

Professor Nick Rombes  
231 Briggs  
Office Hours: W 12:00-2:00, F 12:00-1:00

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## English 311: American Literature to 1865

English 311 introduces you to some of the key writers and literary movements from the early American period, ranging from gothic novels to slave narratives to the first inklings of modernist poetry. This is a vibrant, complex period of American literary history, when many of the models and genres we now take for granted (i.e., the novel) were first emerging as untested forms. This was also a time of experimental hybrids, as in the case of many slave narratives, which shape-shifted back and forth between autobiography and fiction to produce a new and vibrant form of narrative. We will pay special attention this term to how writers pushed the limits of Enlightenment discourse, experimenting with new modes of self-expression. Often, these new forms placed writers in opposition to the official culture of politicians, clergy, and parents; the result was a diverse body of literature that often took risks in exploring the contradictions of life in a rapidly expanding capitalist nation. Novels, for instance, were denounced as dangerous and corrupt by elites of the day; for many young people, novel-reading became a form of rebellion.

Because all literature—and aesthetics—emerges from historically specific conditions of production, we will spend time situating much of what we read in the larger cultural matrix from which it developed. The rapid rise of the novel in America, for instance, was only possible because of specific advances in printing and distribution technologies. Indeed, the very aesthetics of the novel (temporal structure, character development, linear plot) cannot be separated from the larger American economic system that gave rise to a literate leisure class of readers who wished to see representations of themselves and their worldviews in the books they read. It is precisely this lively, intricate play between readers, texts, and culture that will govern our approach to literature this semester.

Finally, recent technological developments in our own era, especially the web, have altered the way we study these texts and authors, making them more accessible and immediate than ever before. Yet how do these new technologies reshape the authors we are studying? How is our experience, say, of reading Dickinson or Poe on the web mediated by the very technology of the web? Theorist Marshall McLuhan suggested that one can never separate the content of something from its medium. We might ask ourselves, what does it mean to study Emily Dickinson and her texts on the web rather than in a printed book? How does the medium of the computer (and the computer screen) shape our responses to Dickinson?

### Required Texts:

Charles Brockden Brown. *Wieland, or The Transformation*. New York: Penguin, 1991 (1798).  
Hannah Crofts. *The Bondwoman's Narrative*. New York: Warner Books, 2002.  
Cathy Davidson. *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.  
Emily Dickinson. *The Master Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Amherst: Amherst College Press, 1986.  
Hannah W. Foster. *The Coquette*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986 (1797).  
Isaac Kramnick. *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*. New York: Penguin, 1995.  
Edgar Allan Poe. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. New York: Penguin, 1986 (1838).

### Useful Websites:

*Voice of the Shuttle*, woven by Alan Liu:  
<http://vos.ucsb.edu/>  
*Columbia Guide to Online Style*:  
[http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx\\_basic.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx_basic.html)  
Emily Dickinson Electronic Archives:  
<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/dickinson>

### Assignments

Essay One: On <i>Wieland</i> (3-5 pages)	15%
Essay Two: On <i>Coquette</i> or <i>Bondwoman's Narrative</i> (8-10 pages)	20%
Project Three: Paper or Media Project on Dickinson (10-12 pages)	25%
Reading Quizzes/Short Write-ups	20%
Final Exam	10%
Class Participation	10%



### Attendance

I expect you to attend all classes and to arrive on time. For every two classes that you miss beyond three, I will lower your final course grade by ½ letter.

### Late Work

Work is due in class on the assigned date, unless I indicate otherwise. Please note that quizzes and short write-ups **cannot** be made-up.

### Plagiarism

When you use—directly or through paraphrase or summary—the work and ideas of someone else without giving proper credit and citation, you are plagiarizing. When you use the ideas of others, always make sure you cite your sources in the standard citation style of your discipline (in our case, the MLA style). And when in doubt, ask me. If you plagiarize in this class, I will fail you.

### Semester Schedule

(PER = *Portable Enlightenment Reader*)

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## Part One: Ideology and Genre: From Puritanism to Enlightenment

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### Week 1

9-4	Introductions
9-6	Davidson, ch. 1: "Introduction: Toward a History of Texts" Davidson, ch. 2: "The Book in the New Republic"

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### Week 2

9-9	Condorcet, "Future Progress of the Human Mind" (PER, 26-38) Voltaire, "Reflections on Religion" (PER, 115-31) <i>Wieland</i> , ch. 1-4 (pp. 3-41)
9-11	"The Temple of Reason" (PER, 168-73) Watts, "The Young Artist as Social Visionary" (handout) <i>Wieland</i> , ch. 5-6 (pp. 42-69)
9-13	Godwin, "Enquiry Concerning Political Justice" (PER, 473-80) <i>Wieland</i> , ch. 7-10 (pp. 70-115)

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**Week 3**

- 9-16 Franklin, "Industry and the Way to Wealth" (PER, 483-90)  
*Wieland*, ch. 11-14 (pp. 116-55)
- 9-17 Halttunen, "The Birth of Horror" (handout)
- 9-20 *Wieland*, ch. 15-21 (pp. 156-218)

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**Week 4**

- 9-23 *Wieland*, ch. 22-end (pp. 219-end)
- 9-25 Davidson, ch. 3: "Ideology and Genre"
- 9-27 Voloshin, "*Wieland*: Accounting for Appearances" (handout)

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**Week 5**

- 9-30 Constantia, "On the Equality of the Sexes" (PER, 601-09)  
De Gouges, "The Rights of Woman" (PER, 609-18)  
*The Coquette*, 5-21
- 10-2 Davidson, ch. 4: "Literacy, Education, and the Reader"  
*The Coquette*, 21-30
- 10-3 Paper #1 Due**

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**Week 6**

- 10-7 *The Coquette*, 30-117
- 10-9 *The Coquette*, 117-40
- 10-11 *The Coquette*, 141-end

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**Part Two: Race, Representation, and the Gothic**

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**Week 7**

- 10-14 Davidson, ch. 6: "Privileging the Feme Covert"
- 10-16 Race, Essentialism, and Social Construction (handout)
- 10-18 Race, cont.
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**Week 8**

- 10-21 *Bondwoman's Narrative*, "Introduction"
- 10-23 *Bondwoman's Narrative*, 5-84
- 10-25 *Bondwoman's Narrative*, 85-171
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**Week 9**

- 10-28 *Bondwoman's Narrative*, 172-end
- 10-29 Slave Narratives on the Web

**11-1 Paper #2 Due**

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**Week 10**

- 11-4 Remini, "Slavery and Union" (handout)
- 11-6 *Pym*, ch. 2-4
- 11-8 *Pym*, ch. 5-9
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**Week 11**

- 11-11 Rowe, "Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism" (handout)
- 11-13 *Pym*, ch. 10-16
- 11-15 *Pym*, ch. 17-end
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**Part Three: Emily Dickinson's New Media**

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**Week 12**

- 11-18 Hirsch, "Postmodern or Post-Auschwitz: The Case of Poe" (handout)
- 11-20 Nelson, "Ethnocentricism Decentered: Colonialist Motives in *Pym*" (handout)
- 11-22 McLuhan, "The Medium" (handout)  
Dickinson Electronic Archives: <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/dickinson>
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**Week 13**

- 11-25 Dickinson, *The Master Letters*
- 11-27 McKinstry, "The Letters of Emily Dickinson" (handout)
- 11-29 No Class—Thanksgiving



## Paper Number One

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### Overview

This 3-5 page paper is due **Friday, October 3<sup>rd</sup>** in class. It is worth 15% of your grade. I will gladly give comments to topic ideas, outlines, or introductions that you either bring to class or send to me via e-mail.

### Structure

You are free to choose from one of the topics below, which includes the option of writing on a topic of your own choice, relating to *Wieland*. You do not need to conduct research for this paper. Here is what you are trying to do in the paper:

- Make a claim or a thesis. Bear in mind that this thesis should be analytical and academic in nature, not evaluative. In other words, your audience is the discourse community of student-scholars and professor-scholars. Avoid a claim or a thesis that is evaluative in nature (i.e., “*Wieland* was full of excitement,” “*Wieland* was confusing,” etc.). Remember that you are not reviewing or evaluating the novel—you are writing an analytical piece that basically says, “here is something interesting/important about the novel . . . let me show you why.”
- Explore your claim or thesis through careful analysis of the novel
- Use specific evidence from the novel to support your claims (see the attached Textual Evidence Sheet).
- Do not summarize the plot of the novel or long passages from the novel. Assume that your audience has read the novel and is familiar with it.
- Have a clearly structured, persuasive account of your exploration
- Have a conclusion
- Above all, be imaginative and take intelligent risks. I would rather see you (and I will reward you) struggle with a difficult, complex topic than do something safe and easy.

### Format

- The paper should be typed, double-spaced, with one inch margins all around
- Make a separate title page with the title of the paper, your name, my name, the class, and the date
- Select an interesting title that reflects your topic
- Include page numbers (but do not paginate the title page)
- When you quote from the novel, use page numbers. For example: Clara continually asks us as readers to question her reliability as narrator, as when she says “What I have related will, no doubt, appear to you a fable” (74).
- You do not need a works cited page for this first paper.

### Topic Choices

1. In his “Introduction” to *Wieland*, critic Jay Fliegelman suggests that *Wieland* is disturbing because it doesn’t clearly spell out which characters readers are supposed to identify with. He writes:  
Brown the novelist was well aware of the dangers of a genre whose power derived from its ability to encourage identification. Given that the villain may enchant and the heroine disgust, the novelist cannot ensure identification with the “right” character. Even as it warns against seduction, the novel has seduction as its very essence and project. (xxiv)  
Write an essay that explores this problem of identification in *Wieland*. How does the novel complicate the identification process, and what are the consequences of this for the reader?
2. Here are two possible, opposing ways to read *Wieland*.
  - a. *Wieland* is essentially a conservative novel, one that promotes order and the status quo. Why? Because it implicitly warns against the dangers of desire, anarchy, and “outsiders”

(i.e., Carwin). In short, the novel represents all sorts of violence and rampant desire in order to show just how dangerous these things can be.

- b. No---*Wieland* is a subversive, even radical novel. It shows how bogus many of the values of the Enlightenment (order, reason, stability, structure) really are. Sure, the novel tries to reestablish order at the end (Clara gets married; Carwin is banished) but Brown did this only to satisfy the conventions of his day, which demanded that "evil" be punished. The novel is most exciting when it deals with its "bad" people because that is where the novel's sympathies lie

Write an essay which argues for a or b, or some combination of both.

3. Devise a topic of your own choosing about something you found intriguing about the novel.

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Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is an absurd one.

♦Voltaire♦

I don't know what you can  
do for it—thank you—Master—  
but if I had the Beard on  
my cheek—and you—had Daisy's  
petals—and you cared so for  
me—what would become of you?

♦Emily Dickinson, Master Letter Number

3♦

For the sake of creating a  
mysterious dread, I have  
made myself a villain.

♦Carwin in  
*Wieland*♦

