

**American Modernism (HL2029)**  
**Lecturer: Dr. Sima Aghazadeh**  
**Semester 2, Jan 2024 / Tuesdays 2:30-5:30**  
**Venue: TBC**

This course expands students' knowledge of American literature and culture from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries until the 1940s. While many important figures of "high modernism" were Americans living abroad, this course primarily focuses on the literary developments within the American landscape itself. American Modernism developed in conversation with several phenomena: new forms of social and economic integration; new modes of perspective and experience emerging from psychology, philosophy, and the visual arts; urbanization and industrialization; ambivalence towards a technologically and economically innovative mass culture; and new sexual and political discourses that altered understandings of sex, race and gender. We will pay close attention to how individuals can be included and excluded in a national literature, and we will examine how American social realities are represented and contested, using new literary strategies. Across the term, students will address how modernist aesthetics and world historical events find unique expressions in the American literary tradition.

The main reference book will be Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol 2. Any edition of the assigned novels is acceptable for close-reading and class discussion.

## **Course Schedule**

### **Week 1 (16 Jan): Introduction: From Realism & Naturalism to Modernism**

#### **Week 2 (23 Jan): What is an American?**

- Douglass: "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"  
[Microsoft Word - Douglass \(wheelersburg.net\)](https://www.wheelersburg.net/microsoft-word-douglass)
  
- Du Bois: "The Souls of Black Folk"  
[Souls of Black Folk-Du Bois- text.pdf](#)

#### **Week 3 (30 Jan): American individualism/Modernism in poetry:**

- Robert Frost
- Wallace Stevens
- William Carlos Williams

#### **Week 4 (6 Feb): American modern poetry to be continued:**

- Ezra Pound
- T.S. Eliot

(Selected poems are available in Norton Anthology of American Literature as well as in printouts that will be provided in the class.)

**Week 5 (13 Feb): Post-war nostalgia: Willa Cather's *My Ántonia***

**Week 6 (20 Feb): Lost Generation:**

- Gertrude Stein (selected writings)
- Ernest Hemingway's *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*  
[The Snows of Kilimanjaro. text.pdf](#)

**Week 7 (27 Feb): American Dream & Great Depression:**

- Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*

### **Recess Week**

**Week 8 (12 March): Black identity:**

- Ellison's *Invisible Man* (the free e-book is available to read and download but it is encouraged to have the paper book.)

**Week 9 (19 March): Harlem Renaissance (*Invisible Man* to be continued)**

**Week 10 (26 March): Death of American Dream in Drama:**

- Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

**Week 11 (2 April): Making of a modernist:**

- William Faulkner's *Sound & Fury*

**Week 12 (9 April): William Faulkner to be continued**

**Week 13 (16 April): The personal, the public, the political: *Citizen Kane***

**Week 14 (6 May): Final Exam**

### **Student Assessment:**

#### **Class participation & presentation 15%**

- Students are advised to read all the selected works in advance and discuss and present their understanding/opinions during the class. The participation grade will reflect the commitment to the class as evidenced by attendance, preparation of readings, contribution to discussions, and productive and respectful responses to others' ideas. Students should note their questions and be ready to share them in class.

#### **Essay 1: Character analysis essay 10%**

- The essay should be well-structured and coherent (max. 1000 words), engage critically with the texts and include at least 3 references with the citation at the end. Points should be fully developed and supported with specific evidences.
- The character for analysis to be selected from the following list:

