Expatriate Writing in Paris

Course Description

This course will examine the work and lives of some American and other expatriates who wrote in Paris in the first half of the twentieth century. We will read short stories (and one novel) by these writers as well as short biographical and critical pieces about them and consider at length the impact that Paris had on their lives and work, with special attention to the way the beliefs and values expressed in their writing were shaped by their experience of self-exile.

Course Objective

Upon the completion of the course, students will be able to make a statement—however elliptical—about the beliefs, values, and experiences (as expressed in their writing) of these twentieth century expatriates in a way that relates to their own beliefs, values, and experiences (as expressed in their writing) as twenty-first century expatriates. Since this is a craft course, our primary concern is mining other people’s work and lives in ways that will benefit the student’s own writing. This use might mean appropriating a technique in the service of refining a technique, or borrowing an obsession in the process of discovering an obsession, but for the student in this course this will primarily mean deciding what’s important in one’s own fiction by describing what’s important in someone else’s.

Course Requirements

This class will depend on discussion to be interesting, useful, and worth the student’s time. For that reason, attendance is mandatory and the majority of the final grade will be determined based on preparation for and participation in class, evaluated in part by four short (one page) papers written in reaction to our reading. The final paper will be a short (five pages) examination by the student of one of the student’s own creative pieces written during their course of stay in Paris, asking some of the same questions of their own work that we asked of the work of our twentieth century expatriates.

Class Schedule

June 25 — Sylvia Beach: Shakespeare and Company
June 27 — Hemingway: A Moveable Feast
July 2—Americans in Paris (Franklin, Jefferson, Gallatin, Catlin, Fuller, Twain, Duncan, James Weldon Johnson, Bourne, Cowley)
July 4—Americans in Paris (Introduction, Hughes, Loos, Faulkner, Crosby, Porter, Stein, Miller, Bishop, Wilbur, Thurber, Kerouac)
July 9—Djuna Barnes: Nightwood
July 16—Henry Miller: Tropic of Cancer
July 18—Malcolm Cowley: Exiles Return

Reading List

Barnes, Djuna: Nightwood (New Directions 2006)

Hemingway, Ernest: A Moveable Feast (Scribner 2010)
Miller, Henry: Tropic of Cancer (Grove, 1987)