

Literary Modernity in the U.S.

Wednesdays at 12 p.m. in Murray 207

Professor Andrew Goldstone (andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu)

Office hours: Thursdays, 11:45–12:45 in Murray 040A

<http://andrewgoldstone.com/lm26>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a US-focused case study in modernism in the context of the broader transformation of print and literacy in the first half of the twentieth century. For a long time an American-dominated modernism was thought to cover nearly everything of interest in (early) twentieth-century literature, but scholarship has increasingly acknowledged the limitations of this approach, which ignores or devalues a wide range of literary production that does not resemble classic modernism. In order to grasp the effects of the structural transformations that affected reading and writing broadly in the period, this course proposes that modernism and its many non-modernist others are best studied as joint products of an expanding, fragmenting, and polarizing literary field. To give our inquiry some heuristic limits, we accept a US national frame, bearing in mind as we read individual writers that really, universally, literary relations stop nowhere. The course is divided into two parts. The first half of the course gives a selective overview of American modernism up to 1940. The second half of the course is a series of rapid introductions to a few key US literary tendencies contemporary with but distinct from modernism: the Harlem Renaissance, proletarian literature, and several genres of commercial fiction. Needless to say we cannot cover the field in its totality, but our goal is to articulate some of the themes, transformations, and interpretive problems that an expansive literary history of the twentieth century encounters.

Readings include both primary texts and scholarship throughout the semester. The primary texts are to be studied with particular attention to the era's distinctive print media (little magazines, pulps and slicks, experimental anthologies, and so on). The selection of secondary readings gives rather short shrift to classic modernist scholarship in order to emphasize more recent approaches to the broader field.

This course satisfies the A5 and D coursework distribution requirements.

LEARNING GOALS

Students in this course will:

1. gain a working knowledge of classic US modernism in fiction and poetry;
2. gain an introductory knowledge of several important non-modernist tendencies in US literature of the early twentieth century;
3. engage critically with contemporary scholarly discourse on modernism and its relation to social modernity more broadly;
4. reflect theoretically on the problems posed by the study of an expanded literary field.

REQUIREMENTS

The final grade will be based on a score calculated as follows:

$$\text{grade} = 0.15(\text{participation}) + 0.1(\text{write-ups}) + 0.75(\text{paper})$$

Participation. There are many ways to participate actively and effectively in a seminar discussion. It is important for everyone (including the instructor) to reflect on what they are doing as a discussion participant and how they can best contribute to the development of the collective inquiry. I am always happy to meet one-on-one to talk over ideas or concerns about the seminar.

Seminar-leading and write-up. In each seminar session, one student will have a special responsibility for one of the readings: that student will begin discussion of that reading with some observations and questions. A short (2 pp.) write-up will be due the subsequent week.

Narrative bibliography. In preparation for the final paper, a short narrative about potential primary and secondary sources is due at the end of March. This bibliography will not be separately graded.

Term paper. The major assignment is a research paper of 20–25 pp. (8000–12000 words) making an argument building on the themes and materials of the course. Papers must address the material circumstances of production and circulation.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

All reasonable accommodation will be given to students with disabilities. Students who may require accommodation should speak with me at the start of the semester. You may also contact the Office of Disability Services (ods.rutgers.edu; 848-445-6800).

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Graduate students and faculty are expected to demonstrate the highest level of academic integrity. In our work, primary evidence and the scholarly work of others should be cited and attributed with care and precision. It should go without saying that generative “artificial intelligence” tools, constructed through massively unscrupulous harvesting of private as well as public data, do not operate at this level of rigor, and they do considerable social and environmental harm besides. I will not use them, and neither should you.

SCHEDULE

JANUARY 21. INTRODUCTION.

- Modernism, non-modernism, modernity; questions of method.

JANUARY 28. FRAMEWORKS; NATURALISM, VIA CRANE.

- Crane, *The Open Boat and Other Stories*, selections:
 - "The Open Boat."
 - "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky."
 - "The Blue Hotel."
- Kaestle and Radway, *Print in Motion*, chaps. 1, 3, 6.
- Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 71–91, 103–9, 113–31, 138–59, 214–23.
- Campbell, "The Rise of Naturalism."

FEBRUARY 4. AESTHETICISM, VIA JAMES.

- James, *The Ambassadors*, books 1–6.
- Watt, "The First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors*."
- Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, introduction (and optionally, 192–201).

FEBRUARY 11. MODERNISM, VIA JAMES.

- James, *The Ambassadors*, complete.
- Goble, "Wired Love."

FEBRUARY 18. EXPAT MODERNISM, THE SHORT VERSION.

- Stein, "Melanctha."
- Hemingway, *in our time*.
- Hemingway, *In Our Time*, especially "Indian Camp" and "Big Two-Hearted River."
- Porter, "Flowering Judas."
- Porter, *Hacienda*.
- Lawrence, *The Anxieties of Experience*, chap. 4.

FEBRUARY 25. TO BE RESCHEDULED, DATE TBD.

MARCH 4. INSTITUTIONS OF MODERNISM: POETRY.

- Little-magazine explorations via the Modernist Journals Project. Look unsystematically at:
 - *Camera Work*, special number (August 1912): Stein, Matisse, Picasso.
 - *Blast* 1, no. 1 (June 1914): the “Great English Vortex” (mostly the Canadian Lewis and the American Pound).
 - *Little Review* 3, no. 6 (September 1916): a quick read.
 - *Others* 3, no. 4 (December 1916). Read Williams’s “El Hombre” (24).
 - *Poetry* 15, no. 1 (October 1919): Stevens in a magazine context.
 - *Little Review* 7, no. 4 (January–March 1921): after *Ulysses* had to end its run.
- Volume explorations (*: bring in printout):
 - *Eliot, *The Waste Land*, including, of course, the notes.
 - Stevens, *Harmonium*:
 - “Earthy Anecdote.”
 - “Domination of Black.”
 - * “The Snow Man.”
 - * “Nuances of a Theme by Williams.”
 - “Metaphors of a Magnifico.”
 - “A High-Toned Old Christian Woman.”
 - * “The Emperor of Ice-Cream.”
 - * “Sunday Morning.”
 - “Bantams in Pine-Woods.”
 - * “Anecdote of the Jar.”
 - “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird.”
 - “To the Roaring Wind.”
 - M. Moore, *Observations*:
 - “To an Intra-Mural Rat.”
 - “To a Steam-Roller.”
 - “To a Snail.”
 - “In This Age of Hard Trying . . .”
 - * “Poetry” (1924, 1925).
 - “Critics and Connoisseurs.”
 - * “The Fish.”
 - * “England.”

- "New York."
- "Silence."
- "An Octopus."
- "Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns."
- . . . including, of course, the notes.
- Williams, *Spring and All*, prose and poems from the beginning through Poem VIII; Poems XVIII, XXII, XXVII.
- Kenner, *A Homemade World*, introduction and chap. 3.
- Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism*, chap. 3 (and optionally, introduction).

MARCH 11. FAULKNER, OR, TECHNIQUE.

- Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*.
- Sartre, "On *The Sound and the Fury*."
- Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Pluralism, Modernism*, chap. 1.
- Wall, "Sound and Fury."

(MARCH 18. SPRING RECESS.)

MARCH 25. BARNES, OR, STYLE.

- Barnes, *Nightwood*.
- Herring, *Queering the Underworld*, chap. 4.

(FRIDAY, MARCH 28.)

- Narrative bibliography due.

APRIL 1. MODERNISM VS. THE RENAISSANCE.

- Locke, *The New Negro*, selections:
 - Alain Locke, foreword.
 - Alain Locke, "The New Negro."
 - Albert C. Barnes, "Negro Art and America."
 - Jean Toomer, "Carma, from *Cane*."
 - Jean Toomer, "Fern, from *Cane*."
 - Zora Neale Hurston, "Spunk."
 - Eric Walrond, "The Palm Porch."

- "Poetry" (all selections, 129–150).
- Gwendolyn B. Bennett, "Song."
- Langston Hughes, "Jazzonia."
- Langston Hughes, "Nude Young Dancer."
- Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts."
- Paul U. Kellogg, "The Negro Pioneers."
- Melville J. Herskovits, "The Negro's Americanism."
- W. E. B. DuBois, "The Negro Mind Reaches Out."
- "Who's Who of the Contributors."
- Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 396–433.
- Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, chap. 8.
- Owens, "Hard Reading."

APRIL 8. RECUPERATION.

- Hurston, *Their Eyes*.
- Wright, "Between Laughter and Tears."
- Walker, "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston."
- Sorensen, *Ethnic Modernism*, chap. 6.

APRIL 15. PROLETARIAN LITERATURE (AT AN ANGLE).

- Smedley, "Cell Mates."
- Hughes, *Collected Poems*, selected 1930s poems:
 - "Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria."
 - "Open Letter to the South."
 - "Ph.D."
 - "Good Morning Revolution."
 - "Always the Same."
 - "Goodbye Christ."
 - "A New Song."
 - "Cubes."
 - "One More 'S' in the U.S.A."
 - "Ballad of Roosevelt."
 - "Ballads of Lenin."
 - "Let America be America Again."
- Ibid., from *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, 1951:

- "Dream Boogie."
- "Theme for English B."
- Le Sueur, "I Was Marching."
- Gold, "Jews Without Money."
- Denning, *The Cultural Front*, pt. 3, chap. 5.

APRIL 22. SLICK FICTION.

- Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.
- The *Harper's Bazar* serial publication is available in scans on the Internet Archive.
- McGurl, *The Novel Art*, chap. 4.
- Optional: North, *Reading 1922*, chap. 4.

APRIL 29. PULP DETECTIVES.

- Daly, "Knights of the Open Palm."
- Hammett, "The Main Death."
- Nebel, "Too Hot to Handle."
- Smith, *Hard-Boiled*, chap. 1.

SPECIAL SESSION, DATE TBD. GETTING WEIRD.

- Du Bois, "The Comet."
- Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu."
- C. Moore, "Shamblau."
- Rieder, *Science Fiction and the Mass Cultural Genre System*, chap. 2.

(MONDAY, MAY 25.)

- Term paper due at 12 p.m.

BOOKS TO BUY

The course texts are available at Barnes & Noble, or order elsewhere (search using the ISBNs below). Alternative editions are normally fine; I have suggested some "upgrade picks" if you'd like to turn money into the objective form of cultural capital.

- Barnes, Djuna. *Nightwood*. New York: New Directions, 2006. ISBN: 9780811216715. There is also a useful if unwieldy critical edition from Dalkey Archive, edited by Cheryl Plumb.
- Crane, Stephen. *The Open Boat and Other Stories*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1993. ISBN: 9780486275475. Crane fanatics can get it all in one Library of America volume.
- Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury*. New York: Vintage, 1991. ISBN: 9780679732242. I will fully admit to owning a Norton Critical edition of this novel as well. It explains much less than you might imagine. The authoritative edition would be the Library of America *Novels 1926–1929*, which also includes the three early novels only specialists read.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *In Our Time: Stories*. Edited by Michael Croland. Garden City, NY: Dover, 2021. ISBN: 9780486848969. Released from the dead hand of copyright. This 1925 collection as well as the earlier 1924 version are also in the Library of America volume *The Sun Also Rises and Other Writings 1918–1926*.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 1937. New York: Harper Perennial, 2013. ISBN: 9780060838676. Or acquire the Library of America *Novels and Stories*, edited by the late Cheryl Wall.
- James, Henry. *The Ambassadors*. Edited by Christopher Butler. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN: 9780199538546. Or buy the Penguin Classics edition.
- Locke, Alain, ed. *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Touchstone, 1999. ISBN: 9780684838311. A convenient paperback reprint of the 1925 anthology. A scan of the original book publication is on HathiTrust.
- Loos, Anita. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes and But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes*. New York: Penguin, 1998. ISBN: 9780141180694. What, no Library of America version? However, the 1925 novel is available in a HathiTrust scan: <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31822008523466>.

OTHER READINGS

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| <p>Baker, Houston A. <i>Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance</i>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.</p> <p>Bourdieu, Pierre. <i>The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field</i>. Translated by Susan Emanuel. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996. A great work, worth owning and reading in full.</p> | <p>Campbell, Donna. "The Rise of Naturalism." Chap. 30 in <i>The Cambridge History of the American Novel</i>, edited by Leonard Cassuto. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521899079.034.</p> <p>Daly, Carroll John. "Knights of the Open Palm." In <i>The Black Lizard Big Book of Black Mask Stories</i>, edited by Otto Penzler. New York: Vintage, 2010.</p> |
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- Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London: Verso, 1997. A critical magnum opus.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. "The Comet." Chap. 10 in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920. HathiTrust, 2018. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044011439957>. Neither of the Library of America's two Du Bois volumes includes his fiction.
- Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land*. New York: Boni / Liveright, 1922. HathiTrust, 2014. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/dul1.ark:/13960/t9k371w5q>. For fuller study, consult either of two massively over-annotated versions: Lawrence Rainey's *Annotated Waste Land* (Yale, 2006), which has a digital version, or Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue's *Poems of T.S. Eliot* (JHUP, 2015).
- Freedman, Jonathan. *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture*. Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Goble, Mark. "Wired Love: Pleasure at a Distance in Henry James and Others." *ELH* 74, no. 2 (2007): 397–427. <https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2007.0012>.
- Gold, Michael. "Jews Without Money." *New Masses*, June 1928, 11–12. <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/new-masses/1928/v04n01-jun-1928-New-Masses.pdf>. A short publication from Gold's 1930 novel of the same title.
- Hammett, Dashiell. "The Main Death." In *Crime Stories & Other Writings*. New York: Library of America, 2001. <https://loa-shared.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Hammett-Main-Death.pdf>.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *in our time*. Edited by James Gifford. Paris: Three Mountains, 1924. Victoria: Modernist Versions Project, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.17613/ro2py-rtf62>.
- Herring, Scott. *Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rutgers-ebooks/detail.action?docID=448552>.
- Hughes, Langston. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Edited by Arnold Rampersad. New York: Vintage, 1994. https://search-proquest-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/lion/publication/publications_2059727?accountid=13626. The libraries give us access to an awful ProQuest digitization of Rampersad's marvelous edition.
- Hutchinson, George. *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Kaestle, Carl F., and Janice A. Radway, eds. *Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880–1940*. Vol. 4 of *A History of the Book in America*. University of North Carolina Press, 2009. https://jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469625829_kaestle. Available digitally, but it's a useful reference to have on your shelf.
- Kenner, Hugh. *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.
- Lawrence, Jeffrey. *The Anxieties of Experience: The Literatures of the Americas from Whitman to Bolaño*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1093/os0/9780190690205.001.0001>.

- Le Sueur, Meridel. "I Was Marching." *New Masses*, September 18, 1934, 16–18. <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/new-masses/1934/v12n12-sep-18-1934-NM.pdf>. A selection of Le Sueur's work is available as *Ripening* (Feminist Press, 1982).
- Lovecraft, H.P. "The Call of Cthulhu." *Weird Tales* 11, no. 3 (February 1928): 159–78. <https://archive.org/details/WeirdTalesV11No2192802>. There is a Library of America *Stories* volume with all the Lovecraft you might ever desire.
- McGurl, Mark. *The Novel Art: Elevations of American Fiction after Henry James*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ovm2fp>. This is a very good book.
- Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America: Nativism, Pluralism, Modernism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11cwobb>.
- Moore, C.L. "Shamblau." *Weird Tales* 22, no. 5 (November 1933): 531–50. https://archive.org/details/Weird_Tales_v22no5_1933-11_ELPM-SliV. For more Moore, try *The Best of C.L. Moore*, ed. Lester del Rey (New York, Taplinger, 1977).
- Moore, Marianne. *Observations*. New York: Dial Press, 1925. HathiTrust, 2025. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015008594452>. Moore's first volume is available in a recent edition by Linda Leavell from FSG. The comprehensive edition of Moore is Grace Schulman's *Poems of Marianne Moore* (Penguin, 2003).
- Nebel, Frederick. "Too Hot to Handle." *Dime Detective* 14, no. 1 (September 15, 1934): 10–31. <https://archive.org/details/DimeDetectiveV14No119340915/>.
- North, Michael. *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rutgers-ebooks/detail.action?docID=272547>.
- Owens, Imani D. "'Hard Reading': US Empire and Black Modernist Aesthetics in Eric Walrond's *Tropic Death*." *MELUS* 41, no. 4 (December 2016): 96–115. <https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/mlw051>.
- Porter, Katherine Anne. "Flowering Judas." In *Flowering Judas and Other Stories*, 139–63. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1935. https://archive.org/details/floweringjudasot0000ounse_g7x9. There is a Library of America *Collected Stories* volume.
- . *Hacienda*. New York: Harrison of Paris, 1934. HathiTrust, 2024. [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b104379](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b104379). Subsequently included in the 1935 *Flowering Judas*.
- Rainey, Lawrence. *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Rieder, John. *Science Fiction and the Mass Cultural Genre System*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2017. <https://research-ebsco-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/c/nx7rpm/search/details/ypzav6hzhn>.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. "On *The Sound and the Fury*: Temporality in Faulkner." In *We Have Only This Life to Live: Selected Essays, 1939–1975*, translated by Chris Turner, 17–25. 1939. New York: New York Review Books, 2013.
- Smedley, Agnes. "Cell Mates." Edited by Jan MacKinnon and Steve MacKinnon. *Signs* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1977): 531–39. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173318>.

- Smith, Erin A. *Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bs9kc>.
- Sorensen, Leif. *Ethnic Modernism and the Making of US Literary Multiculturalism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Stein, Gertrude. "Melantha: Each One As She May." In *Three Lives*, 85–236. New York: Grafton, 1909. Internet Archive, 2006. <http://archive.org/details/threelivesstorieoosteerich>. Dover used to sell a very cheap paperback of *Three Lives*, but not any more. Two Rutgers emeritae have also edited it; Marianne DeKoven for Norton, and Catharine Stimpson (with Harriet Chessman) for the Library of America *Writings 1903–1932*.
- Stevens, Wallace. *Harmonium*. New York: Knopf, 1923. Internet Archive, 2019. <https://archive.org/details/HarmoniumoowsImages>. The reference edition of Stevens is the Library of America *Collected Poetry and Prose*.
- Walker, Alice. "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston." *Ms.*, March 1975, 74–79, 85–89.
- Wall, Joshua Logan. "Sound and Fury: Accent and Identity in Faulkner's Immigration Novel." *MELUS* 42, no. 1 (April 2017): 94–115. <https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/mlw067>.
- Watt, Ian. "The First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors*: An Explication." *Essays in Criticism* 10, no. 3 (July 1960).
- Williams, William Carlos. *Spring and All*. Frontier Press, 1970. HathiTrust, 2025. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.32106005794406>. New Directions issues Williams's works in two volumes of *Collected Poems* (1986, 1988) and another with *Paterson* (1992).
- Wright, Richard. "Between Laughter and Tears." *New Masses*, October 5, 1937, 22, 25. <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/new-masses/1937/v25n02-oct-05-1937-NM.pdf>.

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