Modernism is back: the past few years have seen a tremendous resurgence of interest in literary modernism, with the reexamination of well-known writers and the recovery of neglected ones. These canonical shifts have involved a critical rethinking of the idea of modernism itself: while literary modernism once seemed (particularly in the heyday of the New Criticism) a matter of well-wrought, intricately unified works of art (to be taken apart and put back together by trained professionals), more recent thinking recognizes the antihierarchical, disruptive, playful, skeptical energies at work in modernist writing. As many readers have observed, modernism reexamined begins to look a lot like postmodernism. What's particularly exciting is the recognition that modernist writing has, still, the power to shock and delight in its newness and its challenges to traditional understandings of form, “voice,” and representation.

This course is devoted to finding meaning and pleasure in a wide range of modernist American poetry. We'll think about modernist American poetry in relation to its primary American antecedents (Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman) and examine the antagonism between the Anglo-American modernism of T.S. Eliot and the homegrown modernism of William Carlos Williams. We'll consider poetry in relation to currents in visual art (such as cubism) and explore "the French connection"—the influence of avant-garde French poetry. We'll also look at modernism in relation to Romanticism, as with the poetry of Wallace Stevens. We'll look at the innovative work of Gertrude Stein (for many contemporary American poets the mother of us all), e.e. cummings (a long-dismissed modernist), Mina Loy and Muriel Rukeyser (rediscovered modernists), Marianne Moore (still a neglected modernist), and Edwin Denby and David Schubert (still almost invisible). We'll learn about poetic "movements" (Ezra Pound, H.D., Amy Lowell and Imagism; Lorine Niedecker, George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff, Louis Zukofsky and the Objectivists) and consider how a "movement" might help or hinder a poet's development and reputation. We'll consider modernist attention to urban reality (Hart Crane and Langston Hughes, for instance) and rural reality (Niedecker’s extraordinary poetry). We'll consider African-American modernism (Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Sterling Brown, all long-absent from modernist canons) and the relations between modernist poetry and jazz. We'll learn about "little magazines" and small presses, the primary means of publication for innovative American poetry. And we'll learn something about where American poetry began to go after the heyday of modernism. The course offers a chance to see the gradual work of canon-formation in progress and to recognize that the possibilities of poetry (how to write) and criticism (what to value, how to read) are always under construction. Above all, the course offers a chance to become acquainted with some of the most extraordinary poetry of the past century.

A note on reading poetry: In conceiving this course, I'm well aware that for many students, even graduate students, poetry is difficult. Too often the difficulties lead to dead ends: the belief that poems are too elusive and that understanding is impossible, or the belief that poems mean whatever one wants them to mean. One of my main objectives in teaching the course is to help each student develop a keen eye for the features of poems and ways to articulate what he or she sees—thus making the poems we're reading alive, accessible, and rewarding. (You don’t need to be an expert reader already, but you should be something of an expert by the end of the course.)

TEXTS

Kenneth Koch, Making Your Own Days: The Pleasures of Reading and Writing Poetry
Cary Nelson, ed., Anthology of Modern American Poetry
Gertrude Stein, Tender Buttons
William Carlos Williams, Collected Poems, Volume One
**REQUIREMENTS**

Dedicated reading and participation in discussion, some short pieces of writing, one longer researched project (15 pp.), a final examination.

**POLICIES**

**Attendance**
Attendance is essential: you should attend class as often as I do. A missed class or two (we have only fifteen) will greatly diminish your possibilities to contribute to and get very much from the course.

**Late Work and Make-Up Work**
Late writing is acceptable only if you have my approval (which is not automatic) well in advance. Missed work cannot be made up. For the researched writing project, all deadlines must be met (details to follow).

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

**Office Hours**
In my experience, it's a given that graduate students talk at length with their professors outside of class—to exchange ideas, ask questions, develop possibilities for papers. If office hours aren't workable for you, talk to me and we can figure out another time.

**Decorum**
Our purposes here are serious—not grim or morbid, but genuinely intellectual. No eating, talking, note-passing, sleeping, doing work for other classes, or other private business. Take notes, always. Take notes, always. ("A good teacher says everything twice": poet Howard Nemerov.)

**A Word About Discussion**
I like what the writer Thomas Merton says about a teacher he admired:

Most of the time he asked questions. His questions were very good, and if you tried to answer them intelligently, you found yourself saying excellent things that you did not know you knew, and that you had not, in fact, known before. He had "educed" them from you by his question. His classes were literally "education"—they brought things out of you, they made your mind produce its own explicit ideas (The Seven Storey Mountain).

I think of discussion as a way to get at the substance of what we’re reading. As a student (and especially as a graduate student) I always felt patronized when someone replied to my contributions by saying "Very good" or "That’s interesting" or the like, so I try not to give those rote non-responses. Instead I try to engage what someone is saying. Sometimes a student’s observation will make me think of something I hadn’t thought to say before. Or I might ask another question—sometimes for the sake of debate, sometimes to look for a lengthier explanation (for instance, "What makes you see it that way?"). Or someone else in the class might want to ask a question or offer a different perspective.

If everyone comes in prepared to make substantial contributions to each discussion, we will have wonderful discussions. If you have qualms about participating in discussion, please talk to me.

**Grading**

Your grade will be based on your short writing assignments (30%), final examination (30%), longer project (30%), and participation (10%).
Writing assignments receive letter grades. Missing writing receives a zero. Participation in the course receives one of five grades: 100 (consistent informed participation), 85 (frequent informed participation), 75 (less frequent participation or less informed participation), 50 (only occasional participation), 0 (little or no participation). You may check on participation at any time.

To calculate semester grades, I use the following numerical equivalents for letter grades:

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<th>Letter Grade</th>
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<td>A</td>
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For semester grades, 90 or above is an A; 80 or above, a B; 70 or above, a C; 60 or above, a D; below 60, an F.

**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 the representation of them as one's original work" *(Random House Dictionary of the English Language)*—has the right and responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course.

**Academic Integrity**

Any breach of academic integrity is a serious matter and will get you a serious penalty, typically an F for the course. You will also get a file in the Judicial Affairs office and be required to participate in an ethics workshop organized by Judicial Affairs. You should be familiar with Eastern's statement on academic integrity (posted in classrooms) and should ask if you have any questions about quoting from and/or documenting sources. You should not collaborate on written work, "borrow" work, have someone "go over" your work, or give your work to anyone.

**PROVISIONAL WEEKLY OUTLINE**

1: “Don’t think—look”: Looking at poems
2: A Volcano and a Mountain: Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman
3: Imagism, Amygism: Ezra Pound, H.D., Amy Lowell
4: “A heap of broken images”: T.S. Eliot’s *Waste Land*
5: Cubism and Poetry: Guillaume Apollinaire, Gertrude Stein
6-7: “THE WORLD IS NEW”: William Carlos Williams
8: “to sit at desk / and condense”: Objectivists 1: Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen
9: Objectivists 2: Charles Reznikoff, Lorine Neidecker
10: Imagination and Reality and Wallace Stevens
11-14: Modernists, Lost and Found
   11: Hart Crane, Kenneth Fearing, Muriel Rukeyser
   12: Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, e.e. cummings
   13: Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Gwendolyn Brooks
   14: Edwin Denby and David Schubert
15: Last Things (researched writing, a look at poetry after modernism)