Modernism, History, and Politics, English 374, Spring 2015

MWTThF 11:00-10:50  
L&L 358  
Handouts on Canvas

Dr. Sutphin  
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Office hours: M 2:00-3:00  
W by appointment  
Th 12:30-1:30  
Fri. 12:00-1:00

Texts:

- Selected Poems and Four Plays, William Butler Yeats
- Passing, Nella Larsen, ed. Thadious M. Davis (Penguin Classics)
- “The City of Refuge” and Other Stories - Rudolph Fisher
- Between the Acts - Virginia Woolf
- Trilogy - H.D. with introduction and notes by Aliki Barnstone (New Directions)

Packet at the bookstore contains chronologies and essays on Modernism and The Harlem Renaissance; Virginia Woolf’s “Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown” and “Why Art Today Follows Politics”; critical articles on W. B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot, a critical article on Nella Larsen and Rudolph Fisher; a biographical essay on Virginia Woolf, and an introduction and notes to Between the Acts.

Some of these works may be available in other editions and formats. Note that the Penguin Classics and New Directions editions have introductions and notes that will be essential for this class. Because copyright restrictions in the U.S. still hamper the publication of Woolf’s work, making only the inadequate Harcourt editions available, I have included the introduction and notes from the Oxford edition in the packet.

Purpose of the Course:

In addition to the outcomes listed below, the specific purpose of this course is to read selected significant Modernist works in the context of their engagement with historical events and cultural and political ideas and values.

The definition of Modernism is controversial. Modernism has been variously defined and dated. Modernist literature, art, architecture, music, etc., has often been seen as claiming a new aesthetic and sensibility as opposed to a “Victorian” aesthetic and sensibility. Of course, this effort at definition ignores complexities and disagreements in work produced within the Victorian period and within the period we call “Modernist” – roughly 1911-1946 – but it is an effort to articulate a sense that the old styles and forms could not serve the artists of the time. It has been argued that modernist artists needed to project undesirable qualities onto the Victorians in order to define themselves as forward thinking, original, and sophisticated. Nevertheless, modernists were conscious of trying to do something new stylistically and/or address modernity. See the handout on characteristics associated with Modernism.
The relation of Modernism to history and politics has been contested as well. Modernist criticism and criticism of Modernist work sometimes suggests that art was above and should be uncontaminated by the messy world of political ideology. Virginia Woolf argued in witty essays that literary works should not be didactic, while W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot have often been interpreted as imagining the ideal poet/artist as a detached spectator of the human scene. This attitude about art is held by some people in our own time who cite Modernists as authorities on the subject. However, while Modernists were often concerned with innovations in style, form was not their only concern, nor were they all practicing the same level of avant guard “high modernism.” Modernist work could not really be free of ideology and exhibits profound connections to the historical and cultural shifts in which it was written. Some modernist writers did want to make the inner lives of their characters and speakers the subject of much of their work and create new conventions to represent human consciousness. This desire and the techniques adopted to represent it did not rule out implications about historical and political issues. Those who were not especially avant guard in their writing style were nevertheless often concerned with their subjects’ encounters with the “modern,” often represented by the big city, by new sexual mores, by technological war, by the struggles by marginalized, disenfranchised people, such as women, the working-classes, and the Irish and African Americans to live fuller, freer lives.

The Modernist canon has also been growing and becoming more complex. Of the works in this class, those by Yeats, Eliot, and Woolf have been canonical for a long time, although the way these writers have been interpreted has not remained static. A wider recognition of women writers and writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance has resulted in the canonization of H.D. and Nella Larsen. However, writings with a claim to be called modernist are far more numerous than any course could cover and many less recognized writers are left out. So in the interests of including highly gifted writers who contributed to the web of modernism, I’m including short stories by Rudolph Fisher (a writer mentioned in overviews of the Harlem Renaissance but not usually included in courses).

These issues are discussed more thoroughly in packet materials. See the course schedule.

Outcomes:

1. Explain the way a literary work can be analyzed and interpreted against the background of the literature of its particular period, citing several relevant authors for comparison.

2. Survey a literary movement or historical event within the period (in this case, Modernist) with reference to canonical and noncanonical texts as well as a variety of literary genres, relating the literary history of the period to concurrent political, cultural, intellectual and aesthetic histories.

3. Identify specific literary movements, as well as the socio-cultural implications of those movements, with the Modernist period.

4. Explain ways in which literature contributes to our knowledge of a particular period by aligning itself with or by articulating a significant difference from dominant discourses.

5. Demonstrate knowledge of representative texts from specific periods and/or movements.
Requirements and policies:

Attendance and participation:

Keeping up with the reading, attending class, and contributing to the conversation are essential. In addition, you will be working with other class members who will count on you to participate. Read carefully and actively, write questions and responses in the margins of your texts or in a notebook. These questions and responses will serve as the basis for both class participation and papers.

Note on attendance, handing in assignments, and participation:

Four absences may reduce your final grade by one degree (A- to B+);
Five absences may reduce your final grade by one full letter (A- to B-);
Six or more absences may cause you to fail the course.

There are no excused absences or automatic extensions. Late assignments are generally unacceptable. However, I understand that emergencies do arise. An exception may be made if I agree that your circumstances warrant it. If you establish a pattern of conscientious attendance and turning in assignments on time, your credibility increases, and when you have an emergency, I can assume that you are a responsible person and are doing everything you can to meet your obligations. If you establish a pattern of absences, late assignments, and continual excuses, you damage your credibility, making it difficult for me to justify giving you a break. Ask for an extension only if you have a genuine emergency. While coming to class every day is important, simply being here doesn’t earn an “A” in this category. Being here is a basic requirement. You exhibit the level of your participation through the thoughtfulness of your questions and comments, the degree of care and reflection you give to your writing, your tone and attitude in regard to your work and the members of the class, your commitment to the course. **May 15** is the last day to drop without petitioning. Reasons to drop by May 15: you have missed more than three classes or know that you will miss more than three class periods before the end of the quarter and/or you missed the due date for the first paper or did not participate in the critical approach group. Don’t just disappear if you decide not to attend class and fall behind in your work; withdraw to avoid receiving a failing grade.

Avoiding plagiarism: Of course, part of “participation” in any course is doing your own work and being very careful to give credit to any sources you quote or authors whose ideas you use. Although some plagiarism is not detected, a great deal of it is because professors are experienced readers. A case of plagiarism damages your credibility as well as your grade. It wastes my time to read a stolen paper – and ultimately, it wastes yours. Professors may report plagiarism to Student Affairs.

If you need disability related educational accommodations, contact Disabilities Services (963-1202, DS@cwu.edu, 140 Bouillon). Let me know about accommodations made through DS.
Tests:

Four tests evaluate your reading knowledge of the texts as well as class discussion about them and their literary and historical contexts. The tests will contain specific questions about main points made in groups’ reports and article presentations.

Make-up test policy: You may make up one test if you miss class on the day the test is given if you make it up within two class days. For example, if you miss a test on Monday, make it up before class Friday. Go to the English Department office (L&L 422) and ask for the test. It will be in a file with your name on it, and you can take it at the desk just outside the office. If discussion during the make-up grace period covers material on the test that would give you an unfair advantage over your classmates, I will have to eliminate that material from the test.

Papers:

Two 6-page papers that advance a thesis of your own with the incorporation of at least two sources. The first of these papers may be on any of the works we’ve read through May 4 (Yeats through Fisher). For rules on incorporating your sources, consult The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (7th ed.), or Purdue Owl at https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/11 (or look up Purdue Owl on Google). MLA prefers attributive tags (“Martha Benson argues” or “According to Martha Benson” rather than freestanding citations. See also instructions and ideas for papers in separate handouts available later in the quarter.

Papers should be followed by a works cited page giving full bibliographic information according to MLA format. Use only scholarly sources—print or from library databases. Keep in mind that not all valuable scholarship is available in full text forms. If you limit your search to full text, you may miss significant sources. Use the MLA Bibliography as your major research source. We will take some class time to review databases and search strategies.

Papers must be typed, double-spaced on standard 8½ x 11” paper. Leave about an inch margin on all sides. Number your pages. Use a staple or paper clip (no plastic folders please). Consult a recent handbook for grammar and punctuation rules. Proofread your paper carefully before and after it comes out of the printer. I may be asking you to submit both a paper copy and a copy on Canvas.

For the first paper, you’ll write a proposal (350 words, exclusive of any citations, for 20 pts.) on which you’ll receive typed comments on this proposal. I will give you separate directions and examples for this assignment. We’ll also have a workshop on a draft of this paper and a workshop on the second paper.

Revision option: If you receive a grade of C- or lower on your paper, you may rewrite if you meet the following conditions:

1) You take the paper with my comments to the Writing Center and consult with someone there. That person will notify me that you have been there and when.

2) Your revision shows evidence that you have attempted to deal with the problems mentioned in the comments and meet the expectations of the assignment as outlined in the paper guidelines given out in class.
3) You turn in the revision **one week** from the date you received the original paper back by 12:00 p.m. at my office or in my department mail box.

4) At the time you turn in your paper, you also turn in the graded copy with my comments.

I will not have time to comment on your revision, but I will read it and see whether I can justify raising your grade to a C. **C (76%) is the highest grade possible on a revision in order to be fair to others who did not have the option to rewrite.**

**Reading/Research/Presentation Groups:**

The groups have three main purposes:

The first purpose is to choose passages of the text to read closely and discuss with the class the significance of these passages in relation to figurative language, character development and relationships, theme, social-political comment, and/or other subjects the group has determined are important.

The second purpose is to provide some cultural/historical background that enriches our experience of the text. This information might have to do with allusions in the work to historical/political events, to attitudes about race, gender, social class, sexuality, etc., or to references to literary, artistic, musical, scientific, etc. works and/or popular culture. This contextual information may be prompted by notes in the edition of the text but should go beyond them. You can’t cover every subject, so agree on one or two that seem especially significant to your group. **Some of your sources for the report may be Internet sources, but analyze them carefully to see how reliable they are. What group or organization are they affiliated with? Do they cite their sources? See the separate handout on presentations for detailed requirements.**

The third purpose of the critical group is to find and discuss with the class a recent scholarly critical article (within the last 15 years*) that provides an interesting perspective on the work you are assigned. Explain how the article offers a way to read the work or addresses a significant issue the work raises. Your responsibility is to summarize/analyze the article and lead class discussion for a period of approximately 40 minutes. **This work must be from a scholarly source: a book chapter or journal article accessed from the library’s on-line catalogue or from a library database. See the separate handout for detailed requirements.**

*If you find an article you think is exceptionally useful that is over 15 years old, consult with me.

**Grades:**

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>tests</td>
<td>60 pts. (10 to 20 pts. per test, depending on works covered)</td>
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<td>proposal for first paper</td>
<td>20 pts.</td>
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<td>1st paper</td>
<td>70 pts.</td>
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<td>2nd paper</td>
<td>70 pts.</td>
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<td>2 paper workshops</td>
<td>15 pts.</td>
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<td>critical research presentation</td>
<td>70 pts.</td>
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<td>attendance and participation</td>
<td>35 pts.</td>
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Schedule:
I will do my best to stay on schedule. We may need to alter it, so I will keep you posted about changes by announcements in class and/or e-mail. Check your Central e-mail account regularly.

Wed., April 1
Intro to course
texts and contexts: Different Versions of Modernism
“On Being Asked for a War Poem,” “The Second Coming” - W. B. Yeats

Thurs., April 2
“Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” and “Why Art Today Follows Politics” - Virginia Woolf

Fri., April 3

Mon., April 6
“Modernism and the Politics of Culture,” Sara Blair (chapter 6 in the Cambridge Companion to Modernism,” (packet) “Yeats and Politics” - Jonathon Allison (packet) and “Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation,” “Coole and Ballylee,” “September 1913,” “Easter 1916”

Wed., April 8
“Modernism and Gender,” Marianne DeKoven (chapter 9 in Cambridge Companion - packet) and “No Second Troy,” “On a Political Prisoner,” “Prayer for My Daughter”

Thurs., April 9
“Under Ben Bulben,” “The Circus Animals’ Desertion”

Fri., April 10
Group reading/research/presentation assignment explained
Finding and using literary criticism: I’ll talk about a couple of articles as examples, one of which is Peter Lecouras’s in the packet. I’ll refer to certain sections of this article, so bring your packet to class, but you do not need to read the article.
Groups assigned

Mon., April 13
Wed., April 15 reading for today: the rest of *The Waste Land*, Eliot’s notes and explanatory notes
We will probably start our discussion of *WL* today, but do have the first section read by Mon., April 13.

Thurs., April 16 *The Waste Land*

Fri., April 17 Eliot’s “The Wasteland”: finding and using literary criticism
Bring packet to class because I will be talking about an article or two in the packet.

Mon., April 20 **Test** on Yeats’s and Eliot’s poems, context, criticism, ideas about Modernism
Ideas for papers handout / Proposal and Workshop assignments

Wed., April 22 *Passing* - Nella Larsen “Encounter,” 143-78

Thurs., April 23 *Passing* - **Group 1**: text and context, “Re-encounter,” 181-210

Fri., April 24 *Passing* - “Finale,” 211-42
**Group 1: Passing** and literary critical article or chapter

Mon., April 27 *Passing* - general discussion
Start reading Fisher stories.
Start considering ideas for papers if you haven’t already begun.

Wed., April 29 stories from *The City of Refuge* - Rudolph Fisher - general discussion
“The City of Refuge,” “The Promised Land,” “The Guardian of the Law,” “Miss Cynthie” (44 total)

Thurs., April 30 Fisher stories - **Group 2**: text and context
“High Yaller,” “Fire by Night” (33 total)

Fri., May 1 Fisher stories - **Group 2**: text and context
“Blades of Steel,” “The Man Who Passed,” “One Month’s Wages” (17) (45 total)
**One-page proposals for papers** on Yeats poems, *The Wasteland, Passing*, and/or Fisher stories due for those in **Groups 3 and 4**
Mon, May 4  Fisher stories - **Group 2:** text and literary critical article or chapter
One-page proposals for papers on Yeats poems, *The Wasteland, Passing,* and/or Fisher stories due for those in **Group 1**  
Some proposals handed back.

Some proposals handed back: discuss proposals in class; review citation conventions

Thurs., May 7  **Test** on *Passing* and *The City of Refuge* stories, context and criticism  
Directions for workshop.

Fri., May 8  **Paper workshop:** Bring at least a two-page typed draft of your paper, including a citation to one piece of literary criticism and how you plan to use it in the paper. More proposals handed back.  
**Group 2 members:** you are excused from this workshop to compensate for time spent on your own workshop.

Mon., May 11  **First papers due** unless you’re in the Fisher group (**Group 2**)  
Connections between some of Woolf’s other novels and *Between the Acts.*  
**One-page proposals** due if you’re in the Fisher group (**Group 2**)  

Wed., May 13  *Between the Acts* - Virginia Woolf, 3-43 (break on page) How are you finding your way in the text? What’s going on? What are the clues? How is Woolf employing or deviating from the conventions of novel writing?  
Proposals back to Group 2

Thurs., May 14  *Between the Acts* - **Group 3:** text and context  
43-68 (break on the page)

Fri., May 15  *Between the Acts,* 68-106 (break on page) continue with discussion

Mon., May 18  *Between,* 106-82 (break on the page)  
**Groups 3:** text and literary criticism  
**First papers due** if you’re in the Fisher group (**Group 2**)  

Wed., May 20  *Between,* 182 - to end  
Ideas for papers handout

Thurs., May 21  **SOURCE** - no class
Fri., May 22  Test on Between the Acts, context and criticism
Mon., May 25  Memorial Day
Thurs., May 28  Trilogy: first part of “Tribute to the Angels,” sections 1-26 (63-87)
            Group 4: text and context
Fri., May 29  “Tribute to the Angels,” sections 27-43 (88-110)
Mon., June 1  “The Flowering of the Rod” 1-26 (113-47)
            Group 4: text and context
            Trilogy and literary criticism - Fifth group
Thurs., June 4  Follow up yesterday’s discussion.
            Test on Trilogy, context, criticism / discussion
Fri., June 5  Paper workshop

Final paper due Wed., June 10, 10:00 a.m.