

Week 12 Day 2: Canadian Modernism

ENGL201: Introduction to Modernist Literature

Land Acknowledgement

- Toronto is in the 'Dish With One Spoon Territory'. The Dish With One Spoon is a treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee that bound them to share the territory and protect the land.
- We acknowledge with respect the Lkwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

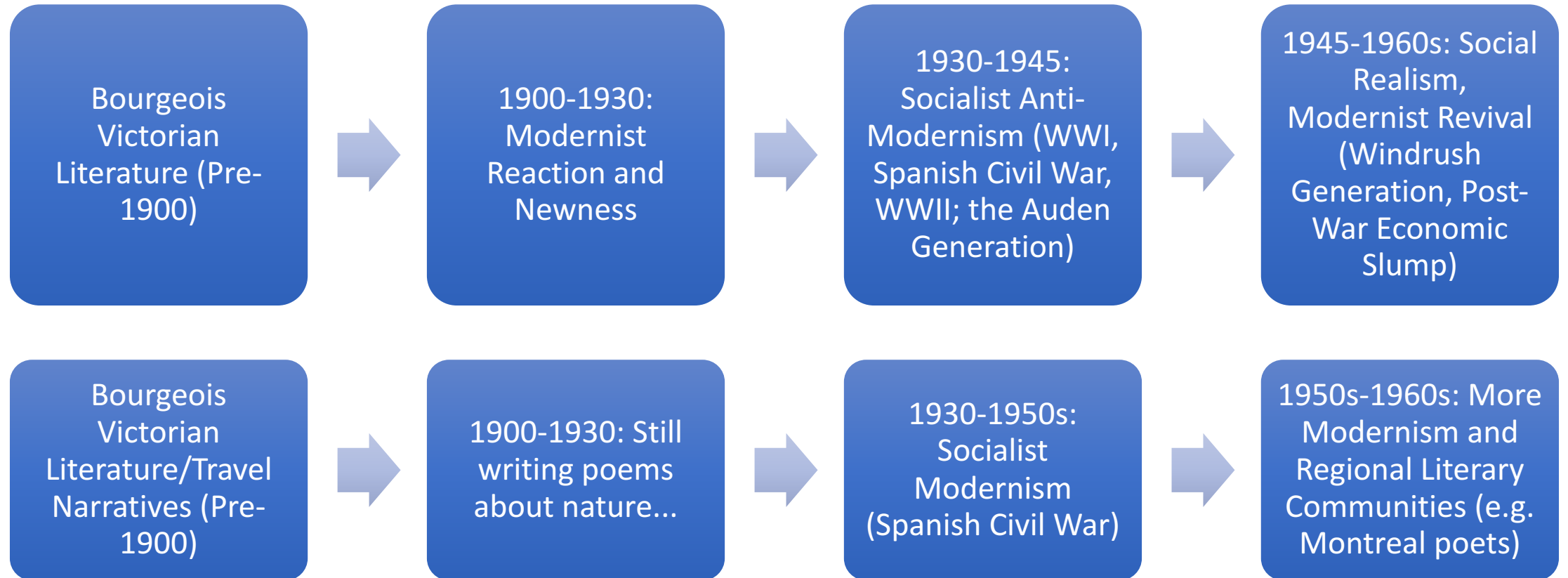


Lawren Harris, "Lake and Mountains," 1928

Canadian Modernism

- Starts in the mid-1930s;
- Working class/socialist;
- Opposes "those subjective reactions to Love, Beauty, the First Crocus, Snow in April and similar graceful but immediately irrelevant bubbles" (Leo Kennedy, "The Future of Canadian Literature");
- Cultivated in little magazines like *Masses* (1932), *New Frontier* (1937-1938), *The Daily Clarion* (1936-1939);
- Across literary forms like poetry, fiction, and avant-garde theatre (Toronto Worker's Experimental Theatre).

Modernism vs. Canadian Modernism



“Catalonia” – Dorothy Livesay

“The flag of darkness lowers at half mast
blotting the blood stained hieroglyphs from eyes
strained from the smoke, the flares, the rat-tat-tat
of guns’ incessant bark. A sudden lull
fans wind on brow, recalls from far off hills
the ones who rest... oh unbelievably
a girl who rests tired head on easy arm
and sleeps encircled by her own heart beat.” (1-8)



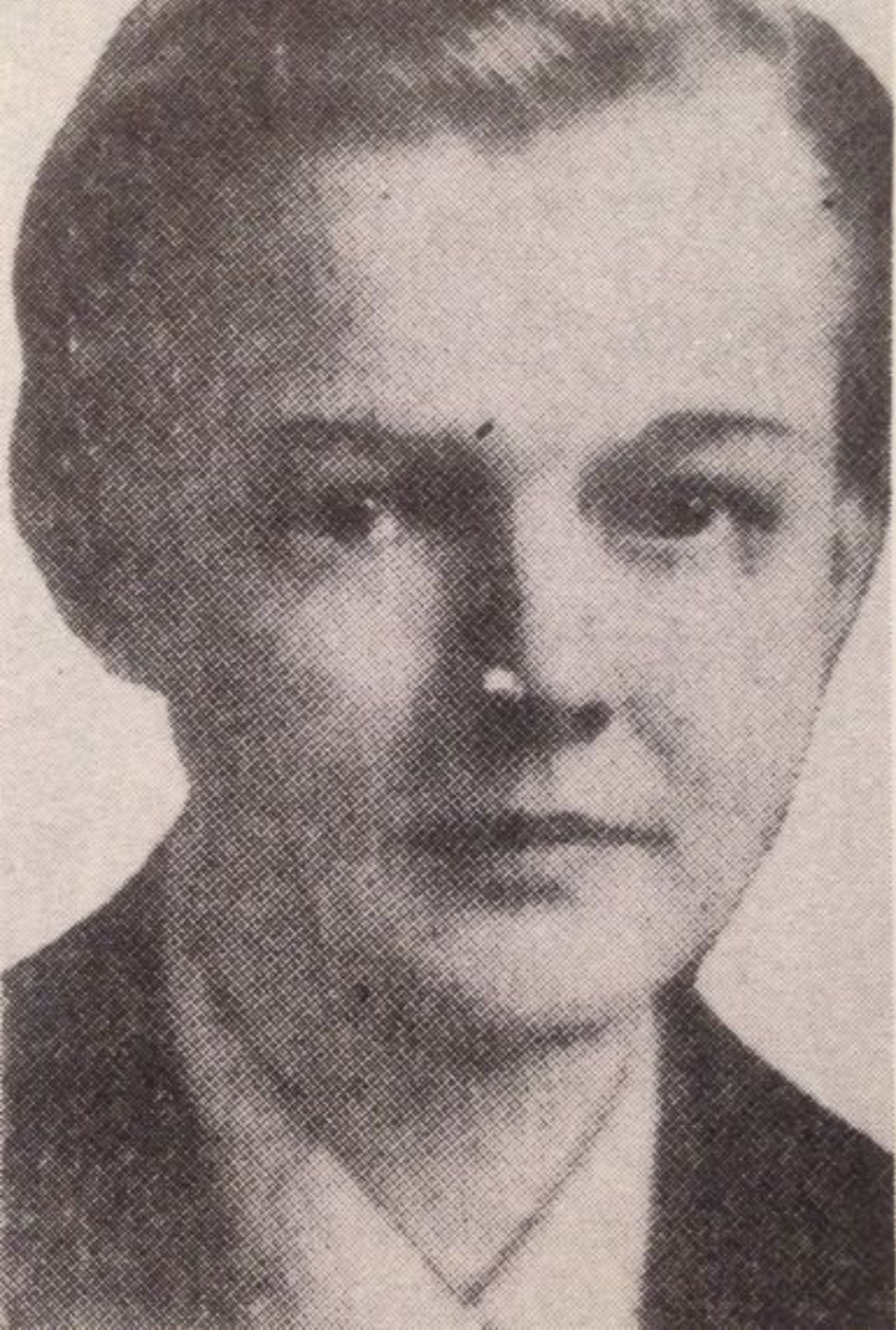
“[These writers’] diverse political and aesthetic commitments also represent the multiple, and sometimes competing, positions available to writers interested in uniting the political critiques of socialism with the aesthetic innovations of modernism.”
(Candida Rifkind, *Comrades and Critics: Women, Literature, and the Left in 1930s Canada*,



Dorothy Livesay (1909-1996)

- Canadian poet and memoirist;
- Two-time Governor General's Award winner;
- Born into a literary family: mother was a poet and a journalist, father was General Manager of Canadian Press from its very early days;
- Early work consists of politically committed poems and short stories;
- Gained recognition for imagist poetry;
- *Green Pitcher* (1928);
- *Day and Night* (1944);
- *The Unquiet Bed* (1967);
- *Right Hand Left Hand* (1977);
- *Journey with My Selves: A Memoir, 1909-1963* (1991).





Jean Watts (1909-1968)

- Canadian journalist, theatre artist, and artistic patron;
- Came from a wealthy family, likely capitalist wealth;
- Founding member of the Worker's Experimental Theatre (later Theatre of Action), provided funds for the founding of literary journal *New Frontier* (1937-1939);
- Sent to the Spanish Civil War as a special correspondent for the *Daily Clarion*;
- Left the *Daily Clarion* to become one of the only female ambulance drivers in the International Brigades.

This was the last time, I think, that you and I, and now Lon, were in complete agreement about the role we had to play in combating fascism and the outbreak of war in Spain. In those days intellectuals were made to feel needed; we felt ourselves to be a part of a worldwide struggle.

Back in Toronto, much was going on in leftist circles. You were now something of an heiress, having reached the age when your grandfather's money could be released for your living expenses and for literary projects. With great zeal and enthusiasm for the United Front, you and Lon started a monthly magazine that was intended to rally middle-class intellectuals in Canada, as did the Left Book Club in England and *New Masses* in the United States. The result was a cooperative effort, *New Frontier*, a monthly journal to the left of the *Canadian Forum*, aimed at teachers, social workers, writers and artists. Even reading it today, we would have to admire its lively content of informed opinion. And you, Gina, were already a correspondent from Spain. You left Canada at this time to go with Dr. Bethune to Spain, where you drove an ambulance, at first for his blood transfusion unit and later for the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion.

But in 1935-36, with Spain being murdered by Franco, working for that magazine gave me my first real opportunity to see myself in print, speaking out on the ills of the Depression. I travelled west, through Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta to British Columbia, writing documentary reports about strikes, lockouts, demonstrations by the unemployed. All during those years I was in the main writing prose, documentary realism. (83)

444.

"Jim" Walter Lawson
and DL

at Fork Lake
The Highlands
(Victoria) 1963 ?

women as artists



Again, I am under the influence of Gina's brilliance. Her passionate need is to write, but she says that she cannot. Compared with her I should be uncertain and depressed. But I am not....Most people have a reason for living, that is to say, a philosophy, a creed. Mine is beauty. Gina, so coldly scientific, hasn't even that. There is nothing to balance her, to hold her. She should have been gifted in some definite way. It is terrible that she isn't. (64)



And in this question-and-answer session with Charlie Boylan:

He: *Do you think [Dorothy Livesay] represents the woman's point of view?*

Gina: *For me that's a rather meaningless generalization. I don't know what the woman's point of view is.*

He: *When, then, a woman's point of view.*

Gina: *Well, obviously she represents a woman's point of view!*

He: *Take the love poetry at the end of her last book, do you identify with it, understand it?*

Gina: *Yes, certainly. But can't men identify with it too? I mean, is love poetry so divided between the sexes? Such things are only significant to women? I don't think so, but then of course I'm not a man.*

Not a man, my Gina. But with a toughness and intransigence that is still, in our age, attributed to the masculine. An uncompromising mind in a very sensitive and sensual frame.

So, Gina, in the thirties and forties you were the New Woman. Disagree as we did, your vibrant pace swung me along the same road. (86-7)

By our second university year something else was happening to your emotional life that distressed me deeply. You were in love with a camp counsellor and had been on the verge of a lesbian relationship that summer. I hated to think of it. And now, on campus, you were going around with a known lesbian crowd. True, they were not regarded with the sense of taboo associated with 'fairies'—our name for homosexuals. It was a peculiarity of woman's state that there were no laws prohibiting them from cohabiting. Perhaps this was because women did not pervert children, as it was believed men did? In any case, *The Well of Loneliness* was the book, yet it did not help me to accept your new role. This caused a rift. Then, the September of my third year, I went through my own rite of passage by leaving home for the first time and studying at Aix-Marseille from October to May. The possibility of travel was what had led me into taking modern languages in the first place. You, however, stayed home, struggling with medical courses. I received few letters from you. Then I heard from my sister at Christmas that you had had a breakdown, you had quit university and were sent to relatives in California to recuperate. (71)

By now you had broken with your lesbian circle and were ready to take on the men. Alas for Dee! For as soon as there seemed to be a young man interested in me, the time came to introduce him to you. And there was no way I could be your rival. You were like a rocket among candles: lithe, sinuous, graceful. (75)

