From Seduction to Civil War: The Early U.S. Novel
Engl 209/Amst 298
Spring 2015
MW 8:30-9:50, 285 Court Street

Professor Matthew Garrett
285 Court Street, Office 309
Email: mcgarrett@wesleyan.edu
Office hours: M 12-1pm, W 12-1pm
Phone: 860-685-3598

COURSE OVERVIEW
This course examines the relationship between nation and narrative: the collective fantasies that incited reading and writing into the 19th century. We will study the novel as a field of literary production in dialogue with European models and expressive of changes in national culture, a form that both undermined and reinforced dominant ideologies of racial, gender, and class inequality during this turbulent period of national formation and imperial extension. We will consider the ways the pleasure of novel-reading depends upon, even as it often disavows, the world outside the story. We will trace the ways these novels both reflect and participate in the historical development of the United States during a period that spans national founding, the consolidation of northern capitalism and an exacerbated North/South division, expansion into Mexico and the Pacific, and civil war. Through close attention to literary form, we will continually pose the question, What is the relationship between literary culture and historical change? We will examine who was writing, for whom they wrote, and the situation--political, commercial--in which "the American novel" was produced and consumed. We will begin with the novel of sentiment and seduction and conclude with reflections on slavery and racial revolution on the eve of the Civil War, all the time asking about the ways the novel might seduce us into either tolerating or resisting the way of the world.

REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES
Reading. Read and reread. Then read again. Makes notes in the margins, underline and circle words and phrases: be an active reader. Each week’s reading assignments should not be overwhelming, but they are substantial. Plan your time. Complete the reading before each session, give yourself time to think about the texts before class, and arrive with a handful of points for discussion. Take notes on your reading and bring them to class. “Recommended” readings are not required, but it will be much to your advantage to read them.

Writing. The writing for the course comprises two kinds of assignment:

A) Four short reading exercises (3pp.) providing a close reading of a passage from a novel. These will give you the chance to engage closely with the language of the novels, and to pay attention to syntax, style, and the microdynamics of plotting and characterization. And they will sharpen your critical reading skills as the semester progresses.

B) Two essays, 5-7pp. and 10-12pp., on either a topic I provide or one that you have discussed with me. These essays may develop in various directions, but they should be based on close analysis of the text(s). The second essay will be an opportunity for you to develop a more complex argument; that essay may incorporate reading and research beyond the syllabus, and I will provide some general bibliographical guides for further reading.

Participation. This course is a seminar: we succeed or fail collectively. Arrive at each of our sessions ready to talk and ready to listen with engagement and generosity to your fellow students. If a text excites you, talk about why. If something confuses you, ask questions. If you agree with comments someone makes, elaborate on your agreement with the class. If a text bores you, ask yourself why as
you read, and then talk about your response in class. If you disagree with someone, explain why. In short, contribute with gusto to our common enterprise in the seminar.

**Attendance, deadlines.** Attendance at every session is required; more than three absences will be grounds for failing the course. Assignment due dates are provided on the syllabus so that you can plan your work for the semester. All due dates are firm: extensions will be granted only in cases of serious illness or personal crisis. *Don’t even ask.*

**Disabilities resources.** Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible. If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

**Honor Code.** Please write an abbreviated form of the Honor Code pledge (“No aid, no violation.”) at the top of the first page of all assignments. All work must be done in compliance with the Honor Code, which prohibits the following: the attempt to give or obtain assistance in a formal academic exercise without due acknowledgment; plagiarism; the submission of the same work for academic credit more than once without permission; willful falsification of data, information, or citations in any formal academic exercise; deception concerning adherence to the conditions set by instructor for the formal academic exercise; failure to take constructive action in the event of committing or observing a violation or apparent violation; providing false information and/or deceptive use of documents during an Honor Board hearing. **If you need help with proper citations or you have any questions at all on how to avoid plagiarism, please talk with me.**

**Grading**
Your final grade breaks down like this:

- 10%: Participation
- 10%: In-class presentation
- 25%: Reading exercises
- 55%: Two essays (5-7pp., 20%; 10-12pp., 35%)

**Texts (available at Broad Street Books):**

- Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple* (London, 1791; Philadelphia, 1794), Penguin
- Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland* (1798), Penguin
- James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Penguin
- Robert Montgomery Bird, *Sheppard Lee* (1836), NYRB
- Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall* (1855), Penguin
- Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851), Northwestern UP
- Martin Delany, *Blake* (1861-62), Beacon Press

**Please purchase the correct edition (Penguin, Northwestern, etc.)**
Additional readings, marked with an asterisk (*) below, will be posted on the course Moodle site. These readings are required. Read them with care, and print them out and bring them to class for our discussion.

**Schedule**

1. MONDAY, 1/26 -- **Introduction: Genre and History**
   [Introduction to the genre: What is a novel, and what is "the novel"? Introduction to the history of the form and its position in the early United States. Overview of publication history and the market for novels: numbers of novels printed, new novels versus reprints, imports versus domestic productions, formats, readership.]

   **Seduction 1: Charlotte Temple: Pleasures of Reading, Perils of Sympathy**


   3. MONDAY, 2/2 -- *Charlotte*. Read pp. 63-120. Additional reading: Samuel Richardson, from *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady* (1747-48)*


   **Seduction 2: Wieland: From Writing to Speaking**


   **First reading exercise due in class.**

   **Seduction 3: Hearing Voices**


   **The Novel Makes History…**


   **…and History Makes the Novel**


   **Second reading exercise due in class.**
**Spring Break**

**The Way of the World 1: Getting Lost in the U.S.A.**

   **First essay due by 5pm in box outside my office.**

**The Way of the World 1: Getting Lost in the U.S.A. (con.)**

16. WEDNESDAY, 4/1 -- Sheppard Lee. Read pp. 327-425

**The Way of the World 2: Virtue and Sentiment, Writing and Work**
17. MONDAY, 4/6 -- Ruth Hall: *A Domestic Tale of the Present*. Read the introduction and pp. 1-152.


**The Novel as "Imperial Folio"**

20. WEDNESDAY, 4/15 -- *Moby-Dick*. Read pp. 113-195 (through Chapter 42). Recommended critical reading: John Bryant, "*Moby-Dick* as Revolution."
   **Third reading exercise due in class.**

**The Novel as "Imperial Folio" (con.)**

22. WEDNESDAY, 4/22 -- Read pp. 300-379 (through Chapter 86).

**Week 14 -- The Novel as "Imperial Folio" (con.)**

24. WEDNESDAY, 4/29 -- *Moby-Dick*. Finish the novel (pp. 491-573). Recommended critical reading: Michael Paul Rogin, "*Moby-Dick* and the American 1848."

**Week 15 -- The Novel vs. the Novel**
25. MONDAY, 5/4 -- *Blake; or, The Huts of America*. Read the introduction and pp. 1-159

   **Fourth reading exercise due in class.**

   **FRIDAY, 5/15 -- Second essay due in box outside my office by 5PM.**