

English 307: Survey of American Literature from Origins to the Civil War
Spring 2020

Hours: Tues/Thurs 8:25-9:40 p.m.

Room: TH 408

Professor: Austin Bailey

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Office Hours: Fridays 9-10 a.m.

Course Description:

In 1630, aboard the *Arbella* and heading for the rocky coasts of what is now New England, John Winthrop delivered his famous sermon, “A Model of Christian Charity.” In it, Winthrop compares his flock’s success in the “New World” to the ligaments and sinews of a body held together through mutual affection and love in Christ: “. . .love is as absolutely necessary to the being of the body of Christ, as the sinews and other ligaments of a natural body are to the being of that body.” These ties function only if the Puritan social body devotes itself to doing what it has been commanded by God and “providence” to do, that is, live out the ideals of the protestant reformation. If the experiment prevails, the corpus will remain a functioning, animate whole.

By the end of the 18th century, however, Calvinist zeal begins to cool and the Enlightenment ideals of deism, science, and individual liberty take hold. This is reflected in representative works such as Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*, which stresses thrift, self-mastery, and empiricist experimentation, as well as Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano Or Gustavus Vassa, The African: Written by Himself*. Generally referred to as the Federalist period in American letters, this way of thinking is turned upside down in 1836 with the publication of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Nature*. There, Emerson declares that “Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?”

Through such gnomic provocations, Emerson foments what comes to be called the “American Renaissance,” a controversial term coined by cold war critic F.O. Matthiessen in reference to the highly innovative period of literary production stretching roughly from the 1830s to the beginning of the Civil War in 1861. Matthiessen’s initial American Renaissance canon included only a handful of white male authors: Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville, and Hawthorne. Since Matthiessen, the canon has been significantly expanded to include female authors (who after all were the most popular authors of their period) as well as African-American authors. It is also during this time that Harriet Beecher Stowe’s anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* pushes the cause of abolition significantly forward (enraging an already belligerent south) and John Brown, a self-styled Puritan abolitionist, attempts to lead a slave insurrection at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia, and fails. Brown’s eventual capture (by Robert E. Lee) and public hanging exacerbates already seething tensions over slavery and helps move the country toward the Civil War.

This course constitutes a survey of key works of American Literature, from its “Origins”—the colonial and Puritan literature of European settler colonialism—to the Civil War (1861). This

class is primarily an intellectual history in that we will consider how the literatures of three principle periods—Colonial, Federalist, and Renaissance—represent evolving paradigms of value, belief, and self-identification in American culture and history. Yet while this class’s focus is principally canonical literature, we will not take the canon at face value only but, rather, interrogate its motives—its imperialist and hegemonic underpinnings—by considering its histories of formation.

Course Objectives:

Students will determine, through their Goal Prospectus, how they interpret the course’s objectives *for themselves*. However, the generic course objectives are as follows:

--Students should come away with having read, analyzed, and reflected on a selection of canonical American literature up the Civil War.

--Students should have participated in class discussions and activities minus the occasional absence

--Students should have produced one formal piece of academic writing: a research paper at two different stages (more on that below)

--Students should have gone through the process of ungrading (as detailed below).

Participation:

The reading this semester is fairly short but challenging. I encourage everyone to reflect on your reading process. What do you do when you read? Do you take notes in the margins? Do you google the author and view their Wikipedia page? Do you see what other people have said or written about an author or text online? Do you verbalize your thoughts back to yourself or to someone else? Do you journal? Do you post Facebook or Twitter posts about your reading? All of these things are strategies for interacting meaningfully with the texts. It’s important that you discover for yourself what your best reading process is and try as much as you can to utilize it. That said, it is always better to read something than nothing. See if you can’t *come to class with at least one idea to contribute to discussion*. While participation through discussion is important, I also recognize that some students struggle to speak. While I will always encourage everyone to speak, you will have opportunities to participate in other ways, such as through group work and in-class or take-home writing assignments.

Turnitin:

All formal papers (i.e. both drafts of your research paper) must be submitted to www.turnitin.com. Please note: turnitin is a plagiarism checker, but I am not using it for that purpose. Rather, I’m using it as repository for your work, so that neither you nor myself lose it, and so that I can offer legible feedback on all your papers. Turnitin is a free service and you may already have an account from high school or a previous semester. If not, go to www.turnitin.com and register by creating an account. You need to provide an email and password. This does not need to be a Hunter email; it can be any email and password of your choosing. Once you’re

registered, you must enroll in our class. Each assignment will be labeled with a submission deadline. Our class ID and enrollment key are listed below.

Class ID: 23717727

Enrollment Key: Literature

Textbooks:

There are no required textbooks for this class. However, if students want to purchase a physical copy of the textbook, most of the readings will be scanned from The Norton Anthology of American Literature, the Shorter Ninth Edition. Below is the ISBN and the weblink to Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.com/Norton-Anthology-American-Literature-Shorter/dp/0393264521>

ISBN: 9780393264524

Ungrading the Classroom:

As an educator, I utilize something called “ungrading”: a pedagogical practice that strives to decenter grades as the primary means of evaluation. Instead of receiving grades, students in this class will submit two self-evaluations for the semester: a midterm self-evaluation and an end-of-semester self-evaluation. Additionally, students will be asked to submit what I am calling a “Goal Prospectus”: a half-page to one-page statement of what your personal educational goal is for the semester. I will provide you with some questions and I will ask you to respond to them for your goal prospectus. Your mid-term and final self-evaluations—which will also come with a set of questions—will respond to your “Goal Prospectus,” as well as provide some additional information. On Blackboard I will provide some informative links on Ungrading, but our primary point of reference will be Jesse Stommel’s essay “Why I Don’t grade,” which we will go over in class and which will be available on Blackboard.

Since grades must be assigned for this course (as CUNY is a grading institution), you will be asked to assign yourself a tentative grade, both in your midterm and end-of-term self-evaluation. These grades will apply not to any individual assignments but to your overall course performance. In other words, you are assessing yourself holistically. In both instances, I aim to have minimal intervention in this process. I will only step in if I think you are grading yourself too harshly (which happens more than one might think) or if I feel that you and I are seeing things too differently. Ungrading can cause anxiety because grades are deeply ingrained into our educational consciousness and experience, but this is not something that you need to worry about. If you have concerns, please address them to me and we can have a conversation. Dialogue, in fact, is one of the primary goals of ungrading.

Self-evaluations will be submitted along with your formal essay assignments. I will be offering feedback on both, but primarily on the latter.

Class Calendar (subject to change).

Jan 27	Introductions, go over syllabus, discuss Ungrading Colonial Period and the Puritans (1500s-1700s)
Jan 29	Introduction and Ch. 1 from <i>Many Headed Hydra</i> ; excerpt from <i>Winnebago Trickster Tales</i>
Feb 3	David Howard-Pitney, "The Afro-American Jeremiad"; Perry Miller, "Errand into the Wilderness"
Feb 5	Jonathan Edwards, "A Sense of the Heart"
Feb 10	Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light"; "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"
Feb 17	Anne Bradstreet, poems; article, "Advertising the Domestic"
	Federalist Literature (1700s-1800s)
Feb 19	Benjamin Franklin, from Autobiography; article, "The Vanishing Mother"
Feb 24	Olaudah Equiano, from <i>Narrative of the Life</i>
Feb 26	Phillis Wheatley, poems.
Mar 2	Washington Irving, "Author's account of Himself"; "Rip Van Winkle."
	The American Renaissance (1830s-1860s)
Mar 4	Ralph Waldo Emerson, <i>Nature</i>
Mar 9	Emerson, "The Poet"
Mar 11	Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience"
Mar 16	Margaret Fuller, "The Great Lawsuit"
Mar 18	Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition"; "The Raven"; "The Fall of the House of Usher"; "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"; "Masque of the Red Death"; "The Tell-Tale Heart"; article, "Poe and Popular Irrationalism"; article, "Poe and the Feminine ideal"

Mar 23	Poe continued
Mar 25	Melville, “Hawthorne and his Mosses”; Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown”
Mar 30	Melville, from <i>Moby-Dick</i>
April 1	Walt Whitman, from <i>Leaves of Grass</i>
April 6	Emily Dickinson, poems
	Spring Break April 8-16
April 20	Frederick Douglass, from <i>Narrative</i>
April 22	Harriet Beecher Stowe, from <i>Uncle Tom’s Cabin</i> ; Baldwin article
April 27	Stowe, <i>Uncle Tom’s Cabin</i>
April 29	Harriet Jacobs, from <i>Incidents</i>
May 4	Randall Fuller, from <i>From Battlefields Rising</i>
May 6	David Reynolds, from <i>John Brown, Abolitionist</i>
May 11	Walt Whitman, selection of war poems
May 13	Last-day goodbyes

Last day of class TBA

Academic Honesty Policy (from the Hunter College Senate): Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g. plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The college is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy of Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Integrity Procedures.

The English Department has an annual Prizes and Awards competition. Work that you do in this course might be suitable for submission. Please consider applying by the February deadline. Information will be posted here: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/english/student-opportunities/prizes-awards>

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Sexual Misconduct Policy: In compliance with the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Hunter College reaffirms the prohibition of any sexual misconduct, which includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment retaliation against students, employees, or visitors, as well as certain intimate relationships. Students who have experienced any form of sexual violence on or off campus (including CUNY-sponsored trips and events) are entitled to the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights for Hunter College.

- a. **Sexual Violence:** Students are strongly encouraged to immediately report the incident by calling 911, contacting NYPD Special Victims Division Hotline (646-610-7272) or their local police precinct, or contacting the College's Public Safety Office (212-772-4444).
- b. **All Other Forms of Sexual Misconduct:** Students are also encouraged to contact the College's Title IX Campus Coordinator, Dean John Rose (jtrose@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-650-3262) or Colleen Barry (colleen.barry@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-772-4534) and seek complimentary services through the Counseling and Wellness Services Office, Hunter East 1123.
- c. **CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct Link:**
<http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/la/Policy-on-Sexual-Misconduct-12-1-14-with-links.pdf> ”

ADA Statement: In compliance with the ADA and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational access and accommodations for all its registered students. Hunter College's students with disabilities and medical conditions are encouraged to register with the Office of AccessABILITY for assistance and accommodation. For information and appointment contact the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room E1214 or call (212) 772-4857 or TTY (212) 650-3230.