University of Waterloo
English 343: Nineteenth-Century American Literature
Winter 2000
Tues/Thurs 10:00-11:20; EL 205

Instructor: Victoria Lamont
Office: HH 226
Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 11:30-12:30; Wed 1:00-2:00
Email: vlamont@watarts.uwaterloo.ca
Phone: 885-1211 ext. 6873

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”
(Thomas Jefferson, The Declaration of Independence)

American society in the nineteenth-century was rife with paradoxes. It was a nation founded upon the “self-evident” truth that “all men are created equal,” yet implicit in the displacement of aboriginal people, the enslavement and segregation of Afro-Americans, and the disenfranchisement of American women, was an assumed definition of the word “men” which excluded more than half of the American population from the privilege of pursuing the ‘American Dream’ of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” These exclusions, however, were vigorously debated, not only in political arenas, but also in literature. Beginning with the premise that literature plays an integral role in structuring our perception of the society in which we live, this course will examine the participation of a select group of American authors in broader literary conversations about the meanings of “America.” This approach will supply the broader framework for introducing students to important authors and literary developments in American literature before 1900.

TEXTS
Required
Lydia Maria Child, Hobomok (Rutgers University Press)
Frederick Douglas, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas (Oxford University Press)*
Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom’s Cabin (Oxford University Press)
Herman Melville, Billy Budd, Sailor and Selected Tales (Oxford University Press)
Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (Everyman)
Emily Dickinson, Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson (Everyman)
Edith Wharton, House of Mirth (Signet)**

*Due in bookstore Jan. 20
**Due in bookstore by mid February
ASSIGNMENTS AND DISTRIBUTION OF MARKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Presentation:</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Sign Up</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview (worth 10% of Essay grade):</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Sign Up</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Essay:</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Mar 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam:</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Papers:</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>*See Note</td>
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*Note: Discussion papers to be submitted at the beginning of class. You need not submit a discussion paper for a primary text you are presenting on.

**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.**

**Group Presentation**
Working in groups of five, you will lead a class discussion of the primary text assigned for that day. Your presentation should last the duration of the class.

Additional Requirements
1. A handout summarizing the content of your presentation (topics, arguments, evidence), 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. Three possible short-answer exam questions based on the content of your presentation, to be included on your presentation handout. I will compile these questions throughout the term and draw from the best of them when I prepare the final exam. A good question will connect the primary text to broader issues or topics raised in the course. In addition, questions should be open-ended (i.e. solicit elaboration rather than a “yes/no” answer), they should create opportunities for students to express their own ideas and arguments (as opposed to looking for a single “right” answer), and they should be narrow enough in focus to solicit focussed responses.

Guidelines for Presentations
The main goal of your presentation is to generate intellectual discussion. To this end, I offer the following guidelines:
1. Do not lecture or constantly read from a written text. This approach tends to shut down discussion. 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 alternate between presenting your material and generating class participation.
4. Think of creative strategies engaging your audience in the material. Some suggestions: make use of audio-visual aids, assign a group discussion on a topic, give students a quiz or mock exam questions, dramatize a scene from the text, organize a class debate.
5. 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.
6. 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
Everyone in the group will receive the same mark; thus it is the group’s collective responsibility to ensure that all members contribute equally. 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 feedback and discussion, attention to broader issues raised in the course, commitment to and enthusiasm for the project.

Interview and Research Essay
Length: 8 pages; 1 page=250 words typed & double-spaced
For this assignment, you will compare and contrast two texts on the syllabus. One of these texts can be one you’ve studied for your group presentation. Your paper must cite (and use) a minimum of two secondary sources on each primary text (for a total of four secondary sources). You must use correct MLA citation format when citing secondary sources in your essay. Do not invent your own citation format, as marks will be deducted for doing so. If you are unfamiliar with MLA guidelines for citing primary and secondary sources, consult a handbook such as The Little Brown Compact Handbook. If you have any questions that are not addressed in the handbook, ask me.

While this assignment requires you to consult secondary sources, in the essay itself your own ideas and voice should predominate. Avoid extensive quotations of other people’s ideas (paraphrasing is preferable). When you borrow ideas or words from others, you are required to credit your sources using MLA citation format. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism.

10% of your mark for this assignment will be based on an interview with me. For this interview, you will orally present your essay topic, thesis, essay plan (i.e. structure and
progression of argument), and primary and secondary evidence. You may submit written
notes if you wish, but this is not a requirement. You should, however, arrive at your
interview having made significant inroads with your research, and with a well-developed
thesis and essay plan. When you are ready for your interview, make an appointment with
me, preferably during my office hours. All interviews must be completed by February
17.

Steps:
1. Choose two texts to compare and contrast, and identify a workable basis for
comparison—i.e. a more general topic relevant to both texts.
2. Choose at least four secondary sources that are relevant to your topic. You must
consult at least two sources for each text. Your secondary sources should be drawn from
peer-reviewed journals or books published by University/scholarly presses, and they
should have been published after 1990. Read your articles carefully and take good notes,
including the necessary citation information.
3. Extrapolate a thesis from your topic based on your analysis of both primary and
secondary material. Draft an essay plan which summarizes both the structure of your
discussion and the primary and secondary evidence you will be using to support your
argument.
4. Schedule an appointment for your interview (no later than February 17) During this
10-minute interview, you will orally present your essay topic, thesis, essay plan, and
primary and secondary evidence. Evaluation for the interview will be based on your oral
presentation, but you may hand in written notes if you wish.
5. Write the essay.

Evaluation
Research papers will be evaluated according to the originality, interest, level of
intellectual challenge, coherence, and persuasiveness of the thesis; analysis and
integration of primary and secondary evidence; choice of and level of engagement with
secondary material; and mechanics (organization, sentence structure, grammar,
punctuation, correct use of MLA citation format).

Final Exam
The final exam will take place during exam week and will cover the entire course. You
will be required to discuss texts other than those examined in presentations and essays.

Discussion Papers

Requirements:
1-2 page (typed, double-spaced, 1 page = 250 words) discussion papers are due
throughout the term. You are exempt from having to prepare a discussion paper for the
primary text you are studying for your group presentation. The purpose of the discussion
paper is to facilitate focussed reading and class discussion. For each discussion paper,
you will identify possible issues for class discussion, along with your own thoughts about
the issue(s). Possible “issues” for discussion can include aspects of the text that interest,
intrigue, or perplex you; similarities/differences between the text and previous texts
discussed in the course; or the ways in which the text can be situated in relation to broader issues addressed in the course. While essay form is not expected, discussion papers should be coherent and should demonstrate attentive reading and analysis of the assigned text.

Students will receive general feedback for discussion papers, but they will not all be formally graded. At the end of the term, you will hand in your three best discussion papers for formal grading. **Be sure to keep all of your discussion papers.**

Marks for discussion papers will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:
1. Regular submission of all discussion papers **on time**, with due attention to specified requirements.
2. Grade for three best discussion papers submitted at the end of term.

**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 (p. 1:11). 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.

**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 official 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 (Norma Snyder, 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 official documentation to explain and justify the missed/late assignment. Documentation requirements for medical emergencies are outlined in the University of Waterloo calendar (p. 1:10). Students are also expected to know University and Faculty regulations regarding exams and assignments (University Calendar p. 1.9-1.11 and 9.8). Non-medical emergencies will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and must be accompanied with appropriate documentation. 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.

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS**

**Week 1**
Jan 4: Introduction and Seminar Assignment
Jan 6: Introduction II  
**Week 2**
Jan 11: *Hobomok*; **Discussion Paper Due**
Jan 13: *Hobomok*
**Week 3**
Jan 18: *Hobomok*
Jan 20: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; **Discussion Paper Due**
**Week 4**
Jan 25: Group Presentation, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
Jan 27: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, cont’d.
**Week 5**
Feb 1: Group Presentation, *The Scarlet Letter*; **Discussion Paper Due**
Feb 3: *The Scarlet Letter*; Critical Reading
**Week 6**
Feb 8: *The Scarlet Letter*; Critical Reading; **Discussion Paper on three Critical Readings Due**
Feb 10: *The Scarlet Letter*; Critical Reading
**Week 7**
Feb 15: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*; **Discussion Paper Due**
Feb 17: Group Presentation, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*; **Last Day for Interviews**
**Feb 21-25: Winter Study Break**
**Week 8**
Feb 29: Group Presentation, “Benito Cereno” (From *Billy Budd, Sailor and Selected Tales*); **Discussion Paper Due on Two Stories by Melville**
Mar 2: Group Presentation, “Bartleby the Scrivenor” (From *Billy Budd, Sailor and Selected Tales*)
Week 9
Mar 7: *Leaves of Grass* (selections TBA); **Term Paper Due**
**Mar 9: Group Presentation, *Leaves of Grass* (selections TBA-see note below);**
**Discussion Paper Due**

Week 10
**Mar 14: Group Presentation, *Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson* (selections TBA-see note below); **Discussion Paper Due**
Mar 16: *Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson* (selections TBA)

Week 11
Mar 21: Group Presentation: *The House of Mirth*; **Discussion Paper Due**
Mar 23: *The House of Mirth* cont’d

Week 12
Mar 28: *The House of Mirth* cont’d
Mar 30: Review; **Three Best Discussion Papers Due**

**Note: groups presenting on poetry must select specific poems to focus on and notify me and the class of their selections one week before the presentation.**