

English 377: American Romanticism
Tuesday and Thursday 10:45 am-12:00 pm
Drown Hall 202

Instructor: Edward Whitley

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVE

The goal of this course is to understand how a variety of diverse literary texts from the antebellum period in the United States (about 1820–1860) can all be grouped under the general heading of “Romanticism.” In a nutshell, literary Romanticism is characterized by a focus on intense emotional expression and the creative workings of an author’s powerful imagination. We will break the larger heading of Romanticism into two component parts: (1) sentimentalism, a literary ethos that values sympathy, empathy, and human contact; and (2) the sublime, an aesthetic that attempts to create within readers a sense of the awe-inspiring, otherworldly, and terrifying aspects of life. Both sentimentalism and the sublime depend upon emotional reactions from readers and imaginative creations by authors, but these two literary styles have traditionally been treated as opposites rather than as complimentary concepts.

Historically, women writers from this period have been classified (negatively) as sentimental writers while the men have been accorded the (privileged) title of authors of the sublime. We will challenge these assumptions and look at how male and female writers employ equally the aesthetics of both the sublime and the sentimental. We will also move beyond the assessment of sentimentalism as a “cheap” attempt at “tear-jerking”—with the corresponding assumption that the sublime is a more sincere or authentic pathway to the emotions—as we attend to the ways that sentimentalism and the sublime each carry a certain set of assumptions about the place of the individual in the larger community, with sentimentalism privileging the connection of individuals in communities and the sublime placing its emphasis on the individual in isolation. Both aesthetic approaches attempt to answer one of the big questions about the human experience (What is my relationship to others?) in a moment of U.S. history when tremendous social upheaval left Americans wondering not only what their relationship was to other Americans in a diverse and expanding nation, but what it meant to be an American at all.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok* (Rutgers ISBN 081351164X)

Frederick Douglass and Harriet A. Jacobs, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Modern Library ISBN 0679783288)

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (Modern Library ISBN 067978327X)

Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (Penguin ISBN 0140437487)

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Norton Critical Edition ISBN 0393963039)

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Penguin ISBN 0140421998)

Supplementary readings on Coursesite (www.coursesite.lehigh.edu). [CS on course calendar]

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Three short papers

- a. Close reading (explication) of a significant passage (or passages) from one of the texts (4–5 double-spaced pages). (20%)
- b. Review of two secondary sources (i.e., scholarly article or book chapter) dealing with one of the texts (two single-spaced pages). (15%)
- c. Review of two primary sources from the nineteenth century about a topic or topics addressed in a text or texts from the syllabus (two single-spaced pages). (15%)

These short papers are due on three different dates during the course of the semester. You may choose the order in which you submit each of these papers and the texts that you write about for each topic.

2. One long (8–10 double-spaced pages) final paper. (30%)
3. Unannounced quizzes on reading assignments. (10%)
4. Active participation in class discussions and/or contribution to online discussion board at www.coursesite.lehigh.edu (5%). To get full participation credit for the semester either make one comment per week in class or write one post per week outside of class. Note: I will be tracking the posts to Coursesite throughout the course of the semester. Do *not* plan on doing all of your posts all at once at the end of the semester.
5. Attend two on-campus lectures related to course topics and write a one page, double-spaced report of each lecture (5%)

POLICIES

- A. *Academic Integrity*: Cheating or plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated.
- B. *Special Needs*: If you have a learning disability that requires accommodation or if you are involved in any activity (such as athletics) that will require you to miss class, please let me know as soon as possible.
- C. *Courtesy*: If for any reason you feel offended, ignored, or otherwise mistreated in class, please talk either to me or to the English Department (located on the first floor of Drown Hall) as soon as possible. Please show courtesy to classmates by avoiding potentially offensive language, turning off cell phones, and participating in class. Also, I will strive to show you the courtesy of respecting your celebration of religious or cultural holidays. Please let me know if any assignment due dates conflict with these holidays as soon as possible.
- D. *Late Assignments*: Assignments will be penalized ten percent for every class period they are late. If assignments are not turned in at the beginning of class they cannot be turned in until the next class period. I will not accept assignments as email attachments or in my mailbox on campus. Technological failure is no excuse for a late assignment.
- E. *Absences*: While attendance is not required, if you are absent from a class you are responsible for contacting a classmate to find out about the material you missed. If you miss a quiz or an in-class assignment because of an absence you will only be allowed to make it up if you have an approved excuse.
- F. *Email and Office Hours*: You are welcome to email me with questions and concerns, but only expect a response to your message after 24 hours. If your question requires a lengthy response, please come to office hours to discuss it rather than expecting a long email from me.
- G. *Late Additions*: Students registering for class late will be required to keep up with reading assignments and will be held to the same deadlines as students who were in class from the

beginning. Students registering late are responsible for contacting classmates to find out the material they missed.

- H. *Grade Complaints*: If you wish to take issue with the grade you receive on any class assignment you must first wait 24 hours before contacting me with your complaint. When you do so, you must return the graded assignment with a typed cover memo explaining why you think you deserve a different grade (this may *not* be done over email).
- I. *Rewrite Policy*: You may only rewrite your papers and resubmit them for a higher grade if you receive a C or lower the first time the paper is submitted. Resubmitted papers can earn no higher than a B and must be completed within two weeks from the time that the paper was returned.

COURSE CALENDAR

- T 8/31** Course Introduction
R 9/2 Burke, from *On the Beautiful and the Sublime* (CS)
Dobson, from “Reclaiming Sentimental Literature” (CS)
- T 9/7** *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* ch. 1–11 (1–112)
R 9/9 *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* ch. 12–24 and note (113–221)
- T 9/14** *Hobomok* preface and ch. 1–10 (3–77)
R 9/16 *Hobomok* ch. 11–20 (78–150)
- T 9/21** *Moby-Dick* ch. 1–26 (1–167) [skim ch. 9, 14, 15, 23–25]
R 9/23 *Moby-Dick* ch. 27–50 (168–335) [skim ch. 32–33]
T 9/28 *Moby-Dick* ch. 51–79 (336–503) [skim ch. 51–57, 62–63, 65, 74–76,]
R 9/30 *Moby-Dick* ch. 80–116 (504–669) [skim ch. 80, 82–83, 85–86, 88, 90, 95, 97, 101, 103–105]
R 9/30 **Lecture at 4pm in Drown 210**
T 10/5 *Moby-Dick* ch. 117–135 and epilogue (670–825) [skim ch. 125]
W 10/6 **Lecture at 7:30pm, location TBA**
- R 10/7** **First Paper Due**; Meet in Linderman 302
T 10/12 **Pacing Break: No Class**
- R 10/14** *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* ch. 1–9 (1–80)
T 10/19 *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* ch. 10–15 (81–145)
R 10/21 *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* ch. 16–21 (145–223)
F 10/22 **Lecture at noon in MG 102**
T 10/26 *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* ch. 22–32 (223–303)
R 10/28 *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* ch. 33–45 (304–88)
- T 11/2** Douglass preface and ch. 1–9 (3–63)
R 11/4 Douglass ch. 10–11 (64–106)
Jacobs preface and ch 1–3 (117–137)
T 11/9 Jacobs ch. 4–20 (138–249)

- R 11/11** Jacobs ch. 21–41 (250–350)
- T 11/16** *UTC and U.S. Culture*; Meet in Linderman 302
Second Paper Due
- R 11/18** *Leaves of Grass*, “Song for Occupations” (87–97), “The Sleepers” (105–115), “I Sing the Body Electric” (116–123), “There Was A Child Went Forth” (138–139)
- F 11/19** **Lecture at noon in Linderman 200**
- T 11/23** *Leaves of Grass*, “To Think of Time” (98–104), “Faces” (124–128), Whitman’s Introduction (5–24), “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (CS)
- R 11/25** **Thanksgiving: No Class**
- T 11/30** *Leaves of Grass*, “Song of Myself” (25–86)
- R 12/2** Dickinson, pages 1–3 of handout, through poem 501 (CS)
- T 12/7** Dickinson pages 3–6 of handout, poems 510 to end (CS)
- R 12/10** **Third Paper Due**; Course Evaluations
- M 12/20** **Final Paper Due at noon in my office/box**