

YC - English 2611-211
American Literature through 1865
Epistemologies of the American Federal and Renaissance Periods

Monday & Wednesday
1:30pm until 2:45
Room: TBA

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Office Hour by appt.
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The theme for our American Literature survey this semester is epistemology, and we will try to discover the contrast in epistemological thinking between the writers of the so-called American Renaissance period and those of the Federal period. We will approach these two periods in reverse chronological order, beginning with the writers of the mid-nineteenth century and reading our way back to the writers of the late eighteenth century. Work by work, we will skip around a bit, beginning the semester with *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. We include some pertinent literature that is either older, Winthrop's famous address on the deck of the *Arabella*, for example, or more contemporary work, such as Pauline Maier's *American Scripture*.

Just the literature of the mid-nineteenth century alone, with Emily Dickinson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman (excluding by necessity so many worthy others) can place a strain on a semester-long survey. We will try to understand *Walden* as a particular revision of the rationalist project. We will focus on Melville and Whitman, framing a gender study. Our reading of *Moby-Dick* will focus on its curious blending of genres and will be informed by phenomenologies of drama and of reading. We will read "Bartleby" in the context of labor and humanism, also as adding depth to our study of the figure of Melville. We will try to understand Whitman's poetic project as we read *Leaves of Grass*, reading closely the "Song of Myself." We will read snippets of Emerson's essays.

Of the Federal period authors, we will read from the letters of Thomas Jefferson as well as his instructions to Lewis and Clark and excerpts from *Notes on the State Virginia*. We will read the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. We will also read from *The Federalist Papers*.

Students should show increased proficiency in the method of close reading.

COURSE TEXTS

(for Purchase at Yeshiva College Bookstore)
Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (Simon & Schuster)
Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (Norton)
Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Norton)
Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Penguin) 1855 edition, Cowley, ed.
Pauline Maier, *American Scripture* (Random House)
Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays & Lectures* (Library of America)

etexts

Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11030/11030.txt>

Hobbes, *Leviathan*. <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/h/hobbes/thomas/h68l/>

Locke, "Second Treatise on Civil Government". <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/locke/john/l81s/index.html>

Hawthorne, *Twice Told Tales*. <http://www.textfiles.com/etext/AUTHORS/HAWTHORNE/>

Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of...* <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/DouNarr.html>

Madison, Hamilton, and Jay. *Federalist Papers*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext91/feder16.txt>

recommended

Emily Dickinson. *Final Harvest* (Thomas H. Johnson, ed.)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tales* (Norton)

Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Cambridge)

STUDENT WORK

Each of the following four categories represent one-quarter of a student's semester grade:

Class Participation & Seminar Attendance. Students are expected to work together to foster a learning environment in the classroom. Students should arrive at seminars with questions, observations, issues, or passages worth the attention of the group, and are expected to speak thoughtfully and to listen generously. Respect for the process and fellow students, and interest in the material are also reflected in Class Participation grade. Holistic letter grades in this category are evaluated in cooperation with the student at midterm and revisited when the semester is over. Plan to attend all seminar meetings.

Reading. Students are expected to read and engage with course texts, to keep up with the syllabus, and to explore experimentally beyond the syllabus. Students engagement with the texts, breadth and depth of reading are judged holistically by letter considering all other student work when the semester is over.

Commentary (a.k.a., Short Assignments). Each student must submit written commentary on literature throughout the semester. A kind of notebook-assignment, each submission should be roughly one page in length, and should draw attention to a passage in an assigned or recommended text. Students can use commentary to discuss the significance of the passage in relation to the work and/or ideas discussed in seminar, or to pose probing questions for discussion. Honesty and struggle are at a premium on these assignments, while polish is viewed as extra. Students should submit at least three commentary papers before February 7th, and can submit a maximum of nine before the end of March. No commentary papers will be read in April or May. These papers will be graded on a ten point numerical scale, and averaged together. Pop quizzes and thought-pieces written in class also count towards the Short-Assignments grade. I estimate there will be three in class short-assignments. Students are asked to put together a portfolio of graded assignments to be considered for the commentary-grade. Submit commentary papers on the Angel Online system.

Essays. Please turn in two papers on literature this semester. As a general guideline, one paper should have as its subject a concern of form in *Moby-Dick* (or in another work of fiction or poetry). The other paper should enter into a philosophical or theological discussion with one or more works on the syllabus. Each should be 4-7 pages in length, and should follow the style guidelines of the MLA or Chicago. Essays can only be submitted on scheduled due dates and no late work will be accepted. Each essay receives three grades, scored on a ten point scale, -- one for writing, one for reading and use of quotation, and one for quality of the ideas. Grade for this category represents an average six scores on two essays. All essays should be submitted over email.

Extra recognition is awarded, in the form of one or two points per category on a student's semester average, for the following proficiencies:

Posture of Critical Objectivity. }

Close Reading. } explanations of these categories will emerge in discussion and through students' work.

Grasp of Concepts }

SCHEDULE

Jan.

M, 15 -- Introductions. Syllabus review. Thoreau on "Reading," from *Walden*. What is epistemology?

W, 17 -- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, through Ch. 6* ; Liberty and Epistemology

M, 22 -- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, finish*

W, 24 -- Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government" aka "Civil Disobedience"

M, 29 -- Whitman, "Song of Myself," chants 1 to 30; *Leaves of Grass*. poem

W, 31-- Whitman, "Song of Myself," chants 18 to 51; Dickinson #632, "The Brain -- is Wider than the Sky-" & #303, "The Soul selects her own Society"

Feb.

M, 5 -- Melville, "Bartleby"; Thoreau, *Walden*, excerpts from "Economy" & "The Bean-Field" ; the Human Spirit in the Unbridled Labor Market

W, 7 -- Hawthorne, "Wakefield"; *Walden*, excerpts "Sounds" ; Understanding *Walden*. ; **mid-term begins.**

M, 12 -- Melville, *Moby-Dick*, "Loomings" through "The Sermon" ; What is the Genre? ; Sober Cannibals and Drunken Christians ;

W, 14 -- Melville, *Moby-Dick*, "A Bosom Friend" through "The Lee Shore" "In Landlessness Alone Resides the Highest Truth" & *Moby Dick* and Epistemology ; **all midterms due.**

M, 19 -- Melville, Moby-Dick, "The Advocate" through "Midnight, Forecastle" ; A Dramatic Study Takes Shape

W, 21 -- Melville, Moby-Dick, "Moby Dick" through "Stubb Kills a Whale" ; Labor, Representation, "The Advocate"

M, 27 -- Melville, Moby-Dick, "The Dart" through "The Doubloon" the Politics of the Eclipse of Ishmael

W, 28 -- Melville, Moby-Dick, "Leg and Arm" aka "Samuel Enderby..." through "The Carpenter"

Mar.

M, 5 -- Melville, Moby-Dick, "Ahab and the Carpenter" through "The Symphony"

W, 7 -- finish Moby-Dick ; the orphan-narrator

M, 12 -- ; Dickinson #539, "The Province of the Saved" ; Hawthorne, "Earth's Holocaust," (p144- 159 in *Tales*)

W, 14 -- Emerson, *Nature*, Chapters 1 & 2, "Nature" & "Commodity" & "The Transcendentalist" (p 9-13 ; 193-209) ; ;
Reading Emerson's Essays ; *Nature*, ch. 4. "Language"

M, 19 -- Dickinson #668, "'Nature' is what we see-" ; Emerson, excerpts from selected Essays, "the Poet" ; "Circles" ;
"Language" from *Nature* ; proem to *Leaves of Grass*. What is a nation? **First Essay Due**

W, 21 -- Emerson, excerpts from "Experience" & *Representative Men*, "Shakespeare, or the Poet."

M, 26 -- Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, parts 1 & 2 ; excerpts Locke, "Essay Concerning Human Understanding"

W, 28 -- Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, parts 3 & 4;

April

~~M, 2~~

~~W, 4~~

~~M, 9~~

~~W, 11~~

M, 16 -- Letters of Thomas Jefferson

W, 18 -- Federalist, #51, democracy and republicanism ; the liberalism and conservatism of the Federalists

M, 23 -- The Declaration of Independence ; roots of the Declaration, Locke, "2nd Treatise" and Hobbes, *Leviathan*

W, 25 -- Pauline Maier, *American Scripture* ; **Second Essay Due**

M, 30 -- reading day

OTHER NOTES

- Work is collected only at appointed times.
- The use of study aids can be a valuable precursor to individual research, and there should be no shame or concealment about the use of study aids. And while I maintain that the use of study aids can distort a more true engagement with the texts, nonetheless I have found students who use study aids sometimes fairly reap the advantage. A student's time is better spent (and a student's better grade) will reflect time spent engaging with the texts directly.
- Students are advised to be familiar with Yeshiva College policy on plagiarism, and I am obligated to pursue disciplinary action against plagiarists. Students should read "Upholding Academic Integrity," copies of which are available in the College Writing Center.
- The mid-term will consist of a short-answer discussion question and a self-evaluation. The final examination will consist of passage identification and short-answer discussion questions. Both will be used in the consideration of a student's grade, but the scoring of examinations does not weigh in a student's average.