English Avant-Gardes

This honors seminar enquires into the historical and theoretical problem of the literary avant-garde in England. It focuses on two moments: the “High Modernist” era of 1910-22 and the period from 1960-76, when English writers and artists, inspired by European and American influences, attempted to renew the modernists’ spirit of invention in art and politics. The seminar is in this sense a study of influence and revival—but it will be our job to analyze modernism, not just celebrate its persistence in the work of novelists like Ann Quinn or poet-editors like Eric Mottram. We will read theorists, such as Peter Bürger, who contrast Anglo-American “modernism” with the “historical avant-garde” of Zurich or Berlin. We will perform individual research in the Modernist Journals Project, which has created online archives of influential “little magazines” like Blast and The New Age. We will read seminal works of poetry and fiction by Ezra Pound and Virginia Woolf. And we will debate—through criticism, novels and poems, and the instructor’s archival research—how and why the persistence of neo-modernist avant-gardism in England has played such a small role in the dominant literary histories.

Required Texts

The following books, which have been ordered from the Illini Union Bookstore, should be bought or borrowed by all students:

- Ann Quin, Berg. (Dalkey Archive Press, 2001)
- Virginia Woolf, Jacob’s Room (Oxford U.P., 2005)

With the exception of one text marked [H] (for “handout”) all other readings are available online or in the course reader. Look for a URL or for the code [CR], which refers to the Engl 396 reader, available through Notes-n-Quotes.

Reserve and Reference List

On Reserve at Undergraduate Library


Texts in Other Libraries at UIUC

Required Assignments

Written Assignments
- Definitional Paper on the term "Avant-Garde" (3-5 pp.) [15% of grade]
- Weekly Reading Journal Midterm Assessment [15%]
- Short Research Project on The New Age (3 pp.) [10%]
- Weekly Reading Journal Final Assessment [15%]
- Discussion Paper on Quin or the British Poetry Revival (6-8pp.) [25%]

Each of these assignments will be explained in detailed handouts. All work is due on the date given on the syllabus. See the Graduate English Office for rules on EX grades.

Class Participation

I want this class to run as a weekly research colloquium, not as a lecture series that's sometimes interrupted by a student presentation. Without teaching each other, challenging each other's ideas, and listening to one another, our writing and thinking will suffer. 20% of your final grade will be assessed on an A-C-F scale that reflects whether you're a committed, mediocre, or lazy contributor to the everyday workings of our seminar. If you are shy about speaking up in class, email your thoughts to your classmates, or stop by my office hours.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. You can expect me to get in touch if you miss more than a couple of classes. Missing large numbers of classes, or regularly turning up late or underprepared, will affect your class participation grade.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism—i.e., the unattributed use of another person’s ideas, language, or data—is a serious ethical and methodological problem in the academic humanities. UIUC’s policy on Academic Integrity is in Part IV of the Student Code (www.admin.uiuc.edu/policy/code/article_1/a1_1-402.html). Penalties for plagiarism can range from a failing grade for the assignment to expulsion from the University. Please be conscientious in acknowledging any sources (especially online sources) that you consult in writing papers. For information on citing sources, see <www.library.uiuc.edu/egx/guides/citation.html>

Communication

If my posted office hours are inconvenient, I am happy to meet by appointment. Please contact me by email (matthart@uiuc.edu) or phone (333-4774) if you are have questions about class material or an assignment, or if you encounter circumstances that might adversely affect your participation in class, such as an illness or family emergency.

Emergency Alerts

The University’s emergency plan utilizes cell phones to ensure that emergency alerts reach students and staff. I will bring a charged cell phone to class in order that we may receive any necessary emergency alerts. Please turn off your cell phone or set it to silent alert for the duration of our meeting.

Calendar of Classes and Assigned Readings
W 8/29  Introductions
   o  Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (1939)  
     <http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/kitsch.html>

W 9/5  BLAST 1  [MEET IN LINCOLN HALL 390]
   o  Blast vol. 1 (1914)  
     <http://dl.lib.brown.edu:8080/exist/mjp/mjp_journals.xq>
   o  Mark Morrison, “Blast: An Introduction”  
   o  Modernist Journals Project Profile of Wyndham Lewis  
     <http://dl.lib.brown.edu:8080/exist/mjp/plookup.xq?id=LewisWyndham>

W 9/12  BLAST 2  [MEET IN LINCOLN HALL 390]
   o  Blast vol. 2 (1915)  
     <http://dl.lib.brown.edu:8080/exist/mjp/mjp_journals.xq>
   o  Ezra Pound, “Small Magazines”  
   o  Teresa Prudente, “Italian Futurism and English Vorticism”  

W 9/19  Theories of the Avant-Garde

   Definitional Paper Due W 9/26

W 9/26  Pounding BLAST
   o  Ezra Pound, Hugh Selwyn Mauberly (Contacts and Life) (1920) [CR]
   o  Peter Nicholls, from Modernisms: A Literary Guide (MacMillan, 1995) [CR]
   o  Mark Morrison, from The Public Face of Modernism (Wisconsin U. P., 2000) [CR]

W 10/3  “On or About December, 1910”  [MEET IN LINCOLN HALL 390]
   o  Virginia Woolf, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1924) [CR]
   o  Modernist Journals Project, December 1910 Project  

W 10/10  “Art is Significant Deformity” 1
   o  Virginia Woolf, Jacob’s Room (1922)

W 10/17  “Art is Significant Deformity” 2
   o  Virginia Woolf, Jacob’s Room (1922)

   Reading Journal Midterm Assessment 10/24

W 10/24  The New Age  [MEET IN LINCOLN HALL 390]
   o  Browse in The New Age vols. 1-30 (1907-22)  
     <http://dl.lib.brown.edu:8080/exist/mjp/show_series.xq?id=1158589415603817>
Robert Scholes and Staff of the MJP, “General Introduction to The New Age, 1907-22”

Ann Ardis, from Modernism and Cultural Conflict (Cambridge U. P., 2002)

W/ 10/31 No class

- Individual Research on a writer, theme, or issue of The New Age

Research Project Due 11/7

W 11/7 The Neo Avant-Garde

- Paul Mann, from Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde (Bloomington, IN: Indiana U. P., 1991) [CR]
- from Dietrich Scheunemann, ed., Avant-garde/Neo-avant-garde (New York: Rodopi, 2006) [H]

W 11/14 A Post-War Avant-Garde English Novel?

- Ann Quin, Berg (1964)
- Giles Gordon, Introduction to Beyond the Words: Eleven Writers in Search of a New Fiction (London: Hutchinson, 1975) [CR]
- Karl Miller, Introduction to Writing in England: The Last Fifteen Years (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968) [CR]

W 11/21 Thanksgiving Break

W 11/28 The British Poetry Revival 1

- Peter Barry, from Poetry Wars (2006) [CR]
- Documents from the Eric Mottram Papers, King’s College London (ca. 1971-78) [CR]

W 12/5 The British Poetry Revival 1

- Documents from the Eric Mottram Papers, King’s College London (ca. 1971-78) [CR]
- Poems by Barry MacSweeney, Bob Cobbing, Allen Fisher, and Lee Harwood [CR]

Final Paper and Reading Journal Due 12/14