

# English 203 Studies in American Literature

Fall 2010  
Section 00  
MWF 9-9:50 a.m.  
Oddfellows 106

Prof. Jeremy Wells  
jwells@allegheny.edu  
Office: Oddfellows 235  
Office hours: MTW 11 a.m.-1 p.m. or by appt.  
Office phone: x4322

*These volumes are so far from being intended as a substitute for genuine history, that the ambition of the writer would be fully gratified if, by this work, any of our young countrymen should be stimulated to investigate the early history of their native land.*

So concludes the preface of Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie; or, Early Times in Massachusetts*, the first work of literature we will read in this and one that will prove a touchstone for us throughout the semester. Our goal will be, in part, "to investigate the early history of [our] native land" (or, if the United States happens not to be your country of birth, the early history of the nation in which you now reside). Much more so, however, we will be investigating how American literature has helped to construct and reconstruct a narrative of national history, one that helps us ("our young countrymen," Sedgwick calls them; our young countrywomen, too, I will add) to imagine a relationship between ourselves and our national predecessors—our "Founders," as we may or may not wish to call them.

To do this, we will focus on two episodes in American history that have since been interpreted (in literature, film, popular history, and other forms of culture) as moments of national origins, moments at which "America" itself may be said to have begun. The first of these is what Sedgwick terms "early times in Massachusetts," namely the colonization of the lands near the Massachusetts Bay by pilgrims, Puritans, and others during the early 17th century. The second will be the Civil War and the era of national rebirth, as it subsequently came to be called, that followed. In both cases we will be reading texts from a range of genres (including short stories, novels, and poems) and time periods (from 1827, the year *Hope Leslie* was published, to 2008, the year of Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*). The course will thus provide you some sense of U.S. literary history. More than this, however, it aims to provide you a sense of U.S. literary *historicity*: a sense of how works of the imagination both reflect the historical moments at which they were produced and contribute to an ongoing, never settled, and always charged set of debates concerning who "we" are, what our "early history" represents, and to whom our "native land" belongs.

**Required Texts** All texts except for the course reader are available at the Campus Center bookstore. The course reader should be completed long before we begin reading from it; I will notify you when it becomes available. If you do not already own copies of the texts ordered for this course, buy the editions listed below. If you happen already to own a different edition of a text and do not wish to purchase another, check with me to make sure your edition is acceptable.

Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie* (Rutgers)  
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (Penguin)  
John Updike, *Roger's Version* (Fawcett Columbine)  
Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* (Vintage)

Paul Negri, ed. *Civil War Poetry: An Anthology* (Dover)  
Frances Harper, *Iola Leroy* (Beacon)  
Ambrose Bierce, *Civil War Stories* (Dover)  
William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* (Vintage)

## Course schedule Tentative and subject to change

- Fri. 8/27 Introduction and Course Overview
- Mon. 8/30 Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*, Preface-vol. 1, ch. 3 (pp. 1-40)
- Wed. 9/1 Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*, vol. 1, chs. 4-7 (pp. 41-94)
- Fri. 9/3 Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*, vol. 1, chs. 8-12 (pp. 95-169)
- Mon. 9/6 Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*, vol. 2, chs. 1-8 (pp. 173-280)
- Wed. 9/8 Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*, vol. 2, chs. 9-15 (pp. 281-353)
- Fri. 9/10 Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, "The Custom House" and chs. 1-3 (pp. 7-64)
- Mon. 9/13 Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, chs. 4-8 (65-103)
- Wed. 9/15 Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, chs. 9-14 (104-152)
- Fri. 9/17 Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, chs. 15-19 (125-186)
- Mon. 9/20 Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, chs. 20-Conclusion (187-228)
- Wed. 9/22 Dickinson, "To fight aloud, is very brave," "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church," "The Bible is an antique Volume," "'Hope' is the thing with feathers," "'Faith' is a fine invention," "Heaven is what I cannot reach!" "Dust is the only Secret," "God is a distant—stately Lover," "The Brain—is wider than the Sky" (handout)
- Fri. 9/24 Dickinson, "To hang our head—ostensibly," "I cautious, scanned my little life," "I never felt at Home—Below," "Savior! I've no one else to tell," "I never saw a moor," "He fumbles at your Soul" (handout)
- Mon. 9/27 Dickinson, "Dare you see a Soul *at the White Heat?*" "I like a look of Agony," "I'm 'wife'—I've finished that," "Did the harebell loose her girdle," "I started Early—Took my Dog" (handout)
- Wed. 9/29 Updike, *Roger's Version*, Books I-II (3-148)
- Fri. 10/1 Updike, *Roger's Version*, Book III (149-226)
- Mon. 10/4 Updike, *Roger's Version*, Books IV-V (227-329)
- Wed. 10/6 Morrison, *A Mercy*, pp. 1-41
- Fri. 10/8 Morrison, *A Mercy*, pp.42-118
- Mon. 10/11 *Fall Break: Class does not meet*
- Wed. 10/13 Morrison, *A Mercy*, pp. 119-196
- Fri. 10/15 Morrison, *A Mercy* (cont.); **paper #1 due in class**
- Mon. 10/18 Transition: Allegheny's origins, Allegheny's Civil War (no assigned reading; details TBA)
- Wed. 10/20 **Midterm Exam**
- Fri. 10/22 From *Civil War Poetry*: Howe, "Battle Hymn of the Republic"; Timrod, "Ethnogenesis"; Whittier, "Barbara Frietchie"; Bryant, "The Death of Slavery"; Ticknor, "The Virginians of the Valley"; Finch, "The Blue and the Gray"; Bierce, "The Hesitating Veteran"
- Mon. 10/25 From *Civil War Poetry*: selections from Walt Whitman (87-102)
- Wed. 10/27 From *Civil War Poetry*: selections from Herman Melville (38-47)
- Fri. 10/29 Howells, "Editha"; Twain, "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed" (CR)
- Mon. 11/1 Harris, "Ananias"; Twain, "A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It" (CR)
- Wed. 11/3 Alcott, from *Hospital Sketches*, "My Contraband" (CR)
- Fri. 11/5 *Reading day: Class does not meet*

- Mon. 11/8 Harper, *Iola Leroy*, chs. 1-13 (pp. 7-119)
- Wed. 11/10 Harper, *Iola Leroy*, chs. 14-21 (pp. 120-197)
- Fri. 11/12 Harper, *Iola Leroy*, chs. 22-concluding "Note" (198-282)
- Mon. 11/15 Bierce, from *Civil War Stories*: "What I Saw of Shiloh," "Four Days in Dixie," "Chickamauga," "Killed at Resaca"
- Wed. 11/17 Bierce, from *Civil War Stories*: "Incident at Owl Creek Bridge," "An Affair of Outposts"
- Fri. 11/19 Faulkner, *The Unvanquished*, "Ambuscade" and (3-35)
- Mon. 11/22 Faulkner, *The Unvanquished*, "Retreat," "Raid," and "Riposte in Tertio" (37-154)
- Wed. 11/24 *Thanksgiving Break: Class does not meet*
- Fri. 11/26 *Thanksgiving Break: Class does not meet*
- Mon. 11/29 Faulkner, *The Unvanquished*, "Vendée," "Skirmish at Sartoris" (155-210)
- Wed. 12/1 Faulkner, *The Unvanquished*, "An Odor of Verbena" (211-254); **paper #2 due in class**
- Fri. 12/3 **Group presentations**
- Mon. 12/6 **Group presentations**
- Wed. 12/8 **Group presentations**
- Sat. 12/11 **Final Exam (9 a.m.)**

## Course policies and procedures

**Contacting me** In addition to my regular office hours (MTW 11 a.m.-1 p.m.), I am available for appointments; you will need to e-mail or talk to me before or after class to arrange one. I tend to do most of my e-mailing in the morning and early afternoon. I cannot be counted upon to check e-mail during the evening, though, so if you're wanting to correspond about an upcoming paper, do not wait until the evening before it's due to contact me.

**Readings** You should complete the assigned reading before each class and be ready to discuss it. Longer readings are divided into sections, and you are responsible only for those pages assigned for that day.

To borrow a line from a great teacher of mine, you should also think of reading as a contact sport. Active reading requires writing, so be sure to mark your text, noting specific passages, questions, etc. you would like to discuss in class.

**Attendance and participation** The success of the course depends on the enthusiastic participation of each and every member. I thus expect you to arrive to every class having completed the assigned reading and prepared yourself to contribute to class discussion. Come with responses to the questions I may have posed during the class before. Come also with questions and comments of your own—and, more generally, with a willingness to involve yourself in the give-and-take of that day's discussion. I do a fair amount of preparation to ensure productive discussions, but my favorite classes are inevitably those that assume lives of their own (which is to say, those in which students take the lead and work collaboratively to address the issues they find most compelling).

You may wish to e-mail or meet with me before or after class if there are specific issues you would like to discuss. I consider these forms of participation, too, though they cannot entirely substitute for active in-class participation.

Your participation grade (20% of your final grade) will reflect how well you make these contributions. The student who does not miss class and comes always prepared, always willing to contribute insights of his or her own, and always willing to respond thoughtfully to the questions and comments of others will receive a grade in the "A" range. The student who does not miss class but contributes less frequently and/or in a less clearly prepared manner will receive a "B." The student who misses class routinely (four or five unexcused absences) will receive a "C," as will the student who shows up but participates infrequently and/or unpreparedly. The student who

receives a “D” participation grade likely has six unexcused absences. The student who has seven or more unexcused absences simply fails the course.

Excused absences generally involve family emergencies or illness. In the case of illness, you are required to provide a doctor’s note. Should you miss class for any reason, you are responsible for knowing what went on, including any changes to the syllabus or revisions to assignments.

**Papers** You will write two 5-6 pp. papers for this course, each of which will count for 15% of your final grade. We will discuss later what constitutes a successful paper, and I will provide you a handout that outlines my expectations and explains what in my book separates “A” from “B” work, etc. Handouts for both papers will arrive at least two weeks before their due dates.

**Exams** You will take a midterm as well as a final exam, each of which will test whether you have been keeping up with the assigned reading and paying attention to the issues discussed in class. Each will constitute 20% of your final grade. Details will be discussed in advance of each exam.

**Group presentations** Our final three class meetings will be devoted to presentations in which you and (in all likelihood) two additional classmates present the results of some research you have done into some text or issue related to those we discuss in this course. A handout will be provided soon after the midterm exam, and I will assist you in developing research topics and forming groups whose members possess similar interests.

**Plagiarism** Article III, section 3 of the Allegheny College Honor Code defines plagiarism as “using the ideas or words of another without citing the sources from which the ideas or words are taken.” We will devote a portion of an upcoming class to discussing plagiarism and how to avoid it. Know now simply that I take it very seriously, that it will result in an “F” for the course, and that I will refer any instance of it to the Honor Committee.

**Grading** Your grade for the course will be computed as follows.

Participation .....	15%
Paper #1.....	15%
Paper #2.....	15%
Midterm.....	20%
Final Exam.....	20%
Group Presentations.....	15%

**Cell phones and other noisemakers** Let us remind each other to silence these before class begins. My son currently has mine set to play a heavy metal guitar riff when a call comes in. No one wants to hear that in the midst of a vigorous discussion of an Emily Dickinson poem.