Spirit Worlds: Religion and Early American Literature

Eng 154B (Spring 2018)  
MWTh 11:00-11:50  
Location: Rabb Graduate Center 119  
Professor Tharaud  
Office: Rabb 138  
Phone: 781-736-2140  
Office Hours: Th 1:00 to 3:00 and by appointment

**Course Description:** Ask people what they think of when they hear the phrase “early America,” and religion is almost certain to come up. From pious pilgrims seeking “religious freedom” to accused witches in Puritan Massachusetts, and camp-meeting revivalists to self-styled prophets inciting slave rebellion, America from the early seventeenth century to the eve of the Civil War was a potent (and at times explosive) mix of spiritual energies and religious movements. This course explores some of the most significant of these currents and investigates how they shaped and catalyzed the American literary imagination. As we combine key literary texts and historical documents with influential scholarship by literary scholars and religious historians, we’ll think about how the categories of “religion” and “literature” have been historically constituted, and about their evolving relationship to concepts like reason, the Enlightenment, and secularization. We’ll also sample contemporary representations of early America in film, on stage, and in public space in order to think about the use of early American religiosity as a symbol in current cultural and political debates. Requirements include regular participation in class discussions, weekly discussion response posts, two formal essays, and a review of a contemporary representation of early America for a general audience. This course may be used to satisfy the 12-page paper requirement for the English major.

**Required books:** The following texts are available for purchase at the Brandeis University Bookstore. If you buy them from another vendor, please get these editions. Other course readings will be available on the course page on Latte. They are marked “[L]” on the reading schedule.

- Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (Vintage Classics, 1990)
Reading Schedule

I Piety and Persecution in Puritan New England

Jan. 10 (W)  Welcome and introduction

Jan. 11 (Th)  John Winthrop, *A Model of Christian Charity* (1630)
              Perry Miller, “Errand into the Wilderness” (1953), pp. 3-19 [L]

Jan. 15 (M)  Martin Luther King Day – No Class


Jan. 18 (Th)  (Brandeis Monday)
              Anne Bradstreet, selected poems and “To my Dear Children” [L]
              Hall, “A World of Wonders,” pp. 94-116 [L]


Jan. 25 (Th)  Nicholas Hytner (director), *The Crucible* (1996) [L]

II Spreading the Word: Preaching and Print in the Age of Awakenings

              Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741) [L]
              Jonathan Edwards, “Personal Narrative” (ca. 1739) [L]
Recommended: Jon Butler, “Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretative Fiction” (1982) [L]

Jan. 31 (W) George Whitefield Hack-a-Thon: Bring your laptop!
   Frank Lambert, Inventing the “Great Awakening” (1999), chap. 3, “imported Divinity” [L]

Feb. 1 (Th) George Whitefield Hack-a-Thon (cont.): Bring your laptop!
   John Marrant, A Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings (1785) [L]

III Enlightenment, Illusion, and the Secular

Feb. 5 (M) Charles Brockden Brown, Wieland (1798), chaps. 1-6

Feb. 7 (W) Brown, Wieland, chaps. 7-12

Feb. 8 (Th) Brown, Wieland, chaps. 13-14

Feb. 12 (M) Brown, Wieland, chaps. 15-22

Feb. 14 (W) Brown, Wieland, chaps. 23-25

Feb. 15 (Th) Brown, Wieland, chaps. 26-27 (finish)

Feb. 19-23 Midterm Recess – No Class

IV Slave Religion: Sorcery, Prophecy, Rebellion

Feb. 26 (M) William Earle, Obi; or, the History of Three-Fingered Jack (1800), Letters I-VII

Feb. 28 (W) Earle, Obi, Letters VIII-XV (finish)

**Friday, March 2: Essay #1 (5-6 pp.) due uploaded to Latte by 5 p.m.**


Mar. 7 (W)  Joseph Smith, Jr., “Extracts from the History of Joseph Smith,” from *The Pearl of Great Price* (c. 1838), pp. 36-48 [L]

Mar. 8 (Th)  Nate Parker (director), *The Birth of a Nation* (2016) [L]

**V: New Revelations: Literary Scripturalism in the American Renaissance**

Mar. 12 (M)  Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851), chaps. 1-16


Mar. 15 (Th)  Melville, *Moby-Dick*, chaps. 36-42

March 19 (M)  Melville, *Moby-Dick*, chaps. 43-55

Mar. 21 (W)  Melville, *Moby-Dick*, chaps. 56-78

Mar. 22 (Th)  Melville, *Moby-Dick*, chaps. 79-86

Mar. 26 (M)  Melville, *Moby-Dick*, chaps. 87-104

Mar. 28 (W)  *Moby-Dick*, chaps. 105-131

Mar. 29 (Th)  Melville, *Moby-Dick*, chaps. 132-Epilogue (finish)

March 30-April 6  Passover and Spring Recess – No Class
VI: Catholicism, Conquest, Modernity


Apr. 11 (W) Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Book 2: “Missionary Journeys”

Apr. 12 (Th) Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Book 3: “The Mass at Ácoma”

**Friday, April 13:** Contemporary review due uploaded to Latte by 5 p.m.

Apr. 16 (M) Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Books 4-5: “Snake Root,” and “Padre Martínez”

Apr. 18 (W) Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Book 6: “Doña Isabella”

Apr. 19 (Th) Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Book 7: “The Great Diocese”

Apr. 23 (M) Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Book 8: “Gold Under Pike’s Peak”
Leona Sevick, “Catholic expansionism and the politics of depression in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*” (2006) [L]

Apr. 25 (W) Brandeis Friday -- No class

Apr. 26 (Th) Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Book 9: “Death Comes for the Archbishop” (finish)
Course conclusion

**Wednesday, May 2:** Essay #2 due uploaded to Latte by 5 p.m.
Course Policies and Requirements

Prerequisites: None

Four-Credit Course (three hours of class-time per week): Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Learning goals:

- A basic grasp of key genres and literary modes including sermons, conversion narratives, captivity narratives, and prophetic utterance, and the novel.
- Familiarity with several key episodes and movements in American religious history, including New England witchcraft trials, the Great Awakenings, the Enlightenment, slave religion, evangelical revivalism, and Roman Catholic immigration.
- Knowledge of scholarly debates surrounding these episodes and movements, including over the “invention” of the Great Awakening, the survival of African religions in the Americas, and the meaning of secularization in the early national and antebellum periods.
- Practice analyzing contemporary representations of early American religious life in more sensitive and nuanced ways in light of these historical and critical contexts.
- To hone the ability to perform analysis of literary materials and other cultural artifacts for multiple audiences (scholarly as well as general)
- To build students’ fluency discussing literature and history in a classroom setting

Grading breakdown:

- Attendance: 10%
- In-class participation: 15%
- Response posts: 10%
- Essay #1: 20%
- Contemporary review: 15%
- Essay #2: 30%

Course requirements:

1. Attendance: Regular and prompt class attendance is mandatory. If you need to miss class because of sickness, religious observance, or an emergency, please contact me in advance if possible. You will be responsible for posting a response to the readings for the session you missed on the discussion board on Latte within a week. Students who come to class without bringing that day’s assigned readings will be marked absent. Each unexcused absence will lower your attendance grade (10% of the total) by a letter grade. Missing more than four classes will result in failing the class.

2. In-class participation: Participating fully in this class requires completing the assigned readings and participating in class discussion. Reading assigned material carefully and in its entirety before class on the day it is assigned is essential for your success in this class. You can
expect to read between 50 and 100 pages per class period (less on Thursdays). **Please be sure to buy the exact editions listed on the syllabus so we can all refer to the same page numbers**, and bring all texts to class in hard copy (bring the book). The majority of our class time will be spent in detailed discussion of these texts, so your participation grade includes contributing to class discussion. Every student is expected to speak at least once per class. I may call on you even if you haven’t raised your hand.

3. **Response posts**: These brief weekly written responses will be posted to the course discussion board on Latte ([http://latte.brandeis.edu](http://latte.brandeis.edu)) and account for 10% of your final grade. They are intended to ensure you are keeping up with the reading, to jump-start your own thinking about a text, and to improve the quality of our in-class discussions. Responses do not need to be as formal or as polished as formal essays, but they should reflect thoughtful engagement with the day’s text and should make a claim about it. Some weeks I will provide a topic to write about; other weeks you will choose your own. Either way, these posts should engage substantively with some feature of the text that interests you. This might mean unpacking a particular character, symbol, word, or idea that seems crucial to understanding the text, or identifying a key problem or tension that plays out there. They can also be a place to express personal reactions to a text and to explore aspects of it that excite, frustrate, or confuse you. There is no word-count requirement, but each post should be at least a solid paragraph. Students with last names starting with A-L will be assigned to respond to Monday’s readings, and those beginning with M through Z will respond to Wednesday’s readings. Please post your response by 10 p.m. the night before the reading is to be discussed in class. (If no class is held on your day that week, post a response for the next regularly scheduled class.) You are allowed to skip three posts over the course of the semester, so you should have a total of 10 posts by the end of the term. These responses are not evaluated for a letter grade: you get full credit as long as you turn it in on time, write a full paragraph, and engage substantively with the text.

4. **Contemporary review**: This brief (2,000 word or less) assignment asks students to respond to a contemporary text or public event dealing with early American religion and/or literature (e.g., a recent film, book, play, museum exhibit, art installation, public festival, memorial ceremony, etc.) in a format designed for a general audience. This might be in the form of a review, feature story, or essay that might appear in an Arts and Letters section of a newspaper or magazine; it could also be produced as a podcast, video, or other medium.

5. **Essays**: These formal papers collectively account for half your grade. The first essay (5-6 pp.) will ask you to perform a close reading of a literary text. The final essay (8-10 pp.) asks you to dig deeper into one of the topics covered during the semester, or a related topic relevant to the course. This paper should have a research component; it might explore primary source materials from the period beyond those covered in the course and/or incorporate secondary sources not included on the syllabus. English majors may expand this paper to 12 pages to satisfy the 12-page paper requirement. Each essay should make a clear claim (expressed in a thesis statement) and support it with specific evidence from the text. The argument should unfold in a logical, well-organized fashion and be framed by a compelling introduction and conclusion. Formatting guidelines are below. I will accept revisions for the first essay.
Formatting guidelines: All papers should be in 11- or 12-point type, double-spaced, using Times New Roman or another standard, readable font, and not in italics. Margins should be 1 inch all around. Any citations should use Chicago style (for a helpful overview see the “Quick Guide” at [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html)).

Late policy: Papers will be docked a half-grade for each day they are late (e.g., from A to A-).

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s ideas or words in your writing without acknowledging the source. It is a serious offense, and may result in failing the class and suspension from the university. When in doubt, see me or consult the student resources listed by Brandeis Library & Technology Services ([https://lts.brandeis.edu/courses/instruction/academic-integrity/index.html](https://lts.brandeis.edu/courses/instruction/academic-integrity/index.html)), as well as this handout on “How to avoid plagiarism” ([http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html](http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html)).

Writing Center: Students who want additional help with their writing are encouraged to visit the campus Writing Center ([http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/](http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/)); Goldfarb Main Library, Room 107; 781-736-2130; writingcenter@brandeis.edu).

Electronic devices: Computers and tablets are allowed during class for taking and reviewing notes only. Browsing the Internet, checking email or Facebook, etc. is not allowed during class; if I find you doing those things I will bar you from bringing your device to future classes. Cell phone and smartphone use during class is prohibited.

Communications: Any changes to the syllabus or class schedule, including accommodations for snow days, will be communicated via the class email list and posted on Latte. Please plan to check your university email account and Latte daily to keep informed.

Disabilities: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.