

# *Incurably Romantic?*

## *A Genealogy of the Romance Genre*

### *from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Seduction Novel to the "Twilight" Saga*

**Lecturer:** Priv.-Doz. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, Gastprofessor

**Room and time:** AR-K 122/23, Thursday, 14-16

**Course type and number:** Hauptseminar (1032300033)

**First session:** October 14, 2010

**Module:** Bachelor LCMS/LKM M 7.2: Gender Studies

**Course description:** Romanticism is undoubtedly one of the most misunderstood, but also one of the most influential literary movements in the United States. Marked by important shifts in the social history of Western cultures (e.g., the American and the French Revolution, feminism, and abolitionism), the Romantic Movement is often seen as a counter-discourse to the predominance of science and rationality in the Age of Enlightenment. Through its focus on emotions as well as aesthetic and supernatural elements (e.g., the "sublime"), the romance creates a literary realm full of dramatic tensions and unsolved riddles. We will trace the tradition of American romanticism through various subgenres, from the early seduction novel (Susanna Rowson) to the sentimental novel (Maria Susanna Cummins), the later blend of naturalism and romanticism (Kate Chopin), and the 20th- and 21st-century versions of the genre (M. Mitchell). What made romanticism so fascinating to American readers, rendering it the dominant genre from the 1800s far into the 1850s? Why is the genre still so influential today, in the form of romantic comedies (*Pretty Woman*), melodrama (*Titanic*), and fantasy romances (the *Twilight* saga). We will also briefly deal with 19th-century romantic thinking inspired by Transcendentalism (especially Walt Whitman) and this variant's contribution to what is called "helle Romantik," delimiting this approach from the pessimistic outlook of "Negative Romanticism" (Nathaniel Hawthorne). The materials to be discussed will include novels, short stories, poems, and paintings (e.g., the Hudson River School). To underline our findings, we will also take a look at a few cinematic examples which pick up the romantic tradition.

#### **Grading:**

2 CP: active participation in class discussions, expert session plus handout & at least nine entries in the discussion forum *before the session*;

5 CP: competent & lively participation in class discussions, expert session plus handout & at least ten entries in the discussion forum *before the session* & a 5-page summary of one important primary or secondary text (to be made accessible to the class);

7 CP: competent & lively participation in class discussions, expert session plus handout & at least ten entries in the discussion forum *before the session* & final paper of ca. 15 pages on a seminar-related topic with a close reading.

**Note:** Poor attendance or class participation will negatively affect your final grade!

**Deadline for Final Papers:** Friday, March 31 (Thursday), 2011. Note: There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

#### **Syllabus**

##### **14 October American Romanticism – Definition and History**

Basic texts (recommended):

Michael Davitt Bell, from *The Development of American Romance* (1980).<sup>1</sup>

Morse Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism" (1951).

##### **21 October The Formula of the Romance Novel – Sin, Seduction, and Redemption**

Main text (required):

Susanna Rowson, excerpts from *Charlotte Temple, A Tale of Truth* (1791), especially chapters 1, 33 & 35.

Background text (optional):

Tania Modleski, "Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women" (1982).

<sup>1</sup> All main texts for this course are available at Moodle: <https://moodle.uni-siegen.de>. All these texts are also available in the form of a course reader (for those who like to have everything printed out already). Copy write, Weidenauer Str. 248 (behind the police station), phone: 0271-45416.

- 28 October**     **“Negative Romanticism” – The Dark Side of Romance**  
Main text (required):  
Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844).  
Background text (optional):  
Edward M. Holmes, “Hawthorne and Romanticism” (1960).
- 04 November**   **The Female *Bildungsroman* as Religious Romance**  
Main text (required):  
Maria Susanna Cummins, excerpts from *The Lamplighter* (1854), especially chapters 1 & 48.  
Background text (optional):  
Kimberly Devlin, “The Romantic Heroine Exposed” (1985).
- 11 November**   **Transcendental Romanticism – Cosmic Love, Universalism, and Democracy**  
Main example (required):  
Walt Whitman, poems from *Leaves of Grass*, “To a Stranger” (1860), “Sometimes with One I Love” (1860),  
“Among the Multitude” (1860) “Gods” (1871).  
Background text (optional):  
R.P. Adams, “Romanticism and the American Renaissance” (1952).
- 18 November**   **“All that is glorious around us...” – The Hudson River School and the Celebration of Nature**  
Main text (required):  
Frederick A. Sweet, “The Hudson River School and the Early American Landscape Tradition”(1945).
- 25 November**   **Romanticism and Naturalism – The Determinist Logic of the Romance Genre**  
Main text (required):  
Kate Chopin, “The Story of an Hour” (1894).  
Background text (optional):  
Lawrence I. Berkove, “Fatal Self-Assertion in Kate Chopin’s ‘The Story of an Hour’” (2000).
- 02 December**   **Reinventing the Past – The Historical Romance**  
Main text (required):  
Margaret Mitchell, excerpts from *Gone with the Wind* (1936).  
Additional material (optional):  
*Gone with the Wind* (dir. Victor Fleming, 1939).
- 09 December**   **Romantic Suspense – The Love Story as a Mystery Thriller**  
Main example (required):  
*Suspicion* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1941).  
Background text (optional):  
Rick Worland, “Before and After the Fact: Writing and Reading Hitchcock’s *Suspicion*” (2002).
- 16 December**   **The Cinderella Myth – Romance as Education**  
Main example (required):  
*Pretty Woman* (dir. Garry Marshall, 1990).  
Background text (optional):  
Karol Kelley, “A Modern Cinderella” (1994).
- 13 January**     **Love and Death – Class, Tragedy, and Idealism in the Romantic Epic**  
Main example (required):  
*Titanic* (dir. James Cameron, 1997).  
Background text (optional):  
Robert von Dassanowsky, “A Mountain of a Ship: Locating the ‘Bergfilm’ in Cameron’s *Titanic*” (2001).
- 20 January**     **Gays in the City – Queer Romanticism and the Subversion of the Romantic Code**  
Main text (required):  
Armistead Maupin, *Michael Tolliver Lives*, esp. “Footnotes to a Feeling” and “This Day Alone” (2007).  
Background text (optional):  
Robyn R. Warhol, “How Serial Form Works in Armistead Maupin’s *Tales of the City*” (1999).
- 27 January**     **Vampires, Eroticism, and Victorian Nostalgia – The *Twilight* Phenomenon I**  
Main example (required):  
Stephenie Meyer, excerpts from *Twilight* (2005), especially “Preface” and “First Sight.”  
Additional material (optional):  
*Twilight* (dir. Catherine Hardwicke, 2008).
- 03 February**    **Romanticism as a Mass Phenomenon – The *Twilight* Phenomenon II**  
Main example (required):  
Stephenie Meyer, “Sneak Peek at ‘New Moon,’ the Irresistible Sequel to *Twilight*” (2005).  
Background text (optional):  
“Interview with Stephenie Meyer” (*Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* Apr. 2006).