

EARLY  
NORTH CAROLINA  
LITERATURE:  
A  
SYLLABUS  
FOR  
SERIOUS READERS

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For some, North Carolina literature seems to start and end with Thomas Wolfe. But that simplistic notion denies a long and distinguished literary history that begins before the first narratives were written about the settlements at Plymouth and Jamestown. In fact, North Carolina easily boasts the longest literary heritage in English of any state, a heritage that began well before the creation, even, of state borders and identities. While this syllabus is not inclusive, it does try to cover the state's most notable literary works from 1584 to the twentieth century. The term "literature" is used broadly here, to include genres not commonly associated with literary studies. Travelogues, diaries, and propaganda treatises may be more often associated, for example, with disciplines such as geography, history, and political science. But no matter what their genre, if written works hold the reading interest of passing generations, they may, without much license, be called literature. Such are these works. "North Carolina literature" refers here to works that deal with North Carolina, are set in North Carolina, or were written by people who were born, lived extensively, or traveled in what is now known as North Carolina. Readers should always bear in mind that some works are included more for what they tell us than for a high literary style; and they should recognize the importance of how literary history, just as political, social, and economic history, has evolved. For contemporary readers, some of these works will be difficult to get through without such recognitions.

Unfortunately, many are out of print and, therefore, accessible only to diligent readers willing to seek out earlier editions. Some, such as James Johnston Pettigrew's *Notes on Spain and the Spaniards*, have not, to my knowledge, been reprinted since their original publication. Richard Walser has done a great service for students of North Carolina literature by reissuing several neglected early North Carolina works – among them Thomas Burke's *Poems*, Lemuel Sawyer's *Blackbeard*, and

George Higby Throop's *Bertie* – but even some of his reprints are no longer in print and are difficult to find. Some reprints by scholars other than Walser – including Byrd's *History* and Schaw's *Journal of a Lady of Quality* – are out of print and generally unavailable. The tasks facing scholars of early North Carolina literature are many and fundamental, including critical editions of works not now generally available to readers.

Appended to each reading "assignment" are abbreviated lists of North Carolina libraries where copies of most books are located; a key to these abbreviations appears at the end of this syllabus. (Those entries without such lists are generally available in the editions noted.) Readers should remember that some library copies are rare editions and access to them may be limited. Reference librarians, especially those in the many excellent North Carolina Collections and reading rooms about the state, can be particularly helpful in securing copies, although in many instances photocopies or microfilm copies will have to suffice.

As for the ordering of the texts in the syllabus, some may prefer a different method of arrangement, perhaps with the narratives about the Roanoke voyages separated from the eighteenth-century works or with the Civil War works in a category distinct from those of the Reconstruction period. Others may wish to arrange the texts not by chronology or historical periods but by genres – diaries, drama, fiction, poetry, speeches, travelogues, and the like. But the ordering here is chosen to give readers a chronological overview of the state's chief literary works preceding the twentieth century.

Instructors wishing to teach from this syllabus can adjust its pace by having students read more excerpts and fewer complete works. It was originally devised for my East Carolina University graduate seminar, "Early North Carolina Literature" (3 semester hours). Students in that seminar found it represented a heavy but not overwhelming reading load for their 14-week semester.

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## I. The Colonial and Revolutionary Period: 1584-1783

- Arthur Barlowe, narrative of the 1584 Roanoke voyage

Sir Arthur Barlowe (ca. 1550-ca. 1620) was an English navigator who, with Philip Amadas (or Amidas), explored the coast of what is now North Carolina. His letter to Sir Walter Raleigh (reprinted in vol. 3 of Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* [1589; enlarged 3-vol. ed., 1598-1600]) persuaded Raleigh to select Roanoke Island for colonization.

*His narrative is reprinted in Quinn and Quinn's Virginia Voyages from Hakluyt (London: Oxford UP, 1973) and in other editions.*

- Ralph Lane, narrative of the settlement of Roanoke Island, 1585-86

Ralph Lane (ca. 1530-1603), born in Northamptonshire, was in Queen Elizabeth's service from 1563. In 1585, he went to Virginia and later that year commanded the colony at Roanoke Island. With colonists, he returned to England in 1586.

*He wrote an account of the Virginia settlement published in Hakluyt's Voyages (1589); and his Roanoke Island narrative is reprinted in Quinn and Quinn's Virginia Voyages from Hakluyt (London: Oxford UP, 1973) and in other editions.*

- Thomas Hariot (or Harriot), *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588)

According to Walser and Malone, the report of Hariot (1560-1621) is "the first book about the New World written in English by one who had lived there. . . . [P]ublished two years after his return to England, [it] is divided into three sections: the 'merchantable commodities,' or those products which could be sold profitably in England; the commodities that would provide 'victuall and sustenance of mans life' in the New World; and 'the nature and manners of the people' (that is, the Indians). Hariot's little book, of which only six copies are extant, is a delectable treatise. Not unlike later reports by adventurers written to their sponsors back in Europe, it set the pattern for the 'promotional' literature of the next two centuries" (3).

*Hariot's narrative is reprinted in Quinn and Quinn's Virginia Voyages from Hakluyt (London: Oxford UP, 1973) and in other editions.*

- John White, narratives of the 1587 and 1590 Roanoke voyages

The narratives of Governor White (fl. 1575-93) tell what little we know about the "Lost Colony."

*White's narratives are reprinted in Quinn and Quinn's Virginia Voyages from Hakluyt (London: Oxford UP, 1973) and in other editions.*

- Henry White, "The Fall of Man" (1698)

According to Walser and Malone, "Poetry made a humble start [in North Carolina] in 1698 when Henry White [ca. 1642-ca. 1712], a prominent Quaker in Perquimans Precinct, wrote a long untitled religious poem about 'the fall of man' and his 'restoration by Jesus Christ'" (6).

*White's holographic poem is in the Friends Historical Collection at Guilford College. White's poem first appeared in Early American Literature, volume 18 (Spring 1983); it was reprinted in Southern Friend: Journal of the North Carolina Friends Historical Society, volume 6 (Spring 1984).*

- John Lawson, *A New Voyage to Carolina* (1709)

John Lawson (1674-1711) is featured in this issue of *NCLR*. (See p. 60.)

*A New Voyage to Carolina, edited by Hugh T. Lefler (UNC P, 1967), is the first fully indexed edition; and Lefler's introduction gives excellent background and context.*