

English 660
Spring 2008
Science and Nineteenth-Century
American Literary Culture

William Rossi
363 PLC; 6-3955
Office hrs: M, 4-6;
Tues., 2:45-4:45

SYLLABUS

During the middle third of the nineteenth century, while Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, and Herman Melville were publishing their best-known writings exploring human relations to environment, a newly professionalized natural science was emerging as the authoritative source of natural knowledge. Although relations between literature and science are often imagined as essentially opposed, this course will uncover more complex cultural and historically situated dynamics in the relationship between these discourses. With attention (among other filiations with science) to mid-century evolutionary theories and narratives, we will see how these writers drew key metaphors from contemporary science; relied upon and parodied its methods; and invented narrative and rhetorical strategies both to access the growing cultural authority of professional science and to contest it.

Required Texts

Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation and Other Evolutionary Writings*, ed. James A. Secord (Chicago, 1994).

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (Norton, 2003).

Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Harvard, 1999).

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or The Whale*, 2/e, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford (Norton, 2001).

Henry D. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer (Princeton, 1988).

_____, *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings*, 3/e, ed. William Rossi (Norton, 2008).

Written and Oral Work

(Guidelines for written assignments and a schedule for discussion responsibilities to be distributed asap.)

- 1) One theoretically and/or historically situated critical analysis of a primary text (1000-1250 words), due the end of Week 5.
- 2) A turn as discussion leader, responsible for linking primary readings and a critical selection, during Weeks 3-6, 8-9; when not serving as a discussion leader, each student should email me two readings questions (focused on primary texts) by 3pm Monday.
- 3) Two-page paper prospectus with as complete bibliography as possible, due via email by June 1.
- 4) Oral presentation on paper topic and argument, June 3.
- 5) A conference-length paper (12-15 pages) on a topic relevant to the course and discussed with me, due June 11.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

(* = available on Blackboard; NCE = Norton Critical Edition; SF = suggested further reading)

Week 1

4/1 Introductions and course business; Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993); mid-century evolutionary models

Week 2 Books of Nature

4/8 READINGS

Science Studies: Latour, *Pandora's Hope* (1999), chaps 1-4; *Jan Golinski, *Making Natural Knowledge: Constructivism and the History of Science* (1998), Intro and chap 1, pp. 13-27; *Dov Ospovat, *The Development of Darwin's Theory* (1981), 6-9.

Natural Science, Natural Theology: *Charles Bell, *The Hand: Its Mechanism and Vital Endowments as Evincing Design* (1833); *William Whewell, *Astronomy and General Physics Considered with Reference to Natural Theology* (1834)

Transcendentalism: Frederick Henry Hedge, "Coleridge's Literary Character" (1833) [in RWE NCE, 577-79]; *William Henry Furness, "The Miracles of Jesus" (1837); *Theodore Parker, "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity" (1841)

Emerson: *"The Humanity of Science" (1836); in NCE: Letter to Edward Bliss Emerson, 31 May 1834; *Nature* (1836); "The American Scholar" (1837)

Week 3 Emerson's Experience

4/15 READINGS

Emerson: "The Method of Nature" (1841) and "The Transcendentalist" (1842); "History" and "Circles" (1841); "The Poet" and "Experience" (1844)

Science Studies: *Lorraine Daston, "Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective" (1992); **plus** either Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges" (1991) or Laura Walls, *Emerson's Life in Science* (2003), chaps 1 and 2 (plus her Emerson readings).

SF Literature Studies: *David Robinson, *Emerson and the Conduct of Life* (1993), 54-70.

Week 4 Thoreau's Development

4/22 READINGS

Thoreau: *Walden* (1854), "Economy" thru "Higher Laws;" graze nutritious selections from the Walden Journal (1845-47), 319-45.

Chambers: *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) 1-43; 134-235; 277-390; *Explanations*, title page and table of contents.

Science Studies: Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, chaps 5-6; **plus** *Evelleen Richards, "The Romantic Gestation of Nature in British Biology"

Week 5 Witnessing Creation

4/29 READINGS

Thoreau: *Walden*, “Brute Neighbors” thru “Conclusion;” sandbank Journal selections, 345-47, 355-56, 371-72, 374-75.

Chambers: Autobiographical Preface to *Vestiges* 10/e (1853) [204-7]; *excerpts from “Proofs, Illustrations, Authorities”

Literature Studies: readings of *Walden*’s thawing sandbank: Leo Marx, “[Transcendental Pastoral Design],” NCE 463-64; Robert Sattelmeyer, “The Remaking of *Walden*,” NCE 505-7; *Andrew McMurry, *Environmental Renaissance* (2003), 135-49; Lawrence Buell, excerpt from *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), 131-34, and “Thoreau and the Natural Environment” [NCE]

plus

Science Studies: Donna Haraway, “When Species Meet: Introductions” (2008)

SF Literature Studies: *Wm Rossi, “Following Thoreau’s Instincts” (2004)

Week 6 Into “the Wild”

5/6 READINGS

Thoreau: “Walking” (1851-62), “The Succession of Forest Trees” (1860), and “Wild Apples” (1862)

Literature Studies:

in NCE: Neill Matheson, “Thoreau’s *Grammatica Parda*:

Conjugating Race and Nature;” Steven Fink, “The Language of Prophecy in ‘Wild Apples;’” Lance Newman, “[Capitalism and Community]” **plus**

Laura Dassow Walls, *Seeing New Worlds* (1995), 167-210.

SF Thoreau: “Ktaadn and the Maine Woods” (1848)

Literature Studies: *David Robinson, “Thoreau’s ‘Ktaadn’ and the Quest for Experience” (1997)

Week 7 Natural History, Spirituality, and Skepticism

5/13 READINGS

Melville: *Moby-Dick*, chaps 1-57; “Hawthorne and His ‘Mosses;’” letters to Hawthorne, 532-48

Literature Studies: Walter Bezanson, “*Moby-Dick*: Work of Art,” [NCE 641-57]

Week 8 Whaling and Knowing

5/20 READINGS

Melville: *Moby-Dick* chaps 58-Epilogue

Literature Studies: *Samuel Otter, *Melville’s Anatomies* (1999), intro, chap 4; **plus** *Eric Wilson, “Melville, Darwin, and the Great Chain of Being” (2000)

Week 9 Back to Beginnings

5/27 READINGS

Thoreau: *Cape Cod* (1866)

Literature Studies: *Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature* (2007), 109-39; **plus**
Kris Fresonke, "Is Nature Necessary?" (2006)

Week 10

- 6/1 Prospectus due via email by 5 pm
- 6/3 Dinner and Presentations at Rossi house

Finals Week

- 6/11 Papers DUE by 4 pm in 363 PLC or mailbox