

English 8200: Seminar: Studies in Early American Literature. Spring 2006	Edward M. Griffin
“Twentieth-Century Literature Encounters Early America”	E-mail griffin@umn.edu
Thursdays, 3:25-5:55 p.m., Lind Hall 315	Office Hours: M, Tues, 3-4 p.m. and by appointment

GENERAL INFORMATION

This spring, the seminar in early American literature departs from my usual practice. The topic under investigation will be “Twentieth-Century Literature Encounters Early America.” We shall read the literature of early America through certain filters provided in many genres by writers of our time, both American and British, who have recovered the colonial and national periods for their own literary—and often political—purposes. What cultural work, we shall ask, have early American literature and history done in “the American century”? How and why have writers living three centuries after British colonization and the war for American independence chosen to seize those early days for their subject matter and even for their forms? How has early America supplied contemporary America with the long-sought-after “usable past”?

The reading list is selective but broadly representative. John Berryman's long poem “Homage to Mistress Bradstreet” takes us back to the seventeenth century and Anne Bradstreet, the mother of American verse in English. While Berryman meditates on the first great American poet, Peter Ackroyd's novel *Milton in America* transplants her contemporary, the great English poet John Milton, to seventeenth-century Massachusetts. Robert Lowell's verse drama *Endecott and the Red Cross* rewrites Hawthorne to reconsider, in the 1960s, the issues of power in those very early years of the British colonial enterprise. Ackroyd's fellow English novelist Christopher Bigsby, like Lowell, retells Hawthorne in his novel *Hester*, a speculation on how Hester and Arthur got together before they arrived in seventeenth-century Boston and before Hawthorne's romance even begins. At the end of the century, the 1692 witchcraft episode receives its most famous modern literary treatment in Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, but Esther Forbes's 1928 novel *A Mirror for Witches* may be even more compelling because of its superior historical accuracy. Moving into the eighteenth century, *Hanging Katherine Garret*, a recent novel by U of M Ph. D. candidate Abigail Davis, captures the ongoing ramifications of the Pequot war a century after the battles. Lowell's one-act play *My Kinsman, Major Molineux*, follows Hawthorne's lead about revolutionary America but reads that story in light of concerns of the mid 1960s. And two mammoth, “post-modern” novels, John Barth's *The Sot Weed Factor* (based on Ebenezer Cooke's eighteenth-century satirical poem) and Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* (based on that duo's manifold adventures) will challenge the reading and interpretive skills of each of us.

The seminar will be challenging, for it requires everyone to cross many boundaries of history and literature, but border banditry can often be exciting, and I hope that this adventure will offer its share of thrills and chills.

CONDUCT OF THE SEMINAR

A graduate seminar, by definition, involves a fairly intensive investigation of a delimited topic. It depends, moreover, upon the exchange of ideas among its members. Hence I shall expect active class participation each member, and I'll try to lecture only occasionally. I shall assign some readings to be done in common for each class meeting. Naturally, we cannot for genuine class participation unless each member has prepared the readings. A seminar also tries to produce new knowledge based on research. Typically, each student goes off to live the life of the lonely scholar in the stacks, but in this seminar we will try teamwork, encouraging not isolation but cooperation, not private communication between the student/scholar and the teacher/scholar but more public sharing of information among a small community of scholars. The invention of electronic mail makes this goal much easier to achieve now than heretofore, and we'll use E-mail frequently

By Wednesday at 10:00 p.m. before each Thursday meeting of the seminar, you are expected to send an E-mail to the entire class. That message will contain an issue arising from the week's assignment or from your research that you would like the entire seminar to discuss at the Thursday meeting. It could be something significant that puzzles you or engages you in some other way, or it could be an issue of theory or interpretation. Frame your topic as a problem or a proposition suitable for debate and discussion. In short, you will set most of the agenda for our seminar meetings. (Messages received earlier than the deadline, of course, will be particularly welcome.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER	ISBN NUMBER
<i>A Mirror for Witches</i>	Esther Forbes	Any edition	
<i>The Crucible</i>	Arthur Miller	Penguin Classics	0142437336
<i>Homage to Mistress Bradstreet</i>	John Berryman	Farrar, Straus & Giroux	0374506604
<i>The Sot-Weed Factor</i>	John Barth	Anchor; Anchor Books	0385240880
<i>Mason/Dixon</i>	Thomas Pynchon	Picador	0312423209
<i>The Old Glory (My Kinsman, Endecott and the Red Cross)</i>	Robert Lowell	Farrar, Straus and Giroux	0374527040
<i>Hanging Katherine Garret</i>	Abigail Davis	Heritage Books	0788419226
<i>Milton in America</i>	Peter Ackroyd	Faber & Faber	0571190189
<i>Hester</i>	Christopher Bigsby	Penguin	0140238115

Hawthorne, short tales	http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/h/hawthorne/nathaniel/h39ta/ Or http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Eaf120.html		
<i>The Sot-Weed Factor in The Maryland muse. Containing I. The history of Colonel Nathaniel Bacon's rebellion in Virginia. Done into Hudibrastick verse, from an old ms. II. The sotweed factor, or voiage to Maryland</i>	Ebenezer Cooke	Early American Imprints Series (Evans) No. 3407, pp. 17 ff.	
Several poems to her husband	Anne Bradstreet	Handout	
<i>A sermon preached on the occasion of the execution of Katherine Garret, an Indian-servant, (who was condemned for the murder of her spurious child,) on May 3d. 1738. To which is added some short account of her behaviour after her condemnation. Together with her dying warning and exhortation. Left under her own hand.</i>	Eliphalet Adams	Early American Imprints Series (Evans) No. 4215	
CALENDAR OF READING ASSIGNMENTS			
DATE	TOPIC	READINGS	NOTES
1/19	Intro & Organization		
1/26	The Garret Case	<i>Hanging Katherine Garret Adams, Execution sermon</i>	Abigail Davis visit Read EAI 4215
2/2	The Sot-Weed Factor	Cooke, <i>The Sot-Weed Factor</i> electronic text Barth, <i>The Sot-Weed Factor</i>	Read EAI , 3407

2/9	The Sot-Weed Factor	Barth, <i>The Sot-Weed Factor</i>		
2/16	The Sot-Weed Factor	Barth, <i>The Sot-Weed Factor</i>		
2/23	Anne Bradstreet	Bradstreet poems to her husband Berryman, <i>Homage to Mistress Bradstreet</i>	Bradstreet handout	
3/2	Merry Mount, Endicott and the Red Cross, My Kinsman, Major Molineux	Hawthorne, three stories Lowell, <i>Endecott and the Red Cross</i> and <i>My Kinsman</i> , from <i>The Old Glory</i>	Hawthorne electronic texts	
3/9	Radio theatre production of play	Ditto	Performance	
3/16	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK	
3/23	Salem, 1692: The Witchcraft Experience	Forbes, <i>A Mirror for Witches</i> Miller, <i>The Crucible</i>		
3/30	Salem, 1692: The Witchcraft Experience. Radio theatre production	Miller, <i>The Crucible</i>	Performance	
4/6	Mason and Dixon	Pynchon, <i>Mason & Dixon</i>		
4/13	Ditto	Ditto		
4/20	Ditto	Ditto		
4/27	A British perspective	Bigsby, <i>Hester</i>		
5/4	Another British perspective	Ackroyd, <i>Milton in America</i>		