

## American Romanticism and Nature

ENGL 5326-001 Topics in American Literature Before 1900

Spring 2016 Syllabus

Tues. 6:00 – 8:50 p.m. Carlisle 212

Prof. Neill Matheson office: 406 Carlisle

office hours: Wed. 2:00-5:00 p.m., and by appointment

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### Course Description:

From its origins, the U.S. has been persistently imagined as “nature’s nation,” implying not only that early American wilderness was often contrasted with settled and civilized Europe, but also that many Americans imagined their national identity in terms of a unique relation to the natural world. This course explores ideas about nature in nineteenth-century American literature, especially American Romanticism, often associated with new ways of thinking about and valuing the natural world, even as it was beginning to come under pressure from an expanding human presence. We will read such writers as Thoreau, Whitman, Poe, and Melville, exploring the porous boundary between nature and culture. We will also consider some earlier American precursors, including naturalists William Bartram and John James Audubon, looking especially at Audubon’s extraordinary ornithological paintings (as well as other early American naturalist artwork). One particular focus throughout the course will be the human-animal distinction, which we will explore in light of recent critical and theoretical work in animal studies. Nineteenth-century America was a period in which the very notion of species was being negotiated, with profound implications for how humans thought of themselves, as well as how they conceived of other animals. We will read Melville’s novel *Moby-Dick* as an extended meditation on human attempts to make sense of animal otherness, and on the troubled, often violent history of relations between humans and nonhuman animals. The course will end with Sarah Orne Jewett’s regionalist fiction as a late response to these Romantic rethinkings of our relation to nature, and an anticipation of twentieth-century ideas about the loss or preservation of natural environments and their threatened inhabitants, human and nonhuman.

### Course Texts:

John James Audubon, *Writings and Drawings* (Library of America)

William Bartram, *Travels of William Bartram* (Dover)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature and Other Essays* (Dover)

Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (Penguin)

Herman Melville, *The Encantadas and Other Stories* (Dover)

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (Penguin)

Edgar Allan Poe, *Selected Tales* (Oxford)

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings* (Norton)

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Norton)

Additional readings will be available as e-texts. I will set up a UTA Box folder for the course, where you will be able to access and download them.

### **Course Requirements:**

1. Eight response papers. Minimum two full pages double-spaced. Response papers should engage with the week's readings, especially emphasizing critical/theoretical readings as well as primary literary texts. You should address the arguments of the scholarly texts we read, but you can also use these papers to explore your own ideas about the readings (critical or literary). Topics for your seminar paper may emerge out of your response papers.

**Note:** Response papers should be submitted by email prior to the class meeting in which we will discuss the readings they address. These short papers will not be graded individually—I will give them an aggregate grade at the end of the course. However, I will let you know if one of your response papers earns a "C" or below.

2. Seminar paper. A substantial research paper (minimum 15 pages) drawing on readings and issues from the course. Students will give a presentation based on their papers at the end of the course. The final class meeting(s) will be set aside for this purpose.

3. Participation.

**Note:** All required work must be completed in order to pass the course.

### **Course Grade:**

Eight response papers	25%
Participation and presentation	15%
Final paper	60%

### **Student Learning Outcomes:**

Students will become familiar with literary works by the authors covered in the course, as well as with important critical issues, particularly related to the course thematic, that have shaped scholarship on these writers individually, and in relationship to each other. Students will become acquainted with a range of contexts relevant to considering these authors, including literary historical accounts of literature in the period, and nineteenth-century ideas about nature, natural history, taxonomy, and animality, especially as these ideas are explored or represented in literary works. Students will be able to produce original scholarship according to accepted academic standards, reflecting an awareness of existing scholarship on their topic.

### **Official UTA Policies & Course Policies**

#### **Attendance and Participation:**

At The University of Texas at Arlington, taking attendance is not required. Rather, each faculty member is free to develop his or her own methods of evaluating students' academic performance, which includes establishing course-specific policies on attendance.

Because this is a graduate seminar that meets once a week, absences will only be excused in the case of truly unavoidable circumstances. Two or more absences will have an effect on your final grade. I expect you to come to class each week having carefully read the texts for that day's meeting, prepared with questions, comments, thoughts, enthusiasms, or objections. Participation for the course includes informal contributions to class discussion as well as presentations.

### **UTA Drop Policy:**

Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance. Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

### **Academic Integrity:**

Students enrolled in all UT Arlington courses are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

*I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.*

*I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.*

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

The policy for this course is that any assignment found to involve plagiarism or other significant academic dishonesty will receive a zero.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act:**

UT Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including *The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*, *The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA)*, and *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of disability. Students are responsible for providing the instructor with official notification in the form of a letter certified by the **Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD)**. Students experiencing a range of conditions (Physical, Learning, Chronic Health, Mental Health, and Sensory) that may cause diminished academic performance or other barriers to learning may seek services and/or accommodations by contacting:

**The Office for Students with Disabilities, (OSD)** [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or calling 817-272-3364.

**Counseling and Psychological Services, (CAPS)** [www.uta.edu/caps/](http://www.uta.edu/caps/) or calling 817-272-3671.

Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Let me know if you have a disability, and we can work together to ensure that you are able to participate fully in the course.

#### **Title IX:**

*The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit [uta.edu/eos](http://uta.edu/eos). For information regarding Title IX, visit [www.uta.edu/titleIX](http://www.uta.edu/titleIX).*

#### **Student Feedback Survey:**

At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as “lecture,” “seminar,” or “laboratory” shall be directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student’s feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington’s effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

#### **Final Review Week:**

A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. (In this course, there is no final exam.) During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

#### **Emergency Exit Procedures:**

Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit, which is located down the flight of stairs across from the elevators on the second floor of Carlisle Hall. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

## Student Support Services Available:

UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to [resources@uta.edu](mailto:resources@uta.edu), or view the information at <http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/resources/index.php>

## Electronic Communication Policy:

UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

I will use your UTA email address for course handouts and announcements, as well as to contact you individually if necessary. Please be sure to check your MavMail account frequently.

## Reading Schedule

**Note:** There may be minor changes, additions, or deletions in the course readings.

- 1/19 Introduction
- 1/26 William Bartram, from *Travels of William Bartram* (15-290)  
M. Allewaert, "Swamp Sublime: Ecologies of Resistance in the American Plantation Zone"  
Michael Pollan, "The Intelligent Plant"  
(<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/12/23/the-intelligent-plant>)
- 2/2 Audubon, from *Mississippi River Journal* (3-95)—also read the note for February 21, 1821 (on 886-89); from *Ornithological Biography*: "The Wild Turkey" (195-211), "The Carolina Parakeet" (233-38), "The White-Headed Eagle" (238-48), "The Passenger Pigeon" (260-69), "The Ivory-Billed Woodpecker" (269-75), "The Black Vulture or Carrion Crow" (293-314), "The Pewee Flycatcher" (324-33), "The Golden Eagle" (354-58); "My Style of Drawing Birds" (759-64), "Myself" (765-94)  
Christoph Irmscher, "Audubon at Large"
- 2/9 Emerson, *Nature* (1836); "The Uses of Natural History" (1833)  
Emerson, poems: "Forbearance," "Blight," "Hamatreya"  
Wordsworth, poems: "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," "Nutting"  
Laura Dassow Walls, "Of Atoms, Oaks, and Cannibals: or, More Things that Talk"  
William Stowe, "Linnaean Poetics: Emerson, Cooper, Thoreau, and the Names of Plants"

- 2/16 Thoreau, *Walden*  
Essays in Norton Critical Edition by H. Daniel Peck, Laura Dassow Walls, Lawrence Buell
- 2/23 Thoreau, "Walking," "Wild Apples," "The Journal and Walden," "Selections from the Journal, 1845-54" (in Norton *Walden* volume)  
Rochelle Johnson, "Passion for Nature beyond Metaphor"  
Critical reading t.b.a.
- 3/1 Whitman, "Song of Myself," "To the Garden the World," "Spontaneous Me," "In Paths Untrodden," "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing," "Earth My Likeness," "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life," "This Compost"  
Whitman, "Birds—And a Day" and other selected entries from *Specimen Days*  
Paul Outka, "(De)Composing Whitman"
- 3/8 Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)"  
Ursula K. Leguin, "She Unnames Them"  
Kari Weil, from *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?*
- 3/15 **Spring Break!!**
- 3/22 Poe, "The Black Cat," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "Instinct vs. Reason—A Black Cat," "Four Beasts in One; The Homo-Cameleopard," "Hop-Frog," "The Raven"  
Colleen Glenney Boggs, "Animals and the Letter of the Law (Edgar Allan Poe)"  
Michael Ziser, "Animal Mirrors"
- 3/29 Melville, *Moby-Dick*  
Philip Armstrong, "'Leviathan is a Skein of Networks': Translations of Nature and Culture in *Moby-Dick*"
- 4/5 *Moby-Dick*  
Nicole Shukin, "Rendering's Modern Logics"
- 4/12 *Moby-Dick*  
Lawrence Buell, "Global Commons as Resource and as Icon: Oceans and Whales"
- 4/19 Melville, "The Encantadas"  
Charles Darwin, "Galapagos Archipelago" (ch. XVII of *Journal of Researches*)  
Denise Tanyol, "The Alternative Taxonomies of Melville's 'The Encantadas'"  
Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Geophilia"
- 4/26 Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, "A White Heron"  
Sarah Ensor, "Spinster Ecology"
- 5/3 Presentations

**Final paper due Friday, May 6 (by email)**