Narrative Odysseys:
Maritime Literature, Frontier Romance & Global Modernity from Camões to Coetzee

Course Description

“Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were not out of sight of land? Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and make him the won brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all.”

– Herman Melville, Moby Dick, “Loomings”

This course will explore the political problems and literary opportunities presented by the sea in archipelagic, transatlantic, and global anglophone narratives. The Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin developed the concept of the “chronotope” to describe the ways in which spatial environments shape our relationship to the world, unlocking (and foreclosing) patterns of experience that are reflected in the structure of fictional representation. The ocean represents a special kind of environment that is utterly distinct from and yet deeply resonant with the one we normally inhabit. It is the space of wandering and migration, profound loneliness and desolation, cowardice and heroism, disorienting cultural contact and exchange, radical instability and change; it is the space we associate with the origins and otherness of life, and thus also with life’s hidden mysteries and deepest secrets. In a globalized world, these concerns emerge as increasingly central to modern life, whether we begin our search for “modernity” in medieval Ireland, Renaissance Portugal or in our own 21st-century culture.

Our reading will consider a number of ocean-based environments (the voyaging ship, the island, the shore, the coast, the river, the underwater depths), character types (the quester, the castaway, the beachcomber, the marauder, the explorer, the megalomaniac), countries (England, Scotland, America, France, South Africa), regions (the Mediterranean, the Commonwealth, the Hemisphere), and narrative structures through the lens of the chronotope. We will try to understand how these elements shape the form of the novel, with limited attention to narrative poetry. The question of genre will be explored through a variety of seafaring genres (epic and quest romance; utopian, historical and science fictions; young adult literature, adventure tales and fantasy) and literary forms (ethnography and travel narrative, short story and novella, classic novels). While we will begin with a genealogy of forms drawn from the Renaissance (The Lusiads, The Tempest), readings will focus primarily on the 18th- and 19th-century Anglo-American tradition from Smollett to Woolf by way of Melville, Twain, Stevenson, and Conrad, culminating in an excursion into the reaches below The Line with Verne and Coetzee. Supplemental readings in poetry will be available as appropriate, with a running undercurrent of Byron, who was the great Romantic poet of the sea, and Elizabeth Bishop. In the visual arts, we will examine the late-period seascapes of the Romantic painter J.M.W. Turner and perhaps a handful of films.

Secondary readings will introduce students to classic works of narrative theory and literary criticism, as well as political theory drawn broadly from the Marxist tradition. We will situate our inquiry into maritime literary culture within contemporary debates concerning cultural mobility and encounter, sovereignty and the state of exception, the critique of political economy and empire, postcolonialism and the contestation of the ‘canon.’ Critical readings may include: Mikhail Bakhtin, Northrop Frye, Margaret Cohen, Fredric Jameson, John Richetti, J. Hillis Miller, Wai Chee Dimock, Paul Gilroy, Penny Fielding, Ian Duncan, Daniel Heller-Roazen, Derek Attridge, Timothy Morton, Christopher Reed, and Giorgio Agamben.
Students will have a vital role in shaping the structure and content of discussions. There will be some common secondary readings set in advance for every class, but each student will have a chance to help coordinate and lead two seminars throughout the semester. In the second half of the course (Melville and beyond), this will entail selecting author-specific criticism to assign to the group from a curated bibliography in consultation with the instructor. Given the range of potential topics on the table each week (see below), students will have an opportunity to navigate the syllabus according to their interests while simultaneously gaining familiarity with the landscape of criticism and assembling an archive of research materials for the Junior Essay. (Critical Readings listed are provisional.)

**Course Requirements**

1. Attendance and participation in weekly discussions
2. Coordination and presentations on secondary readings for two seminars, between Weeks 3 & 10
3. Several short response and/or targeted bibliographic exercises
4. A library consultation on research resources and methods with Odile Harter (TBD)
5. A meeting with the Department Writing Fellow about the prospectus for the Junior Essay
6. Attendance at three general meetings for the junior tutorial program
7. A 2-4 page Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography (8-10 sources) due by Week 8

**Reading Schedule**

**0. Introductory: The Story of the Lost Ship**

“[Borges wrote:] ‘generations of men, throughout recorded time, have always told and retold two stories—that of a lost ship which searches the Mediterranean seas for a dearly loved island, and that of a god who is crucified on Golgotha.’”

– Northrop Frye, _The Secular Scripture_, “The Word and World of Man”

**WEEK 1:**


Luís Vaz de Camões, _The Lusiads_ [Os Lusiadas] (1572), Cantos 1-3 [75pp]

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798)

William Wordsworth, “The world is too much with us; late and soon” (1806)

George Gordon, Lord Byron, from _Child Harold’s Pilgrimage_, Cantos III (1816) & IV (1818)

Wallace Stevens, “The Place of the Solitaires,” “Stars at Tallapoosa” (1923)

J.M.W. Turner, introduction to the late-period seascapes (1835-1842)

Scenes from _Leviathan_ (2013), dir. Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Verena Paravel, a film produced via Harvard’s Sensory Ethnography Lab <http://sel.fas.harvard.edu/>

**I. The Age of Adventure: Now, Voyager**

1. **Adventures at Sea: A Genealogy of Romance**
Le tour du monde in Four Centuries: The Romance of Enterprise, The Empire of Other Worlds

**WEEK 2:**
Luís Vaz de Camões, *The Lusiads [Os Lusíadas]* (1572), Cantos 4-10 [150pp]
The *Voyage of Maildun [Immram Maele Duin]* (11c), ed. Patrick Joyce (1879) [65pp]

*Critical Reading:*

2. **INTERLUDE: UTOPIA**

Islands and Shipwrecks: Sovereignty in Crisis, States of Nature & the Remaking of Society

**WEEK 3:**
William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (1611) [110pp]

*Supplemental:*
William Cowper, “The Cast-Away” (1799)
Robert Browning, “Caliban Upon Setebos” (1864)

*Critical Reading:*
Fredric Jameson, from *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (Verso, 2005)

3. **SCOTLAND**

The Ship: The Maritime Picaresque and the Royal Navy

**WEEK 4:**

*Critical Reading:*
Walter Reed, from *An Exemplary History of the Novel: The Quixotic versus the Picaresque* (University of Chicago Press, 1981)

**WEEK 5:**

*Critical Reading:*
John Richetti, from *The English Novel in History, 1700-1780* (Routledge, 1998)
John Peck, from *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in British American Novels, 1719-1917* (Palgrave, 2001)

**Piracy: Rogue Fictions and Historical Rebellions**

**WEEK 6:**

*Supplemental:*
Penny Fielding, from *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (Oxford UP, 1993)

*Week #6: Provisional Paper Topic Due*


4. AMERICA

Masquerade on the Mississippi: Allegory, Satire and the Theater of the Nation

WEEK 7: Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (1857) [250pp]

Supplemental: Walt Whitman, *The Sea-Drift from Leaves of Grass* (1855)

Hester Blum, from *The View from the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum American Sea Narratives* (University of North Carolina Press, 2008)
Robert Tally, Jr., from *Melville, Mapping and Globalization: Literary Cartography in the American Baroque Writer* (Bloomsbury, 2011)

Rafting the River of History: Black Humor, Dark Comedy and the Figure of Race

WEEK 8: Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), [290pp]

Glenda Carpio, from *Laughing Fit to Kill: Black Humor in the Fictions of Slavery* (Oxford UP, 2008)

*Week #8: 2-4 page Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography due*

IV. ADRIFT IN MODERNITY: GENDER, ECOLOGY & THE COLLAPSE OF ROMANCE

5. INTERLUDE: EXISTENTIAL CRISSES

The Gulag Archipelago: Abandonment and Exile, Masculinity and Morality in the Jungle of Imperial Adventure


Supplemental: Matthew Arnold, “To Marguerite.—Continued” (1849), “Dover Beach” (1851, 1867)
William Butler Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium” (1928), “Byzantium” (1933)
Critical Reading:  Fredric Jameson, from *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Cornell UP, 1982)  
J. Hillis Miller, from *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Harvard UP, 1982)  

Shorelines and Streams of Consciousness: Still Lives, Queer Ecologies & Space-Time in Flux

WEEK 10: Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) [210pp]


Timothy Morton, from *The Ecological Thought* (Harvard UP, 2010)  
Christopher Reed, from *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (Oxford UP, 2011)

*Week #10: 8-10 page Draft due*

V. OTHER HEMISPHERES: THE SEA, THE WORLD

6. THE LOWER DEPTHS

The Final Frontier: Scientific Romance Beneath the Waves

WEEK 11: Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1869-70) [370pp; 185pp]

Supplemental: Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “The Kraken” (1830)  
Adrienne Rich, “Diving into the Wreck” (1973)

Rosalind Williams, from *The Triumph of Human Empire: Verne, Morris, and Stevenson at the End of the World* (Chicago UP, 2013)

*Week #11: 15-20 page Draft due*

Imagination Unbound: Into the Abyss of Speculative Fiction

WEEK 12: Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1869-70) [370pp; 185pp]


Timothy Unwin, from *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing* (Liverpool UP, 2006)

7. END OF THE LINE: CASTAWAYS
Islands of Culture: Deconstructing the Canon, Writing from the Margins in Global Anglophone Literature

**WEEK 13:** Junior Essay Research and Drafts Roundtable Discussion


Ankhi Mukherjee, “The Death of the Novel and Two Postcolonial Writers,” *MLQ* 69.4 (2008), 533-56


**Supplemental:**


**JUNIOR ESSAY DUE 8 December 2015**

**Junior Essay Schedule**

- Week #6: Provisional topic due
- Week #8: 2-4 page Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography (8-10 sources) due
- Week #10: 8-10 page draft due
- Week #11: 15-20 page draft due (dept deadline: 17 November 2015)
- Junior Essays due 8 December 2015

**Mandatory Junior Tutorial Program Meetings**

- First meeting: Tuesday, 15 September 2015, 4-5pm (Barker 133)
- Second meeting: Tuesday, 13 October 2015, 4-5pm (Barker 133)
- Tutorial Conference: Mon, 7 Dec 2015 or Wed, 9 Dec 2015, 4-6:30pm (Thompson Room)

**Assigned Texts**

*Prices listed can be found on Amazon.com {ISBN #’s in brackets}.


Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, 2nd ed., ed. Hershel Parker and Mark Niemeyer (NCE, 2005) **$20** {039397927X}


Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, ed. Mark Hussey (Mariner Books, 2005) **$13** {0156030470}

The New World (2004), dir. Terence Malick

Optional Films (Selected)

- Jason and the Argonauts, dir. Don Chafey (1963)
- Robinson Crusoe, dir. Luis Bunuel (1954)
- Lifeboat, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (1944)
- Island of Lost Souls, dir. Erle Kenton (1932)
- Mutiny on the Bounty, dir. Frank Lloyd (1935)
- Mutiny on the Bounty, dir. Lewis Milestone (1962)
- Treasure Island, dir. Victor Fleming (1934)
- Jaws, dir. Steven Spielberg (1975)
- The Beach (2000), dir. Danny Boyle
- Miami Vice, dir. Michael Mann (2006)
- Alien, dir. Ridley Scott (1979)
- Aguirre, The Wrath of God, dir. Werner Herzog (1972)
- Fitzcarraldo, dir. Werner Herzog (1982)
- Apocalypse Now, dir. Francis Ford Coppola (1979)
- 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, dir. R. Fleischer (1954)
- Upstream Color, dir. Shane Carruth (2013)
- All Is Lost, dir. J.C. Chandor (2013)
- Mr. Turner, dir. Mike Leigh (2014)
The Master (2012), dir. Paul Thomas Anderson