Incurably Romantic?

A Genealogy of the Romance Genre

from the 18th 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).

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):

1 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):  

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):  

11 November  Transcendental Romanticism – Cosmic Love, Universalism, and Democracy  
Main example (required):  
Background text (optional):  

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):  

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):  
Background text (optional):  

13 January  Love and Death – Class, Tragedy, and Idealism in the Romantic Epic  
Main example (required):  
Titanic (dir. James Cameron, 1997).  
Background text (optional):  

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):  
Background text (optional):  
“Interview with Stephenie Meyer” (Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy Apr. 2006).