

ENGLISH 4385: SPECIAL TOPICS
FALL 2012
UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA
MONDAY/WEDNESDAY 12:30-1:50PM
HUMANITIES 209

**THE UN-VIRTUOUS REPUBLIC:
TROPES OF TRANSGRESSION IN THE EARLY AMERICAN NOVEL**

**NB: COUNTS FOR AMERICAN I, LITERARY HISTORY REQUIREMENT, AS WELL AS GENRE & THEORY
REQUIREMENT**



William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States*. By William Wells Brown, *A Fugitive Slave*. London: Partridge & Oakey, 1853.

"THE DEATH OF CLOTEL. Page 218." [Frontispiece Image]

Documenting the American South <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/brown/frontis.html>>

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CONTEMPORARY VOICES

“There must be a positive Passion for the public good, the public Interest, Honour, Power, and Glory, established in the Minds of the People, or there can be no Republican Government, nor any real Liberty. And this public Passion must be Superiour to all private Passions.”

John Adams, Letter to Mercy Otis Warren (April 16, 1776)

“If the impulse and the opportunity be suffered to coincide, we well know that neither moral nor religious motives can be relied on as an adequate control.”

James Madison, *Federalist Papers*, # 10 (1787)

* * *

“I long to hear that you have declared an independency—and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.”

Abigail Adams, Letter to John Adams (March 31, 1776)

“As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government every where. That Children and Apprentices were disobedient—that schools and Colleges were grown turbulent—that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters. But your Letter was the first Intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerfull than all the rest were grown discontented.—This is rather too coarse a Compliment but you are so saucy, I wont blot it out. Depend upon it, We know better than to repeal our Masculine systems.”

John Adams, Letter to Abigail Adams (April 14, 1776)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Licentious lovers, sentimental women, rebellious daughters, devious ventriloquists, tragic mulattoes, and sadistic priests: the stuff of early American fiction but hardly material for a republic built on the classical ideal of a virtuous citizenry. Education, literature, and political culture in the early nation were supposed to produce individuals able to curb their private passions and contribute to the public good. While John Adams proclaimed republican virtue as the foundation of a successful political system, James Madison and other members of the Constitutional convention already looked for ways to create safeguards against impulses threatening to undermine the nation. Yet the foremost hazard to public virtue was established by the founders themselves: by disenfranchising not only ethnic minorities and landless laborers but all women regardless of class or race, the early Republic harbored masses of discontented individuals ready to channel their passions into revolutionary action. And Abigail Adams seemed to be one of them.

This course examines the novel as the literary form best suited to test, critique, and transgress the cultural, moral, and political ideals of the early republic. Fiction revealed the fears riddling the new nation, including subversion at the hands of secret societies or foreign powers, seduction of romantic young women, and the effects of racial mixing (perpetrated, in part, by its own founders). We will attempt to understand how writers and readers of early American novels negotiated the difficult terrain between affirmation and transgression. Early American novels confronted readers with the most difficult question in republican citizenship: how to make personal and critical choices in the face of overwhelming complexities.

ANNOTATED LIST OF PRIMARY TEXTS

Note: Please do not use any editions other than the ones given in this syllabus, so we can literally all be on the same page!

Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette; or, The History of Eliza Wharton*. 1797. Broadview Press, 2011. 9781551119984

Why educate women if society does not grant them any choices, especially in marriage? The tragic fate of one woman who rejected too many suitors was the predicament of most women in the early Republic writ large: they held no economic, social, and political rights outside the protection of their fathers and husbands. Neither the femme sole or the femme covert enjoyed the freedoms white men had gained during the American Revolution.

Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*. 1798. W. W. Norton, 2011. 978-0-393-93253-9.

In Brown's first novel (and the first gothic novel written in America), the paranoid fears of the early Republic keep piling up—deceptive foreigners undermining a domestic community, the violation of private spaces, and the manipulation of voice and authority.

Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok*. 1824. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1986. 978-0813511641

In this historical novel, Mary Conant, a young Puritan woman in 1620s Salem, rebels against patriarchal authority through her choice of marriage partners. The novel also questions the racist ideologies of the early Republic by propagating racial reconciliation through intermarriage.

William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*. 1853. New York: Penguin, 2004. 978-0142437728.

The first novel written by an African-American, Clotel traces the tragic effects of the founders' failure to abolish slavery by following Thomas Jefferson's mixed-race offspring into the ante-bellum South and into an insecure future between freedom and bondage.

Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein, *The Mysteries of New Orleans*. [selections only] 1854-55. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2002. 978-0801868825.

In this sweeping panorama of ante-bellum New Orleans, a German nobleman-turned-novelist predicts a horrid fate for a slave-holding nation. Any vice, for Reizenstein, is fundamentally linked to slavery—the original sin of the American republic.

Additional (brief) primary and secondary texts (TBA) provided as handouts.

REQUIRED SECONDARY TEXT:

Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. Expanded edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 978-0195148237.

SECONDARY READINGS

- I will post on my website a separate list of recommended secondary readings. You will pick one of these works for your “**Book review/secondary text analysis**” assignment (see below).

TOOLS FOR WRITING (RECOMMENDED)

- Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 6th edition. New York: Modern Language Association, 2003. [previous editions are acceptable]
- A handbook of literary terms (e.g. Holman/Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*, or M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*).
- A college dictionary (e.g. *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* or *American Heritage Dictionary*; for the etymology and usage of words, however, consult the *Oxford English Dictionary*, reference section, or <http://chaucer.library.emory.edu/oedbin/oed3www>).

WEBSITE: Following the English Department's paperless policy, I will post as many materials as possible on my departmental web page, which you can access at www.westga.edu/~perben/. Here I will post the syllabus, discussion questions, resources for research, detailed descriptions of assignments, etc.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

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|---|-----|
| • ATTENDANCE | 10% |
| • PARTICIPATION | 15% |
| • QUIZZES | 10% |
| • CLOSE READING PAPER | 10% |
| • BOOK REVIEW/SECONDARY TEXT ANALYSIS | 10% |
| • EARLY AMERICAN FICTION PROJECT, including: | |
| ○ Research Proposal | 5% |
| ○ Annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources | 5% |
| ○ Draft and Peer Review | 5% |
| ○ Final paper | 25% |
| • ORAL PRESENTATION (BASED ON FICTION PROJECT) | 5% |

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS IN DETAIL: (separate handouts detailing certain assignments to follow during the semester)

- **ATTENDANCE:** Regular and timely attendance is **MANDATORY**. Every student will start with a grade of 0% on attendance at the beginning of the course. Attendance for each class meeting then counts toward your overall attendance grade, with perfect attendance resulting in 100% or a full 10% portion of the overall course grade. Thus, you do not need to turn in doctors' notes or any excuses for absences, email me, or call me about your absence. Students participating in official, university-sponsored activities will be excused but must make prior arrangements with me, i.e. provide a schedule of absences. Everyone is responsible for signing an attendance list circulated at the beginning of every class meeting. If you arrive late, it is your responsibility to request the attendance list at the end of class (do not interrupt class by asking for the list if you arrive late!). Failure to sign up on the attendance list will be counted as an absence for that day. Absences will also result in a grade of 0% for any missed quizzes.
- **READINGS:** All reading assignments are to be completed by the beginning of the class period scheduled for discussion of these assignments (see detailed course schedule). I expect you to bring all assigned primary texts to the class meeting during which they are to be discussed. I encourage you to cultivate an active and engaged reading style, using underlining, marginalia, notes, etc. Classroom discussion will usually involve close readings, and I may ask you to support your comments with appropriate evidence from the text.

- **PARTICIPATION and DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Active class participation is the essence of successful learning and a successful course. I not only expect you to participate in classroom discussions, but also to develop a familiarity and collegiality with your classmates. I will help you prepare for your reading and classroom discussion by posting specific reading questions for each text on the website. I may restate these questions in class to guide discussion, and you may use them to cultivate active note-taking. We can discuss at any point during the semester how you are doing on your participation grade.
- **QUIZZES:** I will ask you to complete frequent pop-quizzes, testing general knowledge of the reading assignments for that particular day (primary materials, i.e. novels, only). Quizzes are multiple choice (10 questions = 100%; i.e. 10 correct answers = A, 9 correct answers = B, etc.) and are *closed book*. There are **NO make-up quizzes**, except for students participating in previously arranged, official university business (such as athletic team events, debate team events, etc.). If you miss class, you also miss the quiz for that day, resulting in a grade of 0% for that quiz.
- **CLOSE READING PAPER:** For this paper, pick one or a few letters from *The Coquette*, reading closely for literary technique, characterization, etc. Your paper should provide a clear and argumentative thesis about the text and develop your argument through detailed textual analysis. **NO SECONDARY SOURCES FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT, PLEASE!**
- **BOOK REVIEW/SECONDARY TEXT ANALYSIS:** At the beginning of the semester, I will ask you to pick one secondary work and write a review for distribution with the rest of the class. This exercise will familiarize you with paradigms in early American criticism or history. While similar to reviews published in scholarly journals, your assignment does not require an evaluation of the work in light of existing scholarship (thus, you don't have to read everything else that has been written on a certain topic). However, you should emphasize how the work under review illuminates one or more primary texts assigned for class. The review should be **3-4 pages** in length. I will provide sample book reviews from scholarly journals.
- **EARLY AMERICAN FICTION PROJECT:** While literary studies are primarily concerned with the interpretation of readily available texts, I would like to introduce you to the exciting archival and editorial activities of early American scholars who discover or re-discover neglected or non-canonical texts and prepare them for modern audiences. Essentially, much of what we *could know* about early American literature and culture—especially its minority authors and their writings—remains unacknowledged by scholars, students, and mainstream literary histories. I will assist you in locating/selecting a novel or other fictional text that has not been republished in a modern edition.

Beyond **locating a suitable text**, you will choose, transcribe, and annotate a representative **textual selection (ca. 10 pages)** and prepare a substantial **scholarly introduction (8-10 pages)**, providing biographical, historical, or literary background information. The introduction may also place the work into the context of the readings we have discussed throughout the semester. Finally, you will function as your own designer and publisher, i.e. select an appropriate image for your cover art and produce the “all-important” dusk-jacket description of the book, which markets a work through a pithy and somewhat “hyped” summary (see, for example, the back cover for *Mysteries of New Orleans*). We will discuss in class how the editorial and marketing process of these novels influences readers’ perception of early American literature.

Preparatory stages of this assignment will be staggered throughout the semester and include: 1) a research description (what text you are working on, what background research you will do, etc.), 2) an annotated bibliography of research sources 3) a draft, 4) a final version.

- **ORAL PRESENTATION:** At the end of the semester, you will give a circa 10 minute presentation on your project during one of our last class sessions. You should give your classmates the historical, literary, cultural, and biographical background necessary to place the text you worked on in a meaningful context and explain its significance for readers today. How can a modern audience profit from reading this work? Also, you should reflect on the challenges you encountered in finding, transcribing, and annotating the text. What are the problems and opportunities in bringing a text from a different period and culture to a 21st-century audience?

COURSE POLICIES

- ☞ **Attendance and Deadlines:** In case of absence, you are responsible for keeping up with all assignments, readings, and in-class work. **I do not make lecture notes etc. available to students who missed class** (please get in touch with a fellow student). I can only accept late work if you discussed the issue with me ahead of time. All exceptions and acceptance of excuses are completely at my discretion.
- ☞ **Tardiness:** A roll book will circulate at the BEGINNING of class. Everyone who is late will be noted as tardy. **Three (3) “tardies” will result in one (1) absence!**
- ☞ **CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:** *NB: Before you read the following, keep in mind that I wouldn't have to address these issues if they hadn't caused problems in the past!* I expect everyone to be ready to work at the beginning of class. This means in particular having ALL reading materials assigned for that day on hand and ready to use, as well as any tools for note-taking. You MAY bring drinks and/or non-smelly or non-noisy food to class. Most importantly: Be respectful toward the opinions, ideas, and personal identity of all members of our class! Especially, be courteous and attentive during your class-mates' oral presentations, as you would expect the same during your presentations! **The following actions will result in an immediate dismissal from class and result in an absence for that day (and may result in the administrative withdrawal from the course):**
 - surfing the net or using email, Facebook, etc. on a personal laptop or the workstation
 - using any other electronic device, such as i-phones, MP3-players, etc. In particular, I am extremely allergic to students text-messaging during class. Please turn off any of these devices *before* class.
 - sleeping or even acting like you're sleeping (e.g. putting your head on your desk)
 - disruptive behavior, such as interrupting other students or the instructor while they're speaking, insulting or disparaging the opinions of other students, etc.
- ☞ **Communication and E-mail Policy and Etiquette:** According to university policy, I can only accept and answer emails sent from your official West Georgia email account (you can access this remotely through webmail or through “MyUWG.”). I would also like to institute an “email etiquette;” i.e. please observe basic rules of politeness and formality in email messages. These rules include:
 - All messages must include an address line (e.g. “Dear Dr. Erben” or “Dr. Erben”)
 - Use polite and appropriate language, as well as reasonably edited prose (i.e. complete sentences, correct spelling, etc.)!

- No text-messaging language and abbreviations.
- Always sign your name!

- ☞ **Individual Help, Office Hours, and Writing Center:** The writing center provides individual tutorials for any writing-related problems, but no proofreading service. The center is located in TLC 1201. However, I am not only available during my designated office hours, but am happy to speak to you about assignments and any other questions by appointment (or right after class).
- ☞ **Special Accommodations:** Students in the UWG community have a right to equal access to classes and materials, regardless of special needs, whether temporary or permanent. Students with disabilities on file with Disability Services will be accommodated in this class per West Georgia regulations. Please see me immediately for arrangements. Disability services may be reached at (770) 839-6428.
- ☞ **Plagiarism:** There are different forms of plagiarism, from blatant theft of entire papers to negligence in acknowledging a source in your writing. However, you will be held responsible for any form of plagiarism—whether intentional or not. Consequences and responses to plagiarism are entirely at the discretion of the instructor. Please pay specific attention to the English Department's site on plagiarism: <http://www.westga.edu/%7Eengdept/Plagiarism/index.html>. I expect all papers to abide by MLA Format (See: *MLA Handbook for the Writers of Research Papers*) for proper documentation of sources (primary and secondary).

From Virtue's blissful paths away
 The double-tongued are sure to stray;
 Good is a forth-right journey still,
 And mazy paths but lead to ill.

COPY-RIGHT SECURED.



Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*. New York: 1798. Detail from front page.
 Readex, Early American Imprints, Series I: 1639-1800.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Please check our course website for the latest updates on deadlines, assignments, and important announcements. **All changes are at the discretion of the instructor. Important: All assignments, including readings, are to be completed for the date listed in the schedule!**

Date	Course Topics/Readings	Assignments due
Mo 8/20	Intro to the Course. Syllabus.	
We 8/22	Read: Linda Kerber, “The Women’s World of the Early Republic” (handout). Selected letters from John and Abigail Adams (handout). VIDEO (in-class): selections from <i>John Adams</i> series	
Mo 8/27	Read: Cathy Davidson, <i>Revolution and the Word</i> , “Introduction to the Expanded Edition” (pp. 3-56); “Literacy, Education, and the Reader” (121-150) From <i>The Coquette</i> : Appendix C: The Education of Young Women” (pp. 333-338)	
We 8/29	Read: <i>The Coquette</i> : Introduction (9-29); Hannah Webster Foster Chronology; the text, Letter I-XXIII (37-71).	
Mo 9/3	No class; Labor Day	
We 9/5	Read: <i>The Coquette</i> , Letter XXIV-end (71-176); From <i>The Coquette</i> : Appendix A: Elizabeth Whitman: The Model for Eliza Wharton (317-324)	
Mo 9/10	Workshop: reading and evaluating literary criticism/literary history (intro to secondary text analysis) Read: Davidson, from <i>Revolution and the Word</i> , “Privileging the <i>Feme Covert</i> : The Sociology of Sentimental Fiction” (185-232).	Close Reading due.
We 9/12	Read: <i>Wieland</i> : “Preface” (vii-x); the text (7-23) Lecture: German mystics and religious fanaticism in early national America.	
Mo 9/17	Read: <i>Wieland</i> : the text (23-181).	Designate a text for “Secondary Source Analysis.”
We 9/19	Read: <i>Wieland</i> : “Sources and Context” (each piece assigned to different students) (235-313)	
Mo 9/24	Read (all students): <i>Revolution and the Word</i> , “Early American Gothic” (306-355). Read (specific essays assigned to small groups): <i>Wieland</i> , “Criticism” (315-573).	

We 9/26	Read: Native American Removal Policies in the Early Republic (handout) In-class video: <i>We Shall Remain</i> (selections from “After the Mayflower” and “Trail of Tears”)	
Mo 10/1	Read: <i>Hobomok</i> : Introduction (ix-xxxviii); the text, 1-83.	
We 10/3	Read: <i>Hobomok</i> , 84-150.	
Mo 10/8	Introduction to Fiction Project. Workshop: Finding a source text for the early American fiction project.	Secondary Source Analysis due.
We 10/10	Read: <i>Clotel</i> , Introduction (vii-xxv); Thomas Jefferson, selection from <i>Notes on the State of Virginia</i> (handout).	
Mo 10/15	Read: <i>Clotel</i> (selections TBA).	
We 10/17	<i>Clotel</i> , discussion cont.	
Mo 10/22	Research workshop	Early American Fiction Project: Research Proposal due.
We 10/24	Read: Steven Rowan, introduction to <i>Mysteries of New Orleans</i> (xiii-xxxiii).	
Mo 10/29	Read: <i>Mysteries of New Orleans</i> , Book 1	
We 10/31	Workshop: writing the scholarly introduction/annotating the text (Fiction Project)	
Mo 11/5	<i>Mysteries of New Orleans</i> , Book 2	Early American Fiction Project: Annotated Bibliography due.
We 11/7	Cont. <i>Mysteries of New Orleans</i> , Book 2	
Mo 11/12	<i>Mysteries of New Orleans</i> : Book 3	
We 11/14	Cont.	
Mo 11/26		Oral Presentations
We 11/28		Oral Presentations
We 12/5	Final Exam Period; 11-1:30pm	Early American Fiction Project: draft due (bring 2 printed copies to class and email a copy to instructor)
Th 12/6		Early American Fiction project due in front of my office by 5pm

