

Duncan Faberty
 English 395w
 AM3WA
 M & W 10:50-12:05
duncanfaberty@hotmail.com office phone: (718) 997-4668
 Office: Klapper 632
 Office hours: M: 1:30-3:30 & W: 9:30-10:30 & by appointment

The Plight of Sympathy: Benevolence and Self-Interest in Early America

Towards the conclusion of Charles Brockden Brown's quixotic novel *Arthur Mervyn*, a lawyer informs Mervyn that if he wanted to profit from his restless efforts to help others he "should have known his own interest better." Despite occupying a chaotic city populated by counterfeiters, convalescents, madman, and failed speculators, Mervyn seems driven to wildly circulate in the service of benevolence. The tensions between benevolence and self-interest which Brown maps in *Arthur Mervyn* are hallmarks of many early American novels, as a range of post-Revolutionary writers sought to redefine what social cohesion meant in a nation comprised of supposedly liberal individuals. Many of these writers deployed a language of feeling to grapple with the unprecedented ways in which the Revolution had called into question operant definitions of citizenship and identity. In the midst of post-Revolutionary uncertainties, many "American" writers sought to discern the cultural effects of unregulated self-interest on "national" culture. In this course we will examine a range of early American texts which question both the limits of self-interest and the complex social utility of benevolence. In so doing, we will consider how many of these writers explored "deviant" behavior in order to demonstrate how artifice and illusion had permeated the social fabric of the early Republic, a situation which made it difficult to discern the truth of anyone's character or identity.

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 broad range of critical essays to think about the conventions and limitations of disciplinary (considering, for example, the differences between literary, biographical, and historical approaches to marshaling and deploying evidence) and to consider 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 progress, 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:

Participation (including group work and peer editing):	25%
Journals:	20%
Annotated Bibliography:	15%
Final Essay:	40%

Required Texts: All available for purchase at QC bookstore - please buy these additions.

- 1) Charles Brockden Brown, *Arthur Mervyn* (Kent State UP) 0873387384
- 2) Charles Brockden Brown, *Ormond* (Broadview) ISBN: 1551110911
- 3) Olaudah Equiano, *Interesting Narrative* (Broadview) ISBN: 1551112620
- 4) Lenora Sansay, *Secret History* (Broadview) ISBN: 1551113463
- 5) Tabitha Gilman Tenney, *Female Quixotism* (Oxford UP) ISBN: 0195074149

* 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

- Aug 27 Intro: Adam Smith & The Plight of Sympathy
sections from *Theory of Moral Sentiments* & *The Wealth of Nations*
- Aug 29 Royal Tyler *The Contrast* (1787) **xerox**
- Sept. 3 **No Class**
- Sept. 5 Jennifer Baker, "Performing Redemption on the National Stage," from *Securing the Commonwealth: Debt, Speculation, & Writing in the Making of Early America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). **PDF**
- Richard S. Pressman, "Class Positioning and Shays' Rebellion: Resolving the Contradictions of *The Contrast*," *Early American Literature* 21:1 (1986), 87-102. **PDF**
- Sept. 10 Olaudah Equiano *Interesting Narrative* (1789) **pages 1-145**
- Sept. 12 **No Class**
- Sept. 17 Olaudah Equiano *Interesting Narrative* (1789) **pages 146-253**
- Sept. 19 Vincent Carretta, "Questioning the Identity of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African" from *The Global Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity A. Nussbaum (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003). **PDF**
- Joseph Fichtelberg, "Captives of the Market," from *Critical Fictions: Sentiment and the American Market 1780-1870* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003). **PDF**
- Sept. 24 Charles Brockden Brown - *Arthur Mervyn* (1799-1800) **pages 1-146**
- Sept. 26 Charles Brockden Brown - *Arthur Mervyn* **pages 147-215**
- Oct. 1 Charles Brockden Brown - *Arthur Mervyn* **pages 217-323**
- Oct. 3 Charles Brockden Brown - *Arthur Mervyn* **pages 324-446**
- Oct. 8 **No Class**
- Oct. 10 Andy Doolen, "Imperial Geographies and *Arthur Mervyn*," from *Fugitive Empire: Locating Early American Imperialism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). **PDF**
- Sean Goudie, "Charles Brockden Brown's West Indian Specie(s)," from *Creole America: the West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). **PDF**

- Oct. 15 Charles Brockden Brown - *Ormond* (1799) **pages 1-169**
- Oct. 17 Charles Brockden Brown - *Ormond* **pages 169-276**
- Oct. 22 Hana Layson, "Rape and Revolution: Feminism, Antijacobinism, and the Politics of Injured Innocence in Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond*," *Early American Studies* 2:1 (2004) **PDF**
- Leonard Tennenhouse, "Caribbean Degeneracy and the Problem of Masculinity in Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond*," from *Finding Colonial Americas* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001). **PDF**
- Oct. 24 Tabitha Gilman Tenney - *Female Quixotism* (1801) **pages v-88**
- Oct. 29 Tabitha Gilman Tenney - *Female Quixotism* **pages 88-226**
- Oct. 31 Tabitha Gilman Tenney - *Female Quixotism* **pages 226-326**
- Nov. 5 Sarah Wood, "Nobody's Dulcinea: Romantic Fictions and Republican Mothers in Tabitha Gilman Tenney's *Female Quixotism*," from *Quixotic Fictions of the USA 1792-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). **PDF**
- Linda Frost, "The Body Politic in Tabitha Tenney's *Female Quixotism*," *Early American Literature* 32:2 (1997). **PDF**
- Nov. 7 **Prospectus Due & Workshop on Final Essays**
- Nov. 12 Lenora Sansay – *Secret History, or The Horrors of St. Domingo* (1808) **pages 1-89**
- Nov. 14 Lenora Sansay – *Secret History, or The Horrors of St. Domingo* **pages 90-154**
- Nov. 19 Michael Drexler, "Brigands and Nuns: The Vernacular Sociology of Collectivity after the Haitian Revolution," from *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003). **PDF**
- Matt Clavin, "Race, Rebellion, and the Gothic: Inventing the Haitian Revolution," *Early American Studies* 5:1 (2007). **PDF**
- Nov. 21 No Class
- Nov. 26 Isaac Mitchell - *The Asylum* (1811) **Vol I**
Annotated Bibliography Due
- Nov. 28 Isaac Mitchell - *The Asylum* **Vol II**

Dec. 3 Cathy Davidson, "Isaac Mitchell's *The Asylum; or Gothic Castles in the New Republic*," *Prospects* vol. 7 (1982). **PDF**
 Joseph Fichtelberg, "Lovers and Citizens," from *Critical Fictions: Sentiment and the American Market 1780-1870* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003). **PDF**

Dec. 5 **Draft of Final Essay Due for Peer Editing**

Dec. 10 Herman Melville - *Benito Cereno* (1855) **PDF**

Dec. 12 Paul Downes, "Melville's *Benito Cereno* and the Politics of Humanitarian Intervention," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103:2/3 (2004), 465-488. **PDF**

Ezra Tawil, "Captain Babo's cabin: racial sentiment and the politics of misreading in *Benito Cereno*," from *The Making of Racial Sentiment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). **PDF**

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Dec. 19 **Final Essay Due by 3 PM in Klapper 632.**