

Full Fathom Five: Surviving Shipwreck, Then & Now

Instructor: Emily Sun

emilysun@g.harvard.edu

Office Hours: TBA

Tutorial Description:

In this tutorial, students will engage with a number of shipwreck narratives, from antiquity to the 21st century. During the course of the semester, we will investigate not only the motif of the literary shipwreck itself, but also the function of shipwrecks within larger narratives as occasions for events, encounters with others, and “sea-changes” that transform both individuals and communities. We’ll begin by examining variations upon the shipwreck tale, exploring the evolving conventions of the “classic” shipwreck narrative, from Homer’s *Odyssey* and Virgil’s *Aeneid* to the contemporary works of Derek Walcott, Paul Yoon, and M. NourbeSe Philip.

For the remainder of the semester, we will turn to the ways that watery wrecks and passages catalyze various collisions, transformations, and translocations. The course will largely focus on connecting the medieval and modern—bridging the gap between the earliest shipwreck narratives of the English literary tradition to more recent works. We’ll investigate how representations of the racial, religious, and cultural other are received and circulated by shipwreck-borne encounters in such works as the medieval *Liber monstrorum* (*Book of Monsters*), Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, and Gabriel García Márquez’s short stories. We will also trace the modern shipwreck narrative’s indebtedness to classical and medieval romance traditions, exploring the adventures and subsequent homecomings that arise from the disastrous wrecks of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Kidnapped* and William Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. Finally, we’ll navigate literary constructions of national and migrant identity, examining depictions of the exile washed onto British shores in works such as Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae* and Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses*.

Throughout this course, we will approach the subject of the shipwreck through the lens of postcolonial theory and scholarship, while also interrogating the ways that shipwrecks cause bodies (and/or representations of bodies) to variously move, circulate, and encounter one another. Utilizing such approaches will help us better understand how literary shipwrecks serve as the impetus for transforming, constructing, and revising relationships, boundaries, and identities. Additionally, this course aims to introduce students to methods for engaging with texts in a transhistorical fashion—to explore the ways in which crossing the borders of not only space but also time can create fruitful dialogue between seemingly disparate texts and/or literary traditions.

Tutorial Goals: Over the course of the tutorial, students will engage in a transhistorical survey of shipwreck literature, and additionally navigate the currents of postcolonial theory and scholarship. They will also learn how to conduct scholarly research at an upper-division level, culminating in a 20-25 page research paper in preparation for an honors thesis. Students will gain experience working with a variety of sources and putting critical and theoretical approaches in conversation with their own ideas. Students will work closely with the instructor to hone integral

scholarly research skills, such as designing a research question, developing a critical bibliography around that question, and writing with greater clarity and precision.

Assignments:

- **Short Essay** (Week 5, 10%): A 5-7 page paper, an extended close reading of a primary text.
- **Prospectus & Annotated Bibliography** (Week 8, 15%): two page prospectus of the project submitted before students begin working on it. An annotated bibliography of 8-10 sources should accompany the prospectus. The bibliography should reproduce in a few sentences the main argument of the work you intend to make use of. It should also include, in a few sentences, how you plan on engaging with the thesis of the work you have summarized.
- **Draft** (Week 12, 15%): A full draft will be due on Week 12 and then circulated among classmates the following week in preparation for a final paper workshop during the final tutorial meeting. An ungraded but required 10-page draft of the paper will be due on Week 11.
- **Final Paper** (Reading Period, 40%): 20-25 page paper on a major literary work read in this class.
- **Minor Assignments and Participation** (20%):
 - 2 short response papers of 1-2 pages, focusing on a passage from one of our primary texts (sign-ups during first class)
 - 2 in-class presentations summarizing one of our critical articles (sign-ups during first class)
 - Participation and Preparation: A small seminar thrives when students participate actively and offer thoughtful contributions to class discussion.
- **Conference Presentation** (ungraded but required): a 5-minute paper on your research

Required Texts: (other texts will be provided electronically)

Owen Chase, *Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing Shipwreck of the Whale-Ship Essex* (1821)

John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*

Gabriel García Márquez, *Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* (1989)

M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!* (2008)

Salman Rushdie, *Satanic Verses* (1988)

William Shakespeare, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (c. 1607)

William Shakespeare, *Tempest* (c.1610)

Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (1886)

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726)

Schedule:

Unit 1:

What's in a Shipwreck?: Understanding the Shape of the Shipwreck Narrative

In this unit, we will interrogate the tropes of the “classic” shipwreck story, moving from texts of classical antiquity such as Homer’s *Odyssey* to more recent texts such as the work of Derek

Walcott. What makes the shipwreck such a compelling and lasting motif, and what constitutes a “shipwreck story” in the first place? What is the relationship between the shipwreck story and real life, and what can be gained by putting fictional accounts into dialogue with historical ones? After examining the “straight” version of the literary shipwreck, we’ll turn to deconstructions of the shipwreck narrative presented by such works as M. NourbeSe Philip’s rewriting of the *Zong* massacre.

Week 1:

Primary Readings–

- Homer, *Odyssey* (8th-7th c. BCE) (excerpts)
- Virgil, *Aeneid* (29-19 BCE) (excerpts)
- Dante, *Inferno*, (c.1314) (excerpt from Canto XVI)
- Derek Walcott, “Sea Grapes” (1976), “The Sea is History” (1979); “The Schooner Flight” (1979); *Omeros* (excerpts) (1990)

Secondary Readings–

- James V. Morrison, from *Shipwrecked: Disaster and Transformation in Homer, Shakespeare, Defoe, and the Modern World* (2014) (Ch. 1, “Shipwreck Narratives”, Ch. 2. “Shipwreck and Identity in Homer’s *Odyssey*”; Ch. 3, “Shipwreck and Opportunity from Ancient Egypt to the Modern Caribbean”)

Week 2:

Primary Readings –

- Owen Chase, *Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing Shipwreck of the Whale-Ship Essex* (1821)
- Edgar Allan Poe, “MS. in a Bottle” (1833)
- Paul Yoon, from *Once the Shore* (“Once the Shore”, “Among the Wreckage”) (2009)

Secondary Readings–

- Edouard Glissant, “Imaginary”, “The Open Boat”, and “Errantry, Exile” from *Poetics of Relation* (1990)
- Hans Blumenberg, “Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence” (1997)

Week 3:

Primary Readings –

- M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!* (2008)

Secondary Readings–

- Christina Sharpe, “The Wake” and “The Ship” from *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016)
- Jenny Sharpe, “The Shape of Immateriality”, “Silence: The Archive and Affective Memory” from *An African Diaspora Poetics of Loss* (2020)

Unit 2:

Of Monsters and Men: Encounters With the Other

In this unit, we will explore the shipwreck as a precipitating event for various sorts of encounters with others. We will begin by exploring medieval texts that feature sea-crossings: the *Liber Monstrorum* (*Book of Monsters*) and multiple members of the “Constance” group (a cluster of medieval texts that focus on a persecuted heroine exiled at sea). What arises when bodies are removed from their local environments to collide with new shores, new contexts, and new ontologies? For the second part of this unit, we will turn to more critical outlooks on such narratives as presented by Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* and Gabriel García Márquez’s short stories. In this unit, we will look to postcolonial scholarship to help us unravel the dynamics of the representation of the other. How do shipwrecks become opportunities to stage cross-cultural encounters, and who becomes defamiliarized—made foreign, exotic, and even monstrous—in the process? And who gets to tell these stories of encounter? What are the stakes of (mis)representing encounters with very real bodies and societies?

Week 4:

Primary Readings –

- Liber Monstrorum* (late 7th-early 8th c.)
- Constance Materials:
 - Emaré* (late 14th c.)
 - John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, Book II (late 14th c.)
 - Geoffrey Chaucer, “Man of Law’s Tale” from *The Canterbury Tales* (late 14th c.)

Secondary Readings–

- Edward Said, “Introduction” from *Orientalism* (1978)
- Stephen Greenblatt, “Introduction”, “Marvelous Possessions”, “Kidnapping Language” from *Marvelous Possessions* (1991)

Week 5:

Primary Readings –

- Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) (Part 1)
- Gabriel García Márquez, “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World” (1968), “A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings” (1968), “Blacamán the Good, Vendor of Miracles” (1972), “Last Voyage of the Ghost Ship” (1972), “Sea of Lost Time” (1974)
- Gabriel García Márquez, “The Solitude of Latin America” (1982)

Secondary Readings–

- Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988)
- ”Part Two: Placemarks and Cultures” from Marc Shell, *Islandology* (2014)

Short Paper Due

Week 6:

Primary Readings –

-Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (Part 2)

Secondary Readings–

-Homi Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory” from *The Location of Culture* (1994)

-Robert Markley, “Gulliver and the Japanese: The Limits of the Postcolonial Past” (2004)

-separate library/research visit during week 6 (date TBA)

One-on-One Conference to Discuss Your Short Paper – Times TBD

Unit 3:

Suffering Sea-Change: Romance, History, & Homecoming

The shipwreck is a useful device for moving plots forward, destructing status quos and spurring change. Shipwreck narratives, with their many associated translocations and transformations, and their many departures from and returns to home, can be said to go hand-in-hand with the genre of romance. In this unit, we will begin by exploring the relationship between shipwreck and genre—particularly the romance genre—in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, before moving back in time to explore multiple iterations of the *Apollonius of Tyre* story (a popular medieval romance centering on an exiled, riddle-solving prince), including its reincarnation in Shakespeare’s oeuvre as *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. We will end the unit by moving forward in time once again, to Robert Louis Stevenson’s historical romance novel, *Kidnapped*, where a shipwreck does not force our hero far from home, but instead runs him aground, back to whence he came. In these narratives, what is the purpose of displacing a body from home, only to restore it later? When shipwreck strikes, what purpose does the ensuing adventure serve?

Week 7:

Primary Readings –

-Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (c. 1610)

Secondary Readings –

-Takaki, Ronald. "The 'Tempest' in the Wilderness: The Racialization of Savagery" (2000)

-Lawrence Danson, "The Shakespeare Remix: Romance, Tragicomedy, and Shakespeare's 'Distinct Kind'" from *Shakespeare and Genre: From Early Modern Inheritances to Postmodern Legacies* (ed. Anthony R. Guneratne) (2011)

Optional Readings:

-Read ahead for any works that you may want to use for your final paper

Week 8:

Primary Readings –

-Old English *Apollonius of Tyre*

-John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, Book VIII

-William Shakespeare, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (c. 1607)

Secondary Readings–

- Kristin MS Bezio, “From Rome to Tyre to London: Shakespeare’s Pericles, Leadership, Anti-Absolutism, and English Exceptionalism” (2017)
- James Simpson, “The Comic” from *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (2002)
- “Epilogue: The Tempest’s Many Beginnings” from Sebastian I. Sobekki, *The Sea and Medieval English Literature*” (2008)

Paper Prospectus and Bibliography Due

Week 9:

Primary Readings –

- Kidnapped*, Robert Louis Stevenson (1886)

Secondary Readings–

- Julia Ditter, “Wayfaring in the Outlands: Borders, Mobility, and Nature in Robert Louis Stevenson's Writing” (2021)
- Madeline B. Gangnes, "Material Romance: *Kidnapped* In and Out of Young Folks Paper" (2020)
- from Lawrence Phillips, *The South Pacific Narratives of Robert Louis Stevenson and Jack London: Race, Class, Imperialism* (2012)

Unit 4:

Strangers in Strange Lands: Dis/Reinventing National & Migrant Identity

In this unit, we will examine the relationship between shipwreck narratives and the construction of identity—particularly national identity. The texts of this unit depict the potential of the shipwreck, because of the many physical movements it can precipitate, to radically draw and redraw boundaries, selves, and communities. We will begin by tracing a set of shipwrecks—including that of Brutus, the legendary founder of Britain—across time, form, and language. Moving from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Latin *Historia regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*), to Wace’s Anglo-Norman *Roman de Brut*, and finally to Lazamon’s Middle English *Brut*, we’ll consider how shipwreck survivors and sea-crossers play a crucial role in the foundation and development of a place. How, we will ask, can the same shipwrecked figure represent radically different identities? Accordingly, we will also consider the visions of English nationalism, empire, and identity presented in Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses*, in which a plane wreck off the coast of England sets into motion the incorporation—as well as the exclusion—of the border-crossing migrant.

Week 10:

Primary Readings –

- selections from Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain* (c. 1136)
- selections from Wace, *Roman de Brut* (c. 1155)
- selections from Lawman, *Brut* (c.1200)

Secondary Readings–

- from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983)
- Daniel Helbert, ““Alienos Ortulos’: Geoffrey of Monmouth in the Garden of Others” (2019)

Week 11:

Primary Readings –

-Salman Rushdie, *Satanic Verses* (1988) (Part 1)

Secondary Readings–

-Salman Rushdie, “Introduction” and “In Good Faith” from *Imaginary Homelands* (1991)

-Wendy W. Walters, "Monstrosity and Representation in the Postcolonial Diaspora: *The Satanic Verses, Ulysses, and Frankenstein*" from *Borders, Exiles, Diasporas* (ed. Elezar Barkan and Marie-Denise Shelton) (1998)

10 Pages of Final Paper Draft Due

Week 12:

Primary Readings –

-Salman Rushdie, *Satanic Verses* (Part 2)

Secondary Readings–

-Homi Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation” from *The Location of Culture* (1994)

Full Draft of Final Paper Due

Final Discussion & Paper Workshop**Week 13:**

Primary Readings –

-Stephen Crane “The Open Boat” (1897)

-*Life of Pi* (2012)

Between Weeks 12 & 13: *Life of Pi* watch party (& pizza!)

Reading Week: Final Draft of Final Paper Due

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is the use of another person’s ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failure on the paper to dismissal from the course to even more serious actions. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with Harvard FAS’s Honor Code: “*Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.*”

Collaboration: You are absolutely encouraged to talk with other students about the course and its readings, and to read each others' work. In individual assignments (which may include midterm or term papers, short writing assignments, homework or reading questions and responses, or take-home exams), academic collaboration and external sources should be always cited.

Attendance: Your attendance in tutorial is vital to your own success as well as to the success of the class as a whole; so is your attendance in Junior Tutorial General Meetings and at other required events. I will allow each student a "free" tutorial absence to be used in case of sickness, travel, etc: no explanation necessary. Missing more than one class will decrease your participation grade, and excessive absence could result in failing the course. Also, being late really disrupts the work we're doing together: 2 lates = 1 absence. If you have extenuating circumstances, you must communicate with me in a timely manner so that we can discuss how to deal with it.

Due Dates & Late Grades: Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due by 11:59pm on the date listed in the schedule. Late assignments will be docked 1/3 letter grade per day late, except for the final paper, which must be turned in before the due date. Students failing to turn in a final paper, or turning it in late without an official excuse, will fail the tutorial. If, well in advance of an assignment, you expect you will need an extension, please talk with me.

Email: I'll use our course listserv to distribute important info throughout the semester—from emailing you handouts to adjusting assignments and deadlines. You are responsible for checking your email on a daily basis. If you have a question that you need to ask me by email, be sure to give me at least 24 hours, or you may not get a response until it's too late. Also, please let me know if you'd like to use a non-Harvard email address.

Accommodations for students with disabilities: *"Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term, (TBA). Failure to do so may result in the Course Head's inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation."*