Cultures of American Modernism Syllabus, 2016-17

Mark Whalan, whalan@uoregon.edu, room 207 PLC, Office hours Monday 2:15-3:15, Friday 1-3

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; political transformations in the nature of citizenship and state governance; 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 approaches to the politics of modernism; 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; modernist ecocriticism; 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 Canvas.

- 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 our class in week nine. I expect you to pursue independent research and wider critical reading in producing your paper. The paper is due on Monday June 12th (exam week).

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://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-3-administration-student-affairs/ch-1-conduct/student-conduct-code) 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.

**Texts to purchase:**


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

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

READING SCHEDULE

Week One: 4/5/17. Introductory reading


On canvas.

Additional reading:


Marjorie Perloff, “The Aura of Modernism.” This also discusses the resurgence of interest in modernism, this time by thinking (in part) about how modernism exists on the internet (available on Canvas).

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](http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~altieri/manuscripts/Sensuous.html)


Week Two: 4/12/17. Regional Modernism, National Advertising

Essential reading


Wider reading:


Week Three: 4/19/17. Left Modernism: John Dos Passos, 1919

Essential Reading:

**Recommended Reading:**

Mark Whalan, ““Oil Was Trumps”: John Dos Passos’s *U.S.A.*, World War One, and the Growth of the Petromodern State.” Accepted by American Literary History. Reader reviews included.


**Week Four: 4/26/17. 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 Canvas.

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)


**Recommended reading:**


**Week Five: 5/3/17. Material Modernisms and the Little Magazine Project**

**ASSESSED LITTLE MAGAZINE PRESENTATIONS TO OCCUR**

**Essential Reading:**


**Additional reading:**


**Week Six 5/10/17: Green Modernism**

**Essential Reading:**


**Wider reading:**


Susan Scott Parrish, “Faulkner and the Outer Weather of 1927,”
Week Seven: 5/17/2017. The Harlem Renaissance: Nella Larsen’s *Passing*

LITTLE MAGAZINE PAPERS DUE, 5-6PP

Essential Reading:


Wider reading:


Sianne Ngai, “Irritation.” In *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007: 174-208. [This chapter is on Larsen’s novel *Quicksand*, but is one of the best recent readings on Larsen and a fascinating example of how affect theory and close attention to narrative technique allows us to crack open some of the often familiar interpretations of ‘repression’ and the burdens of representation in Larsen’s fiction].

Week Eight: 5/24/2017. Transnational modernism

750-WORD PROSPECTUS FOR FINAL PAPER DUE


Both on Canvas.

**Wider reading:**


**Week Nine: 5/31/2017: The Great War**

**Essential reading:**


*The Forbidden Zone* is also available online at [http://www.ourstory.info/library/2-ww1/Borden2/fz.html](http://www.ourstory.info/library/2-ww1/Borden2/fz.html)


**Wider reading**


**Week Ten: 6/7/2017. Middlebrow modernism**

**Essential Reading:**


**Wider reading**


**MONDAY JUNE 12TH, NOON: 10-12PP RESEARCH PAPERS DUE**