From Homer’s *Odyssey* to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, from *The Love Boat* to *Star Trek*, the ocean voyage has long served as a laboratory of social relations. Disparate populations (“the motley crew”) are thrown together at sea and forced into self-reliance and co-existence: nations and economies writ small.

Unlike members of a crew, however, single characters at sea – Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Hemingway’s Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* – must battle not only overwhelming natural forces, but also loneliness. Existentialism and isolation, therefore, along with condensed social relations (the rigid hierarchy of a ship’s command), mark the poles of maritime fiction.

One thesis we will explore in this course is why modernism and modernity depend on maritime tropes, from “drift” “and “currents” to oceanic adventure and reflective meditation, the latter best represented by the work of Virginia Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, for example.

Modern literature plays with the idea that landed identities – gender, nationality, individualism – are often best illuminated at sea. Melville’s *Billy Budd*, for example, with its background of hierarchy and mutiny, individualism and cruelty, exposes the emerging order of modern America. Conrad’s *The Secret Sharer*, with a ship’s captain and a stowaway mirroring each other, illustrates the doubts of many in Britain about aggressive imperialist behavior. Later, in the twentieth century, when the ship becomes a space ship, as in Stainislaw Lem’s *Solaris*, we understand that literature and society are always compelled to seek out the edges of known world and imagination. And the Internet, from surfing through Yahoo to Internet Explorer and the term “navigation,” employs oceanic language to chart this vast new territory.

Philosophy and critical theory, too, have long employed imagery of the ocean to represent new ideas, from Edmund Burke’s concept of the “sublime” (the wild, unknowable ocean) through Freud’s “oceanic feeling” (a desire to retreat from this world) to Eve Sedgwick’s “eddies of queer time” (an image developed to depict arrested, troubling temporalities).

In this class, we will read a number of classic maritime novels in order to trace the themes and styles of both modern fiction and literary theory.
Themes to be explored:

- Isolation, existentialism and the self (alone at sea)
- Society and labor (the crew)
- Piracy and legality (from buccaneers to hackers)
- Mutiny and social hierarchies
- Adventure
- Exploration and imperialism (from Homer’s *Odyssey* to interstellar travel)
- The language and insights of critical theory (from “the sublime” to “streams of consciousness”)

Novels

- Herman Melville, *Billy Budd* and *Benito Cereno*
- Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*
- Ernst Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*
- Stanislaus Lem, *Solaris*
- Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*
- J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*

Poems: We will also read a selection of poems, including, but not limited to:

- “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (Samuel Coleridge)
- “The Sea is History” (Derek Walcott)
- “Exultation is the Going” (Emily Dickinson)
- “The Voyage” (Charles Baudelaire),
- “The Drunken Boat” (Rimbaud)
- “Sailing to Byzantium” (W. B. Yeats)
- ”As I Ebb’d With The Ocean of Life” (Walt Whitman)
- “Convergence of the Twain” (Thomas Hardy)

Television

- An episode of *The Love Boat* and an episode of *Star Trek*.

Sea Songs and Shanties: We will listen to the following:

- “Lord Franklin” [exploration]
- “The Bonnie Ship The Diamond” [whaling]
- “The Wreck of Edmund Fitzgerald” [shipwreck]
- “Fiddler’s Green” [end of a hard life]
- “Blow the Man Down” [working shanty]
- “Canadee-I-O” [women escaping to sea],
- “Sloop John B” (Beach Boys) [escape],
- “Sailing” (Rod Stewart) [gospel spiritual]
- “Into the Mystic” (Van Morrison) [mysticism]
The Sea in Theory: From critical theory, we will read excerpts from the following authors:

- Judith Halberstam (theory of “eddy”)
- Edmund Burke (“the sublime”)
- Karl Marx (“the proletariat” and the global)
- Freud (“the oceanic feeling”)
- Michel Foucault (“heterotopia”)
- Zygmund Berman (“liquid modernity”),
- Deleuze and Guattari (“flows” and “currents,” “the smooth and the striated”)

Maritime paintings:

- “The Monk By the Sea” (1810), by Caspar David Friedrich
- “Raft of the Medusa” (1819), by Gericault
- “Impression, Sunrise” (1872), by Monet
- “The Great Wave” (1832), by Hokusai
- “The Gulf Stream,” (1899), by Winslow Homer

Film: