

Fall 2019 Course Descriptions

Instructor: David McWhirter

Course: ENGL 350

Title: 20th Century Literature Pre-World War II

Description: In this course we will attempt to define some key themes and impulses of literary modernism in Europe and America. Our main focus will be on issues of identity and subjectivity—the breakdown of older, stable concepts of the self and the pursuit of new, sometimes extreme modes of self-definition (or self-dissolution)—as they relate to the changing conditions of modern life, including urbanization, new technologies and media, and globalization, and to shifts in social structures governing gender, race, sexuality, and class. We will pay close attention to the aesthetic strategies adopted by modernist writers in their attempt to, as Ezra Pound put it, “make it new.” To what extent do the modernists’ experimental forms reflect a sense of chaos and fragmentation? To what extent do those forms embody a renewed quest for coherence? Is modern life primarily characterized by feelings of loss and nostalgia? or by an enlarged horizon of possibilities, especially for previously disempowered groups? Readings for the course will include poetry and fiction by (primarily) British and American writers, two films from the 1920s, and some brief selections from Freud, Marx and Nietzsche that will help define the seismic cultural shifts experienced in the west in the first half of the 20th century. Requirements: two 6-7 page papers totaling about 12-15 pages, and a final exam.

Proposed Readings: Poetry by T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, and W.H. Auden; films by F.W. Murnau (*Sunrise*) and King Vidor (*The Crowd*); fiction by Kate Chopin (*The Awakening*), Virginia Woolf (*Mrs. Dalloway*), Jean Toomer (*Cane*), and Dorothy Richardson (*The Tunnel*).