

**English 98r. Junior Tutorial
Fall 2017**

**Sentiment, Self, Society:
19th Century American Women Writers**

Instructor: Emily Silk

“Female literature seems to be all the rage now...Who are your most successful lady authors?”
-- Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time* (1854)

During the 19th century, American women writers achieved unprecedented levels of critical acclaim, commercial success, celebrity, and (at times) notoriety on the literary stage. “Female literature” was indeed all the rage, as one gentleman observes while perusing a bookstore in Fanny Fern’s hit novel *Ruth Hall*. His question, however, is a deceptive one: our gentleman is actually a publisher looking to see whether the bookseller will name his author, the breakout success Ruth Hall, as a “success.” It is also a bit of authorial self-promotion: *Ruth Hall* is an autobiographical novel, based on Fern’s own rise to literary celebrity. Fern herself was one of the most successful “lady authors” of the 1850s, and *Ruth Hall* one of several novels by American women that sold in record-breaking tens (and even hundreds) of thousands during this period. Such runaway bestsellers famously inspired an exasperated reflection from Nathaniel Hawthorne, penned in an 1855 letter to friend and publisher William Ticknor: “America is now wholly given over to a d[amne]d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public is occupied with their trash.” Who exactly were these “scribbling women,” and what made their work “all the rage” in 19th century American life?

Course Overview

This junior tutorial is an introduction to 19th century American women writers, with a particular focus on the novel and the short story. We will seek to understand the breadth and depth of fictions composed by American women between 1790 and 1900, as well as the historical currents that informed the production and reception of these texts. We will pay particular attention to the intersections of literature by women with political, social, and cultural movements in 19th century American life. The writers on our syllabus wield fiction to stake persuasive social and political claims about slavery and abolition, women’s rights, national identity, territorial expansion, industrial labor reform, and more. Because several of our texts were among the most widely read and celebrated of their time, this course will also explore the status of “popular” fictions in American culture between 1790 and 1900. What kind of prestige (or notoriety) does popularity confer? What can popular (and unpopular) fictions tell us about the tastes, values, interests, and anxieties of 19th century Americans?

More broadly, this tutorial serves as an introduction to scholarly writing in the discipline of English. Our readings draw on a range of secondary materials, intended to familiarize you with current approaches and debates relevant both to the study of 19th century American literature and more broadly to novel studies, genre studies, women and gender studies, race and ethnicity studies, and cultural studies. Ultimately, you will situate your own work in relation to these approaches and debates through the research and writing of an original 20-25 page scholarly paper (the junior essay) on a relevant topic of your choosing.

Course Objectives

By the conclusion of this tutorial, you should be able to:

- Articulate major thematic, formal, generic, and historical trends relevant to the study of American literature and women writers during the 19th century
- Summarize and participate in current academic debates relevant to the study of American literature and women writers during the 19th century
- Describe and analyze a variety of genres, including the sentimental novel, the slave narrative, sensation fiction, regional fiction, and the naturalist novel
- Understand, evaluate, and apply critical methods to literary texts, drawing on scholarly work in gender studies, race and ethnicity studies, genre studies, postcolonial studies, etc.
- Design a research question and conduct scholarly research to address it, making productive use of secondary criticism in addition to primary texts
- Develop a compelling literary argument in the form of a 20-25 page research paper

Required Texts

The following texts should be purchased or borrowed from the library; all other course readings will be made available on Canvas. Unless you already own another edition of the text, I recommend acquiring the editions in parentheses. If you wish to borrow rather than purchase books, all of these texts are available in the Harvard Library system as well as through Borrow Direct and Interlibrary Loan.

- Susannah Rowson, *Charlotte Temple* (1791) [Penguin, 978-0140390803]
- Susan Warner, *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) [Feminist Press, 978-0935312669]
- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) [Modern Library, 978-0375756931]
- Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time* (1854) [Penguin, 978-0140436402]
- Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1862) [Penguin, 978-0140437959]
- Louisa May Alcott, *Behind a Mask, or A Woman's Power* (1866) [William Morrow, 978-0688151324]
- María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, *The Squatter and the Don* (1885) [Modern Library, 978-0812972894]
- Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899) [Bantam, 978-0553213300]

Assignments

Engaged participation is the name of the game in tutorial, and your contributions to discussion are a vital part of our seminar experience. Please come to class each week having read and considered the assigned texts, ready to ask questions and to draw our attention to passages that you find particularly interesting, puzzling, problematic, etc. Beyond reading and preparing your personal notes for class, the work of the tutorial is as follows:

Two Brief Presentations (5-7 minutes each) introducing and evaluating critical readings; we will have sign-ups for presentation dates during the second week of class.

Weekly Discussion Question (max. 50 words), posted to Canvas by 8 pm the night before class. Great discussions (as well as great papers) begin with great questions, and tutorial is an opportunity for your questions to drive our conversation. This weekly post is a chance for you to begin organizing your thoughts about the readings before class, and to preview the questions that your classmates are pondering. Each week, we will use your questions to help spur our conversation; to that end, please come to class having also read the questions submitted by your peers. ****You are exempt from posting a discussion question on weeks when you are presenting critical readings. You also get one free pass, no questions asked.****

Short Paper (5-6 pages) that makes an argument based on a close reading of one or more works read during the first four weeks of the course.

Junior Essay (20-25 pages) on a topic of your choice, to be determined during the first several weeks of class in consultation with me. The final essay is due at the end of reading period and is preceded by several intermediate deadlines:

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| WEEK 6 | 1-Hour Research Workshop at Widener Library (in class) |
| WEEK 7 | 2-Page Prospectus outlining topic and provisional argument Annotated Bibliography of at least 8-10 sources, with a brief description of each work's argument and how the essay will engage with it |
| WEEK 9 | 10-Page Partial Draft of the junior essay |
| WEEK 11 | 20-25 Page Full Draft of the junior essay |
| READING WK | Final Junior Essay due to the English Department |
| READING WK | 5-Minute Presentation on your research, to be delivered aloud at the Junior Tutorial Conference |

In addition, please be sure to mark your calendar for three required Junior Tutorial General Meetings:

Tutorial Program Welcome and Overview (Week 2, TBD date and time)
Introduction to Critical Methods (Week 4, TBD date and time)
Seniors Tell All – Reflections on the Junior Essay (Week 6, TBD date and time)

Grading Breakdown:

Attendance & Participation (including discussion questions): 10%
Presentations (critical readings and conference): 10%
Short Paper: 15%
Prospectus & Annotated Bibliography: 10%
Draft of Junior Essay: 15%
Junior Essay: 40%

COURSE SYLLABUS

Week 1: Introduction

- * Herman Melville, “Hawthorne & His Mosses” (1850)
- * Nathaniel Hawthorne, letter to William Ticknor (1855)
- * Ester Bloom, “When Women’s Literary Tastes Are Deemed Less Worthy” (*The Atlantic*, 2015)
- * Handout: first edition frontispieces & title pages for selected novels on our syllabus (in-class)

UNIT 1

SENTIMENT & SYMPATHY

We begin this course with two bestselling novels in the genre of sentimental fiction: Susannah Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* (1791) and Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* (1850). Both instant hits with American readers, these novels had the kind of popular success that notoriously inspired Hawthorne’s exasperation with “scribbling women.” In this unit, we will consider the power of these novels’ emotional appeals: what makes their heroines, whose sufferings are meant to inspire tears, so wildly popular? As a counter-example, we will turn to Louisa May Alcott’s sensation novel *Behind a Mask* (1866), considering its irreverent subversion of the virtuous heroine type and its claim to another kind of female power.

Week 2: Seduction & Redemption

- * Susannah Rowson, *Charlotte Temple* (1791)
- * Gideon Mailer, “The History of *Charlotte Temple* as an American Bestseller” (2013)
- * Cathy N. Davidson, “Privileging the *Feme Covert*: The Sociology of Sentimental Fiction” from *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (1986)

Week 3: Virtue & Reward

- * Susan Warner, *The Wide, Wide World* (1850)
- * Catharine O’Connell, “‘We Must Sorrow’: Silence, Suffering, and Sentimentality in Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World*” (1997)
- * In-class discussion: reading and using secondary sources effectively

Week 4: Subversion & Deception

- * Louisa May Alcott (as A. M. Barnard), *Behind a Mask, or A Woman’s Power* (1866)
- * Louisa May Alcott, excerpts from *Little Women* (1868-69)
- * Judith Fetterley, “Impersonating ‘Little Women’: The Radicalism of Alcott’s ‘Behind a Mask’” (1983)
- * In-class discussion: defining a research question & building blocks of the research paper

UNIT 2

WRITING THE SELF

In this unit, we turn to two autobiographical narratives that test the boundaries and the power of the sentimental mode: Fanny Fern’s *Ruth Hall* (1854) and Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Both narratives trace the emergence of an authorial voice and the social-political weight of the written word: Fern’s impoverished heroine rises to celebrity status through her socially conscious newspaper columns, while Jacobs

deploys sentimental tropes to make an abolitionist appeal in the genre of the slave narrative. We will ask how these narratives present visions and versions of the authorial self, and to what ends. We will also consider the autobiographical narrative as a category: to what extent are these texts themselves ‘fictions’ of identity?

Week 5: Capitalism & Celebrity

- * Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time* (1854) & selected reviews
- * Virginia Woolf, “A Room of One’s Own” (1929)
- * Robert Gunn, “‘How I Look’: Fanny Fern and the Strategy of Pseudonymity” (2010)
- * Outside of class: individual conferences to discuss short paper feedback & research topic ideas

Week 6: Junior Paper Research Workshop (no assigned reading or discussion post this week)

- * Instead, please begin to research and read texts relevant to your junior paper topic
- * By 8 pm the night before class, please email the tutorial a 2-3 sentence topic ‘pitch’ and a starter list of 5 sources that you think will be relevant to your topic
- * In-class library visit: finding resources in the Harvard library system (with Odile Harter, research librarian)
- * In-class discussion: strategies for writing an effective prospectus & annotated bibliography

Week 7: Sentiment & American Slavery

- * Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)
- * Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman?” (1851 & 1863 versions)
- * Jean Fagan Yellin, “Written by Herself: Harriet Jacobs’ Slave Narrative” (1981)

UNIT 3 FICTION AND REFORM: MOBILIZING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

How did women writers mobilize fiction (especially the novel) for the purposes of reform? Building on our study of Fern and Jacobs, this unit continues and deepens our attention to narrative engagements with social, political, and cultural reform movements. Reading primary texts by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, we will consider the ways in which these writers—and those from our previous two units—advocate for change on local and national stages. How do they present acts of protest, resistance, and reform? What narrative strategies do they deploy to advance their claims about race, gender, law, politics, and national identity?

Week 8: Marriage, Medicine & Madness

- * Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’” (1913)
- * Catherine Golden, “One Hundred Years of Reading ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’” (1993)
- * In-class discussion: building evidence-driven analysis (with TYW as case study)
- * Outside of class: individual conferences to discuss prospectus feedback & next steps
- * Recommended: begin reading *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* for next week’s class

Week 9: “Everybody’s Protest Novel”

- * Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852)
- * James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel” from *Notes of a Native Son* (1955)
- * Sianne Ngai, “Animatedness” from *Ugly Feelings* (2005)

Week 10: Race, Gender & Law in the West

- * María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, *The Squatter and the Don* (1885)
- * Excerpts from Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) & California Land Claims Act (1851)
- * John Morán González, “Blushing Brides and Soulless Corporations: Racial Formation in María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s *The Squatter and the Don*” from *The Troubled Union: Expansionist Imperatives in Post-Reconstruction American Novels* (2010)
- * Outside of class: individual conferences to discuss partial draft feedback & next steps

UNIT 4

REALIST & NATURALIST TURNS

In the postbellum period, sentiment gave way to a wave of fictions that sought to capture the ‘real’ order of everyday life. Championed by *Atlantic Monthly* editor and realist writer William Dean Howells, regional fictions in particular sought to capture the details of localized American life. As we read these narratives, we will ask: what is ‘real’ and/or ‘regional’ about them? What approaches do they take in pursuit of their social and political aims? How do they embrace or resist the sentimental conventions familiar from earlier works? We will end this unit with Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, considering this novel’s proto-feminist vision and its relation to the category of literary naturalism. Of all the texts in this unit, we will ask: how do they stage ‘everyday’ life? How do they stage revolt, resistance, or resignation to the order of everyday life?

Week 10: Realism, Labor & Advocacy

- * Rebecca Harding Davis, “Life in the Iron Mills” (1861)
- * William Dean Howells, excerpts from *Criticism and Fiction* (1891)
- * Jean Pfaelzer, “The Terrible Question of ‘Life in the Iron Mills’” from *Parlor Radical: Rebecca Harding Davis and the Origins of American Social Realism* (1996)
- * In-class discussion: strategies for thinking about essay structure and organization

Week 11: Regionalism & ‘Local Color’

- * Sarah Orne Jewett, “A White Heron” (1886)
- * Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, “A New England Nun,” “The Revolt of Mother” (1891) & “Luella Miller” (1902)
- * Alice Dunbar-Nelson, “Little Miss Sophie” (1895) & “The Stones of the Village” (circa 1910)
- * Judith Fetterley & Marjorie Pryse, “Introduction” to *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (2003)

Week 12: Naturalism

- * Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899)
- * Donald Pizer, “A Note on Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* as Naturalistic Fiction” (2001)
- * In-class discussion: strategies for the introduction and conclusion

CONCLUSION

Week 13: Topic of Choice & Presentations

- * Readings to be determined based on interests of the class
- * In-class presentations: practice runs for Junior Tutorial Conference

COURSE POLICIES

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failure on the assignment to dismissal from the course to even more serious actions. You are responsible for understanding Harvard FAS's Honor Code: "Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs."

Collaboration: I encourage you to talk with other students about the course and our readings, as well as to read one another's work. In individual assignments (including presentations and papers), academic collaboration and external sources should be always cited.

Office Hours & Conferences: In addition to regular office hours, I am always happy to schedule additional meetings to discuss readings and research. It's never too early to come talk to me about ideas for your junior paper! I'll also be scheduling individual check-ins with each of you across the semester to discuss the progress of your work. Expect to attend at least three conferences with me, the first after you submit your short paper, the second after you submit the prospectus, and the third after you submit the partial draft of your junior paper.

Email & Course Website: I will communicate with you by email each week on relevant logistics and what to expect in the upcoming class session. In addition, you should always feel free to email me with any thoughts, questions, or suggestions you may have. Readings, announcements, and other materials will be posted to our course site on Canvas, though announcements will always also be distributed by email.

Attendance: Attendance in tutorial is key to your own success and that of the class, as is attendance at Junior Tutorial General Meetings and other required events (research orientation, Junior Tutorial Conference, etc.). I will give each student one "free" absence in case of sickness, travel, etc.: no explanation necessary. Missing more than one class will impact your participation grade, and excessive absence could result in course failure. If you have extenuating circumstances, please communicate with me as soon as possible so we can decide on a plan of action together.

Deadlines & Late Grades: Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due by 11:59 pm on the date listed in the schedule; late assignments will have one-third of a letter grade subtracted per day late. I am willing to grant extensions for exceptional circumstances: if you think you will need an extension on an assignment, please talk with me as soon as possible. Note that I cannot grant extensions for the final paper: students who fail to submit a final paper, or submit a final paper late without an official excuse, will fail the tutorial.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: "Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to do so may result in the Course Head's inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation."