

American Literature of the Nineteenth Century

ENGL 256

Spring 2010

Meeting: MW 8:30-9:45 in Root 205

Michael Garcia
304 Root Hall
Phone: 859-4612
Office Hours: MW 9:45-11:15

Course Description from the Registration Catalog

Survey of representative literary texts in their historical, social, and aesthetic contexts. Attention to issues of access to the literary market and the cultural work of literature, particularly in figuring the rise of a distinctly American tradition. Readings from such writers as Cooper, Poe, Emerson, Whitman, Hawthorne, Melville, Douglass, Dickinson, Clemens, and James. Prerequisite, a 100-level course in English or equivalent. Not open to students who have taken 257. Not open to seniors except with permission of the department.

Expanded Course Description

This course is a survey of representative literary texts in their social, historical, and aesthetic contexts. These contexts are particularly important in a course about nineteenth-century American literature and so, whenever they are provided, you should read the head notes that precede the assigned text. The past is another country—American culture of the nineteenth-century is in many ways quite foreign to us now. To explore texts from an earlier century, we have to start by striving to see past our modern-day biases and assumptions. That is not to say that we can ever fully understand or recreate the historical context in which a text was produced. But it helps to shift our point-of-view in that general direction when approaching these texts. Nor should trying to learn something about that historical context lead us to ignoring the language of the text itself. On the contrary, as we move back in time it becomes even more important that we also pay particular attention to the formal aspects of texts.

While paying due respect to the differences between nineteenth-century America and our own world will require some effort at times, you may find the similarities between the two worlds striking. You will readily recognize some intimately familiar American themes in these readings—values and sentiments deeply embedded in the American psyche. Indeed, it was during the nineteenth-century that an American Literature first came into its own as a national literature. One critic dubbed the American Renaissance the “age of the first-person singular.” Not surprisingly, Individualism is one of the quintessential American themes. Other themes and topics that we will explore in this class include Race, Class, Gender, Slavery, and Regional Differences.

Course Objectives

In this course you will:

- Gain familiarity with key texts and themes in nineteenth-century American Literature.
- Challenge monolithic expectations about American Literature and society.

Read texts closely.

Consider the multiple levels of context in which words and texts are meaningful.

Improve critical thinking and writing skills.

In this course you will refine your writing skills. Strive to:

Read all writing closely, including as the toughest reader of your own work.

Develop a clear, precise, and well-defined thesis statement.

Develop and support your thesis with evidence and persuasive reasoning.

Subordinate additional ideas and commentary to your main argument.

Structure your paragraphs optimally with clear and smooth transitions.

Appreciate the nuances of diction.

Mind the mechanics and grammar of formal written English.

Revise as re-vision—writing as a process of discovery and critical thinking.

Course Requirements and Grading Breakdown

Paper 1 (4-5pp.)	10%
Oral Presentations (15 min.)	15%
Paper 2 (8-10pp.)	20%
Final Paper (Paper 3) (8-10pp)	30%
Class participation, pop quizzes, attendance, and in-class assignments	25%

Required Texts

Gardner, Janet E. *Writing about Literature: A Portable Guide*. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2009. ISBN: 9780312474997.

Strunk, William and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999. ISBN: 020530902X.

Weston, Anthony. *A Rulebook for Arguments*. 4th edition. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2009. ISBN: 9780872209541.

Baym, Nina. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol. B*. 7th ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2007. ISBN: 9780393927405 (vol. B)

James, Henry. *The Turn of the Screw* (Norton Critical Edition). 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 1999 [1898]. ISBN: 039395904X.

Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Norton Critical Edition). 3rd ed. New York: Norton, 1999 [1885]. ISBN: 0393966402.

Recommended Texts

Abrams, M. H. and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 9th ed. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009. ISBN: 9781413033908.

Lunsford, Andrea A., Paul Kei Matsuda, and Christine M. Tardy. *The Everyday Writer*. 4th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009. ISBN: 9780312594572 (plastic comb).

A Note on Text Editions

You must purchase all Required Texts for the course. Unfortunately, I cannot allow anyone to use (exclusively) an online version of any course text. (The principle difficulty is that this leaves you without an identically paginated—to the edition that the rest of the class is

using—copy of the text with which to follow along in class. What’s more, it inhibits your engagement with the text if you are unable to write in the margins as you read the text.) For the same reason do try to purchase the particular edition of each text that I have indicated above — the alternate page numbering alone of another edition can impair your ability to follow along and fully participate in class discussion. That said, if you have an alternate edition of the text, bringing it as a supplement to the edition that we are using in the class is a great idea and can greatly enrich our discussion of the text.

Books and Films on Course Reserve

I have placed the following texts on two-hour reserve at the Daniel Burke Library. You will find the titles on this course reserve list helpful for improving your writing and critical thinking skills.

Writing Books:

Writing without Teachers by Peter Elbow. 1998.

They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein

Films on Reserve at the Media Library:

Scarlet Letter (FFH 1991) PS1868 .A1 1979r

Scarlet Letter (1984) PN1997 .S29 1934r

Amistad (1995) E447 .A586 1995

Electronic Course Reserves

Over the course of the semester I may place new materials on electronic course reserve through the campus library. These materials will be required reading. Whenever an electronic reserve reading—indicated by the abbreviation (E)—appears on the Course Schedule of readings, print it out and bring it with you so that you can follow along in class when we discuss the reading.

Course Website

No course website is available at this time. If one is made available later in the semester, you will be given instructions on how to enroll in the site.

Paper Formatting

All assignments handed in are to be in 12 point font, double-spaced, and paginated. As should go without saying, use normal margins. In the upper left-hand corner should appear, single-spaced, your name, the course number, and the date—each having its own line. Each paper should have a title. Center the title so that it will stand out better.

Use as your guide the model MLA-formatted student paper on page 138-42 of the Gardner booklet or in the “MLA Documentation” section of Lunsford’s *The Everyday Writer*. These model papers clearly demonstrate everything from the upper left-hand corner layout to what the bibliography should look like. They also demonstrate such principles as organization of the paper and the method and style of writing literary criticism.

Buy a stapler. Any paper that you hand in should be stapled together in the upper left-hand corner. Unstapled sheets get lost, and this may cause me to assume that you have only written half a paper.

Use MLA style citation: (<http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/printsources.html>). MLA style is compatible with the Hamilton College Style Sheet, which provides additional, indispensable information: (<http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/style>). All papers must have a Works Cited.

Assignments must be handed in *in class* on the day that they are due. Late assignments lose one letter grade for each day that they are late. Keep copies of all your work.

Expect work you submit to be shared with other class members for peer editing, group projects, and/or class discussion. Student papers might also be shown to other instructors, writing advisors, and the like. I will ask your permission first if using your work as a model paper to show students in other courses.

A word about content: your paper should offer your own unique ideas, insights, and arguments. Don't just repeat what we discussed in class. You can start with a topic that we discussed in class but your thesis must be your own. It should present the reader with *your* argument. This is one of the key differences between class discussion (or even different types of writing, such as reading responses or pre-discussion notes) and the writing of a formal paper. Good class discussions are those in which everyone engages with what their fellow classmates have said in class. In a formal paper, the way to engage with the larger scholarly and other conversations about the text is through citation. In class discussion our ideas often merge together. In a formal paper, particularly of literary criticism, written sources are usually privileged over oral ones. Generally, you will want to err on the side of caution by citing any sources that have directly influenced your own thinking. But bear in mind that in the MLA style only works that are quoted from or directly referred to in citation form should be included in the Works Cited (as opposed to a Bibliography) at the end of the paper.

In your formal papers you will want to cite and interpret primarily passages from the literary text that you are writing about, and secondarily from sources such as academic journals in the field. Thus, the most compelling—not to mention most original—papers tend to explore topics and themes beyond those covered in class. That said, bear in mind that in this class you will always be writing about a particular literary text, and this will impose some natural boundaries on the both the scope of the paper and your choice of paper topic.

As experienced writers, you already know that the secret to writing success is to start early. If you wait until the night before a paper is due before committing anything to paper, it will invariably not be a very good paper. Also know that you do not have to wait until we finish discussing a text in class before you can start writing about it. Rather than relying on class lecture for your ideas, read the text on your own and start writing about it early. You can then use class discussion of the text as a tool to refine your thinking about what you have already written in drafts of your paper.

Oral Presentations

On the second day of class you will sign up for a date on which to give your oral presentation. Your presentation topic will be on whatever reading is assigned for that day in the course reading schedule. The presentation should last 10-15 minutes, ultimately leading into class discussion. Your presentation should present the class with historical, biographical, and other contextual information that will inform our reading of the text. Your preparation for the

oral presentation will thus require some outside research. A computer will be available in class for your use during presentations. Some presenters opt to use a PowerPoint slide show as a visual aid during their presentation. This allows the presenter to show the class helpful historical documents, images, and the like. Some presenters also use the classroom computer for projecting an outline of their presentation for the entire class to see. But if you prefer to memorize your presentation or to conduct it from prepared handwritten notes, feel free to do that instead. You will also engage directly with the primary text, with the larger aim of leading us into a class discussion of the text. One way to do this is through offering some discussion questions that we can engage with as a class. Additional information on oral presentations will be provided in class.

A Note on Evaluation

It is sometimes assumed that merely fulfilling the requirements for the course, or a particular assignment, merits a default grade of A. This is not the case. Simply fulfilling the minimum requirements for a paper or the course is likely to get you an average grade, which would be in the C range. Higher grades are based on the exceptional quality of your work. I also reward the development of your thought and writing whenever this is apparent. Papers that offer particularly unique, compelling, or insightful arguments are almost certain to earn higher grades than most, as are papers that evince an exceptional degree of research and thought.

Do NOT think of a grade of B or C (or whatever) as having been derived by the “deducting” of points from what “began”—by virtue of merely having been handed in—as an A. The “point deduction” model may apply to a multiple choice test in, say, an introductory physics course, but it is not how writing is evaluated in most humanities courses. You might find the following breakdown helpful in orienting your expectations about what letter grades represent on all assignments in this course:

A—excellent overall

B—good with some excellent aspects

C—adequate

D—mostly adequate with some unacceptable aspects

F—unacceptable overall

Class Participation

This is a reading, writing, and discussion course, not a lecture course. Come to class prepared to talk about the text. Read the text closely, engaging in mock dialogue with the text as you read. Do so and you will always come to class brimming with questions, observations, and arguments about the reading to share with the community of literary critics, readers, and writers that the class will provide.

Note that the model of class discussion that we are striving for is one in which you engage not only with the readings, but also with each other’s ideas. Keep in mind that mere volubility is no substitute for apt, substantive, and well thought-out comments. In fact, since there is seldom enough time to do justice to each text or topic, brevity is often as important as clarity and precision whenever speaking to the rest of the class. That said, most students speak too little rather than too much. What we will strive for in this course is vibrant and robust class discussion in which everyone is fully engaged and participating.

I may occasionally require that you write 150-200 word pre-discussion notes to hand in before class. Or I may ask you to bring to class one or two discussion questions about the

reading. In-class writing (such as impromptu reading responses or group projects) might also be assigned. And sometimes you may be asked to prepare a brief presentation (either for later in the class, or for a subsequent class), either individually or in small groups.

Pop quizzes may be given at any time. As long as you have read the text the quiz will be easy. Any detailed questions that I might ask will be readily answerable if you have read the text carefully. If, on the other hand, you are relying on Spark Notes, a website summary, the film version of the book, or someone else telling you the plot—instead of reading the text for yourself—you can expect to find the questions well beyond your grasp.

As a discussion course, attendance is critical. The first two absences will not be counted against you but all subsequent absences will negatively impact your grade in the course. The **two free absences should** easily cover medical, family, or other emergencies in most cases, so there is no need to present the instructor with a medical note for absences. In the event of an extended absence due to illness, a family emergency, or the like, you should notify the Registrar's Office, which will in turn notify all of your professors about your situation. *Missing a total (cumulative, not just consecutive) of **three weeks** or more of class constitutes a failing grade in the course.* All students are responsible for announcements made in class as well as material covered in class. So if an absence is unavoidable, make arrangements with another student to find out what you missed in class.

Tardiness and leaving class early are disruptive to your fellow students. Realize that either may be counted as a full absence, particularly if the problem becomes excessive over the course of the semester. If you absolutely cannot complete the class without leaving for a drink of water, to use the restroom, or whatever, I only ask one thing of you: don't re-enter the classroom. Instead, in consideration of your fellow students, quietly collect all of your things and take them with you when you leave. This will likely be counted as an absence.

As a discussion class, open laptops are not allowed. Cell phones should be silenced and put away before class and may be confiscated for the duration of the class if used (including for texting) during class.

Office Hours and Email

I'd much rather see you and get to know you in person than as an email. As such, I encourage you to take full advantage of my office hours, whether for simple queries or more substantive questions and discussion. Email is a poor substitute for live interactions, which are both more fun and more productive. (And of the two, only office hours are appropriate for discussing paper ideas and thesis statements.) Feel free to drop by without an appointment anytime during scheduled office hours.

Documentation and Plagiarism

Obvious cases of academic misconduct such as plagiarism, cheating, or collusion constitute violations of the Hamilton Honor Code. In such cases the student will be referred to the Dean of Students.

A few words about plagiarism and documentation might be instructive. Though there are gray areas as to when one should cite and when a paraphrase is adequate, we all recognize blatant plagiarism when we see it. As for the gray areas, cite your sources. That is the simplest advice I can give you, and the hallmark of scholarly work. We all stand on the shoulders of giants; we all benefit from the ideas of others. Many of our best ideas are common knowledge, societally and globally shared. It is hard to imagine an idea that does not owe something to

someone else's brilliant thoughts too. A class like this is partly about finding your own voice. When you write about the great ideas that others have undoubtedly thought before you, you should do so in your unique voice. If your great idea (or your agreement with some great idea, or the realization that somebody else has stolen your idea before you even thought of it) was inspired by a passage in a book you just read two days ago you will have to be more mindful of your wording. Your thinking and writing should be your own: make sure it hasn't been supplanted by the thought and phrasing of the book's author. **When in doubt, cite.** If your paraphrase is not clearly in your own words and voice—perhaps because the kernel of truth you wish to glean gets lost as you deviate from the original wording—then cite your source.

Documentation is particularly important when using online sources. Academic journals accessed online need to be cited. Ideas taken from other online sources also need to be cited. As information available online ranges so widely from the reliable to the utterly unreliable, it is particularly important that you offer complete transparency as to your online sources. In addition to duly crediting your sources, proper documentation allows readers to evaluate the strength and reliability of the evidence that you are providing. Papers that rely excessively on superficial web searches (such as simply paraphrasing websites that come up on a Google Search) are likely to receive a very low grade. Papers that engage in such shoddy scholarship without citing their sources are even more at risk.

Writing Center and Writing Resources

The Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center is an academic support service available to all Hamilton College students. The Writing Center is an indispensable resource whenever writing papers for this course. In addition to a library of helpful writing books, the Writing Center offers one-on-one assistance with writing. Check their website (<http://www.hamilton.edu/writing>) for hours, policies, and contact information. I also encourage you to take advantage of the extensive writing resources available through the Writing Center website. Here is one good starting point: (http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/tips_guides.html).

Another indispensable resource is the Hamilton College Library. In addition to print resources, many literary resources are available online. To explore some of these, click on “Academic Search Premier” or “LexisNexis Academic” from the library's homepage (<http://onthehill.hamilton.edu/library/home.html>).

Special Accommodations

If you have a documented disability requiring academic adjustments or accommodations please bring me your documentation and speak with me during the first two weeks of class.

Course Schedule

The date that an item appears on the syllabus is the date that it is **due in class**. *Email submissions are not accepted without the prior approval of the instructor*, which will only be granted in extenuating circumstances. Readings are sometimes referred to by their title, and sometimes just by author name. “(E)” designates readings on electronic course reserve through the library. Otherwise—with the exception of the Gardner, Weston, Twain, and James texts—all readings are in the *Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol. B*.

Lengthier readings will be spread out over several days but informed class discussion requires familiarity with the entire text from the first day that it appears on the syllabus. The syllabus sometimes indicates when we will be focusing class discussion on a particular section of

text. I may periodically announce in class a chapter or section to pay particular attention to for the next class. As you have probably already discovered in your college careers, staying ahead of the readings is much more productive and less stressful than falling behind on them.

Week 1 COURSE INTRO: WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE

- 1/18 Introduction; “Student Questionnaire” (E)
 1/20 Cooper: from *Last of the Mohicans* (1826); Apess: “An Indian’s Looking Glass for the White Man” (1833) (pp. 1003-9; 1051-58); Gardner chapters 1-2; **Quiz on Syllabus Sign-up** for a date to give your Oral Presentation.

Week 2 SELF-RELIANCE

- 1/25 Emerson: “American Scholar” (1837), “The Divinity School Address” (1838) (pp. 1138-63); Gardner chapters 3-4
 1/27 Emerson: “Self Reliance” (1841) (pp. 1163-80); Weston pp. 1-7, 59-79;
 (E): “Self-Evaluation,” “Instructor’s Symbols and Abbreviations on Essays,” “Symbols for Common Errors” (Baker), “Checklist” (Baker, inside cover), “Academic Standards for Analytical and Evaluative Writing.”
Oral Presentation and Class Discussion

Week 3 AMERICAN PURITANISM

- 2/1 **Paper 1 due** (4pp literary criticism on Emerson’s “Self Reliance”)
 Hawthorne: “Young Goodman Brown” (1835) (pp. 1289-98)
 2/3 Hawthorne: *Scarlet Letter* (1850) (pp.1352-1399)
Oral Presentation and Class Discussion

Week 4

- 2/8 *Scarlet Letter* (pp.1399-1453); Sowards (E)
 2/10 *Scarlet Letter* (pp.1454-1493)
Oral Presentation and Class Discussion

Week 5 AMERICAN GOTHIC

- 2/15 Poe: “Sonnet to Science” (1829, 1845), “To Helen” (1831, 1845), “The Raven” (1845), “Annabel Lee” (1849) Philosophy of Composition” (1846), “Poetic Principle” (1850), (pp. 1532-33; 1536-39; 1542-43; 1617-26)
 2/17 Poe: “Tell-tale Heart” (1843), “Purloined Letter” (1844), “Cask of Amontillado” (1846) (pp. 1589-92; 1599-1616)
Oral Presentation and Class Discussion

Week 6 AMERICAN SLAVERY

- 2/22 Douglass: *Narrative of the Life* (1845); Fuller: “Review of Narrative of the Life” (1845) (pp. 2060-97; 1673-74)
 2/24 *Narrative of the Life* (pp. 2097-2129)
Oral Presentation and Class Discussion

Week 7

- 3/1 Jacobs: from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) (pp. 1808-29);
 “Ten Keys to a Clear and Graceful Style” (E).
 3/3 Thoreau: “Resistance to Civil Government” (1849, 1866) (pp. 1853-72);
 “Mid-Semester Check-Up” (E).

Oral Presentation and Class Discussion

Week 8 MELVILLE ON RACE AND CLASS IN AMERICA

- 3/8 Melville: “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (1853) (pp. 2363-89)
 3/10 **Paper 2 due** (8-10pp. literary criticism of one of the following literary texts: *The Scarlet Letter*, one of the Poe short stories, or *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.
 Melville: “Benito Cereno” (1855) (pp. 2405-61)

Oral Presentation and Class Discussion

Week (Break)

- 3/15 SPRING BREAK. No class.
 3/17 SPRING BREAK. No class.

Week (Break)

- 3/22 SPRING BREAK. No class.
 3/24 SPRING BREAK. No class.

Week 9 SELF AND SOCIETY

- 3/29 Melville: from *Moby-Dick* (1851) (pp. 2320-2363)
 3/31 Whitman: *Song of Myself* (1855, 1881) (pp.2210-27)

Oral Presentation and Class Discussion

Week 10

- 4/5 Whitman: *Song of Myself* (pp. 2227-54)
 4/7 Whitman: “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (1856, 1881), “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” (1859, 1881), “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer” (1865), “Live Oak, with Moss” (1858-59), (pp. 2263-72; 2274; 2296-2300)

Oral Presentation and Class Discussion

Week 11 DICKINSON AND GENDER

- 4/12 Dickinson: 112, 122, 123, 124, 202, 225, 236, 259, 260, 269, 279 (1859-64) (pp. 2254-65)
 4/14 Dickinson: 320, 339, 340, 365, 372, 373, 407, 409, 446, 448, 466, 479, 576, 588, 591, 598, 1096, 1263, 1668, 1773 (pp. 2567-80; 2588-94)

Oral Presentation and Class Discussion

Week 12 RACE IN AMERICA

- 4/19 Twain: *Huckleberry Finn* (1885) (pp. 1-95)
 4/21 Twain: *Huckleberry Finn* (pp. 96-218)

Oral Presentation and Class Discussion

Week 13 THE TURN INWARD
 4/26 Twain: *Huckleberry Finn* (pp. 219-296)
 4/28 James: *Turn of the Screw* (1898) (pp. 1-43)
 Oral Presentation and Class Discussion

Week 14
 5/3 James: *Turn of the Screw* (1898) (pp. 43-85)
 5/5 Film: *The Scarlet Letter* (1991)

Final Exam Date (**check exam schedule**):

Final Paper (Paper 3) Due (8-10pp. literary criticism, topic of your choice, on any one of the following texts: Whitman’s poetry, Dickinson’s poetry, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, or *The Turn of the Screw*. The Final Paper is due on the day—and at the beginning of the scheduled hour—of the final exam. The Final Paper can be thought of as a “take home final exam.” Check the Registrar’s schedule for final exam date, time, and location.)