ENG 5000-001: Introduction to Graduate Studies: Emerson

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This course is built to help graduate students situate themselves as new members of the field of professional literary studies. It will help you to make the transition from the mindset proper to undergraduate literary scholarship to a much more advanced level by grasping the skills and methods that distinguish the habits of the professional literary historian. As an undergraduate, you learned to rely upon the research of other scholars as you developed your own arguments about literature. But as a graduate student, you have elected to become one of those scholars. That means, among other things, that your relationship with history and literature is about to shift so as to privilege the examination of primary materials over the reception of secondary texts. Insofar as you are now to enter into engagement with other scholars as equals—in other words, not as some kind of passive receiver but as a fellow researcher—you must learn to examine primary materials for yourself. Doing so will allow you to develop your own insights into both literary texts and the eras out of which they emerge, and doing that will allow you to hone your own problems as well as tools to deal with those problems rather than simply repeating the lines of inquiry developed by others.

This semester we will take on this challenge by focusing on one figure from American literary history: Ralph Waldo Emerson, perhaps the very most influential figure in American literary history. Our examination of Emerson will focus especially upon the late 1840s and 1850s, the years during which Emerson’s New England became radicalized around abolition, and the period of sectional strife that would lead to civil war. It was also a period that would require Emerson to complicate and sharpen his earlier convictions about American exceptionalism, a transformation he logged in the several major works he produced during these years. We’ll read so many of those works that by the time we’re done, you’ll know more about this period in Emerson’s development than all but perhaps 100 other readers in the United States.

But our study of Emerson will not only be distinguished by the number of his texts we take in. We’re also going to place Emerson’s works, as well as recent scholarship focused upon those works, in various historical contexts we will develop ourselves as we examine historical documents from the archive. Moreover, you are going to gain experience in dealing with Emerson’s works as written in his own hand, untouched by editors, and in the process you will edit those texts so as to make them available to other Emerson scholars and hence contribute something valuable to the field. All of this, of course, will be a part of the longer process of developing new insights about Emerson, suitable for presentation at a professional conference. By the end of our time together, you will feel very different than I expect you do today. Most importantly, you will feel equipped to succeed in a demanding graduate program, and ready to think about your own areas of contribution in an exciting and changing profession.
Course Requirements and Policies

In addition to coming to class and keeping pace with the readings, each student will be required to complete the following tasks this semester:

1. **Oral presentations:** Throughout the semester, each seminar member will be assigned a contemporary critical essay about Emerson on which to report to the rest of the class. In these reports, presenters are responsible for (1) presenting their material to the class in a way that summarizes the argument therein and that facilitates discussion, and (2) hazarding some ideas about how the critical work might re-shape our understanding of Emerson—or, possibly, and if you’re very confident, how the perspective it develops might be limiting in certain ways. Meeting this second requirement requires that presenters take the critical framework developed in the essay to bear upon a passage from Emerson not discussed in that essay. Since the critical works will be complex, reporters should supply handouts outlining the argument and highlighting key passages. (These should not provide a “script” for the presentation, however—presenters should not simply read from a text for their report. Instead, you should show the ability to “talk to” the material. In other words, you should understand the essay well enough to talk about it on your feet.) All seminar members must read the critical essay by the night during which it is discussed. Presentations will begin during week 2. (15%)

2. **Research Exercises:** This course is intended to outfit you with a set of skills: research practices and methodologies that define the kind of work done in our field. Periodically, I’ll assign you a research task using these methodologies, and you will share the results of these assignments—and, if called upon, the experiences you have in undertaking them—at the next class meeting. (10%)

3. **Annotated edition of an Emerson work:** I will supply members of this class with something very, very rare this semester: photographic copies of manuscripts written by Emerson, housed at the Houghton Rare Books Room at Harvard University. Working in small groups, students will work through the challenges of Emerson’s handwriting and use the historical archives we have available to us in order to produce scholarly editions of these texts. Producing editions of these texts will not only teach you some of the challenges and pleasures of working with primary materials; it will also represent a true contribution to the field. (20%)

4. **Annotated bibliography:** On some issue of concern in the field of Emerson Studies. This will give you a chance to enter into the professional conversation about some problem at play in the field about which you’ve become interested over the course of the semester. You will use this bibliography in writing a paper proposal and in pursuit of the final requirement. (20%)

5. **Research essay:** Prepared according to MLA format, approximately 20 pages long, and
focused upon the issues pursued in the annotated bibliography above. A much-shortened version of this paper will be presented during our seminar’s Departmental Symposium, which will occupy the last two class meetings and which will be open to the English Department community at large. Additionally, each student will submit to me a proposal for this research paper, due on October 27 and conforming to guidelines I will distribute. (35%)

6. Participation in discussion: Ours is a graduate seminar, and so I assume that everyone will appear weekly as strong class citizens, prepared and eager to participate energetically in a demanding discussion. As you surely know by now, participating well doesn’t simply mean talking a lot—it means fostering a dialogue, frequently making comments showing that you are engaged in a process of careful reading and reconsideration of that already read, and showing that you are attuned to what others in the class say and to what is in the text.

Attendance policy: Don’t miss class.

Late assignments: Generally, I don’t give extensions. That said, there are sometimes truly unavoidable, insurmountable circumstances that absolutely prevent a student from completing a paper on time. In such cases, students will provide a full account in writing, and I may then decide to give an extension. But note that in such instances, I will expect to see the extra time reflected in the final draft—assignments that have been given an extension are read with an even more demanding eye than those that have not. Lastly: in order to be granted an extension, students must contact me at least two days before the assignment’s due date.

Required Texts

All required texts are available through Booth Library’s electronic reserve (http://www.library.eiu.edu/ereserves/ereserves.asp). The password is ch5000.

I have also placed on 3-hour print reserve the seven-volume Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the standard edition amongst Emerson scholars. Since this edition remains incomplete, however, I have also reserved for you the 12-volume Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, as well as some other standard scholarly editions of texts not covered in either of these two collections: Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Poetry Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the Topical Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson. I’ve also reserved a few signal biographies and works of criticism, but the main purpose of the print reserves is to give you reliable access to all extant scholarly editions of Emerson’s works. A complete list of the reserved items is at the reserves desk.
Reading Schedule:

Trust thyself

Tue Aug 25

Introduction, course overview
Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance” (1841)

Tue Sep 1

Emerson, *Nature* (1836); “Experience” (1844)

Tue Sep 8

Emerson: “Emancipation in the West Indies” (1844); “Address to the Citizens of Concord on the Fugitive Slave Law” (1851); “Seventh of March Speech on the Fugitive Slave Law” (1854); “American Slavery” (1855)
Report: John Carlos Rowe, “Hamlet’s Task: Emerson’s Political Writings” (1997)

Tue Sep 15

Emerson, from *English Traits* (1856); “Permanent Traits of the English National Genius” (1835); “New England Reformers” (1844)

Tue Sep 22

Emerson, “Eloquence” (1857); “Illusions” (1856); “Wealth” (1860)

Dred Scott

Tue Sep 29

Frederick Douglass, Speech on the Dred Scott Decision (1857)
Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, Decision in Dred Scott v. Sanford (1857)
Justice John McClean, Dissenting Opinion in Dred Scott v. Sanford (1857)
| **Charles Sumner** | Tue Oct 6 | Senator Charles Sumner, Speech to the U.S. Senate on the Crisis in Kansas (May 19-20, 1856; students should download the speech from *Congressional Globe*)

"Deadly Assault on Charles Sumner" (*National Era*, May 29, 1856; students should download the article from the American Periodical Series online archive)

"The Southern Press" (*Saturday Evening Post*, June 14, 1856; download from APS)

Anson Burlingame, “Defense of Massachusetts,” speech to the U.S. House of Representatives, June 21, 1856 (download from *Congressional Globe*)

Andrew Butler, Speech to the U.S. Senate on the Sumner Assault, June 12-13, 1856 (download from *Congressional Globe*)

Emerson, “Speech on the Affairs in Kansas” (1856); “The Assault on Mr. Sumner” (1856)

| **John Brown** | Tue Oct 13 | Henry David Thoreau, “A Plea for Captain John Brown” (1856)

Emerson, “Remarks at a meeting for the relief of the family of John Brown” (1859); “John Brown” (1860)


Scholarly editions due |
| **The Mexican War** | Tue Oct 20 | Thomas Cary, “An Oration Delivered Before the Authorities of the City of Boston, 1847”

Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government” (1849)

| **Transatlantic Formations** | Tue Oct 27 | Emerson, “The Genius and National Character of the Anglo-Saxon Race” (1843); “The Anglo-American” (1852)

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<td><strong>Emersonian Contact</strong></td>
<td>Tue Nov 3</td>
<td>Emerson, “Friendship” (1841)</td>
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<td>Annotated Bibliographies due</td>
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<td>Walter Benn Michaels, from <em>The Trouble with Diversity</em> (2007)</td>
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<td>Webcam discussion with Jeffrey Insko</td>
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<td><strong>The Fortune of the Republic</strong></td>
<td>Tue Nov 17</td>
<td>Emerson, “The Fortune of the Republic” (1863)</td>
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<td><strong>Tue Dec 1</strong></td>
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<td>Department Symposium, week 1</td>
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<td><strong>Finals Week:</strong></td>
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