

The University of Texas at El Paso

Department of English

American Literature to 1865
English 3311 (CRN: 20762)
[T/R, 12:00 – 1:20 p.m., via Zoom](#)

Spring 2021

[Office Hrs: Mon/Wed., 1:30-3:00 p.m., via Zoom;](#)
and separately by appointment

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Course Description:

This course offers a survey of American literature and literary history, from its beginnings in the early colonial period to the end of the Civil War. Our approach will be at once broadly historical and intimately textual. As we connect our readings to established trends of American literary history, we will attend also to those social, political, historical, and philosophical factors which beg that history's ongoing redefinition. Topics and themes to be addressed will include: colonialism and conquest in the New World; Puritanism and the typology of mission; the Enlightenment and the American Revolution; republicanism, liberalism and the rise of individualism; slavery, abolition, and the evolving problematics of race in America; artistic innovation and literary tradition; gender and separate spheres ideology; formal constructions of citizenship and publicity; romance, sentiment, and the rise of the novel; political representation and the politics of canon formation; orthodoxy, dissent, and the sign of "America."

Course Format:

This is a fully-online course that combines synchronous course sessions on Zoom (on Tuesdays and Thursdays during scheduled sessions) with a weekly online writing and discussion component conducted on an asynchronous basis. For those of you new to online coursework, have no fear. As you will see from our Schedule of Readings below, each week is organized by date in the manner of a conventional in-person literature course, with a set of readings designated for Tuesday, and another designated for Thursday. We will meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays via Zoom, at the Meeting Place linked at the top of the page. Each week, an alternating group of students will also take the lead in an online Discussion Forum by offering up some short reflections on that week's reading assignment. So our primary coursework will take place in two separate venues, but they will intersect in meaningful ways on an ongoing basis. In addition to these components, there will be two scheduled exams (a midterm and a final, both administered via Blackboard), and a mid-semester and final research paper (also submitted via Blackboard).

Required Texts (available at the UTEP bookstore):

The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Ed. Nina Baym, 9th Edition (Vols. A & B).
Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (Third Norton Critical Edition)

Schedule of Readings (to be completed by corresponding date).

Lsn.	Date	Assignment
1	Jan. 19	Introduction: “America and its Literatures”; Stephen Greenblatt, “Culture” (Blackboard)
2	Jan. 21	Mapping the Colonial Imaginary Christopher Columbus “Letters” (I. 58-66); Bartolomé de las Casas, “Devastation of the Indies” (66-71); Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, from <i>La Relación</i> (I. 71-79)
3a	Jan. 26	Rascality and Religiosity in English North America John Smith, from <i>The General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles</i> (I. 110-122); William Bradford, <i>Of Plymouth Plantation</i> Book 1, Chapters 1, 4, 7, 9, 10 (I. 129-148); excerpt from <i>Mourt’s Relation</i> (Blackboard); John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity” (I. 176-189)
4a	Jan. 28	Puritan Poetics, Antinomianism, and the Language of Dissent Anne Bradstreet, selections (I. 217-249); Michael Wigglesworth, from “The Day of Doom” (I. 249-266); Excerpt from John Winthrop, “The Journal of John Winthrop” (I. 189-195)
5b	Feb. 2	The Indian Captivity Narrative: Lamentation, Faith, and Restoration Mary Rowlandson, <i>A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson</i> (I. 267-301)
6b	Feb. 4	The American Enlightenment I: The Representative Man & Gender Equality Benjamin Franklin, from <i>The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin</i> , parts 1 & 2 (I. 466-530)
7a	Feb. 9	The American Enlightenment II: Language, Liberty, and Slavery Thomas Paine, from <i>Common Sense</i> (I. 681-689), from “The Crisis, No. 1” (I. 689-695), from <i>The Age of Reason</i> (I. 653-95-702); Thomas Jefferson, from <i>Autobiography</i> , “The Declaration of Independence” (I. 702-710, Excerpts from <i>Notes on the State of Virginia</i> [On Phillis Wheatley, “Query XIV. Laws”] (I. 712-716); Phillis Wheatley, poems and letters (I. 787-798)
8a	Feb. 11	Epistolarity and Novelistic Form Hannah Webster Foster, <i>The Coquette; Or, the History of Eliza Wharton</i> (841-871); Judith Sargent Murray, “On the Equality of the Sexes” (770-779)
9b	Feb. 16	Coquettishness and the Gentleman Rake Foster, <i>The Coquette</i> , cont’d (872-908)
10b	Feb. 18	Scandal, Seduction, and Public Morality Foster, <i>The Coquette</i> , cont’d (908-941))
11a	Feb. 23	Race, Resistance, and Abolition (I) Samson Occom, “A Short Narrative of My Life” (I. 585-595); “A Sermon at the Execution of Moses Paul, an Indian” (I. 595-606); David Walker, from <i>David Walker’s Appeal in Four Articles</i> (II. 773-777); William Lloyd Garrison from <i>The</i>

Liberator, “To the Public” (II. 780-783); Angelina E. Grimké, from *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* (II. 783-786)

- 12a Feb. 25 **Call it Sleep**
Washington Irving, “The Author’s Account of *Himself*”, “Rip Van Winkle” (II. 25-41); William Cullen Bryant, “Thanatopsis” (II. 116-119); “The Prairies” (II. 121-123)
- 13b Mar. 2 **American Gothic II: Dark Obsessions**
Edgar Allan Poe, Poetic Selections (II. 604-620); “The Philosophy of Composition” (II. 701-709); “The Fall of the House of Usher” (II. 629-642)
- 14b Mar. 4 **American Romanticism I: Emersonian Individualism**
Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, Introduction & ch. 1 (II. 178-184), “The American Scholar” (II. 210-223); “Self-Reliance” (II. 236-253)
- 15a Mar. 9 **Poet of the Democratic Self**
Walt Whitman, (II. 1294-1297), “Song of Myself” (II. 1312-1356), “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (1364-1368); Fanny Fern, “Leaves of Grass” (II. 896-898)
- 16 Mar. 11 **MIDTERM**
Mar. 15-19 **SPRING BREAK**
- 17b Mar. 23 **Politics, Retreat, and the American Romantic Landscape**
Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government” (II. 950-970) from *Walden*, “Where I Lived and What I Lived For” (II. 1012-1022), “Reading” (II. 1022-1028), “Conclusion” (II. 1136-1144); John L. O’Sullivan (Jane McManus), from “Annexation” (Blackboard)

Essay #1 Due on Blackboard, 11:59 p.m.
- 18b Mar. 25 **“NO! in thunder”: Hawthorne and Romance**
Herman Melville, “Hawthorne and his Mosses” (II. 1413-1425); Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Custom-House” (II. 425-451)
- 19a Mar. 30 **The National Romance**
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, ch. 1-13 (II. 451-517)
- 20a Apr. 1 **The National Romance, cont’d**
Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, cont’d, ch. 14-end (II. 517-569)
- 21b Apr. 6 **Gender, Print, and the Public Sphere**
Margaret Fuller, from “The Great Lawsuit: MAN *versus* MEN. WOMAN *versus* WOMEN” (II. 722-761); Fanny Fern, “Aunt Hetty on Matrimony” (II. 892-895), “Hungry Husbands,” (II. 895-896), “Male Criticism on Ladies’ Books,” (II. 899-900), “Fresh Leaves, by Fanny Fern,” (II. 900-901), “A Law More Nice Than Just,” (II. 901-902); Sojourner Truth, “Speech to the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, 1851” (II. 786-787)
- 22b Apr. 8 **Race, Resistance, and Abolition (II)**

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written By Himself* (II. 1159-1228)

- 23a Apr. 13 **Race, Gender, and the Politics of Sentiment**
Harriet Jacobs, from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (II. 909-931)
- 24a Apr. 15 **Poesis Sui Generis**
Emily Dickinson, all selections (1654-1694)
- 25b Apr. 20 **“Call Me Ishmael”**
Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ch. 1-29 (3-106)
- 26b Apr. 22 **“The Whiteness of the Whale”; Or, Reading Through Skins**
Melville, *Moby-Dick*, cont’d, ch. 30-54 (106-205)
- 27a Apr. 27 **American Bodies Politic/Body Politics**
Melville, *Moby-Dick*, cont’d, ch. 55-99 (243-321)
- Online Paper Workshopping – Meet in Zoom Class Session**
- 28a Apr. 29 **Of Fire, Water, and Fate**
Melville, *Moby-Dick*, cont’d, ch. 100-Epilogue (321-410)
- 29b May 4 **“And I Only Am Escaped Alone to Tell Thee.”**
Moby-Dick, completed.
- Online Paper Workshopping – Meet in Zoom Class Session**
- 30b May 6 **Deaths (Re)Births, and Tragic Reckonings**
Walt Whitman, “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” (II. 1382-1388)
- May 11 **Final Papers Due on Blackboard, 11:59 p.m.**

A Final Exam will be administered at a date and time to be announced by the University.

Course Requirements:

Reading of required texts. The reading load for this course is substantial; it is therefore important that you stay current in your work. Additionally, many of these texts can be quite challenging to read; to really understand them, you will need to read them more than once. As Thoreau said, reading “in a high sense” is “not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the nobler faculties to sleep the while, but what we have to stand on tiptoe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to” (*Walden*, “Reading”). Let us be readers on Thoreau’s model. Practically speaking, this means re-reading, underlining, making marginal notes, writing provocative questions and observations to bring with you to class, and actively connecting ideas and techniques between the texts we read.

Attendance and Participation (10%): Although I will lecture frequently—usually for some introductory portion of our Zoom session—your ongoing participation is vital to your learning and to the success of the course for all. Come to our sessions prepared to share your questions and observations, with your

readings completed, open, and ready to consult. The more involved you are on a weekly basis—in online reading journal responses, in full group discussion, and in breakout sessions—the more you will learn and enjoy. Faithful attendance is an important component of this, and is expected. Please be advised that, upon your sixth unexcused absence from our Zoom sessions, you will either be dropped from the course (i.e., prior to the University drop deadline of April 1st), or will fail the course (after April 1st). In keeping with standard departmental policy, absences are only excusable in cases of documented family or medical emergency.

Weekly Critical Reflections and Responses (25%, graded cumulatively): During the first week of the semester, the class will be divided into two groups: Critical Reflection Group “A” and Critical Reflection Group “B.” By noon Friday on alternating weeks, it will be the job of the individuals in each group to post a short, one-page critical reflection (roughly 250-300 words) on ONE of the readings we have completed and discussed in that week’s class sessions. You can do this either *before* we discuss that reading in class (this is a great way to prep for class), or *after* (this works great to ponder further on something that’s been discussed that week, or to bring up something from the readings that didn’t make it into our class discussion). Before or after, it’s up to you—just make sure you have your reflection by noon Friday of that week at the latest. It will then be the job of individuals in the alternating group to read these critical reflections and post a thoughtful reply to one of them by 11:59 p.m. on the Monday of the week following. This will begin in the second week of the course. So, for example, if you are in Critical Reflection Group “A,” you will write your first one-page critical reflection on one of the readings from January 26th or 28th, and post your entry by noon on Friday, January 29th. If you are in Critical Reflection Group “B,” your job will be to read through these entries sometime over the course of the next three days, and post a thoughtful response to at least one of them by Monday, February 1st, at 11:59 p.m. For the week of Feb 2-4, the roles will be reversed, and so on.

In your **Critical Reflections**, you needn’t discuss every text assigned (some days have several), nor do you need to discuss your chosen text comprehensively. Instead, your job is to find some aspect of a text you find interesting and important, show us why you find it to be so, and offer it up for discussion, interpretation, and analysis. Use the Critical Reflections to articulate the questions and ideas you develop in the course of your reading, and to reflect on the developing themes of the class—always taking care to respond specifically to relevant passages from the text. Although somewhat informal, these entries are expected to consist of deliberative, thoughtful paragraphs that are free of grammatical error. In these reading journal entries, you must:

- **Introduce** and **contextualize** the topic under review, briefly. A sentence or two is fine. What have you observed that begs closer scrutiny? How might exploring it promise to open up a deeper understanding of the text in question?
- **Incorporate** a minimum of one quotation in your discussion. Quoted passages are the centerpieces of academic argument, the evidence we use to develop our interpretations and analysis. If you find it helpful to do so by way of comparison, you are welcome to include quotations from, or references to, other texts from the syllabus we’ve explored already. But these should be offered in the service of your interpretation of the principal text under review.
- **Offer some provisional reflections** about the meaning and significance of the particular passages you’ve chosen to discuss. How, and why, is the passage (or passages) you’ve chosen important? What can a reader gain by seeing the text as you see it?

In turn, good **Responses** will strive to add further insight and elaboration to the original points made; one should not seek out arguments to rebut, but rather claims to develop, amplify, and extend. Granted, some differences of opinion are inevitable—but responders should always maintain a tone of civility and respect for the writers and opinions to whom and to which they are responding. Try to respond to someone different each week if you can.

Midterm Essay & Final Essay (15%; 20%): A medium-length critical essay (4-6 pages) will be due on March 23rd, and a longer Term Paper (7-10 pages) will be due on Monday, May 11th. I will provide more information on this as the class unfolds, but you may write on any topic that bears relevantly on our work in the course. I will also have suggestions for you, depending on your interests. Please feel free to talk to me during my office hours to help develop ideas. MLA bibliographical guidelines are to be followed.

Midterm Examination & Final Examinations (15%; 15%): Details to follow.

A Note on Online Etiquette and Decorum: Let us try to offer respect and good cheer to one another, in all of our online exchanges—both in our written exchanges on Blackboard, and in our real-time interactions via Zoom. Discussing things online can sometimes feel distant and alienating, but we can do much to overcome that simply by observing the same small customs of public etiquette and civility we employ in the classroom under normal circumstances. So, for example, when you are in a breakout session with your peers, be sure to introduce yourself and refer to other folks by name. Follow up on other people's comments and questions in large-group discussion, just as you would in a regular face-to-faceclass, and give credit when you hear something smart. These things may seem small, but they make a big difference. In addition, in our Zoom sessions be sure to have your camera turned on for the duration of our class sessions. It's ok if you want to employ a virtual background, but it's important that we all see one another and know that we're all on the same page, working towards a common goal. Many thanks in advance.