Stockholm University

Optional Literature Module: Bad Modernisms: The Avant-Garde and the Rear Guard of Modernism
(7.5 credits)
Spring 2025 (VT25)
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Module description

Bad Modernisms: The Avant-Garde and the Rear Guard of Modernism

> "It was modernism itself that gave bad a good name. Being bad has always meant crossing the line, turning away from what is accepted and familiar, heading out for the unknown; but it was only with modernism that the value of such transgression underwent a sharp reversal … it was modernism that gave currency to the idea that going to the limits might be essential to the recreation of the world."
>
> —Heather K. Love

The aim of this module is to help undergraduate students to develop advanced skills for reading and analyzing English-language literature. Students will study literary texts in English from specific historical, critical or generic perspectives and will learn advanced analytic methods, as well as theoretical perspectives. The module comprises a number of seminars, all of which involve active participation from the students. The students will read primary texts and secondary material before each seminar. The final examination will be comprised of one oral and one written assignment.

More specifically, this module will cover a range of literary texts written in the early twentieth century—the period that became known as modernism. It introduces students to some major literary figures of the period, its cultural contexts and key concepts, and aims to illuminate the relationship between literary innovations and the culture of modernism. The topics will include modernism's preoccupation with new technologies, psychology, race and empire, and popular culture. Other concepts that will help to organize the course are space, time, and the body, which were greatly altered by the dynamic processes of modernization. By studying a select group of British and American modernist texts, we will consider how modernization transformed cultural and aesthetic sensibilities. The texts include novels, poems, manifestos, and essays, all of which aspire to convey modernity's radically changed understanding of the self and the world. Modernism entailed a radical break with tradition and we will explore these changes in the writers' experimental rendering of interiority and the social world.

Intended learning outcomes

Upon completion of the module, students are expected to be able to:

- Account for the contents of the course literature;
- Display the ability to use basic theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field;
- Apply these concepts to literary texts;
- Analyse literary texts from a relevant theoretical perspective;
- Motivate their own analyses in writing in a manner relevant to the field;
- Display a good understanding of written English;
- Express themselves in academic English.

Grading

The module adopts the 7-grade SU scale (A–F).
To receive a final grade, students must have completed all the examination assignments [not done all examination assignments=no grade].
To receive a passing grade (A to E), students must complete and pass all the examination assignments, and thus demonstrate that they achieved all the learning outcomes at least at the minimum level (see "Module grading" below).

Module activities

The module consists of the following activities:

- Seminars (pre-seminar instructions for each seminar will be posted on Athena);
- Before each seminar, students are expected to finish the assigned reading, do any accompanying tasks, and discuss the texts and tasks in groups. Students should be prepared to discuss the reading and tasks at the seminar;
- Students are expected to complete all the tasks assigned by the teacher.

Examination

Students are required to complete the following:

- Assignment #1 – Oral Presentation (Pass/Fail)
- Assignment #2 – Analytical Essay, 2000–2500 words, at least TWO secondary sources required

Module format

The module will take place in the form of seminars, where students will practice analyzing literary texts in terms of the specific historical, generic and critical perspectives dealt with in the course, as well as develop their skills in providing textual support for their reading.

Seminars are intended to be active, hands-on opportunities for students to practice the skills they will learn throughout the module; for this reason, the students should bring the assigned text(s) with them to every seminar.

Required reading

Primary Texts

Reading will include a selection of 1800–2000 pages from the following list.

1. S. Greenblatt. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume F: Twentieth Century and After*. From *Norton*: A selection of readings on modernist manifestoes.
2. James Joyce. *Dubliners* (1914)
3. Ford Madox Ford. *The Good Soldier* (1915)
4. Virginia Woolf. *Jacob's Room* (1922)
5. T.S. Eliot. *The Waste Land* (1922) (Norton)
6. Ernest Hemingway. *The Sun Also Rises* (1926)
7. Zora N. Hurston. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)
8. Jean Rhys. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1931)

The assigned selection of texts from secondary sources (see the titles below) will be available on Athena as PDFs.

For the **Oral Presentation** (Assignment #1), please choose the seminar slot for your presentation and sign-up for it in Seminar 1.
For the **Analytical Essay** (Assignment #2), please choose among any of the primary texts – novels, short stories, or poetry – assigned for this course.

Secondary Readings
Selection from:
Armstrong, Tim. *Modernism: A Cultural History*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2005.
Bradshaw, David. Ed. *A Concise Companion to Modernism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.
Whitworth, Michael. Ed. *Modernism*. Blackwell Guides to Criticism Series. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.

Schedule

SEMINAR DATES	SEMINARS THEMES AND CONTEXTS	PRIMARY AND SECONDARY READINGS	ASSIGNMENT DEADLINES AND ACTIVITIES
SEM 1	Introduction: Module Literature and Syllabus	What is **Modernism**? Difficult works of literature? Works that share a sense of living in a new and peculiar time? Who are the key figures of modernism? Can modernism's novelty and difficulty be seen as aligned with a change in social dynamics? What is **Modernity**? It refers to new technologies and mass consumption: new modes of transport (the auto, bus, aeroplane, tractor, underground train), new media (film, photography, the X-ray, telephone, typewriter, tape recorder, phonograph); new materials (plastic, dyes and man-made fibres); new sources of power and energy (oil, petroleum, electricity, the internal combustion engine, steam turbine). In modernity, the experience of being modern felt *qualitatively* different from previous times.	1. Sign-up sheet for individual presentations (3 slots for each text seminar) 2. Discussion questions for each seminar will be posted in Plans on Athena a week before the seminar date.
SEM 2	*Theme* Modernity and its discontents	NORTON: 1. James Joyce's *Dubliners* 2. "The Twentieth Century and After" pp. 1827—1847 3. "Modernist Manifestos" pp. 1996—2019 (*Excerpts from*: Hulme, Flint and Pound, Blast, and Mina Loy)	Individual Presentations
SEM 3	*Theme* Reformation of time *Concept—Time* Tim Armstrong, "Modernity, Modernism, and Time" (PDF)	*The Good Soldier*	Individual Presentations
SEM 4	*Theme* Renovation of the Senses *Concept—The Self* Tim Armstrong, "The Self and the Senses" (PDF)	*Jacob's Room*	Individual Presentations
SEM 5	*Theme* Urban imagination *Concept—The City* Simmel and Berman, "Modernity and the City" (PDF)	*The Waste Land*	Individual Presentations

SEM 6	*Theme* Modernism and the Construction of Race, Class, and Human Value *Concept—Race* David Bradshaw, "Eugenics: 'They Should Certainly Be Killed'" (PDF)	*The Sun Also Rises*	Individual Presentations
SEM 7	*Theme* The Harlem Renaissance *Concept—Aesthetics* Modernism and the vernacular: a selection of short essays by Harlem writers (PDF)	Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*	Individual Presentations
SEM 8	*Theme* Experiment with Form *Concept—Aesthetics* Tim Armstrong, "Reforms! Bodies, Selves, Politics and Aesthetics" (PDF)	Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*	Individual Presentations Deadline for Analytical Essay: May 30 Deadline for Analytical Essay Retake: August 15

Please note that there may be occasional changes to seminar dates/times and rooms. Check Time Edit regularly for updates.

Deadlines
Assignment #1 – Oral Presentation
Assignment #2 – Analytical Essay – May 30, 2025 (Resubmission Deadline: August 15)

Grading Criteria: Oral Presentation

Criteria	**Pass**	**Fail**
Content	The presentation introduces the topic of the presentation in a clear and concise manner demonstrating the student's understanding of the literary, historical and theoretical issues discussed. These issues are presented and discussed in a lucid manner.	In the presentation the student does not demonstrate a sufficient understanding of the literary, historical, and theoretical issues discussed. These issues are not presented and discussed in an adequate manner.
Organisation and Language	The presentation is well structured and easy to follow. The language used is academic and does not contain any severe mistakes.	The organisation of the presentation is poor, and the language used contains several mistakes.

Module Grading Criteria: The Analytical Essay

	A	B	C	D	E	Fx	F
	excellent skills in	**very good skills in**	**good skills in**	**satisfactory skills in**	**adequate skills in**	**inadequate skills in**	**totally inadequate skills in**
Overview of material	accounting for the contents of the course literature	accounting for the contents of the course literature	accounting for the contents of the course literature	accounting for the contents of the course literature	accounting for the contents of the course literature	The student has displayed some, but not all, of the skills of the level of the criteria for E.	The student's work does not demonstrate the achievement of the course outcomes at a minimally adequate level.
Discussion	displaying the ability to use basic theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts	displaying the ability to use basic theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts	displaying the ability to use basic theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts	displaying the ability to use basic theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts	displaying the ability to use basic theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts		
Analysis	analysing literary texts from a relevant theoretical perspective critically, and motivating their own analyses in writing in a manner relevant to the field	analysing literary texts from a relevant theoretical perspective critically, and motivating their own analyses in writing in a manner relevant to the field	analysing literary texts from a relevant theoretical perspective critically, and motivating their own analyses in writing in a manner relevant to the field	analysing literary texts from a relevant theoretical perspective critically, and motivating their own analyses in writing in a manner relevant to the field	analysing literary texts from a relevant theoretical perspective critically, and motivating their own analyses in writing in a manner relevant to the field		
Comprehension	displaying a good understanding of written English	displaying a good understanding of written English	displaying a good understanding of written English	displaying a good understanding of written English	displaying a good understanding of written English		
Expression	expressing themselves in academic English	expressing themselves in academic English	expressing themselves in academic English	expressing themselves in academic English	expressing themselves in academic English		