American Literature to 1865

Professor Bross
Fall, 2004: M, W, F  9:30-10:20
Office Hours: M, F  10:30-11:30; W 2:30-3:30
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Description:  This course explores American voices from the time of English settlement of the eastern edge of this continent until the mid-nineteenth century.  We will look at the ways diverse speakers wrote themselves into history and we will search for connections among their representations of the land, themselves, and the others with whom they came in contact.  We will proceed both chronologically and thematically and attempt to knit together the various threads that make up the warp and weft of American cultural, intellectual, historical and literary discourses.

Texts:
Anne Bradstreet, To My Husband and Other Poems (Dover)
Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter (Penguin)
Ralph Waldo Emerson, Selected Writings (Penguin)
Mary Rowlandson, The Sovereignty and Goodness of God (Bedford)
Lydia Maria Child, Hobomok (Rutgers)
Jeffrey Richards, ed., Early American Drama (Penguin)
Phillis Wheatley, Complete Writings (Penguin)
Hannah Foster, The Coquette (Oxford)
Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (Dover)
Herman Melville, Benito Cereno (Dover)

Course Pack (available at Copy Mat)
Several Texts will be available on-line, as indicated in the reading schedule

Assignments (see descriptions following the schedule of readings)
20%  Participation (includes in-class writings and quizzes)
50%  Reflective Essays
   25%  Part 1
   25%  Part 2
30%  Final Project
Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Unit I: Antinomian Impulses
August 23-27
M: Introduction to the course
W: Bradstreet, selected poems (“The Author to her Book”; all of the love poems; “To the Memory of my dear and ever honoured Father”; “An Epitaph On my dear and ever honoured Mother”; “Upon the burning of our house,” the grandchildren poems [pp 16-17]; “To my Dear Children”; “For deliverance from a fever”; “The Flesh and the Spirit”; “In Honour of that High and Mighty Princess Queen Elizabeth”; “The Prologue”), Godey’s Lady’s Book (on-line at http://www.history.rochester.edu/godeys/browse through and read as much of the March 1850 edition as possible)
F: *Scarlet Letter** essay due

August 30-Sept. 3
M: *Scarlet Letter*, midwife materials (on-line at www.dohistory.org)
W: *Scarlet Letter*
F: “Examination of Mrs. Hutchinson,” *Hydra Decapitata* (both in Course Pack)

Sept. 6-10
M: Labor Day—no class
W: “Mrs. Hutchinson,” (Course Pack), *Scarlet Letter*
F: *Scarlet Letter*

Sept. 13-17
M: Emerson, “Nature”
W: “Nature”

Unit II: Wilderness Condition
F: Rowlandson, *Sovereignty and Goodness of God*

Sept. 20-24
M: Rowlandson
W: Rowlandson
F: Rowlandson, related documents, pp. 118-144

**Portfolio essays returned in preparation for midterm portfolio**

Sept. 27-Oct. 1
M: *Hobomok*
W: *Hobomok*
F: *Hobomok** Midterm Portfolio due

Oct. 4-8
M: Cherokee Memorials (Course Pack)
W: “Eulogy on King Philip” (Course Pack)
F: Catch up day
Unit III: Witchcraft!
Oct. 12-15
M: October Break
W: Salem witchcraft (on-line at http://etext.virginia.edu/salem/witchcraft/texts/transcripts.html excerpts TBA)

Oct. 18-22
M: Mather, Wonders
W: Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown”
F: Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown”

Unit IV: New National Identities
Oct. 25-29
M: Royall Tyler, The Contrast
W: Tyler, The Contrast
F: Tyler, The Contrast

Nov. 1-5
M: Phillis Wheatley, poetry and prose, selections TBA
W: Wheatley selections
F: Wheatley selections

Nov. 8-12
M: Coquette
W: Coquette
F: Coquette

Proposal for final project due—one typed paragraph

Unit V: Slavery
Nov. 15-19
M: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl
W: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl
F: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Nov. 22-26
M: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl
W, F: Thanksgiving

Portfolio essays returned in preparation for Final Portfolio

Nov. 29-3
M: Benito Cereno
W: Benito Cereno
F: Benito Cereno

**Final Essay Portfolio due**
Dec. 6-10
M: *Amistad* materials (on-line at [http://amistad.mysticseaport.org/library/welcome.html](http://amistad.mysticseaport.org/library/welcome.html) excerpts TBA) and screening of film (place and time TBA)
W: Review of the semester
F: NO CLASS
Description of Assignments

Participation
Grade: 20 points total (includes verbal participation and in-class quizzes or writings as needed)

To earn an A in participation, you must make regular, prepared contributions to class discussion. I expect that you will come to class with the appropriate text in hand, having read and digested the assigned reading for the day. I expect that you will have both thoughtful queries and thoughtful responses to the readings. If you are a shy participant, prepare a couple of questions to pose at the beginning of class so that your voice is heard. In addition, the class email list will be open to you to pose discussion topics, ask questions, or respond to readings. I will take note of your e-participation and factor it into your grade.

You MUST attend class. Since we are covering so much, so fast, you need to be involved in the daily process of developing and analyzing our conclusions about the works of early American literature considered in this class. You will be responsible for everything covered in class and any announcements I make whether or not you are present. If you have to miss class, be sure that you arrange beforehand with someone in the class to provide you with notes and announcements. Although I don’t plan to have a formal attendance policy in this class, you will not get credit for participation if you are regularly absent, and I will not accept make up quizzes or in-class writings for any reason. Moreover, I will not accept response essays late—you must be in class on time to get full credit for them. It is your responsibility to contact me as soon as possible, preferably in advance, if you have a legitimate reason (illness, for instance) for missing class on the day an assignment is due. Also, I place an extra emphasis on informed participation in the last couple of weeks in the semester.

Directed essays and exercises
Length: 2-3 pages for each usual and customary essay; 3-5 pages for cover essays.
Due: almost weekly
Grade: 50 points total—25 for the first set and 25 for the second.

These short essays are designed to lead into class discussion each week. They are most successful when they are focused on a narrow topic or short passage. Do not try to squeeze a size 13 essay into a size 7 shoe. They are meant to be “essays” in the dictionary sense, that is, to be writings in which you try out new or risky ideas within the parameters of the prompt. However, they are not journal entries, which are often stream-of-consciousness, first-draft kinds of writing. You should take the time to reflect on the readings and the prompt, and the prose should be fairly polished, certainly free of grammar, punctuation or other mechanical errors. The essays will be evaluated in two groups—two essay portfolios (see below)—but each essay will be collected as it comes due. Your folders of essays will be returned to you one week before the midterm and the final due date so that you can write the introductory essays. One additional point: I usually pose several interrelated questions in each prompt. I don’t expect that you will answer each of them separately, but rather that you will use them to help pose and then answer your own questions about our readings.
Note 1: each essay portfolio should include 5 pieces—starred entries are required, but you can choose to pass on one week’s assignment for the first portfolio, and two for the second.

Note 2: pay careful attention to the prompt for the cover essay for the second portfolio. You will be most successful with this one if you work on the required chronology throughout the semester.

PORTFOLIO ONE (five essays total)

**Week I, Friday, Aug. 27:** Characterize Hawthorne’s use of gender in the *Scarlet Letter* in terms of the examples of “womanhood” illustrated in the readings on Wednesday. In the novel, what constitutes a “normal” or an “ideal” man or woman? (And note that these terms are not synonymous.) How does Hawthorne reflect 17th and/or 19th century gender norms as represented by Bradstreet’s poems and *Godey’s Lady’s Book*? You should choose one character to consider or one short, specific passage to analyze closely.

**Week II, due EITHER Monday, Aug. 30 or Friday, Sept. 3:** (choose one of the following prompts, and you must write on the readings due on the day you turn in the assignment):

i. (Monday) How does midwifery or giving birth function in the Antinomian controversy compared to *The Scarlet Letter*? Be sure to analyze a specific passage (or passages) rather than just to describe the story in general.

ii. (Friday) Compare and contrast the trial scenes of Hester Prynne and Anne Hutchinson. What are the key differences? Speculate on the meaning those differences make for either the 17th century materials or for *The Scarlet Letter*

**Week III, Wednesday, Sept. 8:** What does Hawthorne’s treatment of the historical figure of Hutchinson reveal about his characterization of Hester Prynne, whom he specifically compares to/contrasts with Hutchinson?

**Week IV, Monday, Sept. 13:** Choose a short passage from Emerson’s “Nature” and discuss the ways in which the notion of "antinomianism" as an inner light is used and transformed by Emerson. Is Emerson himself an Antinomian? If you address this last question, be sure to define the term as you are applying it to a 19th-century writer, since the 17th-century definition did not have its original power in Emerson’s time.

**Week V, Monday, Sept. 20:** When and how do you feel as if you have access to Rowlandson’s feelings or inner self? What enables or prevents that access? Be sure to cite and closely analyze specific passages—this essay is not meant to reveal your personality, but to explore how your intuition enables a critical reading of Rowlandson’s writing. (With thanks for this question to Lisa Logan.)

**Week VI, Friday, Oct. 1:** Mid-semester self-evaluation. I’m interested in reading your analysis of your own work—and more about your approach to analyzing the literature than on your approach to the format of the assignments. To that end, you might treat your essays as if they belonged to another writer. Look over your essays to date and consider what they add up to. Have your thoughts about American literature changed since week one? What has been surprising or new in the readings and discussions? What questions do you have? What does the sum of the essays tell you about your own approach to these materials? Did you make any missteps that you’d like to correct given your perspective now? Where do you want to go from here? Finally, indicate which final project you have chosen and if appropriate, indicate the topic. Hand in this essay as an introduction to the rest of the collection.
PORTFOLIO TWO (Five essays total)

Week VIII, Friday, Oct. 15: Analyze Mather’s editing practice. What are the key differences between the records of the witchcraft trials and Mather’s presentation of them? How might these differences shape the perspective of Mather’s reader about the Salem crisis? Be sure to focus on specific details.

Week IX, Wednesday, October 20: What use does Hawthorne make of the Salem witchcraft history? Is that history important to the plot or merely atmospheric? What comment on that history does his story seem to make (whether you think his allusions are significant or trivial), and is that a different comment than he offers his nineteenth-century readers about issues of their time and place?

Week X, Wednesday, Oct. 29: What themes seem most important in the play, or what ideas are most central? Choosing one or two of these themes or ideas, explore why women are focal figures in the play, and how the male versus the female characters are used to illustrate Tyler’s most important points.

Week XI, due Friday, Nov. 5: (choose one prompt, and NOTE exercise for Monday in prompt i)
   i. For Monday, read “On Being Brought from Africa to America” and write a brief paragraph (due Friday with the essay), describing your initial reaction to the poem. Have you read this poem before? What is its tone/emotion? How/why would a slave woman write this poem? Then, after reading Wheatley’s other works, analyze your initial reaction—accurate still? Have you changed your perspective and why?
   ii. How can we understand a slave woman’s praise of the “Founding Father” Washington in poetic form? Draw from the other writings by Wheatley for evidence to support your point of view.

Week XII, due Friday, Nov. 12: (choose one prompt):
   i. Why doesn’t Charles Deighton write? In other words, what significance is there to the novel’s sense of gender roles, friendship circles, “the rake,” etc., to Deighton’s epistolary silence? What kind of assumptions can one draw about his character based on others’ letters or based on his silence?
   ii. Write a letter from Charles Deighton to a character in the book. Your letter should reflect your sense of Deighton’s character as well as his reader, and you should be sure to give it a number so I know where in the text it is meant to appear.

Week XIV, Monday, Nov. 15, Wednesday, Nov. 17, OR Friday, Nov. 19 (but you must write on the materials for the day you turn in the assignment): Dialectical journal on the week’s texts. Choose several “hot spots” of your own. On one side of your paper write down your first thoughts, a pattern you’re noticing, or a passage that has caught your eye. On the other side, make some thoughtful, if necessarily incomplete comments about your first thoughts or about the raw material you transcribed. Think of this prompt in terms of discussion-starters and discussion responses. What in the text that you have read so far is puzzling, interesting or stimulating?
**Week XV, Friday, Dec. 3:** I invite you once again to provide an introduction to the portfolio that contains the same kind of self-reflection or re-meditation that the midterm cover essay provided, BUT I’d like you also to stretch to some other kinds of information. Along with whatever personal comment you submit, be sure to include a comprehensive chronology of texts that we’ve covered this semester, set within a chronology of important events, ideas, literary movements, or other information that you’ve found helps you contextualize the readings. Choose one aspect of the chronology and write a reflection of what placing a given text into a chronological order helped you to understand about early American literature that you might have missed if you’d only considered the text in a thematic context.

Final project (Choose one)
Length: variable
Due: Finals week
Grade: 30%

A. Take-home essay plus in-class exam
   1. On the Tuesday of our final week, I will distribute a take-home essay. The 1000-1500 word essay typed, polished essay is due when you take the in-class exam.
   2. Final exam—short essays, identifications. About 90 minutes

B. Create a unit of study for early American literature modeled after those we have used this semester. You may choose to revise one of my units, but be sure that yours is significantly different, so as to constitute original work. The successful project will combine 3-6 texts that, when taken together, usefully illuminate one another. You might consider a unit on the body or food or deviance. You might put together a unit on King Philip’s War. Feel free to consult with me for recommendation of further reading about a particular theme or topic. The entire project will consist of your outline, discussion, and bibliography. Although quality and quantity do not necessarily coincide, in projects such as this one, lengthier results often indicate more engagement and deeper thought. The project may include any number of supplementary historical or cultural resources, but it must, at minimum, include the following:
   1. 3-5 page introduction that analyzes the texts, pointing out common threads and themes, situating the works in our study of early American writings as a whole.
   2. 1-3 page introduction for each text that ANALYZES/INTERPRETS/CLOSE READS a significant moment in the text. Encyclopedia-like presentations of plot or biography will not do, although it is very likely that historical or cultural contexts will be necessary for the analyses.
   3. OPTIONAL: 2-4 page review of text(s) considered for the unit, but rejected, and rationale for exclusion.
   4. Bibliography

C. Independent research project, subject to my approval, resulting in an 8-12 page paper. Past projects have included longer essays devoted to one text or topic (such as the captivity narrative), studies of contemporary revisions of early American texts (such as works made into films, i.e. *Last of the Mohicans, Dances with Wolves, Pocahontas, Sleepy Hollow*), or construction of an early American "character" accompanied by a collection of documents written by and to that character. A good idea this semester would be a study of early American drama drawing on the
other plays in our anthology. Do not attempt this option unless you have a clear interest in a specific topic and a clear plan. Feel free to talk with me as soon as you have the glimmer of an idea.

D. Group project: research early American theater culture and produce a public reading/performance of The Contrast. The group will produce a playbill for the reading that will include essays on the history and interpretations of the play along with a bibliography. See me early if you are interested in this option.

E. Group project: Create and host a film series based on adaptations of early American literature studied in this class or related to this class. The group will produce a film guide for the series that will include essays on the films and their relation to the original literature or culture. See me early if you are interested in this option.

Course Policy on Honesty and Plagiarism: How many of us, I wonder, have taken the time to read through Purdue’s Code of Honor or to wade through a standard handbook’s explanation of plagiarism and proper citation? (If you lack such a handbook, see the OWL’s nifty page: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/plag.html). As a professor, I routinely direct students to these sources for information about staying on the side of truth and light for assignments in my class. I assume that you’ve had an introduction to basic research and citation techniques. I evaluate assignments and grade accordingly. If I find plagiarized material in your work, I will assign penalties ranging from a redo on the assignment, a grade of F on the assignment, an F in the class, to the involvement of the dean’s office.

As the 2002-2003 University Regulations state, “our foremost interest is toward achieving noble educational goals” (50). I believe that striving to understand and appreciate (with fair-minded criticism) our early American forebears through their written and cultural expression is a noble enterprise. I believe it. I believe that you will best achieve such understanding and appreciation by reading regularly (even doggedly) through the assigned texts, participating in open discussions inside and outside of class and—perhaps most importantly—by wrestling with early American language and ideas in written essays created expressly for this class (that is, you are writing new essays within the context of English 350 rather than recycling material written at other times or for other classes), using your own intuition, building on your own textual observations for proof, and sometimes, relying on other peoples’ ideas as scaffolding, building blocks, skeletons, frames, etc. And when you turn to this latter strategy, a perfectly respectable, even noble academic practice, you should, of course, give these other people credit for having gone before you and made your ideas possible.

The problem is, of course, that not everyone has had the kind of introduction to research and citation practices that I assume. Please come and see me if you are a) unsure about how to make proper citations—bring in a past paper if you like, and we can work through it—or b) overwhelmed by an assignment and are starting to get panicky about its completion. The temptation to plagiarize can be overwhelming at such times. While I most likely will not be setting aside time in class to talk about research approaches and citation issues, I am very happy to help you figure these things out on your own, in small groups, or in office hours.
Honors Option:

There is a three-fold requirement for the honors option in this class.

1) Participation: First, I expect that you will be leaders in class discussion. That means that I will rely on you to help create a positive group dynamic rather than simply to participate individually. I will be looking in particular for the ways that you respond to comments made by other students in the class and so help to facilitate a real discussion. Basically, this requirement is a heightened version of the participation grade everyone will be working toward.

2) Directed essays: All of the essays are required for the honors option (the regular course allows students to skip one essay in each portfolio).

3) Final project: Any project EXCEPT the final exam is open to you.