

American Transcendentalism

An Online Course

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John Cage. "17 Drawings by Thoreau." 1978. National Gallery of Art

Texts

The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings. Ed. Lawrence Buell. New York; Modern Library Classics, 2006. ISBN: 978-0812975093

Fuller, Margaret. *The Essential Margaret Fuller*. New Brunswick, NJ; Rutgers University Press, 1995. ISBN: 978-0813517780

Thoreau, Henry David. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. Ed. William Howarth. Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 2004. ISBN: 978-0691118789

Course Description

The American transcendentalists articulated a distinctly American ideology between the two American revolutions, the War of Independence and the Civil War. Their philosophy was scientific, even while they differentiated themselves from empiricism. They were influenced by charismatic trends in revivalism, oriental mysticism, and evangelical rhetoric; while they embraced a radical skepticism founded in their Unitarian traditions at Harvard and New England. Their style was Romantic. They extolled the emotions, change, reform, irony, egalitarianism, education, and nature. They saw the mind as a reflection of Nature and Nature as the embodiment of God. They believed that writers were prophets and, through reason, reflection and insight, they could envision the ideal society. Their philosophy could be understood as an aesthetics. It was influenced by the arts—painting, music, poetry, botany, architecture—and its purpose was to influence the arts. It was inspired by German philosophy, especial Kant, who claim we were born with innate concepts, which make perception possible, but that knowing things in themselves was impossible. Their ambitions, though, paralleled those of German philosophers of their own time, like Hegel, who thought that it was the nature of humanity to resolve perceptual gaps and to truly "know." The period of transcendentalism is said to have concluded with the Civil War. But its influences have continued in musicians like John Cage, artists like Donald Judd, architects like Sullivan and Wright, intellectuals like Noam Chomsky, environmentalists like Edward Abbey, and activists like Martin Luther King (and Malcom X). Our principle goals are to read a lot, inspire each other's thoughts, and to write well about our reading. The best way to know a text well is to write about it.

Objectives for 5304

Students will be able to

1. Develop an awareness of the literary tradition of American Transcendentalism.
2. Apply the transcendentalist thought to solve problems related to education, race, class, sexism, and the environment.
3. Use literature as a means of critically understanding our society.
4. Apply techniques of literary research and criticism to write about writing.
5. Use theoretical concepts in early American literature as a lens for interpretation.

Graduate Program in English Learning Outcomes

ENGLISH (GRADUATE)

Graduate students will be able to

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the significance of major authors, literary works in different genres, and definitive literary movements in British and American literature
2. Explicate literary works representative of two periods or genres in British literature and two periods or genres in American literature
3. Employ methodology and terminology used in creative writing or linguistics
4. Conduct substantial research to support original interpretations of literary works, provide original applications of literary or linguistic theories, or present literature reviews of authors or genres that have inspired creative writing projects

DISTANCE EDUCATION STATEMENT

Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, library resources, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website. Students should submit online assignments through Blackboard or SRSU email, which require secure login information to verify students' identities and to protect students' information. The procedures for filing a student complaint are included in the student handbook. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website.

Class Participation

The following is an excerpt from the Sul Ross State University Distance Learning Handbook:

V. STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT & RESPONSIBILITIES

Students are expected to respect their classmates' and instructors' privacy and the work or comments they produce. All assignments you submit or tests you take must be your own work unless your instructor has requested that you work in groups. You may not submit work that is plagiarized or violates copyright laws. It is also your responsibility to respect copyright protection of licensed computer software. If you are taking a distance education course from a remote site, please remember that you are guests on the remote site campus. The facilities, equipment, staff, and materials at that site are neither the property nor employees of Sul Ross State University. Please

treat the site respectfully and be responsible in caring for the site that we have been allowed to use. Absence policies in effect for on-campus, traditional classroom instruction courses also apply to students enrolled in distance education courses, including Web-based and ITV courses.

The University allows a maximum of 20% absences in a course before an instructor may drop a student for excessive absences. In Web courses, this policy is interpreted as not participating for more than 3 weeks in a long semester, 1 week in a summer session, or 3 days in the midwinter session. Any student dropped for non-participation will receive an F in the course dropped. Inactivity may include the following:

- Not logging on to the course
- Not submitting assignments
- Not participating in scheduled activities
- Not communicating with the instructor by phone or email, and/or
- Not following the instructor's participation guidelines stated in the syllabus

Projects

I. Discussion Posts on Blackboard (300 points)

I will expect a total of 10 posts through the semester. The due dates for each blog post is on the calendar on the syllabus. The length of each post should be from 300-500 words, which could be one to three paragraphs. Although summarizing is one step in analysis, focus on raising questions, interpreting, and responding critically. To develop your ideas use quotes. Another good strategy is to consider the reading through reference to other literature you know: inter-textual reading. I would like our posts to function like a conversation in which we respond to each other's ideas as well. When other projects are due, no blog post will be due.

II. Short 6-page Interpretation through "Close Reading." (200 points)

Close reading means that one concentrates on the formal aspects of a piece of literature as a work of art and avoids the influence of scholarly criticism. I think doing "reader response" criticism, and asking yourself how you subjectively respond to the text will also work for this paper. If close reading from New Criticism focuses on form, reader response theory focuses on the meaning of a text. This paper can be a first draft of your final term paper, which will have to cite scholarly criticism. You can also write about a completely different subject for your term paper. Since you are interpreting a text "closely," it's very important that you use quotes and inquire deeply into their form and underlying arguments.

III. Précis on One Piece of Criticism (200 points)

A précis is a summary and outline of a text. Please read one scholarly recent article, which you find yourself through the library databases (MLA), and write a critical abstract followed by an outline of the main ideas in the article with quotes from the author. This should help inform the class about current scholarship in transcendentalism and provide background for your own term paper. Post your précis as a discussion board post.

IV. Term Paper (300 points)

The term paper can focus on one aspect of one work of literature or compare two works of literature. Send a brief statement of purpose to me a month before the paper is due (3.31)

Peer Feedback and Editing.

I will give up to 25 points extra-credit to any student who carefully responds to and proofreads another student's "close reading" and term paper (up to 50 points total). The best way means of proofreading is by using the review functions in Word. This allows you to "track changes" and make marginal "comments," then accept or reject the changes when you receive your paper from the proofreader. Email the proofread copy to the classmate, and cc the instructor in order to receive extra-credit.

Projects	Due Date	%	Points
Posts to the Class Reading Blog (10 in number)	About once a week	30	300
Short 6-page "Close Reading"	10.12	20	200
Précis on One Piece of Criticism	10.26	20	200
Term Paper 10-15 pages in length	12.7	30	300
Total Points Available		100	1000

DEADLINES

Unless otherwise specified, all assignments will be turned in at the beginning of class on their due dates. All alternative arrangements must be approved before the relevant deadline. Late work without previous arrangement with me will only be accepted upon demonstration of extenuating circumstances.

Blackboard

If you confront technical issues which interfere with your ability to use Blackboard, contact the LTAC (Lobo Technology Assistance Center) at 432-837-8888 or <https://techassist.sulross.edu>

Accommodating Students with Disabilities

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Sul Ross State University provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. If you would like to request such accommodation because of a physical, mental, or learning disability, as soon as possible please contact Counseling and Accessibility Services:

Accessibility Services Coordinator
Counseling and Accessibility Services
Ferguson Hall Rm. 112
432-837-8203

Writing Center and Academic Learning Center

The Writing Center is located in MAB 102 and the Academic Learning Center is located in FH 213. Tutors are available to help you with any problems you may have with an assignment. Take advantage of this service any time you need help. The tutors are there for you. You may contact the Writing Center at extension 8270 and email writing@sulross.edu


Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Dishonest acts, such as plagiarism (using words or a specific author's ideas from another source without acknowledging the source) or collusion (having other people write parts of your paper for you), may result in an "F" on the assignment and may lead to a disciplinary hearing conducted through the office of the Dean of Students, which could result in suspension or expulsion from SRSU. If you have questions about whether your use of other sources (such as books, websites, friends, or Writing Center tutors) is fair or not, please ask before turning in the work that you have a question about.

Course Calendar

Dates	Topics	Readings	Project Due Dates and Notes
Week One			
8.24	Buell's <i>The American Transcendentalists</i>	Buell's Introduction xi-xxviii	
Week Two			
8.31	Buell's <i>The American Transcendentalists</i>	I. Anticipations Any two essays from 3-30	Post 1 On Buell and two essays from "Anticipations"
Week Three			
9.7	Buell's <i>The American Transcendentalists</i>	II. Manifestoes Emerson's "Nature" or "The American Scholar" and one other short essay from 31-128	Post 2 On your readings from "Manifestoes"
Week Four			
9.14	Buell's <i>The American Transcendentalists</i>	III. Spiritual Ferment Emerson's "Divinity School Address" and one other short essay from 129-192	Post 3 On your readings in "Spiritual Ferment"
Week Five			
9.21	Buell's <i>The American Transcendentalists</i>	IV. Secular Reform Any two essays from "Secular Reform" from 193-370. Recommended: Thoreau's "Resistance to Civil Government."	Post 4 On your readings in "Secular Reform"

Week Six			
9.28	Buell's <i>The American Transcendentalists</i>	V. Critical Statements Emerson's "The Poet" (392-404) and Whitman's Preface to <i>Leaves of Grass</i> (416-18).	Post 5 "The Poet" and Whitman's Preface.
Week Seven			
10.5	Buell's <i>The American Transcendentalists</i>	V.C. Poetry Poetry by Emerson and one other poet	Post 6 On your readings in Poetry
Week Eight <i>Midterm</i>			
10.12	Fuller	<i>Women in the Nineteenth Century</i> 243-300	Due October 12 6-page Literary Analysis, a Close Reading of one of our texts.
Week Nine			
10.19	Fuller	<i>Women in the Nineteenth Century</i> 300-378	Post 7 On <i>Women in the Nineteenth Century</i>
Week Ten			
10.26	Fuller	Dispatches from Europe for the <i>New York Tribune</i> (379-446) or <i>Summer on the Lakes</i> (69-226).	Post 8 Your reading in either <i>New York Tribune</i> dispatches or <i>Summer on the Lakes</i>
Week Eleven			
11.2	Fuller		Due October 26 Précis of one scholarly article on one of our readings
Week Twelve			
11.9	Thoreau	<i>A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers</i> pp 1-100 and Introduction by John McPhee	Post 8 Your reading in either <i>New York Tribune</i> dispatches or <i>Summer on the Lakes</i>

Week Thirteen			
11.16	Thoreau	<i>A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers</i> pp 100-200	Post 9 On your reading in Thoreau's <i>A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers</i> Last Day to Drop with W: November 20
Week Fourteen			
11.23 Thanksgiving Vacation	Thoreau	<i>A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers</i> pp 200-300	
Week Fifteen			
11.30	Thoreau	<i>A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers</i> pp 300-395	Post 10 On your reading in <i>A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers</i>
Week Sixteen			
12.7 No Exams	Thoreau		Due December 7 Term Paper 10-15 pages, grounded in theory and criticism