States of Affect:

Education, Seduction, Reform, and Sympathetic Identification in “Early” America

"Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations."

Adam Smith - The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759).

Course Description: “In eighteenth-century constructions of it,” as Elizabeth Barnes argues, “sympathy – the act of imagining oneself in another’s position – is contingent upon familiarity.” For Barnes, the imagination and familiarity are conjoined twins, and in their codependence frame the ways in which individuals relate to one another. In other words, in order for a reader to engage in sympathetic identification with another figure, the reader must imagine some sort of familiarity between reader and subject. “Sympathy” thus becomes, as Barnes suggests, “both the expression of familiarity and the vehicle through which familiarity is created.” In this course, we will examine the ways in which a broad range of “early” American writers sought to establish bonds of sympathy between their readers and their subjects in order to enact social reform or political change. In so doing, we will consider the ways in which these writers actively attempt to move readers into conceiving of themselves as represented in the struggles and situations that their “fictive” characters inhabit. Our aim will be to question the ways in which these writers deploy sympathetic identification in order to engender multivalent fantasies about democracy and equality. As we move to refine our understanding of the social utility of sentimental literature, we will also problematize the ways in which the sentimental seeks to gloss over the complexities of affect (the operant tensions between inward dispositions as contrasted with external manifestations) in order to establish individual feelings as the basis for authenticity and community construction.

Course Objectives: The purpose of this course is to explore the complexities of Early American literature and culture by emphasizing the relationship between writing, reading, and intellectual inquiry. In addition to our examination of primary texts, we will be reading a wide range of critical essays to explore the conventions and limitations of disciplinarity (considering, for example, the differences between literary, biographical, and historical approaches to marshaling and deploying evidence) and to evaluate the challenges of writing about canonical and non-canonical texts (to contemplate, among other questions, whether or not the canonical “status” of a novel demands a different kind of scholarly engagement). As such, our engagement with the
secondary material will be aimed at thinking about how and why critics frame their arguments in the ways that they do (as we actively interrogate their writing practices and strategies) as much as it will be about the content and conclusions of those arguments. You should come away from this course with a heightened sense of the conventions of literary analysis and of the boundaries of disciplinary thinking.

**Course Requirements:** Regular attendance and active participation are essential. Students are responsible for completing all assigned readings, and demonstrating their grasp of the readings through informed contributions to class discussion as well as in occasional in-class writing assignments.

**Journals:** For the duration of the semester, students are required to produce a one page (typed) informal response to each grouping of assigned readings which will be due at the beginning of each class meeting (this will generate approximately 27 typed pages by then end of the semester). Approach the journals as an informal occasion to reflect critically about our readings and discussions. I will collect and respond to these journals after every session, but they will not be evaluated in terms of structure or mechanics. I may occasionally read aloud from these journal entries to stimulate class discussion as well as make copies of entries for use in class.

**Research Essay:** The main formal writing assignment will be a 15 page (typed/double spaced/12 pt. font) research essay on a topic developed by the student (in consultation with the instructor). We will be working on these essays across the length of the semester, and the assignment will include four formal stages (as well as a variety of informal ones). We will discuss the essay assignment in more detail as the semester progresses, but the four formal stages for the project are:

1) the Prospectus  
2) an Annotated Bibliography  
3) a working Draft for use in our peer-editing session  
4) the revised Final Essay  
(Due dates for each formal stage indicated on syllabus)

**Grade Distribution:**

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation (including group work and peer editing)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journals:</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography:</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Final Essay:</td>
<td>40%</td>
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Required Texts: All available for purchase at QC bookstore - please buy these editions.

1) Robert Montgomery Bird, *Sheppard Lee, Written by Himself* (NYRB) 1590172299  
2) Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly* (Hackett) 0872208532  
3) William Hill Brown, *The Power of Sympathy* & Hannah Webster Foster *The Coquette*  
   (Penguin) 0140434682  
4) Hannah Crafts, *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* (Warner Books) 0446530085  
5) Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings* (Penguin) 0142437603  
6) Herman Melville, *Israel Potter* (Northwestern UP) 0810115913  
7) Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple* (Oxford UP) 0195042387  

* All other texts are available on the CD distributed in class. All of the PDF readings  
  must be printed out and brought to class on the day they are assigned.

**Required Readings**

**Jan 28**  
Intro

**Jan 30**  
Benjamin Franklin *The Autobiography* (1771 & 1789)  
pages 1-70

**Feb 4**  
Benjamin Franklin *The Autobiography* (1771 & 1789)  
pages 71-176

**Feb 6**  


**Feb 11**  
William Hill Brown *The Power of Sympathy* (1789)

**Feb 13**  


**Feb 18**  
No Class
Feb 20  
Susanna Rowson *Charlotte Temple* (1794)

Feb 25  

Mar 3  
Marion Rust, “What’s Wrong With *Charlotte Temple*?” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60:1 (2003). [PDF]

Feb 27  
Hannah Webster Foster *The Coquette* (1797)

Mar 3  


Mar 5  
Leonora Sansay, *Laura by A Lady of Philadelphia* (1809)

Mar 10  


Mar 12  
Charles Brockden Brown *Edgar Huntly* (1799)  
pages ix-87

Mar 17  
Charles Brockden Brown *Edgar Huntly* (1799)  
pages 88-194

Mar 19  


Mar 21-24  
No Class

Mar 26  
Robert Montgomery Bird, *Sheppard Lee: Written By Himself* (1836)  
pages xv-198
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Pages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar 31</td>
<td>Bird, <em>Sheppard Lee: Written By Himself</em> (1836)</td>
<td>199-330</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2</td>
<td>Bird, <em>Sheppard Lee: Written By Himself</em> (1836)</td>
<td>331-425</td>
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<td>Edgar Allan Poe, Review of Sheppard Lee from the <em>Southern Literary Messenger</em> (September, 1836)</td>
<td>PDF</td>
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<td>April 7</td>
<td><strong>Prospectus Due &amp; Workshop on Final Essays</strong></td>
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<td>April 9</td>
<td>Walt Whitman, <em>Franklin Evans</em> (1842)</td>
<td>ix-42</td>
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<td>April 14</td>
<td>Walt Whitman, <em>Franklin Evans</em> (1842)</td>
<td>43-114</td>
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<td>April 21-23</td>
<td><strong>No Class</strong></td>
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<td>April 28</td>
<td>Hannah Crafts, <em>The Bondwoman's Narrative</em> (185X)</td>
<td>x-130</td>
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<td>April 30</td>
<td><strong>Annotated Bibliography Due</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hannah Crafts, <em>The Bondwoman's Narrative</em> (185X)</td>
<td>131-240</td>
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<td>May 7</td>
<td><strong>Draft of Final Essay Due for Peer Editing</strong></td>
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May 12  Herman Melville *Israel Potter* (1855)


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May 22  **Final Essay Due by 3 PM in Klapper 632.**