

English 461-05: Senior Seminar - The Figure of the Pirate  
Eastern Connecticut State University  
Fall Semester, 2008  
Wednesdays, 7-9:45pm  
Library 314

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## The Figure of the Pirate

Though there have been pirates for as long as there has been seafaring trade, the image of the pirate that has entered popular culture dates to a period from roughly the late sixteenth through the late eighteenth centuries—the very period in which European countries sought to extend the reach of their commerce to all corners of the world. The exploits of figures like Blackbeard or Captain Kidd provided material for the popular press of their own day, and subsequent re-tellings of pirate stories (from *Treasure Island* to *Pirates of the Caribbean*) have frequently, almost compulsively, revisited that historical moment.

Quite apart from the feats of this or that particular pirate, however, “the pirate” has become a *figure*—a metaphor, a personification—for imagining that which is beyond the verge of law and order: we speak of “pirate” radio stations, for example, and refer to the downloading of copy-righted songs or movies as “piracy.” Whether imagined as a rapacious predator on legitimate commerce or as a romanticized figure of anarchic resistance to authority, the pirate has come to stand for all that lies beyond the verge of law and order within which most of us live our lives.

This class will examine the figure of the pirate as a fixture of the modern cultural imagination. On the one hand, we will explore the figure of the seafaring pirate as he (or, sometimes, she) appears in a range of literary and non-fictional texts, both from the “golden age” of piracy itself and in following centuries, down to our own time. We will also consider the ways that piracy is transformed and metaphorically extended into a pervasive cultural trope, both in the eighteenth century and our own day.

### **Required Texts** (available at the campus bookstore)

J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and *Peter Pan and Wendy*, ed. Peter Hollingdale (Oxford)

“Daniel Defoe,” *The General History of the Pyrates*, ed. Manuel Schonhorn (Dover)

Matt Mason, *The Pirate’s Dilemma* (Free Press)

Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, ed. Emma Letley (Oxford)

Other readings will be posted to Blackboard or available online.

## COURSE POLICIES

**Please Note:** It is Eastern Connecticut State University's policy to make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible. You will also need to contact the Office of AccessAbility at (860) 465-5573. The Office of AccessAbility coordinates all arrangements with instructors, and I can't provide accommodations for you unless your need for them has been documented with that office.

### About the class

The emphasis in this class is on reading, independent exploration, and discussion: there will be very little if any lecturing. As such, it is absolutely critical that you come to class prepared for discussion. In addition to reading and discussing the texts on the syllabus, students will be responsible for a fair amount of independent research in this class—some formal, some quite informal—which you'll be asked to share with the group in both oral and written form. You'll need to keep up, then, not just with the assigned texts, but also with the ongoing research conversation. Each week when you come to our class meeting, you need not simply to have done the readings, but to have really *thought* about them. So it's crucial that you allow yourself enough time to do so. I would strongly recommend allowing no less than one hour every day for the work of this class.

### Assignments

The principal work of this first semester in the two-semester sequence is to prepare you for your independent research and writing in the Spring. There will not be any especially lengthy formal written assignments this semester—you won't be writing a term paper, for instance. But that's not to say you won't be doing quite a bit of work (and, indeed, quite a bit of writing) this semester.

The major written assignment for this term will be a fairly substantial (7-10 page) prospectus laying out your initial vision of the seminar paper you intend to write next semester, together with a preliminary list of sources for your paper. That prospectus will be due **Wednesday, December 17** (the day reserved for a final exam).

Over the course of the semester, we will maintain a class blog, to which all students must contribute at least ten substantive entries (ca. 500 words: roughly two double-spaced pages. By way of comparison, the description on the first page of this syllabus is 289 words long.) Your blog entries should be directed by your own interests: they can take the form of reflections on the assigned readings for the week, reports on other material you've found that seems related to the themes of the course, etc. There are only a few ground rules for blog entries:

- 1) Please keep the tone of your entries consistent with the intellectual aims of the seminar, and respect your readers' sensibilities and their reasons for reading your posts;
- 2) You must post at least every two weeks—the class should never go fourteen days without hearing from you;
- 3) At least three of your posts must discuss secondary scholarly work related to the themes of the class: you should use these posts to draw our attention to relevant scholarship that's *not* on the syllabus.

In addition to your principal entries, you will also have the opportunity to comments on other students' posts. While I do not have formal guidelines for comments comparable to the ones I've provided for your substantive posts, your contribution to the discussion in comments will factor into the participation portion of your grade.

Finally, students will work in pairs to prepare a twenty-minute presentation on our assigned readings for a given class period. These presentations should lay the groundwork for subsequent discussion. While they may well be exploratory (you don't have to have all the answers), they should provide a clear point or perspective that can serve as a jumping-off point for our conversation. The presentations should give us something concrete to respond to: either a tentative hypothesis to explore or a pointed question with which to engage.

***A note on plagiarism:*** In the world of the university, plagiarism is a very serious offense. If I discover that you have attempted to pass off someone else's work as your own, you will receive a grade of "F" in the course. In keeping with Eastern's academic misconduct policy, I will also report instances of plagiarism to the University's judicial officer.

### **Attendance and Participation**

Participation in discussion is an integral part of this class. Indeed, this semester it is the most important part of this class. Though I don't adhere to a strict formula regarding numbers of absences, I certainly know who's in class and who's not—just as I know who's engaged with the class discussion and who's not. If you miss classes, you should expect the participation portion of your grade to suffer. Of course, that's also true if you are mentally absent from classes at which you are physically present.

### **Grading**

Your final grade for the course will be *no lower than* the grade arrived at using this formula:

Group presentation:	20%
Blog contributions:	25%
Prospectus:	25%
Course Participation:	30%

In calculating grades, I use the grade point scale published in the University's faculty handbook (i.e. A = 4.0; A- = 3.7; B+ = 3.3; B = 3.0; B- = 2.7; C+ = 2.3; C = 2.0; C- = 1.7; D+ = 1.3; D = 1.0; F = 0). In some cases, an assignment may receive a "slashed" grade, which will be interpreted as falling midway between the two grades on the quality point scale (e.g. "C+/B-" would equal 2.5).

### **Schedule**

(Some shifting may occur)

Week 1	Wed	3	Introductions
Week 2	Wed	9/10	Alexander Exquemelin, from <i>Bucaniers of America</i> John Oldmixon, from <i>the British Empire in America</i> Peter Earle, <i>The Pirate Wars</i> , ch. 6 (Blackboard)
Week 3	Wed	9/17	Adrian Van Broeck, <i>The Life and Adventures of Captain John Avery</i> <i>A General History of the Pyrates</i> , 3-8, 26-62, 71-94, 148-65, 194-250 John Richetti, <i>Popular Fiction Before Richardson</i> , ch. 3 (Blackboard)

Week 4	Wed	3/8	<p><i>A General History of the Pyrates</i>, 383-451</p> <p>Marcus Rediker, <i>Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea</i>, ch. 6 (Blackboard)</p> <p>Robert C. Ritchie, <i>Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates</i>, chs. 6, 8-10 (Blackboard)</p>
Week 5	Wed	10	<p>Daniel Defoe, <i>Captain Singleton</i>, 1-180 (“... nor had I with it any Regret at the wasting so glorious a Sum of Money, as I brought to <i>England</i> with me.”)</p>
Week 6	Wed	1 1/4	<p>Daniel Defoe, <i>Captain Singleton</i>, 180 (“I next shipped my self, in an evil Hour to be sure, on a Voyage to <i>Cadiz</i>”)-end</p> <p>Hans Turley, “Piracy, Identity, and Desire in <i>Captain Singleton</i>,” <i>Eighteenth-Century Studies</i> 31.2 (1997-98): 199-214. [Available through <i>Project Muse</i>.]</p>
Week 7	Wed	2/3	<p>John Gay, <i>Polly</i> (Blackboard)</p> <p>Robert G. Dryden, “John Gay’s <i>Polly</i>: Unmasking Pirates and Fortune Hunters in the West Indies,” <i>Eighteenth-Century Studies</i> 34.4 (2001): 539-57. [Available through <i>Project Muse</i>.]</p> <p>Rob Canfield, “Something’s Mizzen: Anne Bonny, Mary Read, <i>Polly</i>, and Female Counter-Roles on the Imperial Stage,” <i>South Atlantic Review</i> 66.2 (2001): 45-63. [Available through <i>JSTOR</i>.]</p>
Week 8	Wed	5/11	<p>Daniel Defoe, <i>An Essay on the Regulation of the Press</i> (Blackboard)</p> <p>James R. Sutherland, “<i>Polly Among the Pirates</i>,” <i>The Modern Language Review</i> 37.3 (1942): 291-303. [Available through <i>JSTOR</i>.]</p> <p>John Feather, <i>A History of British Publishing</i>, ch. 4 (Blackboard)</p> <p>Ronan Deazley, <i>On the Origin of the Right to Copy</i>, ch. 2 (Blackboard)</p> <p>Jody Greene, <i>The Trouble With Ownership</i>, ch. 5 (Blackboard)</p>
Week 9	Wed	10/29	<p>Robert Louis Stevenson, <i>Treasure Island</i></p> <p>[Secondary reading TBA]</p>
Week 10	Wed	2 1/5	<p>J. M. Barrie, <i>Peter Pan</i></p> <p>[Secondary reading TBA]</p>
Week 11	Wed	11/12	<p>W. S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan, <i>The Pirates of Penzance</i> (Blackboard)</p>
Week 12	Wed	11/19	<p><i>The Black Pirate</i>  <i>Captain Blood</i>  <i>The Black Swan</i></p>
Week 13	Wed	11/26	<p>NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING</p>

Week 14	Wed	4	<i>Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl</i> <i>Pirates of the Caribbean 2: Dead Man's Chest</i> <i>Pirates of the Caribbean 3: At World's End</i>
Week 15	Wed	1 1/5	<i>Steal This Film</i> and <i>Steal This Film, Part II</i> (Blackboard) Matt Mason, <i>The Pirate's Dilemma</i>