

# LS 811: Tradition and Modernity – The Modernists’ Dialogue with the Past

Spring 2013 | Dr. Thomas Grieve

In this course we will investigate the dialogue of the literary modernists with the past -- their attempts to "make it new," to enlist Ezra Pound's famous injunction. Broadly speaking, I want to investigate what the various "its" were that they sought to renovate. Despite the received notion that the modernists were iconoclastic innovators, they were all deeply rooted in tradition and derived their impetus from their "discovery," that is their discrimination and appropriation, of what they deemed essential in the past that needed to be brought to bear on their present moment.

I propose to examine this dialogue with tradition in the work of four canonical modernists: W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf. We will investigate Yeats's dialogue with the Celtic tradition, romanticism, and gnosticism in selections from his poems, essays and prose works; Pound's dialogue (primarily through the mode of translation, but also in selected poems and essays) with the Latin golden age poet, Sextus Propertius, with the medieval troubadours and with Chinese poetry and philosophy; Eliot's dialogue in his poems and essays with Elizabethan dramatists, the 17<sup>th</sup> c. metaphysical poets, nineteenth century French poets, and with the Anglican faith; and Woolf's dialogue in her novel and in selected essays with early manifestations of feminism and with the crumbling stabilities of Victorian England. We will probe the ideological implications of these appropriations of the past.

## REQUIRED TEXTS:

W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*. Ed. Richard J. Finneran. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. (ISBN: 0-684-80731-9)

Ezra Pound, *Personae: The Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*. Rev. ed. Lea Baechler & A. Walton Litz. New York: New Directions, 1990. (ISBN: 13-978-0812-1138-3; 10-0-8112-1138-X)

T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems, 1909-1962*. Harcourt Brace & Company, 1968. (ISBN: 0-15-118978-1)

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1981. (ISBN: 978-0-15-690739-2)

N.B., Essays by the above writers and by critics will be made available through email attachments and/or WebCT.

## COURSE SCHEDULE:

Week 1: Introduction and Orientation. (Reading: T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Hugh Kenner, "The Making of the Modernist Canon")

Week 2: W.B. Yeats: the Celtic Twilight and the Romantic Tradition. (Readings: selected poems, "The Celtic Element in Literature," "The Symbolism of Poetry," "The Autumn of the Body")

Week 3: W.B. Yeats: Courtly Love. (Readings: selected poems, "A General Introduction for My Work")

Week 4: W.B. Yeats: Gnosticism. (Readings: selected poems, excerpts from *A Vision*)

Week 5: Ezra Pound: Troubadours and personae. (Readings: selected poems, "Troubadours – Their Sorts and Conditions," "A Retrospect")

Week 6: Ezra Pound: Imagism and Cathay. (Readings: selected poems, "Vorticism," excerpts from "How to Read," Stephen Yao, "...The Poetics of Chineseness")

Week 7: Ezra Pound: Translation and Propertius. (Readings: selected poems)

Week 8: T.S. Eliot: Elizabethans and Metaphysicals. (Readings: selected poems, "Hamlet," "The Metaphysical Poets")

Week 9: T.S. Eliot: French Symbolism. (Readings: selected poems and translations, "Baudelaire")

Week 10: T.S. Eliot: Faith lost and won. (Readings: excerpts from selected poems, excerpts from selected essays)

Week 11: Virginia Woolf: Victorian, Edwardian, Modern. (Readings: Part I of *To the Lighthouse*, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," "Character in Fiction")

Week 12: Virginia Woolf: Gender and writing. (Readings: Part II of *To the Lighthouse*, "Modern Fiction," "Women and Fiction")

Week 13: Virginia Woolf: Early Feminism. (Readings: Part III of *To the Lighthouse*, "Professions for Women," "Shakespeare's Sister," "A Sketch of the Past")

## ASSESSMENT:

There will be three components in the assessment of participants' performance in the course: attendance and participation (20%); seminar discussion paper and responses (30%); final essay of @ 15 pages (50%).