

## ENGL392—THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL

Spring 2020

Section 1

Tues/Thurs: 3:30-4:45 pm

Combs Hall 114

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**WEBSITE** (for blog posts and readings)

[www.literatureoftheamericas.com](http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com)

**OFFICE HOURS** (Combs Hall 324):

Tues/Thurs: 2:15-3:30 pm

4:45-6:00 pm

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will explore the category that readers, critics, and the publishing industry alike call “The Great American Novel.” We will pick one book with perhaps the greatest claim to the throne: Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851). In addition to studying this “Great American Novel,” we will read literary theory and cultural and political history. We will take seriously each of the key words in the title of this course. 1) “The Great” invokes canon formation. What counts for greatness in literary history? Who decides? 2) “American” is a term we generally use to denote the culture and geopolitics of the United States of America, but not that of Central and South America, nor other non-U.S. parts of North America (Canada and Mexico). Do we need to rethink what counts as “American” and non-American within the Western Hemisphere, i.e., the Americas? How do we do so without losing sight of the differences (language among these) between the United States and its “American” neighbors, as well as within non-conforming communities inside various nations? 3) The “Novel”—from its origins in the seventeenth-century—has been the literary genre most attuned to hybridity and diversity of viewpoint. Nonetheless, has the genre itself generated a competition for national masterpiece? Perhaps a worldwide culture industry has imposed categories of distinction and belonging. On the other hand, is it possible that tribalism and hierarchy are simply part of the way in which humans organize their environments? What do we gain and lose from using “The Great American Novel” as a category of analysis in literary study?

### **COURSE GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

To provide a sustained analysis of American literature, including “postcolonial” works from outside of the recognized canon as well as that produced by historically “marginalized” people.

To prepare students to take an independent role in the research and presentation of contextual materials to form a better understanding of authors, literary texts, and cultural movements.

To prepare students to demonstrate independent critical thinking skills measured in a variety of ways, including through written work and an oral presentation relating to the course topics.

To promote a substantial mastery of all course materials and prepare students to contribute to class discussion in ways that further our understanding of the major course topics.

**REQUIRED TEXTS (Available at the University Bookstore)**

Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick* (Norton Critical, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

This course has a constant and sometimes demanding workload. Active participation during class discussion is essential to doing well. At a minimum, I expect you to:

- 1) have excellent attendance
- 2) arrive and leave on time
- 3) do the assigned readings carefully before class
- 4) turn in your work on time
- 5) bring the necessary materials and texts to class
- 6) listen respectfully to me and to your classmates (no cell phone use in class)
- 7) contribute to class discussion and activities on a regular basis.

**It is your own responsibility to find out what you miss when you are not in class.** *I suggest that you exchange email information with at least one other classmate in order to ensure that you are always prepared. Do not email me asking what you missed.* Note that you will receive an *unsatisfactory* mark on your mid-semester report if you fail to comply with these requirements and/or have a working course grade lower than a C. **I will accept no late submissions of any kind from you without a medical note.**

## **GRADE DISTRIBUTION**

I want students to learn and to earn the grades that they deserve, so please make an appointment with me should you have undue difficulty with the course. Written assignments include:

- 1) one midterm exam consisting of two 2-page essays on course topics
- 3) one final exam consisting of one 5-page essay on *Moby-Dick*

Oral assignments include:

- 1) one class-long lead discussion of one assigned critical article.
- 2) one 20-minute group presentation on one additional "Great American Novel" (student choice)

\*You will receive instructions for completing these assignments at least a week before they are due.

Below is the course grade distribution:

- 1) Attendance, Participation, and Discussion Lead: 20%
- 2) Group Presentation: 20%
- 3) Midterm: 25%
- 4) Final Exam: 30%

## **GRADING CRITERIA**

I have designed the following criteria guidelines to help you grasp how I conduct a large part of the grading. I divide formal written assignments in the following ways:

**\*Papers: Content and Analysis (70%)**

--An average paper (C) demonstrates a superficial understanding of the topic; it is usually based almost exclusively on class notes. It generally relies too much on summary rather than explicit analysis of textual points, and uses quotations ineffectively.

--A better paper (B) incorporates readings that have been assigned in other contexts (including in-class assignments), analyzes literary and film devices as they are employed in a text, and uses specific quotations from texts in order to illustrate the grounding of its analysis.

--A superior paper (A) demonstrates all the qualities of a "B" paper, and includes a more sophisticated understanding of the chosen topic. That is, an "A" paper uses the tools of textual analysis, apt use of

quotation, concise and explicit remarks justifying that analysis, while drawing on all the available resources of the course.

**\*Papers: Form, Style, Mechanics and Usage (30%)**

--An average paper (C) demonstrates a reasonable control of basic English syntax, verb and subject (including pronoun) agreement, tense consistency, proofreading, paragraph organization, etc.

--A better paper (B) demonstrates an ability to vary sentence structure, has few if any proofreading errors, employs careful transitions and organization in a more sophisticated way, and controls grammar.

--A superior paper (A) demonstrates all the qualities of a "B" paper, and in addition demonstrates an ability to control complex sentence structure, vary verbs effectively, and contains no proofreading errors.

**\*Student Discussion Lead**

I will grade this as part of your (oral) participation. During your delivery, I will look for evidence of 1) team preparation before delivery and 2) a lively execution in connection with the assigned critical text.

**\*Group Presentation:**

I will grade your group based upon the following:

- 1) How well you translate the outside reading and research to your presentation (25%)
- 2) The amount of effort exhibited by your performance (25%)
- 3) How well you collaborate as a team (25%)
- 4) The effectiveness with which you lead discussion and answer questions (25%).

**HONOR CODE**

You must pledge all of your work, as the honor pledge obtains for all work submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for this course. I will refer all violations, without exception, to the Honor Council.

**Engl392—The Great American Novel**

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Section 1

**Week #1**

1/14 Tues

1/16 Thurs

**"THE GREAT": WHAT IS A CANON?**

Introduction to the course

Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (1994)

[Chapter 1: An Elegy for the Canon]:

<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/The-Western-Canon.pdf>

**Week #2**

1/21 Tues

1/23 Thurs

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851) [Etymology-Chapter 9]

Henry Louis Gates, "Editor's Introduction: Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes" (*Critical Inquiry*, 1985):

<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Writing-Race-and-the-Difference-It-Makes.pdf>

**Week #3**

1/28 Tues

1/30 Thurs

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851) [Chapters 10-27]

Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (1999) [Introduction: The Figure in the Carpet]:

<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/The-World-Republic-of-Letters.pdf>

**Week #4**

2/4 Tues

2/6 Thurs

**“AMERICAN”: WHO AND WHAT BELONGS?**

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851) [Chapters 28-41]

Herbert Eugene Bolton, “The Epic of Greater America” (*The American Historical Review*, 1933):

<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/The-Epic-of-Greater-America.pdf>

**Week #5**

2/11 Tues

2/13 Thurs

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851) [Chapters 42-57]

F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941) [Chapter X: The Revenger’s Tragedy]:

<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/American-Renaissance.pdf>

**Week #6**

2/18 Tues

2/20 Thurs

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851) [Chapters 58-79]

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) [Chapter 1: The Homeland, Aztlán/El Otro México]:

<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Borderlands-La-Frontera.pdf>

\*Thursday Poetry and Prose Reading: “The Whiteness of the Whale”

Combs 139, 5:00-5:30 pm.

**Week #7**

2/25 Tues

2/27 Thurs

**“NOVEL”: MODERNITY AND GENRE HYBRIDITY**

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851) [Chapters 80-98]

\*Midterms Due in Class

**Week #8**

3/3 Tues

3/5 Thurs

Spring Break

Spring Break

**Week 9**

3/10 Tues

3/12 Thurs

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851) [Chapters 99-119]

Carlos Fuentes, “Latin America and the Universality of the Novel” (1992):

<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Latin-America-and-the-Universality-of-the-Novel.pdf>

**Week 10**

3/17 Tues

3/19 Thurs

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851) [Chapters 120-Epilogue]

Instructor Away at a Professional Conference

**Week #11**

3/24 Tues

Edward Mendelson, “Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon” (*Modern Language Notes*, 1976):

<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Encyclopedic-Narrative.pdf>

3/26 Thurs

James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel” (1949):

<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Everybodys-Protest-Novel.pdf>

\*Gayle Wald Classroom Visit

**Week #12**

3/31 Tues

Lawrence Buell, "The Unkillable Dream of the Great American Novel: *Moby-Dick* as Case Study" (*American Literary History*, 2008):

<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/The-Unkillable-Dream-of-the-Great-American-Novel.pdf>

4/2 Thurs

David Ferrer, "Fifty Reasons Real Books are Vastly Superior to Ebooks" (*The Quad*, 2019):

<https://thebestschools.org/magazine/real-books-superior-ebooks/>

\*Class meets in Special Collections Room (Simpson Library 217)

**Week #13**

4/7 Tues

**CASE STUDIES: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

Group Presentations

4/9 Thurs

Group Presentations

**Week #14**

4/14 Tues

Group Presentations

4/16 Thurs

Group Presentations

**Week #15**

4/21 Tues

Group Presentations

4/23 Thurs

Kemp Symposium

**Week #16**

*Final Exams Due via Email*

## APPENDIX:

### **Accessibility Statement**

“The Office of Disability Resources has been designated by the college as the primary office to guide, counsel, and assist students with disabilities. If you receive services through the Office of Disability Resources and require accommodations for this class, make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your approved accommodation needs. Bring your accommodation letter, along with a copy of our class syllabus with you to the appointment. I will hold any information you share with me in strictest confidence unless you give me permission to do otherwise. If you have not made contact with the Office of Disability Resources and have reasonable accommodation needs, (note taking assistance, extended time for tests, etc.), I will be happy to refer you. The office will require appropriate documentation of disability.”

### **Title IX Statement**

University of Mary Washington faculty are committed to supporting students and upholding the University’s Policy on Sexual and Gender Based Harassment and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence. Under Title IX and this Policy, discrimination based upon sex or gender is prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex or gender based discrimination, we encourage you to report it. While you may talk to me, understand that as a “Responsible Employee” of the University, I MUST report to UMW’s Title IX Coordinator what you share. If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, please contact the below confidential resources. They can connect you with support services and help you explore your options. You may also seek assistance from UMW’s Title IX Coordinator. Please visit <http://diversity.umw.edu/title-ix/> to view UMW’s Policy on Sexual and Gender Based Harassment and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence and to find further information on support and resources. Resources Confidential Resources On-Campus Stefanie Lucas-Waverly, M.S. Talley Center for Counselling Services Title IX Coordinator Lee Hall 106, 540-654-1053 Office of Title IX Fairfax House Student Health Center 540-654-5656 Lee Hall 112, 540-654-1040 slucaswa@umw.edu Crystal Rawls Off-Campus Title IX Deputy for Students Empowerhouse Assistant Director of Student Activities 24-hr hotline: 540-373-9373 540-654-1801 crawls@umw.edu Rappahannock Council Against Sexual Assault (RCASA) 24-hr hotline: 540-371-1666

### **Recording Statement**

Classroom activities in this course may be recorded by students enrolled in the course for the personal, educational use of that student or for all students presently enrolled in the class only, and may not be further copied, distributed, published or otherwise used for any other purpose without the express written consent of the course instructor. All students are advised that classroom activities may be taped by students for this purpose. Distribution or sale of class recordings is prohibited without the written permission of the instructor and other students who are recorded. Distribution without permission is a violation of copyright law. This policy is consistent with UMW’s Policy on Recording Class and Distribution of Course Materials.

