

THE ENDS OF EXPLORATION



ENGL 460, Fall 2021
Rhode Island College
Tuesday/Thursday, 2-3:50 p.m., Craig-Lee 100

Dr. Russell A. Potter

<https://endsofexploration.blogspot.com>

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

-- T.S. Eliot

In this senior seminar we'll explore the literature of exploration itself, from the early modern era to the present. What has driven human beings to explore? What's the relationship between exploration and risk? Where do we draw the line between exploration and exploitation? Can explorers be both heroes and villains? What function, beyond the obvious practical ones, has exploration served in human history? These and other questions will guide us through our readings – historical, poetical, historical-poetical, tragical-historical, poetical-comical, and many other literary avatars of the urge to look around our corners, to be “the first that ever burst / into that silent sea.” Each week, a post on our course blog will give backgrounds and raise questions about our readings; a response to this main post is due each week. In consultation with me, students will each choose a specific moment, mode, or theme of exploration, follow and represent it throughout our discussions, and weave it into a final seminar paper.

Books (Available at the RIC Campus Bookstore)

Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*
Krakauer,
Into the Wild
Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*
Kpomassie, *An African in Greenland*
Fortier, *On The Proper Use of Stars*
Campbell, *The Library of Ice*
Ritter, *A Woman in the Polar Night*
H.G. Wells, *The First Men in the Moon*
Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot*

Films (These will be viewed in their entirety at home, but we may watch clips in class)

Forbidden Quest (1993)
Search for the Northwest Passage (2004)
The Terror, Episode One (2018)
The First Men in the Moon (1964)
Space is the Place (1972)

COURSE STRUCTURE AND POLICIES

This course will run as a seminar, with students responsible for coming to class having done the reading and prepared for engaged discussion. In addition, each student will choose, in consultation with me, a figure, theme, era, or other focal point, one that they'll represent in our discussions throughout the semester, present as a seminar paper in the final weeks, and which will form the core of a final research essay. Lively and engaged discussion are vital to our undertaking. There is a list of suggested topics on our blog which, while not exclusive, will I hope help suggest some possible areas of focus. We'll have individual meetings mid-term to refine your topics, and I'll also be asking for drafts a few weeks before the final due date in order to be able to give everyone some preliminary feedback and advice.

As with all other English courses, students are strongly advised to familiarize themselves with the college's policies on academic honesty (see the RIC student handbook for these). Use of the work of others without proper attribution constitutes a serious violation of these policies; such plagiarized papers will receive not credit and may result in course failure.

COVID-19 NOTICE

Due to the ongoing uncertainty about the COVID-19 virus and its variants, we may in some weeks have our synchronous meeting via Zoom rather than in person. In such a case, I'll notify everyone via their RIC email in advance, and a link to the Zoom meeting will be posted to Blackboard. When we do meet in person, I expect all students to follow all policies of the College and of the State of Rhode Island, which at the time of this writing include wearing masks when in any campus building or room. If necessary and helpful, we may on occasion meet outdoors. Within the limits of the possible, we'll also aim to maintain distance between individuals, and all class activities will be designed so as to not require contact. All papers and all written work will be created and shared electronically; online discussions will take place on our class blog, and drafts and papers will be handed in via Blackboard.

GRADING POLICY

There are two kinds of work that will be evaluated for this class: the first is *quantitative* and the second, *qualitative*. The quantitative elements are your responses to each week's blog post, along with attendance and class participation at our synchronous meetings, whether in person or via Zoom. These elements are essential requirements of the class, but are not graded. This is for two reasons: first, because having the blog posts ungraded creates, I hope, a more relaxed and informal space for expressing your opinions on our texts and viewings; second, because these elements are simple requirements. The *qualitative* element of the class is the formal, written work – your seminar paper – which will draw and benefit from both online and in-person discussions, as well as feedback from me and a reading of your draft version. I realize that, with a single seminar paper, the stakes can feel daunting – but by guiding the process in stages over the semester, I hope to make it less so.

A NOTE ON OUR BLOG

A note on our blog: The comment field is at the end of each blog posting. If you use a Google identity, you can automatically tag your posts; you may also simply post anonymously – but in that case be sure to include your name in your post. I also recommend composing your response in a separate file, and then using “paste” to insert it – that way, if there are any issues with the posting, you won't lose your text. Remember also that you can reply to other students' posts; when you use the “reply:” function your text will be automatically threaded. NB: Be sure to have “cookies” enabled or the blog won't work properly.



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Posted by Russell Potter at 6:17 AM

No comments:

Post a Comment

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COURSE SCHEDULE

Week I (September 9) Introduction to the course.

Week II (September 14, 16) Tuesday: Poe, “Descent into the Maelstrom,” MS. found in a Bottle.” Thursday: Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Preface and Chapters 1-8.

Week III (September 21, 23) Tuesday: Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Chapters 9-17. Thursday: Poe, Pym, Chapters 18-24 (end); Pierre Delpeut, *Forbidden Quest* (film).

Week IV (September 28, 30) Tuesday: Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, Chapters 1-10. Thursday, Into the Wild, Chapters 11-18; Potter, “Exploration and Sacrifice”; film, *Search for the Northwest Passage* (2004).

Week V (October 5, 7) Tuesday: Backgrounds on the Franklin Expedition – Potter, “The Man Who Ate His Boots.” Thursday, start Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*

Week VI (October 12, 14) Tuesday: Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*. Thursday: Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*.

Week VII (October 19, 21) Tuesday: Arctic Forensics I: Barr, “Epilogue A Motive for Murder.” Thursday: Arctic Forensics II: “Weathered, broken bones: Forensics of the Franklin Expedition.”

Week VIII (October 26, 28) Franklin in Fiction. Tuesday: First half of Fortier, *On the Proper Use of Stars*. Thursday: Second half of *On the Proper Use of Stars*. Television series, *The Terror*, episode one (2018).

Week IX (November 2, 4) Strangers among us. Tuesday: First half of Kpomassie, *An African in Greenland*. Thursday: Second half of Kpomassie.

Week X (November 9, 11) Exploration and gender. Tuesday: First half of Ritter, *A Woman in the Polar Night*. Thursday: Second half of Ritter.

Week XI (November 16, 18) The poetics of ice. Tuesday: First half of Campbell, *The Library of Ice*. Thursday: Second half of Campbell.

Week XII (November 23) Space is the Place: Backgrounds on space exploration (linked on blog).

Week XIII (November 30, December 2) Space in fiction. Tuesday: H.G. Wells, *The First Men in the Moon* (1901). Thursday: Film, *The First Men in the Moon* (1964)

Week XIV (December 7, 9) Why we explore. Tuesday: Sagan, first half of *Pale Blue Dot*. Thursday: second half of Sagan.

Week XV (December 14, 16) To infinity and beyond. Film: *Space is the Place*, with Sun Ra and his Intergalactic Solar Arkestra (1972).