

Modernist Women Writers

Start date 25th May 2018 **End date** 27th May 2018

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge

Tutor Dr Jenny Bavidge **Course code** 1718NRX058

Director of Programmes Emma Jennings

For further information on this course, please contact Public Programme Coordinator, Clare Kerr
clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk or 01223 746237

To book See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 746262

Tutor biography

Jenny Bavidge is University Senior Lecturer in English Literature, Academic Director in English Literature for the Institute of Continuing Education and a Fellow in English at Murray Edwards College, Cambridge. She is a Fellow of the English Academy. Jenny is Past-President of the Literary London Society and conference coordinator for the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment. Her publications have included work on London in literature, children's literature, ecocriticism, and rats.

Course programme

Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00 Dinner

20:30 – 22:00 **Introduction: Women Modernists and the Gender of Modernism**

In this first session, the themes of the course will be outlined and we will begin to discuss the work and contexts of women's modernist writing. We'll explore the different 'versions' of modernism and begin by reading selected poems (supplied) by H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Gertrude Stein.

22:00 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

Saturday

07:30 Breakfast

09:00 – 10:30 **Virginia Woolf: 'Words are dangerous things...'**

***To the Lighthouse* (1)**

In these first two sessions we will address Woolf's considerable contribution to modernist literature, both in her fiction and in her essays about women and writing. Woolf suggested that modernist women writers such as Dorothy Richardson were bringing into being a 'woman's sentence' and we will attempt to define what such a sentence would look like. We will also consider how Woolf uses formal innovations including 'stream of consciousness' and how, in her novel *To the Lighthouse*, she attempts to represent the struggles and triumphs of the female artist.

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30 **Woolf *To the Lighthouse* (2) cont.../**

13:00 Lunch

14:00 – 16:00 Free

16:00 Tea

16:30 – 18:00 **Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1935)**

Djuna Barnes' challenging, twisting novel *Nightwood* is a unique piece of writing. Experimental in form and daring in content, it reads in places like a strange hallucination. Reflecting Barnes' personal life, it is one of the first literary novels to depict lesbian relationships. We will ask what Barnes is aiming to achieve in this work and contrast her sense of the purpose of narrative with that of Woolf.

18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	<p>A Trip around the Left Bank</p> <p>With <i>Nightwood</i> still in mind, our final session on Saturday will be spent among the <i>flâneuses</i> and <i>demi-mondaines</i> of 1920s/30s Paris. We will look at the artwork of leading female modernists and view clips from the documentary <i>Paris Was a Woman</i> (Greta Schiller, 1996), an absorbing study of the female artistic community of the interwar Left Bank. We'll think about the importance of the city as a space of freedom and self-expression.</p>
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion
Sunday	
07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	<p>Elizabeth Bowen, <i>The House in Paris</i> (1935)</p> <p>Elizabeth Bowen's novels may seem at first glance closer to nineteenth-century realism than to the experiments of modernism but her writing is complex and layered, often probing the nature of subjectivity and identity. In this session, devoted to <i>The House in Paris</i>, we will consider her affinity with Woolf, who admired Bowen's work and Bowen's belief that the object of a novel should be 'the non-poetic statement of a poetic truth.'</p>
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	<p>Jean Rhys, <i>Good Morning Midnight</i> (1939)</p> <p>In our final session, we will look at Jean Rhys' melancholy but darkly funny novel, which deals with modernist themes of alienation and disintegration; Rhys develops her own take on stream of consciousness and investigates the nature of memory and thought.</p>
12:45	Lunch

The course will disperse after lunch

Course syllabus

Aims:

- To introduce students to major modernist works by women writers;
- To foster an enjoyable and productive atmosphere in which to discuss and analyse literary texts;
- To investigate the potential of modernist literary experiment with form to reflect female subjectivity and experience.

Content:

This course examines the work of significant women novelists - Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes, Jean Rhys and Elizabeth Bowen - who wrote in widely varying contexts in the literary period broadly known as 'modernist'. As well as analysing the innovative style and ground-breaking themes of their novels, we will consider the way their work explores female experience and self-expression.

In the work of these writers we can see the development of a distinctively female strand in modernism, one that not only created a space in which to express the personal experiences of women in the early twentieth century but also gave voice to the emerging feminist sense of the marginalisation and suppression of women's voices. We will investigate the authors' investigations of themes central to modernist development: alienation, fragmentation and experimentation and also attend to the specific national and class contexts of each writer, from the wild nights of Barnes' Paris to the careful detail of Bowen's domestic interiors. We will close-read these sometimes difficult and dense works in order to appreciate their adventures in form and the beauty of their prose and extend our discussions into questions about modernism and gender.

Presentation of the course:

Classes will include short talks and structured discussion of the novels, and extra material such as poetry, which will be supplied. We will also view sections of the documentary *Paris Was a Woman*.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

- Understand the contribution of the authors to the development of modernism;
- Enjoy discussing the novels and appreciate their place in a wider literary and critical context;
- Be familiar with some of the theoretical and critical thinking around feminism, gender and modernism.

Reading and resources list

It will be very helpful if students can have read as many of the **four featured novels** as possible before the course begins. Any edition will do, those listed below are suggestions only.

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Oxford World's Classics)

Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (Faber and Faber, with an introduction by Jeanette Winterson)*

Elizabeth Bowen, *The House in Paris* (Vintage Classics)

Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (Penguin Modern Classics)

***Tutor's note: *Nightwood* is difficult and a challenging read. While the other novels on our list may occasionally be mysterious or ambivalent, there are elements of *Nightwood* which deliberately set out to challenge the reader's expectation of what a novel should be like or how a plot should develop. Stick with it!**

Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Benstock, Shari	<i>Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940</i>	University of Texas Press, 1987
Felski, Rita	<i>The Gender of Modernity</i>	University of Harvard Press, 1995
Leveneson, Michael	<i>The Cambridge Companion to Modernism</i>	University of Cambridge Press, 1999
Scott, Bonnie Kime	<i>The Gender of Modernism</i>	Wiley, 2000
Woolf, Virginia	<i>The Essays of Virginia Woolf</i>	Oxford World's Classics, 2009

Website addresses

We'll be looking at the poetry of H.D. and Gertrude Stein in our first session. Further examples of their work can be found here:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/h-d>

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/gertrude-stein>

For further reading into Modernism, see the Yale Modernism Lab website, a rich reference source:

<https://modernism.coursepress.yale.edu>

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 05 February 2018