

English 361, “The Early American Novel and Other Fictions”

Monday 250-5:20

Room 230 John Hope Franklin Center

IMPS (Interactive Multimedia Project Space) Room

Professor Cathy N. Davidson

Office: 127 Franklin Center *(Please do not deposit papers or messages in my Allen Building mailbox; they will not be received in due time.)*

Office Hours: Wednesday 11:30-1:00, 127 Franklin Center.

Description

English 361, “The Early American Novel and Other Fictions,” begins from the assumption that none of the key terms in the course title is fixed, definitive, transparent, or clear. Although the title hinges on the most basic structuring notions of our profession—periodization (“early”), nation (“American”), and genre (“novel”)—this course argues that each of these is a fiction in need of critical interrogation. Beyond that, implicitly and explicitly, it looks at the profession of English and the state of English Departments today and asks what role we do have, what role we should have, and how holding to our structuring principles (periodization, nation, and genre) helps us thrive in the modern day intellectual economy or seals our doom (or perhaps somewhere in between those poles). In other words, this course is both about a body of literary works and about the nature of literary study in what historian Robert Darnton has argued is humanity’s fourth great information age. The late eighteenth century, with the democratization of cheap printing, popular print forms, and mass schooling, marked the beginning of the third of these monumental eras where technological, social, and cultural change happened simultaneously and interactively.

The course will be framed according to social, cultural, theoretical, and political issues central to humanity’s third great information age, the democratization of reading which comes from technological changes (mass printing, manufacturing methods for cheap paper and cheap ink), institutional changes (circulating libraries and public education), and cultural changes (the zeal for the novel that created a demand for books that allowed for mass printing and inspired and prompted technological innovation). We will also be looking at how technological issues intertwine with social issues such as democratic representation at a time of slavery and a variety of racisms, republicanism when women were disenfranchised, freedom of speech in the wake of the Alien and Sedition Acts, and post-colonialism and Anglophilia in the context of (and in reaction to) the Haitian Revolution.

One premise of this course is that humanists should be at the center of the current information age. Another premise is that, if we are not, it may be partly from our own reluctance to engage the age and interrogate ourselves. A requirement will be, in some way, to make public our own ideas about the work we are doing as a class and as a profession. Students will be required to correct, update, or create an entry on Wikipedia. Virtually all of the entries for this time period are accurate enough but woefully sparse and un-critical.

Another premise is that we well might be a happier profession (and better teachers) if we learned to work collaboratively with one another. Consequently, all class sessions will be kicked off by

a team of students working together and supplying us, via the class blog, with some topics to consider in advance of the class meeting. It is assumed that each student will be involved in at least two of these collaborative discussions, in patterns to be worked out on the first day of class.

We will be using a public class blog and website to post weekly analyses about the works we are reading and to engage in public, direct, serious, difficult, and entirely civil intellectual interchange. (Strong disagreement is different from incivility, in other words.)

The final paper for the course will be an initial draft of a publishable essay, written within the deadline of the course period. An alternative assignment is a collaborative paper and an individual syllabus for a proposed course in early American fiction.

Further details of all of the written assignments can be found at the end of this syllabus.

English 361 Blackboard Site—for now:

Although we will likely be migrating to another site in the course of the term, we will begin by using the blog, wiki, documents, and other tools on our English 361 Blackboard site.

Required Texts:

I have selected a number of primary texts as well as a number of secondary readings that address either the novels themselves or some relevant historical or theoretical issue raised by the novels. It is assumed that the discussion leaders will offer us selections from critical theorists to read along side these assigned readings. Part of the collaborative task will be deciding upon select, pertinent, concise and interesting theoretical readings and to guide us through those in the blogging topics you pose for us.

Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, ed. Vincent Carretta (Penguin Classic)

Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette* and William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*, bound in one (Penguin Classic)

Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, (Oxford U Press)

Charles Brockden Brown, *Arthur Mervyn* (any edition)

Royall Tyler, *The Algerine Captive* (Modern Library Classics)

Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint* (Duke U Press)

Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, Expanded Edition (Oxford U Press)

Sibylle Fisher, *Modernity Disavowed* (Duke U Press)

Sadiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, (Oxford U Press)

“Early America Novel” issue of *Novel*, Volume 40, nos 1 and 2.

Recommended reading: *Wikipedia*, *The Missing Manual*

Class Schedule: Overview

Readings should be completed and blogged about before the class session in which they will be discussed. All class sessions will have teams of two or three student leaders who will discuss and then post two or three blog topics for us to consider in our reading, who will be responsible for reading all the blog postings before the class session, and who will lead class discussion. A formal class presentation is optional. Student leaders for each session will also be responsible for subsequently translating their insights into a public presentation of the work, either updating a Wikipedia entry or finding another way to represent our conversation to a general public they identify.

Class Schedule

Wed Jan 7 Introduction to class, discussion of syllabus, sign-up for two collaborative discussion sessions per student

Mon Jan 12 *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano*
Leonard Tennenhouse “Is There an Early American Novel?” *Novel* (Volume 40).
Cathy N. Davidson, “Olaudah Equiano, Written by Himself,” *Novel* (Volume 40).

Discussion leaders: Allison & Sarah

Mon Jan 19—No class; Dr. Martin Luther King Holiday.

Mon Jan 26 Continuing discussion of *Equiano*,
Jonathan Elmer, “Melancholy, Race, Sovereign Exemption,” in *Novel* (Volume 40).
Sadiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*

Discussion leaders: Bill & Seth

Mon Feb 2 William Hill Brown, *The Power of Sympathy*
Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America, Introduction and Chapter Five, “Commodity and Communication”

Discussion leaders: Alexa & Melissa

Mon Feb 9 Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette*
Lauren Berlant, “Poor Eliza,” *American Literature* (Volume 70) and *The Female Complaint*

Discussion leaders: Anna & [Anne Marie]

Mon Feb 16 Continued discussion of Brown and Foster, plus Elmer, Hartman, Berlant and Chapter Six, “Privileging the *Feme Covert*,” *Revolution and the Word*

Discussion leaders: Kwantaek & Seth

Mon Feb 23 Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, plus wrap up of all critical perspectives read so far in the course

Discussion leaders: Sarah and Anna

Mon Mar 2 *No formal class meeting today; an additional dinner session will be scheduled later in the semester.*

Spring Break Friday March 6-Monday March 16

Mon Mar 16 Royall Tyler, *The Algerine Captive*
Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, “Secret Histories,” In *Novel* (Volume 40).
Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*

Discussion leaders: Bill and Allison

Mon Mar 23 Continue discussion of Tyler, plus Dillon and Fischer

Discussion leaders: Alexa and [Anne Marie]

Mon Mar 30 Charles Brockden Brown, *Arthur Mervyn*
Amanda Emerson, “Fictitious Historiography,” *Novel* (Volume 40).

Discussion leaders: Kwantaek & Melissa

Mon Apr 6 Continued discussion of Brown, plus Emerson

Mon Apr 13—Final class—Wrap up of CB Brown and the course

Mon April 27 noon Final papers due in my Franklin Center mailbox

Course Requirements

(1) Two Collaboratively-led Discussion Sessions (different groups for each session)

Each student will be part of a collaborative team responsible for leading at least two classes. Please make sure to sign up with different team members for each session. The purpose is to work with and learn from different groups while also being responsible to and for the class as a whole. (*Hint: Being an active participant in the seminar is as important for collaboration as being one of the team leaders. I am hoping this collaborative exercise will be a great pedagogical as well as intellectual experience and we will be discussing all of the different aspects of making collaboration work and making a learning environment stimulating.*)

Method: Students will sign up for their collaborative teams on the first day of class, making sure to sign up for two different class sessions on different topics.

The discussion-team will set us all topics to think about as we read. These will be posted, with comments, on the class blog.

All other students will be required to blog on these topics.

The discussion-team will be responsible for kicking off the conversation in class, possibly drawing from the blogs posted by all of the other students in the class, possibly with some new topics to discuss. The point is to *engage* the class. A presentation is fine and can be as creative (including multimedia and technologically-mediated) as you wish, but don't leave out the rest of us. It's a *discussion* not a *performance*.

Please note: everyone working together collaboratively will receive the same grade unless the collaborators inform me of why this should not be the case.

(2) Translating the Discussion Sessions into Public Content

Every teacher is a "public intellectual." Our blogs will be public. That's what we do as a profession and we need our contribution to the world at large to be more visible, more productive. In addition, we want it to have some practical demonstration. Each one of the collaborative discussions should yield some public contribution. To start with, this will be an editing or an enhancement to an existing Wikipedia article or it might be an entirely new Wikipedia article. Where else can you make a public intervention? Will you Twitter it? Let people know on Facebook? Find other forums where your work can make a difference in the greater public, and where you will be the "authority" in this field, with all the requirements that implies for credibility, accuracy, rhetorical persuasion?

The last part of this assignment is to provide url's on the class blog for all places where you have been able to make your mark. This is "intellectual graffiti," a public dressing up of the Internet's virtual walls with accurate, intelligent, critical, theoretically-engaged commentary. In your blog, share the url's but also any wisdom of you have gained from doing this. Were there "tricks" to ensure your Wikipedia post would stay alive? How did you find other places in which you could contribute to the discussion? Share this with us and with whoever might be reading our class blog.

If we believe history and literature and cultural studies and cultural theory matter, then we cannot cordon off our insights from the age in which we live or we will program our own irrelevancy and our demise.

Please note: everyone working together collaboratively will receive the same grade unless the collaborators inform me of why this should not be the case.

(3) Final Paper. Due in my Franklin Center mailbox at noon on April 27.

There are two different formats for the final paper and you may choose either one:

(A) A conventional single-author draft of a publishable article (presumed to be 15-25 pp in length).

This is a draft of a scholarly paper that you will intend to submit for future publication and will include all of the appropriate scholarly apparatus of such an article. If this paper is based on the initial collaborative presentation, you will need to include a paragraph about the collaboration, including your mechanism for giving credit to others.

(B) A collaborative paper plus a single-author syllabus for a course on “Early American Fiction.”

The **collaborative paper** can be some version of what you presented for the class discussion, revised to be the equivalent of a substantial, collaborative project that may be submitted for publication, online or in print. Everyone participating will receive the same grade and you will need to write a paragraph description of the collaboration and everyone’s participation, with all members signing off on this description.

The **syllabus needs to be single-author**. I want everyone to have an opportunity to turn in one assignment that represents their individual work. You will be designing a syllabus for an undergraduate course in “Early American Fiction” and will include a rationale discussing how it is structured and why as well as a detailed syllabus laying out the course requirements, the books, the structure, and the assignments.