

## **EN 2270, “Modernisms”**

Course Director: Dan Dufournaud

Seminar: W 11:30 – 14:30, YK VH 1005

Office Hour: W 15:00 – 16:00, Atkinson 516

Email: [dduf213@yorku.ca](mailto:dduf213@yorku.ca)

### **Course Description:**

Understanding a literary movement requires an investigation of the historical, political, social, intellectual, and economic contexts in which it took shape. Literature is often a record of and response to real-world phenomena, and this especially holds true for Modernist literature. The aim of this course is not merely to introduce students to the Anglo-Modernist literary movement but to situate each work within the broad cultural matrix from which it emerged. Journeying from America to Ireland to England, from the 1890s to the 1950s, from the suffragette movement to the Harlem Renaissance, this course is called “Modernisms” because there are as many differences as similarities among the writers and literary works we will consider. Ezra Pound’s famous dictum, “Make it new,” will guide our discussions. How did writers “make it new”?

For some writers, political concerns outweigh formal experiment; for others, innovative form is a vehicle of escape from a stultifying tradition. Some adapt their literary technique to innovations in visual art, capturing the fleetingness of experience or the chaos of the mind, while others attempt to incorporate into their work the horrors of war or the sights and sounds of the city. At the turn of the century, immigration and economic opportunity made urban environments sites of hope, insecurity, and class strife. Alongside the demographic and industrial explosion of the city, gender roles and expectations were among a number of nineteenth-century conventions that underwent a dramatic shift in the first half of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, privilege and opportunity were by no means distributed evenly across the social field. Many of the literary works we will investigate address these social transformations and inequities.

This course meets once a week, for three hours. Classes will consist of lectures as well as tutorial-style discussions and group work. A significant focus of each class will be students’ responses to the reading(s). Aside from the final exam, the course culminates with a long research essay—but three response papers, and the feedback on them, will help students develop their writing skills, thereby putting them in a position to write a thoughtful final essay.

### **Mark Breakdown:**

- 1) Three 500-word response papers: 10% each = 30%
- 2) Midyear test: 15%
- 3) Peer-review exercise: 5%
- 4) Eight-page research essay (roughly 2000 words): 25%
- 5) Final exam: 15%
- 6) Participation: 10%

## Required Course Texts\*:

Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Dover); John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (Mariner); T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (Norton); F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Penguin); Cecily Hamilton, *Diana of Dobson's* (Broadview); Langston Hughes, *Selected Poems* (Vintage); Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (Penguin); James Joyce, *Dubliners* (Penguin); Nella Larsen, *Passing* (Dover); D'Arcy McNickle, *The Surrounded* (U of New Mexico P); Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Harper Perennial); Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Penguin)

\* The readings for November 6—all of which are poems—are accessible for free online.

## Assignments:

1) **Three 500-word response papers** constitute the biggest chunk of your grade. The aim of each response is to analyze one of the readings. No thesis or additional research is required (though feel free to incorporate secondary sources)—but responses must be written in formal prose as well as formatted according to MLA guidelines. (That means that each response should have a “Works Cited” entry at the end, even if it is just the one reading you are addressing.) These responses will allow you to sharpen your writing and close-reading skills. Here are some questions you might want to ask yourself as you consider whether to write a response to a given week's reading(s): did a passage or poem strike me as particularly meaningful? How do form and content work together in this passage or poem? Are they at odds? What might this passage or poem convey about the historical period in which it was written? This list is not exhaustive, but please take the response papers as opportunities to provide bold analysis rooted in textual evidence. Substantiating your readings with textual evidence can be tricky, but you need to do it—just be sure that long quotations drawn from the text do not overwhelm your critical voice.

Response papers are due at the beginning of each class. They will not be accepted late, and hard copies are a must. So if you want to write on *Diana of Dobson's*, you need to submit your response at the beginning of class on September 18. You cannot double up on a reading covered over two or more weeks. While there is a good deal of freedom with this assignment, two responses are due in the fall semester. If you show up on November 13—the first of two classes in which we will discuss *The Waste Land*—without having submitted at least one response, then you have forfeited 10% of your grade.

2) The **midyear test** will be written in class, on November 27. Unless changes are made to the format in the meantime, it will consist of three parts: definition of key concepts, which will ask students to connect each concept to one of the course texts; sight passages, which will ask students to name the text from which the passage is drawn and explain its significance; and an essay question. The midyear test is worth 15% of your final grade.

3) The **peer-review exercise** will take place, in class, on March 18 (unless we decide as a group to move it up a week or two). The expectation is that you will show up with a working thesis (no more than a paragraph) and a tentative roadmap for your essay (no more than a few sentences about each of your major points). In pairs, or groups of three at most, you will read each other's tentative plans and offer feedback. If you do not come to class on March 18, you forfeit 5% of your grade.

4) The **eight-page research essay** is the most demanding assignment of the course. A list of essay prompts will be circulated at a later date, but feel free to construct your own topic through discussions with me. The prompts will ask for an essay comparing and contrasting two or more primary texts. The requirements are standard: a clearly articulated thesis, at least *four peer-reviewed* secondary sources, and a final draft formatted according to MLA guidelines.

5) The **final exam** will be written during the April exam period. It will follow the same format as the midyear test. It, too, is worth 15% of your mark. The final exam will not be cumulative but cover material from the second half of the course.

6) **Participation** is worth 10% of your final grade, so please do not fall behind on the weekly schedule. I will often pose questions and solicit responses to the readings. Throughout the year, moreover, there will be plenty of opportunities for group work, and discussions cannot get off the ground unless people have read and thought about the weekly material. This portion of your grade is at once challenging (reading everything) and relatively easy (sharing your thoughts).

### **Schedule:**

September 4 – Introduction

September 11 – Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899)

September 18 – Cecily Hamilton, *Diana of Dobson's* (1908)

September 25 – James Joyce, *Dubliners* (1914), “The Sisters” – “Ivy Day in the Committee Room”

October 2 – James Joyce, *Dubliners* (1914), “A Mother” – “The Dead”

October 9 – Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (1903), “Book First” – “Book Third”

October 16 – Fall reading week

October 23 – Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (1903), “Book Fourth” – “Book Tenth”

October 30 – Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (1903), “Book Eleventh” – “Book Twelfth”

November 6 – Thomas Hardy, “The Darkling Thrush” (1900); Edna St. Vincent Millay, “First Fig” (1920), “Four Sonnets” (1922), “I, Being Born a Woman and Distressed” (1923); H.D., “Oread” (1914), “Sea Rose” (1916), “Sea Violet” (1916); “Leda” (1921); “Fragment Thirty-Six” (1921); William Carlos Williams, “Tract” (1917), “The Widow’s Lament in Springtime” (1921), “Spring and All” (1923), “The Red Wheelbarrow” (1923), “This Is Just to Say” (1934); Marianne Moore, “The Fish” (1918), “A Grave” (1921), “To a Snail” (1924), “What Are Years?” (1940)\*

\* The majority of these poems are accessible online at “Poetry Foundation.” The Moore poems, however, will require a bit of digging via Google.

November 13 – T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922)

November 20 – T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922)

November 27 – Midyear Test

January 8 – Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927), “The Window”

January 15 – Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927), “Time Passes” – “The Lighthouse”

January 22 – F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), “Chapter I” – “Chapter VI”

January 29 – F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), “Chapter VII” – “Chapter IX”

February 5 – John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), “First Section”

February 12 – John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), “Second Section” – “Third Section”

February 19 – Winter reading week

February 26 – D’Arcy McNickle, *The Surrounded* (1936), “Chapter One” – “Chapter Sixteen”

March 4 – D’Arcy McNickle, *The Surrounded* (1936), “Chapter Seventeen” – “Chapter Thirty-Four”

March 11 – Langston Hughes, *Selected Poems*, “Afro-American Fragment” (3), “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (4), “The Weary Blues” (33-34), “One-Way Ticket” (177), “Note on Commercial Theatre” (190), *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (219-272), “I, Too” (275)\* + Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929), “Part One”

\* For the Hughes poems, the numbers in parentheses correspond to the page number in the Vintage edition of his *Selected Poems*.

March 18 – Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929), “Part Two” – “Part Three” + Peer-review exercise

March 25 – Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), “1” – “12”

April 1 – Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), “13” – “20” + Research essay due

### **Campus Resources:**

The **Writing Department** offers workshops and tutoring services. It is located in S329 Ross and can be contacted, by telephone, at (416) 736-5134.

The **Learning Skills Program** offers workshops, online assistance, and support pertaining to every facet of student life. It is located in S172 Ross and can be contacted, by telephone, at (416) 736-5144. For more information, please consult the Learning Skills webpage: <http://lss.info.yorku.ca/workshops/>.

**Personal Counselling Services** provides free one-on-one counselling to all York University students. They can help you through a crisis or with issues such as anxiety and workload management. It is located in N110 Bennett Student Centre and can be contacted, by telephone, at (416) 736-5297.

**York Federation of Students**—YFS—is your student union, and it provides a variety of services from last-second printing to discounted metro and museum passes. It is located in 106 Student Centre and can be reached, by telephone, at (416) 736-2100, ext. 58066. For more information, please visit the YFS website: [www.yfs.ca](http://www.yfs.ca).