This course will be a broad, if far from comprehensive, survey of American modernist poetry. On occasion we will turn our attention to English, French, Caribbean, and Latin American poetry as well.

Our primary concern will be to work through a number of important adventures in a century-long tradition of modernist poetry. It is true that the whole question of periodizing modernism remains open to debate, not least because different national traditions, as well as different arts (literature, painting, music), require different narratives. That said, we will at least provisionally work with a slightly wider frame than is usual in this context, taking modernist poetry to begin in the second half of the nineteenth century, to become a “cultural dominant” in the occasionally hopeful yet largely catastrophic years of 1914-1945, and to come to an end in the early decades after WWII. Throughout the course we will explore the various ways modernist poets engage a range of ambitions and predicaments they inherit from earlier romantic and post-romantic poets, the various ways they respond to the thoroughly unstable social worlds around them, and the various ways they continue to speak (or perhaps no longer speak) to contemporary poets and readers.

Course Requirements:

- Regular attendance
- Careful reading of all the assigned texts
- One short discussion paper
- One long paper at the end of the semester

Texts:
- Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition
- Arthur Rimbaud, *Illuminations* and *A Season in Hell* (optional)
- Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*
- André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*
- T.S. Eliot, *Selected Poems*
- William Carlos Williams, *Imaginations*
- Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems*
- Marianne Moore, *The Complete Poems*
- H.D., *Collected Poems, 1912-1944* and *Hermione*
- Wallace Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind*
- George Oppen, *New Collected Poems*
- Aimé Césaire, *Collected Poems*
Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Painting, and Music in Europe, 1900-1916* (optional)
Course Packet (poems and essays)

Map of Course:

- h = handout
- cp = course packet (available on moodle)
- * = concentrate on

None of this is fixed in stone: there may be changes as we move along.

I

W AUG 29:

Introduction

General Periodizing Questions

General Questions Concerning Modernist Poetry

Romantic and Post-Romantic Horizons and Predicaments:

Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey,” “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (h)
Browning, “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” (h)

Note: you may want to begin making your way through Butler, *Early Modernism*

W SEPT 5:

Whitman, “Preface” and “Song of Myself” in the first (1855) edition of *Leaves of Grass*,
“Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” (h), “As I Ebb’d with the Ocean of Life” (h)
Donald Wesling, “The Crisis of Versification, 1855-1910” (cp 2)

Optional: Rimbaud, “After the Flood,” “Childhood,” “Lives,” “Génie”

II

W SEPT 12:

Stein, *Tender Buttons*

Loy, “Songs to Joannes” (cp 3)
Marjorie Perloff, essay on Stein from *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (cp 3)

Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism*, chapters 1-4 (cp 3)

**W SEPT 19:**

Apollinaire, “Les Fenêtres,” “Zone” (cp 4)

Breton, “Mille et mille fois,” “Tournesol,” “Facteur Cheval,” “Vigilance” (cp 4)

Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*

Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism*, chapters 5-6 (cp 4)

Optional: Perry Anderson, “Modernity and Revolution” (cp 4)

**III**

**W SEPT 26:**


Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (cp 5)

Michael Levenson, chapter on “The Waste Land” from *A Genealogy of Modernism* (cp 5)

Optional: Carol Christ, “Dramatic Monologue, Mask, and Persona” (cp 5)

**W OCT 3:**

Williams, *Spring and All*

Williams, “Asphodel, That Greeny Flower” (cp 6)

Hugh Kenner, “Something to Say” (cp 6)

**W OCT 10:**

Hughes, poems from 1921-30 and 1931-40


McKay, sonnets from *Harlem Shadows* (h)

Brown, “Long Gone,” “Ma Rainey” (h)

Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (cp 7)

Optional: Houston Baker, essay on the Harlem Renaissance (cp 7)

W OCT 17:

Moore, *Selected Poems*

Charles Altieri, “The Logic of Constructivist Abstraction” (cp 8)

Optional: John Slatin, essay on “The Octopus” (cp 8)

W OCT 24:

H. D., *Sea Garden*

H.D., *Hermione*


W OCT 31:

H.D., *Trilogy*

Pound, the first four *Cantos* (cp 10)

Rukeyser, “Letter to the Front” (cp 10)

Vallejo, “Today I like life much less,” “From disturbance to disturbance,” “Stumble between two stars” (cp 10)

Alicia Ostriker, essay on H.D. (cp 10)

Optional: Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other” (cp 10)

W NOV 7:
Stevens, poems from 1910s through 1940s
  *“Sunday Morning,” *“The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad,” *“The Snowman,”
  *“Tea at the Palaz of Hoon,” *“The Idea of Order at Key West,” *“A Postcard from
  the Volano,” *“Of Modern Poetry,” *“The Poems of Our Climate,” *“The Man on the
  Dump,” *“Man and Bottle,” *“Asides on the Oboe,” *Poem with Rhythms,” *“The Well-
  Dressed Man with a Beard,” *“The Motive for Metaphor,” *“The Creations of Sound,”
  *Paisant Chronicle”

Stevens, poems from 1940s through 1955
  *“The Auroras of Autumn,” *“Angel Surrounded by Paysans,” *“The Rock,” *“The
  Course of a Particular,” *“Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour,” *“The World as
  Meditation,” *“The Planet on the Table,” *“The Plain Sense of Things,” *“The River of
  Rivers in Connecticut”

Stevens, “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words” (cp 11)

Optional: Frank Lentricchia, chapter on Stevens from Modernist Quartet (cp 11)

Optional: Harold Bloom, essay on Stevens (cp 11)

IV

W NOV 14:

Oppen, Discrete Series, The Materials, This in Which, Of Being Numerous
  *“Image of the Engine,” *“Return,” *“Blood from the Stone,” *“Myself I Sing,”
  “Time of the Missile,” *“The Crowded Countries of the Bomb,” *“Leviathan,” *“Psalm,”
  “Guest Room,” *“A Language of New York,” *“Eros,” *“Of This All Things”*“A
  Narrative,” *“Of Being Numerous,” *“Route,” *“Ballad”

Oppen, “Interview with L. S. Dembo” (cp 12)

W NOV 21:

Oppen, Of Being Numerous, Seascape: Needle’s Eye, Myth of the Blaze, Primitive
  *“Of Being Numerous,” *“Route,” *“Ballad” *“Of Hours,” *“Song, The Winds of
  Downhill,” *“Some San Francisco Poems”

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, essay on Oppen (cp 13)

W NOV 28:

Césaire, Notebook of a Return to the Native Land

W DEC 5:

Césaire, *Miraculous Weapons, Solar Throat Slashed*

Césaire, “Poetry and Knowledge” (cp 15)

Césaire, “Interview with René Depestre” (cp 15)

*** Final Paper due on Monday 10 December by 10:00 a.m. ***