Spring 1-15-2002

ENG 3701-001: American Romanticism

Christopher Hanlon
Eastern Illinois University

Follow this and additional works at: http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_spring2002
Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_spring2002/93

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the 2002 at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spring 2002 by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

The pre-Civil War decades, dubbed by F. O. Matthiessen the "American Renaissance," have long been recognized as the most transformative in American literary history, the period that produced Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Whitman, Dickinson, Poe, and Melville. The antebellum period was the site on which American Romanticism took root, finally blossoming with Thoreau's Walden, Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, Melville's Moby Dick, Whitman's Leaves of Grass, and Dickinson's enormous and innovative corpus of poetry. In many ways, a distinctive American literary voice was born during this period of literary experimentation and production, as if in direct response to Emerson's 1837 declaration of cultural independence, that "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American . . . is already suspected to be timid, imitative, plain."

This reading/lecture/discussion course will focus on some of the key texts that comprise American Romanticism. Readings will span many of the authors traditionally regarded as the key literary figures of the period, and will also explore the work of writers who have previously gone unrecognized or under-appreciated. Secondary readings, on reserve at Booth Library, span some of the formative texts of American studies as well as more contemporary commentaries.

Our emphasis here will be two-fold: most importantly, we will engage in a close reading of texts that comprise the Romantic era in American literature, concentrating on them both as individual works and as part of a larger conversation that took place in antebellum, post-Federalist America. Secondly, we will attempt (to borrow a phrase by the Americanist David Reynolds), a look "beneath" the American Renaissance in order to gain an understanding of the great socio-political, cultural, and economic upheavals that informed all of these writers (even Dickinson) in their artistic efforts and accomplishments. And hopefully, by the end of our time together, we will be prepared to dissect and discuss what is only an apparently simple question: What is or was American Romanticism?

**GRADING FORMULAE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st paper (5 pp.)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd paper (7 pp.)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper (12 pp.)</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES:**

Your choice of either one or two major essays, the first approximately five pages or 1250 words in length, the second approximately 7 pages or 1750 words in length, OR one final essay approximately 12 pages or 3000 words in length (see grading formulae above). If you opt for two shorter papers, the first paper requires you to formulate an argument about Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter. The second paper may deal with any other work(s) on the syllabus, and requires you to formulate an argument that takes into consideration some of the critical work that has been done on that text over the past twenty years. For the first paper, students are required to turn in a one-page project proposal outlining the scope and purpose of the paper by April 12 at the latest. Students who opt for a single 12-page final paper may choose any topic they wish, must also integrate secondary sources (at least two) into their argument, but must also hand in a one-page proposal on April 12.
Two examinations, one to be held on March 8, and the other to be held during Finals Week (date and time TBA). Each of these exams will consist of an objective section designed to assess the closeness of your reading, along with an essay section requiring you to write extended, well-crafted answers to pointed questions about the readings.

Participation in discussion: The course will be conducted primarily as a discussion course (supplemented with occasional, short lectures from me). As you surely know by now, such a course is only truly successful if a high percentage of students participate; it can be unappealing if the discussion turns into a dialogue between the professor and a handful of students. To make the discussion run well: 1) you should plan on participating—at least making a comment or asking a question—every day; 2) you should be careful not to dominate discussion (i.e., those of you who are not shy should give other students an opening to participate); 3) you should participate with tact and civility (take other people's remarks and questions seriously, don't interrupt, respond courteously, etc.). The grade for participation will depend upon meeting all these criteria. If given, occasional reading quizzes will be brief, designed to encourage everyone to keep up with the reading, and will also help me to determine participation grades.

Attendance will be taken at each class. 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 event that you are unable to attend class, please arrange with a colleague to provide you with notes, comments, and handouts from that meeting. If you must miss class for two consecutive meetings, please notify me through my home phone number. Additionally, you may call me at home any night of the week between 7:30 and 10:00 to discuss any ideas, problems, or concerns related to the course.

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 six absences, either excused or unexcused, and still pass the course—even if unknowing or accidental, can result in your failing the course 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 to clarify. 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.
Reading Schedule/Syllabus (items may be changed)

Introduction: The Romantic Turn in America

Jonathan Edwards, from Images or Shadows of Divine Things ............................................. January 9 (in-class handout)
Benjamin Franklin, from The Autobiography ............................................................................ January 9 (in-class handout)
Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle" ......................................................................................... January 9 (in-class handout)
Thomas Cole, Falls of the Kaaterskill (painting) ................................................................. January 9 (in-class viewing)
Thomas Cole, The Oxbow (painting) ......................................................................................... January 9 (in-class viewing)
Frederick Church, Cotopaxi (painting) ................................................................................... January 9 (in-class viewing)
* Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature ......................................................................................... January 9

i: The Transcendentalists

Emerson, "Self-Reliance" ............................................................................................................ January 16
Emerson, "The American Scholar" ......................................................................................... January 18
Emerson, "Experience" ............................................................................................................ January 23
Emerson, "The Poet" ................................................................................................................ January 25
Emerson, selected poetry to be announced ........................................................................... January 25
Margaret Fuller, The Great Lawsuit ....................................................................................... January 28
* Henry David Thoreau, Walden, first chapter ("Economy") ................................................ January 30
Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government" ............................................................................ February 1

ii: Inventing the Great American Novel:
    Sedgwick, Hawthorne, Melville

Catharine Maria Sedgwick, "A Reminiscence of Federalism" .............................................. February 4
Sedgwick, text to be announced ............................................................................................. February 6
***FIRST PAPER DUE FEBRUARY 11***
* Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter .............................................................................................. February 11 - 15
Hawthorne, "Chiefly About War Matters" ............................................................................... February 15 (coursepack)
Hawthorne, "Artist of the Beautiful" ...................................................................................... February 18 (coursepack)
Hawthorne, "Drowne’s Wooden Image" .................................................................................... February 18 (coursepack)
Hawthorne, "Rapaccini’s Daughter" ....................................................................................... February 20
Hawthorne, "The Birth-Mark" ................................................................................................... February 22
Herman Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener" .............................................................................. February 25
Melville, "Benito Cereno" ........................................................................................................ February 27
* Melville, "Billy Budd, Sailor" ................................................................................................... March 1
Melville, selected poems to be announced ............................................................................. March 4-6

Midterm Examination ............................................................................................................. March 8

iii: The Gothic Imagination: Edgar Allan Poe

Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart" ........................................................................................................ March 18
Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado" ............................................................................................... March 18
Poe, "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" ........................................................................ March 20 (coursepack)
Poe, "Hop-Frog" ..................................................................................................................... March 20 (coursepack)
* Poe, from The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym ................................................................... March 22 (coursepack)
Poe, "The Purloined Letter" ..................................................................................................... March 25
Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition" ..................................................................................... March 27
iv. The Literature of Slavery & Abolition

Harriet Beecher Stowe, from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* ............................................. April 1-3
Henry Timrod, "Ethnogenesis" ........................................................................ April 3 (coursepack)
Timrod, "The Cotton Boll" ............................................................................. April 3 (coursepack)
Frederick Douglass, from *The Autobiography of Frederick Douglass* ............. April 5

v: The Re-Invention of American Verse:
Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman

Emily Dickinson, read all of the poems in the Anthology .................................. April 8-12
****FINAL PAPER PROPOSALS DUE APRIL 12****
Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas" ................................................................... April 15
Whitman, selections from *Song of Myself* ................................................... April 17
Whitman, "Live Oak, With Moss" ................................................................... April 19
Whitman, from "Children of Adam" .................................................................. April 19
Whitman, "Out of the Cradle, Endlessly Rocking" ........................................ April 22
Whitman, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" .................................. April 24
****FINAL PAPER DUE APRIL 26****
Wrap-up, open discussion ............................................................................ April 26