



## Introduction

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The genesis of this seminar was an elaborate two-year plan of mine: one year on ancient and medieval romances, a second on “new world romance,” starting with the journals and reports of the discoverers, and moving on to various American romantic fictions. The guiding spirits were Richard Chase’s classic, “The American Novel and its Tradition,” and Will Spensjemann’s more recent study, “The Adventurous Muse.” In compressing the seminar into one year, I wasn’t sure we ever read enough old romances to develop a sure sense of the genre—though it’s an elusive enough genre, I suppose, no matter how many instances of it one piles up. So we struggled constantly to make sense of our guiding notion, and to see quite a broad variety of American texts, from “Two Years Before the Mast” to “The Red Badge of Courage” to science fiction in terms of romance. (We saw them a good deal less in terms of “The American Dream,” which tended to stay submerged for long stretches in our discussions, but which is very nicely represented by Peter Herndon’s unit on actual American utopian communities.)

The units that follow accordingly reflect a somewhat broad definition of romance. Some, such as Casey Cassidy’s on “The Treasure of the Sierra Madre,” Tony Franco’s on Edgar Rice Burroughs, or Lorna Dils’s on science fiction, treat texts that have a strong, clear relation to the tradition of American fiction we concentrated on. Others vary from that tradition, whether in genre (such as Dwight Inge on “As you Like It” or Cheryl Merritt on “The Ox-Cart” and “Raisin in the Sun”), or in place (Ruth Iosue on “Les Miserables,” and Dwight Inge again). But all arise in some way from our theme, and in their very variety reflect the protean nature of romance.

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