

History 10C

Monsters, Marvels and Messiahs: Europe in the Age of Discovery

Monday/Wednesday 1:00 – 2:20

Mr. Denery

“Just as the countries of the East are remarkable and distinguished for certain prodigies peculiar and native to themselves, so the boundaries of the West also are made remarkable by their own wonders of nature. For sometimes tired, as it were, of the true and the serious, she draws aside and goes away, and in these remote parts indulges herself in these secret distant freaks.” So writes Gerald of Wales in *The History and Topography of Ireland*. Why do people travel? Gerald, who wrote his book in the late twelfth century, offers at least one reason – because it is interesting, because when we travel to strange and exotic places (Ireland?!) we may see rare, absurd and memorable things. Gerald, who traveled throughout Ireland, saw (or claimed to have seen) and heard (or claimed to have heard) many interesting and strange things. Of course none of this is as obvious as it seems at first. What makes an area “remote”? What makes something interesting and worth recording? How are such oddities to be explained? For example, what on earth does Gerald mean when he asserts that “in these remote parts [nature] indulges herself in these secret distant freaks”? And finally, how does this encounter with other landscapes, plants, people and cultures, force the traveler to distinguish himself from what he discovers, the normal from the abnormal, and the abnormal from the pathological?

In this seminar we explore the powerful role that both the reality and the metaphor of travel has exercised upon the European imagination through a close reading of a variety of (mostly) primary sources.

Required Texts:

Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination*

David Abuoafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus*
The Greek Alexander Romance

Dante, *Purgatory*

Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*

The Travels of Sir John Mandeville

Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*

Fontenelle, *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*

Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, *Castaways*

Additional readings (marked with a “J”) will be available on-line.

You should expect about 100 pages of reading per week. Occasionally, the readings will reach 150 pages. Do not let this worry you too much. The readings are not that difficult, are often quite entertaining (at least I think they are entertaining) and sometimes the total will drop below 50 pages. The reading amounts listed below on the course schedule are somewhat tentative and will, at times, be revised (usually downward). I will supply weekly reading guidelines to help you focus on key themes, passages and questions.

Office Hours:

Monday/Friday: 2:30 to 4:00

13 Hubbard Hall

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Course Requirements:

3 Short Papers: 60% (20% per paper)

Final Paper 30%

Participation 10%

You will be asked to write three short (three to four page) papers. Each short paper will consist of an analysis and interpretation of one text (or group of texts). For your final paper you will choose one of your short papers and use it as the basis for a larger comparative paper (eight to nine pages). The text you use for comparison must be one that you have not previously written about. The idea here is not merely to create a compare/contrast paper, but to combine your analysis of different sources to create a larger argument about the issues raised in this seminar – their significance, how they change and develop over time, etc. Needless to say, we will discuss all of this in more detail in seminar as occasion demands. All papers are to be handed in at my office. I do not accept computer files, or e-mail submissions of any sort.

Class participation is essential to the success of any seminar. You will be expected to attend seminar regularly and to join in discussion. This means, among other things, that you will need to read the assigned texts, to have thought about them in advance and to come prepared to ask (non-trivial) questions about them and to attempt to offer answers to the questions that other students raise. You will also be asked to lead class discussion once during the course of the semester.

Course Schedule:**I. Introduction and Themes**

9/7 Introductions and Themes

9/9 *Genesis*

Gerhart Ladner, “*Homo Viator*: Mediaeval Ideas on Alienation and Order”

II. Travel and Conquest in the Western Imagination

9/14 *The Greek Alexander Romance*

9/16 *The Greek Alexander Romance*, cont.

III. Travel in the Middle Ages

Wk 4 **Travel as Conquest**

9/21 Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*

9/23 Meetings for first paper

9/25 **First Paper Due, 12:00 noon, Hubbard 13**

Wk 5 **Travel as Literature, pt. 1**

- 9/28 Chretien de Troyes, *The Knight with the Lion*
9/30 Chretien de Troyes, *The Knight with the Lion* (cont.)

Wk 6 **Travel as Literature, pt. 2**

- 10/5 Dante, *Purgatory*
10/7 Dante, *Purgatory*, cont.

Wk 7 **Imagining the World Before Columbus**

- 10/12 No Class/Fall Break
10/14 Freedman, *Out of the East*, pp. 1-163

Wk 8 **Imagining the World Before Columbus, pt. 2**

- 10/19 *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*
10/21 *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, cont.
Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, pp. 3-64

III. Columbus and the New World

Wk 9 **Columbus**

- 10/26 Columbus, *Digest of the First Journey*
10/28 Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, pp.105-98
10/30 **2nd Paper Due, 12:00 noon. Hubbard 13**

Wk 10 **Lost in America**

- 11/2 De Vaca, *Castaways*
11/4 Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, pp. 199-238

Wk 11 **Barbarians, Humans and Christians**

- 11/9 Aristotle and Aquinas on Barbarians
11/11 Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians*
Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, pp. 306-13

IV. The European Imagination in an Expanded World

Wk 12 **Relativism**

- 11/16 Montaigne, *On Cannibals, Coaches*
11/18 No Class, Meetings
11/23 **3rd Paper Due, 12:00 noon, Hubbard 13**

Wk 13 **Other Worlds**

- 11/23 Francis Godwin, *The man in the moone, or, A discourse of a voyage thither*
11/25 No Class/Thanksgiving

Wk 14 **Other Worlds, pt. 2**

- 12/2 Fontenelle, *Conversations on a Plurality of Worlds*
12/4 Fontenelle, cont.

Wk 15 **Natural Worlds**

12/9 Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*

12/11 Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*

12/17 **Final Paper Due, 12:00 noon, Hubbard 13**