Instructor: Jennifer Brady  
Email: jenniferbrady@fas.harvard.edu  
Office: Barker 124  
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10-11

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar focuses on the United States before 1865. Poised halfway between our current moment and the seemingly archaic, superstitious fervor of the Salem Witch Trials, America in the antebellum era was in the process of fitfully, at times reluctantly, becoming modern. We will focus on strange objects—daguerreotypes of dead children, the spectacles created by P. T. Barnum, the seedy newspapers of antebellum New York—and texts that figure the disorienting changes to media, transportation, personhood, and nation that unfolded as the United States settled uneasily into nationhood. Considering literary and subliterary texts, religious beliefs, visual culture, and political practices with an eye to race, gender, sexuality, and class, students will learn about a period that is in many respects deeply alien to contemporary Americans but offers surprising moments of coincidence with the present.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Short Assignments, 3-4 pages each
You will complete 3 short assignments that ask you to follow up on our shared readings—to close-read a text from class or read something extra, to answer a provided research question, or to follow a footnote of your choosing. As you follow a lead outward from our readings, you will engage in analysis and argumentation to make a point about how your additional research and reading extends or reframes our original readings. Assignments should be 3 pages in length—and absolutely no more than 4 pages. Although their object is interpretation and analysis, they do not require central arguments and should not include lengthy introductions. No more than a short paragraph should postpone turning to the actual work of the response.

All students will complete Short Assignment #1, a close-reading of *The Coquette* due on Sept. 19 at noon. Other short assignments are scattered throughout the semester, and students are welcome to choose which prompts and/or deadlines best suit them. All students must complete a total of three short assignments, Short Assignment #1 and two of the following optional short assignments.

- Optional Short Assignment #2, due Oct. 3 at noon—Barnum’s Feejee Mermaid
- Optional Short Assignment #3, due Oct. 10 at noon—The Kingdom of Matthias
• Optional Short Assignment #4, due Nov. 21 at noon—Henry Box Brown in Performance
• Optional Short Assignment #5, due Nov. 28 at noon—Fanny Fern in the *New York Ledger*
• Optional Short Assignment #6, due the Wednesday at noon after we discuss the reading you’re writing about—Follow the Footnote

**Short Essay, 5 pages, due on Oct. 17 at noon**
This assignment asks you to practice skills essential to academic writing and to prepare for the research necessary for your final project. In this paper, you will focus on a single primary text that we have considered together. You will subject this text to close scrutiny, being attentive to language, form, imagery, point-of-view, and other relevant concerns, and then build an original argument from your observations. Your essay also must engage directly and substantively with a work of scholarship that we have read together. Your essay will therefore enter into a critical conversation about the primary text and the concerns of the secondary piece. Broad prompts will be provided well in advance of the due date, and students will also have the opportunity to propose their own topics.

**Final Research Project**
Students will choose from multiple options for the final project, but all will entail substantive research and writing. Note that only the final project itself will be graded, but failure to complete the proposal or short draft will result in a grade penalty on the final project. Extension days may be used on the proposal and short draft, but not on the final essay itself.
• Nov. 14 at noon: Proposal with working bibliography
• Dec. 5 at noon: Short draft (4 pages)
• Dec. 17 at 2pm: Final project (10-12 pages)

Final project options:
• A research essay on the topic of your choosing
• Extra Novel Project
• *Additional options will be forthcoming*

**Grading Percentages:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short writing assignments (3)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Essay</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COURSE POLICIES**

**Presence and Participation:** I expect you to attend class every week. Students are allowed a single absence, no questions asked. Use this absence strategically, if at all, because each additional absence will reduce your participation grade and therefore your final grade by half a percentage point (i.e., from 19.5 points to 19 points, or from a 92 to a 91.5). Emergencies are the only exception to this rule; interviews, extracurricular engagements, etc., are not. This
course is a seminar, and I therefore expect you to engage substantively in class discussion every week. Strong participation often depends on good preparation. You should do your reading well: mark up your book, article, etc.; take notes for yourself in the margins; underline important passages; turn down pages to which you want to return. Please come to each class with all materials, including assigned texts and copies of texts from our course website. If you do not have copies of the week’s readings in seminar, your participation grade will be lowered. If you have questions or concerns about your class participation at any time, please feel free to meet with me.

**Subject material:** Our subject matter can be divisive and offensive and is certainly worthy of scrutiny and critique. However, I encourage you to approach the material as an important (if often difficult) part of history and culture, meant to spark lively discussion about its past and its present significance. You are welcome to come speak with me if you have any concerns.

**Pronouns:** Preferred gender pronouns will be respected by everyone in our class. I will default to the pronouns you have selected on my.harvard; if you have other preferences, please let me know. Address your fellow students directly by name or “you” when responding to a point made by your classmates, with whom you are in conversation during our discussions.

**Written Work:** Students may build on their work throughout the semester if they so choose. A short assignment can be developed into the short essay, the short essay can be developed and expanded into the final research essay, etc. In returning to previous work, however, students must substantively revise, revisit, and otherwise reconsider their initial ideas and prose. Work that does not attempt and accomplish this serious work of revision will be penalized.

**Extensions and Late Assignments:** Everyone will start with three extension days to be used at your discretion and on any assignment except the final essay itself. You do not need to ask for an extension, but can use these days as necessary; however, I would appreciate your letting me know that you’re using extension days on a given assignment. Your three days may be used in any combination (e.g., one day for the short essay, two days for Writing Assignment #4), but once you have used all three extension days, no more extensions will be allowed except in extreme circumstances. Late assignments will be marked down one level for each 24-hour period they are late (e.g., an A- becomes a B+, a C+ becomes a C, etc.).

**Printing and Screens:** Many of our course readings are PDFs, so please try to bring hard copies to class. It is to your advantage as a reader to fully annotate and mark up readings, so try to limit screens in the classroom. Since most of our class time will be spent in talking with each other, I encourage you to think of class as a space to generate questions and discussion, rather than notes. If you are reading in class from a screen, please do not use the keyboard. It is not appropriate to use phones during discussion.

**Accommodations:** If you need academic adjustments or accommodations in this course, please speak with me and present your letter from the [Accessible Education Office](http://www.accessibleeducation.harvard.edu) (AEO), which is a resource for students with disabilities and temporary health conditions who may require
accommodations to fully participate in all aspects of Harvard student life. If you wish to notify me, please do so by the end of the second week of the term so that I may respond in a timely manner, since accommodations are not retroactive. The AEO consults with any student who experiences barriers related to physical or mental health, or learning disabilities, and works collaboratively with students and their faculty. Students are not required to share their diagnoses or clinical documentation with anyone outside of the AEO, but you may wish to notify me if there are potentially inaccessible elements of this course. All discussions will remain as confidential as possible within the parameters of FERPA; I may consult AEO to discuss appropriate implementation. Please be in touch with the AEO directly if you are not yet registered.

The Harvard College Honor Code, Academic Integrity, and Collaboration:
Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s ideas or language as your own, whether intentionally or not. It is in most cases a serious violation of ethics and policy, punishable by grading penalties and referral to the Honor Council for disciplinary action.

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are welcome to discuss our readings and your ideas about them with your peers. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. If you find yourself using the idea or words of another scholar—whether that scholar sits across the table from you in seminar or published a book that you are reading—you must cite that idea and/or those words. In all written work you submit, you must adhere to standard citation practices, including citing any books, articles, websites, etc., that have helped you. Please use either MLA or Chicago citation methods. Finally, I expect you to be familiar with the Harvard Guide to Using Sources, which is available at http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu.

RESOURCES OF INTEREST

General:
Electronic Databases of Primary Sources, available through HOLLIS at
https://databases.hollis.harvard.edu/:
Accessible Archives (including African American Newspapers: The 19th Century)
American Broadsides and Ephemera
America’s Historical Newspapers
ProQuest Historical Newspapers
American Periodicals
Early American Imprints, Series I (1639-1800) and Series II (1801-1819)
Everyday Life and Women in America, c.1800-1920

Online Databases:
Chronicle America, Library of Congress: https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/

Human:
Steve Kuehler, Research Librarian for History & Literature, kuehler@fas.harvard.edu

REQUIRED TEXTS

Henry Box Brown, Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written by Himself (University of North Carolina Press, 2008)
Fanny Fern, Ruth Hall (Penguin, 1997)
George Foster, New York By Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches (Univ. of California Press, 1990)
Hannah Foster, The Coquette (Oxford University Press, 1987)

*** Please do your best to read and bring to class the editions specified. Texts are available for rental or purchase at the Harvard Coop and on reserve at Lamont Library. You can use this link to rent or purchase your books from the Harvard Coop: https://tinyurl.com/300-HSLT-90DO-F18-1. PDFs of other readings are available on the course Canvas site. If you encounter any problems (financial or otherwise) accessing course material, please get in touch with me.
SCHEDULE OF READING & WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1, Sept. 7: Course Introduction

Week 2, Sept. 14: The Novel
Hannah Foster, *The Coquette* (1797)

DUE on Wed., Sept. 19, at noon: Short Assignment #1—Close-reading *The Coquette*

Week 3, Sept. 21: The Dead
Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Experience” (1844)

Week 4, Sept. 28: The Humbug
Richard Adams Locke, *The Moon Hoax; or, A Discovery that the Moon Has a Vast Population of Human Beings* (1859)
***After class: optional visit to the Peabody Museum to view the Feejee Mermaid

DUE on Wed., Oct. 3, at noon: Optional Short Assignment #2—Barnum’sFeejee Mermaid

Week 5, Oct. 5: The Prophet

DUE on Wed., Oct. 10, at noon: Optional Short Assignment #3—The Kingdom of Matthias
**Week 6, Oct. 12: The City**
George Foster, *New York By Gas-Light* (1850)
David Henkin, Chapter 3: “Commercial Impudence and the Dictatorship of the Perpendicular: Signs of the City” in *City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York* (1998), pp. 69-100

DUE on Wed., Oct. 17, at noon: Short Essay

**Week 7, Oct. 19: The Body**
Robert Montgomery Bird, *Sheppard Lee: Written by Himself* (1836), Books I-IV

**Week 8, Oct. 26: The Body, cont.**
Bird, *Sheppard Lee*, Books V-VIII

**Week 9, Nov. 2: The Vanishing Indian**
William Apess, *A Son of the Forest* (1831)

**Week 10, Nov. 9: The Escape Artist**
Henry Box Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written by Himself* (1851)

DUE on Wed., Nov. 14, at noon: Final project proposal

**Week 11, Nov. 16: The Pseudonym**
Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall* (1854)
Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860” (1966)

DUE on Wed., Nov. 21, at noon: Optional Short Assignment #4—Henry Box Brown in Performance

**Week 12, Nov. 23: THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS**
DUE on Wed., Nov. 28, at noon: Optional Short Assignment #5—Fanny Fern in the *New York Ledger*

**Week 13, Nov. 30: The Archive**  

DUE on Wed., Dec. 5, at noon: Final project short draft

DUE on Mon, Dec. 17, at 2pm: Final project