

English 4623: American Romanticism
Spring 2024

Professor Todd Giles

Bea Wood 232

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Class meets 12:30-1:50 TR in PY201A

Office Hours: MWF 10:00-11:00 (Dillard 324) & TR 11:00-12:00 (BW 232) & by appointment

“The things taught in colleges and schools are not an education, but the means of education.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

“It is only when we forget our learning that we begin to know.”

Henry David Thoreau

Texts

There are no textbooks for this course. All our readings are provided for you as PDFs on D2L. It is your responsibility to print them off, mark them up, and bring them to class.

Course Description

Our discussions of American Romanticism and Transcendentalism (c. 1820–1860) will be informed by the theoretical lens of ecocriticism, the study of literature and its relationship to the environment. Ecocritics ask questions about how nature is represented in literature, explore the ways in which setting shapes authors and/or their characters, and how they themselves shape the environment. Ecocritics also examine how nature is depicted in relation to culture, how “the wild” determines actions/morals, and how human history relates to ecological history.

All of our texts have been chosen, to one degree or another, for their explorations of what we might call their *ecoconsciousness*. In our “Drill, baby, drill!” world of natural resource exploitation, these texts, written at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in America, are as pertinent today as when originally written, helping us shed light on where we have been as a nation and where we are heading.

Keywords: Transcendentalism, anthropocentrism, spirituality, wilderness, wild, over-soul, nostalgia, pastoralism, sublime, nature vs. culture, imagination, environment, animism, ecocentrism.

My courses are organized around the Academic Seminar model pioneered in German universities in the 19th century, in which faculty and students work together to strive for new knowledge based on five pillars: interdisciplinarity; academic freedom; critical thinking; seeking knowledge as an end in itself; and integrating new knowledge while at the same time preserving and interpreting the past.

My pedagogy is founded on the intrinsic value of questioning and reflection, including the questioning of my own assumptions. As a student in my class you will develop your higher-order thinking skills through active learning—clarifying and challenging your own perspectives and those of others through the critical analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of theoretical and literary texts. We will examine and discuss challenging questions and complex realities, learn to think for ourselves, and connect to the world in rich, subtle ways.

Course Requirements

Assignments	Grade Percent
Daily Writing/Homework/Participation	20%
Close Reading Paper	20%
Archival Paper	20%
Ways of Seeing Paper	20%
Academic Journal Paper	20%

Grading Policy

In this class, the following numerical equivalents for final grades are used: A = 100-90%; B = 89-80%; C = 79-70%; D = 69-60%; F = 59-0%.

Daily Writing and Class Activities

You will write frequently in and out of the classroom. In-class writings will include quizzes and various other responses to prompts on topics relevant to that day's readings or things recently covered. These writing activities will be graded on a plus/check/minus scale: a plus for doing a thorough job (100%), a check for completing the work in an acceptable fashion (70%), and a minus for not completing the work or for obvious lack of effort (0%). Some assignments, depending on length and difficulty, will count for more than one daily grade. You cannot make up in-class writing or homework. **This portion of your course work can easily make or break your overall grade, so be sure to keep up.**

Class Preparation and Participation

To succeed on your daily writing you must show that you've closely read, have at least a cursory understanding of the material, and address, to the best of your ability, the writing prompts. I do not expect you to remember exact quotations, but specific examples from the work always help get the point across. It is also good to try to tie in any relevant terminology or critical concepts from class discussions. Read the assigned material by the date listed on the schedule of readings. As you read, take notes and

underline/highlight what you believe are key passages in the text (a climactic scene, crucial lines for understanding the work, a summary of the argument, etc.), or things you have trouble understanding. **Come to each class with comments and questions!**

Paper Submission Format and Policy

All out-of-class assignments must be typed in Times New Roman 12-point black font with one inch margins using MLA format. By enrolling in this class, the student expressly grants MSU a “limited right” in all intellectual property created by the student for the purpose of this course. The “limited right” shall include but shall not be limited to the right to reproduce the student’s work product in order to verify originality and authenticity, and for educational purposes. **Note:** You may not submit a paper for a grade in this class that already has been (or will be) submitted for a grade in another course, unless you obtain the explicit written permission of me and the other instructor involved *in advance*.

Late Paper and Assignment Policy

Unless arrangements are made *in advance* for extenuating circumstances, you will automatically lose a letter grade for each day a paper is late, including weekends. If you can't make it to class on the day a major assignment is due, email me in advance and hand it in either during my office hours or into the main English office (216 Bea Wood Hall) by 5:00 the day the paper is due to avoid losing a letter grade for a late paper. A paper that is more than a week late will automatically receive an F, regardless of the quality of work. **All major assignments must be turned in to pass the class. You will not be able to make up daily work and there is no extra credit.**

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s thoughts, words, ideas, or lines of argument in your own work without appropriate documentation (a parenthetical citation at the end and a listing in “Works Cited”)—whether you use that material in a quotation, paraphrase, or summary. It is a theft of intellectual property and will not be tolerated, whether intentional or not. I have a zero tolerance for any type of plagiarism. **All incidents of plagiarism will be penalized (the paper will receive an automatic F), reported, and kept on file. The second incident of plagiarism in class by the same student will result in the student receiving an F for the course.**

Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Disability Support Services in Room 168 of the Clark Student Center, 397-4140.

Safe Zone Statement

I consider this classroom a place where you will be treated with respect as a human being – regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual

orientation, political beliefs, age, or ability. Additionally, diversity of thought is appreciated and encouraged, provided you can agree to disagree. It is my expectation that ALL students consider the classroom a safe environment.

Attendance Policy

Because this is a writing and discussion course and the work we do in class is designed to help you understand the readings and improve your writing skills, you must attend class to do well. Although I do not take daily role, your in-class writing and participation grades should ensure your attendance and preparedness. By failing to regularly attend class you will not understand the critical terminology and concepts necessary to successfully complete the daily writing assignments and larger papers. You are in college; come to class.

Tardiness Policy

Your behavior in the college classroom should be no different than what will be expected of you as a working professional. Regularly arriving late to class is disruptive to your instructor and your classmates; as such, it will not be tolerated. Students who arrive after the daily writing assignments have begun will automatically receive a minus. Likewise, they will not be allowed to hand in their daily reading questions.

Electronics Policy

Cell phones, laptops, and other electronic devices must be turned off during class. If a student is caught using an electronic device during a quiz or test they will automatically receive a zero on it. Likewise, each time a student is seen playing with his or her cellphone or ipod during class they will automatically lose credit for the day—any in-class writings, quizzes, homework assignments due that day will receive a minus. I will tell students they are losing credit for the day for the first few weeks of class, after which time it is not my responsibility to alert them. Other disruptive behavior, including coming in late on a regular basis, chatting with classmates during class discussion or tests, sleeping, or any other behavior not conducive to a mature learning environment, will first receive a warning; if the behavior continues, an instructor drop will be initiated.

Grade Appeals

I will be happy to try to explain the rationale behind any grade; however, I absolutely do not negotiate, haggle, or argue about grades. Part of my job is to evaluate your work and to assign a written grade to it. I do that to the best of my ability the first time. The bottom line is that you have to take responsibility for your own education.

MSU Writing Labs

I encourage you to begin drafting papers as early as possible and to take advantage of the MSU Writing Labs located in 224 Bea Wood and RC246 Moffett Library. Writing tutors will not edit your papers for you, but they will provide you with specific suggestions for improving your writing.

Writing Proficiency Requirement

All students seeking a Bachelor's degree from Midwestern State University must satisfy a writing proficiency requirement once they have 1) passed English 1113 and English 1123 and 2) earned 60 hours. You may meet this requirement by passing either the Writing Proficiency Exam or English 2113. Please keep in mind that, once you have earned over 90 hours, you lose the opportunity to take the \$25 exam and have no option but to enroll in the three-credit-hour course. If you have any questions about the exam, visit the Writing Proficiency Office website at <http://academics.mwsu.edu/wpr>, or call 397-4131.

Reading Schedule

This schedule is tentative; I reserve the right to amend it with oral notice in class. If you anticipate a problem with due dates, please speak with me well in advance.

Week 1

1/16 Introduction; discuss ecocriticism

1/18 **MEET AT MOFFETT LIBRARY** (Special Collections, Room 207); read Philip Freneau, poems (**handout**); **discuss Archival Paper**

Week 2

1/23 Merriweather Lewis, *Journal* selections; John James Audubon, from *Ornithological Biography*; **discuss Close Reading Paper**

1/25 James Fenimore Cooper, from *The Pioneers*; Susan Fenimore Cooper, from *Rural Hours*

Week 3

1/30 Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle"

2/1 William Cullen Bryant, poems; Thomas Cole, poems

Week 4

2/6 Lydia Sigourney, poems; Early Native American poetry

2/8 Early Native American poetry continued; William Apess, "An Indian's Looking-Glass . . ."

Week 5

2/13 Ralph Waldo Emerson, selection from *Nature*; "Self-Reliance"

2/15 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Each and all"; "Hamatreya"; "The Rhodora"; "The Snow-Storm"

Week 6

2/20 **MEET AT WFMA**; **discuss Ways of Seeing Paper**; **Archival Paper Due**

2/22 Frederick Douglass, from *Narrative of the Life . . .*;

Week 7

- 2/27 George Moses Horton, Phillis Wheatley, & Albery Whitman, poems; Frances Harper, poems
2/29 Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown"; "The Birth-Mark"

Week 8

- 3/5 Edgar Allen Poe, "The Black Cat"; "The Tale-Tell Heart"
3/7 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, poems; John Greenleaf Whittier, poems

Week 9

- 3/12 **Spring Break**
3/14 **Spring Break**

Week 10

- 3/19 Margaret Fuller, from *Summer on the Lakes*; Frederick Douglass, "Niagara"
3/21 Henry David Thoreau, Ch. II "Where I Lived, and what I Lived For" from *Walden*

Week 11

- 3/26 Henry David Thoreau, Ch. IV "Sounds" & Ch. V "Solitude" from *Walden*; **discuss Academic Journal Paper; Ways of Seeing Paper Due**
3/28 **Holiday Break**

Week 12

- 4/2 Henry David Thoreau, "Walking"
4/4 Walt Whitman, from "Preface" to *Leaves of Grass*; Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" #s 1-14

Week 13

- 4/9 Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" #s 48-52; "I Sing the Body Electric"
4/11 Walt Whitman, "This Compost"; "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"; "As I Ebb'd . . ."

Week 14

- 4/16 Walt Whitman, "When Lilacs Last . . ."; "A Song of the Rolling Earth"
4/18 Herman Melville, from *Moby Dick* (1)

Week 15

- 4/23 Herman Melville, from *Moby Dick* (2)
4/25 Herman Melville, from *Moby Dick* (3 & 4)

Week 16

- 4/30 Emily Dickinson, poems
5/2 Emily Dickinson continued; Alice Cary, poems

* **Academic Journal Paper due during our yet-to-be-determined final exam time.**