

# ENGL 2235

## American Literature

### General Information

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**Instructor:** Sean McAlister, [smcalister@langara.ca](mailto:smcalister@langara.ca) (Office: A308b)

**Course Times:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30-4:20pm

**Credits:** 3 (for information about transfer credit, visit [bctransferguide.ca](http://bctransferguide.ca))

### Course Description

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“We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate”  
- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (84)

This course is a survey of American literature, spanning the Early National period (1780-1830) to the present. We will use the phrase “the old, weird America” (coined by Greil Marcus in reference to the *Anthology of American Folk Music*) as a point of access for considering the *peculiarity*—that is, both the uniqueness and the strangeness—of U.S. history and literature. We will place particular emphasis on the ways that emergent communication technologies (print, telegraphy, radio, television, the internet, etc.) have both mediated connections and sown dramatic, sometimes violent divisions between people throughout the history of the republic.

### Course Texts

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#### Proposed Readings:

#### **18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> Century Texts:**

Charles Brockden Brown, “Somnambulism”

Phyllis Wheatley, selected poems

Washington Irving, “Rip Van Winkle”

Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown”

Edgar Allan Poe, “A Mesmeric Revelation” and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”

Emily Dickinson, selected poems

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (selections)

Herman Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener”

Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

Walt Whitman, “I Sing the Body Electric”

Henry James, “In the Cage”

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**20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Texts:**

H.P. Lovecraft, "The Whisperer in Darkness"

*The Anthology of American Folk Music* (selected tracks)

Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

Tommy Orange, *There There*

Percival Everett, *James*

**\*course texts are subject to change before the semester begins**