

The University of Texas at El Paso

Department of English

American Fiction to 1900
English 4317 (CRN: 18578)
 M/W 3:00 – 4:20 p.m., Hudspeth 100

Fall 2021

Office Hrs: M/W, 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., &
 otherwise by appointment, [via Zoom](#)
 Hudspeth Hall, Rm. 218
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This course offers a survey of American fiction, from its popular emergence at the end of the 18th Century, 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 conspiracy; developing issues of race, gender, and class; tradition and innovation in literary artistic practice; industrialism and pastoral America; recognition, representation, justice; and slavery, individualism, and the meanings of freedom.

Required Texts (available at the UTEP bookstore):

Charles Brockden Brown, *Ormond; Or, the Secret Witness* (Broadview)
 James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (Penguin)
 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (Bedford)
 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* (Penguin)
 Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard, *The Morgesons* (Penguin)

Schedule of Readings (to be completed by corresponding date). “(Blackboard)” indicates item made available on Blackboard.

Lsn.	Date	Assignment
1	Aug. 23	Introductions. “America and its Fictions”
2	Aug. 25	Charles Brockden Brown’s <i>Ormond</i>: 18th-Century Contexts Charles Brockden Brown, “The Difference Between History and Romance” (B); “Judith Sargent Murray, “On the Equality of the Sexes” (B); Excerpt from John Robison, <i>Proofs of a Conspiracy Against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies</i> (B); Jedidiah Morse, Excerpt from “A Sermon, preached at Charlestown,

		Nov. 29, 1798..." (B) *Murray, Robison, and Morse reprinted in <i>Ormond</i> , pp. 279-295
3	Aug. 30	Catastrophe and Collapse in Charles Brockden Brown's New York Charles Brockden Brown, <i>Ormond; Or, the Secret Witness</i> , ch. 1-10 (Introduction; pp. 37-115)
4	Sep. 1	Conspiracy and Contagion in Philadelphia Brown, <i>Ormond</i> , cont'd, ch. 11-1 (115-163)
	Sep. 6	LABOR DAY – NO CLASS (keep reading Brown)
5	Sep. 8	Conspiracy, Contagion, and Transatlantic Revolution Brown, <i>Ormond</i> , cont'd., ch. 16-end (163-276)
6	Sep. 13	Prefatory Matters: Language and Cooper's Indigenous America James Fenimore Cooper, <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> (1826), Prefaces-ch. 8 (1-80)
7	Sep. 15	The "Man Without a Cross" and the American Homosocial Romance Cooper, <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> , cont'd, ch. 9-15 (81-155)
8	Sep. 20	Race, Romance, and Revenge Cooper, <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> , cont'd, ch. 16-25 (156-266)
9	Sep. 22	"The Cult of the Vanishing Indian" Cooper, <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> , cont'd, ch. 23-end (267-350)
10	Sep. 27	The American Gothic: Call it Sleep Edgar Allan Poe, "The Black Cat" (1843) (Blackboard)
11	Sep. 29	Hero as Supergenius: Poe's Master Detective Edgar Allan Poe, "The Purloined Letter" (1845) (Blackboard)
12	Oct. 4	New England Cultures of Reform: Brook Farm and "The Veiled Lady" Hawthorne, <i>The Blithedale Romance</i> (Preface, chapters 1-7); Louisa May Alcott, "Transcendental Wild Oats" (366-80); The Brook Farm Phalanx, Prospectus for <i>The Harbinger</i> (433-40); Hawthorne, <i>Letters to Sophia Peabody</i> (425-25).
13	Oct. 6	The Blithedale Romance: Spiritualism, Mesmerism, and Public Spectacle <i>The Blithedale Romance</i> , cont'd (chapters 8-20); Harriet Martineau, excerpt from "Miss Martineau on Mesmerism" (300-10); Margaret Fuller, excerpt from "The New Science; or, the Philosophy of Mesmerism or Animal Magnetism" (310-12).
14	Oct. 11	Class cancelled (work on your papers!)
15	Oct. 13	The Blithedale Romance (III): Gender and Reform <i>The Blithedale Romance</i> , cont'd (chapters 21-end), Hawthorne, "On Margaret Fuller" (490-92); from Hawthorne's Journal (B) Recommended: Richard Brodhead, "Veiled Ladies: Toward a History of Antebellum Entertainment" (B)

16	Oct. 18	Inscrutable Defiance: “I prefer not to” Herman Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (1853)
		Paper #1 Due
17	Oct. 20	MIDTERM
18	Oct. 25	Historical Fictions... William Wells Brown, <i>Clotel; Or, the President’s Daughter</i> (1853), “Introduction”; “Memoir of the Author”
19	Oct. 27	...and Fictions of History William Wells Brown, <i>Clotel</i> , cont’d, chapters 1-10
20	Nov. 1	The Meanings of Heroic Sacrifice Brown, <i>Clotel</i> , cont’d, ch. 11-end
21	Nov. 3	Laboring Bodies and Artistic Selfhood Rebecca Harding Davis, <i>Life in the Iron Mills</i> (1861)
22	Nov. 8	Gender Identity and the Ends of Innocence Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard, <i>The Morgesons</i> (1862) (Intro.-102)
23	Nov. 10	Sexuality, Selfhood, and Rebellion Stoddard, <i>The Morgesons</i> , cont’d. (102-187)
24	Nov. 15	Still Lives Stoddard, <i>The Morgesons</i> , cont’d. (187-end)
25	Nov. 17	Gender, Insanity, and Defiance Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wall-Paper” (1892)
26	Nov. 22	Voiceless Beauty: Law, Mutiny, and the Aesthetics of Justice Herman Melville, “Billy Budd, Sailor”
	Nov. 24	THANKSGIVING
27	Nov. 29	“Struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang!” Herman Melville, “Billy Budd, Sailor,” continued.
28	Dec. 1	“Allow me to Introduce...”: Figuring the Individual’s Conscience (II) Charles Chesnutt, “The Wife of His Youth” (1899) (B)
	Dec. 8	Final Paper Due via Blackboard, 5:00 p.m.

A Final Exam will be administered on a date and time announced by the University

Course Requirements:

Reading of required texts. The reading load for this course is substantial, and many of the individual works on the syllabus are quite long. If you fall behind in your reading, it will be very difficult to catch up; 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 carefully, ponder their implications, and return to the texts frequently for further review. Keep a dictionary close at hand when you read and always look up unfamiliar words (UTEP now subscribes to the OED online). Take notes. Write questions in the margins of the text, and bring your notes and questions with you to class.

Attendance and Participation (10%): Although I will offer short lectures frequently, your ongoing participation in class is indispensable to the success of the course. Come to our sessions prepared to share your questions and observations, and to extend your thinking into new directions. The more involved you are on a daily basis, and the more willing you are to experiment and take risks with your thinking, the more you will learn and enjoy the class. Faithful and on-time attendance is an important component of this, and is expected. Please be advised that, upon your sixth unexcused absence, you stand to be dropped from the course (i.e., prior to the University drop deadline of October 29th), or will fail the course (i.e., after October 29th). Do not assume that I will drop you automatically prior to the Oct. 29 deadline for reasons of excess absence; if you know you need to drop, it is your responsibility to do so. In keeping with standard departmental policy, absences are only excusable in cases of documented family or medical emergency.

Critical Essays (15%; 25%): Two papers will be required, a medium-length due October 18th and a longer term paper at the end of the semester. 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 come talk to me during my office hours to help develop ideas. MLA bibliographical guidelines are to be followed for the proper citation of texts and sources.

In-Class Presentation (10%): Each student will be required to offer a brief but formal in-class presentation, capped at 10 minutes in length. These presentations ask you to raise valuable and interesting questions about a given day's reading, and are intended to provide a gateway into deeper discussion of the text. Students will sign up for presentations during the second class session; more detailed guidelines will be provided separately.

Midterm & Final Examinations (20%; 20%): Exams will test your knowledge of the readings, and ask you to provide interpretive claims about selected passages. More details to follow.

Plagiarism. This is a form of academic fraud, and I take it very seriously. You will not receive credit for any work that has been plagiarized; moreover, any work suspected of plagiarism will be forwarded, as a matter of official University Policy, to the Office of the Dean of Students for adjudication. The consequences of plagiarism can be very serious, resulting in reduced course grades, course failures, and sometimes in academic suspension. I understand, though, that citing sources properly can be confusing at times; if you're ever in doubt, just ask me.

Cell Phone Policy: No cell phones in class; please silence them and put them away for the duration of our class sessions. Although some of you may have electronic text editions of titles from the syllabus on, say, a kindle app, I ask you to recognize that cell phones are woefully inadequate reading devices for serious intellectual work in a classroom setting. Other cell phone uses are likewise not permitted; they are a distraction to all, and their use (however habitual, however addicting—believe me, I get it; I share this addiction) is disrespectful to your fellow students. If I see you texting, browsing social media, &c., I will ask you to leave and mark you as absent for the day. If you have reason to anticipate an emergency phone

call (say, a sick child or relative that may require you to excuse yourself during class), please inform me before class begins.

COVID Protocols:

As you likely know already, due to sharply increased incidence of the Delta Variant locally and across the state the El Paso Health Authority issued a city-wide indoor masking mandate that went into effect on August 18th, a move that was affirmed by votes on both the City Council and the EPISD Board.

However, because UTEP is an agency of the State of Texas, we cannot mandate that you wear masks on campus. But out of concern for my family and yours, I do strongly and warmly encourage you to get vaccinated and wear a mask during class, and to observe [the best practices recommended by the CDC](#). If you are exposed to someone with COVID, please get tested; if you develop symptoms, please stay at home, get tested, and let me know via email. I promise to do what I can to keep you up to date with our course via Zoom; absences for reason of voluntary quarantine following CDC guidelines will be fully excused. For more information on COVID at UTEP, including an extensive and regularly-updated FAQ, please [click here](#). For information about UTEP's free on-site COVID testing, [click here](#). For information on UTEP's free vaccination clinic (including monetary incentives!), please [click here](#).