English 78b: Modernism, Atheism, God  
Spring 2016

Prof. Sherman  
email: davidsherman@brandeis.edu  
office: Rabb 136  
office hours: Thursday 12:00-2:00, Friday 12:30-2:00, and by appointment  
office phone: 781-736-8214

Class Schedule:  
Tue / Fri 11:00-12:20  
Rabb 236

In this course, we will explore European and U. S. literature after Nietzsche’s proclamation, at the end of the 19th century, that God is dead. How does this writing imagine human life and the role of literature in God’s absence? How does it imagine the afterlives of God, and permutations of the sacred, in a post-religious world? How, or why, to have faith in the possibility of faith in a secular age? What does “the secular” actually mean, and how does it persuade itself that it is different than “the religious”? We will approach international modernism—and touch upon its postmodern legacies—as a political and theological debate about materialism and spirituality, finitude and transcendence, reason and revelation.

This is a four-credit course. I expect students to spend at least nine hours a week preparing for class sessions and completing assignments.

Learning Objectives:  
• to be able to situate modern literature within other significant discourses about religion and secularization  
• to be able to articulate how literary forms and techniques pose questions and generate meanings related to experiences of religion and secularization  
• to be able to write interpretive essays that discover how literary texts engage the theological debates of their time  
• to research the academic world of literary criticism and use this criticism for your own essays

Required Texts (at Brandeis Bookstore):  
Course Reader [CR; available from instructor]  
Rainer Maria Rilke, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge (Vintage, trans. Stephen Mitchell)  
James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (Penguin)  
T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets (Harcourt)  
William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying (Vintage)  
Beckett, Waiting for Godot (Grove)

Rules and Requirements:  
• Please use paper books rather than e-books. Laptops may be used in class only with permission and for accessing relevant course materials. If you use a laptop for other purposes (email, web browsing), you will be asked to leave the class and be considered absent for the day. Bring other materials (e.g., paper, pens) for taking notes.  
• All assignments must be completed and submitted to receive course credit. Late work will be penalized by one plus/minus for each day past the due date.  
• Three unexcused absences lowers the final course grade by one plus/minus, and each additional absence by another plus/minus.  
• Plagiarism will be penalized by failure on the assignment or course, appearance before a university committee, and/or expulsion.
Students who wish to have reasonable accommodations made for documented disabilities or Brandeis athletic obligations should speak to me immediately.

Grades and Assignments:

Short Papers: Four 3-4 page papers. 15% each. Due within one week of class discussion of the selected text(s). Students may do the following assignments in any order and about the texts of their choice, but each assignment must focus on different texts.

Close Reading: A detailed and searching formal analysis of a passage that compels and fascinates you. In your close reading, you can connect your main passage to others in the same text. Your focus could be a line or stanza of a poem, the entirety of a short poem, or a paragraph or two from prose fiction. Describe the nuances of imagery, rhetoric, voice, and/or prosody (patterns of rhythm and sound) to reveal a significant action or meaning embodied in this language.

Intertextual Conversation: Bring two literary or theoretical texts into conversation about a complex, challenging question. How does each writer approach this problem, make it urgent and vivid? What can we better understand about one text by considering it in light of the other?

Personal Response: Your emotional and intellectual reaction to a text. Your like and dislike of it. The particular difficulties or opportunities it offers you. Your idiosyncratic strategy for making sense of it. Critical free play.

Critical Research: A summary of a piece of published, peer-reviewed scholarship about the text. Using quotations from the essay or book chapter you select, present its thematic concern, methodological approach, and principal arguments. Published articles can be found on JSTOR and Project Muse, both available online through Brandeis Scholar. Books with relevant chapters can be found in Goldfarb Library, in the shelves next to the author you select.

Final Essay: 6-8 pages. 40%. Due Tuesday 5/3, noon, in my mailbox. A literary analysis of any text(s) from the syllabus that includes reference to at least one piece of published, peer-reviewed literary criticism. Questions and guidelines will be distributed.

Class Schedule:

Fri 1/15
Introduction

Tue 1/19
Huxley, excerpt from Agnosticism and Christianity [CR]


Fri 1/22

Tue 1/26
Rilke, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge

Fri 1/29
Rilke, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge
Tue 2/2
Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

Fri 2/5
Nietzsche, excerpts from *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; “On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense” [CR]
Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, chapter 1

Tue 2/9
Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, chapter 2-3

Fri 2/12
Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, chapter 4-5
Tillich, “Human Nature Can Change” [CR]

SPRING BREAK 2/15-2/19

Tue 2/23
Kafka, *The Castle*, chapters 1-7

Fri 2/26
Kafka, *The Castle*, chapters 8-18

Tue 3/1
Kafka, *The Castle*, chapters 19-25

Fri 3/4

Tue 3/8
Nietzsche, passages on eternal recurrence from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *The Will to Power*, and *The Gay Science* [CR]
Benjamin, “On the Concept of History” [CR]; “Paralipomena to ‘On the Concept of History’” (optional) [CR]

Fri 3/11
Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, pp. 1-67

Tue 3/15
Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, pp. 68-179

Fri 3/18
Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, pp. 180-261

Tue 3/22

MARCH RECESS 3/25-3/28

Tue 3/29
Eliot, “Burnt Norton” from *Four Quartets*

Fri 4/1
Eliot, “East Coker,” “The Dry Salvages,” and “Little Gidding” from *Four Quartets*

Tue 4/5
Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, pp. 53-59 [CR]
Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

Fri 4/8

Tue 4/12
O’Connor, “You Can’t Be Any Poorer than Dead,” “The Lame Shall Enter First,” “Revelation” [CR]

Fri 4/15
Borges, “The Approach to Al-Mu’tasim” [CR]
Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, chs. 1-3

Tue 4/19
Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, chs. 4-6

Thur 4/21, *BRANDEIS FRIDAY*
Final paper workshop and course summary

*Final Paper due Tuesday, May 3, noon, in my mailbox*