University of Waterloo
English 342: American Literature to 1860
Fall 2001
Tues/Thurs 11:30-12:50
HH 150

Prof. V. Lamont
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Availability (effective Sept. 10-Dec. 3)
Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 3:00-4:00, Wed 11:30-12:30, and at other times by
appointment. If you do not find me in my office at these times, I am probably running an
errand and will be back within a few minutes.
Teaching Schedule: Tues/Thurs 11:30-2:20, Wed 1:00-4:00

Students are welcome to contact me in my office at any time, although I cannot guarantee
that I will be available unless you come during my office hours or make an appointment
in advance. I am usually on campus all day on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. I
also check my email at least once a day (usually in the late afternoon) during the week. I
am usually not on campus on Fridays (my research day). Please note that I do not check
my email on weekends.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course will survey important developments in American literary history from the
early 1800s until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. During this period, when the
American Revolution (1783-87) was still in recent memory, the United States was in an
early stage of defining itself as a nation; indeed, its geographical boundaries were still
growing as the nation expanded westward. As the instability of the Revolutionary period
subsided, Americans had more resources to devote to cultural pursuits, making the early
19th century a period of extraordinary growth and development in American literary
activity, when some of the most recognizable names in American literature—Emerson,
Hawthorne, Melville, Stowe—emerged. Much of the literature of this period focused
upon self-consciously defining American identity, isolating its key values, and finding
appropriate literary vehicles for expressing a uniquely “American” culture. This process
was highly conflicted; thus, the objective of the course is not to arrive at some exclusive
or prescriptive definition of “American” identity, but to understand the conflicts involved
in early-19th century debates about national identity, and the role that literature played in
this process.
TEXTS
Required
Lydia Maria Child, Hobomok (Rutgers University Press)
Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom’s Cabin (Oxford University Press)
Norton Anthology of American Literature vol. I

Highly Recommended
Note: All royalties earned from the sale of The Little, Brown Compact Handbook will go to the Department of English Scholarship Fund.

ASSIGNMENTS AND DISTRIBUTION OF MARKS

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Important: If you experience difficulty with any of the assignments described below, it is crucial that you talk to me early on in the process. Students are also encouraged to see me for guidance on any aspect of the course.

Group Seminar Presentation
This assignment will give you the opportunity to meet each other and work as a team. The purpose of this assignment is to present a broader historical context through which the primary text might be understood and interpreted. You should attempt to link the seminar material to the particular writers and texts we are studying in the course. The seminar should last 30 minutes. Students will sign up for seminar topics (listed in the schedule of classes, below) during the first week of class. The questions accompanying each topic are intended to facilitate brainstorming; you are responsible for formulating your own original research questions.

This assignment requires research. Start your research early to allow time for interlibrary loans and recalls.

Everyone in the group will receive the same mark, and it is the group’s collective responsibility to ensure that everyone contributes his or her fair share; however, the instructor reserves the right to reduce the grade of individual students who have clearly not made an adequate contribution to the project. If you experience problems with group dynamics, it is important that you bring them to my attention as soon as they arise.

Additional Requirements
1. A handout summarizing the content of your presentation in enough detail to serve as study notes for the final exam, to be distributed to the class on the day of your presentation.
2. An annotated bibliography of works consulted for the presentation, formatted using correct MLA style as explained in the *Little Brown Handbook*. Do not make up your own citation style; doing so will result in the loss of marks. Each entry must be accompanied by a brief (1-3 sentences) summary of the major argument of the text.
3. A copy of the notes and any additional aids (e.g. overheads) you use for the presentation. This material will not be formerly evaluated. I will use it to help jog my memory when grading your presentation, and to come up with questions for the final exam.

**Pointers**
1. Stay within the time allowed.
2. Work as a group. Presentations consisting of four or five loosely connected—or unconnected—topics will receive lower marks than those showing solid evidence of team-work at all stages of the project.
3. Avoid information overload. The most common weakness in group presentations is that they present too much detailed material without clearly emphasizing key points. Talk about the forest, not the trees.
4. Problems with group dynamics (usually related to unfair division of workload) should be brought to my attention immediately. There is nothing I can do about them once the project reaches its final stages.
5. Creativity is encouraged. Role playing, dramatizations, multi-media aids, class exercises, and debates are just a few of the alternatives to the traditional lecture as means of delivering the content.
6. Remember, the main goal of your presentation is to generate intellectual discussion.

**Tips for Public Speaking**
1. Do not constantly lecture or read from a written text. Unless you are “natural” at public-speaking, you will probably need to equip yourself with a script, but your delivery should be informal and “speakerly.”
2. Make eye contact with everyone in the room. Do not fix your gaze on one person; this tends to exclude everyone else from the discussion.
3. Create spaces for exchange with your audience throughout your presentation. An audience can only listen for so long before they get bored and start to tune out. It’s a good idea to “wake up” your audience occasionally through some kind of participation exercise (a writing exercise, a discussion question, a poll, a quiz, etc.)
4. Ask good questions (not as easy as it sounds!). A good question should be open-ended (i.e. it should solicit elaboration rather than a “yes/no” answer). A good question should not look for the “right” answer; rather, it should be an invitation for the audience to contribute their own ideas. When asking questions, it’s a good idea to write student responses on the board. This validates student responses, and makes it easier for you and the class to analyze the responses.
5. Go with the flow! Remember, the point of your presentation is to engage the audience. If you get a good discussion going, don’t shut it down prematurely so you can get through all of your material. While every member of your group should have an equal chance to participate in the presentation, it’s not the end of the world if you don’t get through everything you have prepared.
Evaluation
Presentations will be evaluated as follows: intellectual challenge of the content, evidence of ample background preparation, equal division of labor of all group members in both preparation and presentation of material, integration of individual contributions into a coherent whole, ability to facilitate class participation and discussion, attention to broader issues raised in the course, commitment to and enthusiasm for the project. Everyone in the group will receive the same mark. It is the group’s collective responsibility to ensure that all members contribute equally, and to contact me to mediate if there are problems with the division of labor or other aspects of group dynamics that cannot be resolved within the group. In circumstances where a student clearly does not complete his or her fair share of the group assignment, I reserve the right to assign that student an individual grade.

Essay
Required Length: 8-10 pages presented according to these specifications:

- typed or word processed, single-sided, on 8 1/2” x 11” white paper;
- double-spaced, with three lines of type per inch—no more and no less;
- body text in a 12 pt font or 10 characters per inch;
- all margins set at 1”—no more and no less; do not use right justification;
- number all pages 1/2” down from the upper-right hand corner with your last name before the number;
- on the first text page, provide your name, the date, and course number one inch down from upper-left corner. Double-space between this identification and the essay title, center the title, and double-space between title and first line of text.

Topics: Devise an original topic within the following parameters: it should compare and contrast two texts on the syllabus, and the topic should address the course’s focus on the role literature played in broader social, political, and cultural conflicts in early 19th-century American culture, paying particular attention to the text’s structure and language. Try to make the topic as unique and specific as you can. Once you have devised a topic, you must make an appointment to discuss it with me. I will not accept essays from students who have not done so.

Evaluation
Essays will be evaluated according to the following components: originality, interest, and level of intellectual challenge of the thesis; coherence and persuasiveness of the argument; analysis and integration of supporting evidence; and mechanics (organization, sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, correct use of MLA citation format). First-class (85-100%) marks will be awarded only to essays that excel in every category. Note that, because the composition and content of an essay are interdependent, problems with the composition of an essay are likely to impede the clear expression of the content.
Participation
Students are expected to prepare for class by carefully reading the assigned text, and to participate in class discussion. Each student is responsible for keeping track of his or her participation in a participation journal. In this journal, you will record the comments and questions you contributed to class discussion, explain what prompted you to offer these comments or questions, and describe the outcome of your contribution to the discussion. You may also include private reflection on content of lectures and discussion. You may be asked to write journal entries in class to prepare for discussion. Journal entries for the week are due in my mailbox (HH 252) every Friday so that I can read them while the week’s classes are still fresh in my mind; late entries are of little benefit and will not be accepted. I will keep your journal entries until the end of the term, when I will re-read them in order to determine your mark for class participation.

Evaluation
Student participation will be evaluated on the basis of the following evidence, as recorded by students in their participation journals: preparation (careful reading of assigned text before class), contributions to ongoing critical conversations in class (are they constructive? productive? intellectually stimulating?), private reflection on class discussion and lectures (does it demonstrate intellectual engagement with content of the course?).

Final Exam
The final exam will take place during exam week and will cover the entire course, including material covered in lectures, class discussions, and group presentations. You will be required to write about texts other than those examined in presentations and essays.

NOTE ON AVOIDANCE OF ACADEMIC OFFENCES
All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes an academic offense, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for their academic actions. When the commission of an offense is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline) which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (section 1; on the Web at http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infoucal/UW/policy_71.html). If you need help in learning how to avoid offenses such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean.

I reserve the right to run student essays through plagiarism detection software.
LATE POLICY
In order to ensure that all students receive fair and equal treatment with respect to lateness or absence, the policy for this course regarding late or missed assignments is as follows:

Group Presentations: A student who fails to attend a group presentation day when his/her group is scheduled to present, or who misses a substantial part of the presentation because of lateness, will receive a failing grade for the group presentation assignment. If an emergency arises, be sure to contact all involved (me, your group members) as soon as possible. Depending on the circumstances, we will either reschedule the presentation or come up with an alternative basis for evaluating your grade for the presentation, provided you supply reliable documentation to explain and justify your absence.

Term Papers are due at the beginning of class on the designated deadline date. Extensions will be considered provided the student consults with me in a reasonable amount of time before the deadline. The penalty for late assignments is a deduction of 3% per day or part thereof, including weekends. Assignments submitted on the deadline date, but after class has started, will be considered late. Submit assignments outside of class at your own risk. Assignments submitted outside of class should be signed and dated by the English Department secretary (HH 252) and submitted to my mailbox; otherwise, they will be dated according to when I receive them.

*Exceptions will be made in the case of an emergency, provided you contact me (by phone, email, or in person) within three working days of the assignment due-date, and are able to provide reliable documentation to explain and justify the missed/late assignment. Documentation requirements for medical emergencies are outlined in the University of Waterloo calendar (p. 1:8; form available from the Web, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosa/illness.html). Non-medical emergencies will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and must be verified with reliable documentation; to be reliable such documentation should be issued by an objective third party (not a friend or relative) who can substantiate claims that an emergency occurred. Students are also expected to know University and Faculty regulations regarding exams and assignments (University Calendar p. 1:7-1:11 and 7:8-7:12). While I sympathize with students who encounter computer/printer malfunctions, I do not consider these to be emergencies.

I will not accept any essays at all after the last class of the term. All term marks are considered final as of the final exam date.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Please bring your texts to class.

Week 1
Sept. 11: Introduction and Group Presentation sign-up
Sept. 13: Introduction II and in-class group assignment
Week 2
Sept. 18: Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok*;
Sept. 20: *Hobomok*

First participation journal entry due Sept. 21

Week 3
Sept. 25: *Hobomok*
Sept. 27: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Seminar – The Slavery Debate: What were the key arguments, who were the key players, and what role did literature play?

Week 4
Oct. 2: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Seminar – Speaking as Former Slave: Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs spoke as representatives of the slave population, but as published authors, they were actually exceptions. Find out as much as you can about slave culture and tell us about it. In light of what you discover, how representative are Douglass and Jacobs of the broader slave population?

Week 5
Oct. 9: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Week 6
Oct. 16: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
Oct. 18: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

Seminar – Uncle Tom in the 20th Century: Research the history of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s literary reputation from the first appearance of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to the present (be selective – focus on key shifts in the way her work has been regarded by critics, academics, and general readers). How and why has her reputation changed over time? How might these changes be linked to changing definitions of “good” literature or ideological shifts in American society? How are literary values connected to social values?

Week 7
Oct. 23: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
Oct. 25: Herman Melville, *Bartleby, The Scrivenor*

Seminar – Research the profession of authorship during the 1850s and tell us about it. You may consider researching Melville’s professional career and relating it to broader developments in authorship. What might *Bartleby, the Scrivenor* have to do with the situation of the American author during that period? How has contemporary authorship changed (or not)?
Week 8
Oct. 30: *Bartleby, The Scrivenor*
Nov. 3: Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*

**Seminar - Women's Rights:** What were some of the key events and arguments of the early-19th century women's rights movement and how does *The Scarlet Letter* respond to them? How do contemporary arguments about women's rights compare to 19th century ones? How do ideas about gender inform the way that women's rights are conceived?

Week 9
Nov. 6: *The Scarlet Letter*
Nov. 8: *The Scarlet Letter*

**Essay topics must be discussed with me no later than Nov. 9**

Week 10
Nov. 13: no class; I will be available for essay consultation
Nov. 15: Walt Whitman, **Essays Due**

Week 11
Nov. 20: Walt Whitman, selections TBA

**Seminar - Walt Whitman as an "American" Poet:** Find out as much as you can about Walt Whitman and his life's work. How representative is the selection of his work in the Norton anthology? Find a few other anthologies and get a sense of which of Whitman's works are most commonly anthologized. Given that Whitman is known as the "American" poet, what version of American identity is suggested by the selections that are most commonly anthologized? Did he write any works that challenge this view? Tell us about them. What does your research teach us about the role canonization plays in the construction of national identity?

Nov. 22: Emily Dickinson

Week 12
Nov. 27: Emily Dickinson

**Seminar - Emily Dickinson, Recluse?:** Test the popular view of Emily Dickinson as a recluse whose poetry was more or less disengaged from the society in which she lived. How does research on her life and work alter this picture of Dickinson? Can her poetry be interpreted through some of the historical frameworks we have been studying in class? How do ideas about gender influence the standards and interpretive frameworks most commonly applied to her poetry?

Nov. 29: Review