From Seduction to Civil War: The Early U.S. Novel
Engl 209/Amst 298
Spring 2011
TTh 10:30-11:50, 285 Court Street

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.

In-class presentations. Each member of the seminar will pair up with another to give an in-class presentation on a question or problem from the reading and to direct our attention to particularly significant passages. We will schedule these presentations during the second week of class.
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.

Students with disabilities. It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services and making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please notify me as soon as possible (certainly by the second week of the semester) so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html.

The Honor Code. Please include the following pledge on each of your assignments: "In accordance with the Honor Code, I affirm that this work is my own and all content taken from other sources has been properly acknowledged." More information on the Wesleyan Honor Code may be found at http://www.wesleyan.edu/studenthandbook/3_honorsystem.html.

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)
- Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland* (1798)
- James Fenimore Cooper, *The Lasts of the Mohicans* (1826)
- Robert Montgomery Bird, *Sheppard Lee* (1836)
- Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall* (1855)
- Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851)
- Martin Delany, *Blake* (1861-62)

Additional readings, marked with an asterisk (*) below, will be posted on the course Moodle site. These readings are required. Read them, and print them out and bring them to class for our discussion.
SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 -- INTRODUCTION: GENRE AND HISTORY
THURSDAY, 1/20

WEEK 2 -- SEDUCTION 1: THE PLEASURES OF READING, THE PERILS OF SYMPATHY
TUESDAY, 1/25 -- *The Power of Sympathy; or, The Triumph of Nature. Founded in Truth*. Read the introduction (only pp. ix-xli) and the entire novel (pp. 1-103).


WEEK 3 -- SEDUCTION 2: FROM WRITING TO SPEAKING
TUESDAY, 2/1 -- *Charlotte*. Read pp. 63-120. Additional reading: Samuel Richardson, from *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady* (1747-48)*

**First reading exercise due in class.

WEEK 4 -- SEDUCTION 3: HEARING VOICES
TUESDAY, 2/8 -- *Wieland*. Read pp. 105-278.

THURSDAY, 2/10 -- *Wieland*. Read the introduction (pp. vii-xliv) and "Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist" (pp. 279-355).

WEEK 5 -- THE NOVEL MAKES HISTORY…
TUESDAY, 2/15 -- *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757*. Read the introductions and Chapters 1-11.

THURSDAY, 2/17 -- *The Last of the Mohicans*. Read Chapters 12-18.

WEEK 6 -- …AND HISTORY MAKES THE NOVEL
TUESDAY, 2/22 -- *The Last of the Mohicans*. Read Chapters 19-28.

**Second reading exercise due in class.

WEEK 7 -- THE WAY OF THE WORLD 1: GETTING LOST IN THE U.S.A.
TUESDAY, 3/1 -- *Sheppard Lee, Written by Himself*. Read the introduction and pp. 1-98.
** CLASS CANCELED. Make-up assignment will be posted on Moodle.
**First essay due by 5pm in box outside my office.

Weeks 8 and 9: Spring Break

Week 10 -- The Way of the World 1: Getting Lost in the U.S.A. (con.)

THURSDAY, 3/24 -- Sheppard Lee. Read pp. 327-425

Week 11 -- The Way of the World 2: Virtue and Sentiment, Writing and Work
TUESDAY, 3/29 -- Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present. Read the introduction and pp. 1-152.


Week 12 -- The Novel as "Imperial Folio"
TUESDAY, 4/5 -- Moby-Dick; or, The Whale. Read through p. 112 (Chapter 24).

THURSDAY, 4/7 -- Moby-Dick. Read pp. 113-195 (through Chapter 42). Recommended critical reading: John Bryant, "Moby-Dick as Revolution."*
**Third reading exercise due in class.

Week 13 -- The Novel as "Imperial Folio" (con.)
TUESDAY, 4/12 -- Moby-Dick. Read pp. 195-300 (through Chapter 65).

THURSDAY, 4/14 -- Read pp. 300-379 (through Chapter 86).

Week 14 -- The Novel as "Imperial Folio" (con.)
TUESDAY, 4/19 -- Moby-Dick. Read pp. 380-490 (through Chapter 113).

THURSDAY, 4/21 -- 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
TUESDAY, 4/26 -- Blake; or, The Huts of America. Read the introduction and pp. 1-159

**Fourth reading exercise due in class.

Week 16 -- Returns and Rereadings
TUESDAY, 5/3 -- Delany, "Political Aspect of the Colored People of the United States" (1855).*

**FRIDAY, 5/6 -- Second essay due in box outside my office by 5PM.