

American Modernist Vanguard, 1900-1940

English 5355.061 || SPRING 2025

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| COURSE DESCRIPTION & GOALS

Welcome! Our focus this semester is upon the experimental and vanguard literatures and manifestos composed by American writers during the first half of the 20th century. “Modernism” is a much-debated term; however, it is generally understood to refer to the aesthetic and cultural movements that influenced artistic production in literature, the visual arts, music, dance and theater performance, and architecture—on an international scale—until the destabilization brought by World War II. Most scholars agree that the many manifestations of ‘modernism’ were a response to ‘modernization’ in the opening 20th century: discoveries and innovations in the sciences, technologies, communications, as well as political developments (governing ideologies, economic structures, and class struggle) and coming social change for the under-represented and marginalized, to include, in the U.S., African Americans, indigenous peoples, immigrants, and women.

We will survey the context and claims of avant-garde European and American literary movements—Dadaism, Futurism, Imagism, Surrealism—as background to our engagement with influential writers working across a variety of genres. This exploration of the aesthetic, linguistic, and cultural strategies of Modernist disruption and innovation will allow for our own critical inquiry into this historical period and for the ways its provocations and theories prepare for later 20th-century American literary vanguards, to include the Beats, the Objectivists and Projectivists, the Black Mountain School, Black Arts Movement, Theatre of the Absurd, second-wave feminist writing, and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry.

Pedagogically, I am committed to your appreciation and enriched understanding of the aesthetic, social, and cultural contexts for this body of literature as well as to your further development as sophisticated readers, critical thinkers, and writers.

Learning Outcomes

Content-Based

- ◆ Students will demonstrate the capacity to forge crucial connections between and among creative and critical texts, historical movements, and evolving ideas about literary Modernism’s unique contributions to Anglo-American letters;
- ◆ Students will practice formulating a thesis related to Modernist literature and scholarship and to support the thesis with evidence and argumentation;
- ◆ Students will deepen their thinking about the relationships between and among history, culture, and the arts as well as the relationships between identities and historically shifting ideas about difference (gender, sexual identity, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, national/international).

Skills-Based

- ◆ Students will engage in close readings of complex literary and theoretical texts and, as a result, will hone skills in nuanced analysis, research, cogent writing, and thoughtful discussion and debate;
- ◆ Students will practice both personal and learning community responsibility as borne out in meeting

deadlines, respectfully engaging with peers and faculty, and working to highest academic standards.

- ◆ Students will work collaboratively to gain and apply disciplinary knowledge and skills for academic and professional development.

These outcomes will be demonstrated through discussions, discussion leadership, writing assignments, analytical essays and creative writing, all aimed to elicit objective analysis and substantive written responses.

■ REQUIRED READING

- ◆ Barnes, Djuna. *Nightwood*. New Directions, 2006. 9780811216715.
- ◆ Eliot, T. S. *The Waste Land*. Ed. Michael North. Norton Critical Editions. 978-0393974997
- ◆ Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. Ed. Michael Thurston. Norton Critical Editions, 2022. 978-0393656008
- ◆ Loos, Anita. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes and But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes*. Penguin, 1998. 9780141180694.
- ◆ Stein, Gertrude. *Stein: Writings 1903-1932*. Eds. Catharine Stimpson and Harriet Chessman. Library of America, 1998. 978-1883011406
- ◆ Thurman, Wallace. *Infants of the Spring*. Dover Publications; Reprint edition, 2013. 978-0486499895

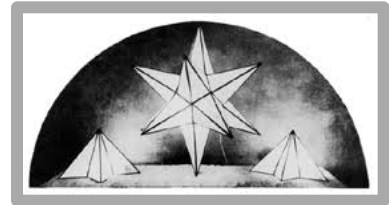
■ DIGITAL ARCHIVES

Modernist Studies Association: <https://msa.press.jhu.edu/index.html>

The Modernist Journals Project: <https://modjourn.org/journal/>

The Modernism Lab at Yale:

<https://campuspress.yale.edu/modernismlab/>



GRADS: Search the University of Pennsylvania Call-For-Papers site to see current conversations that feature conferences and panels relevant to our field of study. If you are interested in submitting a conference proposal, I am happy to work with you: <https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/category/all>

■ POLICIES & REQUIREMENTS

COMMUNICATION POLICY || Emails will be answered within 24-36 hours during the school week and occur between 9am and 8pm. Feedback on written assignments will be within 2 weeks of submission unless otherwise informed. Please note: I teach on a Tuesday - Thursday on-campus schedule this term.

DISCUSSION FORUM POLICY || Prompts, questions, and responses on the discussion board are to enable students to brainstorm about the readings and assignments. The postings on the discussion board must be focused on the assigned topic. All technical problems associated with Canvas, the Internet, or library databases, including passwords and user IDs, should be directed to the respective departments. The course instructor cannot answer technical questions.

COMMUNICATION & COLLEAGIALITY || We are all responsible for creating a seminar that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful. We commit to doing so in a way that values diverse perspectives and experiences and encourages productive reflection and interaction. Above all, be respectful (even when you strongly disagree) and be conscious of the ways that our identities position us in the classroom. All postings on the discussion board must meet academic and professional standards. Abuses in the forms of bullying and/or discriminatory comments on gender, sex, race, or ethnicity are not allowed and will be reported if the instructor's intervention does not see immediate changes in behavior.

CONVENTIONS OF ADDRESS || Speaking to a professor, administrator, staff member, employer, manager, or colleague is different (at least initially) from speaking/texting with a friend, family member, or other familiar relation. In a professional, intellectual context like the University, it is conventional to refer to faculty, administrators, staff, and others by their titles (Doctor, Professor, Instructor, Coach, Ms./Mr.) unless explicitly instructed otherwise. You should also get into the habit of including greetings, salutations, and language appropriate to such contexts (not, for example, “Hey,”). I will respectfully refer to you according to your stated preferences and expect that you’ll reciprocate in kind.

HOMEWORK & PAPER FORMAT || Complete all assigned readings and assignments by the due date so that you can participate in online and classroom discussion and writing activities. All written assignments should be typed, double-spaced, use normal margins and readable font. Paper headings should include your name, date, course title, and professor’s name. Each page should include page number and your last name. Use MLA documentation to cite sources and include a Works Cited page.

DUE DATE POLICY || Assignments must be submitted through Canvas on or before the due date (unless otherwise requested). Work turned in late without a compelling reason will be lowered one-third of a grade per day.

AI POLICY || For this course, **AI is not permitted in this course at all.** I expect all work students submit for this course to be their own. I have carefully designed all assignments and class activities to support your learning. Doing your own work, without human or artificial intelligence assistance, is best for your efforts in mastering course learning objectives. For this course, I expressly forbid using ChatGPT or any other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for any stages of the work process, including brainstorming. Deviations from these guidelines will be considered a violation of UT Tyler’s Honor Code and academic honesty values.

■ ASSIGNMENTS & PROJECTS

Readings & Discussions

⌘ **Assigned Readings** || Complete all literary and critical assigned readings by the due date so that you can participate in discussion and learning activities. It will be beneficial for you if you keep a **reading/response journal** or an **annotated bibliography** of the critical readings, that is, a short description of each article’s main topics and arguments. This will save you time when crafting your prospectuses and final paper.

⌘ **Weekly Discussion Leader Canvas Postings** || Across the semester, each student will be responsible for initiating multiple discussions of the assigned readings through the posting of prompts and claims. I’ve made initial assignments; please let me know if you have a conflict with that date. **Format: 400+ words. POST by Monday (midnight) of the week during which the readings are assigned.**

Discussion prompts should briefly summarize the week’s readings, noting the line of argumentation in scholarly articles and the subjects, themes, form, and style of the literary works. You might comment from your 21st-century vantage point on the aims of the writer(s) and the issues resulting from their historical period. Conclude with several thoughtful discussion questions/prompts for the week’s discussion.

Discussion leadership postings will be **letter-graded** according to the concision of the summary, the depth and thoughtfulness of the discussion prompts and questions, and the grammatical correctness and polish of the prose posting on Canvas. *You are welcome to consult with me as you draft your posting!*

⌘ **Weekly Class Discussion Responses** || Each class member is responsible for a cogent response to the week's discussion leader's posting. Once you've posted for the week, feel free to respond more briefly to colleagues' comments. **Format: 200+ words. POST responses by SATURDAY (midnight) of the calendar week. Graded 'complete/incomplete.'**

Researched & Creative Writing

⌘ **"Manifesto Moments" Mini-Reports** || Students will research and design a PowerPoint report on cultural-historical movements and theories relevant to our study. This will be due for **posting by the Wednesday (midnight) of the week indicated on the schedule**. Assignments will be made during the first week of classes. *Letter-graded.*

⌘ **Creative Variation & Explication** || To test your engagement with this literary period, you will create an original work (poem, short fiction, screenplay, multimedia, collage, choreography, music, manifesto) inspired by a modernist writer's work, style, or aesthetic movement. *This effort will not be letter-graded.*

In an attached **explication (600+ words)**, explain the premises for your creative work and discuss the ways in which you engage the elements of modernism. Briefly explain what attracted you to your author, work, or movement and what insights you have gained in the process of writing your creative piece. *This explication will be letter graded. More information will be shared in class and on Canvas.*

⌘ **Alternative Syllabus** || This assignment offers graduate students the opportunity to design a syllabus for a different configuration (thematic, topical, generic) of creative and theoretical readings and emphases for an Anglo-American experimental vanguard/modernism course to be offered at a high school, community college, or university. *More information on formatting and grading will be handed out in class.*

⌘ **'Prospectus' Research Paper Abstract** || There will be TWO "prospectus" assignments for which students will map out an abstract for a research paper, to include a working thesis argument paragraph followed by a set of supporting passages (both creative and critical-scholarly sources) and a rationale statement for how these would be used to support the thesis. You are free to choose your own topic of analysis as you explore more deeply your insights about works under review during the period of the semester leading up to the due date. Include the questions you are using to help guide your research; the specific novel/s you propose to examine; and difficulties, questions, or problems you anticipate. You will get feedback, so ask any other questions as well. Concision and logic of the argument are key!

Format: Word count should be a minimum of 500+ words and no more than 1200, including the bibliography. Title your prospectus and submit as a Word document (not PDF). More information about the formatting and letter grading is posted in Canvas and will be discussed in announcements. *Letter-graded.*

⌘ **Final Research Paper** || For the end-of-term project, expand upon and/or revise one of the prospectus assignments already submitted OR design a new paper topic that explores a set of propositions that constellate creative and critical texts into significant conversations. *If a final paper is not submitted, the student will fail the course.*

In a minimum of 3500+ words including Works Cited, engage the creative and critical works we've discussed and deploy arguments highlighted throughout the semester in order to offer a literary-critical examination and focused reading. The paper should include a minimum of three outside scholarly sources. Feel free to draw from the criticism we've read over the semester. Your essay must be typed and

formatted according to the “Homework & Paper Format” description above. Use MLA documentation to cite sources. Submit the final paper through Canvas in a Word document.

I’ve designed this assignment to model an article submission to *The Explicator* journal or another literary publication that attracts your attention (it is up to you whether you actually do a final submission at semester’s end). We will talk more about this later in the semester. ***Be inspired by a UT Tyler alum!*** Jonahs Kneitly. (2021). “Rappaccini’s Queer Daughter: Gender Non-Conformity in “Rappaccini’s Daughter.” *The Explicator*, 79(3), 97–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00144940.2021.1920358>

⌘ **E-Symposium** || Seminar paper abstracts will be posted during the final week of the semester in a mini-conference format. Feel free to use this forum for brainstorming and requesting suggestions and feedback from your colleagues to help you during your final paper drafting process. **Graded ‘complete/incomplete’**

GRADES & FINAL EVALUATION

Final course grades will be based on the weighted average grades based on the following percentages. The final grade will include my assessment of your overall contribution and progress in the class. Feel free to communicate with me at any time about your grades.

GRADUATES:

Discussion Leadership	5%
Weekly Class Discussion Responses	15%
Manifesto Moments” Mini-Reports	15%
Prospectuses (2)	20%
Creative Variation	10%
Alternative Syllabus	10%
Final Paper and E-Symposium	25%

PAPER GRADING STANDARDS

Excellent (A) papers have clear theses and soundly organized arguments that reflect detailed, nuanced understanding of the text. They are precisely and concisely written and have few if any mechanical problems—even minor ones. They weave quotations into their arguments smoothly and forcefully. A vital, graceful voice animates such essays; they say something compelling in a compelling way.

Good (B) papers have clear theses and are thoughtfully and reasonably organized. They may be marred by a few infelicities (inappropriateness) of style, but they will have no major mechanical problems—and not many minor ones either. These are solid, disciplined papers that make a definite point in a logical, coherent manner to a definite audience.

Satisfactory (C) papers have a thesis supported by evidence. The writing is clean and properly proofed, but not always compelling; it may be marred by some minor mechanical problems and one or two major ones (like fragments or run-ons). While their arguments may not be particularly cogent, these papers do say something interesting, and they say it in a comprehensible and responsible way.

Poor (D) papers, while giving evidence of effort on the part of the writer, lack a thesis, have major mechanical problems, poor organization, betray serious misreadings of the text, and show little sense of subject or audience.

Failing (F) papers have weaknesses even graver than those indicated for poor papers. They usually betray a lack of effort on the part of the writer. Any evidence of plagiarism (intentional or otherwise) will result in a failing grade—and referral to the Academic Conduct Committee.

Illustrations

Page 1 || “Portrait of Gertrude Stein (with American flag as backdrop),” Carl Van Vechten, 1935

Page 2 || Lamps by Mina Loy

Page 7 || Drawing by Djuna Barnes

