Instructor: Luke Carson  
Office: Clearihue C325

Course Description:  
The democratic ideals established in the revolutionary founding of America helped create a literary culture fascinated by stories of individuals seeking a life that is authentic and meaningful – and, sometimes alternately, one that is marked by distinction – under conditions that both enable and constrain their prospects. On the one hand, this leads writers to focus intensely on the inner lives of their protagonists as they suffer and reflect on their struggle; on the other, it leads to a careful attention to the society and the history that both enable their pursuit and limit what is possible. We will study the formal tendencies of “modern” American fiction, both as a continuation of 19th-century realism and naturalism, and as breaking towards the more radically experimental forms of storytelling we identify with “modernism.” We will read one short story and five novels by six outstanding American authors with some focus on the ways each engages with and represents such perennially divisive issues as the lure of “real” experience vs. cultural authority; the power of money vs. the promise of democracy; family values vs. women’s independence; immigrants vs. “real Americans”; the legacy of slavery and the enduring “problem of the color line.”

Texts:  
Edith Wharton, *Age of Innocence* (Broadview)  
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Broadview)  
William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (Vintage)  
Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Harper)  
Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (Vintage)

Grading:  
3 1-page analyses 15%  
2 four-page analyses 45%  
three-hour final exam 30%  
8 to 10 quick quizzes 10%