In her 1924 essay “Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown” Virginia Woolf wrote:

On or about December 1910, human character changed. I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless; and, since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910.

Woolf meant by this a change in the *zeitgeist* that seems to have transformed the visual arts (with the development of Cubism), architecture (with the development of Bauhaus), poetry (with Imagism and assorted poetic movements—with associated manifestoes and aligned literary magazines—culminating in the transformation of the possibilities of poetry by Pound, Eliot, and Stevens), and fiction (with the development of modernist experiments in point of view and narrative form by Joyce and Woolf herself). These transformations may or may not be linked (scholars argue about this) with the political transformations that both caused and resulted from the First World War, and with the economic transformations attendant upon the modernization of the world economy. One might link the artistic changes Woolf describes to the scientific and political changes Max Weber described (and registered) in his famous essay “Science as a Vocation,” written in 1918 while civil war in Germany was raging just outside of his classroom.

Woolf’s choice of date is meant to be wry, but she has pointedly not chosen August 1914 (a date often enshrined in syllabi about modernism). Whatever it was that happened, the change in the world of all of the arts in the west that happened in that era was as profound as the change that separated the arts of the age of Mozart from the arts of the age of Beethoven.

This course will confine itself to texts by United States authors (yes, we get to claim Eliot too!), but it will pay equal attention to texts in prose and in verse, and will look at texts from many regions of U.S. culture, including some authors who were opposed to the modernist experiment and sought alternative forms.
Texts

- Fitzgerald, F. Scott *Tender is the Night* Scribner ISBN: 978-0684801544

Sessions

**Week 1** (August 28, 29, September 4) Ernest Hemingway: *In Our Time*
You may be familiar with *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway’s novel of the First World War, or *The Sun Also Rises*, his novel of the disordered lives of the “lost generation” of the 1920s. His first book, the story collection *In Our Time*, makes bolder stylistic experiments than any of his famous novels. It’s my belief that the short story was a more congenial form for Hemingway anyway.

(January 26) *The Waste Land*
Eliot’s poetry changed how poetry was written forever, and for the next few decades to be a poet in English was to take a stance about Eliot’s style, his thematic concerns, even his politics and gender ideology.

**Week 3** (September 12, 16, 18) *The Waste Land* (continued)

**Week 4** (September 19, 23, 25) William Faulkner: *The Sound and The Fury*
This early tour de force of multiple point of view narration is Faulkner’s most ambitious engagement with the modernist style as practiced by Joyce and Woolf. It also represents an almost systematic opposition to the style championed by Hemingway. (Yet, curiously, both authors went to school to the same mentor, Sherwood Anderson, whose *Winesburg, Ohio* taught them how to write short stories, and whose patronage helped them in their early careers, but whom both authors later broke with and ridiculed.)

**Week 5** (September 26, October 2, 3) *The Sound and the Fury* (continued)
**Week 6** (October 7, 10, 15) Willa Cather: *A Lost Lady*
Cather was a principled anti-modernist in fiction. This enigmatic, lyrical novel, with its very morally ambiguous central figure, certainly looks back to her own earlier *My Ántonia*. But how Marian Forrester is portrayed provides an interesting counterpoint to Faulkner’s Candace Compson and Hurston’s Janey.


Frost seems to announce himself, both in his stylistic choices and in his critical prose, as the most committed anti-modernist of all. But the reader should think twice before taking his pose as a provincial na¨ıf at face value.

**Week 8** (October 24, 28, 30) Hart Crane: *The Bridge*
Crane saw himself as at once an enthusiastic embracer of the modernist style in poetry projected by Eliot, and as a proponent of poetry of Whitman’s scope and subjects. Learning from Eliot’s style, but rejecting both his politics and his subjects, and for that matter rejecting his skeptical treatment of modern culture, Crane sought to turn poetry in a different direction. Few thought of *The Bridge* as a great success when it was published, but even those most critical of his work, from his frenemy Allen Tate to the poet-critic Yvor Winters (who called him “a saint of the wrong religion”), could not resist the charisma of his poetry.

**October 28** Research Proposal Due


Stevens’ greatest fame as a poet came in the 1940s and 1950s, when he wrote poetry that asks deep questions about the relationship between reality and imagination, and about the place of imagination in a world which stigmatizes imagination as empty. But he started his poetic career as a Greenwich-Village avant-gardist in the ‘teens. The reader should no more reduce him to the insurance company Vice-President he became than Eliot should be reduced to the Tory banker he pretended to be.


**November 13** Annotated Bibliography Due
Week 11 (November 14, 18, 20) F. Scott Fitzgerald *Tender is the Night*
Since most of you will have read *The Great Gatsby* I have chosen to assign Fitzgerald’s other, rather flawed, masterpiece instead. *Tender is the Night* is a novel of the 1930s, and one way to make sense of it is to see it as an attempt of a 1920s sensibility to make sense of the very different literary world of the Depression.

November 18 Conference Week

Week 12 (November 21, 25, December 2) Ralph Ellison: *Invisible Man*
A masterwork. And the hinge between the modernist and postmodernist periods. (taught out of chronological order to take advantage of the long week)

November 25 Draft Research Paper due to Writing Group

Week 13 (December 4, 5, 9)
Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes were Watching God*
This rich, folkloric novel is the best-known text of the Harlem Renaissance.

December 9 Final Draft of Research Paper Due

Requirements

1. Short papers
There will be short (500 to 1000 word) writing assignments due every week for 5 weeks, beginning September 9 and ending October 10. You will pick a passage of about 250 words from the reading for that day or the next and type it out. (This passage isn't included in your word count. I want you to type the passage out because doing so will bring its particulars more closely into view.) Be sure to pick a passage which strikes you as rich and interesting and full of a significance that might not be already obvious to every reader of that text. In other words, I don’t want you to pick a passage that will enable you to repeat some point I have already made in the lecture, or that you were all ready to make on some other basis, but rather some passage which will enable you to bring a new reflection into our conversation, some passage that casts some new light upon the conversation we have already been having, some light that we might not have seen were it not for you. You will write a two to four page commentary (500 to 1000 words) on that passage, giving what you take its point to be, noting its context, and developing in cogent detail the claim it leads you to make about the text. You are not merely to give a summary of the passage, but to point out something important in it that other intelligent, well-informed readers might well have missed, some unexpected turn of argument, some subtext, some complexity of tone or treatment, some unanticipated light upon the characters and their situation, some insight into the point of view of the narrator or the agenda of the novel. Imagine that you are writing for someone who has some knowledge of the text but who does not know what precisely is your point of view about it—someone rather like the other members of this class, for instance. I will not give particular papers letter grades, but I will comment upon them in detail and give them either a check, a check plus, or a check minus. You may revise and resubmit these papers as often as you wish, but please do not merely edit in corrections of errors.
2. **Research Paper**

The principal assignment for this class will be a research paper, of 12 pages (3000 words) minimum, concerned with one or more of the texts this course will examine. To prepare this paper you might need to start with an overarching paradigm from literary study. Some overarching studies of the themes of the course might give you a starting point, or perhaps themes that arise from more general treatments of the texts of the course. Literary theory might provide you with paradigms to discuss issues of racial conflict, cultural conflict, colonialism, or gender and sexuality issues. You may also start with some of the other themes in the course, such as modernization, stylistic innovation, new concepts about point of view, new ideas about the possibilities of art, techniques for representing individual consciousness or the collective spirit of the age, the idea of cultural crisis, or other themes that have come up in the class discussion such as racism and modernization in Ellison, or gender conflict in Hurston. Or you may start with some of the famous arguments in the existing criticism, such as how Eliot’s *The Waste Land* evolved from it’s first drafts (as a baggy, much longer poem called “He Do the Police in Different Voice) to the final version. You should also make yourself familiar with the critical literature on your chosen novel, which you can access using *The MLA International Bibliography* or *JSTOR Language and Literature*.

You will develop the papers in stages, which will include

- A one-page research proposal, giving your topic, developing your take, and outlining the stakes of your project, due on October 28
- An annotated bibliography, outlining what is to be learned from your key sources, due on November 13
- A conference with me, which will take place during the week of November 18
- A rough draft, which will be due to a writing group of your peers on November 25. You will respond to the drafts given to you by the other members of our group, and will meet in a writing group outside of class to discuss your work together.
- A completed research paper, due on December 9. Please also hand in the commented-upon first drafts which you have received from the other members of your writing group.

**Responding to Each Other’s Papers**

As you read each other’s papers bear in mind that the point is to help each other to write better papers. Bear in mind also that as readers you are not all *that* different from me. We both have some familiarity with the text, we both know the kinds of things we have talked about in class, and we both know a thing or two about literary interpretation. We also can recognize that some “tacks” give a new twist to the discussions we have already been having, and maybe suggest some discussions we ought to have in the future. It is this sense—of advancing a conversation already underway— which you should keep in mind as you read each other’s papers. Do not hesitate, then, to write in the margins—you should, in fact, hold up your end of the conversation there. Note down where the major
claim is made, and what you think it is. Note also where some point is tellingly made. Pay attention also to those moments where you don’t quite get what the author is saying. Sometimes these moments happen when the author has left something out that seems obvious to him or her but not to anyone else. (If you find such a moment see if you can guess what’s missing.) If you understand, say that in the margins too—put in the margin all the “uh huh’s” and “wait a minute’s” and “have you thought of’s” that you would be bursting out with if your room-mate were telling you what his or her paper is about. At the end of the paper you should also write a comment. These comments are most useful if they’re not all evaluation. It’s very useful, for instance, to summarize what you think the paper’s argument is, because sometimes the author hasn’t made the argument he or she intended to make, and that is something it is important for the author to know. Here are a few more questions to ask yourself as you compose your responses.

1. What is the author’s major claim? Has the author staked out an argument, or merely announced a subject matter? Is this a subject matter which will call for the author to read the text closely, or could someone who has read the text cursorily make the same argument? What might the author learn from making this argument?

2. What does the author need to do in order to substantiate his or her claim? Do these things get done? Are there counterarguments to be considered, say, or other ways of reading the passages the author chooses to examine? Has the author chosen the passages he or she cites merely as evidence of something the author already knows, or do the passages themselves provide rich sources of information?

3. How does the author’s style strike you? Are there gaps in the presentation? Does the author talk “up” to you, or “down” to you? Does this author have an idea of what it’s like to read this paper?

4. Is the author’s conclusion merely a restatement of the original claim, or does the author close on a note which makes you wonder what turn he or she will take next? Are there questions you still want to ask at the end of the paper that should have been answered in the paper? Are there other questions which you might want to answer in another paper, your own, for example?

Obviously you can’t answer all of these questions in your responses, and some of these questions probably can’t be answered explicitly anyway (although you should keep them in mind). But do remember that the point of reading each other’s papers is not to grade them (that’s my job!) but to see how they are put together and to suggest ways they might better further our continuing conversation.

Writing Groups
On the day the drafts of your papers are due you should bring enough copies for everyone in your group to have one. Even these drafts should be typewritten if at all possible. You should arrange with your writing group for a convenient time to meet and discuss your papers among yourselves, and you should read and comment upon the papers of the other members of your group some time before you meet. (You should look over my handout describing how to do this.)
I will leave the format of your actual meetings up to you, but you will probably find them most useful if you keep them somewhat informal. You might want to begin by asking the author to tell you briefly his or her sense of what the paper is about, and what he or she has learned or proven by writing it. (There is much to be learned from those occasions where the author describes a different—and usually better—paper than the one you have read.) You will also find that time spent on examining what the author is trying to show will generally prove more useful than time spent editing and correcting small errors, although time spent on organization and style can be well spent also. If you do discuss style, be sure not to merely say that the style is vague, or worse, boring—specify instead some of the things the author must add to make the meaning clear, or specify some of the things the author need not say and should omit to avoid insulting the reader’s intelligence.

When the final draft is due, please turn in the revised version—and make sure it is revised rather than merely corrected—along with all the copies of the first version. I won’t be grading the draft, obviously, and I won’t be grading the marginal comments you make in each others’ work either (although I take these very seriously), but I would like to see just how different the drafts and final versions are and what you have learned from talking with each other.

**Rubric**

The papers will be evaluated on the basis of this rubric, which is widely used at Brandeis:

1. **Basic**
   - Clear, concise and professional writing
   - A sustained discussion of a single issue covering multiple points of view.
   - Significant editing of a single paper draft with responses to instructor comments
   - The production of a final paper mostly free of sentence fragments, run-ons, misspellings, etc.

2. **Intermediate**
   - Effective use of scholarly, critical, or historical texts to support an argument
   - Clear articulation of an original thesis
   - Clear and concise survey of scholarly problems on a given topic
   - Completion of a research project which utilizes five or more sources from different types of media

3. **Advanced**
   - Critical engagement with multiple works of scholarship.
   - Sustained presentation of a multipart argument
   - Digital ‘publishing’ of a genre appropriate piece of professional writing of over 2000 words.
Policies

1. Disability Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support you. In order to provide test accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) at 781.736.3470 or access@brandeis.edu.

2. Attendance and Participation Attendance in this course is required. A student with more than two unexcused absences should expect to fail the course. Participation in the class discussion is required, so come to class prepared to speak. There may well be classes at Brandeis in which you can coast for much of the term and recover yourself by heroic efforts at the end, but this isn’t one of them. It’s best to plan to work steadily.

3. Extensions You must contact me no later than the class before a paper is due to receive an extension. I will not grant extensions on the due date of the paper. Late papers will be docked in proportion to their lateness.

4. Academic Honesty You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as section 5 of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.

5. Electronics You are not allowed to have an open laptop in this class. Please turn off your cell phones for the duration of the class.

6. Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week) Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Assignment Weights

I view calculations using these values with suspicion, and I will not accept arguments about your final grade based on calculations from this table, but I include this table to give you a rough idea of how much each assignment is worth.

- Short Papers 20 %
- First Paper 20 %
- Second Paper 35 %
- Participation 25 %