

FRENCH 402

Fall 2019

Professor
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VKC 251
TU-TH
11-12:20



Le livre (détail)
1913 Huile et papier collé sur toile
Juan Gris (1887-1927)

Studies in Modernity

“Il faut absolument être moderne,” proclaimed Arthur Rimbaud in *Une Saison en enfer* (1873). This injunction to be modern was heeded as well as contested by many French artists and writers since the 17th-century quarrel embroiled the *Anciens* against the *Modernes*, a dispute that continues to oppose, today, modernists against traditionalists in all realms of French artistic, literary and cultural life. But it is during the long 19th century that the original conflict over literary form and artistic innovation took a much more tragic turn, erupting with some regularity into bloody internecine conflicts that may have originated in 1789 but continued well past its revolutionary beginning into the 20th century and 21st century. It opposed *Légitimistes* against *Bonapartistes*, *Communards* against *Versillais*, and later, *Dreyfusards* against *Anti-Dreyfusards*, *Pétainistes* against *Gaullistes*, supporters of French Algeria against Thirdworldist nationalists, and 1968 militants against officials of the French state. Whether they were called revolutions or merely “events,” they shaped and influenced the literary and artistic production of the French *modernes*, the writers, artists, playwrights, filmmakers, and intellectuals who wrote and depicted these momentous events, transfiguring them into original, if contested and sometimes censored, literary and artistic works of art. The hegemony of the printed word was also challenged by new technologies like photography, the gramophone, and the cinematograph. One of the main aims of this course is to trace the intellectual genealogy of the *moderne* by examining important texts that will sharpen our understanding of French modernity and literary and artistic modernism.

Readings in French include literary texts by Baudelaire, Zola, Villiers de l’Île-Adam, Proust, Apollinaire, Céline, Duras, Perec, and Bon.

We will also screen and discuss films by the Lumière Brothers, Guy Debord, Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, and Agnès Varda.