ENG 254 Weekly Writing #5

Tuesday Edgar Allan Poe (pages 723-727); “The Cask of Amontillado” (pages 763-767); “The Philosophy of Composition” (pages 768-775); “The Raven” (pages 777-779)

Optional: Toni Morrison on Poe and Hawthorne in Playing in the Dark; Black Matters, in our library and excerpted in our text on page 2506.

Thursday: Nathaniel Hawthorne (pages 786-791); “Young Goodman Brown” (pages 804-813).

Writing Part One: Choose one of the following and compose ½ page response:

- Emerson and Poe were rivals in the literary marketplace and on the lecture circuit. What similarities, what differences do you find in their philosophies and works?
- Why does Poe think that brevity is best in literature? What does he mean by the “single effect” in literature? Explain this single effect. Draw from his short story “The Cask of Amontillado” to illustrate how Poe realizes this quality in his own writing.
- How convincing is Poe’s account of the composition of “The Raven”? Draw from both the essay as well as details from the Raven to explain.
- Explain and comment on Morrison’s thesis on Poe’s “Africanisms” using any of the stories or poems in our collection.

Writing Part Two: Choose one of the following and compose ¼ (or more) page response:

- Young Goodman Brown depicts scenes of evil and terror. How does it differ from Poe’s tales of horror? What differentiates Hawthorne’s “darkness” from Poe’s?
- In what ways does Hawthorne’s tale complicate the transcendentalist foundation of individualism, self-redemption, beauty, etc? To respond to this prompt, consider creating a conversation between Hawthorne and Emerson, or Hawthorne and Thoreau.
- Discuss some of the major themes in the story by considering any of the following questions:
  - Is Young Goodman Brown dream or reality or something in between?
  - Which is more “real” in the story, good or evil?
  - Is it New England’s moral universe that changes in the story or Brown’s?

“For some time now, I have been thinking about the validity or vulnerability of a certain set of assumptions conventionally accepted among literary historians and critics and circulated as “knowledge.” This knowledge holds that traditional, canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first Africans and then African-Americans in the United States. It assumes that this presence – which shaped the body politic, the constitution, and the entire history of the culture – has had no significant place or consequence in the origin and development of that culture’s literature. Moreover such knowledge assumes that the characteristics of our national literature emanate from a particular “Americaness” that is separate from and unaccountable too this presence. There seems to be a more or less tacit agreement among literary scholars that, because American literature has been clearly the preserve of white male views, genius, and power, those views, genius, and power are without relationship to and removed from the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States. This agreement is made about a population that preceded every American writer of renown and was, I have come to believe, one of the most furtively radical impinging forces on the country’s literature. The contemplation of this black presence is central too any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination.” Toni Morrison, Black Matters
Frederick Douglass

When it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this beautiful and terrible thing, needful to man as air, usable as earth; when it belongs at last to all, when it is truly instinct, brain matter, diastole, systole, reflex action; when it is finally won; when it is more than the gaudy mumbo jumbo of politicians; this man, this Douglass, this former slave, this Negro beaten to his knees, exiled, visioning a world where none is lonely, none hunted, alien, this man, superb in love and logic, this man shall be remembered. Oh, not with statues’ rhetoric, not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone, but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives fleshing his dream of the beautiful, needful thing.

Robert Hayden
1962

Emancipation

Corncob constellation,
Oyster shell, drawstring pouch, dry bones.

Gris gris in the rafters.
Hoodoo in the sleeping nook.
Mojo in Linda Brent’s crawlspace.

Nineteenth century corncob cosmogram
set on the dirt floor, beneath the slant roof,
left intact the afternoon
that someone came and told those slaves

“We’re free.”

Elizabeth Alexander
2005