



Pirates, Slaves, and Witches: Reading the eighteenth-century

British Caribbean

Course Description

This course is designed for advanced undergraduates and will critically engage your historical and literary understanding of the eighteenth-century Caribbean. It will discuss issues that have cultural relevance to the present day, from the formation of the “pirate” as a renegade underdog of the imperial frontier, to the more serious matters of racial discrimination and African displacement during the transatlantic slave trade. This course will historically follow the rise and fall of the British imperial reign in the Caribbean, from its start in the late seventeenth century with a discussion of indigenous Caribbean groups, Spanish imperial contact, and Cromwell’s “Western Design.” The course will conclude its literary history with the abolition of slavery in 1836. A final segment of the course will read through examples of contemporary Caribbean literature. This segment will encourage you to consider how present-day authors wrestle with the legacies of slavery and an imperial past.

Throughout the duration of the course, readers will traverse the Caribbean Sea on pirate vessels, witness the rise of Abolition and the end of slavery, consider the economics of empire, and be privy to moments of African and creole resistance in the forms of Voodoo and Obeah. Though a literary course, it will interweave relevant historical and cultural components to create a dynamic understanding of eighteenth-century Anglophone Caribbean literature.

The course is divided into four segments: “Pirates of the Caribbean,” “Gender and Empire in the Atlantic World,” “The Transatlantic Slave Trade,” and “Creole Resistance: Voodoo and Obeah.” The **first segment** will explore the literary and cultural history of the buccaneer and pirate and his (occasionally her) representation in the transatlantic imagination. Recurring tropes of fraternity, freedom, and anti-authoritarianism aggregate in the pirate’s overall representation in both fictional and factual accounts. We will explore these representations and their connection to the British literary romanticization of the pirate subject. **Segment Two** will consider the role that women played in the expanding frontiers of the imperial Atlantic. At the same time, this segment will consider the role that epistolary and personal narratives have on the rise of domestic fiction in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This segment will also finally consider the representation of women of color in the long eighteenth century, as the novels discussed feature biracial protagonists.

Segments Three and Four mark a thematic shift in the course, considering a literary history generated from the transatlantic slave trade. **Segment Three** focuses on the cultural power of the slave voice and the political agency of the slave narrative within the Abolition Movement of the late eighteenth century. Writings from Cugoana, Equiano, and Prince will highlight not only the African American narrative experience but also cement the role of the slave narrative in the African American literary canon. **Segment Four** will consider the political and literary representation of the African obeah and voodoo practitioner from both a pro-slavery and anti-slavery perspective. Obeah and voodoo, as African-creolized spiritual belief systems, have

complicated and rich histories in the Caribbean. The religions' rituals and dances incited fears of rebellion amongst the planter class, and are represented in the Caribbean gothic, a genre typically written by plantation owners. Voodoo and obeah were also contrarily represented as sites of resistance for abolitionists, most characterized in William Earle's *Three-Fingered Jack*. This section will explore these politics of representation as the Caribbean colonies were on the brink of slave emancipation.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will:

- Develop an understanding and appreciation for the rich literary and cultural history of the Anglophone Caribbean.
- Connect contemporary representations of piracy to the literary and cultural history of the "Golden Age of Piracy."
- Recognize and appreciate the literary history that was constructed out of the transatlantic slave trade and Atlantic slavery.
- Be able to identify and distinguish the nuanced genres of the maritime picaresque, epistolary novel, slave narrative, and colonial gothic and their roles within larger British and American canons.
- Generate an important contextual guide for understanding the present-day Caribbean as a cultural space.
- Critically assess issues of race and gender in colonial and post-colonial environments.
- Be able to integrate historical, economic, and literary analysis into their writing.
- Analyze, process and integrate primary and secondary sources into their research.
- Fine-tune a conceptual understanding of the eighteenth-century Caribbean and its literature, applying varying modes of research and analysis in their argument-driven writing.
- Practice varying modes of writing about a given topic (rhetorical analysis, historical reflection, research-based argumentative).

Course Activities and Assignments:

1. Each day's reading will have 2-3 corresponding "Reading Review Questions." These questions will be available on Blackboard and will steer the course for the day's discussion. Each response for the questions should be at least 3-4 sentences to receive full credit and submitted *1 hour before class time*.
2. Students will have three major writing assignments:

Assignment One: Select one pirate from our discussions (Morgan, Avery, Blackbeard, Roberts, Bonny and Read) and write a rhetorical analysis of the narrative as it is written in *Buccaneers of America* or *A General History*. Related questions are: How is your pirate subject represented? What are the social, economic, or literary motivations for this representation? How does this representation feed into the romanticized circulation of the pirate subject today? (5-6 pages, double-spaced)

Assignment Two: On March 5th, the class will jointly excavate a number of digital archives that deal specifically with the transatlantic slave trade (selected from the list below). Based on your own interests, select one material object from any one of these archives. With this object, you will write a conceptual “material history” paper. Related questions are: What is the material made of? What purpose does it serve? How did it impact those that interacted with it? How does it fit into a larger historical and/or social narrative of slavery? (5-6 pages, double-spaced). Some outside research required.

Digital Collections:

National Collection of Saint Bartholomew:

<http://www.memoirestbarth.com/st-barts/iconographie/carte-dessin-peinture-photo-3.html>
(French)

National Museum of African American History and Culture:

https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/collection/search?edan_q=%2A%3A%2A&edan_local=1&edan_fq%5B%5D=topic%3A%22Slavery%22

The British Museum Online Collection:

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx?place=3112%7C39454%7C37286&from=ad&fromDate=1650&to=ad&toDate=1850&page=1

National Archives of Jamaica:

<http://nljdigital.nlj.gov.jm/collections/browse#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0>

International Slavery Museum, Liverpool:

<http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/visit/floor-plan/middle-passage/index.aspx>

This list is not exhaustive. There are many more museums with digital collections available. If you find something of interest, please let me know!

Assignment Three: A final research paper on a topic of your choosing based on what has been studied in the course. This paper will clearly formulate an argument about a topic discussed in class and involve outside research to support this argument. (8-10 pages, double spaced). Topics will need to be newly developed and, while related to an earlier interest, cannot be an expansion of previous writing. Given the importance of this assignment a writing workshop and individual preparation conferences will be integrated into its execution.

Midterm: In lieu of a traditional comprehensive midterm (reading review questions cover reading comprehension), the midterm will be an in-class essay. Select one essay question out of three possible, and write a full and complete response. Essay questions will derive predominantly from material covered in segment two of the course.

Calendar: *Subject to Change*

WK 1	Jan 17	Introduction to Course and Paper One; Transatlantic Encounters: The Caribbean before & After Contact; Cromwell's "Western Design"
2	22	Segment One: Pirates of the Caribbean <i>Buccaneers of America</i> , selected chapters (Captain Morgan); <i>A General History</i> ch.1 (Avery); <i>Villains of all Nations</i> chs. 1-3
	24	<i>A General History</i> , ch. 9 (Roberts); <i>Villains of all Nations</i> ch. 4
3	29	<i>A General History</i> chs. 3, 7 (Blackbeard, Read & Bonny); <i>Villains of all Nations</i> chs. 5 & 6
	31	The End of the "Golden Age." <i>Republic of Pirates</i> , "Piracy's End"; <i>Villains of all Nations</i> chs. 7,8, conclusion.
4	Feb 5	<i>The Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl</i> ; <i>British Pirates in Print and Performance: "Pirate Clichés"</i> Paper One Due
	7	Segment Two: Gender and Empire in the Atlantic World <i>Ends of Empire: "The Feminization of Ideology: An Introduction"</i> <i>The Female American</i> chs. 1-6
5	12	<i>The Female American</i> chs. 7-vol II, ch. 3; "Religious Intolerance in <i>The Female American</i> "
	14	<i>The Female American</i> chs. 4-12; <i>Ends of Empire</i> ch. 5: "Amazons and Africans: Daniel Defoe"
6	19	No Class: Presidents' Day
	21	<i>Woman of Colour</i> , letter packets 1-3
7	26	<i>Woman of Colour</i> , letter packets 4 and 5; <i>Belle</i> (dir: Amma Asante, 2013).
	Feb 28	MIDTERM: In-class essay
8	Mar 5	Segment Three: The Transatlantic Slave Trade (Introduction to Paper Two) <i>The Slave Ship</i> , Introduction; chs 1-2 Exploring the Digital Archive
	7	<i>The Interesting Narrative</i> , chs. 1-4; <i>The Slave Ship</i> , ch. 4

9	12	Spring Break
	14	Spring Break
10	19	<i>The Interesting Narrative</i> , chs. 5 & 6; Excerpts from Cugoano's <i>Thoughts and Sentiments</i>
	21	CLASS CANCELED: Continue reading Equiano on your own
11	26	<i>The Interesting Narrative</i> , chs. 7-12; Excerpts from <i>The History of Mary Prince; To Tell a Free Story</i> , ch. 2
	28	Segment Four: Creole Resistance: Voodoo and Obeah (Introduction to Final Paper) "Romantic Voodoo: Obeah and British Culture, 1797-1807" in <i>Sacred Possessions</i> ; "Colonial and postcolonial Gothic: the Caribbean" Paper Two Due
12	Apr 2	<i>Three-Fingered Jack</i> , letters 1-4; Court Case: <i>Trial against the slave Willem for the practice of obeah and murder</i> , 1823
	4	<i>Three-Fingered Jack</i> , letters 5-8; Excerpt from Williams' <i>Voodoos and Obeahs: Phases of West India Witchcraft</i>
13	9	<i>Three-Fingered Jack</i> , letters 9-15; <i>Reaper's Garden</i> , ch. 4.
	11	Conclusion: Reflecting on the Caribbean Past Sylvia Wynter, "1492: A New World View;" CLR James, "Triumph"
14	16	Jamaica Kincaid, "Blackness;" and <i>A Small Place</i> .
	18	Final Paper Proposals Due: Writing Workshop in Class
15	23	Wrap Up and Feedback
	25	Paper Conferences
16	30	Paper Conferences (as needed)

Final Paper due: Friday, May 11th

Grading

Reading Responses and Participation (20%)

Paper One (15%)

Paper Two (20%)

Paper Three (30%)

Midterm (15%)

Course Materials to be purchased:

- 1.) *A General History of Pyrates*, edited by Manuel Schonhorn. Mineola: Dover Press, 1724 (1999).
- 2.) Markus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2005
- 3.) *The Female American*, edited by Michelle Burnham. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1767 (2001).
- 4.) Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano*, edited by Vincent Carretta. New York: Penguin, 1789 (2003).
- 5.) *The Woman of Colour*, edited by Lyndon Dominique. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1808 (2008).
- 6.) William Earle, *Obi; Or, Three-Fingered Jack*, edited by Srivinas Aravamudan. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1800 (2005).
- 7.) Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988.
- 8.) Markus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*. New York, Penguin, 2008.

Course Materials provided by instructor:

1. Alexander Esquemeling, *Buccaneers of America*, 1678.
2. Colin Woodard: *The Republic of Pirates: Being the True and Surprising Story of the Caribbean Pirates and the Man who Brought them Down*, 2008.
3. Manushag Powell and Frederick Burwick, *British Pirates in Print and Performance*, 2015.
4. *The Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl* (dir: Gore Verbinski, 2003).
5. Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in the Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature*, 1993.
6. *Belle* (dir: Amma Asante, 2013).
7. Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, 1828.
8. Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 1789.
9. Olmos, et al, *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santeria, Obeah and the Caribbean*, 2000.
10. *Trial against the slave Willem*, 1823.
11. Selections from: *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories*, 2002.
12. William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
13. Katleen Gillian, "Religious Intolerance in *The Female American*," <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/598/religious-intolerance-in-the-female-american-or-the-adventures-of-unca-eliza-winkfield>

14. Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*, 2010.
15. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert, "Colonial and postcolonial Gothic: the Caribbean," *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, 2006.
16. Sylvia Wynter, "1492: A New World View," *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas*, 1995
17. CLR James, "Triumph." *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories*, 2001.
18. Jamaica Kincaid, "Blackness." *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories*, 2001.

Useful Information:

Office Hours: M/W: 3:00pm-4:30pm & After Class. For Emergency meetings, by appointment.

Office Location: Phillips 614

Email: vab@gwu.edu (7am-10:00pm)

*If you are going to miss class, contact me ahead of time to let me know. Absences will be excused for serious medical issues, academic-related events (such as conferences) and GW sports-related activities. Verification is required.

GW Writing Center: <https://writingcenter.gwu.edu>

