

5/27/47

PROPOSED COURSE OF LECTURES BY F. O. MATTHIESSEN

The reading for this course will consist of half a dozen major texts: The Heart of Emerson's Journals, Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, Melville's Moby Dick, James' The Portrait of a Lady, Dreiser's Sister Carrie, and Eliot's Collected Poems. The choice of authors has been made on the basis of providing a widely variegated approach to some of the main issues in American literature and cultural history. Emerson, the quintessence of American individualism, who was yet so deeply indebted to Europe, makes the natural starting point. Hawthorne and Melville, rejecting Emerson's optimism, wrote American tragedies, just as surely as Dreiser did in a later day. With Henry James they constitute the four central figures in our fiction, and will enable us to pass from romance and realism to symbolism and naturalism. The strain from Hawthorne to James to Eliot is the one which has scrutinized our spiritual life most profoundly. And with Eliot we turn to poetry, and examine the tradition from Poe and the French symbolists, thus ending, as we began, with the inescapable interweaving of American with European culture.

This course has been arranged so as not to conflict in any way with Mr. Kazin's, and in the hope that the one forms a natural complement to the other. It is expected that the seminar discussions will also include some of the other figures in contemporary poetry and fiction.