

German 790–1: MODERNISM, LANGUAGE, THEORY



According to one narrative, literary modernism emerged out of the crisis of language articulated by such thinkers as Friedrich Nietzsche, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and Karl Kraus. This crisis implicated various aspects of language, from its communicative potential to literary figuration, and from the formulaic to the formless, as well as issues of accent, dialect, idiosyncratic speech, phraseology, and oral versus written practices. The works of numerous writers in the modernist literary tradition—including James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett, Rainer Maria Rilke, Franz Kafka, and Robert Musil—can be read in this context. Whether they reformulate the problems of language in modernity or offer explicit or implicit solutions to it, a critical, often skeptical view of language is central to their works. Decades later, numerous structuralist and post-structuralist critics picked up on this concern with the limits and possibilities of linguistic expression in modernism. The crisis of language thus enjoys an afterlife in the critical writings of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, Dorrit Cohn, and others. This course will trace the crisis of language in modernism in some of its philosophical, literary, and critical manifestations. Class discussions in English. Students are encouraged to read all texts in the original, but English translations will be available.

