**Week Eight: 11/20/2014: The Great War**

**750-WORD PROSPECTUS FOR FINAL PAPER DUE**

Mary Borden, *The Forbidden Zone*, Hesperus Press, 2008.

*The Forbidden Zone* is also available online at <http://www.ourstory.info/library/2-ww1/Borden2/fz.html>

Wallace Stevens, “Lettres D’un Soldat” cycle, on Blackboard.



Margot Norris, "Introduction," Writing War in the Twentieth Century (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2000): 1-32. On Blackboard.

### **Wider reading**

Freedman, Ariela. "Mary Borden's *Forbidden Zone*: Women's Writing from No-Man's-Land." Modernism/Modernity 9.1 (2002): 109-124. On Blackboard.

Sarah Cole, "Introduction" and "Enchanted and Disenchanted Violence," in At The Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.

Introduction, Patricia Rae, Modernism and Mourning. Bucknell UP, 2007.

**Week Nine, 11/27/2014: Thanksgiving. No class.**

**Week Ten: 12/4/2014. Middlebrow modernism**

### **Essential Reading:**

Anita Loos, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes. London: Penguin, 1998.

"Introduction: The Middlebrow – Within or Without Modernism." Melissa Sullivan and Sophie Blanch. Modernist Cultures 6.1(2011): 1-17. On Blackboard.

"From Vernacular Humor to Middlebrow Modernism: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and the Creation of Literary Value." Daniel Tracy. Arizona Quarterly 66.1, 2010: 114-143. On Blackboard.

### **Wider reading**

Faye Hammill, "'One of the few Books that Doesn't Stink': The Intellectuals, the Masses and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*." Critical Survey 17.3 (2005): 27-48.

Nicola Humble, "Sitting Forward or Sitting Back: Highbrow v Middlebrow Reading." Modernist Cultures 6.1 (2011): 41-59.

Jon Shelley Rubin, The Making of Middlebrow Culture. UNC Press, 1992.

Botshon, Lisa, and Meredith Goldsmith. Middlebrow Moderns: Popular American Women Writers of the 1920s. Boston: Northeastern UP, 2003.

['Missing' week: Green Modernism.

**Essential Reading:**

William Faulkner, "The Bear."

Gillian d'Arcy Wood, "What is Sustainability Studies?" American Literary History 24.1 (2012): 1-15. On ProjectMuse.

Wider reading:

Louise Westling, "Pastoral Regression in Hemingway and Faulkner." In The Green Breast of the New World: Landscape, Gender, and American Fiction. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1998: 82-124.

Susan Scott Parrish, "Faulkner and the Outer Weather of 1927," American Literary History, 24.1 (2012): 34-58. On ProjectMuse.

Enda Duffy, The Speed Handbook: Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism. Durham: Duke UP, 2009.

Stephanie LeMenager, "The Aesthetics of Petroleum, After Oil!" American Literary History 24.1 (2012): 59-86.]