

Jonathan Gross

Professor

Department of English

773 325-1780

MoWe 9: 40AM - 11: 10AM

Byrne Hall Room 466

Office Hours: 11:30-12:30 p.m.

Focal Point Seminar: Thomas Jefferson's Scrapbooks

Course Description:

This course on Thomas Jefferson's Scrapbooks will consider Jefferson's literary tastes as they reflect his attitude towards nation, family, and romantic love. Jefferson greeted visitors to the White House in corduroys and slippers. How did this ostentatiously democratic style reflect views expressed in his writings? In what ways did Jefferson's "Declaration of Independence" inaugurate a new political style connected to the Republican party he helped found? What was Jefferson's attitude towards the Supreme Court, Federalism, and his predecessor John Adams? To answer these questions, we will read the scrapbooks he put together for his grand-daughters, focusing on themes of nation, family, and romantic love. Jefferson's poems about dating, marriage, death, --his "Ode on Potatoes", on July 4th, on libertinism, sentimentality, toothaches and even elegies to George Washington and Alexander Hamilton-- give us insight into his sense of humor and the broad range of his interests. We will read poems by Thomas Moore, Peter Pindar, Robert Burns, Anna Barbauld, Helen Maria Williams, novels by Richard Wright (*Native Son*) and William Styron (*Confessions of Nat Turner*) to get some purchase on Jefferson's views on orientalism, race, architecture, democracy and other themes that reflect the transition from the Enlightenment to the Age of Romanticism. One leitmotif of this course is that Jefferson was America's first Romantic, and the course will investigate the meaning of Romanticism as a critical term that might be applied across the disciplines of literature, architecture, and political writing.

Week 1: "Declaration of Independence" and Jefferson's Poems on Nation (1-172, selections); In this class, we will read "Ode to Columbia's Favourite Son"; "Jefferson and Liberty"; "The Devil and the Consul" as examples of nationalist poems. We will read "His Majesty's Birth Day" by H.J. Pye which Jefferson clipped to contrast with "Song for July 4th, 1805" by R.T. Paine. How did English and American notions of liberty differ? How did Jefferson wish July 4th to be celebrated? What does this tell us about his ideas about democracy?

Week 2. *Notes on the State of Virginia*. This week will be devoted to considering myths of Jefferson. We will read Merril Peterson's study, *The Image of Jefferson in the American Mind* (45 page excerpt on reserve reading) to consider how various presidents have coopted Jefferson's legacy. We will then turn to poems celebrating the Lewis and Clark Treaty, particularly Joel Barlow's "'On the Discoveries of Captain Lewis.'" Why did Jefferson select Joel Barlow to write a poem about his administration. Why was Barlow America's first national poet? America's Homer?

Week 3. Elegies of Founding Fathers: Washington, Hamilton and Adams. Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College." Jefferson shared with the graveyard poets, a proto-romantic view of death, graveyards, and melancholy. How do the poems he collected commemorating the deaths of Washington, Hamilton, and Adams show Jefferson to be part of a proto-Romantic culture that considered death and melancholy productive of art and creative expression?

Week 4. Jefferson's Orientalism. This class will look at Jefferson's poems such as "A Very Ancient Chinese Ode" and "A Persian Gazel," "A Persian Song" by Hafiz"; "An Ode from Hafiz" to determine whether Jefferson himself might be characterized as an orientalist. . How did Jefferson design Monticello in such a way as to indicate his interest in Oriental pavilions, and other architectural innovations. By reading Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and Shelley's "Ozymandias", alongside an account of the life of Sir William Jones (chief translator of Eastern poetry verse in Jefferson's day), we will consider the extent to which Jefferson's orientalism was a product of its time.

Week 5. Richard Wright, **Native Son**. By reading a contemporary novel set in Chicago, we will consider the modern ramifications of the United States racial landscape. This class will consider the legacy of race in the United States with short readings from Annette Gordon Reed's "The Hemings of Monticello" and poems Jefferson selected from his scrapbook, including "The Negro Boy's Tale," by the Quaker poetess Amelia Opie. We will read a poem Jefferson clipped entitled "Sadi the Moor" in order to determine his ideas about slavery, alongside his Notes on Virginia, discussed in week 2.

Week 6. Richard Wright, **Native Son**.

Week 7. Gothic Fiction and Jefferson: "Leonora"; what was the influence of Walter Scott on Thomas Jefferson? Why did this poem, by Burger but translated by Scott, influence Jefferson and why did he collect other gothic poems by Selleck Osborn? What relationship does it have to contemporary gothic such as Richard Wright, or the work we'll read for this class, William Styron's **Confessions of Nat Turner**

Week 8. Gothic Fiction and Jefferson (continued): William Styron, **Confessions of Nat Turner**. What anxieties did Jefferson harbor about slavery, and slave rebellions in Haiti (Toussaint L'Ouverture, for example) as depicted in Reed's biographical study. How are these reflected in the fiction by southern writers such as Styron? What was the controversy surrounding Styron's novel. What is your own response to this controversy?

Week 9. Jefferson and the Education of Young Girls. We will read "A Matrimonial thought," "Satire on Snuff," "Address to My Segar," "Advice to Young Women" "Three Things a Good Wife Should be Like", "The Test of Conjugal Love", "The Dutiful Wife. A Lyric Tale" "On Receiving a Nosegay from a Libertine," "On Suicide", "My Mother" and "My Daughter, "The Widow" by Robert Southey to consider attitudes towards women's education.

Week 10. Jefferson and Children's Literature: How has Jefferson's choices in children's literature, such as William Roscoe's "The Butterfly's Feast and the Grasshopper's Ball" influenced modern day tastes, such as *The Cat in the Hat* and *Where The Wild Things Are*?

For each week: please submit 3 questions raised by the reading. Answer one of them in a paragraph of no more than 500 words. You will be graded by check, check plus, and check minus. Check minus assignments must be redone (usually the problem is grammatical and stylistic, but sometimes includes content). You may be asked to post your responses on blackboard.

Grade Distribution

20% Abstract and weekly class assignments. The abstract is due during Week Four; it is a 500 word abstract announcing your topic for your final paper. Weekly questions should be grammatical and thoughtful and will be evaluated based on the class discussion they generate.

30% Rough Draft of Final Paper: due Week 8

50% Final Paper: due during finals week; 17 pages, plus annotated bibliography. Students will have the option of offering a close reading of 7 poems from Jefferson's scrapbooks or writing a traditional research paper. Both papers will need to draw on fiction and non-fiction, one biographical source, and one critical study of Jefferson. A list of suggested readings is provided below.

Close Reading. Students who opt to do the close reading of poems will address the genre, style, and subject of each poem, considering the newspaper in which it appeared and the representation of women and young girls. The poems selected for analysis in this paper should address one of three topics: nation, family, or Romantic love. When completing this assignment, students will need to historicize their notions of love (or family, or nation) by considering how Jefferson's 18th century views were shaped by his education and reading. Final papers that offer close readings of these poems will not solely be concerned with metaphor, figurative language and other devices. Students will be expected to relate these poems to documents Jefferson wrote, particularly his "Declaration of Independence" and "Notes on the State of Virginia" citing specific passages from his work and letters to such figures as John Adams that provide insight into the occasional poetry he clipped from the newspapers. A close reading of Wright or Styron should include at least 5 poems from Jefferson's scrapbooks and focus primarily on the 18th century context that produced these more modern works.

Research Paper. Students who opt to do the research paper can focus on a political tract by Jefferson, as illuminated by his literary tastes, or a literary text that he chose, as illuminated by his political writings. In each case, the focus of the paper should be interdisciplinary, drawing on the fields of political science, literature, and history (or some other field, such as architecture, painting, and the fine arts). The point of the assignment

is to immerse yourself in Jefferson's world, in order to determine how his ideas about democracy, children's literature, romanticism, neoclassicism, or some other subject inform his literary tastes. Papers should be drawn from poems discussed in class.

Required Readings:

Jonathan Gross, *Thomas Jefferson's Scrapbooks: Poems of Nation, Family, and Romantic Love* (Steerforth, 2006).

Thomas Jefferson: **Writings**, ed. by Adrienne Koch (Modern Library).

Richard Wright, **Native Son**

William Styron, **Confessions of Nat Turner**

Suggested Readings:

Douglas Wilson, *The Literary Commonplace Book of Thomas Jefferson*

Jay Fleigelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance*

Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans*

James Basker, ed. *Amazing Grace, An Anthology of Poems about Slavery, 1660-1810.*

Annette Gordon Reed, *The Hemings of Monticello*

Jan Lewis, Essay on Thomas Jefferson's Daughters from *Legacies of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. by Peter Onus

- Students can discuss and analyze work from at least three different fields in their written work for the course. The three fields we will draw on in this course are art history, literature, and political science. We will read such documents as Notes on Virginia, Declaration of Independence, and other works of history and political science from the vantage point of literary critics, considering how Jefferson's democratic style of address gives us insight into the political party he helped to create.

- Students can participate actively in advancing the collective intellectual understanding of the course topic through class discussions. Class discussion will involve close readings of poems and oral reports by students presenting various aspects of Jefferson's career, including his governorship, Vice presidency under Adams, and his literary relations with literary figures such as Joel Barlow and newspaper editors.

- Students can distinguish between primary and secondary sources, and to assess varying degrees of mediation and interpretation in specific source materials. We will look at documents written by Jefferson, including his letters to John Adams, as well as poems selected by him for his grand-daughters, and books he recommended to friends. This distinction between primary and secondary sources

will be crucial in determining what Jefferson read, how it affected what he wrote, and how he became part of a movement known generally as Romanticism.

- Students can construct arguments based on evidence and the work and interpretations of other sources. For the most part, the focus of this seminar will be on writing a research paper that allows students to come to their own view of who Jefferson was and how various scholars, including Dumas Malone, Douglas Wilson, and Annette Gordon-Reed, have responded to his political and literary career.
- Students can revise papers in response to the instructor's comments. According to the syllabus, an abstract and a draft of a 10 page paper will be due at mid-term. At the end of the course, the full paper will be due.
- Students can produce a project with a central argument, in which all parts of the project support the central argument. The final paper is thesis driven and involves integrating close readings of materials read in class to further that argument.

Liberal Studies Goals

Provide a brief account of the ways in which your course would address the Liberal Studies goals of:

- Reflectiveness: Students will have a chance to challenge their preconceptions about American founding fathers by considering Jefferson's contributions to jurisprudence, female education, literary life in the United States and its reflection in present-day circumstances. How did the literary world of Jefferson, which one critic, Daniel Boorstin, describes as "lost," continue in present day terms in the library of congress?
- Value consciousness: We will examine the values implicit in Jefferson's literary choices, specifically the poems he hoped his grand-daughters would read.
- Critical and creative thinking: Students will have a chance to respond to poetry in a creative way, considering links between Jefferson's political writings, his literary tastes, and his selection of reading materials for members of his

immediate family, especially his daughter Ellen. They will do this in a 17 page paper, with an annotated bibliography.

- Multicultural perspective: Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemings will be thoroughly covered, as well as his attitude towards slavery as reflected in the poems on slavery which are in his scrapbooks but have not always been part of the historical record. We will look at Notes on Virginia to gain further ideas about his view of Virginia as a multicultural state, and novels by Richard Wright and William Styron.

Writing Assignments

Students will submit an abstract (500 words), a ten-page rough draft, and a 15-17 page final paper, not including a one page annotated bibliography. There will be some short, in class, writing assignments, with students writing questions as a response to the reading.