MA in Modern and Contemporary Literature and Culture

2015-16

CORE MODULE: READING MODERNITY

AUTUMN TERM

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This module addresses some of the major literary trends and cultural debates of modern and contemporary times. It considers the different ways that ‘modernity’ has been understood – whether it be as a period or as a particular constellation of values or some combination of both – and focuses on the multiple art-forms and theories of art this yielded. We will proceed in a loose chronological fashion, examining a broad swathe of writers, genres and intellectual disciplines. The aim is not to provide an exhaustive survey, but to focus on some salient or representative moments of recent cultural history that will allow you to make informed choices about more specialised options of study. The module is conducted through seminars, offering a broad variety of teaching styles and critical approaches. For each seminar there is core reading which is compulsory preparation, and also a selection of further reading which you are encouraged to sample as widely as possible.

THE TERM AT A GLANCE

Week 1: Introductory Meeting (Richard Walsh)
Week 2: Poetic and Visual Modernism (Hugh Haughton)
Week 3: Joyce’s Ulysses (Lawrence Rainey)
Week 4: The Ghosts of Eliot and Yeats (Matt Campbell)
Week 5: Utopian Longings (Emilie Morin)
Week 6: Reading Week
Week 7: Beckett’s Voices (James Williams)
Week 8: Formalism and Fiction Since 1950 (Richard Walsh)
Week 9: Thatcherism, Neoliberalism and Resources (Claire Westall)
Week 10: Signifying Katrina (Bryan Radley)

With the exception of Week 1, all seminars meet on Mondays at 3pm in G/013.
2) Poetic and Visual Modernism

Hugh Haughton


In 1918, Marianne Moore wrote to Pound from New York, saying: ‘Over here, it strikes me that there is more evidence of power among painters and sculptors than among writers.’ Her friend William Carlos Williams, looking back on the birth of American modernism, wrote: ‘We were restless and constrained, closely allied to the painters. Impressionism, Dadaism, surrealism applied to both painting and the poem’.

This seminar sets out to explore the relationships between poetic and pictorial modernism in Anglophone poetry, focusing on the second decade of the twentieth-century and on a series of texts that emerge in explicit dialogue with the visual arts. Discussion will centre on Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons* and a selective anthology of poems, which I will circulate beforehand.

Core Reading

This list will be fine-tuned in the autumn term, but you are encouraged to read as many as the following texts as you can.

- Ezra Pound, ‘Vorticism’ (1915) and the poem ‘In a Station of the Metro’ (*Selected Poems*).
Poetry and Prose (Library of America, 1997). See also Stevens, ‘The Relation between Poetry and Painting’.

Further Reading

Rebecca Beasley, Ezra Pound and the Visual Culture of Modernism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
Bram Dijkstra, The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech: Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams
Linda Leavell, Marianne Moore and the Visual Arts (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), (see, in particular, the chapter ‘Portraits and Miscellanies’)
Wendy Steiner, Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: The Literary Portraiture of Gertrude Stein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978)
3) Joyce’s *Ulysses*

**Lawrence Rainey**

*Ulysses* is a litmus test: all theories of literary modernism can be tested against it, and every history of the modern novel must come to terms with its extraordinary innovations. We’ll focus on chapter 13 (the ‘Nausicaa’ chapter). This will be made available on-line through the VLE. If you want to purchase your own edition of the novel, please get *Ulysses: the Corrected Text*, edited by Hans Walter Gabler, with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (New York: Vintage Books, 1986; London: Bodley Head, 1993). I would urge you not to bring in editions by other editors (Jeri Johnson, Declan Kiberd, etc.) or other publishers (Penguin Modern Classics, etc.).

**Core Reading**


**Further Reading**


4) The Ghosts of W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot

Matthew Campbell

This will be a session about the ghostly in some of Yeats’s later poems: 'Ego Dominus Tuus', 'All Souls Night', 'Sailing to Byzantium', 'Byzantium'. It will also discuss Yeats's last play, Purgatory, and T.S. Eliot's view of it. Eliot's 'Little Gidding', in which Yeats appears as part of a 'familiar compound ghost', will also feature. The discussion will touch on a number of topics related to modernist poetry and ghosts - the past, anti-modernism, mid-twentieth-century mysticism and religion, as well as poetry in time of war.

Core Reading

W. B. Yeats, The Poems ed. Daniel Albright (London: Everyman 1990) (although any other edition will do);

Further Reading

There are numerous studies of Yeats and Eliot - good introductory essays with very helpful critical suggestions can be found in the recent CUP collections, Yeats in Context, ed. Holdeman and Levitas, and Eliot in Context ed. Jason Harding.
5) Emilie Morin
Utopian Longings

In this seminar, we will discuss Aldous Huxley’s classic *Brave New World* (1932) in the light of post-war and contemporary debates about utopian thinking, as they have developed within and around the work of Frankfurt School philosophers. Our aim will not be to determine whether *Brave New World* is best read as an example of utopian or dystopian fiction; rather, we will seek to explore, through these precise theoretical lenses, the parameters of Huxley’s reflections on technology, boredom and the failures of rationality as they unfold in *Brave New World*.

Set reading for the seminar:
Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (any edition) (you must bring a copy of this novel to the seminar)
Theodor W. Adorno, “Aldous Huxley and Utopia”, from Adorno’s *Prisms*, pp. 95-118 (scan on VLE, under Resources List)
Ernst Bloch and T.W. Adorno, “A Conversation on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing”, from Bloch’s *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, to be read from https://files.nyu.edu/scr266/public/Adorno_Bloch.pdf

Secondary reading:
Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [you can either read the excerpt and the introduction in the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, OR - if you wish to engage with this text in greater depth - you can read the introduction, chapter 2 on the culture industry and the concluding sections on propaganda]

Background reading/surveys:
Erika Gottlieb, *Dystopian fiction East and West: universe of terror and trial* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001)
7) Beckett’s Voices
James Williams

In this seminar we will read two works by Samuel Beckett—or four, depending how you count them—the play Krapp’s Last Tape and the trilogy of short prose texts known as Nohow On (Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho). These texts could be compared in many ways: we’ll be focussing on questions of voice and address. What voices are speaking in Beckett? Who are Beckett’s voices speaking to? Who is listening? Does a voice presuppose a self? What if selves have multiple voices? How is a voice on the page related to a voice in performance? Where are the lines between dialogue and monologue? How is Beckett’s writing animated by these questions?

Core Reading

—. Company (1980), Ill Seen Ill Said (1981), Worstward Ho (1983). This trilogy of very short prose texts, collectively known as Nohow On, comes to only 100 pages in total. The edition to buy is: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Stirrings Still, ed. by Dirk van Hulle (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).*

I may also set some bits of supplementary reading e.g. letters, extracts from the theatrical notebooks for Krapp, etc. but if so I will notify you in good time, and will provide them as a hand-out at least a week ahead of the seminar.

* You may be reassured to know that our seminar will be on the English versions of all these texts. However, if you can read French and are interested in Beckett, you stand to gain a lot from comparing the English texts with their French versions. Please note, however, that Beckett’s composition practices were far more complicated than they are sometimes made out to be (i.e. writing in one language—at first English, then later, French—and then self-translating into the other). Krapp’s Last Tape was written in English for the Northern Irish actor Patrick Magee, then self-translated as La Dernière bande the following year. Company was first written in English, then immediately self-translated into French and published in 1980 as Compagnie; the English text was then revised in light of the French and published later the same year. Ill Seen Ill Said was first written in French as Mal vu mal dit: Beckett began translating it into English even as the French text was still being written and revised. Worstward Ho was written in English, and never translated by the author. Beckett regarded it as untranslatable, but this didn’t stop Édith Fournier from having a go: her translation, Cap au pire, appeared in 1991.

Secondary Reading

There is no set secondary reading, however you are encouraged to explore the following reading list and I would expect a well-prepared student to come to the seminar having read three or four article-length things, or equivalent, from it.


8) Formalism and Fiction Since 1950
Richard Walsh

This seminar will examine various manifestations of the formalist impulse in fiction since 1950, primarily within the French and American traditions; and it will situate these literary texts in relation to contemporary literary-critical and theoretical arguments engaged with formalist issues, especially regarding structuralism, poststructuralism and postmodernism. The reading for the seminar will consist of Alain Robbe-Grillet’s Jealousy (you will need a copy of this), and short selections from among a number of other writers (which I will provide), as below:

Core Reading


A list of recommended further reading for the seminar is below. Specific selections drawn from this list will be provided for the purposes of discussion during the seminar.

Further Reading

9) Thatcherism, Neoliberalism and the Resources of the World-Literary System
Claire Westall

Following the elections of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the early 1980s, neoliberalism became the dominant ideological formation in the Anglo-American world. This seminar will set neoliberalism within the longer history of the capitalist world system but will also attend to a recent effort to portray Thatcher’s attack on labour in the 1980s. By working out from David Peace’s 2004 novel GB84 we will examine the manner in which resource fictions can help us understand how contemporary socio-economic debates relate to the large-scale dynamics of capitalist modernity.

Core Reading

GB84 (2004) by David Peace
(NB: this is a long, dense text and students are encouraged to read it well in advance of Week 8)

And...


Margaret Thatcher, The Downing Street Years (London: Harper Collins, 1993), Chapter XIII, ‘Mr Scargill’s Insurrection’ (VLE)


Further Reading

Web: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v007/7.1brown.html
David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
Katy Shaw, David Peace: Texts and Contexts (Sussex Academic Press 2010)
Web: http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-plutocratic-imagination
10) Signifying Katrina: Disaster Capitalism, Displacement, and Race
Bryan Radley

Following on from the discussion of neoliberalism in the previous week, this seminar will look at the political and cultural legacies of Hurricane Katrina. The focus will be on Mary Robison’s 2009 experimental novel One D.O.A., One on the Way. Does Robison’s fragmentary, blackly comic, and generically mutable narrative provide an apposite aesthetic response to the challenge of representing the political ruptures, psychic wounds, and temporal discontinuities of New Orleans after Katrina? The critical coordinates for our discussion will include the biopolitics of disposability and ideas of disaster capitalism / apartheid (via the work of Henry Giroux and Naomi Klein respectively).

Core Reading


Further Reading / Viewing

Nandini Gunewardena and Mark Schuller, eds., Capitalizing on Catastrophe: Neoliberal Strategies in Disaster Reconstruction (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008), esp. the three chapters that comprise Part 3, “Exposing Katrina: Class, Race, and Displacement”, pp. 117-156.
Cynthia Whitney Hallett, Minimalism and the Short Story: Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robison (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), 101-133. [This chapter provides a useful summary of the first twenty years of Robison’s career, with a focus on the short stories and her place within the minimalist movement.]
Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires, eds., There is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina (London: Routledge, 2006).
Spike Lee, dir., When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Act (USA: HBO Video, 2006).
Tia Lessin and Carl Deal, dirs., Trouble the Water (USA: Zeitgeist Films, 2009).