

English 4324-001: Early American Literature
TTh 1:00 – 2:25
Dr. John David Miles
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Feeling American: The Production and Cultivation of Emotion in Early America

Course Description

In the preface to her 1835 novel *The Linwoods* about the American Revolutionary War, Catharine Maria Sedgwick declares it her goal to “exhibit the feelings of the times,” beyond the “swashing and martial outside” of battle records and historical events. So too will be our goal in this class, as we will read deeply in the literature of early America to see how literary works seek to harness and define human emotions. We will track the “feelings of the times” through an examination of quasi-political documents that hope to inculcate communal fellow-feeling in their audience, in poetry that records the private and even intimate attachments between individuals, as well as in novels that seek to cultivate the proper emotional attachments in their audience. Our work will attend to both the material form of literature and its theoretical content, placing texts’ intellectual work within the context of American Puritanism, republican virtue, moral sentiment, and emancipation. Throughout the semester we will consider how literature uses the emotions produced by reading to affect social and political change in the material world.

Our readings will include selections from John Winthrop, Anne Bradstreet, Royal Tyler, Susanna Rowson, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and Solomon Northrup, as well as philosophical tracts by Francis Bacon and Adam Smith. Student progress will be evaluated through a combination of formal papers, quizzes, and exams. Attendance is mandatory and participation is paramount to students’ success.

Course Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

- Recognize and evaluate some of the important themes, characters, and generic shifts in early American literature.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the complex interplay between literary texts and their historical context.
- Interpret important texts from the period and place them in dynamic conversation with one another in order to understand their thematic and generic kinship.
- Understand how the definition and use of human emotions changed during the period in question, as well as how this shift was reflected in and produced by literary texts.
- Produce scholarly writing that actively engages with primary texts and their criticism.