American Revolutionary Literature

Cultural Identity and Literary Imagination in the United States from 1768 to 1800

Lecturer: PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, Guest Professor

Basic information: Proseminar, 2 SWS, ECTS-Studium, ECTS-Credits: 7; application at KOS.

Place and time: AR-B 2002 - Tuesdays, 12-14.

First session: April 1, 2008.

Modules: LCMS-BA-M3.1 (Literatur- und kulturgeschichtlicher Überblick) ab 2; AmL-3 (Epochen und übergreifende Traditionstränge) ab 2; ENG-GHR-1.2 (Gattungspoetik und Gattungsgeschichte) ab 2; ENG-GYM-2.2 (Text im Kontext) ab 2; Sek I & II-B4 (Amerikanische Literatur) ab 2; ENG-BK-M1.3 (Text im Kontext) ab 2.

Maximum number of participants: 50

Short description: This seminar is meant as an introductory course to one of the most crucial stages in American history – the Revolutionary Years. Looking at a wide range of fictional as well as non-fictional texts produced in the period from 1768 to 1800, we will discuss the historical and aesthetic preconditions under which ›American identity‹ developed as a distinctive force in cultural practice. What role did pamphlets such as Thomas Paine’s Common Sense play in this discourse? How is the emergence of the novel as a new literary form (epitomized by Charles Brockden Brown) linked to the revolutionary impulse of the democratic community? Special emphasis will be put on the literary techniques of self-fashioning in this era which helped bring about the idea of a unique American consciousness. Other sections of the seminar will deal with the notion of heterogeneity cultivated in women’s literature (Susanna Haswell Rowson) and African American literature (Olaudah Equiano). Examining recent scholarly work on the American Revolution, we will also ask about the relevance of this group of literary texts for a modern understanding of the nation. In addition, we will watch a movie – The Patriot (2000) – to find our way into this fascinating period. Please note that this is not a lecture course. You will be expected to be prepared for each session and participate actively in discussions and expert groups.

Credit requirements:
For 5 or 7 credit points: regular attendance, lively participation in class discussions, and at least 9 entries in the discussion forum before the session (1/3), an oral presentation as part of an expert group (1/3), and a final paper (8-10 pp. / 13-15 pp.) (1/3). For 2 credit points: attendance, participation in class discussions, and 8 entries in the discussion forum before the session (50%), oral presentation as part of an expert group (50%).
Syllabus

01. Apr.  Introduction: Patriot Voices
   »The Liberty Song« (1768) & »Alphabet« (1775) (online).

08. Apr.  Early Revolutionary Poetry
   Philip Freneau, »A Poem, On the Rising Glory of America« (1772), 1-11 (online).

15. Apr.  The Declaration of Independence
   Thomas Jefferson, »The Declaration of Independence« (1776), 1-5 (online).

22. Apr.  The Cultural Background: The Crisis of Authority in the Revolutionary Age
   Emory Elliott, »The Crisis of Authority in the Revolutionary Age« (1982), 19-54 (online).
   Background text: Cathy N. Davidson, from Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America (1986), 3-37 (online).

29. Apr.  African American Poetry
   Phillis Wheatley, »On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield« (1770), 14-15, »To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for North-America, &c.« (1773), 31-32, »To His Excellency, George Washington« (1776), 1-2 (online).

06. May  Revolutionary Pamphlets

13. May  Pentecost Holiday (Pfingsten)
   Relax and enjoy!

20. May  The Epistolary Genre

27. May  Proclamations
   James Madison [Publius], »Federalist Paper No. 10« (1788/89), 1-4 (online).

03. June  The Novel of Emancipation

10. June  The American Drama
   Royall Tyler, The Contrast (1790), »Prologue«, 8-9, Act I & II, 10-38, Act V, 66-80 (online).

17. June  The Seduction Novel

24. June  The City Novel I (Hope, Disease, and Corruption)

01. July  The City Novel II (Back to Country Life)

08. July  The American Revolution on Film
   The Patriot (dir. Mel Gibson, 2000) *

* This film is available on DVD. It can be checked out over night at our Sekretariat (Room AR-H 213).