ENGLISH 3701/2, AMERICAN ROMANTICISM

Texts:
Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*
Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*
Assigned reading filed at Booth Library

COURSE DESCRIPTION

When Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that "All things swim and glitter....Dream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion," he was addressing an epistemological concern central not only to American Romanticism but also to our own postmodern age. This course will take as its subject the origin and limits of knowledge--how it is acquired and its degree of certainty--by a close examination of some major and minor writers of the period. Our readings and discussions will focus on the Puritan roots of Transcendentalism as represented by Jonathan Edwards; William Ellery Channing's attack on Edwards and Calvinism; the literary reappraisal of John Locke's rationalism as carried out by Charles Brockden Brown and Poe; Emerson and Thoreau's struggle to make language represent reality; Margaret Fuller's melding of Transcendentalism and feminist issues; Frederick Douglass' claim to rational, legitimate selfhood; Melville's epistemological skepticism; Hawthorne's concerns about the limitations of scientific knowledge; Dickinson's sense of the inscrutable; and Whitman's joining of the spiritual and worldly.
1. First Short Interpretive Essay. A typed, imaginatively titled, double-spaced, 500-word/two-page analytical response to your assigned reading. Base your essay on a short quotation, passage, or scene by exploring the relevance of the quotation/passage/scene to the whole piece of writing (or to the portion of the work we have covered to that point). You might select a passage on which to comment on a character's behavior and personality, or on the importance of a recurring theme, pattern, or image, or on the author's position on human emotions. Before you write your own paper, we as a class will work up a model of an effective interpretive essay. 70 points.

2. First Oral Presentation. The day your assigned essay is due, you will give a brief but thorough presentation of your essay (no more than five minutes). You will also be expected to pose and field questions that pertain to your essay/reading assignment throughout the entire period's discussion. 20 points.

3. One Critical Summary. A one-page, single-spaced, typed summary of a literary critic's reading of the primary material to which you are assigned. Plan to read over lots of secondary material before settling on an essay (book chapter or journal article) that you feel makes a significant point, one which you can--after careful reading and rereading--fully grasp. An explanation: "primary material" is the literature--fiction, poetry, or essay--written by the authors we as a class our studying; "secondary material" is the work written about or in response to that primary material. For example, Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel The Scarlet Letter is a primary work; "The A-Politics of Ambiguity in The Scarlet Letter (New Literary History 19, 1988: 629-54) is a secondary work which analyzes Hawthorne's novel. Book reviews and reference guide entries are not acceptable for this assignment, although I recommend you read them as well for the extra information they can provide. If you have trouble distinguishing a book review from a critical essay, show me your selection first. Provide the facts of publication according to the MLA style sheet. Your critical summary will be due exactly one week prior to your second short interpretive essay. (See "Second Short Interpretive Essay" below.) Well in advance of the first critical summary due date, we as a class will hash out what characterizes an effective critical summary. 50 points.
4. Second Short Interpretative Essay + Critical Viewpoint. This assignment is similar to the "First Short Interpretative Essay" but incorporates your understanding of the literary critic's point which you summarized in the preceding assignment ("3." under "course components"). Your objective is to show how the piece of criticism you selected adds to your understanding of the assigned primary material. This 500-word/two-page assignment must be typed, imaginatively titled, double-spaced. Provide facts of publication according to the MLA style sheet. Prior to the due date, we as a class will work on incorporating criticism into interpretive essays. 100 points.

5. Second Oral Presentation. The day your assigned essay is due, you will give a brief but thorough presentation of your essay (no more than five minutes). Presumably, the component of literary criticism in your second interpretive essay extended your awareness of the assigned primary material. Your presentation, in turn, should help us as a class strengthen our grasp of the primary material. As with the first presentation, you will also be expected to pose and field questions that pertain to your essay/reading assignment throughout the entire period's discussion. 30 points.

6. One in-class written examination. Around the week of mid-term, you will take a written test based on the primary material read to date and on our discussion of it. 200 points.

7. One Extended Interpretive Essay. This is the culminating assignment in which you take a closer look at one of the writers we have covered or undertake a comparison/contrast inquiry into two or more writers regarding a particular theme or idea. This essay must include two relevant secondary sources, which you cite according to the MLA style sheet. Throughout the semester and in response to your shorter interpretive essays (and in response to the essays that your classmates present), I will help you move toward a suitable topic. This five-or-six-pages essay (1250-1500 words) must be typed, double-spaced, and imaginatively titled. 300 points.

8. Third Oral Presentation. During the last class sessions, you will present a 10-minute overview of your paper to the class: your main point, key support, the shifts and turns of mind while you wrote—and lived with—this essay. 40 points.

9. Presentation Outline. To assist you and us, your audience, with the finale—the presentation of your final essay—I ask that you outline the "trip-through-the-paper" which you will take us on. More on this when the time is right. 30 points.
10. **Quizzes.** I will give seven unannounced quizzes over the course of the semester, but I will count only the six highest scores. Quizzes will be based on the factual content of the reading assignments. 90 points.

11. **Participation.** It is essential that you come to class everyday, prepared to engage in discussion and with assignments completed. Regular, active participation is worth 70 points.

   If you miss more than two class sessions (one full week!), your final raw grade will drop by half for each day you are absent. I will round up or down from there to arrive at a final straight letter grade. For example, if at the end of the semester you have 801 points (the "B-" range), a third absence could drop you into the "C+" range (799-767) before your final grade is rounded up or down to a straight letter. I suggest you save up the two free days for inevitable emergencies (car trouble, trips to the doctor, the broken alarm clock), but I will ask no questions and expect no excuses. Regular tardiness can come to equal one absence; make it to class on time!

   Your work directly contributes to the success of our course; therefore, you must meet every deadline for the class to run smoothly. No make-up quizzes will be available (but don’t forget that I drop the lowest score), nor will short essays be accepted late. A late extended essay ("7" under "course components) will lose thirty points for each class day it is overdue.

**Grading Scale:**

- 900-1000 A
- 800-899 B....867-899 B+; 834-866 B; 800-833 B-
- 700-799 C
- 600-699 D

Please note the English Department’s policy regarding plagiarism: 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 original work,"* has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course.

*Random House Dictionary of the English Language
Outline and Calendar

The following schedule of readings and due dates shows the range and order of the texts we will cover. Occasionally, circumstances occur that change a course calendar. If we must alter our schedule of readings and assignments, I will put those changes in writing and make the new calendar available to you. It is your job, however, to know when changes have been made. To help you stay informed and up-to-date, I will reproduce a list of student names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses for your use. If you must miss a class session, contact another student so that he or she can collect hand-outs for you and fill you in on what you missed and any other course news before you return to class.

Tue., Jan. 14  Introductions to the course and each other

Thr., Jan. 16  American Romantic Art Slides


Tue., Jan. 28  Wieland, chapters 9-18.

Thr., Jan. 30  Wieland, chapters 19-27.


Thr., Feb. 6  Pym, chapters 9-17.

Tue., Feb. 11  Pym, chapter 18-25 and "note."

Thr., Feb. 13  "Herman Melville," 2440-2444 and "Benito Cereno," 2497-2554 HA.


Thr., Feb. 20  "Ethan Brand" on reserve in Booth Library and "The Birth-mark," 2147-2158 HA.
Tue., Feb. 25 "Ralph Waldo Emerson," 1498-1501 and another Emerson selection, HA.

Thr., Feb. 27 Critical article summary (Emerson), run-through

Tue., Mar. 4 Library research

Thr., Mar. 6 Emerson selection, HA. Presentations with critical applications begin (3).

Tue., Mar. 11 "Margaret Fuller," 1610-1612 and "Woman in the Nineteenth Century" 1634-1655 HA.

Thr., Mar. 13 In-class written exam

Mon., Mar. 17 -- Fri., Mar. 21 Spring Break


Tue., Apr. 1 "Walt Whitman," 2740-2744 and selected poems, HA.

Thr., Apr. 3 Selected poems, Walt Whitman (HA).

Tue., Apr. 8 "Emily Dickinson," 2869-2876, and selected poems, HA.

Thr., Apr. 10 Selected poems, Emily Dickinson (HA).

Tue., Apr. 15 Conferences

Thr., Apr. 17 Conferences

Tue., Apr. 22 Workshop; rough draft due at the start of class.

Thr., Apr. 24 Essay due at the start of class; discuss outline and presentation of final essay.

Tue., Apr. 29 Paper presentations

Thr., May 1 Paper presentations

Wed., May 7 Final Exam Period, 2:45 - 4:45; paper presentations