ENGL 243.02
Chasing the Great American Novel

Professor: Rafael Walker
When: Monday and Wednesday
Time: 1:00 - 2:15 PM

The ambition to write the Great American Novel—to write the novel that perfectly captures the nation in all its immensity—has haunted American writers for an astonishingly long time. Though the GAN ambition has been thoroughly ridiculed by scholars and novelists alike, it has nonetheless endured with peculiar force in the American imagination. We shall examine this cultural phenomenon by considering some of the most viable contenders for GAN status as well as the approaches that these contenders take in pursuing this elusive grail. Authors include Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Toni Morrison.
Some of the best literature has taken desire as its central subject. Writers have interrogated this subject from a number of angles. How does desire operate? Who should want what? Can one desire too much or too little? What are the consequences of desiring aberrantly? What is the relationship between desire and the imagination? In this course, we’ll examine some of the most poignant explorations of desire in literature, working across genres—fiction, poetry, drama, and film. Authors include Emily Dickinson, Kate Chopin, Nella Larsen, Tennessee Williams, and several short-story writers with some very unusual ideas about desire.