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ENG 5006-001: Writing like a Modernist

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Eng. 5006: Writing like a Modernist
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"Those formerly subversive and embattled styles—Abstract Expressionism, the great modernist poetry of Pound, Eliot or Wallace Steven’s the International Style (Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies); Stravinsky; Joyce, Proust and Mann—felt to be scandalous or shocking by our grandparents are, for the generation which arrives at the gate in the 1960s, felt to be the establishment and the enemy—dead, stifling, canonical, the reified monuments he has to destroy to do anything new."

Goals: In 1988, Fredric Jameson could assume that it was no longer possible to write like a modernist. Even though modernist writers’ “explosion into a host of distinct private styles and mannerisms” in some ways anticipated the fragmentation characteristic of postmodern writing, their methods were no longer tenable, according to Jameson, because they were based on the existence of a “unique self and private identity.” As of 1988, he suggests, this individual self either no longer exists or never did; for that reason modernism “is over and done with.” All that’s left for contemporary writers is pastiche.

Since the 1990s, however, postmodernism itself has been declared “over and done with,” replaced by meta-, hyper-, pseudo-, and alter-modernisms, among others. I’d like to take this post-postmodern moment as an opportunity to revisit the “high modernists” against whom postmodernists defined themselves.

This class will read modernist fiction and poetry in the light of what modernist writers said about their aims and craft at the time. We’ll read these works, at least in part, as writers: looking for what we might learn or even borrow from them. We’ll talk about their writers’ compositional process, the cultural conversation of which they were a part, and their decisions about publication venue, format, and marketing. What did they say about what they were doing? With whom were they talking about their work? To what extent were they responding to earlier writers or to each other? How did the need to publish and promote their work shape its final form? What kinds of collaboration complicated the authorial process?

Toward the end of the semester, we’ll shift our attention to contemporary fiction to get a sense of how living writers have responded to the techniques of their modernist forebears. I’m hoping by the end you’ll have a better understanding of British modernism, particularly as it relates to contemporary fiction and (if relevant) your own writing.

Policies: English Department statement on plagiarism:
Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author and representation of them as one's original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language) --has the right and
the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of NC for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Grades:

20% participation  
30% paper (proposal, annotated bibliography, and completed essay [10-15 pp])  
20% responses on D2L  
20% presentations  
10% imitations

Requirements: The most basic requirement is that you read carefully and come to class ready to talk, ask questions, and discuss. Please come prepared to back up your comments and questions with textual citations. It’s crucial that you annotate as you read: use post-it notes, take copious notes, or buy your books and write in them.

Responses: at least one hour before each class, post a response of 250-300 words to the assigned reading. There are three requirements for these postings; 1. If you’re not the first to post, read earlier postings and respond to one. 2. Then make a single point about your reading and develop it. 3. Quote directly from the reading at some point in your response. Possible starting points: What tensions or contradictions or anomalies do you see? Is there a turning point? An interesting craft choice? An odd moment or a minor character? Important allusion? Is the work responding to a specific event or issue or writer? Connection to the writer’s letters or essays or ideas expressed elsewhere?

Presentations:

1. Modernist Journals Project (explained below).
2. Leading class discussion: Each student is responsible for introducing and leading discussion of a single text. Your presentation should include the following:

A. Information about the text’s composition and publication. When was it composed? What biographical and sociohistorical issues might have influenced its composition and/or reception? When and where was it published? As there textual questions? Legal problems? What other writings by the author or others illuminate his/her purpose/process? (10-15 min)

B. Bibliography: Hand out a bibliography listing a major biography and relevant diaries, letters, or memoirs as well annotations for as 3-5 critical articles or chapters dealing with the text’s composition, craft, publication venue, or reception. Annotations should substantive, paragraph-long account of the authors’ arguments. These articles should inform your presentation; whether you discuss them individually is up to you.

C. Lead the class in a discussion of the text itself. Come with 5 or so discussion questions. These should be highlight what you see as the key themes and questions developed and posed by the text and the critics you’ve read about it. These questions will structure our discussion of the novel for the remainder of the hour. Take 20 minutes
maximum to present material in lecture format. After that, use your questions to trigger discussion (and feel free to be experimental).

Essay (10-15 pp.) should grow out of some curiosity or insight that you develop during the semester in relation to one or more of the assigned texts. I’ll start asking you about your ideas in early March; come see me at some point during the planning stages so that we can talk about your ideas. Your research paper could grow out of your presentation, but need not. Do decide on a topic early enough for you to get the sources you need: plan on using interlibrary loan in the course of your research.

**Syllabus** (subject to change based on your preferences)


Wed. Jan 29: Lawrence. Imitation #1 due.

Wed. February 4: browse the British journals digitized by the Modernist Journals Project <http://www.modjourn.org/> (*Blast, Blue Review, Coterie, Dana, The Egoist, The Freewoman, The New Age, The New Freewoman, Rhythm, Wheels, one of the imagist anthologies) and select an article, story or poem for us all to read and discuss. By Friday, Jan. 31, post to D2L the name of your selected reading assignment (specify journal, vol, issue, and page). Read everyone’s assigned poem or story as well as your own and come prepared to describe the journal in which your choice appeared and to lead a brief discussion of it.

Wed. Feb 11: Ford, *The Good Soldier*  
Coursepack: Ford on impressionism

Wed. Feb 18: Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*  
From back of the book: Joyce, excerpts from *Stephen Hero* and letters on epiphanies and epiklesis; from Coursepack: Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and “Ulysses, Order, and Myth”

Wed. Feb 25: Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*  
Coursepack: from “Modern Fiction” and “Professions for Women”; Richardson, foreword to *Pilgrimage* and Sinclair, from review of *Pilgrimage*

Wed. March 5: Loy. 5pm, Bazargan lecture. Imitation #2 due.  
Coursepack: imagism, Marinetti on Futurism

Wed. March 19: Waugh, *Vile Bodies*
Wed. March 26: Yeats. Imitation #3 due.
Coursepack: Yeats on Symbolism

Wed. April 2: Orwell, *A Clergyman's Daughter*


Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" and "In the Musee des Beaux-Arts."

Wed. Ap 23: Smith, *NW*

Wed. Ap 30: *NW*

Paper presentations and discussion will serve as final exam.

Relevant books and essays having to do with craft (in addition to those in courspack)
Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*
Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*
Woolf, "Modern Fiction," "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown," "The Leaning Tower," *A Room of One's Own*