



Dear Colleague,

It is a great pleasure to announce the NEH Summer Seminar for College Professors on "English Encounters with the Americas, 1550-1610," to be held at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts July 5th-29th, 2011. This seminar will consider primary sources on Anglo-American contact in these early decades through an interdisciplinary lens, using evidence and methods from several different disciplines. We hope to attract a diverse group of applicants, and welcome both your interest and your help in disseminating this announcement of the seminar. In this letter, you'll find information about the topic and approach of the seminar, the setting for the seminar, and broad guidelines for potential participants; more detail can be found on the seminar website, at http://web.mit.edu/neh/english_encounters/index.html.

Why this topic?

Early modern voyages were experienced, witnessed, remembered, and sometimes recorded from a variety of perspectives. As events, they were conditioned by weather, navigational skill, judgment, personalities, logistics, and the unpredictable variables of where they would end up, and in whose neighborhood. Before the fact, they existed in the form of intentions, theories, plans and instructions; after the fact, they returned survivors, samples, records, knowledge (of varying quality), sometimes plunder and captives. They might produce maps, letters, journals, sketches, and rumors as well as books -- small, large, domestic, or foreign. They almost certainly affected the plans and expectations of later voyagers, and they often left a trail of consequences in the places it touched.

Narrative is an important angle of approach to these complex phenomena, because it begins to tell us how participants shaped and made sense of their experience. But travel writing *also* demands -- perhaps more than any other kind of writing -- to be read in the company of its contexts. This proposed summer seminar for college and university teachers aims to put literary and textual approaches to the records of the American encounter in dialogue with the methods and materials of other disciplines. What can we learn about foundational events and narratives, during the century or so after 1492, by fostering collaboration between literature, history, archaeology, anthropology, and other fields, and how can such collaboration be practically undertaken? We will explore the possibilities during the four weeks of this summer seminar, held on the MIT campus in Cambridge, Mass.

Why now?

These early modern texts and events continue to engage a broad audience through the forms of popular books, films, and public history, as they also continue to figure in political and legal negotiations. The Columbian quincentenary of 1992 focused renewed attention from within the academy on the records of England's encounter with the Americas from 1497 on. An important piece of this work, on a set of texts that used to be viewed as largely the province of historians, has come from scholars in literature, and these materials have accordingly become the site of a multisided dialogue between academic disciplines. Influential work by scholars like Stephen Greenblatt, Mary Campbell, and many others has reshaped the boundaries of literary studies as a field, introducing new materials for study and new questions and topics to the study of more traditional literary materials. This generation of new work on the encounter by literary scholars has stimulated work in other, concerned disciplines (history and anthropology in particular) that responded both to its strengths and its perceived weaknesses. As the field and its multiple

audiences have evolved, scholars working on travel writing are increasingly expected to draw on multiple bodies of knowledge, to be familiar with a range of regional histories and cultures, and to address an audience outside their own discipline -- if not outside the academy as such.

In recent years, there has also been an efflorescence of work on the cultures of early modern science, and much of this work bears on travel. Voyages in new directions reflected certain kinds of assumptions about the human and physical geographies they would traverse; they also relied on continued developments in the application of mathematics to navigation and cartography. While early modern voyages had practical ends -- commerce, colonization, and conquest -- they also produced new information: narrative and visual records, collections of objects and botanical samples, sometimes human captives. Increasingly, travelers were directed actively to seek information on particular subjects. Travel writing has thus become an important focal point for historians of science in the period, because it opens a window into the methods, theories, and contents of European thought about the world and about the production of reliable knowledge.

Finally, as travel writing has become a more common object of study *within* the discipline of literature, the methods of that study have also shifted. Scholars have begun to look more closely at the conditions and processes surrounding the production of travel writing. How did notes or logs written in the field or on shipboard eventually become printed books of various kinds and what transformations were effected in the process? Who were the audiences and markets for this writing? One result of this attention to the history of the travel book has been editions that make available (newly or for the first time) many archival documents associated with well-known print narratives: drafts, memoranda, unpublished logs or journals, accounts, instructions. At the same time, digital archives have made even obscure print sources widely available.

In short, those of us working on early modern travel writing today have access to and are potentially responsible for a greatly expanded volume of materials, are asking new kinds of questions, and are addressing a wider and more diverse audience than was the case several decades ago. The broader topic of this seminar -- which bears on the origins of New World societies and social formations -- will always be of concern to our own, particular region of the New World. Developments in the study of travel writing over the last 20 years make a seminar on interdisciplinary sources and methods particularly timely now.

The approach of this seminar

This seminar will take up methods and materials relevant to the study of English travel to the Americas within the chronological framework of the period from (roughly) 1550 to 1610: from the first voyages recorded in print to the first decade of American settlement. Beginning with a focus on early voyages and their practical and intellectual contexts, we will spend the middle two weeks of the seminar on two voyages that have been very well-documented and have attracted an extensive secondary literature spanning multiple disciplines. The final week of the seminar will focus on records of associated with a particular settlement, records that will be far less familiar to most participants and are indeed still in the process of coming to light. These newer materials will provide an opportunity for us to apply some of the approaches explored in the earlier weeks.

The seminar will meet three times a week in the morning, leaving afternoons and the intervening days free for research and meetings with the director and visiting faculty. (Please see below for a brief overview of meetings and topics). We may schedule additional sessions during the final week, perhaps over meals, to allow time for presentations of participants' work in progress. During each of the first three weeks, we'll spend one day on printed primary texts and textual analysis and a second day on other kinds of evidence and analysis, with discussion led by a guest speaker who brings both specific expertise

on our topic, and the perspective of another discipline. Fridays will be set aside for site visits and general discussion. Some of you may want or be willing to lead parts of the discussion on topics of particular interest, and that would be welcome; my experience with past NEH seminars and institutes leads me to expect (and hope) that most of our time will be spent in lively discussion.

I will meet with each of you during the first week (or very soon thereafter) to talk about the individual projects you plan to undertake during the course of the seminar: research projects, articles or short papers, or course development work; we should try to meet a second time to talk about the work before you present it to the group as a whole. During the last week of the seminar, we will discuss organizing conference panels that would further the seminar's aim of speaking and working across disciplines. Participants may also wish to have finished, essay-length versions of their projects considered for publication in a special issue of *Studies in Travel Writing* that will be devoted to work from this seminar.

My particular hope for this seminar is that all of us will leave knowing more than we did at the outset about how, practically, to undertake interdisciplinary work and where to look for sources, interlocutors, and audiences outside our fields. I'm convinced that this kind of work is what's needed both to move the scholarship forward, and to reach larger, more general audiences.

A brief schedule of meetings and topics can be found on the Calendar page; more detailed discussion of meetings, topics and readings can be found on the Contents and Approaches page.

Project director and guest faculty

I began working with the core texts for this seminar, and others like them, when I was a graduate student in English literature, and it was quickly apparent to me that these texts needed to be approached quite differently than literary texts. I needed to find different kinds of questions and -- it seems ever more apparent -- to examine them in a rich set of contexts. My own work has come to reflect the need to understand textual accounts of travel and encounter as located at the intersection of many different kinds of evidence, and many different modes of inquiry.

This seminar extends the idea of new contexts into active collaboration with colleagues from some of the disciplines that have become important to my own work: archaeology, colonial history, and the history of science. I am delighted that we will be joined by several visitors, each of whom has particular expertise on one of our topics: Réginald Auger (Archaeology, Laval) has led excavations of the Frobisher site on Baffin Island; Joyce Lorimer (History, Wilfred Laurier) is the preeminent historian of Anglophone enterprises in Guiana, and recently published a new edition of Raleigh's *Discoverie*; finally, Nicolás Wey-Gómez (History, Caltech) established himself as an authority on the connections between early modern cosmography and ideas of race with his recent book, *Tropics of Empire* (MIT, 2008).

Who should apply?

NEH guidelines designate these seminars primarily for teachers of American undergraduate students. Qualified independent scholars and those employed by museums, libraries, historical societies, and other organizations may be eligible to compete provided they can effectively advance the teaching and research goals of the seminar or institute. Adjunct and part-time lecturers are also eligible to apply. Applicants must be United States citizens, residents of U.S. jurisdictions, or foreign nationals who have been residing in the United States or its territories for at least the three years immediately preceding the application deadline. We are also asked to give priority to applicants who have not participated in an NEH-supported seminar, institute or Landmarks workshop in the last three years. Up to two full-time graduate students in the humanities may also be accepted to the seminar. Finally, you may only apply to *two* seminars or institutes in a given year.

Complete application information can be found on the seminar website, at http://web.mit.edu/neh/english_encounters/index.html. Application materials can also be uploaded there **no later than March 1, 2011**. Your application will have several components (for instance, a c.v. and two letters of recommendation), but **the most important part of the application is the essay**. This essay should include your reasons for applying to the specific project; your relevant personal and academic information; your qualifications to do the work of the project and make a contribution to it; what you hope to accomplish; and the relation of the study to your teaching.

Given the broad topic of the seminar and its focus on interdisciplinary evidence and methods, we welcome applicants from a range of concerned disciplines -- which might include literature, history, anthropology, Native American studies, art history, archaeology, the history of the book, and museum studies. The more detailed information about the seminar and its faculty on our website should help you to assess whether it will be a good match for your own interests and background, but potential applicants should feel free to contact me directly with specific questions about intellectual fit, at maryf298@gmail.com.

Where and when?

MIT is one of the world's premier research institutions. Its 168 acre campus on the Charles River is ideally located for accessing all the cultural opportunities that Cambridge and Boston have to offer. These include important collections of early modern books and manuscripts, historical and archaeological sites dating from the colonial period, as well as several museums with collections relevant to our interests. Participants will become Visiting Scholars at MIT and we will have temporary ID cards for you to pick up on arrival.

MIT's open stacks libraries have a physical collection of over 5 million volumes, as well as extensive digital collections including JSTOR (journals) and Early English Books Online to which participants will have on-campus access. In general, while the humanities collection is excellent, it is limited in size, so it's certainly advisable to plan in advance for materials you know you will want to consult (over and above the course reading). Many faculty members will be able to arrange reciprocal borrowing privileges at other area institutions if their home institution is a member of OCLC (see <http://www.oclc.org/membership/advisorycommittees/profile8.htm>). We can also advise participants beforehand on how to arrange access to the Boston Public Library and Harvard's Widener library. During the first week of the seminar, we will have an orientation and rare book session at Harvard's Houghton Library so that participants can register and become familiar with using the Houghton's very rich collections. Participants may also find materials of interest in the Boston Public Library's special collections, and the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, one of the world's premiere collections of early Americana, is only an hour to the south by train. (Group visits are a possibility, if there's enough interest).

Participants will have the opportunity to reserve air-conditioned, furnished efficiency apartments on campus, in recently renovated graduate housing. All apartments have double beds and full cooking facilities, with shared kitchens and common areas also available for group activities. (See a virtual tour of the Warehouse at http://wh.mit.edu/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=47&Itemid=54, or photos of Ashdown at <http://ashdown.mit.edu/photos-thumb.php?q=20081125building>). A large grocery store as well as a number of inexpensive restaurants are within easy walking distance; a local produce store sells fruit and vegetables on campus every Tuesday and local farmer's markets are also not far away. Buildings have laundry rooms and in-house fitness facilities; participants can also purchase monthly passes to MIT's nearby athletic facilities (\$80/month). These apartments will rent for \$50 a night, including limited cleaning service and weekly linen service. Wireless internet access is generally available throughout the campus, with Ethernet connections available in apartments and in classrooms.

Parking is available for an additional fee, but participants may wish to leave their cars at home and rely on metro Boston's excellent bus and subway system, for which we will provide a prepaid monthly pass.

The stipend for this four-week seminar will be \$3300, with a check for the first half of this stipend waiting for participants on arrival. Please note that these stipends are taxable, and that, although they should cover travel and housing expenses, they may not cover all of your living expenses in a relatively expensive metropolitan area.

Contacts

More detailed information about the seminar, including application instructions, can be found at http://web.mit.edu/neh/english_encounters/index.html. If you have questions about any aspect of the seminar, please feel free to contact me at maryf298@gmail.com; for questions about housing, logistics, or the website, please contact Brad Seawell at seawell@mit.edu.

Thank you for your interest in what we hope will be an exciting project.

Yours truly,

Mary Fuller

NEH Fellow, The Huntington Library, 2010-11
Professor, Literature, MIT

Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this program do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.