ENG 1092-097: Composition & Literature, Honors

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REQUIRED MATERIALS:

TEXTS:
Emily Dickinson, *Complete Poems.*

OTHER:
Electronic media to preserve your drafts (either floppy disks or flash drive)
An EIU e-mail address; the ability to send and receive Microsoft Word attachments; the ability to download, read, and print PDF files.

COURSE TRAJECTORIES AND GOALS:

English 1092 is a class intended to help you grow as a writer and a thinker by providing you the opportunity to work in a sustained, focused way with creative literature. This semester, we will focus upon two poets now considered central to the American literary tradition: Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman. Though they lived during the same era, Dickinson and Whitman appear in many ways to have been very different sorts of people. Dickinson lived her life in the remote township of Amherst, Massachusetts and came out of a conservative religious tradition. She never married, and though she wrote over 1775 poems during her lifetime, she only saw eleven into publication, and she died in obscurity. Whitman was born in New Jersey, was a flamboyant self-promoter who considered himself the poetic bard of his nation, and by the end of his life, was nationally-known for his writing.

While we get to know these two writers in a loose, wide-ranging way, we will also become very familiar with their state of mind—and also the state of their culture—during two signal years. For Whitman, the key moment is 1855, the year he made his public debut with the publication of his first edition of *Leaves of Grass,* the volume that gained him not only notoriety as a kind of bohemian (Dickinson found him so shameful she pretended not to have read him) but also respect as a radically creative new poetic voice (after reading the 1855 edition, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in a letter to Whitman, "I greet you at the beginning of a brilliant career."). For Dickinson, the year of note would be 1862, during which her poetic production suddenly mushroomed: during this year, for some reason, Dickinson wrote 366 poems, more than a poem a day. There would be no Emersons to take note of what Dickinson was accomplishing in her writing, because she kept it to herself, and after the year was over, her writing tapered off to more modest level. Over the course of our study of Dickinson, we will try to discover what prompted this enormous—indeed, apparently obsessive—literary output. We'll also try to understand this intensely private woman as someone who was nevertheless engaged with the public sphere.

In 1855, the United States was fast approaching the political deadlock that would result in the secession of eleven Southern states. In 1862, the country was embroiled in the Civil War, and this would be the year when everyone realized the war would be much bloodier than had been expected. Dickinson and Whitman would each respond in their own way to what Lincoln called the crisis of the "House Divided," and we will learn much this semester about the political causes and ramifications of the war itself. Working together, we will also learn a lot about what was going on in the American mind in 1855 and 1862, and what we learn will help us to draw conclusions—and write compelling essays—about Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman. Thus, this course will equip you to carry out advanced research in American literature and culture while also helping you to develop the skills of synthesis, organization, and
exposition that are the credentials of every successful university-level writer. Along the way, we will get to know two of the most extraordinary people who ever lived.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

**Participation:** Everyone in this course is an honors student; therefore, in addition to keeping apace with the assigned readings, homework exercises, and writing projects, students should come to class prepared to participate. This means that you should come to class with questions to ask each other, ideas to present, texts to read aloud, and observations to make, and it also means that you should be courteous to every other member of the class as they offer their own ideas and questions. It also means that when we workshop each other’s writing, you must be an active, courteous, and helpful reader and editor.

Note, however, that “participation” does not mean merely talking a lot. In order to participate, you do have to speak frequently (say, at least once every class meeting), but you also have to do so in a way that demonstrates active and creative engagement with the course materials. Idle talk—the kind of talk that simply does not indicate such engagement—does not help move our discussions forward and hence does not qualify as participation.

**This is a writing-centered course.** While much of our activity in this course will involve reading and then trading ideas concerning those readings, our primary activity this semester will be writing. Outside of class, you will be asked to complete drafts of your essay projects for other class members to read and then (constructively) critique, and our time in class will sometimes be conducted as writing workshops. I will only sometimes lecture, though I will often promote discussion. This is because as a professional writer, I believe that writers develop their craft by writing. The more time we commit to actually writing, and the more time we commit to discussing that writing with other writers, the more we will develop and hone our individual talents and perspectives.

Four major assignments will determine the bulk of your grade this semester. The due dates for the final drafts of three essay assignments appear on the course syllabus, as do the due dates for preliminary drafts. An in-class presentation will also factor into your grade, which I will determine at the end of the semester using this formula:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay #1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay #2</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay #3</td>
<td>25%</td>
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</tbody>
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In-class presentations will be given by one or two class members and will focus upon an historical context that may prove useful as we attempt to unpack meaning from Dickinson’s and Whitman’s poetry. These presentations should strive to do two things: (1) they should educate the class about the issues, events, and ideas connected with the presentation topic, and (2) they should hazard some hypothesis or set of hypotheses concerning the connection between Dickinson or Whitman’s writing and the presentation’s subject matter. Handouts with bibliographies should accompany these presentations, so that class members can leave with useful notes and a guide for further research. When one student makes a presentation alone, it should last about 15 minutes. When two students make the presentation together, it should last about 25 minutes.

Our three essays will connect the poetry we read with the historical circumstances of its production in order to forward a thesis-driven argument about that poetry. The first essay will be approximately six
pages long, will focus upon Whitman and is due on February 16 (a preliminary draft will be due on February 2). The second essay will also be about six pages long, will focus upon Dickinson, and will be due on March 30 (with a preliminary draft due on March 9). The last essay will ask you to develop a statement about both poets, and to call upon secondary scholarship as you do so. That essay will be due on the last day of class, April 27, and will be about eight-ten pages long.

COURSE POLICIES:

**Academic Honesty:** Please note the English Department's statement on plagiarism (that is, the intentional or unintentional use of another writer's intellectual property without proper acknowledgment):

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism — "The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's own original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language) — has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments, of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, feel free to ask me. Also, please make a point of noting the following: I will not tolerate any form of academic dishonesty in this course. If I come to suspect misconduct of any kind, I will become dogged about rooting it out, and if my suspicions are confirmed, I will dispense appropriate penalties. That said, let's not allow this to become an issue for any members of our class.

**Attendance:** I'll be taking it for each class, and with three absences, students will be considered overcut. Overcutting may result in the reduction of the final course grade by a grade or more, depending upon frequency. In the case of an excused absence (as defined by EIU university-wide policy), your excuse must be made in writing, accompanied by the appropriate documentation, and given to me no later than the first class meeting following the absence. In no case may a student accumulate more than five absences, either excused or unexcused, and still pass the course — if illness or other extenuating circumstances cause you to miss more than five classes, you should petition for a withdrawal.

Another word related to attendance: I ask that students who have not read assigned materials on the day they are to be discussed not bother coming. Such students cannot contribute anything valuable to the discussion, and in any case it is dishonest for them to benefit from the efforts of others by listening in on their conversations. Always read the assigned materials carefully, but if for some reason you have not, don't bother showing up.

Students who habitually show up for class a few minutes after it's started should find a professor who's into that and take their course instead. This professor is insulted by it and reacts badly.

**Due Dates:** Papers and drafts are due on the dates indicated in the course schedule included below. I am *sometimes* willing to grant extensions if (1) students provide a persuasive reason for me to do so, and (2) the request is submitted in writing at least two class meetings in advance of the paper's due date.

**Lastly:** You are not welcome to e-mail me while you are a student in this course. When you have a question, problem, or concern, I want to sit down with you and talk for as long as you need. That's why I keep office hours. I also want to talk with you about interesting ideas you have this semester, just as I want to talk with you — personally — about the readings we take on and research we do. But too many
students these days use e-mail as a way to avoid their professors, a practice I resist obstinately. When you need to communicate with me, attend my office hours, make an appointment for an alternative time, call me at my office (581.6302), or if it's very important and the other avenues have not worked, call me at home (348.6144). We'll talk.

Course Schedule:
(May be altered as semester continues)

Week 1 (class meets in Coleman 3130)

January 10: Introductions; course overview

January 12: Walt Whitman, Introduction to *Leaves of Grass*, pp. 5-27
            *Leaves of Grass* cantos 1-6, pp. 28-34

Week 2 (class meets in Coleman 3120)

January 17: *Leaves of Grass*, cantos 7-52, pp. 34-96

            *Leaves of Grass*, "To Think of Time," pp. 109-116

Week 3 (Coleman 3130)

            Presentation: Walt Whitman's biography

January 26: no class meeting

Week 4 (Coleman 3120)

            Presentation: Presidential History of the 1850s: Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, James Buchanan

February 2: *Leaves of Grass*, "Faces," 137-141
            *Leaves of Grass*, "Song of the Answerer," pp. 142-145
            Presentation: Manifest Destiny: The Mexican/American War, the Wilmot Proviso, the Free Soil Party
            MID-PROCESS DRAFT OF ESSAY #1 DUE, beginning of class
Week 5 (Coleman 3130)

February 7: *Leaves of Grass*, "Europe: The 72d and 73d Years of these States," pp. 146-147
Presentation: American Transcendentalism

*Leaves of Grass*, "Who Learns My Lesson Complete?" pp. 154-155
Presentation: Visual culture of the 1850s: Landscape painting, the Luminists, panorama

Week 6 (Coleman 3120)

February 14: *Leaves of Grass*, "Great Are the Myths," pp. 156-160
Presentation: The review history of *Leaves of Grass*: 1855-56

February 16: FINAL COPY OF ESSAY #1 DUE, beginning of class

Week 7 (Coleman 3130)

February 21: Emily Dickinson, *Complete Poems*, read all the poems from 1862

February 23: Discussion of Dickinson poems

Week 8 (Coleman 3120)

February 28: Discussion of Dickinson poems
Presentation: Emily Dickinson's biography

March 2: Discussion of Dickinson poems
Presentation: Congregationalism in the Nineteenth Century

Week 9 (Coleman 3130)

March 7: Discussion of Dickinson poems
Presentation: Civil War: Military History of 1862

March 9: Discussion of Dickinson poems
Presentation: Civil War Photography
MID-PROCESS DRAFT OF ESSAY #2 DUE, beginning of class

March 14-16: SPRING BREAK

Week 11 (Coleman 3120)

March 21: Discussion of Dickinson poems
March 23: Discussion of Dickinson poems

March 28: Discussion of Dickinson poems

March 30: FINAL COPY OF ESSAY #2 DUE, beginning of class

Week 12 (Coleman 3130)

April 4: In-class writing workshop: Dickinson and Whitman

April 6: In-class writing workshop: Dickinson and Whitman

Week 13 (Coleman 3120)

April 11: In-class writing workshop: working with secondary sources

April 13: In-class writing workshop: working with secondary sources

Week 14 (Coleman 3120)

April 18: No class meeting—conferences in my office

April 20: No class meeting—conferences in my office

Week 15 (Coleman 3130)

April 25: In-class revision workshop

April 27: FINAL COPY OF ESSAY #3 due, beginning of class