

## English/WGS 319: Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers

Fall 2023, course number: 8300/8301, section 01

Hours: Mon/Thurs 2:30-3:45 pm

Room: C112 Hunter North (basement level)

Professor: Austin Bailey

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Office Hours: Fridays 12-3 p.m. and by appointment

Office: 1238 Hunter West and on Zoom



### Course Description:

*Is the pen a metaphorical penis?* This is the opening question asked by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their landmark work of feminist literary criticism, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Women Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (1979). According to the poet Gerard Manly Hopkins, whom Gilbert and Gubar quote, the answer is yes. As Hopkins declares in a letter to a friend, the artist's "most essential quality" is "masterly execution, which is a kind of male gift, and especially marks off men from women" (3). Gilbert and Gubar's study goes on to explore, among other subjects, the anxiety of authorship that influenced women's writing in the nineteenth century. "If the pen is a metaphorical penis," they ask, "with what organ can females generate texts?" (7).

Such fundamental questions about gender and authorship will also form the basis of our inquiry this semester. We will consider a handful of authors and texts produced by women in the United States during the nineteenth-century, both prior to and after the Civil War. While we will not be able to cover the full range of diverse reading available within this period, we will look at selections from several major authors and works to think together about how each handle

varying, yet intersecting, subjects, such as female authorship and/or authorial/creative identity, gender, race, marriage, philosophy, economics, white supremacy, colonialism, and social justice. Importantly, though we will aim to thread connections together between texts, we will also approach each author as a uniquely situated voice rather than an expression of any kind of historically homogeneous, nineteenth-century “womanhood.” In addition to primary texts, we will be reading some scholarly sources (articles, book chapters, etc.), biographical material, and we will watch one or more films that will be funny, entertaining, provocative, and germane to our subject.

### **Letter to Students on the First Day:**

Hi all. Before I go about listing more information on this syllabus, I want to begin by writing a brief, open-ended letter to you. I do this in order to set the tone for the semester and to let you know that I want this class itself to be an open-ended invitation for us to learn, think, inquire, struggle, strive, and even dream together. As a teacher, I deeply value every student’s unique perspective and contribution to the learning community that is our classroom. And while I am “the professor” in this class, I am certainly not the proprietor of any exclusive or privileged body of knowledge. For me, this is not what teaching is or should be about. Rather, as a teacher, my ultimate goal is to help others open doors to their own intellectual and creative freedom, not to police or gate-keep those doors. Knowledge making is world making. As such, it is for anyone and everyone. My pledge to you this semester is that I will try to conduct myself in a way that upholds these general principles and values (even though I may fall short at times). What I expect from you in return (beyond striving to meet the basic course requirements listed below) is simply that you try to make something meaningful out of your learning experience and time in this class, and that you invest in your own critical thinking, following it in whatever direction/s it may take you. And please let me know how I can best support you in this process.

Yours sincerely,  
Austin Bailey

### **Learning Goals/Outcomes:**

--Demonstrate knowledge about, and familiarity with, key themes and ideas in the American literature texts covered

--Demonstrate the ability, through both writing and class discussion, to analyze, close-read, and form coherent arguments about literary texts in effective and convincing ways

--Show analytical facility with one or more texts/authors through student writing and/or multimodal projects that engage texts creatively as well as critically

--Be able to discuss historical events and contexts in which the literature of the periods covered was produced

–Demonstrate the capacity and willingness for self-reflection and metacognitive self-awareness about one’s learning process, particularly by way of completing the course’s assessment methodology of ungrading (detailed below)

### **Course Requirements:**

The requirements for this class are as follows:

Read all assigned texts before each class meeting and come to class prepared to discuss those texts with meaningful contributions. Note: “meaningful” does not mean being an expert and showing off that expertise (though if you have it, great!). Rather, meaningful means coming to class with a contribution (an idea or an underlined passage) that matters to you in some way, which you are prepared to discuss, or introduce for the purposes of discussion.

Be respectful to each other; show care and compassion toward your fellow students (as well as to yourself). I think of respect not only as refraining from all hyper-critical, racist, sexist, ableist, or transphobic comments but also as finding positive things to say about one another, as well as *leaving ample room and time for others to speak*. This last point is especially important. I encourage everyone to speak and am very happy when you do! But just keep in mind that long-winded comments can sometimes discourage others from speaking (even if that is not your intent). It is very important that we all try to maintain an inclusive atmosphere. This equally applies for me, by the way, as your teacher.

Try to complete all writing assignments on time and revise all written assignments at least once, if not more.

Participate in the ungrading process and take that process seriously (even if you have critiques or reservations, which are welcome).

### **Course Encouragements:**

In addition to course requirements, I like to list some course *encouragements*. Course encouragements are less about requirements you need to meet and more about things you might do to care for yourself. Truthfully, I think of all learning as an invitation to gain something, not as a potential to demonstrate one’s lack of something (which, sadly, is how education is too-often framed). Let’s work towards co-learning with that idea in mind. To that end, here are some course *encouragements*:

Try to find some joy in the work you do. I realize this is not always easy or even realistic. But I think it is worth reflecting on what gives you joy: on what makes the work you do in this class enjoyable for you and see if you can’t cultivate that practice to help you learn.

Be kind to yourself; practice self-care in ways that work best for you. Think about what you should do (or not do) to be kind and forgiving to yourself, and don't be afraid to tell me how I might be able to help you in this area.

Try not to worry about being an "expert." This class is not about judgment or expertise, it's about critical engagement and finding out what interests you. One of the most common things I hear from students who seldom speak in class—students who write phenomenal papers with wonderful insights—is that they are afraid to sound unintelligent compared to their classmates. Ironically, it's very likely that any one of their classmates could be having the same exact fear. This doesn't mean that I expect you to speak up. I understand students can feel more comfortable listening, and that participation depends on a lot of (often hidden) factors. However, I encourage you to try to practice non-judgment toward yourself and to avoid holding yourself to impossible (and likely arbitrary) standards.

Read with a purpose, that is, actively rather than passively. I encourage you to read slowly, deliberately, and to ask questions about the text as you go along. It helps to write these questions down, as well as make underlines in the text for passages you find important or interesting. Even if you are not able to read all of the assigned material, it is best to carefully and closely read at least *some* of the material. I would argue that doing so is better than reading too quickly or carelessly for total coverage. The reading this semester is fairly short but challenging. I encourage everyone to reflect on your reading process. What do you do when you read? Do you take notes in the margins? Do you google the author and view their Wikipedia page? Do you see what other people have said or written about an author or text online? Do you verbalize your thoughts back to yourself or to someone else? Do you journal? Do you post Facebook or Twitter posts about your reading? All of these things are strategies for interacting meaningfully with the texts. It's important that you discover for yourself what your best reading process is and try as much as you can to utilize it. That said, it is always better to read something rather than nothing. See if you can't *come to class with at least one idea to contribute to discussion*.

### **Participation:**

You are required to actively participate in this class, which means showing up to class prepared to contribute. However, while participation through discussion is important, I also recognize that some students struggle to speak. To that end, you will have opportunities to participate in other ways, such as through group work and in-class or take-home writing assignments. Hunter is a non-attendance taking institution, which means that you cannot be exclusively graded on the category of attendance. I will not be taking attendance every day, and I am completely fine with you missing some class dates (this happens for all of us). But I do expect you to have a generally consistent and active presence in the classroom. If you are going to be absent, especially on an important class date, it would be preferable if you emailed me ahead of time (though this is not required). If you are having trouble coming to class in general, please reach out to me and we will discuss a plan for you to help you succeed despite whatever is preventing you from being in class.

### **AI Policy:**

AI is here to stay, though what exactly its impact will be long-term is debatable. I have no strict policy on this matter; I only ask that you do your work with integrity and that you take it seriously. AI interfaces, such as ChatGTP, can sometimes be helpful in retrieving and condensing widely available information quickly, and they can even help with sentence-level phrasing. Yet they are largely unhelpful when it comes to producing writing that is unique and that has authenticity and complexity. In other words, your own ideas are better than Artificial Intelligence, so I encourage you to only use AI (if you feel the need to use it at all) to boost or enhance your own voice, and emphatically not as a substitute for your unique voice. If you are over-using AI, I will approach you about it and ask you to rewrite your assignment in such a way that your own voice is nurtured and supported.

### **Turnitin:**

All writing assignments must be submitted to [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com). **Please note: turnitin is a plagiarism checker, but I am not using it for that purpose.** Truthfully, I am not in agreement with turnitin's messaging, its business model, or its philosophies about teaching. Rather, I'm using it as a repository for your work, so that neither you nor myself lose it, and so I can offer legible feedback on all your papers. I turn off turnitin's plagiarism checking feature, as well as the feature that allows its operating system to collect and own your data (one of its practices I also do not agree with). Turnitin is a free service and you may already have an account from high school or a previous semester. If not, go to [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) and register by creating an account. You need to provide an email and password. This does not need to be a Hunter email but any email and password of your choosing. Once you're registered, you must enroll in our class. Each assignment will be labeled with a submission deadline (though all deadlines are flexible). Our class ID and enrollment key are listed below.

Class ID: 40289503

Enrollment Key: Literature

### **Textbooks:**

There are a handful of required paperback texts (and one hardcover text) for this class. In total, the cost of these books should be well under one hundred dollars. I have asked that you purchase these texts online or at a bookstore of your choosing, but I will also create pdfs of the relevant material for those who are not able to find or purchase these books and I will upload them to blackboard. The value of purchasing these textbooks is that it makes our collective reading of them much easier and standardized. That said, if you are unable to purchase these texts, or are having trouble finding them, please do not worry. You will have access to them.

### **Ungrading the Classroom:**

I practice something called "ungrading," a pedagogy that strives to decenter grades as the primary means of assessment. We will read and discuss the blog post below on ungrading by Jesse Stommel as a way of familiarizing ourselves with some of ungrading's core ideas and beliefs. We will discuss it, and pedagogy in general, during our first week of class.

<https://www.jessestommel.com/why-i-dont-grade/>

Instead of receiving grades, students in this class will submit two reflective writings for the whole semester, which I call Learning Narratives (LNs): one at the midterm point and one at the end of the semester. Both of these informal assignments are generally open-ended but should respond to two separate prompts (see below). These LNs will serve as markers of your learning progress and process. They will also enable us to engage in a dialogue about your learning, which will lead us to an alternative way of assessing educational growth beyond grades.

Since grades must be assigned for this course (as CUNY is a grade-giving institution), you will be asked to assign yourself a tentative grade, both in your midterm and end-of-term LN. These grades will apply not to any individual assignments but rather to your overall course performance. In other words, you are reflecting on yourself holistically. I will offer you feedback on your formal writing assignments but I will read your LNs first so that they color my perspective on your writing. This is a deliberate act; it is a way of putting you in control of your own learning narrative and asking me to be responsive to it. LNs are informal writing assignments, so I will not offer much feedback beyond a comment or two.

I aim to have minimal intervention in your process when it comes to your LNs. I will only step in if I think you are evaluating yourself too harshly (which happens more than you might think) or if I feel that your self-reflection is significantly out of sync with what I'm seeing in the classroom and in your essays. Each LN will be submitted simultaneously with your formal essay assignments/projects when those are due.

### **Midterm Learning Narrative:**

Tell me a story about who you are as a student.  
How does this class fit into that story?

You might discuss why you are in college, what you're interested in achieving with your degree, and how this class fits into your broader educational goals.

What, for instance, do you value most about your education? How might this class play some role (big or small) in achieving it?

How do you think you've done so far in this class?

Based on these reflections, and on the total work you've done up to this point, including attendance, participation, reading, and formal essays and/or assignments, what overall (tentative) course grade do you think you have earned at this moment in the semester?

**In a 1-2 page informal response** (double spaced), please reflect on and answer these questions holistically, without itemizing them. I am interested in your thoughts about this as a process, so *please do not feel like you have to justify your course grade*. As mentioned above, you are not on trial. This activity is meant to be an open-ended and thoughtful exchange. I am genuinely curious about your own reflections on your learning process. My goal is to let your Learning Narrative guide the feedback I give you on your formal essays, and to have the opportunity to get to know you as a student better. Please also know that *you do not have to share any information you are not comfortable with sharing*. What you write about is completely your choice.

### **Final Learning Narrative:**

We have come to the end of the semester. We made it! Please reflect briefly on the work you've done, all that you have learned (if you stop and think, it's probably more than you realize), and your previous LN.

What has transpired?

Do you feel as if you have achieved your goal/s this semester and have those goals changed? If they have changed, how and why?

Lastly, what is one thing about your learning experience in this class that you will always remember?

Based on these reflections, what overall course grade do you think you have earned?

**Please answer in a 1-2 page informal response.**

### **Course Calendar (subject to change when needed):**

**\*\*Please note that dates where readings are listed are the same dates those readings will be discussed\*\***

**[\\*\\*Link to current Hunter College academic calendar\\*\\*](#)**

Aug. 28	Introductions/Syllabus/Activity
Aug. 31	Discuss Stommel and ungrading
Sep.4	From <i>Madwoman in the Attic</i> : Ch. 2, "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship"; from the <i>Heath Anthology of American Literature</i> : "Early Nineteenth-Century: 1800-1865"
Sep. 7	Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Emily Dickinson's Letters" ( <i>The Atlantic</i> , 1891); <a href="#">Dickinson's bio</a> from the Poetry Foundation's website.

- Sep. 11 Alexandra Socarides, from *Dickinson Unbound: Paper, Process, Poetics* (2012): “Introduction,” Ch. 1: “Dickinson’s Sheets”; Ch. 2: “Epistolary Practices and the Problem of Genre” (**pick one of the two chapters**)
- Sep. 14 From *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Franklin numbering): 117, 124, 181, 185, 194, 207, 225, 236, 242, 247, 260, 279, 291
- Sep. 18 Sharon Cameron, from *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (1979): read only p.1-5 and p.56-82; Dickinson: 259, 427, 690, 743, 764, 773, 1312, 1313
- Sep. 21 From *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Franklin numbering): 320, 339, 359, 360, 372, 373, 448, 479, 480, 547, 548, 591, 706; Socarides, Ch. 3: “Sewing the Fascicles: Elegy, Consultation, and the Poetics of Interruption”
- Sep. 28 Barbara Baumgartner, “Anatomy Lessons: Emily Dickinson’s Brain Poems”; from Calvin Cutter’s *Anatomy and Physiology*: “Practical Suggestions. Physiology of the Brain” (p. 231-241); Dickinson: 423, 598, 833
- Oct. 2 Discuss midterm and final
- Oct. 5 Watch *Wild Nights with Emily*
- Oct. 9 No classes (Indigenous People’s Day)
- Oct. 12 [Short bio](#) on Harriet Jacobs; from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: “Introduction,” Ch. 1-5 (up to p.29 in Norton)
- Oct. 16 Jacobs, Ch. 6-10 (up to p.52 in Norton)
- Oct. 23 Jacobs, Ch. 10-30 (up to p.131 in Norton);
- Oct. 26 Finish text (up to p.169 in Norton); P. Gabrielle Foreman, from “The Politics of Sex and Representation in Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*”; Lydia Maria Child (letter to John Greenleaf Whittier)
- Oct. 30 Molly Ball, “On Making the Present Past: Nongenerational Temporality in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*”; in-class midterm exam
- Nov. 2 Check-in day



Nov. 6	“Do Black Ghosts Matter?: Harriet Jacobs’ Spiritualism”
Nov. 9	Megan Marshall, from <i>Margaret Fuller: A New American Life</i> (2013): Read pdfs labeled “Part I” and “Part II”; Ralph Waldo Emerson, from <i>Nature</i> : “Introduction,” “Nature,” “Idealism,” “Spirit,” “Prospects”; recommended reading: <a href="#">Transcendentalism</a>
Nov. 13	Margaret Fuller, <i>Woman in the Nineteenth-Century</i> (up to p.52)
Nov. 16	Fuller, <i>Woman in the Nineteenth-Century</i> (finish) Emerson, “Margaret”; Fuller, “Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson”; Fuller, from “Boston Conversations”
Nov. 20	Jess Libow, “Margaret Fuller’s Physical Education”
Nov. 23-26	Thanksgiving break
Nov. 27	<a href="#">Charlotte Perkins Gilman bio</a> ; Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, from <i>Wild Unrest</i> (2010): Introduction, Ch. 6 “In the Care of S. Weir Mitchell”
Nov. 30	In-class workshop on research paper
Dec. 4	Gilman, “The Yellow Wall-Paper”
Dec. 7	“The Yellow Wall-Paper” continued; Butler, “The Trouble of Charlotte Perkins Gilman”; Gilman, “The Negro Problem”
Dec. 11	Last day goodbyes; exit survey

**\*\*Final papers due December 22nd by midnight\*\***

**Academic Honesty Policy (from the Hunter College Senate):** Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g. plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The college is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy of Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Integrity Procedures.

**The English Department has an annual Prizes and Awards competition.** Work that you do in this course might be suitable for submission. Please consider applying by the February deadline. Information will be posted here:

<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/english/student-opportunities/prizes-awards>

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**Sexual Misconduct Policy:** In compliance with the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Hunter College reaffirms the prohibition of any sexual misconduct, which includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment retaliation against students, employees, or visitors, as well as certain intimate relationships. Students who have experienced any form of sexual violence on or off campus (including CUNY-sponsored trips and events) are entitled to the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights for Hunter College.

- a. Sexual Violence: Students are strongly encouraged to immediately report the incident by calling 911, contacting NYPD Special Victims Division Hotline (646-610-7272) or their local police precinct, or contacting the College's Public Safety Office (212-772-4444).
- b. All Other Forms of Sexual Misconduct: Students are also encouraged to contact the College's Title IX Campus Coordinator, Dean John Rose (jtrose@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-650-3262) or Colleen Barry (colleen.barry@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-772-4534) and seek complimentary services through the Counseling and Wellness Services Office, Hunter East 1123.
- c. CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct Link:  
<http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/la/Policy-on-Sexual-Misconduct-12-1-14-with-links.pdf>”

**ADA Statement:** In compliance with the ADA and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational access and accommodations for all its registered students. Hunter College's students with disabilities and medical conditions are encouraged to register with the Office of AccessABILITY for assistance and accommodation. For information and appointment contact the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room E1214 or call (212) 772-4857 or TTY (212) 650-3230.