

Q41103: American Literature 1 (to 1900)
University of Nottingham
Department of American & Canadian Studies
Year One Module

Module Description: This module introduces students to some of the key figures, texts and debates in American Literature in the period up to 1900 and concentrates on four major literary forms: the short story, the novel, the slave narrative and poetry. The books and authors on which we focus have shaped thinking about the nature of American Literature and given rise to fierce critical and intellectual debate. They illustrate the depth of American writers' engagements with problems of literary form and language and offer imaginative representations of their society and its history. The nature of American identity is a central concern of the texts we study.

Aims: An introductory module such as this cannot hope to be comprehensive, so it is structured with a view to providing a sustained encounter with a range of classic American literary texts and facilitating the development of subject-specific and key skills. It takes into account that many of our students have no background in literary studies at A-level and will therefore benefit from a focus on skills-building and confidence-building in the study of literature. With this in mind, the module places an emphasis on close textual analysis and discussion in seminars, with the following key aims:

1. To introduce students to a number of important American literary texts and approaches to literary analysis.
2. To analyse and understand literary language and its uses and effects.
3. To analyse and understand narrative structures and forms and their uses and effects.
4. To explore the relationship between literary texts and their social, historical, cultural and intellectual contexts.
5. To examine the ways literary texts generate critical debate about meaning and value.

Assessment: 20% seminar participation; 40% 1 x 2,000 word essay; 40% 1 x 2-hour exam.

Teaching: One two-hour lecture/workshop plus one two-hour seminar.

Syllabus

- Week 1 Introduction: Module Aims
- Week 2 Narrators
Reading: “Rip van Winkle” (Nathaniel Hawthorne); “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (Herman Melville); “The Yellow Wallpaper” (Charlotte Perkins Gilman)
- Week 3 Beginnings
Reading: First Chapter of Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*; Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*; Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
- Week 4 Genre: Symbolism and Romance
Reading: Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*
- Week 5 Genre: Poetry
Reading: Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”; Emily Dickinson, selected poems
- Week 6 Genre: Detective/Thriller
Reading: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”; Herman Melville, “Benito Cereno”
- Week 7 Genre: Slave Narrative
Reading: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*
- Week 8 Genre: The Great American Novel
Reading: either Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* or Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
- Week 9 Genre: The Great American Novel
Reading: either Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* or Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
- Week 10 Genre: Realism to Naturalism
Reading: Rebecca Harding Davis, “Life in the Iron Mills”; Stephen Crane, “Maggie: A Girl of the Streets”
- Week 11 Revision Lecture