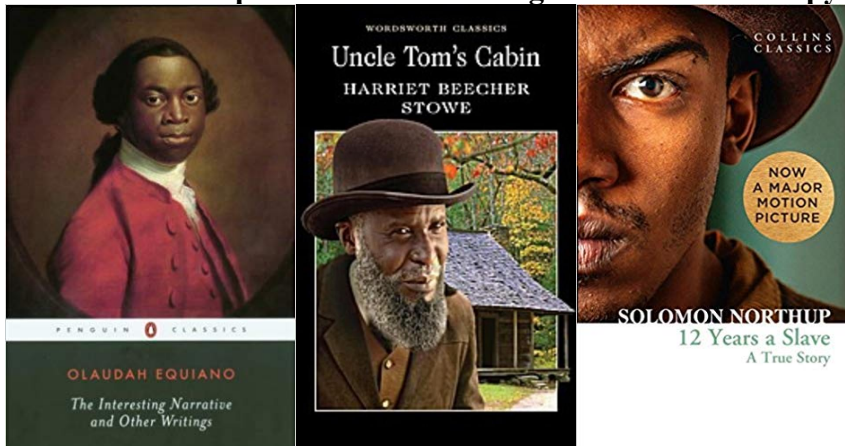


Transatlantic Abolitionism

In 2013, Steve McQueen's cinematographic adaptation of Solomon Northup's 1853 memoir *Twelve Years a Slave* drew extensive critical acclaim (let alone three Academy Awards). One crucial question that such adaptations generally raise, however, is whether the engagement with historical subject matter has been conducted with integrity – not least where as sensitive a topic as slavery is concerned, and when the renewed engagement with this topic generates profits of the scale that *12 Years a Slave* did. In other words: what makes our discourse with the past, whether critical or artistic, ethical and equitable? How ought we to differentiate between condescension towards, appropriation of, and truthful engagement with the past?

This course aims to elicit answers to these questions by unearthing and discussing sufficient literary and historical context to carry out, in Hans-Georg Gadamer's terms, a 'merger of horizons' with some of the most important writers engaged in the abolitionist movements in Britain and the young United States of America. We shall proceed with a general introduction to the topic, followed by a session on literary theory (in particular New Historicism). The following two seminars will be dedicated to selected British poetry against slavery and the slave trade, focusing on William Cowper, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Ann Yearsley, Hannah More, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Burns, and Robert Southey. The fifth seminar will comprise extracts from the abolitionist prose of Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce. In seminars six and seven we will then concern ourselves with *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), the first of two slave narratives on our agenda. With seminar eight, we will turn towards the US, beginning with Phillis Wheatley before focusing on American abolitionist poetry by John Greenleaf Whittier, John Pierpont, Thomas Hill, Joseph Samson, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In the ninth session, we are going to discuss the American anti-slavery prose of Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will follow in weeks ten and eleven, and Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* in weeks twelve and thirteen. Our course will then conclude with a screening of McQueen's 2013 film of that very title in week fourteen.

You will need to purchase the following editions in hard copy for this course:



- Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (Penguin, 2003)
- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Wordsworth Classics, 2002)
- Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (Collins Classics, 2014)

Requirements for successful completion:

Studienleistung: regular attendance and in-class participation, detailed knowledge of assigned texts, and a presentation

Prüfungsleistung: in addition to the above, a 4000-5000 word scholarly essay

Introductory reading: John Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution: an International History of anti-Slavery, 1787–1820* (Cambridge University Press, 2013)