

# TRANSCENDENTAL VISIONS: Re-Imagining The American Dream

SPRING QUARTER: 2007

THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE



*Flight of the Eagle* (1856)

Robert S. Duncanson, 19<sup>th</sup> C. African American Painter

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**Meeting Times:** Thursday 6-10 p.m.  
Field Trip April 17, 2007 at 8:00 p.m.

**Location:** Sem 2 A 3107 & 3105

**Credits:** Upper Division, 4 quarter hours

*In Wilderness is the preservation of the world...*

--Henry David Thoreau, "Walking"

*We are taught by great actions that the universe is the property of every individual in it.*

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

## **Description:**

What conditions sparked the genius of the American transcendentalists, and what forces shape our world today? What are the competing visions of the American Dream? Manifest Destiny or primeval garden? Capitalist success or sustainable community? Activism or apathy? What is the split in the American psyche that is both deeply connected to and conflicted about the connection to the natural world? We will compare the vision of the transcendentalists with contemporary poets, naturalists, activists, and African and Native American writers. Working as writers, poets, and storytellers, we will explore the development of an alternative dream of America that embraces the natural world, social justice, community, and creativity.

We will engage in critical reflection and analysis of a variety of texts, developing tools of literary criticism and historical analysis. Students will experience a rigorous program of reading, writing, artistic expression, and critical discussion. Writing and research assignments are designed for the committed student who wants to work deeply and to write well. Instructional strategies include lectures, workshops, performances, and seminars.

*If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it.*

--Margaret Fuller



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Robert S. Duncanson: African American Painter, 1821-1872. *Falls of Minnehaha; Mount Trempe'lOue*

*All change is a miracle to contemplate; but it is a miracle which is taking place every second.*

*To be awake is to be alive.*

--Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

## **Expectations:**

- Faithful attendance and full participation at meetings, workshops, films, field trips, and seminars.
- Read and write weekly responses to the texts.
- Participate in class workshops and writing groups.
- Maintain a portfolio and journal of class handouts, notes, workshops, papers, research, and cumulative work for the quarter. These will be reviewed at fifth week and final evaluation conferences.
- Successful completion of individual and group projects, presentations, workshops, or assignments on time.

*The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other;*

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Course Equivalencies:** Students can receive a total of four quarter hours credit for college level work in the following areas: American Literature and writing.

*A bard is to be commensurate with a people...His spirit responds to the country's spirit...he incarnates its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes....To him enter the essences of real things and past and present events...*

--Walt Whitman, *Preface: Leaves of Grass*

**Field Trips:** This quarter we are planning to attend Evergreen's Unsoeld Seminar featuring **Frances Moore Lappé**. Her presentation, *Democracy's Edge -- How to take back the America we love*, will take place on Tuesday, April 17, 2007 at 8:00 p.m. in the Longhouse. If you are not able to make this event, please find an alternative.

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Robert S. Duncanson: African American Painter, 1821-1872. *Etude d'un coucher de soleil*, Montréal

## Assignments:

1. Response papers on each of the readings turned in promptly at the beginning of seminar (1-2 pages, typed). These papers will allow you to: 1) comment upon the readings, lectures, workshops, and films, and 2) summarize, reflect upon, and integrate program topics, themes, and issues.
2. A personal or academic essay (5-7 pages) that you will develop, edit, and revise in a series of writing workshops. This essay will allow you to press into the idea of interpretation as you refine and synthesize your ideas of the transcendentalists and/or where we might be headed today.
3. A research project (done with a group or as an individual) that explores an author, topic, theme or issue that intrigues you. As you begin, you will work in groups to share your research and explore some aspect of interpretation and meaning, literary criticism, background material, historic information, parallel texts, and other material. The idea is to press forward into the work of interpretation. This is an opportunity to develop your research skills along with a deeper understanding of the influence of the American Transcendentalists. You will present your research findings in a short five-minute oral presentation during weeks 7 or 8.
5. Attendance at one extra-curricular event. Write a brief statement about how this event fits with program topics, themes, and interests. This quarter we are planning to attend Evergreen's Unsoeld Seminar featuring **Frances Moore Lappé**. Her presentation, *Democracy's Edge -- How to take back the America we love*, will take place on Tuesday, April 17, 2007 at 8:00 p.m. in the Longhouse. If you are not able to make this event, please find an alternative.
6. A final project, performance, or presentation: You can read a passage from your personal or academic essay; write an original poem, song, story, or create a visual art piece in response to the ideas inspired by the transcendentalists. You might perform or recite a poem or passage of by Whitman, Dickenson, Thoreau, or Emerson—or you might put their work to music. You will present your work in 5-10 min. presentations during weeks 9 or 10.

*What's the use of a fine house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?  
Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises?  
If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a  
different drummer.*  
--Henry David Thoreau

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*Everything in Nature contains all the powers of Nature. Everything is made of one hidden stuff.*  
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

*Only the dreamer shall understand realities, though in truth his dreaming must be not out of proportion to his waking.*  
--Margaret Fuller

*Now I see the secret of making the best person: it is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth.*  
--Walt Whitman

## Class Portfolio

Each student is required to keep a class portfolio throughout the quarter. This will be turned in during the fifth week and during week nine of the quarter for evaluation. Include your name and a table of contents. **Record the topic and date of each item** in your portfolio. Each section should be arranged chronologically. The portfolio must be kept in a loose-leaf three ring binder with dividers and should contain the following:

- 1) Table of contents, course syllabus, covenant, and all class handouts.
- 2) Class notes: lectures, speakers, and seminars.
- 3) In-class workshops. (Date each entry).
- 4) Reading response papers and assignments for required texts and readings. Follow format on reading response handout. (A section of reading notes is strongly recommended.)
- 5) Personal/Academic Essay and Writing Project: a.) In-class editing workshops and notes (date each entry). b.) Final draft and early drafts.
- 7) Statement about fieldtrip or extra-curricular event.
- 6) Research project: research notes, hand-outs, and notes for oral presentations.
- 7) Final Project/Presentation: Statement of final project, all notes.
- 8) Self and Faculty evaluations (Three signed copies on official forms at the end of the quarter.)

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TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

*Landscape with Campsite*: Robert S. Duncanson: African American Painter, 1821-1872