

Dr. Kenneth Kidd
AML 4225; Section 1626X
MWF Period 4
MAT 116

Office: TUR 4214
392-6650, ext. 302
Hours: MWF 7
& by appointment

Secrecy, Suspicion & Scandal in Nineteenth-Century American Literature

Texts

Louisa May Alcott, *Behind a Mask*
Horatio Alger, *Ragged Dick*
P. T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*
Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly or Memoirs of a Sleepwalker*
Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok*
Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*
Pauline Hopkins, *The Magazine Novels*
Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*
Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Stories*
Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Tales*
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

AND a coursepack from Custom Copies. If possible, use the editions I've ordered.

Optional: Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*

Overview

Long before "Melrose Place" and the modern talk show, classic genres of American fiction, such as the Gothic novel and the detective story, were structured around the keeping and exposure of secrets that shape/distort the narrative in often bizarre ways. In this course, we'll read a number of canonical, popular, and recently resurrected nineteenth-century works that revel in scandal and/or harbor/expose secrets, including madness, adultery, incest, miscegenation, and same-sex desire. Some of these texts are quite familiar, and others are just now getting the attention they deserve. In some cases, the secrets are more biographical than textual, and/or have been "exposed" by scholars rather than the authors themselves. At issue in part is the idea of an American literary canon and the protocols of critical inquiry. We'll see how these scandalous narratives registered and mediated crises of personal and collective identity -- and continue to inspire suspicion and melodrama. We'll also explore how these tales of secret suffering compare to middle-class popular and therapeutic culture today.

Because these texts work so well together, I've decided not to organize them in sections and instead to approach them chronologically (with one exception). Even so, we'll return to certain key issues, among them gothicism, power, domesticity, crime, and primitivism. In addition to the literary texts, we'll make use of scholarly articles of assorted persuasions. The reading will be time-consuming and sometimes difficult, so be patient and willing to reread; there's more to life than understanding what you read the first (or the hundredth) time, anyway. If we need to, we can adjust the schedule, but please understand that the course will demand some time and concentration.

Although I will sometimes provide you with background material, for which you are responsible, we will conduct class as a seminar, which means that your participation is vital. Please come to class every day on time having read the assigned material. Be ready to share your responses. On occasion I may ask you to work in small groups. If you take more than three unexcused cuts from class, your final grade will be reduced one-third of a letter grade for each excess cut. Habitual tardies will be considered absences. I will take attendance in a variety of ways, sometimes at the end rather than the beginning of class.

Assignments and Grading

Your course grade will be based on the following assignments. There are no exams; nearly all of your grade comes from your writing. This means that while you won't have to remember all of the texts in detail, you will be writing about most of them. Because we have a lot to do in class, I don't plan to devote class time to writing issues, but I'm very available during office hours for help. I'm always happy to read drafts.

I reserve the right to give unannounced quizzes if I feel that students are too far behind in the reading or if discussion lags; should we have quizzes, they will be averaged with the memos.

Memos (10)		30%
Précis (1)	15%	
Essay 1		20%
Essay 2		25%
Active participation		10%

Memos. Over the semester, you will write 10 reading responses of 1-2 s-s., typed pages each. Out of some thwarted business urge I call such a response a "memo." The memo is simply a short meditation on the reading. You may address specific issues or comment on the readings in their entirety; just try to be as specific as you can in your observations and questions. You may also respond to the critical readings, on their own or in relation to the literary texts. This assignment is designed to stimulate class discussion, and to help you remember the texts and generate paper ideas. You may write these at any point in the semester, but you may not do more than one memo per week. Bring them to class; I may ask you to use them. Hold on to them until the end of class, and then turn them in. They do not need to be perfect, but please try to correct spelling

and typing errors. I will grade each memo and average the grades. This is basically a weekly assignment; get into the habit and it will be a piece of cake.

Précis. You will also write one 1-2 s-s pp. précis of a critical article or book chapter addressing some aspect of nineteenth-century literature or culture, excluding our class readings. This assignment requires to you not only to summarize, but also to analyze the method and rhetorical strategy of the article or chapter. The original article must be at least 10 pages long; I'd prefer that it be longer. It may not be from the web unless it originally appeared in a journal. Refer to specific page numbers (even when paraphrasing) so that we can locate the ideas you're summarizing and discussing. Attach a photocopy of your article/chapter, and use the following set-up:

1) First summarize the article or book chapter in 5-8 sentences. Explain the author's overall focus and the main claims of the argument.

2) Describe that author's critical methodology and perspective(s): Is the essay informed by a feminist sensibility? Does the writer emphasize psychological themes, or provide useful historical contextualizations? Is there any attention to socioeconomic issues (i.e. use of Marxist criticism)? Or is it a more traditional "close reading" of a text's language and plot? Often writers rely on a variety of critical methodologies: if so, what approach seems dominant, and does that primary approach effectively organize secondary ones? If the writer's method doesn't seem easy to categorize, just describe that method -- how does s/he approach the topic?

3) Offer an analysis of the essay's rhetorical strategy (the way it's designed to affect the audience): why is it organized the way it is? What makes it effective (or not)? What sorts of logic patterns does the writer rely on? Are there appeals to emotion, and if so, are they appropriate and successful? What makes it (or keeps it from being) effective and convincing? What is the writer's ethos?

4) Speculate about the implications of the information, both for our understanding of the text and beyond. What's useful about the essay? How could you expand it? What questions does it raise about the story, author, reader, etc.? What, in other words, is the piece good for?

You may also want to comment on what's ignored or devalued in the analysis: is the writer overlooking something which complicates (or even undermines) her argument? Does his or her commitment to a particular critical methodology rule out other interpretations?

Essay 1. Write a 5 d-s pp. analysis of any literary text we've addressed (or will address) in class; you do not have to use any additional material, but you may. Any topic and approach is fine, as long as you support your interpretations. Do not repeat what we've already said in class. Use your memos to brainstorm.

Essay 2. Write a 7 d-s pp. analysis of the topic of your choice; the only restrictions are that it must address some aspect of nineteenth-century American literature or culture

related to our class, and must partially draw from one of our critical readings or another critical reading of your choice.

I give A's to essays using an original and spirited argument to illuminate complexities of language and theme. I give B+'s to well-organized, well-developed, relatively error-free essays with sparks of originality or daring, and B's to competent essays needing more complex development and/or clearer focus. Lower grades mean greater problems with development, structure, and grammar. Recurrent grammatical errors lower the grade; occasional spelling errors and typos don't. The best essays sustain complex and/or audacious arguments; a good B essay capably summarizes and compares themes.

Active participation means attending regularly, asking questions, offering insights, sharing memos -- in short, being actively involved. I respect individual styles, and I do not expect you to talk all of the time, but plan to contribute to discussion.

Reading Schedule

Week 1 (1/6-8)	Foucault, <i>History of Sexuality</i> .
Week 2 (1/11-13)	Foucault continued; begin Brown, <i>Edgar Huntly</i> (1799).
Week 3 (1/20-22)	<i>Edgar Huntly</i> continued.
Week 4 (1/25-29)	Child, <i>Hobomok</i> (1824); begin Poe. "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Purloined Letter," "The Tell-tale Heart," and "The Black Cat" (mid-1840s)
Week 5 (2/1-5)	Poe continued. Freud, "The Uncanny." Précis due 2/5.
Week 6 (2/8-12)	Hawthorne, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> (1850).
Week 7 (2/15-19)	Stowe, <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> (1851); Romero, "Bio-Political Resistance."
Week 8 (2/22-26)	Yellow Bird, <i>Life of Joaquin Murieta</i> (1854) (in packet).
Week 9 (3/1-5)	Alcott, <i>Behind a Mask</i> (1866); Estes and Lant, "Dismembering the Text." Optional: Alcott, <i>A Long Fatal Love Chase</i> .
	[Spring Break 3/8-12]

- Week 10 (3/15-19) Alger, *Ragged Dick* (1868); Moon, "The Gentle Boy."
- Week 11 (3/22-26) Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs* (1869); Thomson, "The Cultural Work of American Freak Shows."
Essay 1 due 3/26.
- Week 12 (3/29-4/2) Melville, "Benito Cereno" (1855) and *Billy Budd, Sailor* (1891).
- Week 13 (4/5-9) Melville continued; Mizruchi, "Cataloguing the Creatures"; Stoddard, "Chumming with a Savage."
- Week 14 (4/12-16) James, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898).
- Week 15 (4/19-21) Hopkins, *Of One Blood* (1902/3); Gates, "Introduction."
Essay 2 due 4/21.