

English 646

Timothy Sweet, ENGL 646, Spring 2002, American Literature to 1865

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Tuesday 4:00-6:50

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Overview

The goals of any "core" course in our graduate program are to provide a broad survey of the primary texts and some familiarity with the scholarly tradition and current state of the discipline in a particular field of English studies.

The field for ENGL 646 comprises two periods of American literary history, "early" and "antebellum," each with its own traditions and emerging directions. While this means that less time can be devoted to each than is ideal in one semester, the yoking of periods does provide a unique opportunity to consider "American literature" as a disciplinary object. As we take up each period in turn, we will reflect on the large questions prompted by this consideration. For example: what is "American"? What is "literature"? Why study the field(s) defined by the conjunction of these terms? What are the continuities and discontinuities in the field(s) as currently defined?

The readings are organized as follows:

Part I, Early. Here the syllabus responds to the emerging transnational perspective in early American studies. Recent anthologies of early American literature make available numerous texts not included in previous anthologies such as the *Heath* or *Norton*. Castillo and Schweitzer in particular take a comparatist approach, providing translations of Spanish, French, and other colonial literatures from America in addition to Anglophone literature from various regions.

Part II, Antebellum. In even the expanded-canon or multicultural approaches to this period (e.g., the *Heath*), the disciplinary understanding of "American literature" is roughly synonymous with "literature of the United States," although we are beginning to see comparatist approaches here as well. The syllabus continues questions of nation and empire raised in Part I, while the shift from a transnational to a national or imperial perspective invites us to reflect on canon formation, periodization, and related concerns.

Required Texts

Susan Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer, eds., *The Literatures of Colonial America* (Blackwell)

Peter Mancall, ed., *Envisioning America* (Bedford-St. Martinís)

Joel Barlow, *The Columbiad* (excerpts, photocopied)

James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers* (Penguin)

Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok and Other Writings* (Rutgers)

Mary Jemison/James Seaver, *Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (Oklahoma)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Selected Tales and Sketches*, ed. Colacurcio (Penguin)

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Bedford-St. Martinís)

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd and Other Stories*, ed. Busch (Penguin)

Assignments and Grading

Six weekly reports on scholarship. Summarize and critique a recent scholarly article or book chapter relevant to a week's readings. Reports are required for at least three weeks of Part I of the course and the remainder for Part II. *At least one report for Part I must treat scholarship on a non-Anglophone text.* Each report is due at the class meeting in which we discuss the reading(s) treated in the report (see the schedule below). Late reports will not be accepted. Each should be 2-3 pp., double-spaced. Include the full citation (MLA style) of the article or book you are reporting on. Each report will count for 10% of your final grade.

An anthology selection plus supporting materials. Prepare the following:

1. an *excerpt from a pre-1800 text* by an author not included in the Castillo and Schweitzer or Mancall anthologies;
2. a *headnote* giving background and contextualizing the selection for placement in an anthology of pre-1800 American literature;
3. a *rationale* as to why the selection ought to be anthologized and (if it is taken from a longer work) why you chose to excerpt the particular passage you did.

The selection cannot be one that is commonly included in other anthologies of American literature such as the *Heath* or *Norton*. The idea here is for you to find an early text that is currently not very well known and to make a case that it should be better known. The headnote for the selection should be approximately 750 words, but can be longer if necessary. Your rationale should be 5 -6 pages, double-spaced, plus a list of works cited. Use MLA style. We will discuss progress on this project at about mid-semester and will review a rough draft on 4/16. This project will count for 40% of your final grade.

Schedule

Note: Weekly reports on scholarship are due at the class meeting relevant to the material. For example, a report on scholarship concerning early English promotional tracts such as Hakluyt's "Discourse of Western Planting" would be due on 1/29; one on scholarship concerning the 1680 Pueblo revolt would be due on 2/5. *You must have turned in at least three weekly reports by 3/5. Late reports will not be accepted.*

Part I

1/22 Spanish and Portuguese colonization: C&S 1-9, 18-22, 23-92

1/29 English colonization: Mancall, *Envisioning America* (all); C&S 13-18, 92-99

2/5 New Spain 17th century: C&S 10-13, 103-177, 353-55

2/12 New France 17th century: C&S 99-102, 178-96, 352-53

Chesapeake and West Indies 17th century: C&S 197-235, 348-49

Middle Atlantic 17th century: 338-47

2/19 New England 17th century: C&S 236-337, 350-51.

2/26 18th century English, Spanish, French: C&S 357-463

3/5 Revolution and early U.S. national era: C&S 465-595; Barlow, *Columbiad* excerpts (photocopied)

3/12 Discussion of progress on anthology selection projects

Part II

3/19 Cooper, *Pioneers*

3/26 Spring break

4/2 Child, *Hobomok*; Jemison, *Narrative*

4/9 Hawthorne, *Tales and Sketches*

4/16 Complete draft of anthology selection materials due; in-class workshop

4/23 Douglass, *Narrative*; Melville, "Benito Cereno" (in *BB and Other Stories*)

4/29 Melville, the rest of *BB and Other Stories* except for "Billy Budd"

Anthology selection project due Monday 5/6