

English 391: The American Novel: The 19th Century
MWF 3:00 to 3:50 pm in 176 Education

Fall Term 2013
CRN 13042

Professor Gordon Sayre gsayre@uoregon.edu
Office Hours 9-11 Wednesdays and 1-2 Fridays in 472 PLC

ph. 346-1313

Books available at the UO Duck/Bookstore

(please buy these editions so that we can all refer to the same page numbers)

Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly, or Memoirs of a Sleep-walker* (Penguin Classics)

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd and other Stories* (Bantam)

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (John Harvard Library)

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Penguin Classics)

Samuel Clemens aka Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson and other tales* (Oxford World Classics)

Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (Penguin Classics)

Learning Objectives for this Course

To read seven important 19th-century American novels, and acquire a basic familiarity with the novelists, their lives, times, and major contributions to American Literature.

To be able relate major 19th-century American novels to the political and social issues of the time; particularly slavery, abolition, and the status of African Americans in the United States.

To build critical reading skills with respect to novelistic form and American history, and to understand literary scholarship in this field.

To develop literary critical writing skills commensurate with upper-division English majors.

Reading:

There is a substantial quantity of required reading for this class, and you need to complete all the reading assignments before attending class. During the nineteenth century printing and publishing technologies expanded, and reading novels was, along with theatre, the most popular form of entertainment in America. You will need to learn to set aside time free from distractions and to read quickly and carefully. Annotating your books to mark important passages will help you enormously when you review and write about these texts.

Attendance:

I will be taking attendance by the method of a sign-in sheet that will circulate during each class session. Please sign your full name to verify your presence. Absences should be limited to three classes, and students missing more will be penalized on the final grade.

Academic Integrity:

All work submitted must be your own and must be written exclusively for this class. The use of sources must be properly documented. Quotations without documentation, or the use of papers written by others or for other classes, may constitute plagiarism. If you have doubts or questions about plagiarism or the University's policy on it, talk to me or see the University's academic misconduct police in the *Student Conduct Code* (conduct.uoregon.edu).

Students with Disabilities:

If you have a documented disability and foresee needing accommodations, please make arrangements with me as soon as possible. Please request that the office of Disabilities Services send me a letter verifying your disability (ds.uoregon.edu).

Assignments:

Discussion board postings: weekly reading questions will be the germ of on-line exchanges on the Blackboard course site. See below for a list of questions and the format of the discussion forums. You can also improve your score by contributing to classroom discussion. [20 points]

Research exercise I: For this assignment I want you to uncover other, less academic sources of information about one of the novelists we are reading. Look on the web for a news story, an historical site, biographical information, or a fansite. Turn in the link together with a one-page statement of what you learned from the site about the novel or the author, and why it is interesting or important. [due October 14th, 5 points]

Research exercise II: Three times this term we are all reading a scholarly essay about one of the novels, and will be examining the interests and strategies of each critic. This assignment asks you to use library databases to find a published article about another novel, either *Puddn'head Wilson*, *Edgar Huntly*, *Billy Budd*, or *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Download the pdf and write a one-page response to the article you have found. [due November 15th, 5 points]

Two critical papers, submitted through SafeAssign. Topics for the papers will be posted on Blackboard two weeks prior to the due dates. [due November 4th and December 12th 20 points each]

Midterm exam: November 8 [10 points]

Final Exam: December 9 [20 points]

Grades:

The points for the assignments add up to 100. I will post results for each assignment on the Blackboard gradebook. I anticipate that an A grade for the course will require earning at least 90 of these points, and a B 80 points, a C 70 points. However, I will calculate the final grades using a curve, and the cut-offs will be determined by the collective performance of the class.

Schedule of Reading Assignments:

- 9/30 Introduction: what is a novel?
- 10/2 *Edgar Huntly* chapters 1-7
- 10/4 *Edgar Huntly* chapters 8-12
- 10/7 *Edgar Huntly* chapters 13-20
- 10/9 *Edgar Huntly* chapters 21-27
- 10/11 *Benito Cereno* [roughly the first 40 pages]
- 10/14 *Benito Cereno* Research exercise I due
- 10/16 Catharine O'Connell "Narrative Collusion and Occlusion in Melville's *Benito Cereno*" in *Reading the Sea: New Essays on Sea Literature* (Fort Schuyler, NY, 1999), 113-132.
- 10/18 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* chapters I - XII
- 10/21 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* chapters XIII-XXVIII
- 10/23 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* chapters XXIX-XLI
- 10/25 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* chaps. 1-9
- 10/28 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* chaps. 10-15
- 10/30 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* chaps. 16-22
- 11/1 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* chaps. 23-31
- 11/4 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* chaps. 32-42 First Critical Paper due
- 11/6 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* chaps. 43-45 and Jane P. Tompkins, "Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History" chapter 5 of *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (Oxford, 1985), 122-146.
- 11/8 Midterm exam
- 11/10 *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, chapters 1-8
- 11/13 *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, chapters 9 - 15
- 11/15 *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, chapters 16 – conclusion Research exercise II due
- 11/18 *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* Preface thru chapter 7
- 11/20 *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* chapters 8-14
- 11/22 *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* chapters 15-24
- 11/25 Jared Gardner, "Poe's 'Incredible Adventures and Discoveries Still Further South'" chapter 5 of *Master Plots: Race and the Founding of an American Literature* (Johns Hopkins, 1998), 125-159.
- 11/27 Melville, "Bartleby"
- 12/2 *Billy Budd* [chapters 1-18]
- 12/4 *Billy Budd* [chapters 19-31]
- 12/6 review for final exam
- 12/9 final exam at 15:15
- 12/12 Second Critical Paper Due

Weekly Reading Questions for the Discussion board:

Each discussion forum will be available on Blackboard for five to seven days, and the questions below are designed to pertain to the portions of the text we are reading at that time. Hence for *Edgar Huntly* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the two questions are related to the first and to the second half of the book. You are welcome to write posts about other things that interest you in the novel, and to create new threads appropriately. To earn full credit of 20 points for the discussion/participation component of the course, a student should post at least once in each of the nine weekly forums, and follow the discussion of classmates. Therefore it is important to act promptly--to read and post during the time that each forum is open.

October 2nd and 4th: Huntly admits to a strong curiosity about Clithero. In chapter 2 he says, "Curiosity is vicious, if undisciplined by reason, and inconducive to benefit." Yet just after this he adds, "Curiosity, like virtue, is its own reward." How does Huntly justify his pursuit of Clithero through the middle part of the novel? Do you think his actions are fair and virtuous?

October 7th and 9th: Many romantic and gothic novels employ the device of character doubles. A doubling may be a mysterious affinity or resemblance between two characters, or a polar opposition. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is a classic example of the latter. Clearly, Huntly and Clithero are doubles. For this discussion, either explore other possible character doubles in the novel, or document a pattern of scenes or details that demonstrate the doubling of Huntly and Clithero.

October 14th and 16th: How early in the story did you first suspect what was truly happening on the ship? Looking back at these earlier scenes after finishing the text, analyze how certain clues are presented. Why is it that Delano misunderstood what he was seeing? Is it evidence of his racist attitudes?

October 21st and 23rd: Jacobs' autobiographical novel presents a world where class differences complicate the racial caste system of the antebellum south. What kinds of class status and privileges does Linda Brent enjoy, and how and why are these maintained in spite of her being a slave? How does she use this status to appeal to her readers?

October 28th and 30th: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the most famous of 19th-century Sentimental novels, and a primary tenet of sentimentalism is a belief in the moral sanctity of the family and the home. Examine how Stowe represents the homes of the Shelbys, of Uncle Tom, of the Birds, of the Quakers in Ohio and/or of the St. Clares in New Orleans. What are the positive objects, moods, and values of these homes? Which characters are the custodians of these objects and values? Is there only one kind of sentimental home, or does Stowe offer multiple positive models?

November 4th and 6th: Some scholars have accused Stowe of racism, insofar as the slaves who attain freedom are generally the ones with the greatest share of "white blood." Is this true? Examine the fate of different characters, and consider how the reality of slaves who appeared to be white might have affected readers of the novel in the 1850s.

November 13th and 15th: In the novel *Pudd'nhead Wilson* two plot lines revolve around a pair of twins, outsiders to the town, and a pair of infants, native to the town of Dawson's Landing, who are switched in the cradle. Compare the two pairs and discuss how "twinning" might be defined broadly or metaphorically, and how it can pose questions about the ways in which two individuals' fates and personalities are linked together.

November 20th and 22nd: Natural history and segregation. Look at the passage about the albatross and penguin, pp 139-140, and the one about the water on Tsalal, pp 168-169. Was Poe using these apparently objective or scientific descriptions of natural phenomena to make statements about race relations in the U.S?

December 2nd and 4th: By the end of the novel it should be fairly obvious that Melville makes Billy Budd into a spiritual figure like Christ. But did you also see some allusions to stories in the Old Testament? Describe one or more of these.