

现 代
美国文学简介

**A Brief
Introduction
To Modern
American
Literature**

By Elisabeth B. Booy

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A Brief Introduction To
Modern American Literature
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上海外语教育出版社出版发行

(上海外国语学院内)

上海外语教育出版社印刷厂印刷

新华书店上海发行所经销

850×1168 毫米 1/32 18 印张 400 千字

1982 年 3 月第 1 版 1988 年 9 月第 4 次印刷

印数：34,001—40,000 册

ISBN 7-81009-138-7/I·012

定价：4.70 元

出版者的话

《现代美国文学简介》英文版系目前在我国云南大学外语系讲学的美国专家 Elisabeth B. Booz 所编写。原为讲稿，出版前由作者作了仔细的校订。

全书共三十讲，讲述的是 1919 年至 1980 年间的美国文学，着重为我国学生介绍其重要流派及代表作家与作品，内容简明扼要，评述比较客观，文字浅显流畅，既适合作为学习美国文学的入门教材，也可帮助我国读者锻炼与提高英语阅读能力。

FOREWORD

The thirty lectures with accompanying readings, included in this book under the title "A Brief Introduction To Modern American Literature", were first presented in 1980 as a course for teachers at Yunnan University, Kunming. I served there as a "foreign expert" in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature from early 1979 until 1982. My colleagues complained that they had been cut off from American books for so long that they had no clear knowledge of the modern literature. They asked me to give them a general overview of the modern period and an introduction to the most important authors, poets, essayists, novelists and playwrights.

My task appeared to be twofold: to outline the cultural, political and economic events which have given rise to America's complex contemporary life, and to offer a systematic view of the outstanding modern writers who have written about it. I hoped to indicate in broad strokes how events influenced writers, how writers influenced events, and how writers influenced one another.

I selected the First World War as the obvious starting point for modern American literature but my choice of

authors to be included has been somewhat arbitrary. Some first-rate writers, such as Theodore Dreiser and Edith Wharton, wrote important books both before and after the First World War but I have left them out of this presentation because I feel that the bulk of their work belongs to the earlier period. Similarly, I have omitted many good authors who are writing at the present time. The abundance and variety of contemporary American literature makes it impossible to include them all. I have attempted simply to introduce those writers who have had the clearest influence on literature in the past sixty years and those who represent some significant groups, movements or trends in modern times.

The main reason for this book is to provide a kind of map by which interested readers can find their way along some of the main roads of Modern American Literature. I hope it is simple enough for this purpose. At the same time, I have tried to give enough information (and some opinions of my own) to serve as a point of departure for further reading or research. I hope it will be useful as a foundation on which newcomers to the subject can begin building a better knowledge of contemporary American letters.

E. B. B.
Kunming.

A Brief Introduction to Modern American Literature

Part 1 1919-1940

Lecture 1 1

The Effect of the First World War: A turning point in
American literature.

A new way of life, new point of view, new values.

Writers as social critics and onlookers.

The flight to Paris; the "Lost Generation".

Writers of the 1920's, a brief introduction.

The second decade: the Great Depression.

Writers as social critics and participants.

Roosevelt's W.P.A. Writers Project.

Writers of the 1930's, a brief introduction.

Lecture 2 9

Three Poets Who Opened the Way to Modern Poetry.

Ezra Pound, founder of the "Imagist" movement.

T.S. Eliot, the most influential poet. (Nobel Prize)

E.E. Cummings, experimenter in form and style.

Explanation of poems by these three poets.

Reading: Pound — "In A Station of the Metro"
 Eliot — "Morning At The Window"
 "Prelude"
 Cummings — "Buffalo Bill's Defunct"
 "Sunset"

Lecture 325

Ernest Hemingway: Spokesman for the "Lost Generation". (Nobel Prize)

Hemingway's life, his point of view, his literary style,
 his influence on other writers, his major works.

Reading: "In Another Country" (short story)

Lecture 443

Ernest Hemingway — continued.

Explanation and comparison of Hemingway's two
 short stories. Questions and discussion.

Reading: "A Well-Lighted Place" (short story)

Lecture 560

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Spokesman of the "Roaring 20's"

Fitzgerald's life, his point of view, his literary style,
 his success and influence, his major works.

Reading: Excerpt from *The Great Gatsby*

Lecture 683

✓ *F. Scott Fitzgerald* — continued.

Explanation and comparison of the two readings from Fitzgerald's works. Questions and discussion.

Reading: "The Long Way Out" (short story)

Lecture 7101

Sherwood Anderson: The first "psychological" fiction writer.

Anderson's life, his point of view, his use of psychological theory, his influence on other writers, his major works.

Reading: "The Egg" (short story)

Lecture 8129

Sinclair Lewis: satirical critic of the middle class.
(Nobel Prize)

Lewis's life, his point of view, his literary style, his influence and his major works.

Reading: Excerpt from "Babbitt"

Lecture 9148

H.L. Mencken: Social critic, journalist, linguist.

Mencken's life, his social outlook and style, his influence on other writers. Journalistic criticism

and the role of the press in shaping American public opinion.

Reading: "In Memoriam: W.J.B."

Lecture 10168

Eugene O'Neill: America's most important playwright.
(Nobel Prize)

O'Neill's life, his style, his influence on American theatre and his major works. A brief introduction to other playwrights of the period. The evolution of American drama during the 1920's and 1930's.

Reading: One scene from "The Hairy Ape"

Lecture 11184

A Review of the Nineteen Twenties.

Re-examination of the writers as a group; their significance in the history of American Literature.

The Great Crash set the stage for a new type of writing in the 1930's.

Questions and discussion.

Lecture 12197

Three Important Poets of the 1930's.

Robert Frost, a poet of profound simplicity.

Archibald MacLeish, lyrical poet of social conscience.

Langston Hughes, America's foremost Negro poet.

Explanation of poems by these three poets.

Reading: Frost — "The Road Not Taken"

"Fire and Ice"

MacLeish — "Dr. Sigmund Freud Discovers the Sea Shell"

"Burying Ground By The Ties"

Hughes — "Dreams"

"Florida Road Workers"

Lecture 13217

John Steinbeck, spokesman for the oppressed. (Nobel Prize)

Steinbeck's life, his point of view, his literary style, his influence and his major works.

Reading: Excerpt from *The Grapes of Wrath*

Lecture 14238

William Faulkner, innovative stylist, depicter of the South. (Nobel Prize)

Faulkner's life, his subject matter and his point of view, the development of his literary style and his influence, his major works.

Reading: Excerpts from *Sartoris*

Lecture 15260

Katherine Anne Porter, painstaking, subtle stylist.

Porter's life, her literary style and craftsmanship,
her influence and her major works.

Reading: "Theft" (short story)

Part 2 1940 to the present time

Lecture 16281

American Literature after World War II

The events which changed America's way of life, and
their effect on the literature which was produced.

Lecture 17290

Three Post-War Poets:

Theodore Roethke

Randall Jarrell

Robert Lowell

Reading: Roethke — "Weed Puller"

Jarrell — "The Metamorphoses"

Lowell — "Epilogue"

Lecture 18302

Saul Bellow, Nobel Prize winner.

Reading: Excerpt from "The Adventures of Augie March"

Lecture 19320

Norman Mailer, one of the most active, colorful and political post-war writers.

Reading: Excerpts from "The White Negro" and "The Armies Of The Night"

Lecture 20338

J.D. Salinger, spokesman for alienated youth.

Reading: Excerpt from "The Catcher In The Rye"

Lecture 21355

The Beat Generation, a group of wildly unorthodox. San Francisco writers who foreshadowed the upheavals of the 1960's.

Allen Ginsberg

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Jack Kerouac

Reading: Kerouac —Excerpt from "On The Road"
Ginsberg —"In Back Of The Real"
Ferlinghetti —"Pictures Of The Gone World: 2."

Lecture 22372

Two Black Novelists who opened the door for a flood of
widely diverse, energetic Black Literature

Richard Wright

Ralph Ellison

Reading: Wright —Excerpt from “The Ethics Of
Living Jim Crow”

Ellison —Excerpt from “Invisible Man”

Lecture 23387

The Black Revolution, the literature which added fuel to,
and was produced by, the movement which was called
both the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Li-
beration Movement.

James Baldwin

Malcolm X

LeRoi Jones

Reading: Baldwin—Excerpt from “Going To Meet
The Man”

Malcolm X—Excerpt from “The Autobiog-
raphy of Malcolm X”

Jones—“After The Ball”

Lecture 24408

Kurt Vonnegut, visionary satirist who included science

fiction as a tool of satire.

Reading: Excerpt from "Slaughterhouse Five"

Lecture 25428

Three Dominant Playwrights:

Arthur Miller

Tennessee Williams

Edward Albee

Reading: Miller—scene from "Death Of A Salesman"

Lecture 26448

John Updike, novelist of middle class manners in a period of social upheaval.

Reading: Excerpts from short story "Separating"

Lecture 27467

The Southern Writers, mainly women, who wrote in a distinct manner about some of the same subjects as Faulkner.

Flannery O'Connor

Reading: Excerpt from Short story "Greenleaf"

Lecture 28494

The Jewish Writers, northern urban writers, many centered in New York, who used Jewish subjects and Jewish life as a way to view post-war America. The

European background of American Jewish life is best portrayed by Isaac Bashevis Singer, who won the Nobel Prize in 1978.

Reading: Singer: "The Son from America"

Lecture 29515

The Feminist Writers, a new group of serious poets, novelists and essayists, who emerged from the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970's.

Gloria Steinem

Sylvia Plath

Reading: Steinem — "The Verbal Karate of Florynce R. Kennedy, Esq."

Plath—"Words"

Lecture 30534

Types of Humor in Modern American Literature, satire, irony, Jewish humor, black humor, the humor of violence, terror and the absurd, which became widespread in literature after the Second World War.

Reading: Ogden Nash—five short poems.

James Thurber—"The Unicorn In The Garden"

Philip Roth—excerpt from "Goodbye, Columbus"

Joseph Heller—excerpt from "Catch-22"

Kurt Vonnegut—excerpt from "Slaughterhouse Five"

Lecture 1

THE EFFECT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR: A TURNING POINT IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

The First World War (1914—1918), believed by Americans to be "the war to end wars", was the first that America had ever fought on foreign soil and it led to bitter disillusionment. It shocked American intellectuals out of their innocent naivete and optimism. At the same time, the war marked the beginning of America's use of mass production methods and modern technology which altered the life of the whole nation.

The First World War was followed, in America, by two decades which were distinctly different from one another and clearly defined. The first, the "Twenties", lasted from the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 until the Crash at the end of 1929. These ten years were a time of carefree prosperity, isolation from the world's problems, bewildering social change and a feverish pursuit of pleasure. The second decade, the "Thirties", lasted from the Crash, through the ensuing

Great Depression, until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. This was a period of poverty, bleakness, important social movements and a new social consciousness. The twenty years between the two world wars were a time of great literary creativity. Six American writers who did their best and most original work during these years won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

The Twenties brought a rush of new inventions and manufacturing techniques which changed the way people lived. People moved away from the countryside in such numbers that by 1925 half the population of America lived in cities and suburbs. Women won the right to vote and many started to earn their own money. Cars became commonplace and people began to move about among all regions of the country. Radios, movies, an abundance of standardized national products and national advertizing all helped to turn America into a greedily consuming society.

The socialist labor movement almost disappeared in the Twenties after its leaders were imprisoned or deported in the "Red Scare" of 1919. America turned its back on the world; it became absorbed in making money. The middle class frantically pursued individual "success" and personal enjoyment.

Millions of people lived beyond their means while they gambled on the stock market and went into debt.