

The U.S. Between the Wars: Literature and Culture

For many people in the U.S., the first World War led to a general disillusionment with structures and values embedded in Christianity and other ethical concepts of the western world, which had not served to save mankind from the moral catastrophe inherent in the war. Having endured the great calamity of World War I, many sensitive writers found that they could not "return" to the quiet countryside of America, and they thus began to look for new values that would replace traditionally accepted beliefs.

The writers of this period constitute what has loosely been referred to as "modernism" in America. Defining "modernism" is no easy task, but if many contemporary writers can be termed "post-modern," it is at least in part because of certain ideological ties to their predecessors: disillusioned with old standards, they constantly attempt, as Ezra Pound would say, to "make it new."

In this course, we will examine the philosophical and social temperament in the U.S. of the period through several important writers' attempts at recreating a world.

Course Requirements: oral presentation, final exam

Authors:

Edwin Arlington Robinson, selected poems
Robert Frost, selected poems
Wallace Stevens, selected poems
E.E. Cummings, selected poems
Edna St. Vincent Millay, selected poems
William Carlos Williams, selected poems
Marianne Moore, selected poems
Gertrude Stein, selected works
F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Rich Boy"
Ernest Hemingway, "Big Two-Hearted River"
Langston Hughes, selected poems
Eudora Welty, "Why I Live at the P.O."
William Faulkner, "Barn Burning"

AMERICAN LITERATURE BETWEEN THE WARS

SYLLABUS

Instructor: Jay Dougherty

Note: This schedule is flexible. Changes, if any, will be announced during class.

Oct. 19: Course introduction; overview of trends in literature of the period.

HOMEWORK: Copy course materials. Read "American Literature between the Wars: 1914-1945" and selection of poems from Edwin Arlington Robinson.

Oct. 26: Discussion of E.A. Robinson.

HOMEWORK: Read intro to Robert Frost and the poems.

Nov. 2: Discussion of Frost.

HOMEWORK: Read Carl Sandburg and Wallace Stevens.

Nov. 9: Discussion of Sandburg and image of city. Discussion of Stevens, Stevens' ideology and religion of reality.

HOMEWORK: Read Elinor Wylie and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Nov. 23 Discussion of Wylie and Millay.

HOMEWORK: Read T.S. Eliot

Nov. 30 Discussion of Eliot, Ezra Pound.

HOMEWORK: Read Marianne Moore and e.e. cummings.

Dec. 7 Discussion of Moore and cummings.

HOMEWORK: Read William Carlos Williams

Dec. 14 Discussion of Williams.

HOMEWORK: Read Langston Hughes.

Dec. 21 Discussion of Hughes, Harlem Renaissance.

HOMEWORK: Read Gertrude Stein selection and Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River."

Jan. 4 Discussion of Stein, Hemingway.

HOMEWORK: Read Hemingway, "Clean Well-Lighted Place." Begin Fitzgerald.

Jan. 11 Discussion of Hemingway.

HOMEWORK: Continue reading Fitzgerald.

Jan. 18 Discussion of Fitzgerald. Movie, if possible:
Great Gatsby.

Jan. 25 Discussion of Fitzgerald.

HOMEWORK: Read Eudora Welty, "Why I Live at the
P.O."

Feb. 1 Discussion of Welty.

HOMEWORK: Read Faulkner, "Barn Burning" and "Dry
September."

Feb. 8 Discussion of Faulkner.

HOMEWORK: Read Willa Cather, "Neighbor Rosicky."

Feb. 15 Discussion of Cather; course conclusion.

If you would like a Schein for this course, you will need to attend classes, participate in class discussions centering on the texts, and write a paper of 5-7 pages or give an oral presentation of around 20 minutes in class.

My office is TEL 802, and my office hour will be Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 10.

AMERICAN LITERATURE BETWEEN THE WARS
SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR REPORTS AND/OR PAPERS

1. Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*--description of and comparison with later little magazines.
2. Walt Whitman's influence on William Carlos Williams.
3. Gertrude Stein's theory of repetition, with examples, positive and negative attributes.
4. Comparison of Wallace Stevens' original version of "Sunday Morning" (as it appeared in *Poetry* magazine) with the full, eight-stanza version.
5. Some aspect of any particular author's published correspondence, how it reflects the author's personality or sheds some light on works--Hemingway, Stevens, Stein, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Williams, for example.
6. The American Family or Way of Life as seen through popular magazines of the time (see *Life*).
7. Some aspect of Langston Hughes' autobiographical writings (*The Big Sea* and/or *I Wonder as I Wander*).
8. Discussion of the terms Naturalism and Realism and the prominence of their tenets in the writing of the period.
9. The Imagists, their aesthetic agenda and their achievements.
10. Tracing of a particular theme in an author's writing (paper only).
11. e.e.cummings and the visual poem--precursors and successors.
12. Cummings and concrete poetry.
13. The ideological duel between William Carlos Williams and T.S. Eliot.

Other ideas forthcoming.

For presentations, remember that examples of that which you're discussing are always helpful.

Please try to coordinate report topics with the day's readings.

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