

Talkin' about a Revolution

U.S. Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary Literature, 1770s – 1820s

Room and time: Seminar Room (Attems-gasse 25, Top Floor), Wednesday, 11:45-1:15 · **Course number:** 512 226

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan Brandt · **Office hours:** Thur, 4-6 p.m. (Heinrichstr. 18, 1st floor) · **Email:** stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

Description: “From 1790 to 1820,” the American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson once quipped, “there was not a single book, a speech, a conversation, or a thought in the state.” This seminar is meant as an introductory course to this foundational period in American literary history. Contrary to Emerson’s statement, the revolutionary and post-revolutionary era was marked by a vivid literary and intellectual production that shaped the country’s social and national fabric for decades to come. Looking at a wide range of fictional and non-fictional texts produced between the 1760s and the 1820s, we will discuss the historical and aesthetic backdrop against which a unique American identity was able to develop. Questions of relevance will include the following: How can the novel as a new literary form (epitomized by Charles Brockden Brown, the first professional writer in the U.S.) be linked to the sentiment and emotional condition of the early republic? How did early U.S. authors contribute to the shaping of the American national self? Special emphasis will be put on the literary techniques of self-modeling that helped bring about the notion of a unique American consciousness. Individual sessions will deal with various genres – political pamphlets (Thomas Paine’s *Declaration of Independence*, 1776), political drama (Royall Tyler’s *The Contrast*), life writing (Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*, 1790), the adventure novel (Royall Tyler’s *The Algerine Captive*, 1797), and African American poetry (Phillis Wheatley’s “On Being Brought from Africa to America”, 1773), as well as slave narratives (Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*), picaresque writing (Tabitha Tenney’s *Female Quixotism*, 1801), and short fiction (W. Irving, “Sleepy Hollow” 1819).

Teaching and Learning Method: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by ‘experts’ who organize the session by means of questions, games, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short information block. The experts will upload their Moodle discussion questions 6 days in advance!

Materials: All print texts will be made available on Moodle.

Aims: The course is meant as an overview of American revolutionary and post-revolutionary writing. Students will gain insights into the function and aesthetic techniques of foundational texts of the early U.S. republic.

Assessment: **A.) regular attendance** (no more than 2 absences!) and **active in-class participation**, as well as **eight (!)** substantial entries in the **discussion forum** (1/3); **B.) presentation** as part of an expert session plus **3-page handout** and **online questions** (1/3); **C.) research proposal** (2 pages) and **final paper** (10 pages) (1/3). You need to pass each section to pass the course.

Deadline for Final Papers (including declaration of honesty): Monday, July 13, 2020. You need to upload a digital version of your paper on Moodle and hand in a printed version. There is no (!) extension of this deadline. Please **indicate** on a **post-it** attached to the paper if you would like **detailed feedback**!

Syllabus

11 March	Introduction – Talkin’ about a Revolution Basic texts: Emory Elliott, “Toward the Formation of a United States” (2002). Steven Blakemore, from <i>Literature, Intertextuality, and the Revolution</i> (2012).
18 March	The Birth of the U.S. Republic – Thomas Jefferson and Revolutionary Idealism Main text (reading required): Thomas Jefferson et al., “Declaration of Independence” (1776) Additional text (optional): Pauline Maier, “The American Triumvirate” (1998). Keywords: Democracy; Equality; Federalist Papers; Idealism; Independence; Political Pamphlets; U.S. Constitution.
25 March	‘Joining the Angelic Train’ – Phillis Wheatley and the Question of Democratic Participation Main text (reading required): Phillis Wheatley, “On Being Brought from Africa to America” (1773) and other poems (1773-1776) Additional text (optional): Vincent Carretta, Introduction to <i>Phillis Wheatley – Complete Writings</i> (2001). Keywords: African American Writing; Ancient Greece; Inclusion; Middle Passage; Protest; Revolutionary Poetry.
1 April	The Ideology of Americanism – Crèvecoeur and the Birth of the ‘Melting Pot’ Main text (reading required): H. St. John de Crèvecoeur, from <i>Letters from an American Farmer</i> (1782).

Additional text (optional):

Susan Manning, Introduction to *Letters from an American Farmer* (1998).

Keywords: American Dream; Anti-Government; Authorship; Enlightenment; Exceptionalism; Melting Pot.

22 April

Anti-British Rhetoric – Royall Tyler and the Birth of Political Drama

Main text (reading required):

Royall Tyler, *The Contrast* (1787).

Additional text (optional):

Jeffrey H. Richards, Introduction to *The Contrast* (1997).

Keywords: Britain vs. America; Cultural Independence; Masculinity/Femininity; Telling Names (Dimple/Manly).

29 April

The Revolution and Its 'Other' – Peter Markoe and the Specter of Islam

Main text (reading required):

Peter Markoe, excerpts from *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* (1787).

Additional text (optional):

Timothy Marr, Introduction to *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* (2008).

Keywords: Conspiracy Theories; Continental Congress; Epistolary Novel; Invasion Rhetoric; Islam; Orientalism.

6 May

Independent Study Unit- Research Proposal

Stay at home and create a 2-page research proposal for a potential final paper.

13 May

Guest Lecture – U.S. Society and the Culture of the Self

Martin Klepper (Humboldt University Berlin)

"Mobilizing the Self: Transformations of the Self-Help Discourse in the United States"

20 May

Metaphors of Emancipation - Olaudah Equiano and the American Slave Narrative

Main text (reading required):

Olaudah Equiano, excerpts from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789).

Additional text (optional):

Robert Reid-Pharr, Introduction to *The Interesting Narrative* (2004).

Keywords: Abolitionism; Captivity; Christianity; First-Person Narration; Identity; Sailing; Slave Narrative.

27 May

Narratives of Individualism and the 'Self-Made Man' – Benjamin Franklin and the American Work Ethic

Main text (reading required):

Benjamin Franklin, excerpts from his *Autobiography* (1791).

Additional text (optional):

Steven Forde, "Franklin's Autobiography and the Education of America" (1992).

Keywords: Advice Books; Individualism; Life Writing; Protestant Work Ethic; Self-Control; Self-Made Man.

3 June

Gothic Visions of America – Charles Brockden Brown and the *Bildungsroman*

Main text (reading required):

Charles Brockden Brown, excerpts from *Arthur Mervyn, or Memoirs of the Year 1793* (1799/1800).

Additional text (optional):

James H. Justus, "Arthur Mervyn, American" (1970).

Keywords: Capitalism/Commerce; Charity; Epistolary Novel; Gothic; Philadelphia; Urban Crisis; Yellow Fever.

10 June

The Revolution and Female Self-Empowerment – Tabitha Tenney and the Picaresque Novel

Main text (reading required):

Tabitha Tenney, excerpts from *Female Quixotism* (1801).

Additional text (optional):

Cathy N. Davidson, Introduction to *Female Quixotism* (1992).

Keywords: Adventure; Female Self-Empowerment; Feminism; Picaresque; Quixotism; Romance/Delusion.

17 June

Critiques of the American Revolution - Washington Irving and the Birth of Short Fiction

Main texts (reading required):

Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle" & "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1819).

Additional text (optional):

Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky, "The Value of Storytelling – 'Rip Van Winkle' & 'Sleepy Hollow'" (1985).

Keywords: Anti-Hero; Individualism; Irony; Short Story; Sleep Metaphor; Tradition vs. Modernity.

24 June

Distrust and Cultural Identity – James Fenimore Cooper and the Novel of Manners

Main text (reading required):

James Fenimore Cooper, excerpts from *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (1821).

Additional text (optional):

Brent Woods, "Revolution and Literature: Cooper's *The Spy* Revisited" (2020).

Keywords: Espionage; George Washington; Neutral Ground; Novel of Manners (Austen); Patriotism; Spy Novel.

DUE DATE
RESEARCH PROPOSAL

FINAL PAPER
DUE DATE: July 13, 2020