Literature and History III: Slavery and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century Literature

Eng. 373 Dr. Sutphin
MWThF 10:00-10:50 L&L 403E
L&L 415 ext. 3433; sutphinc@cwu.edu
Office Hours: M 2:00-3:00
W by appointment
Th11:00-12:00
F 11:00-12:00

Texts:

*The History of Mary Prince*, Mary Prince
*Georges*, Alexandre Dumas
*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Frederick Douglass
*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe
*Our Nig*, Harriet Wilson
*Iola LeRoy*, Frances Harper or *The Marrow of Tradition*, Charles Chesnutt


Purpose:

In addition to the outcomes listed below, the specific purpose of this course is to examine nineteenth-century narratives about slavery and freedom in the British West Indies, French colonial Africa, and the U.S. in their historical context. We will be working to understand how the meanings of “slavery” and “freedom” were dependent on each other and how a country where some people were enslaved could construct itself as “free.” We will also be exploring how slavery and the movement to end it were transatlantic endeavors: British, American, and French literature were read in all three countries (*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was even more popular in Britain than in the U.S.), and Britain, particularly, also provided a significant audience and refuge for activists of color. Although often the debate about slavery had as much to do with rivalry between the two nations as it did with human rights and justice, British and American abolitionists did collaborate with and inspire each other. Most of the texts we’ll read are “anti-slavery,” but they often do not conform to what we regard today as more enlightened views of race, gender, and class. While we must call to attention and discuss thinking we regard as serving the interests of the powerful, we should be careful not to stereotype the Victorians as “racist” or “sexist” in contrast to ourselves. In “Reconstructing Victorian Racial Discourse,” Douglass Lorimer argues that

> [a]lthough post colonial discourse has taught us a great deal about the limitations imposed by language and about the meaning of images in the construction of the colonial
Other, our scholarship has allowed us to colonize the Victorians. Consequently, the Victorians have come to stand for the racist Other in binary opposition to our implicit nonracist Self. This reconstruction often relies on a limited selection of sources wherein received racist views are presented as representative opinion. It also ignores altogether those Victorians who were critical of the prevailing racist orthodoxy of the time and has no place for colonial subjects of Asian and African descent who engaged in a campaign of resistance to this racism.” (Black Victorians / Black Victoriana 187)

Part of the purpose of studying literature about the deeply disturbing subject of slavery is to recognize, without simply idealizing, the tremendous courage of both black and white activists.

Another purpose will be to examine the functions of sentimental fiction and melodrama, which were employed in both slave narratives and novels of the period. We will discuss the ways in which these genres have been reinterpreted after a long period in which they were dismissed as merely hackneyed. More recent critics, such as Jane Tompkins, argue that the sentimental novel was the primary vehicle for social comment and critique in the nineteenth century.

Outcomes:
1. Explain the way a literary work can be analyzed and interpreted against the background of the literature of its particular period, citing several relevant authors for comparison.
2. Survey a literary movement or historical process within the period (in this case, Victorian) with reference to canonical and noncanonical texts as well as a variety of literary genres, relating the literary history of the period to concurrent political, cultural, intellectual and aesthetic histories.
3. Identify specific literary movements, as well as the socio-cultural implications of those movements, with the Victorian period.
4. Explain ways in which literature contributes to our knowledge of a particular period by aligning itself with or by articulating a significant difference from dominant discourses.
5. Demonstrate knowledge of representative texts from specific periods and/or movements.

Requirements:

Attendance and participation:

Keeping up with the reading, attending class, and contributing to the conversation are essential. In addition, you will be working with other class members who will count on you to participate. Read carefully and actively, write questions and responses in the margins of your texts or in a notebook. These questions and responses will serve as the basis for both class participation and papers.
Note on attendance, handing in assignments, and participation:

Four absences may reduce your final grade by one degree (A- to B+);
Five absences may reduce your final grade by one full letter (A- to B-);
Six or more absences may cause you to fail the course.

There are no excused absences or automatic extensions. Late assignments are generally unacceptable. However, I understand that emergencies do arise. An exception may be made if I agree that your circumstances warrant it. If you establish a pattern of conscientious attendance and turning in assignments on time, your credibility increases, and when you have an emergency, I can assume that you are a responsible person and are doing everything you can to meet your obligations. If you establish a pattern of absences, late assignments, and continual excuses, you damage your credibility, making it difficult for me to justify giving you a break. Ask for an extension only if you have a genuine emergency. While coming to class every day is important, simply being here doesn’t earn an “A” in this category. Being here is a basic requirement. You exhibit the level of your participation through the thoughtfulness of your questions and comments, the degree of care and reflection you give to your writing, your tone and attitude in regard to your work and the members of the class, your commitment to the course. **February 20 is the last day to drop without petitioning. Reasons to drop by Feb. 20: you have missed more than three classes or know that you will miss more than three class periods before the end of the quarter and/or you missed the due date for the first paper or did not participate in the critical approach group. Don’t just disappear if you decide not to attend class and fall behind in your work; withdraw to avoid receiving a failing grade.

Avoiding plagiarism: Of course, part of “participation” in any course is doing your own work and being very careful to give credit for any sources you quote or authors whose ideas you use. Although some plagiarism is not detected, a great deal of it is because professors are experienced readers. A case of plagiarism damages your credibility as well as your grade. Professors report plagiarism to Student Affairs.

If you need disability related educational accommodations, contact Disabilities Services at 963-2171. Please let me know about any accommodations made through DS.

Tests:

Six tests evaluate your reading knowledge of the texts as well as class discussion about them and their literary and historical contexts. The tests will contain specific questions about main points made in groups’ reports and article presentations.

Make-up test policy: You may make up one test if you miss class on the day the test is given if you make it up within two class days. For example, if you miss a test on Monday, make it up before class Friday. Go to the English Department office (L&L 422) and ask for the test. It will be in a file with your name on it, and you can take it at the desk just outside the office. If discussion during the make-up grace period covers material on the test that would give you an
unfair advantage over your classmates, I will have to eliminate that material from the test.

**Papers:**

Two 6-page papers that advance a thesis of your own with the incorporation of at least two sources. The first of these papers may be on any of the works we’ve read through Feb. 4 on the syllabus (Hammond’s essay through Georges). The second paper may be on any of the works assigned from Feb. 7 on (“The Quadroons” through Iola Leroy or The Marrow of Tradition). For rules on incorporating your sources, consult The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (7th ed.) or MLA format rules at Purdue Owl on line. MLA prefers attributive tags (“Martha Benson argues” or “According to Martha Benson”) rather than freestanding citations. See also instructions and ideas for papers in separate handouts available later in the quarter.

Papers should be followed by a works cited page giving full bibliographic information according to The MLA Handbook. Use only scholarly sources--print or from library data bases. Keep in mind that not all valuable scholarship is available in full text forms. If you limit your search to full text, you may miss significant sources. Use the MLA Bibliography as your major research source.

Papers must be typed, double-spaced on standard 8 ½ x 11" paper. Leave about an inch margin on all sides. Number your pages. Use a staple or paper clip (no plastic folders please). Consult a recent handbook for grammar and punctuation rules. Proofread your paper carefully before and after it comes out of the printer.

Revision option: If you receive a grade of C- or lower on your paper, you may rewrite if you meet the following conditions:

1) You take the paper with my comments to the Writing Center and consult with someone there. That person will notify me that you have been there and when.

2) Your revision shows evidence that you have attempted to deal with the problems mentioned in the comments and meet the expectations of the assignment as outlined in the paper guidelines given out in class.

3) You turn in the revision one week from the date you received the original paper back by 12:00 p.m. at my office or in my department mail box.

4) At the time you turn in your paper, you also turn in the graded copy with my comments.

I will not have time to comment on your revision, but I will read it and see whether I can justify raising your grade to a C. C (76%) is the highest grade possible on a revision in order to be fair to others who did not have the option to rewrite.

**Take-home Final:**

The take-home final will require short essays on either Iola Leroy or The Marrow of Tradition. Some knowledge of the work you did not read will be available through class discussion and will also be part of the final.
Reading/Research/Presentation Groups:
The purpose of the critical group is to find and discuss with the class a recent critical article
(within the last ten years*) that provides an interesting perspective on the work you are assigned.
Explain how the article offers a way to read the book or addresses a significant issue the book
raises. Your responsibility is to summarize/analyze the article and lead class discussion for a
period of approximately 40 minutes.
*If you find an article you think is exceptionally useful that is over ten years old, consult with
me.

Reports on icons, popular reception, and racial attitudes:
I will ask you to do research and briefly report your findings to the class on one of these subjects:
1) Frederick Douglass as public figure/icon in the nineteenth century and beyond; 2) Uncle
Tom’s Cabin in popular culture (which could include “Uncle Tom mania” in Britain or other
popular culture representations of characters from the novel); 3) Illustration of Uncle Tom’s
Cabin; 4) Jim Crow laws in the U.S. after the Civil War and attitudes toward race and people of
color in Britain around the turn of the century (1889-1902). (See schedule for dates.) Some of
your sources for the report may be Internet sources, but analyze them carefully. See separate
handout on reports. Time for reports will depend on the number of people enrolled, but prepare
to talk for at least 10-15 minutes and we’ll have some time for questions/discussion. In addition
to reporting to the class, turn in a three-page double-spaced report (about 900 words). On a
separate page, list the sources you used with full bibliographic information in correct MLA
format. Explanations of scholarly articles will take longer than reports because you will need to
summarize the argument and give us some of the critic’s evidence.

Grades:
tests 90 pts. (13 to 20 pts. per test, depending on works covered)
1st paper 70 pts.
critical research presentation 40 pts.
report 30 pts.
2nd paper 70 pts.
attendance and participation 35 pts.
Total: 335 pts.
Schedule:
I will do my best to stay on schedule. We may need to alter it, depending on weather or other emergencies. I will keep you posted about changes by announcements in class and/or e-mail/Canvas. Check your Central e-mail account regularly.

Wed., Jan. 7 - Introduction / Discussion of quotations


Fri., Jan. 9 - Rhetoric of slavery and freedom: “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?,” Frederick Douglass (packet)

We probably won’t get to this reading assignment today, but I’m including it here as encouragement to begin reading Prince’s narrative when we have a longer break between classes: *The History of Mary Prince* preface and 7-38 and Salih’s introduction vii-xxxii

**Reading/historical/critical groups assigned**


Thurs., Jan. 15 - Research: Finding and evaluating sources
Summary, analysis/discussion of article on MP

Fri., Jan. 16 - *History of Mary Prince*
*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* preface, letter, chapters 1-5, pp. 47-75

Mon., Jan. 19 - Martin Luther King Holiday

Wed., Jan. 21 - *Narrative* chapters 6-appendix, pp. 77-59
Excerpts from *My Bondage and My Freedom* (packet)
**Group 1: Report** on nineteenth-century views of Douglass / Douglass as icon
**Passages chosen** for discussion

Thurs., Jan. 22 - **Group 1: summary and discussion of literary critical article** on *Narrative* and/or *My Bondage and My Freedom*
Fri., Jan. 23 - **Test** on Hammond, Morrison, Douglass (“What to the Slave . . .?”), Edgeworth, Browning, Prince  
I’ll talk about conventions of “race mixing” in history and literature.

Mon., Jan. 26 - *Georges*, Alexander Dumas, chapters 1-6, 3-63 (60)

Wed., Jan. 28 - *Georges* chapters 7-12, 64-117 (53)

Thurs., Jan. 29 - *Georges* chapters 13-15, 118-49 (31)  
**Group 2: Report on slavery in French African island L’ Isle de France**

Fri., Jan. 30 - *Georges* chapters 16-18, 150-83 (33)  
**Group 2: Passages chosen for discussion**

Mon., Feb. 2 - *Georges* chapters 19-26, 184-250 (66)

Wed., Feb. 4 - *Georges* chapters 27-30, 251-92 (41)  
**Group 2: summary and discussion of critical article on Georges**

Thurs., Feb. 5 - **Test** on Douglass’s *Narrative* and excerpts from *MBMF*, and *Georges*  
Question at issue/thesis workshop

Fri., Feb. 6 - Mixed-race conventions in “The Quadroons, ” Lydia Maria Child and *The Octoroon*  
Dion Boucicault (about 44 pages total)

Mon., Feb. 9 - **First papers due**  
Talk on Frances Trollope’s *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw*


Thurs., Feb. 12 - *UTC* chapters 6-8, 45-82 (37)  
**Group 3: passages** for class discussion

Fri., Feb. 13 - *UTC* chapters 9-10, 82-122 (40)  
**Group 3: Report** on *UTC* in popular culture, “Uncle Tom mania,” etc.  
**Group 4: Report** on illustration of *UTC*

Mon., Feb. 16 - Presidents’ Day Holiday

**Group 3: summary and discussion of critical article** on *UTC*
Thurs., Feb. 19 - *UTC* chapters 25-28, 286-326 (40)

**Group 4: passages** for class discussion

Fri., Feb. 20 - *UTC* chapters 29-33, 326-66 (40)

**Group 4: summary and discussion of critical article** on *UTC*

Mon., Feb. 23 - *UTC* - chapters 34-45, 366-456 (90)

Wed., Feb. 25 - **Test** on “The Quadroons,” *The Octoroon*, talk on *Whitlaw*, and *UTC*

Most of the test questions will be on *UTC* and group reports on critical articles and historical background.

Reading: *Our Nig*, Harriet Wilson, chapters 1-4, pp. 1-29 and P. Gabrielle Foreman’s introduction

**Group 5: passages** for class discussion

Thurs., Feb. 26 - *Our Nig*, chapters 5-10, 30-61

**Group 5: Report** on conditions for African-Americans in Northern U.S.

Fri., Feb. 27 - *Our Nig*, 11-12 and appendix, 70-80

**Group 5: summary and discussion of critical article** on ON

Mon., March 2 - **Test** on *Our Nig*

**Option:** Half the class reads *Iola Leroy*/ Half the class reads *Marrow of Tradition*. On test 5 you will be responsible for some knowledge (based on class reports and discussion) of the novel you did not read.

Everyone attends class discussion of *Iola Leroy*, chapters 1-6, pp. 7-49 (42 short pages).

Wed., March 4 - *Iola LeRoy*

Everyone attends class discussion of *Iola Leroy*, chapters 7-18, pp. 50-163 (113 short pages)

**Group 6: passages** for discussion

Thurs., March 5 - *Iola LeRoy*, chapters 19-25,164-220 (56 short pages)

Fri., March 6 - *Iola Leroy*, chapters 26-33, 221-282 (61 short pages)

**Student-led discussion of critical article on Iola Leroy**

Mon., March 9 - *The Marrow of Tradition*

Everyone attends discussion of *The Marrow of Tradition*, chapters 1-12, 1-114 (114 short pages)

**Group 7: passages** for discussion

**Groups 6 and 7: Report** on Jim Crow laws/racism in the U.S. and attitudes toward people of color in Britain at the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century

Thurs., March 12 - *Marrow*, chapters 23-30, 196-267 (71 short pages)

**Groups 7: summary and discussion of critical article on Marrow**

Fri., March 13 - *Marrow*, chapters 31-37, 268-329 (61 short pages)

**Tuesday, March 17 - 4:00 - 2nd papers due** at my office or in my English Department mail box.

Your paper should include at least one work from the latter part of the class, but you may include a work or works from the earlier part of the course that you did not write about in the first paper; for example you could explore connections between and/or revisions of earlier slave narratives (Prince or Douglass) with *Our Nig*, or you could write on “The Grateful Negro” and *Our Nig*, or Douglass’s *Narrative* and the experience of one or more of the characters in *UTC*. (See prompts handout.) Or you could write about the significance of so-called “race mixing” and fiction conventions in *Georges* and *Iola Leroy* or *The Marrow of Tradition*.

**Thursday, March 19 - 9:00 - Test** on either *Iola LeRoy* or *The Marrow Tradition* and questions on groups’ reports (critical and historical) for both novels