

American Literature I: Beginnings to 1860

ENGL-UA 230.001
TWR, 9:15-11:25AM

Instructor: Blevin Shelnett
Email: mbs405@nyu.edu
Office: Room 710, 244 Greene
Office hours: W, 11:30-1:30PM and by appt.

Course Description:

This course offers an intensive introduction to the literature of colonial Anglo-America and the early national United States, from sixteenth-century engagements with “the New World” to major and minor works of the “American Renaissance,” produced on the eve of the Civil War. In addition to reading novels, short stories, and poems, we will explore other kinds of writing traditionally regarded at the margins of the literary, including journals, letters, lectures, sermons, histories, and autobiographies. Along the way, we will consider the way literary production responds to and is shaped by specific historical experiences, such as European colonization of North America, the founding of the United States as a sovereign nation, industrialization and urbanization, slavery, abolition, and Native American “removal.” Conversely, we will consider how literary production shapes our understanding of history and creates the conditions for its reception as “American literature.” We will examine history as a literary genre, as well as issues relating to the expansion of the print marketplace and the spread of literacy, the rise of sentimentality, and the drive to create a national literature.

Required Texts:

Baym, Nina, et al., eds. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, vols. A & B*. 8th edition. New York: Norton, 2011.
Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick*. 2nd edition. New York: Norton, 2002.

Your Responsibilities:

Attendance. Due to the pacing of this course, it is extremely important that you attend each session. If you must miss a class, please notify me immediately. Missing more than three classes results in failure of the course. Repeated tardiness will count as absences.

Reading and Participation. As always, read carefully and closely, including headnotes to each author and section; take notes. You should come to class with your textbook and having completed the reading. Discussion allows us to float more experimental ideas about reading than does lecture or formal writing. Take advantage of this forum by being prepared to participate.

Weekly Posts. To this end, you will be asked to post to NYU Classes each week by 10:00 pm on Monday a response to assigned readings. The response should explicate a line or sentence you found interesting, considering its relation to the text as a whole.

Written Assignments. Follow MLA Guidelines for formatting. All papers should be double-spaced, with one inch margins, in a 12 point font (like the one on this syllabus), pages numbered, with your name on every page. Assignments handed in after the deadline will be reduced by one third of a letter grade for each day late.

Course Requirements and Grade Distribution:

July 24	Midterm exam	15%
July 29	Five-page paper	20%
August 14	Eight-page paper	30%
August 15	Final exam (take-home)	15%
	Participation	20%

Midterm exam: The midterm will consist of identification and analysis of key concepts and passages from our readings as well as an essay offering a close reading of a short poem or extract. The essay should discuss the ways that the author of your poem/extract uses the language and the formal features of the work to present his or her ideas.

Five and eight-page papers: Both may respond to either one of a distributed set of prompts or a topic of your choosing, if approved by me in advance. For the five-page paper, the poem that you wrote about in the midterm will be off-limits.

Final exam: The final exam will be distributed on the last day of class, August 14, and will be due to my email by 5:00PM Friday, August 15. The exam will be open-book and should take about two hours. It will consist of key word identifications, passage analyses, and an essay responding to a selected topic and incorporating three of our assigned texts.

Electronics and Classroom Etiquette: Laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices are not permitted in class. Beverages as well as un-messy and un-noisy snacks are permitted.

Academic Honesty: Words and ideas that derive from another person must be cited when they appear in your writing. Failure to do so constitutes an act of plagiarism, which will result in a failing grade for the assignment and possibly for the course. For NYU's policy on academic integrity please consult: <http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html>.

General Resources:

In addition to my office hours, which are available to you as a class-specific writing resource, you may also find general writing assistance at the NYU Writing Center: http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center.html

NYU Student Health Center for physical, mental and emotional health: <http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/student-health-center.html> and the NYU Wellness Exchange at <http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/wellness-exchange.html>

NYU Speaking Freely, a program that offers informal language conversation courses for free; ungraded and unaccredited: <http://speakingfreely.cas.nyu.edu/page/home>

Week 1: Migration/Contact: Exploring New Worlds

Tues., July 8	- Herman Melville , <i>Moby-Dick</i> (1851)
Wed., July 9	-Introduction, “Beginnings to 1700” 3-13 - Bartolomé de las Casas , from “The Very Brief Relation of the Devastation of the Indies” (1542-46) 38-42 - John Smith , from “The General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles” (1624), “A Description of New England” (1616), “New England’s Trials” (1622) 81-99
Thurs., July 10	- Roger Williams , <i>A Key into the Language of America</i> (1643) 193-204 - Rosmarie Waldrop , from <i>A Key into the Language of America</i> (1994)* - <i>New England Primer</i> (1689) 361-363

Week 2: Doctrine/Dissent: Puritan Life and Writing

Tues., July 15	- John Winthrop , “Model of Christian” (1630), <i>Journal</i> (1630-49) 165-186 - William Bradford , from <i>Of Plymouth Plantation</i> (1630-50) 121-156 - Thomas Morton , “New English Canaan” (1635) 157-165
Wed., July 16	- Anne Bradstreet , “The Prologue” (1650), “In Honor of...Queen Elizabeth” (1643), “The Author to Her Book” (1678), “Before the Birth of One of Her Children” (1678), “In Memory of My Dear Grandchild...” (three elegies, for Elizabeth, Anne, and Simon Bradstreet) (1678), “For Deliverance from a Fever” (published 1867), “Here Follows Some Verses Upon the Burning of Our House” (1666), “To My Dear Children” (pub. 1867) 207-238 - Edward Taylor , “Prologue” to <i>Preparatory Meditations</i> (1682), “Upon Wedlock, and Death of Children” (1682), “Upon a Wasp Chilled with Cold” (pub. 1960), “Huswifery” (pub. 1939), “A Fig for Thee, Oh! Death” (pub. 1960) 289-307
Thurs., July 17	- Mary Rowlandson , <i>A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson</i> (1682) 256-288

Week 3: Revolution/Sovereignty: Authoring Self and Nation

Tues., July 22	- Jonathan Edwards , “Personal Narrative” (1740) 396-409, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (1741) 430-441 - Phillis Wheatley , “On Being Brought from Africa” (1773), “To the University of Cambridge” (1767), “On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield” (1770), “To S.M.” (1773), “To His Excellency General Washington” (1775-76) 762-773
Wed., July 23	- Benjamin Franklin , from <i>The Autobiography</i> , Parts I and II (1771, 1784) 455-457, 480-507, 523-542
Thurs., July 24	- Thomas Paine , “Common Sense” (1776) 639-647 - MIDTERM EXAM

Week 4: America/American: National Identity, Myth, Literature

Tues., July 29	- Susanna Rowson , <i>Charlotte Temple</i> (1791)* - MIDTERM ESSAY DUE
Wed., July 30	- John Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur , <i>Letters from an American Farmer</i> (1769-80) 604-618 - Royall Tyler , <i>The Contrast</i> (1787) 775-816
Thurs., July 31	- Black Hawk , <i>Life of Black Hawk, or Mâ-ka-tai-me-she-kià-kiàk</i> (1833)* - Lydia Sigourney , “Death of an Infant” (1827), “To the First Slave Ship” (1827), “Indian Names” (1834), “To a Shred of Linen” (1838), “Fallen Forests” (1854) 106-116 - Caroline Kirkland , from <i>A New Home—Who’ll Follow?</i> (1839) 167-180

Week 5: Persuasion/Redress: Social Responsibility and Critique

Tues., Aug. 5	- Nathaniel Hawthorne , “Young Goodman Brown” (1835) 386-395, “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” (1835) 401-409, “Minister’s Black Veil” (1836) 409-418, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> “Custom House Preface” (1850) 450-476
Wed., Aug. 6	- Ralph Waldo Emerson , “Nature” (1836) 211-227, “Self-Reliance” (1841) 269-286, “Experience” (1844) 310-326 - Henry David Thoreau , “Resistance to Civil Government” (1849) 961-979
Thurs., Aug. 7	- Frederick Douglass , <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> (1845) 1170-1239

Week 6: Sentiment/Sensation: Addressing, Accessing a Mass Reading Public

Tues., Aug. 12	- Harriet Beecher Stowe , from <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> (1852), 805-904 (specific chapters TBA)
Wed., Aug. 13	- George Foster , from <i>New York by Gas-Light</i> (1850)*
Thurs., Aug. 14	- Walt Whitman , “Song of Myself” (1855, 1881) 1330-1374, “Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand” (1860) 1381-82, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (1856) 1383-87 - FINAL PAPER DUE
Fri., Aug. 15	- FINAL EXAM DUE 5:00 P.M.