



ENGLISH 261 – Arctic Encounters
Professor Russell A. Potter

<http://eng261.blogspot.com>

Mondays and Thursdays, 12:00-1:50, Horace Mann 185

This course examines cultural contact narratives – both 'factual' and 'fictional' – between European 'explorers' of the Arctic and native peoples in the comparative context of European colonialism and emergent literatures, including British, Canadian, Inuit, and Amerindian texts. We will look at the early narratives of European "explorers," as well as at the oral traditions and testimony of native Arctic peoples from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We will look at the way the Arctic was represented – in panoramas, dioramas, and the illustrated press – with a specific focus on the international interest in the fate of Sir John Franklin's last expedition, which disappeared almost without a trace in the late 1840's. We'll continue through an examination of the way the North is framed by the show-makers of more recent years, with reference both to "documentary" film (Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* and NOVA's *Arctic Passage: Prisoners of the Ice*) as well as feature films (Benoît Pilon's *The Necessities of Life* and Zacharias Kunuk's *Atanarjuat*). In the final third of the semester, our focus will be on contemporary Inuit life and culture, particularly in the new Canadian territory of Nunavut. We will read a variety of texts both by "Western" and Inuit writers, including Margaret Atwood, Chauncey Loomis, Kenn Harper, Alooktook Ipellie, Rachel Qitsualik, and Lawrence Millman.

REQUIRED TEXTS (Available at the RIC Bookstore)

Into the Wild, by Jonathan Krakauer
Northern Voices: Inuit Writings in English, edited by Penny Patrone
Minik, the New York Eskimo: An Arctic Explorer, a Museum, and the Betrayal of the Inuit People, by Kenn Harper
A Kayak Full of Ghosts, Lawrence Millman
Selected online texts

FILMS

Nanook of the North (1922)
Atanarjuat (2001)
Search for the Northwest Passage (2005)
The Necessities of Life (2008)
Exile (2009)

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK I (Jan. 18) – Thursday: Introduction to the course.

WEEK II (Jan. 22, 25) – “Lighting out for the Territory –” Monday: *Into the Wild*, pp. 1-70 70-132.
Thursday: *Into the Wild*, pp. 71-132.

WEEK III (Jan. 29, Feb. 1) Monday: *Into the Wild*, pp. 133-207 (end). Thursday: In-class film, *Search for the Northwest Passage*; Potter, “The Man Who Ate His Boots” (blog link).

WEEK IV (Feb. 5, 8) – “Strangers Among Us” – The Franklin search and Inuit encounters. Monday: Parkinson, “All Well: Narrating the Third Franklin Expedition”; Woodman, “Inuit Accounts and the Franklin Expedition” (blog links). Thursday: From Eber, “Encounters on the Passage” (blog link).

WEEK V (Feb. 12, 15) – “Inuit on Display” – Monday: “Eskimos on Display” and items on Abraham Ulrikab, Prince Pomiuk, Nancy Columbia, and Rosie Midway Spoon (Petrone, *Northern Voices*, and blog links). Thursday: Harper and Potter, “Early Arctic Films of Nancy Columbia and Esther Eneutseak” (blog link), with excerpts from selected short films in class.

WEEK VI (Feb. 19, 22) – Minik – Monday and Thursday: Harper, *Minik: The New York Eskimo*.

WEEK VII (Feb. 26, March 1) Monday: Screening of *Nanook of the North*. Thursday: Flaherty, “How I Filmed Nanook of the North”; Louis Menard, “Nanook and Me” (blog links). **Paper #1 Due Thursday.**

SPRING BREAK

WEEK VIII (March 12, 15) – “Good and Bad Eskimos” – Monday: In-class screening of *Eskimo* (1933).
Thursday: Excerpts from *The Savage Innocents*; Discussion of all films.

WEEK IX (March 19, 22) – Inuit folktales – Monday and Thursday: *A Kayak Full of Ghosts*.

WEEK X (March 26, 29) – Monday: In-class screening of *Atanarjuat*, part I. Thursday: In-class screening of *Atanarjuat*, part II.

WEEK XI (April 2, 5) – Monday and Thursday: Screening of *The Necessities of Life*, with discussion following on Thursday.

WEEK XII (April 9, 12) Monday: Inuit culture in the wake of the settlement era. Readings: Alooook Ipellie, “A Frobisher Bay Childhood”; “Damn Those Invaders” (Petrone); “When God Sings the Blues” (blog link).

WEEK XIII (April 23, 26) The Arctic, indigenous peoples, and Canadian Sovereignty. Monday: The High Arctic Exiles; in-class film, *Exile*. Thursday: Of armed icebreakers, interdiction exercises, and cruise ships.

WEEK XIV (April 30) Wrap-up and review; final paper due.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- Each week, beginning in week 2, a weekly response is due on our class blog, located at <http://eng261.blogspot.com/>. This should be roughly 1-2 paragraphs in length, and speak as specifically as possible to that week's readings and viewings. It's vital not simply to say you liked/disliked or found interesting some image, or passage in a text, but to say *why*. Your response may be framed in the form of a question (to which others may respond) or indeed you may choose to respond to or comment on the post of another member of the class.
- There will be a mid-term as well as a final essay. Both papers are open to any topic relevant to our class's topics, readings, and issues. As to length, there is no *absolute* length requirement for either paper, though generally essay should be in the area of 5-7 pages. MLA style should be used for citations, and a Works Cited list included; there is a link to MLA guidelines on our blog. The midterm paper may be revised and re-submitted, although to have this option on the final essay, it must be handed in no later than April 12th. You must attach any and all earlier drafts to the revised version.
- Plagiarism: Please acquaint yourself, if you have not already, with the statement in the College Handbook on this subject. Clear instances of plagiarism will result in an automatic grade of "F," and all such instances are reported to the Chair of the Department.
- Final grade: The final grade is determined from: Participation (including attendance, active discussion, and posting of all required response essays), 30%; Midterm Paper 30%, Final Paper, 40%