

# Description

This course introduces students to some of the key modernist novels that both charted experimental methods and have stood the test of time as representatives of **modernism's unrivalled achievements. Modernist experiments in the novel took issues** of aesthetics and raised the stakes to include issues of epistemology and even ontology. What had previously seemed certain seemed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, increasingly uncertain and many writers felt the need to respond in kind. By experimenting with new techniques, authors such as Conrad, Woolf, Ford, West, and Richardson at once sought a new aesthetic idiom for the new century and tried to engage with the proliferating uncertainties that seemed to characterise it. By pushing beyond realism, such writers sought to enhance the accuracy of their depictions of human life. They tried to capture the experience of the world rather than the world itself, as any hope of a final objective view slipped further and further away. Theories of the unconscious, ideology, relativity, fluid temporality, cultural relativism, and secularism presented a dizzying array of possibilities that were likewise terrifying in their most extreme forms. As Marshall Berman has put it (following Marx), all that was solid melted into air — and demanded a new art to respond to this new condition. Under **the rallying cry of “make it new!” the wide range of experiments we call modernism** emerged. Along the way, new content was likewise introduced, expanding the scope of the novel to include terrorism and espionage, global capitalism and colonialism, madness and cynicism, homosexuality and eroticism.

We will read seven novels in this vein, supplementing with secondary materials to provide theoretical, aesthetic, cultural, political, and historical context. At the forefront of our inquiry throughout will be how aesthetics is itself a mode of thinking, and how modernist experiments in the aesthetics of the novel engaged with the various contexts in which they took place. In addition to the novels we are reading, we will explore shorter works and commentary by writers such as Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Wyndham Lewis, May Sinclair, Elizabeth Bowen, and more.

The reading in this course will be challenging, but equally rewarding. Some use will be made of digital humanities methods for exploring the contexts in which these writers undertook their experiments, but no prior competence in digital methods is expected of students enrolled.