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 the graphic novel (or Stainislaw Lem’s *Solaris*) *The Empire of a Thousand Planets*, 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”)

**Required Texts:**

**Novels**
- Conrad, Joseph. *The Secret Sharer* (1910), and *The Shadow Line* (1915)
- Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)
- Hemingway, Ernst. *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952)
- Melville, Herman. *Billy Budd* (1924) and *Benito Cereno* (1855)
- Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse* (1927)

**Television**
- 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:
- Eve Sedgwick (the “eddy”)
- Edmund Burke (“the sublime”)
- Karl Marx (globalization)
- Freud (“the oceanic feeling”)
- Michel Foucault (“heterotopia”)
- Zygmunt Berman (“liquid modernity”),
- Deleuze and Guattari (“flows” and “currents,” “the smooth and the striated”)
- Adorno and Horkheimer (Odysseus and the dialectic of Enlightenment)

**Film:**

**Poems:** We will also read a selection of poems. See the list below.
1. “Sea-Fever,” by John Masefield
2. “maggie and milly and molly and may,” by e.e. cummings
3. “Exultation is the going,” by Emily Dickinson
8. “my way is in the sand flowing,” by Samuel Beckett.
15. Thomas Hardy, “The Convergence of the Twain.