

English 4350—Major American Authors: Herman Melville and Edgar Allan Poe

Dr. Brian Yothers

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Office Hours: T Th 12:00-1:20

Course Description

We will be examining the lives and works of two of the most complex and fascinating writers in American literature: Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville. We will also consider some of the major critical controversies surrounding each of these writers' works. In the past, Poe has at times been dismissed as a madman, a literary lightweight, an alcoholic, a dreamy romantic, a simple horror writer, or some combination of the above. Within the last few decades, however, Poe has regained his status as one of the giants of American literature, and with good cause. This semester, we will be exploring a wide range of Poe's fiction, poetry, criticism, essays, letters, and reviews in order to understand the complex, ironic vision that has made him one of the most influential and enduring figures in American literary history. Melville is both revered as the author of *Moby-Dick*, *Billy Budd*, and "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and remembered as an author who was curiously unrecognized in his own time. In this class, we will read a broad swath of Melville's work and consider the reasons for his marginality in his own time and for his enshrinement at the center of American literary history three decades after his death. We will also consider the ways in which he has been reimagined over the past 90 years in literary criticism and theory and in literature, film, theater, music, and the visual arts. We will investigate the ways in which Melville's explorations of nationalism, sexuality, cosmopolitanism, race, and slavery contribute to his status as a specifically American literary figure. Melville's poetry, to which he devoted over three decades, will play an important role in these investigations, along with his more well-known prose. Throughout, our central focus will be on the craft of Melville and Poe: their efforts to transmute both experience and voluminous reading into enduring works of art. By the end of the class, you should be able to demonstrate knowledge of and insight into both Melville's and Poe's works and the critical traditions that have grown up around these figures in well-organized and documented written work.

Required Texts

Moby-Dick: A Norton Critical Edition

Billy Budd, and Other Stories (Penguin)

Battle-Pieces, and Aspects of the War (Da Capo)

The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe: A Norton Critical Edition

We will also be making use of the free digital archives associated with Poe's and Melville's works and lives that are available online, including, but not limited to, *Melville's Marginalia Online*, the *Melville Electronic Library*, and *The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*. Two major journals dedicated to each author, *Poe Studies* and *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* are available through the UTEP library via Project Muse, and you will need to make use of these in writing your essays for the class.

Because careful reading is one of the goals of this course, I strongly recommend that you have a good college dictionary at your side while reading in order to look up unfamiliar terms and references. I would particularly recommend that you make use of the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, which is available through the UTEP library web page.

For information on MLA format, grammar, punctuation, clarity, organization, and editing, I recommend the following site: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

Course Requirements

Short Essays

You will write two brief essays of about four pages (1000 words minimum) for this class. The first essay, on Poe, will delineate a critical debate on Poe using 2-3 articles from *Poe Studies*. The second, on Melville, will delineate and critical debate on Melville using 2-3 articles from *Leviathan*. Both essays will need to use Modern Language Association (7th edition) format throughout. Each essay will be worth **20%** of your course grade. The essay on Poe will be due at the start of class on **Thursday, October 1**, and the essay on Melville will be due at the start of class on **Thursday, November 19**.

Critical Essay

You will write one longer researched paper (10 pages, or a minimum of 3000 words, exclusive of works cited) for this class. A detailed assignment sheet for this essay, outlining three possible approaches that you can take to completing it, will be provided early in the semester. The paper must be formatted according to the standards of the seventh edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Any deviation from the formatting and documentation guidelines in this handbook will result in a substantial reduction in your final grade. Your paper should also show evidence of careful planning and organization and thorough editing and revision. Papers that do not address all components of the assignment, do not meet length requirements, do not show signs of careful planning and editing, or do not conform to MLA formatting guidelines will not be considered to have fulfilled the requirements of the assignment and will be graded accordingly. Late essays will not be accepted for any reason, so be sure that you plan to complete the essay early and to be revising it and editing it during the last couple of days before it is due. This essay will be worth **40%** of your final grade, and is due on **December 10 at 1:00 p.m.** A proposal and brief annotated bibliography (at least 5 secondary sources) will be due on **November 5**.

Reading Journal

Each day, you will write a typed response of at least 150 words for one literary work that is part of each day's reading assignment. You should use the journal as a questioning/reaction strategy to help you engage each text more fully. You should select either a specific passage or a specific theme or technique from the text upon which to comment. You should not simply summarize the text, and you should not draw upon external sources for this assignment. In particular, the presence of any un-cited material from an external source will result in no credit being given. This is an academic assignment, so you should proofread carefully for clarity, grammar, and punctuation. Responses that do not meet these standards will occasion a warning, and if the shortcoming is not addressed in future entries, credit may be denied. You may be called upon, without prior warning, to read out your journal entry for a particular day in class as a springboard for that day's class discussion. I will collect your responses at the end of each class session and return them at the beginning of the next class session. Late responses will not be accepted for any reason, so it is important that you attend class regularly and that, if an absence is unavoidable, you send your response to me by the beginning of class. Handwritten responses will also not be accepted, nor will responses sent over email. The journal as a whole will be worth **20%** of your final grade. I will provide occasional opportunities to make up missed entries by attending and responding to events that contribute to the intellectual life of the university. To keep up with such events from this department, I would encourage you to "like" English at UTEP on Facebook.

Grades

A=90-100%
B=80-89%
C=70-79%
D=60-69%
F=0-59%

Attendance Policy

Because much of the course is based on in-class discussion, work and instruction, my attendance policy is strict. You will be allowed four absences without any penalty. Any absences beyond that will mean that you will be dropped from the class if the fifth absence takes place before the drop deadline or that you will receive a failing grade if the fifth absence takes place after the drop deadline. If you are late to class more than three times, your final grade for the class will be reduced by a percentage point for each instance of lateness beyond the third. I do recognize the validity of university-approved excused absences, but the only way in which these can contribute to an exception to the four absence limit listed above is if **all** absences are for either university-approved approved excused absences or documented major medical emergencies.

Late Work

I will not accept late work. If you know you are going to miss a class on the day an assignment is due, turn in your work early. If you did your work and simply forgot to bring it to class, it will be considered late and I will not accept it. Please do not tell me that you are unable to submit an assignment on time because of computer problems; make sure you back up your work sufficiently so that such crises do not arise.

Originality of Work

The work you do for this course must be your own. No credit will be given for any un-cited material from an outside source. If you appear to have deliberately committed plagiarism, your case will be referred to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action.

Center for Accommodation and Support Services (CASS)

If you suspect you may have a disability and need an accommodation, you should contact CASS at 747-5148 or at cass@utep.edu or go to Room 106 Union East Building. You are responsible for providing me with any CASS accommodation letters and instructions.

Email Etiquette

Email is a useful tool if you have questions for me, and emailing me is generally the easiest and most efficient way to make contact outside class. Given that this is a university setting, you should recognize that your emails are documents that represent you professionally, and therefore should rise to certain standards of professional decorum. There are some basic guidelines that you should follow, both in my class and in your other classes.

1. All emails should have a clear subject heading.
2. All emails should have a clear, courteous salutation. "Dear Dr. Yothers:" or "Dear Professor Yothers:" would be appropriate in the case of this class.
3. All emails written for professional purposes should adhere to standard grammar, punctuation, and capitalization.
4. All emails should be signed with your name (otherwise, your reader may not know who you are!)
5. Emails should be sent from your UTEP account. If you do use another account, be sure that the name on the account is appropriate for professional interactions.
6. If there are any attachments, you should explain your reason for sending them and indicate the program in which they were written. In general, your attachments should take the form of Word documents or PDFs.
7. You should consider your rhetorical context when emailing. What is the purpose of your email, and how can you most effectively accomplish that purpose? Three particularly important matters to keep in mind are brevity, clarity, and courtesy. If your email is not clear, specific, and to the point, you may not elicit the response you desire. If your email is discourteous, you diminish the professionalism of the persona you present to others. To cite just one example, some professors find emails that include calls for action "ASAP" to be discourteous or even presumptuous.

Emails that do not meet the standards of professionalism, clarity, and courtesy outlined above will be disregarded.

