

Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture

ENGL 645 | ECS 17 | Thu 7:05 | Spring 2008

Course Website: www.ksu.edu/english/eiselei/engl645/

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Office Hours: Mon 2:00-3:00, Tue 1:30-2:30, Wed 2:30-3:30, and many more by appointment

Course Description

*These States are the amplest poem,
Here is not merely a nation but a teeming Nation of nations ...*

*O I see flashing that this America is only you and me,
Its power, weapons, testimony, are you and me,
Its crimes, lies, thefts, defections, are you and me ...
Freedom, language, poems, employment, are you and me,
Past, present, future, are you and me.
I dare not shirk any part of myself,
Not any part of America good or bad.*

-- Walt Whitman, "By Blue Ontario's Shore"

After tossing off its colonial chains and writing itself into existence with the "Declaration of Independence," the United States entered the nineteenth century as a primarily agricultural society along the Atlantic coastline. The start of this century saw the first generation of people who were born "Americans," and what it means to be an "American" would concern this culture and its writers (like Whitman) for decades. No one definition would generate consensus, however. In fact, the character of nineteenth-century American culture may be better captured by images of difference and division (think of the Civil War, for instance) than by images of agreement and unity. By the end of this divided and tumultuous century, the United States stretched to the Pacific, and the revolutionary agrarian nation had become industrialized, significantly urbanized, imperial, and modern.

At the heart of this course are the key events and movements that changed the course of U.S. history and culture in the nineteenth-century: the aftermath of the American Revolution, Transcendentalism, Indian

removal, slavery and abolitionism, the Civil War and its aftermath, immigration, lynching and Jim Crow, Pragmatism, and imperialism.



"Slave and Free Soil on Eve of Civil War"
from Charles A. Beard & Mary R. Beard, *A History of the United States*

We will examine the ways in which literature was a part of culture, the ways literature represented culture, and the ways literature made, shaped, or re-shaped the century. In other words, we will consider not only how literature might be a "reflection" of culture, but also how texts work in their culture as agents or obstacles for change.

Course Goals and Guiding Questions

The primary aim of this course is to help you to develop ways to think about, study, research, discuss, and write about American writing and culture from 1800 to 1900. You might also think of Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture as a course in how to read primary documents and how to use those documents to construct a literary and cultural history of the United States in the period between 1800 and 1900.

Because the study of literature and culture is interdisciplinary, the range of issues we will explore is quite varied at times. Don't be scared or annoyed by this; be fearless and excited about it. Our primary purpose will always be to invent ways of analyzing, thinking about, talking about, and writing about the connection between literature and culture in the period.

A set of guiding questions should help us to get started and to remain focused.

- What are the connections between writing and culture in this era?
- How do we read and interpret these texts from the past?
- What do they tell us about America and American cultures in the nineteenth-century? In what ways do our reading strategies limit or enhance what the texts disclose?
- In what ways can these documents serve as evidence for cultural-historical claims and interpretations?
- What did these texts *do*? What purposes or functions did these documents serve in their original contexts? And how do we know that they served such functions?
- Should we read a novel or a poem differently than a psychology textbook or autobiography? If so, how does one read a poem to learn about an earlier time or a different culture? And how does one read a scientific text so that it tells us something about the culture, the time, the place in which it was written?
- Are some documents more interesting and valuable than others? If so, how do we determine which documents have more cultural-historical significance and which less?
- What are the uses of these texts for us in the present?

Course Requirements

Reading. The most important work in a 600-level "Readings" course is careful, patient, thorough reading of the assigned texts. You will need to finish the assigned readings by the time indicated on the reading schedule. I encourage you to keep a reading journal or take reading notes on each text. If you don't take notes of some sort, I'm not sure how you'll be able to keep track of our reading throughout the semester.

Attendance. In addition to careful reading, I expect active participation and good attendance from everyone. Some of the most significant learning will happen during our classroom conversations. Thus, I am firm believer in class attendance. Irregular attendance will hurt your grade; good attendance and active participation in class discussions will improve your grade. Because we meet just once a week this semester, regular attendance is especially important.

Papers and Final Exam. The writing in our course will consist of three essays and some informal and in-class writing assignments. During the semester, I will distribute handouts describing these assignments in more detail. I will also ask you to take a comprehensive final examination.

Grades. In determining final grades, each course requirement will carry the following relative weight:

Essay 1	10%
Essay 2	20%
Essay 3	30%
Comprehensive Final Examination	20%
Participation and In-Class or Informal Assignments	20%

If at any point during the semester you'd like to discuss your work and your performance in the class, please drop by to see me. I enjoy talking with students, and I don't want anxiety or uncertainty about grades to interfere with more important questions (Why doesn't James distinguish between the expression of emotion and the emotion itself? Why does Lazarus see America as such an important part of Jewish history? Should we think of Emersonian self-reliance as a macho expression of masculine privilege or as a fundamental tenet of feminism?).

Is this class hard? Walt Whitman writes: "Listen! I will be honest with you, / I do not offer the old smooth prizes, but offer rough new prizes." He wanted his audience to be athletic in their reading endeavors—agile, strong, tireless, energetic.

So, listen. I will be honest with you. This is not an easy course. The readings here are demanding, and so is the schedule. I take attendance and class participation very seriously. I will expect you to talk with and work with other students. You will be asked to write and re-write. Believe me, this is a hard course.

But, precisely because of its difficulty, it will offer rough new prizes. Class will be exciting, even fun. Our discussions will be lively, animated, exhausting. You will have the opportunity to compose the best writing you have ever done. And you will learn so much—about nineteenth-century America and its cultures, about literature and writing, about how to read texts that are strange and difficult because they are distant from our present.



Walt Whitman
from *Leaves of Grass*, 1st ed.

Course Policies

Late Papers. I do not typically accept late papers, but in certain, limited circumstances I will accept papers after the due date. Assignments will lose a letter grade for every week-day that they are late.

Revisions. You may revise your third essay for a higher grade. If you would like to revise this paper, the revision would be due one week after the papers have been returned. To submit a revision, please write a one-paragraph summary explaining why and how you revised and hand it in with both the revised version and the old version with my comments. A revision must be substantially improved to merit a grade change.

The Honor Code. Kansas State University has an Honor and Integrity System based on personal integrity, which is presumed to be sufficient assurance in academic matters that one's work is performed honestly and without unauthorized assistance. Undergraduate and graduate students, by registration, acknowledge the jurisdiction of the Honor & Integrity System. The policies and procedures of the Honor and Integrity System apply to all full and part-time students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate courses on-campus, off-campus, and via distance learning. The Honor and Integrity System web site can be reach via the

following URL: www.ksu.edu/honor. A component vital to the Honor and Integrity System is the inclusion of the Honor Pledge, which applies to all assignments, examinations, or other course work undertaken by students. The Honor Pledge is implied, whether or not it is stated: "On my honor, as a student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this academic work." A grade of XF can result from a breach of academic honesty. The F indicates failure in the course; the X indicates the reason is an Honor Pledge violation. Perhaps the most serious violation of the Honor Code in an English course is plagiarism—taking or copying someone else's words or ideas as if they were your own. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and may be punished by failure on the exam, paper, or project; the truly gnarly XF grade for the course; and/or expulsion from the university.

Students with Disabilities. Any student with a disability who needs an accommodation or other assistance in this course should make an appointment to speak with me as soon as possible. You may also want to contact Disability Support Services (DSS) in Holton Hall 202 (532-6441), so that they may assist us in making any needed arrangements.

Course Resources

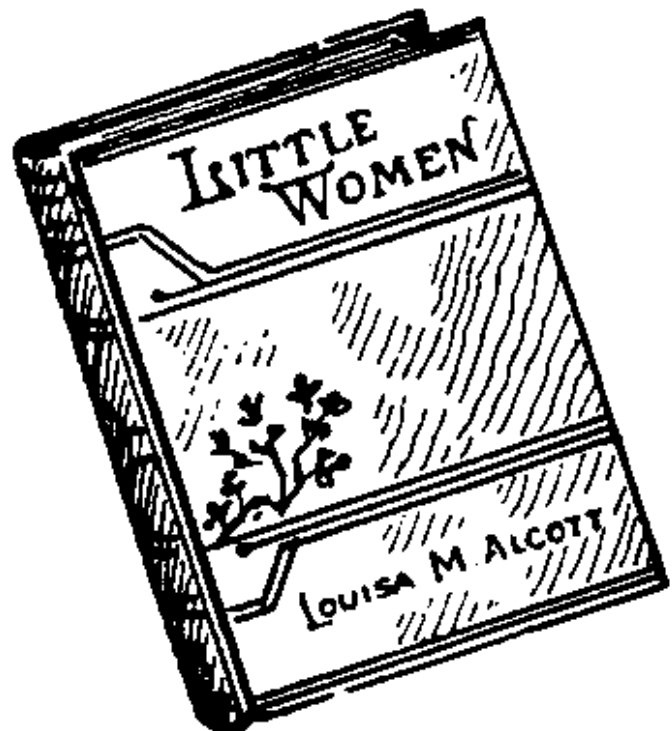
Course Website. The URL for the course website is www.ksu.edu/english/eiselei/engl645. You may find there online resources related to the course, assignments and handouts, as well as basic information about the class.

Course Listserv. You are all subscribed to a course listserv, and we can all post comments, information, and queries by sending messages to 19thcentury@k-state.edu. The purpose of this listserv is to try out ideas and facilitate communication among class participants outside of class. Posting is not required; it is here for our convenience. The only rule is that all postings should be related to our class. If you have your K-State e-mail forwarded to another address, the University can subscribe you to that address also so that you can send messages to this list from either address.

Texts. The following books are available at the K-State Union Bookstore and Varney's:

Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*
Myerson, ed., *Transcendentalism*
Whitman, *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*
Douglass, *Autobiographies*
Alcott, *Little Women*
Lazarus, *Selected Poems and Other Writings*
Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*
James, *Psychology*

The required reading for this course also includes three short pieces available online or, perhaps, in an anthology you may already own. Throughout the semester, I will also assign a few other short, easily available pieces (historical documents, reviews, etc.) to help provide additional cultural context for the week's primary reading.



Reading and Assignment Schedule

- Jan 17 INTRODUCTION
- Jan 24 Catherine Maria Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*, 1-169 [vol. 1]
Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle" [available online at www.bartleby.com/195/4.html
and in standard anthologies of American literature, such as the Norton or Heath]
- Jan 31 Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*, 173-350 [vol. 2]
Paper #1 Due
- Feb 7 Readings from *Transcendentalism*
- Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, from *A Record of a School*, 97-124
 - Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, 124-60
 - Bronson Alcott, from *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, 181-95
 - Emerson, "The American Scholar," 195-212
 - Emerson, "Letter to Martin Van Buren," 226-30
 - Peabody, "Woman," 280-89
 - Margaret Fuller, "Prospectus for *The Dial*," 289-91
 - Fuller, "The Great Lawsuit," 383-427
- Feb 14 LITERARY & CULTURAL RESEARCH: SKILLS AND RESOURCES [Elisabeth Pankl]
Readings from *Transcendentalism* [to be discussed on Feb 21]
- Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 318-40
 - Henry David Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," 546-65
- Feb 21 Readings from Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*
- "Song of Myself," 26-78
 - "Song of the Open Road," 126-135
 - "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," 135-140
 - "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," 206-212
 - "Calamus," 96-116
- Feb 28 Readings from *Transcendentalism*
- Emerson, "Seventh of March Speech on the Fugitive Slave Law," 586-602
 - Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," 602-615
 - Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," 628-47
- Readings from Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*
- "Drum-Taps," 233-275
 - "Memories of President Lincoln," 276-85
- Mar 6 CULTURAL STUDIES CONFERENCE [class will meet at the keynote event this night]
Begin reading Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*
Paper #2 Due
- Mar 13 Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*
- Mar 20 SPRING BREAK [no class]
Begin reading Louisa M. Alcott, *Little Women*
- Mar 27 Louisa M. Alcott, *Little Women*

- Apr 3 Readings from Emma Lazarus, *Selected Poems and Other Writings*
- "Clytie," 41-43
 - "In the Jewish Synagogue at Newport," 49-51
 - "Arabesque," 63-65
 - "The Cranes of Ibycus," 65-66
 - "Leda & the Swan," 67
 - "The South," 67-69
 - "The Creation of Man," 73-79
 - "A Letter, from Judah Halleve to His Friend Isaac," 79-80
 - "Assurance," 96
 - "Echoes," 96
 - From *Poems and Ballads of Heinrich Heine*, 98-103
 - "Songs," *Songs of a Semite*, 175-85
 - "A Translation of Heine and Two Imitations," *Songs of a Semite*, 186-97
 - "The World's Justice," 228
 - "The Feast of Lights," 229
 - "The New Ezekiel," 232
 - "The New Colossus," 233
 - "1492," 233
 - "Critic and Poet," 234-35
 - "The Choice," 235
 - "The Supreme Sacrifice," 235-236
 - "To R.W.E.," 238
 - "Bar Kochba," 238-39
- Apr 10 Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*
- Apr 17 Lazarus, "'By the Waters of Babylon," 241-47
 José Martí, "Our America" [available online at a few different places, including www.historyofcuba.com/history/marti/America.htm and www.csus.edu/indiv/o/obriene/art111/readings/JoseMartiOurAmerica.rtf and in some anthologies of American literature]
 Anna Julia Cooper, "Woman vs. the Indian" and "The Negro as Presented in American Literature," from *A Voice from the South*, 80-126 and 175-227 [available online at docsouth.unc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html and in some anthologies of American literature]
 Begin reading William James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course*
Paper #3 Due
- Apr 24 William James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course*
- May 1 OPEN
- May 8 **FINAL EXAMINATION**