



The collective myths and ideologies of most cultures precede historical self-consciousness; that of America, by contrast, arises in the very recent past, and comes into being simultaneously with European modernity. As such, it provides an extreme and simplified exemplar of all of the movements and conflicts of the modern. The course will introduce the student to the major themes and issues of American literature and culture from the seventeenth century to the present. We will concentrate particularly on attempts to find a new basis for community, divorced from the Old World (the continent of Europe and the continent of the past), and the dissatisfaction with and opposition to that community that comes with modern subjectivity. The journey will take us from raw Puritan colonies to the repressive sophistication of Henry James' and Kate Chopin's nineteenth-century salons—worlds of etiquette and porcelain in which nothing can be said—to the transgressive experiments of decadents, modernists and postmodernists, all united by a restless desire to find some meaning beyond the obvious, some transcendence that will transfigure and explain the enigma of the self and of the unfinished errand, America.

The goals of the course are that students should understand the works studied, and their relations to the societal, intellectual, and aesthetic movements of the period covered by the course: Puritanism, Calvinism, theocracy, Enlightenment, Romanticism, Transcendentalism, slavery, Abolition, Decadence, Modernism, Postmodernism.



Spring 2025 MWF 12:00-12:50

Room: THH 118

Instructor: Anthony Kemp

Office: THH 443

Office Hours: MWF 1:00-2:30

Email: kemp@usc.edu

Texts:

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Selected Essays* 978-0142437629

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* 978-8491050209

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd* 978-014107606

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative* 978-1686819988

Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* 978-0142437322

Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* 978-0141441351

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* 978-0393974997

Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* 978-0811216715

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* 979-8351145013

Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* 978-0060913076

Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 978-0393355949



Schedule:

January

M 13 Introduction

W 15 John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity"

F 17 John Winthrop, *Journal*

M 20 Martin Luther King Day

W 22 Roger Williams, "The Bloody Tenet of Persecution"

F 24 Roger Williams, "Letter to the Town of Providence"

M 27 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Divinity School Address"

W 29 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," "The Transcendentalist"

F 31 Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

February

M 3

W 5 Herman Melville, "The Piazza"

F 7 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative*

M 10 Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

W 12

F 14 Henry James, *The Beast in the Jungle*

M 17 Presidents Day

W 19

F 21

M 24
W 26
F 28
March
M 3
W 5
F 7
M 10 Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*
W 12
F 14
M 17 Spring Recess
W 19 Spring Recess
F 21 Spring Recess
M 24 T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*
W 26
F 28
M 31
April
W 2
F 4
M 7 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*
W 8
F 11
M 14 Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*
W 16
F 18
M 21 Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*
W 23
F 25
M 28 Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club*
W 30
May
F 2
F 9 Final Examination 11-1



Evaluation

This syllabus is subject to revision, particularly in matters of schedule. The reading list will be supplemented by handouts. There will be two papers (5 pages minimum each; some students choose to write papers of 10-20 pages), and midterm and final examinations, each piece of written work accounting for 25% of the final grade. Papers should conform to the written instructions that will be provided to each student. Examinations are objective and test knowledge of the texts and of the concepts presented in class. Students need to attend every class meeting, unless excused by exceptional circumstances. No student may take early or omit the final examination.



Illustrations: Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire: Savage State, Pastoral State, Consummation, Destruction, Desolation*, New York Historical Society.

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking, and harassment are prohibited by the university. You are encouraged to report all incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity/Title IX Office* <http://equity.usc.edu> and/or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://dps.usc.edu>. This is important for the health and safety of the whole USC community. Faculty and

staff must report any information regarding an incident to the Title IX Coordinator who will provide outreach and information to the affected party. The sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> fully describes reporting options. Relationship and Sexual Violence Services <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp> provides 24/7 confidential support.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://ali.usc.edu>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* <http://dsp.usc.edu> provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Dornsife provides a full range of mental health resources, which can be found at <https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling/>

COVID Safety

Students are expected to comply with all aspects of USC's COVID-19 policy. Failure to do so may result in removal from the class and referral to Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards.