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G41.2802 The American Novel to 1855
Summer 2009
MW 4:00-6:00

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course offers a brief survey of American novels from the Revolution to the eve of the Civil War, with particular emphasis on the post-Revolutionary period and the mid-century moment known as the American Renaissance. It also aims to acquaint students with recent approaches to the American novel in these periods, including its transatlantic origins, its diverse audiences, the material conditions of its production and consumption, and its enlistment in efforts to reform society. Special attention will be paid to questions of gendered reading and writing practices, including the novel's place in pedagogy, liberal subject formation, family life, and citizenship. Some discussion will be devoted to questions of methodology, especially in the use of digital databases to construct new literary histories.

REQUIREMENTS

One research exercise and presentation of findings; one reading response (circulated in advance of one of our meetings); one 10-12 page final paper. The research exercise will require print and electronic archival research into the publication and circulation histories of one of our novels – especially their circulation in the U.S. The formal presentation requires you to present this research to the seminar and suggest interpretive inroads for our discussion. This report should not be a biographical study of the author, nor should it simply repeat material readily available in the printed introductions to our novels. Rather, it should focus on the moment of the work's initial circulation and reception and pose questions based on your findings with the goal of opening up our discussion of the work. The reading responses should summarize and evaluate key arguments (including an assessment of method and evidence) in the critical or historical material we will read and should not exceed one page, single-spaced.

STRATEGY

Try to come to each meeting having identified two or three core problems presented by the texts under consideration, even if you haven't worked out adequate solutions to those problems. How do these texts engage our key terms (novel, America, literary history, readership, sensibility, sympathy, etc.) in ways that seem consistent or different from what we've considered so far? What methodological or theoretical approaches might be required to confront the problems you identify? What scenes or passages from

the novels seem to stand out as particularly worthy of discussion? Try to find passages that seem particularly compelling or confusing; see if you can identify stylistic tics that seem peculiar to the authors we study and look for passages to illustrate key formal patterns. For secondary readings, try to write one or two sentences that pin-point the argument. Look at footnotes to begin to think about *how* these critics construct an argument, what kinds of evidence they rely on. Keep a running list of key terms, especially if you're not able to arrive at a working definition of them on your own.

READING LIST (for purchase; you're welcome to use alternate editions)

Brown, Charles Brockden, *Wieland* (Hackett)
Foster, Hannah Webster, *The Coquette* and Brown, William Hill, *The Power of Sympathy*
(bound together; Penguin)
Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Scarlet Letter* (Penguin)
Melville, Herman, *Pierre* (Penguin)
Rowson, Susanna, *Charlotte Temple* and *Lucy Temple* (Penguin)
Stowe, Harriet Beecher, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Signet)

Additional titles and secondary readings will be distributed in class or via blackboard. The manuscript material from the *Cambridge History of the American Novel* (CHAN) is unpublished and not for circulation or citation. Some materials linked via blackboard will require you to be logged in as a proxy user via Bobst or NYUHome; you may, if you wish, read or examine most of our novels in original editions in the Fales Library and Special Collections. Please ask if you have questions about anything above.

The **SCHEDULE** that follows is subject to change.

May 18 Introduction: "Early" "American" "Novel"?

READ: Giles, "Transatlantic Currents and the Invention of the American Novel"
(blackboard)
Fliegelman, from *Prodigals and Pilgrims* (blackboard)

May 20 The "American" Richardson?

READ: Richardson, *Clarissa* [1795 Boston edition] (link via blackboard)
Tennenhouse, from *The Importance of Feeling English* (blackboard)

May 25: Memorial Day (no class)

May 27 The American Revolution and the British Novel

READ: Pratt, *Emma Corbett* (link via blackboard)
Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*
Flynn, from *Americans in British Literature* (blackboard)
Duane, "Susannah Rowson, Hannah Webster Foster, and the Seduction
Novel in the Early US" (blackboard)

June 1 Sympathy and Seduction

READ: Brown, *The Power of Sympathy*
Loughran, from *Republic in Print* (blackboard)
Barnes, "Affecting Relations"

June 3 Luxury and Liberty

READ: Foster, *The Coquette*
Waterman, "Elizabeth Whitman's Disappearance" (blackboard)

June 8 Sins of the Fathers

READ: Brown, *Wieland*
Dawes, "Fictional Feeling" (blackboard)

June 10 The Darkened House

READ: Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*
Kreger, "'Depravity Dressed Up in a Fascinating Garb'" (blackboard)

June 15 Incest and Inheritance

READ: Melville, *Pierre*, chs. 1-13
Dill, "That Damned Mob of Scribbling Siblings" (blackboard)

June 17 Sin City

READ: Melville, *Pierre*, chs. 14-26
Silverman, "Textual Sentimentalism" (blackboard)

June 22 Subject: Slavery

READ: Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, chs. 1-20
Camfield, "The Moral Aesthetics of Sentimentality" (blackboard)

June 24 Feeling Right

READ: Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, chs. 20-44
Merish, "Sentimental Consumption" (blackboard)
Nelson, "Women and Gender in the State of Sympathy" (blackboard)