

ENGL 741, Seminar in American Studies
“Science and Public Culture in Early America”
Fall 2009 W 1600-1850 223 Colson

Tim Sweet
Office 105 Colson, hours W 1500-1600 and by appt.
tsweet@wvu.edu 293-3988

Overview

We will investigate the place of science in American culture from the era sometimes known as the Enlightenment through the beginnings of the Darwinian revolution, concentrating primarily on the relatively accessible fields then known as “natural history” (as distinct from the more mathematized “natural philosophy”).

Readings will be organized into four clusters, each centered on a substantial primary text: Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*; Bartram’s *Travels*; Hawthorne’s *House of the Seven Gables*; Thoreau’s *Walden*.

Methodologically, we will integrate print- and archive-based literary studies of early American scientific cultures (e.g., Parrish) with Bruno Latour’s cultural-materialist sociology of science and accounts of the public sphere (e.g., Warner’s Habermasian analysis). Issues will include literary form, rhetoric, and mechanisms of transmission (print, ms., oral); tensions between colonial or national and cosmopolitan identities; tensions between science and religion; professionalization and the role of the amateur; scientific accounts of race and gender; uses of science in popular culture; science and politics.

Texts

Much of the material will be available through eReserve <http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/reserves/>
The following have been ordered through the WVU bookstore:

William Bartram, *Travels through North and South Carolina &c.* (Dover)
Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Penguin)
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *House of the Seven Gables* (Penguin)
Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvard UP)
Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity* (U of North Carolina P)
Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Princeton UP)
Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic* (Harvard UP)

Assignments and Grading

1. A turn at leading class discussion, worth 10% of the final grade.
2. Four bibliographic essays, one for each cluster of texts (3 pp. each, documented using MLA style), each worth 10% of the final grade. Each essay will synthesize and critique a minimum of three recent scholarly sources relevant to the cluster.
3. Final project, including prospectus, annotated bibliography, rough draft, oral presentation, and final draft of a substantial scholarly essay oriented toward publication (20+ pp., documented using MLA style), worth 50% of the final grade. The final paper is due Friday, December 11.

Date	Readings	Writing due
9/2	Susan Scott Parrish, <i>American Curiosity</i> <u>Discussion Leader:</u>	
9/9	Bruno Latour, <i>We Have Never Been Modern</i> John Angus Campbell, "Charles Darwin: Rhetorician of Science," eReserve <u>Discussion Leader:</u>	
9/16	Michael Warner, <i>Letters of the Republic</i> Linda Kerber, "Objects of Scientific Inquiry," from <i>Federalists in Dissent</i> , eReserve Joyce Chaplin, "Benjamin Franklin's Natural Philosophy," eReserve Benjamin Franklin, "Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge" (1743), photocopy <u>Discussion Leader:</u>	
9/23	Thomas Jefferson, <i>Notes on the State of Virginia</i> (1785) Timothy Sweet, "Jefferson, Science, and the Enlightenment," eReserve <u>Discussion Leader:</u>	
9/30	Jefferson, "Memoir on the Megalonyx" (1797), eReserve Caspar Wistar, "A Description of the Bones Deposited, by the president . . ." (1799), eReserve Rembrandt Peale, "Historical Disquisition on the Mammoth" (1803), eReserve Benjamin Smith Barton, letter to Jefferson (1810), photocopy Charles Wilson Peale, <i>Exhumation of the Mastodon</i> (1806-08) (Maryland Historical Society) Charles Wilson Peale, <i>The Artist in His Museum</i> (1822) (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts) <u>Discussion Leader:</u>	Bibliographic essay 1
10/7	Visit to WVU Library's rare book room: Morton, <i>Crania Americana</i> ; Linnaeus, botanical works, etc. Joel Barlow, <i>Columbiad</i> II.1-290 (1787/1825), eReserve <u>Discussion Leader:</u>	

10/14	William Bartram, <i>Travels</i> (1791) Bartram et al., correspondence and draft mss., eReserve <u>Discussion Leader:</u>	Bibliographic essay 2
10/21	Oral presentations	Prospectus and annotated bibliography
10/28	Franklin, et al., <i>Report . . . on Animal Magnetism</i> (1785), eReserve or ECCO Edgar Allan Poe, "Mesmeric Revelation" (1844), "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845), eReserve Hannah Creamer, from <i>Delia's Doctors</i> (1852), eReserve <u>Discussion Leader:</u>	
11/4	Nathaniel Hawthorne, <i>House of the Seven Gables</i> (1851) Poe, "The Daguerreotype," photocopy <u>Discussion Leader:</u>	Bibliographic essay 3
11/11	Ralph Waldo Emerson, <i>Nature</i> (1836) "Humboldt's Cosmos," <i>American Review</i> 3.6 (June 1846): 598-610, MOA "Baron Humboldt's Cosmos," <i>Christian Examiner</i> 48.1 (Jan. 1850), 53-88, APS William Rossi, "Emerson, Nature, and Natural Science," eReserve <u>Discussion Leader:</u>	
11/18	Henry David Thoreau, <i>Walden</i> (1854) <u>Discussion Leader:</u>	Bibliographic essay 4
11/23-11/27	Thanksgiving recess	
12/2	Peer conferences	Draft of final paper
12/9	Oral presentations Course evaluation	
	Final paper due Friday, December 11	