

ENGLISH 255: GRADUATE SEMINAR: THEMATIC STUDIES IN AMERICAN LITERATURE  
JOHN ENGELL [John.Engell@sjsu.edu](mailto:John.Engell@sjsu.edu) Spring 2014 BBC 002 (but will be moved?) T 16:00-18:45  
Office Hours: T 14:30-15:30 and by appointment

SEMINAR CONTENT/STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES/PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES:

In this seminar we will read, discuss, and write about several American authors active in the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Those in the earlier period are often referred to as "American Romantics" or "American Transcendentalists." Those active in the later period, referred to as "The Beats," were deeply influenced by the earlier group of authors. Indeed, the Beats helped to reestablish American Romanticism as central to our national cultural history. During our first class period I will discuss American Romanticism and the Beat Movement and talk a bit about the writers most representative of these designations. See the required reading list below for the eight writers we will be reading, four from each period.

As for Student Learning Objectives, I trust each of you will deepen and refine your ideas about the ways in which literary influence is manifest, will see a variety of connections and disjunctions among the writers we study, and will study carefully both the form and the content of each work we read, whether a poem, a novel, or an essay.

Here is a list of Program Learning Objectives. Students will demonstrate:

- 1) an appropriate level of expertise in literary history, literary theory, and rhetoric;
- 2) high-level proficiency in literary research and in the synthesis of research;
- 3) critical and analytical skills in the interpretation and evaluation of literary texts;
- 4) a command of written academic English in terms of the ability to organize material, formulate and defend original arguments, employ effectively the language of literary studies, and write under time constraints.

Every writing assignment will be related to/demonstrate Program Learning Objectives 1, 3, & 4. Students who choose the research paper as their long project will demonstrate Program Learning Objective 2 in their essays. Students who choose the creative option for their long project will demonstrate Program Learning Objective 2 in their critical introductions.

REQUIRED TEXTS (in the order in which they will be read and discussed):

Ralph Waldo Emerson. "The American Scholar," "The Divinity School Address," "The Poet."  
All three are on the following website: [emersoncentral.com](http://emersoncentral.com). These essays are also available in many anthologies and on other websites.

Walt Whitman. LEAVES OF GRASS AND OTHER WRITINGS. Ed. Michael Moon. Norton Critical Edition. 2002.

Allen Ginsberg. COLLECTED POEMS 1947-1997. Harper Perennial Modern Classics. 2007.

Herman Melville. MOBY-DICK, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. eds. Hershel Parker & Harrison Hayford. Norton Critical Edition. 1999.

Jack Kerouac. ON THE ROAD. Penguin Great Books of the Twentieth Century. 1999.

Emily Dickinson. THE POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON: READING EDITION. Ed. R.W. Franklin. Belknap P. 2005

Gary Snyder. NEW AND SELECTED POEMS. Pantheon. 1993.

Anne Waldman. HELPING THE DREAMER: NEW & SELECTED POEMS, 1966-1988. Coffee House P. 1989.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS: Each student will give three (3) oral presentations of approximately 15 minutes each. These presentations will be accompanied by a one-page handout for the class. On the date of each oral presentation, the student will also complete and turn in a two page essay related to the subject of the oral presentation.

Each student will write either a critical essay (MA students) or a creative non-fiction piece (MFA students) with critical introduction. These essays/non-fiction pieces will be 10-20 pages long and will be related to one or more of the writers studied in the seminar. I will discuss oral presentations and written assignments in more detail once the seminar begins. All written assignments will be included in and submitted as a Portfolio at the end of the semester.

GRADING:	3 oral presentations & two-page essays	15% each	45%
	Long essay or creative non-fiction piece		55%

SCHEDULE: [Note: Student presentations will occur every week from 4 February through 5 May.) All classes will meet on Tuesday from 16:00 until 18:45 unless otherwise announced.

28 January	Introduction: Syllabus; American Romanticism; the Beats; Emerson essays
4 February	Emerson: "The American Scholar"; "The Divinity School Address"; "The Poet"; Whitman: "Preface" to 1855 LEAVES OF GRASS; ALL POEMS FROM 1891-92 LEAVES OF GRASS: "Song of Myself"
11 February	Whitman: First five poems in "Calamus" section; "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"; "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"; "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"; "The Sleepers"
18 February	Ginsberg: "Love Poem on Theme by Whitman"; "Howl"; "A Supermarket in California"; Sunflower Sutra"; "America"
25 February	Ginsberg: "Kaddish"; "Statras to Kali Destroyer of Illusions"; "Describe: The Rain On Dasaswamdh Ghat"; "Patna-Benares Express"; "Last Night in Calcutta"; "Walking at Night in Key West"; "Elegy for Neal Cassady"; "Father Death Blues"; "Kerouac"
4 March	Melville: MOBY-DICK (Finish the novel.)
11 March	Melville: MOBY-DICK
18 March	Kerouac: ON THE ROAD (Finish the novel.)
1 April	Kerouac: ON THE ROAD Plan for final project (critical or creative) due
8 April	Dickinson: 1862 poems Numbers 272-390
15 April	Dickinson: 1862 poems Numbers 391-498
22 April	Snyder: poems to be announced later
29 April	Snyder: poems to be announced later Waldman: poems to be announced later
6 May	Waldman: poems to be announced later
13 May	Last class: presentations of final projects, both critical and creative Final projects and Portfolios due

ORAL PRESENTATION/SHORT PAPERS: ROUND ONE    ENGLISH 255    SPRING 2014    ENGELL

Following are topics for oral presentations, each presentation accompanied by a one-page handout for every member of the seminar. In addition, each presenter will write and turn in a two-page short essay related to the topic of the presentation, though the essay must be more focused than the presentation and must include a clear thesis.

4 FEBRUARY

- 1) Emerson's three-part definition of the American Scholar (or 'Man Thinking') in his essay "The American Scholar"
- 2) Emerson's attacks on both "historical Christianity" and ministers and the ministry in "Address: Delivered before the Senior Class in Divinity College"
- 3) Emerson's definition(s) of the nature of the true Poet in "The Poet"
- 4) Making sense of the "argument" in Whitman's "Preface 1855: LEAVES OF GRASS, FIRST EDITION"
- 5) Several significantly different depictions of the "I" in Whitman's "Song of Myself"

11 FEBRUARY

- 1) Parallelism, anaphora, and other poetic devices in Whitman's "Song of Myself"
- 2) The "I" as comrade and lover in the first five "Calamus" poems and in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"
- 3) The depiction of place in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"
- 4) The depiction of and attitude(s) toward death in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" And "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"

18 FEBRUARY

- 1) The surreal in "The Sleepers" (Whitman)
- 2) The prosody of Ginsberg's "Howl" compared to the prosody of Whitman's "Song of Myself"
- 3) Direct and indirect allusions to Whitman in the Ginsberg poems assigned for this week
- 4) Ginsberg's "America" and Whitman's depictions of America/the United States in poems we have read

25 FEBRUARY

- 1) "Kaddish" and the sacred/spiritual in Ginsberg and Whitman poems we have read
- 2) Depictions of place in the Ginsberg "India" poems we have read and in "Walking at Night in Key West"
- 3) The elegiac in poems by Whitman and Ginsberg that we have read
- 4) Comparing the quality of Ginsberg's and Whitman's prosody/poetic devices/poetry