SEMMETER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS
University of Virginia, Academic Sponsor

Voyage: Fall 2015
Discipline: Special Topics in English Literature
ENSP 2559: The Sea and the Mirror
Lower Division
Faculty Name: Dr. J. H. Miller
Credit Hours: 3; Contact Hours: 38

COURSE DESCRIPTION

There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not:
The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid.

The way of a ship in the midst of the sea has fascinated human beings from the very beginnings of literature to the present day. Celebrating the elemental relationship of man and the natural world, the sea itself and voyages upon it have inspired poems, short stories, novels, and plays, often – as Hamlet said – “to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.” The sea also functions as a metaphor for the great, universal themes of humanity. From the darkness upon the face of the deep, to the spirit moving upon the face of the waters, to the way of a man with a maid, this course will study selected works ancient and modern, scientific and literary that enlighten our relationship to each other and to the sea around us.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

“The Sea and the Mirror” will focus on the sea around us, specifically on three main bodies of water: the Mediterranean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Caribbean Sea, with ancillary reference to the Pacific and to the now century-old technological marvel of the Panama Canal that created “a path between the seas.” Borrowing Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott’s phrase, “the sea is history,” we will explore how literature has interpreted the stories, myths, and historical events associated with the sea and our responses to it.

Throughout the fall semester, each class day we will read selections from Rachel Carson’s The Sea Around Us, one of the most successful, and poetic, nature books ever written about the world’s oceans. When she accepted the National Book Award for this work Carson wrote, “If there is poetry in my book about the sea, it is not because I deliberately put it there but because no one could write truthfully about the sea and leave out the poetry.” From her we will learn about the sea itself: its origins, its creatures, tides, currents, winds, waves, and storms as well as about its precarious environmental future in the 21st century. In the preface to her book Carson wrote: “It is a curious situation that the sea, from which life first arose, should now be threatened by the
activities of one form of that life. But the sea, though changed in a sinister way, will continue to exist; the threat is rather to life itself.”

During our voyage around the Mediterranean we will read Derek Walcott’s play, The Odyssey: A Play based on Homer’s epic and examine the dramatist’s interesting fusion of both ancient and modern Mediterranean and Caribbean cultures. Before we arrive in Naples we will explore the power of the world’s volcanoes through focusing on the many eruptions of Mt. Vesuvius, including the eruption in 79 AD that devastated Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae. We will read Pliny the Younger’s letter to the historian Tacitus. This letter is the only eyewitness account extant of the devastation caused by the volcano’s eruption. We will also read selections from George Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s novel The Last Days of Pompeii to observe how the author incorporates the Vesuvius eruption into the novel’s plot. Sailing to Istanbul we will read and discuss William Butler Yeats’ short poem “Sailing to Byzantium.”

En route Casablanca we will examine the effects of Western imperialism on African cultures through reading Conrad’s novella, Heart of Darkness. We will also read selections from Olaudah Equiano’s The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, a once-enslaved African who knew about life aboard a slave ship. After visiting Senegal we will leave the Old World and cross the Atlantic following the course of the infamous “Middle Passage” to the New World of Brazil and the Caribbean. We will study Marcus Rediker’s The Slave Ship: A Human History and read Marlene NourbeSe Philip’s epic poem Zong! to understand further the extraordinary trauma that enslaved Africans underwent during this horrific voyage. The Zong case precipitated an important lawsuit at the Court of King’s Bench in London about the monetary value of human beings. We will also study two Caribbean-born poets’ visions of the sea by reading selected works by Derek Walcott and Édouard Glissant, and also by reading Columbian writer Gabriel García Márquez’s narrative The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor.

Anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz has observed of the Caribbean, “So small a segment of the earth’s surface is not easy to take seriously – especially since it lies near the most powerful nation in world history, and has become a favorite place to loaf, bathe, drink and flirt, for Americans and other foreigners. Yet only a couple of centuries ago, the Caribbean islands became the testing ground for European imperialism, modern slave labor, and the first production site for the ‘proletarian drug foods,’ such as sugar, coffee and rum. Never before had Europe succeeded in establishing overseas production of such profitable imports, in tropical lands that they owned by conquest. The ensuing struggles – launched from below by those who worked, and from above by the reformers in the metropolis – to shake loose and overturn those innovative capitalistic experiments preoccupied for centuries the armies, navies and governments of Europe’s most powerful states, as well as the U.S. and Brazil. An important result of European interest was that the islands and nearby shores became one of the most ethnically diverse regions of the globe, exposed to a modernization that had rested on genocide, slavery, large-scale acculturation, early and forced industrialization, and then, revolution.”

Our voyage will conclude with a close analysis of William Shakespeare’s The Tempest, a late romance set on a mysterious and magical island, a play infused with the presence of the sea as an all-powerful, fearsome force of nature while also a force of healing that brings both personal and social transformation. The play also introduces the character of Caliban, “a savage and deformed
slave,” who is a native of the island upon which European sailors and passengers are shipwrecked. The tension between the “primitive” Caliban who “rules” the island and the “civilized” Prospero, former Duke of Milan, who wishes to usurp Caliban’s power, evokes imperialism and its subjugation and enslavement of native peoples that have been recurrent themes during our Atlantic Exploration.

Apart from our sea-journey all of us aboard ship are embarking on another journey – an interior and highly personal one of exploration and self-discovery. Some might call it a pilgrimage – not necessarily to a specific sacred place or holy shrine, though we will undoubtedly visit many, but rather a pilgrimage to seek greater knowledge and truth. Truth about who we are and how we may have changed during our semester at sea. Truth and enlightenment about the Atlantic triangular slave trade. Truth about lives lost and sufferings endured. Truth about imperialism and colonialism. Truth about the human will to be free from oppression. Truth about the sea around us and its future in the 21st century.

More specifically, our objectives are:

*To acquire a deeper understanding of the many ways literature reflects our love-hate relationship with the sea – from its beauty and majesty, to its danger and mystery; from its seductive call to explore the unknown, to its engendering a longing to return home to the safety and familiarity of ports, anchorages, family; from its reflection of the very best of human nature, to its depiction of mankind at its most depraved.

*To understand just what the sea is really like, how our small ship is but a microcosm of humanity, and how we passengers and crew are inextricably woven together – metaphorically and actually – into a community of sailors, adventurers, explorers. To appreciate that for some the sea is slavery and that for all the sea is history.

*To understand the history and culture of maritime ports through field assignments and an in-depth field lab, both of which will be included (along with reference to reading assignments) into your personal sea voyage narrative.

*To appreciate the depth and breadth of imperialism and colonialism around the Atlantic Rim and to understand how the attendant cancer of slavery and its cultural and personal effects continue to influence the post-colonial world of the twenty-first century.

*To learn about ourselves through the process of writing our own personal narrative of this journey.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature Writing Assignments:</th>
<th>4 x 5% = 20%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Field Lab Report:</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voyage Narrative (with field notes):</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Essay:</td>
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REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS (Prior to boarding the ship students may download their own digital editions of required texts, if they are available. Or students may order books through the UVA Bookstore to be delivered to ship. The notation “in course folder,” in topical outline below, means that special readings will be available in digital form on the ship’s intranet.)

AUTHOR: Rachel Carson
TITLE: The Sea Around Us
PUBLISHER: Oxford University Press
ISBN# 13-978-0-19-506997-6 (PBK.)
DATE/EDITION: 1989 Special Edition

AUTHOR: Joseph Conrad
TITLE: The Heart of Darkness and Selected Short Fiction
PUBLISHER: Barnes & Noble Classics
ISBN# 978-1-59308-021-1
DATE/EDITION: 2003 (PBK.)

AUTHOR: Marcus Rediker
TITLE: The Slave Ship: A Human History
PUBLISHER: Penguin Books
ISBN#: 978-0-14-311425-3 (PBK.)
DATE/EDITION: 2008

AUTHOR: Olaudah Equiano
TITLE: The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings
PUBLISHER: Penguin Books
ISBN# 978-0-14-243716-2
DATE/EDITION: 2003 / Penguin Classics (PBK.)

AUTHOR: Édouard Glissant
TITLE: The Collected Poems of Édouard Glissant (trans. from French by Jeff Humphries)
PUBLISHER: University of Minnesota Press
ISBN#: 0-8166-4194-3
DATE/EDITION: 2005

AUTHOR: Gabriel García Márquez (trans. from Spanish by Randolf Hogan)
TITLE: The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor
PUBLISHER: Vintage Books
ISBN# 978-0-679-72205-2

AUTHOR: M. NourbeSe Philip
TITLE: Zong!
PUBLISHER: Wesleyan University Press
ISBN#: 978-0-8195-7169-4
TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

(Class 1) Outward Bound: Departures
Keeping Things Shipshape: introductions, hopes & fears, course objectives, readings, assignments, field lab, field assignments, your own sea voyage narrative, class participation, attendance, grading, honor code, etc.

(Class 2) The Sea Around Us

(Class 3) The Mediterranean Sea: Naples – Mt. Vesuvius and The Last Days of Pompeii
Rachel Carson, “The Birth of an Island” (pp. 84-96). Discussion of eruption of Mt. Vesuvius on August 24, AD 79, based on letters from Pliny the Younger to his friend and historian Cornelius Tacitus (in course folder). Discussion of how a volcanic eruption influences the sea, from tsunamis to changes in coastlines and land elevations. Read selections from Edward George Bulwer-Lytton’s novel The Last Days of Pompeii (1834), Book V, chapters 4-11 (in course folder).

(Class 4) The Mediterranean Sea: A Modern Retelling of Homer’s Odyssey
Rachel Carson, “Hidden Lands” (pp. 57-74). Read Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott’s play, The Odyssey: A Play (1993), a drama based on Homer’s famous epic poem about Ulysses’ sailing the seas on his way home to Ithaca. How does Walcott flavor the descriptions of the Mediterranean with elements from his native Caribbean island of Santa Lucia? What is Walcott’s purpose in retelling the Homeric epic through the fusion of Mediterranean and Caribbean settings?
Essay #1 due at beginning of Class 5 (topic TBD)

(Class 5) “Sailing to Byzantium”
Rachel Carson, “The Long Snowfall” (pp. 75-82).
Read William Butler Yeats’ poem, “Sailing to Byzantium” (1926). Explore the image of “Byzantium” as a spiritual and cultural center with focus on Yeats’ spiritual journey (poem in course folder). Instructor will share aspects of Orhan Pamuk’s Istanbul: Memories and the City.

(Class 6, 7) The Mediterranean and the Grand Tour
Rachel Carson, “The Shape of Ancient Seas” (pp. 97-107)
Read selections from Lord Byron’s Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage (in course folder). Discuss the conflicting emotions of a young, world-weary Englishman upon his discovering the wonders of the ancient world of Europe and the Mediterranean. The poem caused a sensation when it was first published in 1818. Byron later wrote, “I awoke one morning and found myself famous.” What are the qualities of the character of Childe Harold that captivated the imagination of his audience? What are the qualities of the “Byronic Hero?”

Essay #2 due at beginning of Class 10

(Class 8, 9) An Image of Africa: The Heart of Darkness
Rachel Carson, “Wind and Water,” (pp. 111-130)
Read Joseph Conrad’s novella The Heart of Darkness (1899). Discuss Conrad’s complex exploration of the attitudes people hold on what constitutes a barbarian versus a civilized society and the attitudes on colonialism and racism that were integral to European imperialism. What qualities of the novel provoked the Nigerian novelist and poet Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) to describe Conrad as a “thoroughgoing racist?” Evaluate Achebe’s 1975 lecture “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness.’” (in course folder)

(Class 10, 11) “The Ocean is Freedom,” “The Ocean is Slavery”
Rachel Carson, “Wind and Water” (pp. 111-130).
Read Chapter X of The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (in course folder)
Read selections (to be determined) from Olaudah Equiano’s autobiographical memoir The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself (1789). The Interesting Narrative belongs to the genre of “retrospective autobiography,” which gives the author a double perspective of being initially a part of and later separate from the experiences he describes as an enslaved African.

(Class 12, 13) The Middle Passage
Rachel Carson, “Wind, Sun, and the Spinning of the Earth” (pp.131-147)
Read selections from Marcus Rediker’s The Slave Ship: A Human History with special focus on the chapter “John Newton and the Peaceable Kingdom.” Newton was a notorious slave ship captain who later had a religious conversion and became the author of the lyrics of the famous hymn “Amazing Grace.”
Read Derek Walcott’s poem “The Sea is History” (in Selected Poems, pp. 137-139).

Essay #3 due at beginning of Class 14 (topic TBD)
(Class 14) The *Zong* Affair
Rachel Carson, “The Moving Tides” (pp.149-163).
Read Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal” (in course folder)
Read Tobagan native Marlene NourbeSe Philip’s epic poem *Zong!* (2008). Before reading the poem review the précis of *Gregson v. Gilbert* about the *Zong* case (pp. 210-211). Explore how Philip weaves the words of the legal case into a fractured poetic form that, as one critic observed, “tells the story that cannot be told yet must be told. Equal parts song, moan, shout, oath, ululation, curse and chant, *Zong!* excavates the legal text. Memory, history, and law collide and metamorphose into the poetics of the fragment. *Zong!* becomes an anti-narrative lament that stretches the boundaries of the poetic form, haunting the spaces of forgetting and mourning the forgotten.” Before arrival in Salvador, instructor will discuss the 1835 Muslim uprising in Bahia based on João José Reis’s *Slave Rebellion in Brazil.*

(Class 15) The Caribbean Sea: Fragments of Epic Memory
Rachel Carson “The Global Thermostat” (pp. 167-184)
Read Derek Walcott’s speech “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory,” Nobel Lecture, December 7, 1992 (in course folder). Before reading the text of Walcott’s speech *it is important that you listen to it first.* Walcott’s voice is inimitable and conveys so much more emotion and color than just reading the text, good as the text is. His Nobel Prize address provides a general overview of the Caribbean, from the effects of colonialism, the haunting specter of the middle passage, the decimation of families, to the strength of the once enslaved to create vibrant and unique cultures. Be prepared to discuss the following observation of Walcott’s: “All of the Antilles, every island, is an effort of memory; every mind, every racial biography culminating in amnesia and fog. Pieces of sunlight through the fog and sudden rainbows, arcs-en-ciel. That is the effort, the labour of the Antillean imagination, rebuilding its gods from bamboo frames, phrase by phrase.” Read Sidney W. Mintz’s Thomas Henry Huxley Lecture “Enduring Substances, Trying Theories: The Caribbean Region as Oikoumenê,” 1994 (in course folder). This lecture provides an essential background on the unique and neglected history and cultures of the Caribbean.

(Class 16, 17) Two Poets of the Caribbean
Rachel Carson, “Wealth from the Salt Seas” (pp. 185-197)
Read selected poems by St. Lucia poet Derek Walcott and selected poems by Martinique poet Édouard Glissant. While reading these poems explore the significance of the imagery of the sea surrounding the Caribbean islands. As critic and Glissant translator Jeff Humphries writes, “Once the reader accepts that the poem is no more to be made clear than the multicolored chaos of a Caribbean market street, then the poem can begin to take on all the redolent, sweaty animation and lively disorder of the real tropics, not the neat static amusement park reenactments of postcard and tourist brochure; the language of the poem begins to move around us like a hot night and resound in our ears like the ocean at dawn.” Discuss how the ocean is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent in each poet’s work. What “history” can be found in the Caribbean Sea?

Essay #4 due at beginning of Class 18 (topic TBD)

(Class 18) The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor
Read Nobel Laureate and Columbian author Gabriel García Márquez’s 1955 narrative *The Story of*
a Shipwrecked Sailor, a work bearing the accurate but cumbersome subtitle Who drifted on a life raft for ten days without food or water, was a proclaimed a national hero, kissed by beauty queens, made rich through publicity, and then spurned by the government and forgotten for all time. The book, which originally appeared as a series of newspaper articles, is Márquez’s account of the fate of eight crewmembers of a Columbian destroyer who fell overboard and disappeared during a storm in the Caribbean Sea in 1955. Only one sailor survived, Luis Alhandro Velasco. We will examine Márquez’s literary skill in transforming this historical event into a universal narrative of sea-fiction that moves from Velasco’s initial hope to solitude, despair, confusion and hallucinations before he is eventually rescued. Also read Márquez’s “The Solitude of Latin America,” Nobel Lecture, December 8, 1982 (in course folder). In his lecture Marquez writes, “We, the inventors of tales, who will believe anything, feel entitled to believe that it is not yet too late to engage in the creation of... a new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth.” We will discuss his observation with respect to the many cultures of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Personal Sea Voyage Narrative due a beginning of Class 21

(Class 19, 20, 21) “Suffer A Sea-Change / Into Something Rich And Strange”
Rachel Carson, “The Encircling Sea” (pp. 199-212) & Levinton’s “Afterword” (pp. 213-243)
Read Shakespeare, The Tempest (1623) and watch video of the play starring Michael Hordern as Prospero. One of the sources of Shakespeare’s The Tempest may be the story of a shipwreck that occurred after a 1609 hurricane off the coast of Bermuda. In the imagination of Shakespeare, the historical “tempest,” “shipwreck,” and “island” are transformed into a mysterious and beautiful world – a world out of time where the laws of nature are temporarily suspended and where, through trial and tribulation, the social and moral evils of the Old World are transformed into “a brave new world.” That The Tempest is the final literary work of this course is particularly fitting. We will shortly be leaving the “magic island” of our ship and return home. Have we, like the characters in the play, suffered “a sea-change / Into something rich and strange?” With the help of the spirit Ariel, your instructor now releases you from the charms of our sea-journey, restores you to the safe haven of port, home, and family – and asks your indulgence to set him free. To each of you, his final charge: “Be free, and fare thou well!”

(Class 20 -- tentative, time permitting) A Man A Plan A Canal: Panama
Brief presentation on the history of the Panama Canal on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of its completion in 1914 based on David McCullough’s The Path Between the Seas.

(Class 22) Final Essay (in class) on The Tempest

(Class 23) Homeward Bound: Arrivals
Course evaluations, return papers, final grades, and farewells

(Class 24) Finals

FIELD WORK
Poet Robert Frost wrote, “Home is that place where, when you have to go there, / They have to take you in.” During our voyage our “home” will be our ship. And from this vessel we will visit many ports of call, each of which is home for its residents and a short-term haven and refuge for those transient sailors who are temporarily home from the sea. As points of departure to other destinations in countries around the world, ports have their own distinct culture and traditions. During our voyage we will spend one 8-hour day in Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad and Tobago, to learn about maritime life ashore. This field lab will require us to take extensive notes based on our observations, conversations, lectures, and special tours. This required field lab will be supplemented by additional fieldwork conducted on our own in other ports and aboard ship. Your fieldwork and field lab will be incorporated into your personal sea voyage narrative.

FIELD LAB

This field lab will focus on the important role of Maritime Studies at the University of Trinidad & Tobago. UTT is well known worldwide for providing engineers and specialists in academic fields such as maritime law, social sciences, and environmental management. A campus tour will include a visit to the Navigation and Engine Room Simulators. This is where training exercises are conducted for cadets and professionals wishing to keep abreast of the latest practices in professional development. This field lab will enhance an understanding of how our ship’s officers have trained for their professions. An on-campus lunch is included followed by a Q&A session and a tour of the harbor of Port of Spain.

FIELD ASSIGNMENTS

Field Lab Evaluation: During our field lab you must use a field notebook and camera to record your initial observations, conversations, sights, and other impressions. You will later consult these notes to write a 3-4 page written report on what you experienced, including thoughts about the significance of your visit. This report will be submitted to your instructor for evaluation and feedback. Appropriate elements of your lab report should later be incorporated into your sea voyage narrative. The Field Lab Report will be submitted several days after the lab’s conclusion.

Incorporation Of Other Ports Of Call Into Curriculum: Discussions of the complementary nature of literary studies and experiential port visits are incorporated into class meetings, writing assignments, into the field lab, as well as the sea voyage narrative. While the field lab requires a special written report (relevant parts of which should inform the sea voyage narrative) notes taken in other ports must be submitted as an integral appendix to the personal sea voyage narrative.

Documentation Of Completion Of These Experiences: (1) Field Lab: completion of a written report  (2) Other Ports of Call: In-class presentations; submission of field notes with sea voyage narrative.

Evaluation: Students’ written field lab report and will be evaluated on the clarity of its writing and the relevance of its detail, and the quality of insights presented, and its connection to one or more literary works in curriculum. Similarly, in-class presentations and submitted field notes will be evaluated for originality, creativity, insightfulness, and clarity.

METHODS OF EVALUATION / GRADING RUBRIC
Methods of Evaluation: All written assignments (literature-oriented essays and field lab report) will be evaluated on the clarity of writing, relevance of its detail, and the quality of insights presented. Similarly, in-class presentations and submitted field notes will be evaluated for originality, creativity, insightfulness, and clarity. “Class Participation” means active, positive, and respectful engagement in all class discussions, including insightful comments and making connections between literary syllabus and experiential field observations.

Grading Rubric:
A = Exceptional writing/speaking; serious thought; insightful; high creativity and originality
B = Above average writing/speaking; commendable thoughts, insights, and use of evidence
C = Average writing/speaking; fulfills assignment; adequate use of evidence
D = Below average writing/speaking; barely fulfills terms of assignment
F = Failure to fulfill terms of assignment; sloppy writing/speaking; lack of evidence; no insights

RESERVE LIBRARY LIST

AUTHOR: Sidney W. Mintz
TITLE: Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History
PUBLISHER: Penguin Books
ISBN #: 0-14-00.9233-1
DATE/EDITION: 1985

AUTHOR: Ian Baucom
TITLE: Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History
PUBLISHER: Duke University Press
ISBN# 978-0-8223-3596-2
DATE/EDITION: 2005

AUTHOR: Stephan Palmié & Francisco A. Scarano (editors)
TITLE: The Caribbean: A History of the Region and Its Peoples
PUBLISHER: University of Chicago Press
DATE/EDITION: 2011

ELECTRONIC COURSE MATERIALS
To be determined (for inclusion in course folder)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
DVD of William Shakespeare’s “King Lear” (BBC Shakespeare with Michael Hordern as Lear)
DVD of BBC documentary on the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius and destruction of Pompeii

HONOR CODE
Semester at Sea students enroll in an academic program administered by the University of Virginia, and thus bind themselves to the University’s honor code. The code prohibits all acts of lying, cheating, and stealing. Please consult the Voyager’s Handbook for further explanation of
what constitutes an honor offense.

Each written assignment for this course must be pledged by the student as follows: “On my honor as a student, I pledge that I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment.” The pledge must be signed, or, in the case of an electronic file, signed as “signed.”