

ENGL 426 32746

Modernism Revisited
Professor Susan McCabe
Tues/ Thurs 12:30-1:50

Course Description

One hundred years ago, in 1922, there was a publication that would last in poetry probably forever: T.S. Eliot's post-war *The Waste Land*, a poem that changes with each new generation's reading of it. I start with the premise that Eliot was a brilliant poet, who suffered for his art, but tried to use art as the repository of emotions after he had anchored them within a larger literary and artistic context. In his famous poem, Eliot relies on numerous literary fragments to recreate the incohesive broken world he reckoned with after the desecrations and loss of life in World War I. The poem confesses to calling upon these fragments to "shore up [his] ruin. Drawing upon multiple phrases from other works, it is a montage that ends up invoking "Shanti." We will read this landmark poem in great detail, reading two or three key references that make their way into this poem. *The Tempest* is probably the dominant Shakespeare play Eliot calls upon, and the poem's section "What the Thunder Said" resorts to the ancient spiritual text, *The Upanishads*, we will read. He references Wagner's *Tristan & Isolde* in his poem's salvaging, a multi-persona poem trying to put civilization back together. And almost every line, whether Biblical or literary, are selected from assorted texts. It is as if the poem knew each reader needs to put the poem together even as it falls apart in the process. We will read some of his important essays—and deflect them through Toomer and H.D., and Nella Larsen.

We will examine Toomer's 1923 *Cane*, a book than won the biracial poet fame. But it, like Eliot, works through montage, personas, and inventive poetic forms and prose poetry. It is a book that shows "ruin" in an inventive aesthetic that drew upon his traveling in the United States from North to the South, finding in melodies echoes of a past that existed in their bitter-sweet anchor in the horrific past of slavery. We will examine the struggles Toomer had in the reception of his work—and in fact, how and why both Eliot and Toomer seek spiritual solutions to geo-political pressures.

As counter example, we read to other key modernists, H.D., who wrote *Paint It Today*, a novel that reads like a prose poem (written in 1921-1923, published in 1992! But out of print), whose allusions work with and against both Eliot and Toomer. *Selected Poems* and her *Notes on Thought and Vision* (1920) will offer some clues to her particular modernism—her very pronounced denunciation of war and heroic masculinity, her love of women that were not mere "women." We read as well the cinematic-imagistic style of Nella Larsen's *Passing*, published in 1929. Can we connect this novel to anything in Eliot or the others?

The class then **closely reads three** radically different writers who resisted being pinned down, and how these texts endure. How can we reread these texts in relationship to race, gender, class, sense of history, publication, and "private" lives? We will see if we can find anchors in our present artistic practices and inheritances—and making the centenary of Eliot's famous poem a talking-board for the present.

You will be required to read all texts, to ask and research your questions, and come prepared to discuss the texts closely with notes already prepared. You will write several lyric responses (1 to 2

pages, crisply focusing in on a small section or even on a phrase—and its echoes), and a longer one (10-12 pages) that engages in either the very microlevel (that is finding just how powerful each poet's allusions are) and the macro level (the cultural historical moment that helped create the work, or writing about the several writers together).

Required Texts

Anonymous, *Upanashids*

Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land* (Norton edition)

H.D. *Notes on Thought & Vision* (City Lights Books); order from there if you can.

H.D., *Selected Poetry* (New Direction)

H.D., *Paint It Today* (**out of print**; will provide a xeroxed version)

Larsen, Nella. *Passing*.

Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Shakespeare Arden edition)

Toomer, *Cane* (Norton edition)

There will be other readings, if necessary, posted on blackboard. And some items to be read on PoetryFoundation.org

Keep a journal where all of your assignments and inspirations are kept.

Requirements & Grade Breakdown

--Conscientious reading before class, attendance, and active prepared participation 20%

--Each week write at least one page of notes in response to the reading, turned in as typed on email or in class. They can have questions, but they should also show effort at making sense of a poetic strategy or moment in the text. These will be turned in at two intervals: Week 7 (midterm-7 pages), and Week 14 40%

--Final Paper 40% (This can respond to a single allusion traced through the *WL* or a set of allusions that produce a fresh reading of Eliot's "fragments"; another suggestion is to write across several writers in their shared modernism, and what that looks like; as a more challenging project, draft your own *Waste Land*, with footnotes and all. By Week 14, let me know what you decide to focus upon.)

Schedule of Readings & Assignments

1.

Week One

January 11 Introductions & Prospects: Reading "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/44212/the-love-song-of-j-alfred-prufrock>

January 13 Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent"
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69400/tradition-and-the-individual-talent>
(possible Perloff essay on "Prufrock")

**This week's focus: what is the "tradition" and "individual talent" in "Prufrock"?
Come prepared to discuss how at least one of Eliot's allusions functions in the poem as a whole. It may take some digging.**

Week Two

January 18 H.D., Selected Poems

All of *Sea Garden*, and “Leda,” “Eros,” “Helen,” “Eurydice”

Pound on “Imagism”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69409/a-retrospect-and-a-few-donts>

January 20 Compare H.D.’s “Leda” with Yeats’s “Leda and the Swan” and come prepared to discuss mythic distinctions.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43292/leda-and-the-swan>

Week Three

January 25

H.D. *Notes on Thought and Vision*

January 27 Discuss the link between *Notes* and the “Fragment” poems in *Selected Poems* after Sappho, or to Sappho

Week Four

February 1 H.D. “Fragment” poems after Sappho (*Selected Poems*)

YCAL24 Box 43 Manuscript essay on Greek writers (on blackboard)

February 3 Discuss how H.D.’s unpublished manuscript might help figure forth H.D.’s poetics, next to *Notes*.

Week Five

February 8 **Introduce** *Waste Land—its backdrop*; See Jessie Weston on the Grail legend.

February 10 Focusing on the first section, each student writes about an allusion or several lines that build allusions to former texts in fragment form; together we will try to make sense of Section 1.

Research deft word choice with etymology as well as literary reference.

[Approach the text with your contemporary sensibility, and you may check out Matrin Rowson’s using Eliot allusions in his graphic detective novel, (1990)]

Week Six

February 15 Eliot, “Hamlet and His Problems,” “The Music of Poetry”

February 17 Respond to what might apply from the essays discussed to Part I of *WL*.

Week 7

February 22 *Waste Land* II

February 24 *Waste Land* III

Six Responses Due

Week 8

March 1 *The Tempest*

March 2 How does the *Tempest* work throughout the poem, particularly in Sections 1-II? Are there other 17th century plays he alludes to –and to what effect?

Week 9

March 8 *Waste Land* IV-V

March 10 *Upanishads*

Week 10 SPRING BREAK

Week 11

March 22 *The Waste Land* (as a whole!)

March 25 Find an allusion or related allusions we have not fully discussed or noted.

Week 12

March 29 DuBois on Double Vision; Harlem Renaissance poets as new formalists

Claud McKay, “December 1919,” “America”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47381/december-1919>

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44691/america-56d223e1ac025>

Anne Spencer

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/91327/at-the-carnival>

March 31

From Houston Baker’s *Harlem Renaissance*, we will explore the concepts of “Deformation of Mastery” and the “Mastery of Form”

Week 13

April 5 Toomer, *Cane* read to mid-point

April 7 *Cane* continued; what troubles does this text stir up in modernism and identity?

Week 14

April 12 Nella Larsen, *Passing*

April 14 Find the Imagism; Find response to white modernism in the text’s depiction of oppressive cultural norms; is its cinematic style a poetic one? (**7 responses due**)

Week 15

April 19 H.D. *Paint It Today*

April 21 Select three or four allusions—what do they produce or resonate?

Week 16

April 26 Read and Listen to the entire *Waste Land*

April 28 How has the poem changed for you through reading the other works? What would a contemporary version of the poem look like? See also graphic rendering of the poem.

Final Project Due May 12

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.
engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255 Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086 Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu