

The University of Texas at El Paso

Department of English

American Fiction to 1900
English 4317 (CRN: 18905)
 Online Course Scheduled: T/R 1:30 – 2:50 p.m.

Fall 2020

Office Hrs: Tuesdays, 1:30 – 3:00, via Zoom; and
 separately by appointment
 Hudspeth Hall, Rm. 218 (for future reference!)
 Phone: 747-6265

Dr. Robert Gunn

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This course offers a survey of American fiction, from its popular emergence in the 1820s, through the challenging and expansive masterworks of mid-century, to its diverse and provocative manifestations at the end of the 1800s. Careful attention will be paid to traditional categories of literary periodicity; but rather than reading key artifacts of romanticism, realism, and naturalism as isolated aesthetic achievements, our goal will be to locate such key innovations in literary practice in terms of the evolving political, social, and economic conditions of the nineteenth century. This project asks us to be careful and speculative readers, and promises to reward us with a dynamic view of the era while foregrounding many key fundamental questions about the discourse of the novel itself. What kinds of knowledge does fiction produce? How might we understand the knowledges of fiction to differ from those of other kinds of narrative productions, such as history or political speech? How might we perceive the relays and interactions between fiction and everyday life? Topics and themes to be addressed include: the rise of the novel and the short story; the evolving profession of authorship; history and novelistic historiography; democracy, revolution, and sectarian strife; ongoing problems of race, gender, and class; tradition and innovation in literary artistic practice; industrialism and pastoral America; recognition, representation, justice, and the discourse of the novel.

Course Format:

This is a fully-online course that combines synchronous course sessions on Zoom (on Thursdays during scheduled sessions, unless otherwise noted) with a robust online reading journal and response component on an asynchronous basis. For those of you new to online coursework, have no fear. To put the above matters a little more simply, you'll do your course work for Tuesdays on your own time; on Thursdays, we will meet online to discuss our readings as a group. As you will see from our Schedule of Readings below, each week is organized by date in the manner of a conventional in-person literature course, with a set of readings designated for Tuesday, and another designated for Thursday. But rather than meet at the same time on Tuesdays (i.e., as you normally would, with that set of readings completed and prepared for class), your job will be to post a short 250-300 word response to one aspect of that reading in our Blackboard Discussion area; you will also respond briefly but substantively to one of your classmates' posts (see details below). On Thursdays, we will convene online in a full-class Zoom session to discuss Thursday's readings in real time, and also address questions that have been generated on the Discussion Board. So our primary coursework will take place in two separate venues, but they will intersect in meaningful ways on an ongoing basis. In addition to these components, there will be two scheduled exams (a midterm and a final, both administered via Blackboard), and a final research paper (also submitted via Blackboard).

Required Texts (available at the UTEP bookstore):Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette* (Oxford)James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (Penguin)Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (Penguin)Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor, and Other Stories* (Penguin)*Four Stories by American Women: Rebecca Harding Davis, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sarah Orne Jewett, Edith Wharton.* Ed. Cynthia Griffin Wolf (Penguin)William Wells Brown, *Clotel; Or, the President's Daughter* (Bedford)Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard, *The Morgesons* (Penguin)Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (California)

Schedule of Readings (to be completed by corresponding date). “**Lsn**” and “**Date**” appearing in **bold, underlined turquoise** (these are typically Thursdays) indicate sessions to be held via Zoom, at the scheduled class time of 12:00 p.m.

Lsn.	Date	Assignment
1	Aug. 25	Introductions. “America and its Fictions”
2	Aug. 27	Epistolarity and Novelistic Form Hannah Webster Foster, <i>The Coquette; Or, the History of Eliza Wharton</i> (Introduction; pp. 1-53)
3	Sep. 1	Coquettishness and the Gentleman Rake Foster, <i>The Coquette</i> , cont’d (53-115)
4	Sep. 3	Scandal, Seduction, and Public Morality Foster, <i>The Coquette</i> , cont’d (115-end)
5	Sep. 8	Prefatory Matters: Language and Cooper’s Indians James Fenimore Cooper, <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> (1826), Prefaces-ch. 8 (1-80)
6	Sep. 10	The “Man Without a Cross” and the American Homosocial Romance Cooper, <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> , cont’d, ch. 9-22 (81-231)
7	Sep. 15	“The Cult of the Vanishing Indian” Cooper, <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> , cont’d, ch. 23-end (232-350)
8	Sep. 17	The American Gothic: Call it Sleep Edgar Allan Poe, “The Black Cat” (1843) (Blackboard)
9	Sep. 22	Hero as Super-genius: Poe’s Master Detective Edgar Allan Poe, “The Purloined Letter” (1845) (Blackboard)
10	Sep. 24	Hawthorne’s Unlikely Heroine: Spinster in the Marketplace Nathaniel Hawthorne, <i>The House of the Seven Gables</i> (1851), ch. 1-6
11	Sep. 29	The Daguerreotypist and the Ingénue Nathaniel Hawthorne, <i>The House of the Seven Gables</i> , cont’d, ch. 7-14

12	Oct. 1	Happily Ever After?: Storytelling and the Politics of Closure (I) Hawthorne, <i>The House of the Seven Gables</i> , cont'd, ch. 15-end
13	Oct. 6	MIDTERM
14	Oct. 8	Inscrutable Defiance: "I prefer not to" Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853)
15	Oct. 13	Historical Fictions... William Wells Brown, <i>Clotel; Or, the President's Daughter</i> (1853), "Introduction" (3-29); "Memoir of the Author" (49-81)
16	Oct. 15	...and Fictions of History William Wells Brown, <i>Clotel</i> , cont'd, chapters 1-10 (82-131)
17	Oct. 20	The Meanings of Heroic Sacrifice Brown, <i>Clotel</i> , cont'd, ch. 11-end (132-227); "Sources and Revisions" (231-37)
18	Oct. 22	Laboring Bodies and Artistic Selfhood Rebecca Harding Davis, <i>Life in the Iron Mills</i> (1861)
19	Oct. 27	Gender Identity and the Ends of Innocence Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard, <i>The Morgesons</i> (1862) (Intro.-102)
20	Oct. 29	Sexuality, Selfhood, and Rebellion Stoddard, <i>The Morgesons</i> , cont'd. (102-187)
21	Nov. 3	Still Lives Stoddard, <i>The Morgesons</i> , cont'd. (187-end)
22	Nov. 5	Prototype of American Boyhood Mark Twain, <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> (1884), ch. 1-11 (1-76)
23	Nov. 10	The Homosocial Romance, Revisited Mark Twain, <i>Huck Finn</i> , cont'd, ch. 12-22 (77-195)
24	Nov. 12	"All right, I'll go to hell then": Figuring the Individual's Conscience (I) Twain, <i>Huck Finn</i> , cont'd, ch. 23-32 (196-282)
25	Nov. 17	Happily Ever After?: Storytelling and the Politics of Closure (II) Twain, <i>Huck Finn</i> , cont'd., ch. 33-end (283-364)
26	Nov. 19	Gender, Insanity, and Defiance Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (1892)
27	Nov. 24	Voiceless Beauty: Law, Mutiny, and the Aesthetics of Justice Herman Melville, "Billy Budd, Sailor"
Final Paper/Melville Discussion – Meet on Zoom		

Nov. 26	THANKSGIVING
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28	Dec. 1	Online Final Paper Workshopping – Meet on Zoom
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29	Dec. 3	“Struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang!” Herman Melville, “Billy Budd, Sailor,” continued.
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Dec. 7	Final Paper Due on Blackboard, 11:59 p.m.
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A Final Exam will be administered at a date and time to be announced by the University during the week of December 7th-11th.

Course Requirements:

Reading of required texts. The reading load for this course is substantial; it is therefore important that you stay current in your work. Additionally, many of these texts can be quite challenging to read; to really understand them, you will need to read them more than once. As Thoreau said, reading “in a high sense” is “not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the nobler faculties to sleep the while, but what we have to stand on tiptoe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to” (*Walden*, “Reading”). Let us be readers on Thoreau’s model. Practically speaking, this means re-reading, underlining, making marginal notes, writing provocative questions and observations to bring with you to class, and actively connecting ideas and techniques between the texts we read.

Attendance and Participation (10%): Although I will lecture frequently—usually for some introductory portion of our Zoom session, and in some short introductory videos for our Tuesday readings—your ongoing participation is vital to your learning and to the success of the course for all. Come to our sessions prepared to share your questions and observations. The more involved you are on a weekly basis—in online reading journal responses, in full group discussion, and in breakout sessions—the more you will learn and enjoy. Faithful attendance is an important component of this, and is expected. Please be advised that, upon your fourth unexcused absence from our Zoom sessions, you will either be dropped from the course (i.e., prior to the University drop deadline of October 30th), or will fail the course (after October 30th). In keeping with standard departmental policy, absences are only excusable in cases of documented family or medical emergency.

Online Reading Journal and Responses (30 %, graded cumulatively): Each student will be required to post a one-page (roughly 250-300 words) reading journal entry each week under the “Discussion” section of our course Blackboard site. **Entries must be posted by 1:30 p.m. every Tuesday**, and should discuss material from that day’s reading assignment. You needn’t discuss every text assigned (some days have several), nor do you need to discuss your chosen text comprehensively. Instead, your job is to find some aspect of a text you find interesting and important, show us why you find it to be so, and offer it up for discussion, interpretation, and analysis. You are expected to offer an entry each week, except for the week of October 6th (midterm), and the weeks of November 24th and November 29th (the last two weeks of the course, in which we will be meeting via Zoom on Tuesdays). Use the journal entries to articulate the questions and ideas you develop in the course of your reading, and to reflect on the developing themes of the class—always taking care to respond specifically to relevant passages from the text. Although somewhat informal, these entries are expected to consist of deliberative, thoughtful paragraphs that are free of grammatical error. In these reading journal entries, you must:

- **Introduce** and **contextualize** the topic under review, briefly. A sentence or two is fine. What have you observed that begs closer scrutiny? How might exploring it promise to open up a deeper understanding of the text in question?
- **Incorporate** a minimum of one quotation in your discussion. Quoted passages are the centerpieces of academic argument, the evidence we use to develop our interpretations and analysis. If you find it helpful to do so by way of comparison, you are welcome to include quotations from, or references to, other texts from the syllabus we've explored already. But these should be offered in the service of your interpretation of the principal text under review.
- **Offer some provisional reflections** about the meaning and significance of the particular passages you've chosen to discuss. How, and why, is the passage (or passages) you've chosen important? What can a reader gain by seeing the text as you see it?

In addition, each student will be required to post a short **responses** to the online journal entries posted by someone else in the class. Try to respond to a different person each week. Good responses will strive to add further insight and elaboration to the original points made; one should not seek out arguments to rebut, but rather claims to develop, amplify, and extend. Granted, some differences of opinion are inevitable--but responders should always maintain a tone of civility and respect for the writers and opinions to whom and to which they are responding. Responses will be due 48 hours after the due-dates of the original journal entries, i.e., by 3:00 p.m. on each Thursday.

Final Paper (20%): A longer Term Paper (7-10 pages) will be due on Monday, Dec. 7th. I will provide more information on this as the class unfolds, but you may write on any topic that bears relevantly on our work in the course. I will also have suggestions for you, depending on your interests. Please feel free to talk to me during my office hours to help develop ideas. MLA bibliographical guidelines are to be followed.

Midterm & Final Examinations (20%; 20%): Details to follow.

A Note on Online Etiquette and Decorum: Let us try to offer respect and good cheer to one another, in all of our online exchanges—both in our written exchanges on Blackboard, and in our real-time interactions via Zoom. Discussing things online can sometimes feel distant and alienating, but we can do much to overcome that simply by observing the same small customs of public etiquette and civility we employ in the classroom under normal circumstances. So, for example, when you are in a breakout session with your peers, be sure to introduce yourself and refer to other folks by name. Follow up on other people's comments and questions in large-group discussion, just as you would in a regular class, and give credit when you hear something smart. These things may seem small, but they make a big difference. In addition, in our Zoom sessions be sure to have your camera turned on for the duration of our class sessions. It's ok if you want to employ a virtual background, but it's important that we all see one another and know that we're all on the same page, working towards a common goal. Many thanks in advance.