

# American Romanticism: Nature, Mind, and Aesthetic Experience

Fall 2017, University of Southern Mississippi

English 670  
T 3:50–6:25PM  
Liberal Arts Building 367

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Office Hours: T&TH 12-2pm and by appt.

## Course Description

*“All art should become science and all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one.”*  
Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Fragmente*, 115

This graduate course offers a focused survey of romantic and transcendentalist writings during what is conventionally known as the period of American Romanticism. Students will be introduced to the literary and philosophical currents of the period, with a specific eye towards exploring the entangled connections between nature, thought, spirit, and aesthetic experience. We'll consider how different modes of expression such as science, philosophy, poetry, analogy, and figurative language attempt to disentangle and delineate the complex interaction of embodied minds with art and nature. While romantic writers share a commitment to the primacy of aesthetics, we'll consider how each carves an “original relation to the universe” that lends itself to close reading and comparative study.

We'll begin the course by exploring the continuities and discontinuities between American Puritan, Enlightenment, and Romantic modes of expression in Jonathan Edwards and Charles Brockden Brown. We'll then consider the transcendentalist essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson, including his manifesto *Nature*, reading them as both a stimulus and a foil to his fellow contemporaries such as Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Edgar Allan Poe, and Frederick Douglass. We'll also explore the landscape aesthetics of the Hudson River School, investigating the connections between visual art, poetry, and the natural environment. Throughout our travels, we'll also locate these artists in a transatlantic context, exploring how their respective aesthetics were informed by philosophical and scientific ideas found in Locke, Kant, Burke, Goethe, and Humboldt. The course will culminate in an extended reading of Melville's *Moby Dick* and conclude with a comparative reading of the poetic scales of Whitman and Dickinson. Course requirements include active participation in discussion, a class presentation, a reading journal, a short critical analysis, and a conference paper.

## Required Texts

Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly, Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (Penguin) (978-0140390629)  
Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson's Prose & Poetry* (Norton) (978-0393967920)  
Margaret Fuller, *The Essential Margaret Fuller* (Rutgers University Press) (9780813517780)  
Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings* (9780393930900)  
Edgar Allan Poe, *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe* (Norton) (978-0393972856)  
Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave* (9780300184624)  
Herman Melville, *Moby Dick; or, The Whale* (9780393972832)

*\*In addition to the above texts, students are required to read all copies and course packets on the schedule*

### **Your Contributions**

Attendance and Participation	10%
Reading Journal	10%
Oral Presentation	10%
Short Critical Analysis	20%
Final Conference Paper	50%

**Attendance and Participation.** Active, consistent, and informed participation including occasional short writing assignments. Given the seminar nature of the course, it is essential that you come to class having already processed the readings. Be prepared and ready to discuss intelligently; complete all assignments on time; and use the Reading Journal to generate ideas prior to class discussion. You are allowed one absence. Attendance and participation are worth **10%** of your grade.

**Reading Journal.** To generate ideas, you will keep an informal Reading Journal in which you reflect on the reading assignments through *generative free writing*. Unlike your formal writing assignments, this journal is about generating and connecting ideas, and thus should be written freely, quickly, and with little attention to grammar, syntax, or other conventions. For more on the values of generative free writing, see Peter Elbow's "[Freewriting and the Problem of Wheat and Tares.](#)" Think of the journal as a running notebook for the course, where you write down noteworthy quotations, phrases, or key words, and then free write in response to them. Think of your free writing as a commentary on your notes, or your first attempt to synthesize and/or articulate exactly what struck you as noteworthy or interesting about the assigned readings—i.e., what you would pursue further if you wrote about it in a more formal paper. Plan to write for about 15-20 minutes, and don't worry about quality.

Topics for free writing are endless and may include: ideas you find captivating or confusing; ideas related to your own research; thoughts about terms you find productive or confusing; reflections on the argument or methodology of the essay; connections made between the reading and your work in the archive; topics or insights you might investigate with further research. When in doubt, choose a significant or interesting quote and write on that for 15 minutes; or choose a keyword or metaphor and think through its implications; or reflect on an object or example; or connect ideas between two different readings. There are no right topics. Just *free write and generate ideas*—no matter how bad or unclear they may seem. I will scan your reading journal throughout the semester, but I will not read it closely. The Reading Journal is worth **10%** of your final grade.

**Oral Presentation.** A 5-10 minute presentation (accompanied by a one-page handout, front and back) in which you critically synthesize one of the weekly readings. Copies of the handout should be emailed to all seminar participants by midnight of the day prior to our course discussion. A sign up sheet will be distributed the second week of class. Oral presentations are worth **10%** of your grade.

Handouts should be divided into the following sections and should be distributed to all students on the day of the presentation. Thus, in addition to emailing them to the class, you should print out 12 copies for the class to look over while you present.

- **Keywords:** A list of basic terms and concepts relevant to the reading, along with definitions. Organize them as you see fit. You might list them in categories, create a conceptual map, or simply highlight a few important terms.

- Brief Abstract: A one paragraph description and synthesis of the reading's argument. Try to formulate the text's project in no more than 5 lines. Quote specific phrases that are essential to the reading in your abstract.
- Notes on Argument: A few bullet point, critical observations about the reading where you indicate the major steps of its argument or approach.
- Critical Context/Conversation: In this section, briefly comment on the broader context or conversation in which the text intervenes (literary, historical, methodological, theoretical, etc.). In other words, try to articulate the situation of enunciation (i.e., how it responds to other debates, issues, problems, etc.).
- Connection/Application: One paragraph in which you describe and explore any connections you see between this reading and other readings in the course, including the major reading for the same week. In making connections, try to answer the following question: How does this particular reading contribute to our understanding of the course's topic: mind, nature, and aesthetic experience? Where does it contribute to our understanding of and conversation about American romanticism? In addition to content, it may also help you to think about the text's genre, style, and form, or how it approaches and inquires into its topic? For romantics, style and mode of expression are often synonymous with content and message.
- Discussion Questions: Two to three questions about the text for discussion. Highlight some points of confusion, areas open to future research, ideas related to other readings, etc.

As for the in-class presentation, you may use your handout as a guide, but please do not simply read the handout word for word. Use this opportunity to discuss your reaction to the text, your feelings about its content and/or method. Be ready to lead discussion for 5 minutes after speaking.

**Short Critical Analysis.** A short 3-page critical analysis in which you present a focused argument about a text or textual passage from the first six weeks of class. With such a small amount of space, your argument needs to be narrow and specific, focused exclusively on articulating your thesis and proving its significance. You may include quick examples and details to prove your argument, but don't dwell on them. Treat the paper more like an extended abstract, not a conventional paper, in which you present your thesis and then illustrate and prove your argument through close reading and analysis. Keep your paragraphs short and your argument focused; narrow it down to a passage or scene; let the argument flow and emerge out of your close reading.

I would suggest introducing a problem or issue in the first paragraph, then quickly pivoting into your thesis. Use the second paragraph to articulate and explain the thesis, along with its significance and relevance. This is all first page news. On the second page, you can then close read and analyze some examples (or a single key passage) to support and illustrate your argument, doing so quickly and with an eye toward synthesizing quotes into your own sentences. Cut quotes down and cite only the most relevant phrases; even better, focused on a 1-2 key passages. On the final page (or at least the final half page), come back to your argument and restate its significance. Here you can gesture toward the broader critical conversation in which it partakes, planting the seed for a broader intervention in the scholarly discussion. This short critical analysis is worth 20% of your grade.

**Final Paper.** A conference-length paper (8 pages) on some issue or text related to the seminar. In addition to your final paper, you will also write a short abstract (250-400 words) in which you outline the argument of your paper. In this abstract, you should try to articulate the central question or problem that your paper will try to address; outline the historical, theoretical, or methodological

debates in which it will intervene; indicate the type or range of historical/textual sources it will draw on to make that intervention; and address the “so what” question motivating its intervention. You should also append a working bibliography of relevant texts; or, if you wish, you may also add your own comments and responses to create an informal *annotated* bibliography. The final paper is worth 50% of your final grade.

### **Guidelines and Policies**

1. Attendance and promptness are mandatory. Students absent more than 1 times over the course of the semester run the risk of having their overall grade significantly lowered. Those who fail to attend class regularly—for whatever reason—should drop the course by the college’s withdrawal deadline.
2. Plagiarism (failure to cite sources, representing others’ material as your own) is not allowed. Any instance of plagiarism, however extensive the amount of material involved, will result in a failing grade for the course.
3. All assignments composed for the course must be original work. Students may not submit work also submitted for another course.
4. Unless special arrangements are made, all assignments are due on the specified due date. Please do not submit papers late; no assignment will be accepted more than a week after the due date.
5. All assignments completed outside of class must be typed or word-processed on white paper, double-spaced, using a 12-point, Times New Roman font. Margins should be 1 inch on all sides. Students must follow either MLA or Chicago guidelines for submitting all papers.
6. Since this class will usually operate as a discussion course, class participation is essential to its success. Students are expected to come to class prepared, having read **all the readings completely** and given them careful thought. Students are required to bring copies of all required readings to class, arrive on time and stay for the entire class, appear attentive, and demonstrate courtesy to both classmates and the professor.
7. This course is reading and writing intensive. Grading standards will be rigorous. To receive an A or B for the course, students must demonstrate 1) extensive engagement with the course content through written work and class participation, 2) sophisticated, critical, and creative thinking, 3) a clear proficiency in academic written English, and 4) a growing familiarity and comfort with the concepts and methodologies discussed during the semester.

### **Statement on Disability Assistance**

This course follows all university regulations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that qualifies under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and requires accommodations, he/she should contact the Office for Disability Accommodations (ODA) for information on appropriate policies and procedures. Disabilities covered by ADA may include learning, psychiatric, physical disabilities, or chronic health disorders. Students can contact ODA if they are not certain whether a medical condition/disability qualifies.

*Address:*           The University of Southern Mississippi

Office for Disability Accommodations  
118 College Drive # 8586  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001  
*Telephone:* (601) 266-5024 or (228) 214-3232      *Fax:* (601) 266-6035

*Individuals with hearing impairments* can contact ODA using the *Mississippi Relay Service* at 1-800-582-2233 (TTY) or emailing ODA at [oda@usm.edu](mailto:oda@usm.edu).

Note that faculty members must accommodate students with disabilities and must adhere to the excused absence policy of the University. Faculty members are required to excuse absences in which a student misses class in his or her capacity as an official representative of the University. In such cases, students must be given a reasonable opportunity to make up work. See [Faculty Handbook](#) 4.5.4. Documentation in these two cases will come from ODA or from the official body for which the student serves as a representative.

### **Academic Integrity**

All students at the University of Southern Mississippi are expected to demonstrate the highest levels of academic integrity in all that they do. Forms of academic dishonesty include (but are not limited to):

1. Cheating (including copying from others' work)
2. Plagiarism (representing another person's words or ideas as your own; failure to properly cite the source of your information, argument, or concepts)
3. Falsification of documents
4. Disclosure of test or other assignment content to another student
5. Submission of the same paper or other assignment to more than one class without the explicit approval of all faculty members' involved
6. Unauthorized academic collaboration with others
7. Conspiracy to engage in academic misconduct

Engaging in any of these behaviors or supporting others who do so will result in academic penalties and/or other sanctions. If a faculty member determines that a student has violated our Academic Integrity Policy, sanctions ranging from resubmission of work to course failure may occur, including the possibility of receiving a grade of "XF" for the course, which will be on the student's transcript with the notation "Failure due to academic misconduct." For more details, please see the University's [Academic Integrity Policy](#). Note that repeated acts of academic misconduct will lead to expulsion from the University.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Week 1 (08/22): Ideas, Sensation, and Beauty

- Selections from John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, *New Essay on Human Understanding* (1696)
- Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Selected Writings: “The Spider Letter,” “Beauty of the World,” selections from “Images or Shadows of Divine Things,” “Personal Narrative,” and “A Divine and Supernatural Light” (Canvas)

### Week 2 (08/29): American Gothic and Sublime

- Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly, Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799)
- Selections from Edmund Burke, “A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful” (1757) and Immanuel Kant, “Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime” (1764) (Canvas)

### Week 3 (09/05): Emerson, Nature, and Transcendentalism

- Goethe, from *Scientific Studies*: “Nature” [A Fragment by George Christoph Tobler] and “Goethe’s commentary” (Canvas)
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Reason Versus Understanding” (Canvas)
- Ralph Waldo Emerson: *Nature*, “The Method of Nature,” “Spiritual Laws,” and “Circles” in *Emerson’s Prose & Poetry* (Norton)
- \*Perry Miller, “New England’s Transcendentalism: Native or Imported?” (Norton)

### Week 4 (09/12): Emerson, Symbolism, and Aesthetic Experience

- Emerson, *Essays on Poetry*: “The Poet” and “From Poetry and Imagination”
- Emerson, *Sample Poems*: “Each and All,” “The Snow-Storm,” and “Two Rivers”
- Emerson, *Late Essays*: “Experience” and “Illusions”
- Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, “The word ‘Aesthetic,’” *Aesthetic Papers* (Canvas)
- Goethe, “Symbolism” (Canvas)
- \*John Conron, “Reading Forms: Symbolism in Picturesque Effect” in *American Picturesque* (2010) (Canvas)

### Week 5 (09/19): Fuller, Symbolism, and the Feminine Poet

- Fuller, Selections from early writings in *The Essential Margaret Fuller (EMF)*: “Self-Definitions, 1835-42,” “Autobiographical Romance,” “The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain,” and “Leila”
- Fuller, Selections from *Summer on the Lakes* (1844) in *EMF*: Ch. 1-3, pp. 69-110; and Ch. 4 (the “Mariana” section), pp. 118-131
- Fuller, Selections from *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) in *EMF*: pp. 309-313 (On Woman’s “Magnetic or Electrical Influence”)
- \*Jeffrey Steele, “Introduction,” *Essential Margaret Fuller*, xi-xlvi

### Week 6 (09/26): Dark Romanticism and Poe's Aesthetic

- Edgar Allan Poe, from *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe* (Norton):
  - Sample Poems: "Spirits of the Dead," "[Stanzas]," "The Lake—To—," "Israfel," "The Raven," and "Annabel Lee"
  - Poetic Criticism: "The Philosophy of Composition," "From The Poetic Principle," and "From Marginalia"
  - Tales and Sketches: "A Descent into the Maelström," "Ligeia," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "The Oval Portrait"
- \*Backgrounds and Contexts: "Transcendentalism and Alternative Romanticism," pp. 717-732 (Norton)
- *Short Critical Analysis Due on Friday 09/29 (morning)*

### Week 7 (10/03): Visual Art and American Landscape Aesthetics

- Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" (1836) (all readings for this week on Canvas)
- James Fenimore Cooper, "American and European Scenery Compared" (1852)
- Susan Fenimore Cooper, "A Dissolving View" (1852)
- Asher B. Durand, Letter II and Letter IV, from *Letters on Landscape Painting* (1855)
- Poems: Thomas Cole, "A Painter" and William Cullen Bryant, "Forest Hymn"
- \*Jennifer Raab, "Seeing in Detail," *Frederic Church: The Art and Science of Detail* (2015), pp. 1-14
- Landscape Paintings to Study (available on Canvas):
  - J.M.W. Turner, *Snow Storm, Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps* (1812)
  - Thomas Cole, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow* (1836)
  - Asher Durand, *Kindred Spirits* (1849) and *Study from Nature* (1856)
  - Frederic Edwin Church, *Above the Clouds at Sunrise* (1849), *Niagara* (1857), *Andes of Ecuador* (1855), *Heart of the Andes* (1859)
  - Jasper Francis Cropsey, *Autumn on the Hudson River* (1860)
  - Other relevant artists: Fitz Hugh Lane, John Frederick Kensett, Martin Johnson Heade, Sanford Robinson Gifford, Thomas Moran, and Albert Bierstadt.

### Week 8 (10/10): Nature and Thoreau's Transcendental Experiments

- Henry David Thoreau, Selected Chapters from *Walden* (Norton):
  - "Economy," "Where I Lived and What I Lived For," "Reading," "Sounds," "Solitude," and "The Bean-Field"
- \*Goethe, "The Experiment as Mediator of Object and Subject" (Canvas)

### Week 9 (10/17): Thoreau's Practice (Phenomenology and Morphology)

- Henry David Thoreau, Selected Chapters from *Walden* (Norton):
  - "The Ponds," "The Pond in Winter," "Spring," "Conclusion"
- \*Goethe, selections from *The Essential Goethe: "Observation on Morphology in General"* (1795) and "From *On Morphology*" (1807-17) (Canvas)

### Week 10 (10/24): Humboldtian Science and Poe's Cosmos

- Edgar Allan Poe, from *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe* (Norton):
  - “Sonnet—To Science,” “Silence.—A Fable” and “The Power of Words”
  - *From* Eureka: An Essay on the Material and Spiritual Universe
- \*Laura Dassow Walls, “The Face of Planet America,” in *The Passage to Cosmos: Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America* (2009) (Canvas)

### Week 11 (10/31): TBD by the class

- Options include: Nathaniel Hawthorne's short stories, Elizabeth Peabody's theories of education, more selections of Romantic Poetry, Herman Melville's “Benito Cereno,” George Catlin among the Native Americans, John James Audubon's ornithology and bird drawings, William Apess' *A Son of the Forest* (1831), or more essays by Thoreau.

### Week 12 (11/07): Herman Melville and the Aesthetic Imagination

- Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*
  - Etymology and Extracts; Ch. 1-19; Ch. 26-29; Ch. 32; Ch. 35-36; Ch. 41-42
  - Helpful reference material: John B. Putnam's “Whaling and Whalecraft: A Pictorial Account” and the “Glossary of Nautical Terms” (both in the Norton critical edition)
- \*Harrison Hayford, “Loomings?: Yarns and Figures in the Fabric” (Norton)

### Week 13 (11/14): Moby Dick and the American Sublime

- Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*
  - Ch. 51; Ch. 55-57; Ch. 58; Ch. 60; Ch. 68; Ch. 70; Ch. 74-75; Ch. 78-80; Ch. 85-86; Ch. 87; Ch. 93-96; Ch. 99; Ch. 102-104; Ch. 106-108; Ch. 119; Ch. 125-126; Ch. 132-135; and Epilogue
- \*Llana Pardes, “Playing with Leviathan: Job and the Aesthetic Turn in Biblical Exegesis,” in *Melville's Bibles* (2008) (Canvas)
- *Abstracts for Conference Papers Due*

### Week 14 (11/21): Frederick Douglass and the Heroic Slave

- Robert S. Levine, John Stauffer, and John R. McKivigan, “Introduction” to *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition* (Yale)
- Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave* (Yale)
- Frederick Douglass, “Pictures and Progress” (1864) (Canvas)
- \*Carrie Hyde, from “The Climates of Liberty” (Yale)

### Week 15 (11/28): Whitman's Cosmos and Dickinson's Circuits

- Walt Whitman, *Selected Poems* (packet on Canvas)
- Emily Dickinson, *Selected Poems* (packet on Canvas)

- \*TBD: Christine Gerhardt, "Introduction," in *A Place for Humility: Whitman, Dickinson, and the Natural World* (2014) (Canvas)

**Final Conference Papers: Due Date TBD**