

English 3325: Modern and Contemporary American Literature  
**American Literature from 1900-1945**  
Texas Tech University  
Fall 2021

**Section 01: TR 3:30pm-4:50pm**

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This course will introduce students to a range of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction published by American writers between 1900 and 1945, to chart the early onset and development of American literary modernism. Among the topics to which we will be attentive are frustration over traditional modes of representation and radical experimentation in literary style; assertive reconceptualizations of racial, gender, and sexual identity during the period; the influence of technology, urban space, and mass culture on artistic expression; and an ongoing aggressive attempt at American cultural self-definition in relation to the world at large.

**Course Goals, Expected Outcomes, and Methods of Assessments:**

The objective of the humanities in a core curriculum is to expand the students' knowledge of the human condition and human cultures, especially in relation to behaviors, ideas, and values expressed in works of human imagination and thought. Through study in disciplines such as literature and philosophy, students will engage in critical analysis and develop an appreciation of the humanities as fundamental to the health and survival of any society.

With that in mind, our course goals are:

To study American literature in various genres from 1900 to 1945 to the present, with attention to critical issues in the field, including: skepticism about technology and scientific progress; criticism of paradoxes in American democracy and freedom; interrogation of Americanness and American identity; competition between American literature and other American media and expressive forms; challenges to traditional ideas about race, gender, and sexuality; the literary response to two world wars; and heightened aesthetic experimentation in the opening decades of the twentieth century.

Students who satisfactorily complete this course should be able **to demonstrate** a thorough understanding of major figures, texts, trends and movements in American literary history of the first five decades of the twentieth century. More specifically, students should be able **to integrate** course readings with course lectures and discussions **to understand** modern American literature *in context*—**to articulate** how texts relate to other texts, how works narrate and complicate American history, and how, in total, course readings both define and, at times, challenge a unified canon of American writing.

The methods of assessment for this course are various. The most weight will be given to critical writing, in three essay assignments. Students should be able **to articulate** their understanding of modern American literature in straightforward prose that bears evidence of critical thinking about course issues and topics, and is always organized around **clear, distinct thesis statements and direct topic sentences**. Students should know the difference between “observation” and “interpretation,” between “reportorial” writing and “analytical” writing. While students should be able **to identify** notable stylistic characteristics in each text, they should also be able **to explain** how those stylistic qualities are meaningful: how they suggest connections to other texts in American literature, how they relate to historical and political context, and how they operate symbolically.

Students will also be assessed on reading quiz performance, contributions to course discussions, and oral presentations. For reading quizzes, students should be able **to demonstrate** a complete reading of each major work in the course by answering, for each, ten simple questions about events that occur within that text. In classroom discussions, students should exhibit a willingness **to discuss** topics that arise out of our readings and lectures. Students are not expected to show mastery of each work, or offer fully-formed interpretations of works, but simply **to work through** ideas about readings and topics in conversation. In oral presentations, students should be able **to synthesize** research about a particular context in American history (which the student chooses from the list below) with ongoing course readings and discussions, and then **to present** that synthesis in an informal group presentation to their peers.

#### **Required Texts:**

Paul Lauter, ed., *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, Volume D: 1910-1945. [7<sup>th</sup> Ed.]  
Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (1914)  
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925)  
Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930)  
Robert Scully, *A Scarlet Pansy* (1932)

#### **Course Work and Distribution of Term Marks:**

Short paper 1 (750 words)	15%	<b>due 21 September</b>
Short paper 2 (750 words)	15%	<b>due 26 October</b>
Research paper (2000 words)	25%	<b>due 23 November</b>
Group oral presentation	10%	<b>sign up for date</b>
Informed participation in class discussion	25%	
Quizzes on major works	10%	<b>see reading list for dates</b>

You are required to write three formal papers for this course: **two short critical papers**, each approximately 750 words in length, and **one critical research paper** approximately 2000 words in length. In addition, you can expect to do some informal, reflective writing exercises in class for which individual grades will not be assigned. These informal writing exercises will hopefully stimulate your contributions to class discussions, though, and so might be considered as figuring into your participation grade.

Each **short paper** invites you to consider a brief section of a work from our reading list and articulate an argument about that section’s thematic or contextual significance, in relation to

either the rest of the work or the course reading list more broadly. **I will offer you a list of assigned passages for each of these short papers well in advance of their due dates.** Please note that though you may touch on points raised in class discussion, you are required to **go beyond** mere paraphrasing in each short paper. Instead, I expect these to be **argumentative**, centered around a distinct thesis statement that articulates your own position on a particular issue. Do **not** focus your remarks on purely emotional responses or issues of taste. (e.g. “I did not like this text, because I found it unpleasant to read...”) Also, these are **not** research papers and I do **not** expect you to use secondary sources for these assignments. Rather, I wish to see only your own ideas and critical thinking.

The **research paper** allows you to engage in recent critical debates on a topic through sustained analysis of one or more literary texts. Your paper should focus on one of the “big” ideas that stretch across different texts and periods from our reading list. Again, though, think of the research paper as an argumentative exercise, organized around a clear thesis statement, and intended to persuade a reader to adopt your position on a critical issue in the study of modern American literature. For the research paper, I expect to see a **thoughtful and considered engagement with at least three secondary sources** rather than a superficial citing of materials from your bibliography. I want you to decide on your own topic for the research paper, but I also suggest that you do so in conversation with me to ensure that the scope and subject matter of your paper are both manageable and appropriate for the course. Because this is a substantial assignment, I encourage you to begin thinking about topics early and to schedule a meeting with me to discuss your topic well in advance of the deadline.

Each of you will be required participate in a group presentation (with two of your colleagues) on some historical context relevant to the period of American literature we are considering, selected from the list below. I expect your presentation to be **10-15 minutes in length**, with additional time for questions if any arise. You should prepare an overview of the topic at hand and then explain how this topic relates to **specific readings from our list (if possible)** as well as more general issues or themes we have discussed. You are also required to submit an **annotated bibliography of no fewer than four sources** on your chosen topic to your classmates, either as a photocopied handout or as a .pdf file submitted to the entire class via Blackboard through me. All of you need to find your partners and sign up for your presentation with me by **7 September**.

The Mexican Revolution (14 September)  
The Armory Show (23 September)  
World War I (5 October)  
The American Birth Control Movement (12 October)  
“The Red Summer of 1919” (21 October)  
Jazz (26 October)  
*Rhineland v. Rhineland* (9 November)  
Pulp magazines (11 November)  
Queer spaces (New York and Paris) (18 November)

**Informed participation** assumes that you will not only read all assigned texts in time for their discussion in class, but also consider that material carefully and be prepared to contribute to our collective contemplation of them. I suggest that you take notes as you

read each text, and be careful to record your observations as you move through material. Pay attention to connections between texts. Take note of how works correspond to contextual issues that I introduce in class. Make a list of questions that arise when you read the material. All of these approaches will be beneficial to our discussions as a group.

There will be in-class **quizzes** for each of the four major works of fiction on the course (F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, and Robert Scully's *A Scarlet Pansy*). These quizzes will be fairly straightforward—10 questions about specific details from the text—and are to ensure that you have completed reading each of these works by the first day we discuss it in class. These are easy marks to get, especially since they only ask you to do what you are supposed to be doing anyway: reading course material.

### Course Policies:

#### *Grades and Written Assignments:*

1. Grades will be assigned as percentage scores (0-100) throughout the term. Ultimately, your final grade will be converted to the university's letter grade system using this scale:

A+= 97-100	A=94-96	A-=90-93
B+=87-89	B=84-86	B-=80-83
C+=77-79	C=74-76	C-=70-73
D+=67-69	D=63-66	F=62 or below

**Please note that I reserve A-range marks for work of superior quality. Grades in the A-range are by no means the default grade for completing all the assignments in this course.**

2. You must complete **all** of the formal writing assignments (both response papers and the research paper) as well as the **final exam** to pass this course.
3. Papers are to be handed in at the beginning of the class on which they are due.
4. Late papers will be penalized with a **10%** deduction for each day they are handed in after the due date, including weekend days. Even after deductions have guaranteed that a paper will receive a failing grade, you **must** still submit that paper to pass the course.
5. If extenuating circumstances will prevent you from handing a paper in on time, talk to me **before** the paper is due. I am not likely to make allowances after the deadline has come and gone.
6. All papers are to be typed (in a font no bigger than 12-point), double-spaced, and printed on one side of the paper. Please adhere to MLA guidelines for formatting and bibliographical citations.
7. I do **not** accept email submissions of written assignments.
8. I do **not** answer questions about paper topics over email. If you have a question about a paper in development or a topic you wish to propose, I insist—to make it easier on both of us—that you come and talk to me in person at my office hours or at a mutually convenient appointment time.

9. I will respond to emails within conventional business hours (i.e. between 9am and 5pm on Monday to Friday). If you write to me outside of those hours, expect a reply by the next business day.

*Plagiarism and Cheating:*

I expect you to adhere to the highest standard of honesty and academic integrity. All work that you complete in this course—from quizzes to formal papers—**must** be your own. You may not have any notes or texts in open view during quizzes or the final examination. If you fail to comply with this request, you will **automatically** open yourself up to a charge of cheating and I will assign you a failing grade on the quiz or exam.

All written work must be organized around your own ideas and arguments. (In the interest of aiding the resolution of any potential disputes about plagiarism, I encourage you to retain all drafts of your work until the completion of the course.) When you introduce any ideas or quotations that are not your own in an essay, you must **cite explicitly** the source of that material according to MLA citation practice. To repeat, **any** material that is not your own—including verbatim quotations from outside work or paraphrases of other writers' ideas or arguments—must be referenced explicitly. If you have any questions about whether or not you have used a source properly on a given assignment, I encourage you to discuss the issue with me **before** you hand that assignment in. Because academic dishonesty constitutes a grave breach of trust between instructor and student, and diminishes the value of honest students' work, I take all plagiarism cases very seriously. **Plagiarizing materials in any of the three course papers will warrant an immediate failing grade for the entire course.**

*Absences:*

I will allow each student **four** absences without penalty. Each class that you miss after four absences will warrant a reduction of your **overall** course grade by 10%. I do not designate between excused or unexcused absences, except for those designated as excused according to university policy. **That is, if you miss a class because of illness or a car accident or a job interview or a hangover or anything else, you have used up one of your four absences. (Do not bring me documentation, as I will not remove the absence from your record.)** Because you only have four classes you can afford to miss without penalty, I encourage you to manage your attendance wisely, reserving those four absences for emergencies when you need them. For an explanation of university-approved absences, consult your student handbook. **Also, I expect you to know how many classes you have missed throughout the term. You may confer with me at various points in the term about how many absences I have recorded, but please also manage your own attendance record. For exceptions to this policy related to COVID-19, see below.**

*Classroom Civility and Access:*

I expect each of you to assist in creating and maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. At the bottom level, this assumes that you will always be respectful to me and to your fellow classmates. Our classroom space will be open to differences of opinion and ideology, and accessible to all students without regard to gender, race, ethnicity, creed, sexual orientation, or physical limitation. I will **not tolerate** the use of any derogatory or demeaning language. Always extend the same courtesy to other members of the class that you wish to see extended to you. Listen quietly when others are speaking; raise your hand to ask questions or introduce new points; do not have side conversations apart from our main

discussion. I encourage dissent in discussion, but insist that you articulate your ideas in a respectful manner. You are welcome to bring food and drink to class provided that your consumption of them is not a distraction. (Watch those crunchy foods and noisy wrappers.) If you are a cellular phone user, always **make sure** that your phone is turned off before class begins.

Any student who because of a disability may require special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact me as soon as possible to make necessary accommodations. Students should provide appropriate verification from AccessTECH.

### **COVID-19 Information:**

**Vaccinations:** Texas Tech University strongly recommends students adhere to CDC guidelines on COVID-19, including obtaining COVID-19 vaccinations. If you were unable to obtain a vaccination prior to your arrival on campus, the COVID-19 vaccine is available at Student Health Services by appointment. You can find additional information about the vaccine at <https://www.ttu.edu/commitment/covid-19-vaccine/index.php>, and about the recently announced incentive program at <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/communications/emergency/coronavirus/vaccination-incentives/index.php>.

**Face Covering Policy:** As of May 19, 2021, face coverings are optional in TTU facilities and classrooms but, based on CDC guidelines, are recommended and welcome, especially for those who have not been vaccinated for COVID-19 or who may have susceptibilities to the virus.

### **COVID-19 Absence Policy Exceptions:**

I will offer exceptions to the attendance policy for students who need to quarantine either due to direct exposure to COVID-19 infection or who test positive for the virus. Students should consult <https://ttucovid19.ttu.edu/User/Consent> for all university protocols related to exposure and positive tests.

### **Tentative Schedule of Readings and Lectures:**

#### WEEK ONE:

*24 August:* Introduction to the course.

*26 August:* Lecture/discussion: The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and new currents in the 20<sup>th</sup>.

#### WEEK TWO:

*31 August:* Edith Wharton, "The Other Two" (*Heath* 1477-92); Jack London, "To Build a Fire" (1908 version, available online at <http://www.jacklondon.net/buildafire.html>)

*2 September:* Wharton and London continued

#### WEEK THREE:

*7 September:* Booker T. Washington, "from *Up from Slavery* [Chapter XIV: The Atlanta Exposition Address]" (*Heath* 1363-72)

9 September: W.E.B. Du Bois, "from *The Souls of Black Folk* [Chapter III: Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others]" (Heath 1380-89)

WEEK FOUR:

14 September: Ricardo Flores Magón, "Land and Liberty" (Heath 1578-80)

16 September: Robert Frost, "Mending Wall" (Heath 1627-28); Edna St. Vincent Millay, "First Fig," "Spring" (Heath 1658)

WEEK FIVE:

21 September: **Short Paper 1 due**; Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro," "L'art, 1910," "A Retrospect" (Heath 1683-4)

23 September: William Carlos Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow," "The Rose" (Heath 1755, 1756-7)

WEEK SIX:

28 September: Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*

30 September: *Tender Buttons* continued

WEEK SEVEN:

5 October: T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *The Waste Land* (Heath 1876-96)

7 October: *The Waste Land* continued

WEEK EIGHT:

12 October: Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants" (Heath 1964-7)

14 October: **Quiz 1**; F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

WEEK NINE:

19 October: *The Great Gatsby* continued

21 October: Alain Locke, "The New Negro" (Heath 2051-62)

WEEK TEN:

26 October: **Short Paper 2 due**; Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (Heath 2099-2103)

28 October: Zora Neale Hurston, "Sweat" (Heath 2142-51)

WEEK ELEVEN:

2 November: Langston Hughes, "The Weary Blues" (Heath 2273); plus "Blues Lyrics" (Heath 2274-2277)

4 November: **Quiz 2**; Nella Larsen, *Passing* (Heath 2170-2240)

WEEK TWELVE:

9 November: *Passing* continued

11 November: **Quiz 3**; Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*

WEEK THIRTEEN:

16 November: *The Maltese Falcon* continued

18 November: **Quiz 4**; Robert Scully, *A Scarlet Pansy*

WEEK FOURTEEN

23 November: **Research Paper Due**; *A Scarlet Pansy* continued

25 November: **No class scheduled, Thanksgiving**

WEEK FIFTEEN:

30 November: Poetry by Early Chinese Immigrants: Anonymous, “5 [Four days before the Qiqiao Festival],” “8 [Instead of remaining a citizen of China, I willingly became an ox],” One from Xiangshan, “31 [There are tens of thousands of poems composed on these walls],” Anonymous, “35 [Leaving behind by writing brush and removing my sword, I came],” Anonymous, “51 [I hastened here for the sake of my stomach and landed promptly]” (*Heath* 2664-66, 2667)

**Note:** You are responsible for finding out about any changes that I make to this schedule of readings while you are away from class.