

Issues in American Literature and Culture: Writing Failure(s)

AML 2410 Section 8974

Fall 2014, T 7 / R 7-8, MAT 113

Kyle Bohunicky

kbohunicky@ufl.edu

Office: Turlington 4337

Office Hours: Tuesday, Period 8 and by appointment

Course Description:

“So far as I am individually concerned, & independent of my pocket, it is my earnest desire to write those sort of books which are said to ‘fail’” (Herman Melville, *Correspondence* 139).

In a personal letter addressed prior to the publication of *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*, Herman Melville wrote of his thwarted desire to publish “failures” both at home and abroad. The status of Melville’s failures would be reassessed almost a century later, but this reassessment came at the cost of understanding what failure meant for 19th century print culture and society in America. Thus, this section of AML 2410 will return to the question of failure and error for American authors in the 19th and early 20th century. “Writing Failure(s)” explores what transatlantic representations of failure can tell us about the foundations of America’s print culture and its complex, transnational politics.

While this class is interested in what representations of failure can open up for (re)imagining American history and culture, this class will also consider the significance of failure in various communication/writing technologies as well as the commercial print marketplace. Students will be expected to work through representations of failure through three major writing assignments and weekly writing responses. By the end of the course, students should have a strong grasp of how failure played a significant role in the writing of key figures from the 19th and early 20th century, an overview of the print market, and framework for rethinking the significance of failure and error.

Student Learning Outcomes

On completion of the course, students will have demonstrated their ability to:

- Understand the history, major theories, and debates in 19th century American literature and print culture
- Discuss 19th century texts and the various genres of failure
- Analyze failure’s significance to writing and print culture, as well as how the production of failure(s) shapes the medium and larger socio-cultural movements
- The ability to think critically about the role of writing and culture to the production of failure(s)
- Produce writing with a focused thesis, unity throughout the essay, and coherence between paragraphs and ideas and within the essay as a whole

- Display a command of grammar, mechanics, punctuation, spelling, and accurate MLA citation and documentation of research
- Work collaboratively in an academic writing community, learning from and contributing to the writing of your classmates in addition to engaging in critical verbal discourse
- Understand and employ various technological resources in your critical reading, writing, and thinking practices, including the use of word processing to develop essays, e-mail to communicate professionally, and the Internet and library database resources for developing research skills

Required Texts

Herman Melville, *Battle-Pieces and Other Aspects of the War*. Dodo Press, ISBN 9781406509906

The Norton Anthology of American Literature Volume A. W.W. Norton, 8th Edition, ISBN 9780393934762

The Norton Anthology of American Literature Volume B. W.W. Norton, 8th Edition, ISBN 9780393934779

The Norton Anthology of American Literature Volume C. W.W. Norton, 8th Edition, ISBN 9780393934786

Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*. Oxford University Press, 1987. ISBN 9780195042382

W.E.B. Du Bois, *John Brown*. The Modern Library, 2001. ISBN 978-0717803759

All other readings will be made available on E-Learning

Assignments

Assignments must be submitted on ELS before class on the day they are listed as due (see course reading schedule). Essays should be uploaded as Microsoft Word documents (.doc or .docx) to the appropriate assignment box. Title files with your last name, first name, and the title of the assignment (see below). All assignments should be written following Modern Language Association (MLA) formatting guidelines. Final drafts should be polished and presented in a professional manner along with the appropriate citations and a works cited page.

No late assignments will be accepted, unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor. Failure of technology (hard drive crashes, printer out of ink, etc.) is not an excuse. If Sakai is not functioning properly when you attempt to submit a paper, you must immediately email me and apprise me of the situation and bring a hard copy to class, which you may submit for no penalty.

- **Reading Responses** (Five total, 60 points each) – 500 words each

Students will contribute to a shared class blog on ELS five times over the course of semester. Posts must be about the texts we have previously discussed in class. Students' posts should make *significant* connections between past and current readings – surface level analyses and summaries will not suffice. Blogs are due 24 hours after our class discussion of the text. (Minimum 500 words each; 500 points total)

Steps for blogging about your text:

1. Starting Tuesday, September 2nd, you will pick a text from the syllabus that we have not yet discussed.

2. Read the text thoroughly using the following frameworks...

- Attended to contemporary and current successes: what elements inside the text and outside the text result in its success both then and now (in other words, read the text as a “great American work”).
- Attend to contemporary and current failures: what elements inside the text and outside the text result in its failure both then and now (in other words, read the text as a “crappy American work”).
- Read the text as a document that reflects how American culture defined success and failure during that historical moment

Take notes while reading to help formulate a response to the text. If you struggle with one of these perspectives, use your entry to discuss why you found it difficult to read the text in this way.

- **Midterm: Synthesis Paper** (300 points) – 2000 words, Minimum 5 academic sources

Choose two works from the course that you found compelling and write an argumentative essay synthesizing how they address what failure is and what it means to fail. Be sure to answer the following question: what can 19th century American literature and print culture tell us about success and failure. Be sure to include research and evidence to support your claims.

- **Final: Critical Research Paper** (300 points) – 3000 words, Minimum 5 academic sources

In this paper, due at the end of the semester, you will be expected to present a lengthy, sustained argument, supported by literary-critical research, on one or more of the texts read in class. Suggested topics will be provided, but you will also be free to craft your own. A working draft will be due one week prior to the final due date.

- **Participation** (100 points)

Participation accounts for in-class discussion, workshops, quizzes, in-class work and other related activities. Participation is a necessary component of your time in this class, and as such will factor into your grade. You are expected to arrive to class prepared, with homework done, articles/books read, and paper and writing tools at hand. You will work individually, in small groups and in class-wide discussion. I will expect each of you to actively participate each day. You are expected to add constructively to the conversation we have each day. You will treat the instructor and your fellow classmates with respect at all times, especially when you disagree with them. Anyone who breaks that rule will be asked to leave the classroom. ***I reserve the right to give unannounced quizzes if necessary***

This is a General Education course providing the student learning outcomes listed in the Undergraduate Catalog. For more information, see <http://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-educationrequirement.aspx#learning>

Course Policies:

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. Students are allowed three unexcused absences. If you miss more than **three** classes during the semester, each additional absence will lower your overall grade by 50 points. If you miss more than **six** classes, you will **fail** the course. Exempt from this policy are **only** those absences involving university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, and religious holidays, family emergencies, and health issues for which you must provide appropriate documentation in advance of the absence.

Additionally, tardiness will not be tolerated. If you are tardy for three class periods, you will receive an unexcused absence.

Note: If you are absent, it is still your responsibility to make yourself aware of all class discussions and activities as well as any new developments, such as assignments and due dates. You are still responsible for turning assignments in on time. You will not, however, be able to make up any in-class assignments. I will not approach you regarding absences and missing or late assignments; it is your responsibility to speak to me and keep track of your own attendance and assignments. If you anticipate having a prolonged absence for any reason, please speak with me in advance to make appropriate arrangements.

Grading Scale

| | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| A 4.0 / 93-100 / 930-1000 | B- 2.67 / 80-82 / 800-829 | D+ 1.33 / 67-69 / 670-699 |
| A- 3.67 / 90-92 / 900-929 | C+ 2.33 / 77-79 / 770-799 | D 1.0 / 63-66 / 630-669 |
| B+ 3.33 / 87-89 / 870-899 | C 2.0 / 73-76 / 730-769 | D- 0.67 / 60-62 / 600-629 |
| B 3.0 / 83-86 / 830-869 | C- 1.67 / 70-72 / 700-729 | E 0.00 / 0-59 / 0-599 |

Statement of student disability services: The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Statement on harassment: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/sexual/>

Statement on academic honesty: All students must abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

Week 1

Tuesday:
Course Introduction

Thursday:
The Iroquois Creation Story
The Navajo Creation Story
Native American Trickster Tales
The Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee

Week 2

Tuesday:
Samson Occom (PDF)

Thursday:
Writing Day

Week 3

Tuesday:
Letters from an American Farmer (Crèvecoeur)

Thursday:
The Life and Times of *Charlotte Temple* (Reading in America)
Charlotte Temple: Chapters 1 – 9

Week 4

Tuesday:
Charlotte Temple: Chapters 10 – 35

Thursday:
The Coquette: Letters I - XXIX (Foster)

Week 5

Tuesday:
The Coquette: Letters XXX – LXXIV (Foster)

Thursday:
The Yellow Wall-paper (Gilman)

Week 6

Tuesday:
The Birthmark (Hawthorne)
Rappaccini's Daughter (Hawthorne)

Thursday:
The Imp of the Perverse (Poe)
The Masque of the Red Death (Poe)

Week 7

Tuesday:
On the Design of Fiction (Poe)
On the Prose Tale (Poe)
The Philosophy of Composition (Poe)

Thursday:
Writing Day

Week 8

Tuesday:
Union Blues: Melville's Poetic In(ter)ventions (Smith)
Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War: The Portent, Misgivings, The Conflict of Convictions, Apathy and Enthusiasm, In the Turret, Shiloh, The House-Top, In the Prison Pen, The College Colonel (Melville)

Thursday:
Bartleby, the Scrivener (Melville)

Week 9

Tuesday:
Benito Cereno: 1526 – 1556 (Melville)

Thursday:
Benito Cereno: 1556 – 1582 (Melville)

Week 10

Tuesday:
The Quadroons (Child)
What to the Slave is the Fourth of July? (Douglass)

Thursday:
John Brown (Emerson)
A Plea for Captain John Brown (Thoreau)
The Portent (Melville)

Week 11

Tuesday:
John Brown: Introduction, Preface, Chapter 1, Chapter 3, Chapter 4 (Du Bois)

Thursday:
John Brown: Chapter 5 – 6 (Du Bois)

Week 12

Tuesday:
Holiday

Thursday:
Chapter 7 – 13 (Du Bois)

Week 13

Tuesday:
Writing Day

Thursday:
Writing Day

Week 14

Tuesday:
Resistance to Civil Government (Thoreau)

Thursday:
Holiday

Week 15

Tuesday:
The Beast in the Jungle (James)

Thursday:
Writing Day

Week 16

Tuesday:
Course wrap-up

