

UPDATED Modernism in the U.S.: Mapping Culture and Consciousness

Valgfab 2, Dept. of English, Germanic, and Romance Studies
University of Copenhagen, Autumn 2009
Tuesdays 13-15, 24.3.11
Leigh Anne Duck, lad@hum.ku.dk
<http://umpeople.memphis.edu/lduck>
Office 24.3.61, phone 35 32 84 52
Office hours: Tuesdays 15-16 and by appt.

DESCRIPTION:

Early in *The Making of Americans* (1925), Gertrude Stein declares her determination to tell the story of “the old people in a new world, the new people made out of the old”; in other words, she sought to articulate a quite familiar conception of the U.S., which was described almost from its founding as a “melting pot.” Surprisingly, however, this seemingly conventional project yields a strange and experimental text. In that way, Stein’s novel reflects a widespread concern that arose amid the proliferating modernization and migration of the early twentieth century, as writers and observers questioned whether the diverse ethnicities, classes, and regions that constituted the U.S. could ever cohere into a national culture. These anxieties were psychological as well as political: influenced by the spread of psychoanalytic theory and cultural anthropology, writers wondered whether individual psyches could negotiate social change. This course will examine how modernist innovations in fiction and poetry were influenced by ideas about cultural exchange and its impact on society and psychology.

TEXTS:

Available at the university bookstore (though alternate editions are acceptable):

William Faulkner, *Light in August*
Zora Neale Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*
D’Arcy McNickle, *The Surrounded*
Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust*

Other readings will be made available via Absalon, for which *all students must register!*

COMPETENCIES

At the end of this course, students should have developed competency in

- situating aesthetic innovation in relation to broader socio-cultural contexts,
- recognizing themes and styles characteristic of literary modernism in the U.S.,
- reading texts closely in order to analyze elements of form and content,
- contributing actively to class discussion,
- using research to develop arguments regarding literary texts, a process that includes
 - discerning the usefulness of diverse source materials, and
 - documenting sources clearly and consistently,
- (optionally) collaborating to conduct research and organize a scholarly panel, and
- presenting oral arguments based on research findings.

ASSESSMENT:

In accordance with the rules in the studieordning for valgfab 2 options, the assessment of each student in the course will be either pass or fail, based on the following criteria:

- **Attendance.** In order to pass you must attend at least 80% of the classes, or 9 sessions. Late arrival (i.e., more than five minutes into the class) will not count toward your required 80% attendance. If illness or other mitigating circumstances prevent you from attending, I expect to receive either advance notification or appropriate documentation (for example, in the case of serious illness, a doctor's note).
- **Active participation in class.** You are also required to make active, vocal contributions to class, both in open and small- group discussion. Failure to do so can mean failure of the course. This doesn't have to be as alarming as it may sound! The purpose here is to help you develop skills in group analysis of difficult material; you will be (if all goes well) engaged in working through analytic problems with others throughout your life, so why not start here? Remember that
 - you need not be afraid of saying something "wrong." All points of view are welcome, and articulating disagreement—as long as everyone involved is reflective and civil—can help participants and observers come to much deeper understanding of an issue. Furthermore, our readings are odd and difficult, which means that if you find something confusing, there is probably a very good reason for that! We will come to some of our most important insights through seeking to work through confusion.
 - while well-substantiated observations are obviously excellent, thoughtful questions can be just as helpful for class discussion. If you find some aspect of the text weird or off-putting, make a note to ask in class—or even hand (or email) it to me so that I will know to call on you.
- **15-minute conference-style presentation on course-related topic of your choice.** This will be your culminating research project for the course, and you should plan for it throughout the semester: thinking about what you might like to research, discovering classmates with whom you might collaborate, and exploring sources that might be relevant. You should consult with me concerning your plans periodically during the semester: don't just wait to submit your prospectus! Also, be aware of the following:
 - **Date/attendance:** Presentations will be delivered during week 49. You are encouraged to attend the entire event, but *required* to attend the half-day session that includes your presentation. A final schedule and room number will be delivered by week 11.
 - **Collaboration:** I strongly recommend that you form peer groups who can work together to develop research and presentation skills. This will be especially rewarding if groups coalesce around related topics, such as "Modernism and Mobility," "Documentary Aesthetics," "Modernist Spaces and Psyches," or panels based on individual writers or groups of writers. Plagiarism is, of course, prohibited, but group members are encouraged to share research and exchange observations.
 - **Prospectus:** Individual students and/or panels must submit a prospectus for each presentation *no later than* 10 November. (Groups working together should collate each member's prospectus and submit the collection together; you should also submit a panel title at this time.) The purpose of the prospectus is to be sure that you have found a workable argument: by providing me information about your plans for the presentation, you enable me to help you negotiate potential challenges. This document should
 1. identify the text(s) and/or topic on which you will conduct research,
 2. briefly explain your interest in this research topic,
 3. describe your plan for conducting research and developing your argument, and
 4. include a preliminary annotated bibliography, which will provide citation information for sources you have already consulted, as well as brief notes explaining the relevance

of each source to your argument.

Your prospectus must be approved for your presentation to be successful.

○ **Presentation media:**

- **Required for each presentation: a handout**, including an abstract (or overview) of your argument and a bibliography of all works cited and consulted.

- **Welcome, but not obligatory: use of presentation software** (such as PowerPoint).

If you use such software, please note that

- a handout is still required (including the slides in addition to the abstract and bibliography),
- design of slides should be simple and straightforward in order to facilitate audience comprehension (i.e., aim more toward an Imagist than a Faulknerian aesthetic!), and
- you are still responsible for seeing that your argument can be delivered within 15 minutes. Don't get "carried away" by the process of designing slides! You are strongly encouraged to engage in a "trial run" within your research group.
- **Welcome, but not obligatory: additional aesthetic media**, such as representations from the visual arts or clips of music or film, *if* they help to demonstrate or support your argument. Do not allow such clips to take up more than 2 minutes of your presentation time.

RESOURCES:

Because we will only have, effectively, 1.5 hours per week in order to conduct class discussion, and because each of you is required to participate in that discussion in order to pass the course, I will have little time to lecture during class sessions. Accordingly, study guides for each text will be posted on Absalon, in addition to a general bibliography on modernism. Check back often!

SCHEDULE:

Assignments in bold are to be completed by class time on corresponding date.

Week 1/Calendar week 36/1 September: Introduction

Poems by Ezra Pound, Langston Hughes, and William Carlos Williams
(to be projected in class)

Week 2/Calendar week 37/8 September:

Sherwood Anderson, from *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919)

Jean Toomer, from *Cane* (1923)

Muriel Rukeyser, from *U.S. 1* (1938)

Week 3/Calendar week 38/15 September:

William Faulkner, *Light in August* (1932), chaps. 1-11

Week 4/Calendar week 39/22 September:

Faulkner, *Light in August*, chaps. 12-end

Week 5/Calendar week 40/29 September

D'Arcy McNickle, *The Surrounded* (1936), chaps. 1-16

Week 6/Calendar week 41/6 October

McNickle, *The Surrounded*, chap. 17-end

Calendar week 42: no class/university rule

Week 7/Calendar week 43/20 October

Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1953)

Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust* (1939), chaps. 1-7

Week 8/Calendar week 44/27 October

West, *The Day of the Locust*, chaps. 8-end

Calendar week 45: no class/semester break

Week 9/Calendar week 46/10 November

Gertrude Stein, from *The Making of Americans* (1925)

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922)

Week 10/Calendar week 47/17 November

**Zora Neale Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), chaps. 1-21
Prospectus**

Week 11/Calendar week 48/24 November

Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, chap. 22-end

Calendar week 50, 7 and 8 December: **Final presentations in 27.0.47**