

English 5306—American Literature 1800-1865: American Bibles

Dr. Brian Yothers

Hudspeth 212

747-5886

byothers@utep.edu (Note: email is the most efficient way to contact me outside of class)

Office Hours: TR 12:00-1:30 or by appointment

Course Description and Objectives

This class examines what Lawrence Buell has called “literary scripturism”: the tendency of nineteenth-century American literature to imagine itself as engaged in the production of sacred texts, even as they draw heavily upon the Hebrew and Christian Bible and, increasingly by mid-century, sacred texts from other major world religions, including Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. We will be exploring five works that embody literary scripturism: *Moby-Dick* and *Clarel*, by Herman Melville; *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe; *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau; and *Leaves of Grass*, by Walt Whitman. We will consider how each of these works negotiates with the sacred texts with which it is in dialogue even as it strives to create its own canonical authority.

Required Texts

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, Second Norton Critical Edition, Ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly*, Second Norton Critical Edition, Ed. Elizabeth Ammons

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, Civil Disobedience and Other Writings*, Third Norton Critical Edition, Ed. William Rossi

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, Rev. and Expanded Norton Critical Edition, Ed. Michael Moon

Herman Melville, *Clarel, A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*

We will also make heavy use of such digital resources as the *MLA International Bibliography*, the *Walt Whitman Archive*, *Melville’s Marginalia Online*, and the *Melville Electronic Library*.

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

Exam: You will write one exam for this class, on **April 30**. It will follow the structure of the department’s M.A. exam, and will provide some practice for those students who are considering taking that option. It is also a marvelous opportunity to showcase the erudition that you will have acquired this semester. It will be worth **20%** of your grade.

Seminar Paper: You will write an 18-25 page seminar paper (exclusive of notes and works cited) on a topic developed in consultation with me. The project will be due at the beginning of our final exam session on **May 14** and will be worth **40%** of your grade. Please note that it will be the cumulative result of the two projects that follow below.

Initial Proposal: You will write a two page proposal explaining the topic/method that you are developing for your seminar paper and identifying the approaches you plan to take. More than just identifying an idea for a paper, this piece should establish the importance of the topic and the angle into the topic that you plan to take. It should be written in clear, confident, lively, well-edited prose, and it should fulfill the purpose of persuading the reader that such a project is necessary and interesting. This proposal will be due on **February 26** and will be worth **10%** of your grade.

Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography: By **April 2** you will submit a revised version of your initial proposal responding to my comments on the original version along with an annotated bibliography containing at least 12 annotations of secondary sources of at least 200 words, once again in clear, lively, well-edited prose. This assignment will be worth **20%** of your grade.

Participation: You are expected to be present and actively engaged in the discussion every day. Participation will be worth **10%** of your grade.

Grades

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

Attendance Policy

This is a graduate course, and you are expected to be in class for every session. Any absence falls short of the expectations for graduate student professionalism.

Late Work

I will not accept late work.

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.

CASS

If you have or suspect you have a disability and need an accommodation, you should contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at 747-5148 or at cass@utep.edu or go to Room 106 Union East Building. You are responsible for presenting to me 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

February 19	<i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> , Volume 1	"Life of Josiah Henson," From <i>A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin</i>
February 26	Proposal Due	
March 5	<i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> , Volume 2	James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" Jane P. Tompkins, "Sentimental Power" Susan M. Ryan, "Charity Begins at Home"
March 12	Spring Break—No Class	
March 19	<i>Walden</i> , through "Higher Laws"	F. O. Matthiessen, " <i>Walden</i> : Craftsmanship vs. Technique" E. B. White, "Walden 1954" Stanley Cavell, "Captivity and Despair"
March 26	<i>Walden</i> , "Brute Neighbors" through "Conclusion"; "Civil Disobedience," "Slavery in Massachusetts," "Walking," "Wild Apples," "Journal"	Laura Dassow Walls, "Walden as Feminist Manifesto" Lawrence Buell, "Thoreau and the Natural Environment" Stephen Fink, "The Language of Prophecy"
April 2	Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography Due	
April 9	<i>Leaves of Grass</i> , "Epigraph" through <i>Calamus</i>	Michael Moon, "The Twenty-Ninth Bather" John Irwin, "Whitman: Hieroglyphic Bibles"
April 16	<i>Leaves of Grass</i> , "Salut au Monde" through <i>Memories of President Lincoln</i>	David S. Reynolds, "To Heal a Nation" Karen Sanchez-Eppler, "To Stand Between"
April 23	<i>Leaves of Grass</i> , <i>Autumn Rivulets</i> through <i>Old Age Echoes</i>	Allen Grossman, "The Poetics of Union" Betsy Erkkila, "The Poetics of Reconstruction" Ed Folsom, "That Towering Bulge of Pure White"
April 30	Exam	
May 7	<i>Clarel</i> (Parts 1 and 2)	Samuel Otter, "How Clarel Works" Stan Goldman, "The Small Voice of Silence"
May 14	<i>Clarel</i> (Parts 3 and 4) Seminar Paper Due	Shirley Dettlaff, "Ionan Form and Esau's Waste" Jonathan Gellman, "A Midrash on Melville"