

ENGLISH 755: 19TH CENTURY AMERICAN FRONTIER LITERATURE

Fall 2010; Thursdays, 6:00-8:50 PM; HH 259

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HH 226; Office Hours: By Appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In 1800, the United States occupied about one-third of its present territory. Over the course of the century, its boundaries expanded westward through the purchase of territory from France, the forced migration of indigenous people, and war with Mexico. Newly “freed” territory was made available to migrants from further east and abroad for settlement, until the 1890 census declared that America’s western frontier, or line demarcating America’s unsettled territory, was broken up, its period of expansion over. In the process of expansion, indigenous people were displaced further westward, then removed to reservations and sent to boarding schools where they were supposed to be “assimilated,” thousands of Mexicans suddenly found themselves aliens in their former homes, and millions of people from further east and abroad migrated westward.

In this course we will examine how this process of westward expansion was envisioned in American fiction. We will begin by reading major critical works on the significance of the frontier in American history and culture. Then, we will look at influential depictions of the American frontier during the period of Indian Removal, when indigenous people living within the United States were forced to migrate westward, across the Mississippi river, in order to make room for the United States’ expanding Anglo-American population. After examining how certain narratives of expansion were popularized in the dime novel press at mid-century, we will turn to the next major period of expansion into territories claimed by the United States after its 1848 war with Mexico. Then we will move on to texts produced during the period of frontier closure, when the prospect of no more “free” land created a crisis of identity in America and created a demand for narratives that celebrated and memorialized the “disappearing” frontier. We will study texts that represent a range of perspectives, from members of the dominant, Anglo-American settler-class, to the perspectives of marginalized African, Mexican, and Native American authors.

We will engage theoretical and critical approaches associated with the recent growth in scholarship on American Empire. Influenced by post-colonial scholarship, this work analyzes the cultural work that colonial discourse performs to legitimize the subjugation of certain groups, the ways in which conquered communities “write back” to the empire, and the role that cultural institutions play in both supporting and (unwittingly) resisting the colonial enterprise. We will pay close attention to the textual representation of race and its intersections with sex and gender, the representation of nation and national identity, the ways in which literary texts construct and deconstruct notions of territorial entitlement, and key terms in colonial discourse including the concepts of “civilization” and “savagery.”

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES and READINGS

Note: Electronic resources can be accessed via the UW-ACE website for this course. You can link to ACE via the university homepage. If any of the ACE links don't work, you can find all of this material via the library website using either the main library search engine (for books online) or the MLA database (for electronic articles). If you are not on campus, you must sign in using the "connect from home" link on the library website homepage.

Non-electronic articles are in the course mailbox (one of the black mailboxes) in the English dept. mailroom.

Week 1 (Sept. 16)

Introduction to course

Seminar sign-up

Readings:

Turner, Frederick Jackson, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." In The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner. Ed. Fulmer Mood. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1938. 183-232. Available online via ACE (you must be either on campus or logged into Remote Access).

Slotkin, Richard. "The Significance of the Frontier Myth in American History." *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the American Frontier in 20th Century America*. New York: Atheneum, 1992. 1-28. In course mailbox.

Kolodny, Annette: Letting Go of Our Grand Obsessions: Notes Toward a New Literary History of the American Frontiers. American Literature 64.1 (Mar. 1992): 1-18. Available online via ACE.

Week 2 (Sept. 23)

Child, Lydia Maria. Hobomok and Other Writings About Indians, (including all introductory and explanatory content). (Rutgers UP; in bookstore)

Kaplan, Amy. "Manifest Domesticity." American Literature 70.3 (Sept. 1998): 581-606. Available online via ACE.

Week 3 (Sept. 30)

Cooper, James Fenimore. Last of the Mohicans (Including all explanatory/contextual material). (Broadview Press; in bookstore)

Young, Robert. "Hybridity and Diaspora" and "Sex and Equality." Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race. London: Routledge, 1995. 1-29; 90-118. (Hardcopy in course mailbox.)

Week 4 (Oct. 7)

Stephens, Ann S. Malaeska, and Ellis, Edward S. Seth Jones (including introductory section and chronology). Reading The West: An Anthology of Dime Westerns. Ed. Bill Brown. Boston: Bedford Books, 1997. (in bookstore)

Bold, Christine. "Malaeska's Revenge; or, The Dime Novel Tradition in Popular Fiction." Wanted Dead Or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture. Ed. Richard Aquila. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996. 21-42. (Hardcopy in course mailbox).

Week 5 (Oct. 14)

Ridge, John Rollin. The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murrieta (including introductory/explanatory material). (University of Oklahoma Press; in bookstore)

Streeby, Shelley. "Joaquin Murrieta in Popular Culture." Americana Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. 251-290. (Hardcopy in course mailbox.)

Week 6 (Oct. 21)

Essay Meetings; No Class

Week 7 (Oct. 28)

Wister, Owen. The Virginian (including introductory and explanatory material) (Penguin; in bookstore)

Tuttle, Jennifer S. "Indigenous Whiteness and Wister's Invisible Indians." *Reading the Virginian in the New West*. Ed. Melody Graulich and Stephen Tatum. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. 89-112. (Hardcopy in course mailbox).

Week 8 (Nov. 4)

Bower, B.M. Chip, of the Flying U. New York: Little Brown, 1906. (Gutenberg edition available online via ACE.)

Tompkins, Jane. "Women and the Language of Men." West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns. NY: Oxford University Press, 1993. 47-68. (Available online via ACE.)

Week 9 (Nov. 11)

Love, Nat. The Life and Adventures of Nat Love. (U of Nebraska P; in bookstore)

Johnson, Michael K. "You Have Got to Be the Man All Through This Mess": Performing Gender in *The Life and Adventures of Nat Love, Winona, and The Virginian*. Black Masculinity and the Frontier Myth in American Literature. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002. 98-146. (Hardcopy in course mailbox.)

Week 10 (Nov. 18)

Mourning Dove. Cogewea, The Half Blood (U of Nebraska P; in bookstore)

Susan Bernardin, "Mixed Messages: Authority and Authorship in Mourning Dove's Cogwea, The Half Blood." *American Literature* 67.3 (Sept. 1995): 487-509. (Available online via ACE.)

Essay Workshop (if necessary)

Week 11 (Nov. 25)

Essay Workshopping

Week 12 (Dec. 2)

Essay Workshopping

ASSIGNMENTS

Note 1: In evaluating assignments I will take into consideration whether you are an M.A. or Ph.D-level student.

Note 2: Seminars and Essays should take into account relevant assigned readings. Think of the course as one ongoing conversation that each class builds on.

Reading Responses and Participation: (20% of final mark for course)

500-750 word responses to assigned readings are due by email by noon on the Tuesday before class. Please use pdf format. These responses are meant to get ideas flowing for class discussion. They should show that you have completed the assigned readings, make connections between the primary and secondary texts, and engage with the readings in an in-depth way appropriate for graduate-level study in English. They don't have to be written in the form of neat, tidy essays, but they should be written coherently and grammatically.

In class, you should contribute your fair share to the discussion. This means that if there are five people in the room, you should aim to contribute about 20 percent of the time by asking questions, offering your own ideas, and responding constructively to those of others.

Every week you will receive a mark out of 10 that reflects both your written work and oral contributions in class. Cumulatively these marks will be used to arrive at your 20% participation mark.

Those presenting seminars do not have to submit a response for that week.

You can take one "slacker day" during the term. Slacker days are days when you don't complete the readings or write a response. You must announce your slacker day at the beginning of class.

Research Seminar: (1 hour; 30% of final mark for course)

You will give a 30-minute presentation on the assigned primary text, followed by a

discussion that you facilitate. Sign-up for seminars will occur during the first class.

Your seminar should be based on scholarly research—that is, research published in scholarly books and peer-reviewed journals. You may take one of two approaches:

1. Intervene in a critical conversation: If there is a body of research available related to your primary text, then you can synthesis this research, identify a problem with the current state of knowledge about the text, and give a presentation that summarizes and addresses this problem. If there is a very large body of research on your text (e.g. The Virginian), you can focus on scholarship that addresses a particular aspect of the text (e.g. gender, representation of indigenous people, etc.)

2. Critique the text's representation of its historical context: We will be reading some texts (e.g. B.M. Bower) that have not been widely addressed in scholarship. You can approach these texts through contextual research that addresses the way in which the text fits into a specific aspect of its context. For example, Chip, of the Flying U is in part about a woman doctor. You could research the history of the woman doctor in the West during the same period, and critique the text's representation of the figure of the woman doctor in the context of the historical "reality." Of course, you can take this approach with more widely studied texts as well.

How many sources should you cite? The real-world answer to this question is, as many as is appropriate to the topic. However, in recognition of the constraints that graduate students are under, I have set a *minimum* of 10 *well-chosen* books and articles. These sources should be immediately relevant to the topic, and they should reflect the most recent scholarship available. Background resources (e.g. Wikipedia, encyclopedia entries, etc.) don't count.

You will be evaluated on the basis of the level of intellectual challenge of the argument you present, the clarity and coherence of your delivery, your research and preparation, and your effort to facilitate discussion. On the day of your presentation, please hand in a paper copy of your seminar presentation for me to use for references purposes (it will not be marked).

Essay (including Workshop): (50% of final mark for course)

You will write a 20-page (5000-word) scholarly essay. You may write on the same text as your seminar presentation if you wish, so long as your paper expands considerably on the seminar topic. Essays are due (electronically, in pdf format) on Monday, Dec. 13.

Your essay should

- engage one of the approaches explained in the seminar section;
- present a coherent, intellectually challenging argument appropriate to the discipline of English studies that is clearly introduced in the introductory paragraphs;
- follow a developing structure organized into a logical sequence of topics that cumulatively support the argument;
- cite a minimum of 20 relevant scholarly sources;

- engage an appropriate theoretical approach. We will be discussing theoretical approaches in class as relevant to the assigned readings;
- use correct grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and MLA citation style.

Workshop (50 minutes; 10% of essay mark.)

You will complete in advance a 10-page (2500 word) draft of your essay, which will be circulated to the class one week in advance of the workshop date. During your workshop, your peers and I, having read your draft in advance, will take turns offering constructive responses and feedback to your paper. For the workshop to be productive your draft should include a completed introduction to the paper, and the remaining material, however you choose to structure it, should be substantial enough to convey a strong enough sense of your project so that the rest of us can offer you quality feedback.

The workshop portion of your essay mark will be based on the draft you submit to class and your participation in the workshop process as a whole (attendance, preparation, clarity and constructiveness of feedback).

POLICIES

Extensions: Granted in most cases for essays, provided you make arrangements *before* the due date. Not granted for seminars and workshops except in the case of documented medical or mental health emergencies.

Late essay penalties: 3%/day including weekends.

Unexcused, undocumented absence from class, seminar, or workshop: a grade of 0 for the assignment

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. You are expected to know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. For detailed information about plagiarism and its consequences, see:

http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html