

HON 200: The Transcendental and Romantic Self
Spring 2023
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“Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.” This belief in the self, from Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay “Self-Reliance,” epitomized a philosophical and literary movement in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century. Building from ideas by German and British Romantic writers, the “American Renaissance” merged Romantic and Transcendental ideals to elevate the individual self above traditions and previously accepted forms of authority. This new attention to the individual fostered scientific and technological innovations, a new awareness of the natural world, and unique literary forms, but its vision also revealed the destructiveness of social institutions, such as slavery, that inhibited the realization of the “self” for a large portion of the population. In our course, we will study the ideas that shaped the American Renaissance as found in the works of Emerson, Frederick Douglass, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson, and others, while exploring how their ideas can shape our own notion of the self in 2023 and beyond.

Course Text:

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (Norton Critical Editions)

You can find all other readings attached to our course Blackboard site.

Unit 1: The Inward Turn

Mon., Jan. 23: Welcome and introductions; excerpt from W. Benjamin, Fichte

Mon., Jan. 30: William Ellery Channing, from “Self-Culture”; Orestes Brownson, “The Laboring Classes.” I suggest you read Channing’s essay first.

Mon., Feb. 6: Emerson, “Self-Reliance” (excerpt) and “American Scholar” (excerpt)

Mon., Feb. 13: Hawthorne, “The Artist of the Beautiful”

Mon., Feb. 20: No Classes.

Unit 2: Various Selves

Mon., Feb. 27: William Apess “An Indian’s Looking Glass” and *Son of the Forest* (excerpt); begin reading Jacobs’s *Incidents*.

Mon., March 6: Fuller, “The Great Lawsuit” (excerpt), “Declaration of Sentiments”; Continue reading Jacobs’s *Incidents*.

Mon., March 13: Spring Break

Mon., March 20: Herman Melville, "The Bell-Tower"; Continue reading Jacobs's *Incidents*.

- No Digital Timeline Group this week

Mon., March 27: Melville, "The Bell-Tower" (cont.); Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Mon., Apr. 3: Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Mon., Apr. 10: Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Unit 3: The Poetic Self

Mon., Apr. 17: Dickinson

Mon., Apr. 24: Whitman

Mon., May 1: Workshop

Final Exam: Date and Time TBA