

ENGLISH 6320: SEMINAR IN AMERICAN ROMANTICISM (CRN 26701)

Spring 2013, 8:00-9:15 am TTh, Irby 310

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Office Hours: 10:00 am-12:00 pm MWF; 11:00 am-12 pm, 2:30-3:30 pm TTh; and by appointment

TEXTS:

The Norton Anthology of American Literature, eighth edition, volume B

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (Oxford)

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick or, The Whale* (Penguin)

(Note: For Hawthorne and Melville, please buy the editions listed, which the student store is carrying, so that we'll all have the same explanatory notes and page numbers for references to the texts during class discussions.)

COURSE FOCUS:

- An understanding of the ideas, as initially articulated by Ralph Waldo Emerson, regarding the connections between spirit, matter, and art in human life, along with the artist's role in society, that characterize what has come to be called the American Romantic movement
- An understanding of the positive and negative responses to Emerson's formulations to be found in the works of the other American Romantics on the course reading list, along with a grasp of the artistic and ideological individuality of each writer
- An understanding of the sources and context of Romantic ideas in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century schools of religious, philosophical, artistic, political, and social thought
- A familiarity with a range of subsequent scholarly assessments of each writer

READING SCHEDULE:

"To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent . . . Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written."—Henry David Thoreau

Weeks 1-3: Introduction to course; Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," "The Poet," "Experience"

Week 4: Margaret Fuller, "The Great Lawsuit"

Weeks 5-6: Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*

Weeks 7-8: Walt Whitman, Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, "Song of Myself,"

Weeks 9-12: Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

Weeks 13-14: Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* **Essay due at the beginning of class April 23 (week 14)**

Thurs., May 2: Final exam—8:00-10:00 am

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Essay: Each student must submit an original essay dealing with one or more of the works that fall within the boundaries of American Romanticism (not limited to the works we cover in class). This essay should be 15-20 pages and must incorporate secondary sources—books and articles—as many as the individual writer deems useful, but no fewer than ten. We'll have much to say as the course progresses concerning various approaches to writing about literature and important secondary sources for each author. Sometime between February 26 and March 14 (or earlier, if you wish) I'll expect you to meet with me to discuss which work(s) you might want to write about and what approach you might want to take, and then sometime between March 26 and April 16 I'll expect you to submit a rough draft that

we can go over together to make sure you're on a productive track. (See me before or after class or call me to make these appointments.) The final draft will be due at the beginning of class on April 23.

The form and documentation techniques you employ in this essay should follow the guidelines specified in the *MLA (Modern Language Association) Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*, which can also be found, in condensed form, in most handbooks used in composition classes, such as the *Holt* and the *Harbrace*. These volumes are available in the library if you don't have a copy of any of them, and they can also be found, in condensed form, at the English Department website link <http://uca.edu/english/mla-formatting/>.

Critical Journals: Each student must keep a journal consisting of one- to two-page summaries of secondary-source articles and book chapters devoted to the works we discuss in class. Two articles/chapters will be required per author; these will be due at the beginning of the second meeting devoted to each author, with the exception of Margaret Fuller; since we're only spending one week on her text, these will be due at the first meeting. I will ask each student to do a brief oral presentation of several of these summaries over the course of the semester, on a schedule to be determined during the first few class meetings.

Post-discussion Journals: After Thursday's class each week, I'll ask you to submit a journal entry by e-mail answering two questions: what ideas that we've discussed this week are clear to you, and which ones aren't clear, requiring further discussion? There's no letter grade for these entries, but they count collectively toward your participation grade. You may submit these at any time after class that's convenient for you, but no later than 4:30 pm on Friday.

Exam: We'll have only a final, which will be comprehensive and will consist of some short-answer objective questions and some longer essay questions. (I'll discuss this exam and its specific make-up in greater detail during the last couple of weeks of class.)

GRADES:

Your final grade will come from the following percentages:

Attendance/Participation:	20%
Journal:	20%
Exam:	30%
Essay:	30%

COURSE EVALUATIONS (in which *you* get to grade *me*): Student evaluations of a course and its professor are a crucial element in helping faculty achieve excellence in the classroom and the institution in demonstrating that students are gaining knowledge. Students may evaluate courses they are taking starting on the Monday of the twelfth week of instruction—Monday, April 1—through the end of finals week by logging in to myUCA and clicking on the Evals button on the top right.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Knowingly presenting someone else's work as your own, whether in an exam, journal, or any other format, constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism carries serious penalties, from failure on a particular assignment to failure for the course. If you ever have any questions on this subject, please feel free to ask me about them, without fear of embarrassment, and/or consult this file for more information:

<http://uca.edu/academicaffairs/files/2012/08/Plagiarism.pdf>

Here is UCA's official policy statement regarding academic integrity: The University of Central Arkansas affirms its commitment to academic integrity and expects all members of the university community to accept shared responsibility for maintaining academic integrity. Students in this course are subject to the provisions of the university's Academic Integrity Policy, approved by the Board of Trustees as Board Policy No. 709 on February 10, 2010, and published in the Student Handbook. Penalties for academic misconduct in this course may include a failing grade on an assignment, a failing grade in the course, or any other course-related sanction the instructor determines to be appropriate. Continued enrollment in this course affirms a student's acceptance of this university policy.

OTHER UNIVERSITY POLICIES: If you have questions about the university's academic policies, guidelines regarding sexual harassment, or any other matters, please consult the relevant sections of the UCA Student Handbook. UCA adheres to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you need an accommodation under this act due to a disability, contact the UCA Office of Disability Services at 450-3135.

Some Critical Approaches to the Study of Literature

The eminent literary critic Louis Menand argues that we have three basic ways of approaching a story: 1) as “an autotelic [having a purpose within itself] verbal construction, a work of art”; 2) as “a participant in the dialogics [the multiple independent voices] of literary history, a commentary on the tradition to which it belongs”; and 3) as “a window on its time, an artifact.” Encompassed within these three basic approaches, a number of methods of reading critically have arisen; the following is a list of some of the most common ones:

Formalist (New Critical)—looks at the work in and of itself, as a self-contained work of art. Looks at the way the author uses formal devices to develop ideas within the text—handling of point of view, setting, character development, patterns of imagery, other linguistic strategies, etc. The assumption here is that a work of art contains stable, objective truth, essentially unaffected by historical or cultural context, that we as readers simply discover. An old approach, supposedly supplanted by the others, but actually, almost all of them employ its basic technique of closely reading and analyzing a text to reach their goals. Produces an appreciation of individual artistry, but lacking context, can ignore author's intention or ignore or misinterpret then-current references.

Literary-historical—assumes that different periods are marked by general assumptions about life and art, seeks to identify how individual works help create and reflect those assumptions. In American Literature, these periods are generally denoted as Rationalism, Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, Modernism, Post-Modernism. This approach helps to make sense of large periods of literature, but it can be restrictive, ignoring works that don't partake of those assumptions.

Psychoanalytic—applies principles of psychology—Freudian, Jungian, Lacanian, etc.—to characters and plots to produce interpretation, e.g., the idea that Hamlet suffers from an Oedipus complex, which is supposedly Shakespeare's displacement of his own Oedipal feelings. Such analysis can be very illuminating and provocative, but psychological theories can be questionable or questionably applied by the critic.

Reader-response—points out that in many ways readers create or at least complete the meaning of a text when they interpret it, undermining the assumption that a text carries a single correct meaning in and of itself. As such, it's the opposite of formalism, with its positing of objective truth to be found in works of art. Questions how much we get strictly from the work itself and how much we supply ourselves as we read it, and by what standards we create that interpretation. Does literature actually exist in the words of the book or in our minds when we read it? For example, critics in different eras have read Hamlets very differently—he was seen as a man of action in the Renaissance, as a man of deep sensitivity in the Romantic era, as Oedipally tormented in the modern Freudian era.

Deconstruction—takes the reader-response argument further, asserting that a text has no meaning until it's interpreted, and that any interpretation is inevitably subjective, a product of its readers' particular cultural assumptions, etc. Argues that any text is a construct, not an organic reality, as is any interpretation; to reveal this fact is to deconstruct it. Thus, this approach values works that call attention to their constructed nature, such as Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, in all of which the author keeps reminding the reader that the characters and story are things the author is consciously creating.

Feminist—seeks to point out ways in which traditionally valued literature reflects male ideology and to find other categories of value by which to appropriately appreciate lit by and about women. Can be very illuminating about societal assumptions and value systems, and has recovered many previously under-appreciated works by women, such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's “The Yellow Wall-paper,” but feminist critics can be as simplistic and dogmatic as their most doctrinaire male counterparts.

New Historical—seeks to place works in the social, historical, cultural context of the period in which they were written as opposed to the period in which they're set—e.g., *The Scarlet Letter* is about sexual and social mores in Nathaniel Hawthorne's own Victorian world rather than about those matters in the Puritan world in which the story takes place. This approach can give very useful contextual readings, but may ignore what's in the text in favor of where the text came from.

Cultural—like New Historicism, looks at the work in relation to the ideology of the culture that produced it, but doesn't limit itself to works of “literature”; it looks at those alongside what are traditionally considered “lower” forms--popular

magazines, pulp fiction, TV shows and commercials, etc. This approach can be very illuminating about societal assumptions underlying works, but it can devalue serious artistry in favor of obviousness, since it's easier to perceive such assumptions in intellectually impoverished forms such as romance novels, soap operas, reality shows, and sitcoms than it is in more complex and challenging novels, poems, and plays.

Queer Theory—looks at depictions of homosexual, lesbian, and heterosexual characters in literature, usually with a view to arguing that such labels are culturally constructed rather than ordained by God or nature. E.g., much has been written in recent years about the precise significance of the homoerotic elements in Shakespeare's sonnets, Walt Whitman's poems, and Herman Melville's novels. Did the cultures that produced those works understand "homosexuality" in the same way as we do in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?

Ecological Criticism—looks at attitudes works of literature express toward the environment. E.g., James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* were long most highly regarded for the character of Natty Bumppo as the archetypal American hero, whereas now they're often most valued for their focus on exploitative versus sustainable development of the American wilderness; Willa Cather's *My Antonia* and *O Pioneers!* have long been highly regarded for their formal virtues and their celebration of the lives of small farmers, whereas now critics frequently point out that the kind of farming Cather's characters are engaged in is highly detrimental to the land. Not surprisingly, contemporary critics have looked more sharply at the environmental impact of whaling than Melville himself seems interested in doing in *Moby-Dick*.

Postcolonial Criticism—considers the ways in which literature has been used, whether directly or indirectly, as a means of repression of native culture by colonizing European powers, and, concomitantly, as a means of resistance by the people being colonized. Compare, for example, what European imperialists say about the people they colonized in a work such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with what the colonized people say about themselves and their masters in a work such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Though originally applied to British colonization of "the other" in Africa and India, Postcolonial studies now encompasses countries in Asia, the Caribbean, North and South America colonized by other European and western countries—France, Spain, the United States.

"If it is not realistic to expect a nonpolitical criticism, one can still wish for and sometimes get a *sophisticated* criticism—one that, while indebted to a certain politics, can balance that concern with a sustained attention to what the artist is saying."—Joan Acocella

For further reading:

Bedford /St. Martin's Critical Casebook and Cultural Editions of many American literary works

Joan Acocella, *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism*

Mysticism The theory that a knowledge of God or immediate reality is attainable by a human faculty that transcends intellect and logic. W. T. Stace finds in all mystical experiences five common characteristics: (1) a sense of objectivity or reality, (2) a sense of peace or blessedness, (3) a feeling of holiness, sacredness, or divinity, (4) a paradoxical quality, and (5) an ineffability. There are two broad types of *mysticism*: in one, God is seen as transcendent, outside the human soul, and union with Him is achieved through a series of steps or stages; in the other, God is immanent, dwelling within the soul and to be discovered by penetrating deeper into the inner self.

The terminology of *mysticism*, because it is forced to be figurative, is often obscure. A conventional statement of the Christian mystic's progress on the path to God is as follows: The soul undergoes a purification (the purgative way), which leads to a sense of illumination in the love of God (the illuminative way), and after a period the soul enters into a union with God (the unitive way), and progresses into a final ecstatic state of perfect knowledge of God (the spiritual marriage), during some period of which there comes a time of alienation and loss in which the soul cannot find God at all (the soul's dark night).

Aspects of *mysticism* and the mystical experience are common in literature, although to call any single writer—with a few exceptions, such as Richard Rolle of Hampole and William Blake—a mystic is to invite a challenge. Clearly, however, there are mystical elements in the work of Crashaw, George Herbert, Bunyan, Cowper, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Carlyle, the New England transcendentalists, Whitman, I. B. Singer, and T. S. Eliot.

--*A Handbook to Literature*, by William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman, eighth edition

To lose yourself, as if you no longer existed, to cease completely to experience yourself, to reduce yourself to nothing is not a human sentiment but a divine experience . . .

It is deifying to go through such an experience. As a drop of water seems to disappear completely in a big quantity of wine, even assuming the wine's taste and color, just as red, molten iron becomes so much like fire it seems to lose its primary state; just as the air on a sunny day seems transformed into a sunshine instead of being lit up; so it is necessary for the saints that all human feelings melt in a mysterious way and flow into the will of God. Otherwise, how will God be all in all if something human survives in man?

--St. Bernard of Clairvaux, 12th-century Christian mystic

"I entered. I lost the boundary of my physical body. I had my skin, of course, but I felt I was standing in the center of the cosmos. I saw people coming toward me, but all were the same man. All were myself. I had never known this world before. I had believed that I was created, but now I must change my opinion: I was never created; I was the cosmos. No individual existed."

--anonymous account of *satori*, the Zen Buddhist mystical state

Once, as I rid out into the woods for my health, *anno* 1737; and having lit from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer; I had a view, that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God; as mediator between God and man. . . . The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent, with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception. Which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me, the bigger part of the time, in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt withal, an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, than to be emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to live upon him; to serve and follow him, and to be totally wrapt up in the fullness of Christ; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity. I have several other times, had views very much of the same nature, and that have had the same effects.

--Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," c. 1740

As long as there are human beings, there will be religion for the sufficient reason that the self is a theomorphic creature—one whose *morphe* (form) is *theos*—God encased within it. Having been created in the *imago Dei*, the image of God, all human beings have a God-shaped vacuum built into their hearts. Since nature abhors a vacuum, people keep trying to fill the one inside them. Searching for an image of the divine that will fit, they paw over various options as if they were pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, matching them successively to the gaping hole at the puzzle's center. They keep doing this until the right "piece" is found. When it slips into place, life's jigsaw puzzle is solved.

How so? Because the sight of the picture that then emerges is so commanding that it swings attention from the self who is viewing the picture to the picture itself. This epiphany, with its attendant ego-reduction, is *salvation* in the West and *enlightenment* in the East. The divine self-forgetfulness it accomplishes amounts to graduating from the human condition."

--Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters*

Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture* (1986): "Transcendentalism, in fact, really began as a religious movement, an attempt to substitute a Romanticized version of the mystical ideal that humankind is capable of direct experience of the holy for the Unitarian rationalist view that the truths of religion are arrived at by a process of empirical study and by rational inference from historical and natural evidence" (46).

Donna Campbell: "American transcendentalism . . . began as a reform movement in the Unitarian church, extending the views of William Ellery Channing on an indwelling God and the significance of intuitive thought. It was based on 'a monism holding to the unity of the world and God, and the immanence of God in the world' (*Oxford Companion to American Literature* 770). For the transcendentalists, the soul of each individual is identical with the soul of the world and contains what the world contains. Transcendentalists rejected Lockean empiricism, unlike the Unitarians: they wanted to rejuvenate the mystical aspects of New England Calvinism (although none of its dogma) and to go back to Jonathan Edwards' 'divine and supernatural light,' imparted immediately to the soul by the spirit of God."

Orestes Brownson (1803-76) accuses Emerson of "transcendental selfishness": "Are all things in the universe to be held subordinate to the individual soul? Shall a man take himself as the center of the universe, and say all things are for his use, and count them of value only as they contribute something to his growth or well-being?" According to this system, "I am everything; all else is nothing, at least nothing except what it derives from the fact that it is something to me."

Epistemology

Rene Descartes (1596-1650)—*Discourse on Method* (1637), *Meditations* (1642)

Cogito, ergo sum.

Cartesian dualism

John Locke (1632-1704)—*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)

David Hume (1711-1776)—*Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (1748)

Rationalism

tabula rasa

Aristotleanism

Platonism and Neoplatonism

Important Platonic doctrines found in Romantic literature:

(1) The doctrine of ideas (or “forms”). True reality is found not in the mutable [constantly changing] realm of sense but in the higher, spiritual realm of the ideal and universal. Here exist the “ideas” or images or patterns of which material objects are only the transitory symbols or expressions.

(2) The doctrine of recollection, which implies the preexistence and immortality of the soul, which passes through a series of incarnations. Most of what the soul has seen and learned in “heaven” it forgets when imprisoned in the body, but it has some power of recalling ideas and images, hence human knowledge.

--*A Handbook to Literature*, by William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman, eighth edition

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)—*Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), *Critique of Judgment* (1790)

Categorical Imperative

German Idealists:

Jakob Friedrich Fries

Friedrich von Schelling

Friedrich Schleiermacher

Wilhelm de Wette: “Just as sensations give us immediate knowledge of the world, so there is an inward sense—a rational intuition—a spiritual faculty—by which we have a direct and immediate revelation of supersensual things” such as God, freedom, and immortality. —As translated by J. D. Morell, quoted in Philip Gura, *American Transcendentalism* (2007)

Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772)

Jonathan Edwards (1703-58)—“A Divine and Supernatural Light” (1733), “Images or Shadows of Divine Things”

Unitarianism—William Ellery Channing (1780-1842)

William Henry Channing (1810-1884): “Transcendentalism, as viewed by its disciples, was a pilgrimage from the idolatrous world of creeds and rituals to the temple of the Living God in the soul. It was a putting to silence of tradition and formulas, that the Sacred Oracle might be heard through intuitions of the single-eyed and pure-hearted. Amidst

materialists, zealots, and skeptics, the Transcendentalist believed in perpetual inspiration, the miraculous power of will, and a birthright to universal good. He sought to hold communion face to face with the unnameable Spirit of his spirit, and gave himself up to the embrace of nature's perfect joy, as a babe seeks the breast of a mother."