

ENGL 7780: Studies in Race, Gender, and Sexuality
American Letters
Thursday, 12:30-3:10 PM
Haley 3110

Hilary E. Wyss
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Office Hours: R 11-12 and by appt.

The American colonies were awash with letters. From personal correspondence to novels and political tracts written in the form of letter exchanges, over and over again Americans chose epistolarity as the ideal mode for their own representation. In this class we will think through the rhetorical and cultural promise of the letter as a potent way for individuals to imagine, reimagine, and represent themselves in ways that disrupt and reconfigure the universe around them.

Recent scholarship has opened up exciting new ways of understanding the place of epistolarity in American and transatlantic literature. This class will explore the ways in which letters shaped all kinds of communities, giving voice to women, Natives, servants, and occasionally even slaves as material conditions (including increased literacy and better modes of transport) shifted letter-writing from an elite practice to a much more widespread phenomenon. At the same time, with their suggestion of immediate first-hand experience and personal or intimate exchange, letters offered figures from Christopher Columbus to Benjamin Franklin and others an ideal form for public exchange in politically or socially charged situations.

This course is designed to help you develop research skills and to guide you in the formulation of an extended research project. Using our class discussions and shared readings as a launching point, throughout the semester you will research your own topic related to the broad idea of epistolarity in America. You will share your knowledge with the class through a range of multimodal research and teaching presentations as well as periodic informal writing assignments. The final assignment is a twenty-five page seminar paper of “publishable quality” that draws on the research you have been doing throughout the semester.

READINGS:

Hector St John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*
Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*
Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly*
Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*
Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette*
Various electronic resources

ASSIGNMENTS:

The two primary emphases of this course will be discussion of common texts and independent research. We will meet each week to discuss a series of texts that

illuminate a particular issue in the study of American letters; you will use these discussions to identify your own area of interest. In addition to several short research-based assignments early in the semester, you will turn in a project proposal before Spring Break and you should expect to present your work in class in the final month of the semester. Your final project is a “publication-quality” final essay or its equivalent (25 pages; see attached description). You should feel free to talk with me at any point if you have questions or concerns about any of the assignments, and we MUST meet early in the semester to discuss your particular final project ideas.

This is a graduate class and you are on a professional career path; you are expected, therefore, to act like a professional. **You must hand in all assignments on time to pass the course.** You are also expected to attend every class having completed the reading for the day; any unexcused absences will drop your final grade by a full letter grade.

GRADING:

Classwork.....	10%
Book Review.....	10%
Research assignment	10%
Final Project Total.....	70%
Project proposal.....	10%
Writing Group.....	10%
Seminar Paper.....	50%

SPECIAL NEEDS:

Feel free to stop by after class or in my office hours to discuss any learning disabilities, physical disabilities, or special circumstances of which you feel I should be aware. Students who need accommodations are asked to arrange a meeting during office hours the first week of classes or as soon as possible if accommodations are needed immediately. If you have a conflict with my office hours, an alternate time can be arranged. To set up this meeting, please contact me by e-mail. Bring a copy of your Accommodation Memo and an Instructor Verification Form to the meeting. If you do not have an Accommodation Memo but need accommodations, make an appointment with The Program for Students with Disabilities, 1228 Haley Center, 844-2096 (V/TT).

E-MAIL POLICY:

E-mail is an official form of communication at Auburn University, and you are expected to monitor your e-mail regularly for communications about our class. I check my e-mail regularly during the week, and it is generally the best way to get in touch with me outside of class or office hours. Please allow about 24 hours for me to

respond during the week—if you haven't heard from me by then resend your message. I do not always check e-mail over the weekend.

ACADEMIC HONESTY:

Cheating and plagiarism are serious violations of the Student Academic Honesty Code (Title XII) and will be treated according to the procedures outlined in the Student Policy e-Handbook (www.auburn.edu/student_info/student_policies) or on the University Policies website (<https://sites.auburn.edu/admin/universypolicies/default.aspx>).

You are responsible for asking me any questions you may have about honest use of sources or proper documentation.

OTHER INFORMATION:

If normal class activities are disrupted due to illness, emergency, or crisis (such as an H1N1 flu outbreak), the syllabus and other course plans and assignments may be modified to allow completion of the course. If this occurs, an addendum to your syllabus and/or course assignments will replace the original materials.

SYLLABUS: (come to class prepared to discuss the reading listed for that day)

JAN

R-14 INTRODUCTIONS; database hunt (after meeting in the classroom and brief introductions we will head over to the library to talk with Jaena Alabi)

Defining America:

R-21 Columbus etexts:

Introduction: <http://www.ems.kcl.ac.uk/content/pub/b002.html#d0e58>

Letter to Santangel [<http://www.ems.kcl.ac.uk/content/etext/e022-copyright.html>]

Monarch's Letter [<http://www.ems.kcl.ac.uk/content/etext/e024-copyright.html>]

Diffusion of Santangel Letter: <http://www.oshermaps.org/special-map-exhibits/columbus-letter/iv-diffusion-columbuss-letter-through-europe-1493-1497>

R-28 Pocahontas (Rolfe and Smith) Read biographies of Smith, Pocahontas, and Rolfe here: <http://www.nps.gov/jame/learn/historyculture/people.htm> Find out more about ongoing archaeological projects here: <http://historicjamestowne.org/> John Smith Letter, John Rolfe Letter, and portrait of Pocahontas [PDF]

Daniel Richter chapter, [PDF]; Anna Brickhouse chapter, [PDF]

FEB

The 'Personal' Letter:

R-4 Eighteenth-century epistolarity [3 Book Reviews]; visit to the archive in the RBD Library

R-11 Occom and Native American Letters Laura Murray article; Wyss article [PDF]
Occom Circle: <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~occom/> [3 Book Reviews]

R-18 Occom and Wheatley

Wheatley Poetry (download from ECCO or PDF) Wheatley Letter to Occom (PDF)

Joanna Brooks, "Our Phillis Ourselves" [PDF] [3 Book Reviews]

R-25 Rowson, *Charlotte Temple* [3 Book Reviews]; Research assignment due

MARCH

R-3 Foster, *The Coquette* [Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, Chapter 6]

R-10 Adams Correspondence [EAL/ALH article]; Project proposal due

SPRING BREAK

The Self-Made Man (of Letters)

R-24 Franklin, *The Autobiography*

Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*, Chapter 3, [PDF]

R-31 Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 1-6

APRIL

R-7 Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 7-12

R-14 Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly*

R-21 TBA

R-28 CONCLUSIONS

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

CLASSWORK (10%):

I expect you to attend all classes and do all the assigned readings, arriving in class prepared to discuss what you have read for the week. Please refrain from using your computer and/or phone for anything other than class-related information retrieval during class time as a courtesy to your fellow-students.

BOOK REVIEW (10%)

(500-1000 words)

Writing a book review is a skill that will serve you well throughout your professional career. It requires several things of you:

- synthesis: you must summarize and synthesize the main argument of the book in question and the specific ways the author develops his/her argument. Go through the argument chapter by chapter so that people reading your review will have a clear sense of what the book is actually about and if they might be interested in reading it. This will take up the bulk of the review. In this element of the review you must try to represent as fairly and accurately as you can what the book actually says; your value judgments largely are removed from this part.

- analysis: in this part you must express as clearly as possibly whether or not the book succeeds on its own terms. That is, this is not the opportunity to say how YOU would have written the book, but rather how effectively the author makes his/her argument. Are there gaps in the argument? Is it less than convincing? Does this book engage effectively with the scholarship in its area? Does it break new ground? In some ways this is the hardest part of the review. Remember, first of all, that you are dealing with a real person whose work has consumed much of the past few years of his/her life. Avoid sounding smug or condescending when reporting the flaws, and find something good to say as well. Remember, too, that as a graduate student you should choose your words wisely; people remember the reviews they get, both positive and negative, and this person could well be in the position to judge your own work down the line...the conventions of our profession are to phrase criticism gently while at the same time providing an accurate assessment of the book at hand. Think of this as a good place to try out this challenge!

DUE DATE: February 4 - 25

RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT (10%):

Using the book for which you wrote a review, use its footnotes/endnotes to establish a list of 4-6 essential works to pursue further for a research topic of interest to you. While you don't have to have read each of these works in full to complete this assignment, you should turn in an annotated list that briefly outlines the main point of each of these works and explains how it might be relevant to your work.

DUE DATE: February 25

FINAL PROJECT (70%)

Project Proposal (10%) DUE DATE: March 10. You must turn in a short description of the topic of your paper and the research question you will be exploring. I strongly encourage each member of the class to meet with me (and ideally your reading group—see below) to discuss this before you turn in your topic proposal.

Writing Group (10%) Writing groups are an essential way of getting timely feedback in a low-pressure environment from your peers. During the months of March and April you will be required to meet at least **three times** outside of class with a writing group of 3-4 members of the class. You must send me notification of who was at your meeting and the general approach that you took to exchanging your work in progress so that I can document that each of you is “workshopping” your paper.

Seminar Paper (50%): The traditional scholarly essay provides you with the basis for publishable work, and it helps you develop your talents as a researcher and writer of critical work. For this assignment you should develop a thesis that is an original insight into a topic related to American epistolarity. Make sure that your original insight is based in a thorough engagement with primary and secondary sources relevant to your topic. While I do not expect you to write an essay that will be publishable right away, I do expect you to work on a draft of something you might one day develop in that direction.

As an academic you are part of a community of scholars. You access others' work through their publications, and your own work should be seen as engaging in an ongoing conversation with other scholars who share your interests. You should be able to exhibit a mastery of the research relevant to the topic you have chosen, and you should be able to exhibit a clear sense of the most recent directions such scholarship is taking. Be sure to use footnotes to help you indicate the extent of the research you have done. The expectations for such work:

- an essay of 20-25 written pages (excluding notes)
- an original thesis that is well developed and persuasively argued.
- a bibliographic apparatus (footnotes, a works cited page) that gives evidence of extensive research in the field and mastery of the relevant materials.

Please note that if for any reason you feel that your particular professional goals are better met with a different kind of final project I am happy to work with you on developing an equivalent project in different form.