

# Early American Writing

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Year: Senior Sophister

Term: Michelmas Term

ECTS: 10

## Module Outline

This module examines some of the writing which reflects “American” experiences before the establishment of the “Great Republic.” Selected material will represent Native American, Puritan, and slave experiences, together with more recent historical depictions of the development of American literature prior to the 1850s. In particular, this module examines a range of views and literary forms in order to explore the complexities evident in pre-USA America. It therefore covers translations of Native American Trickster Tales, journals, sermons, slave narratives, and autobiographical material, alongside poetry, novels, and short stories from and depicting the period and into the nineteenth century, when “America” as a nation was beginning to gain a sense of itself and of its recent past. The module also then examines later texts set during this time, in order to consider some of the ways in which the early-colonial period continues to be reimagined and re-evaluated as a foundational era in American literature and culture.

**A note of the texts**: Many of the texts covered in the module can be found in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Vol. A, of which there are multiple copies in the library. In addition, scans or electronic versions of many of the texts will be provided on Blackboard in advance of the relevant class.

## Class Schedule

**Week 1**: Introduction.

**Week 2**: Native American Folktales (scans provided on Blackboard).

**Week 3**: Mary Rowlandson, *The Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs Mary Rowlandson*, and Anne Bradstreet, selected poems.

**Week 4**: Michael Wigglesworth, “The Day of Doom.”

**Week 5**: Thomas Morton’s Maypole: selected passages from *New English Canaan*, and William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (scans provided on Blackboard).

**Week 6**: Witch Trials: Selected passages from Cotton Mather, *Wonders of the Invisible World*.

**Week 7: READING WEEK – NO CLASSES**

**Week 8**: Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*.

**Week 9**: Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte, a Tale of Truth*.

**Week 10**: Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*.

**Week 11**: Maryse Condé, *I, Tituba ... Black Witch of Salem*.

**Week 12:** Conclusions and essay consultation.

## Assessment Details

The module will be assessed by one final essay (5,000-6,000 words).

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, students should be able to:

1. Identify and describe critically the primary characteristics of early American writing.
2. Employ a range of interpretive strategies to analyse these texts using appropriate critical vocabulary and theoretical frameworks.
3. Describe the role played by US culture and history, as well as by related authors and literary movements, as key contexts for the texts discussed on the module.
4. Generate original research questions through the identification of an engagement with relevant critical and primary sources.
5. Evaluate early American writing via written work and oral contributions to class discussions.

## Suggested Further Reading

Armstrong, Nancy and Leonard Tennenhouse. *The Imaginary Puritan: Literature, Intellectual Labor, and the Origins of Personal Life*. Berkeley and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992.

Bergland, Renée L. *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2000.

Caldwell, Patricia. *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Chase, Richard. *The American Novel and its Tradition*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.

Elliott, Emory. Ed. *The Columbia History of the American Novel*. New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1991.

Elliott, Emory. *The Cambridge Introduction to Early American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Emerson, Everett. Ed. *Major Writers of Early American Literature*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972.

Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. London: Paladin, 1970.

Goddu, Teresa A. *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Kolodny, Annette. *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975.

Madsen, Deborah L. *Allegory in America: From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996.

Miller, Perry, *Errand into the Wilderness*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975.

-----, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*. Cambridge, Mass. And London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983.

Stannard, David E. *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture and Social Change*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000.

Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.