



Island Fictions

FROM PARADISE TO ICE 



PROFESSOR MARJORIE RUBRIGHT
ENG300 JUNIOR YEAR SEMINAR
MON & WED 2:30-3:45 - SOUTH COLLEGE E-480
OFFICE HOURS: 4 -5 PM MONDAYS, SC E-448

Guiding Questions: Why do islands have such a powerful hold on our imaginations? In the medieval period, earthly paradise was imagined as an island: a walled-garden nestled within our world. Today, migrating monoliths of ice drift down the North Atlantic 'Iceberg Alley,' a foreboding sign to earth scientists of an apocalypse to come. Between then and now, islands have served as a master metaphor in western literature. One historian of cartography has argued that the island is 'well suited to all the dreams of the microcosm.'¹The island conjures ideas of escape and capture, survival and shipwreck, fantasy and reality, the other out there and the inner self. 'Island Fictions' will journey across a wide range of history, literature and non-fiction from the medieval period to now, to explore how and why islands are good to think with, and how these little fragments become a powerful metaphor for imagining the self and other, alternative pasts and futures.

We'll voyage across real and fictive territory: from Sappho's Lesbos, to Homer's Isle of Circe where men are transformed into beasts, to Prospero's island of tempests, to the 'new world' shores of America, and on to the contemporary Caribbean. Along the way, you'll practice writing in a variety of forms: short response essays in your 'Isolario-Commonplace book'; a creative mythological history of an island you invent (past or present); close reading; a comparative critical analysis of two plays – one early modern one on the stage today; and a final research essay, which will be 10 pages in length.

Trips abroad include: the Rare Book Collection at Du Bois and the Center for Interdisciplinary Renaissance Studies to explore late medieval and early modern maps of islands and travel writing; and Mt. Holyoke College's Rooke Theater to watch a performance of the one-man show, *American Moor*, which puts John Donne's assertion to the test: 'no man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.'

¹ Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches to Cartography throughout History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006): 286.

Map of the course: The course has a clear pattern. We read intensively and hold discussions for a number of class meetings. Every week you write. If you're not writing toward one of the four essays then you are always writing an entry in your Isolario (more on that below). Six meetings over the course of the semester, we clear the decks and hold an in-class Writing Lab. There is no reading assigned on those days (with one exception). These writing labs require that you come prepared with drafts (the assigned writing) in hand. The Writing Lab focuses on your written work, peer review, and the revision process.

Required Course Materials (Available through Amherst Books)

- Homer's *Odyssey*, translated by Emily Wilson
- William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Folger Shakespeare Library edition)
- William Shakespeare, *Othello, The Moor of Venice* (Bedford Texts and Contexts), Ed. Kim Hall
- Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*
- J. Schalansky, *Pocket Atlas of Remote Islands: Fifty Islands I have not visited and never will*

All assigned texts that are not on this list are provided on Moodle

Grade Distribution

This is an intensive *writing* course. Throughout it, you will write three shorter essays, a number of short reflections (in your isolario – commonplace book), and a final research essay which will entail significant research as well as multiple drafts and revision. Every essay assignment has component parts, the details of which will be made clear in the assignment handouts. The due dates for each part of an assignment appear on the syllabus. The percentage breakdown below gives you a sense of the overall value of each essay assignment.

Essay 1	2-3 pages	3%	Creative Project
Essay 2	4-5 pages	12%	Close Reading
Essay 3	5-6 pages	20%	Critical Analysis
Essay 4	10-12 pages	30%	Research Essay

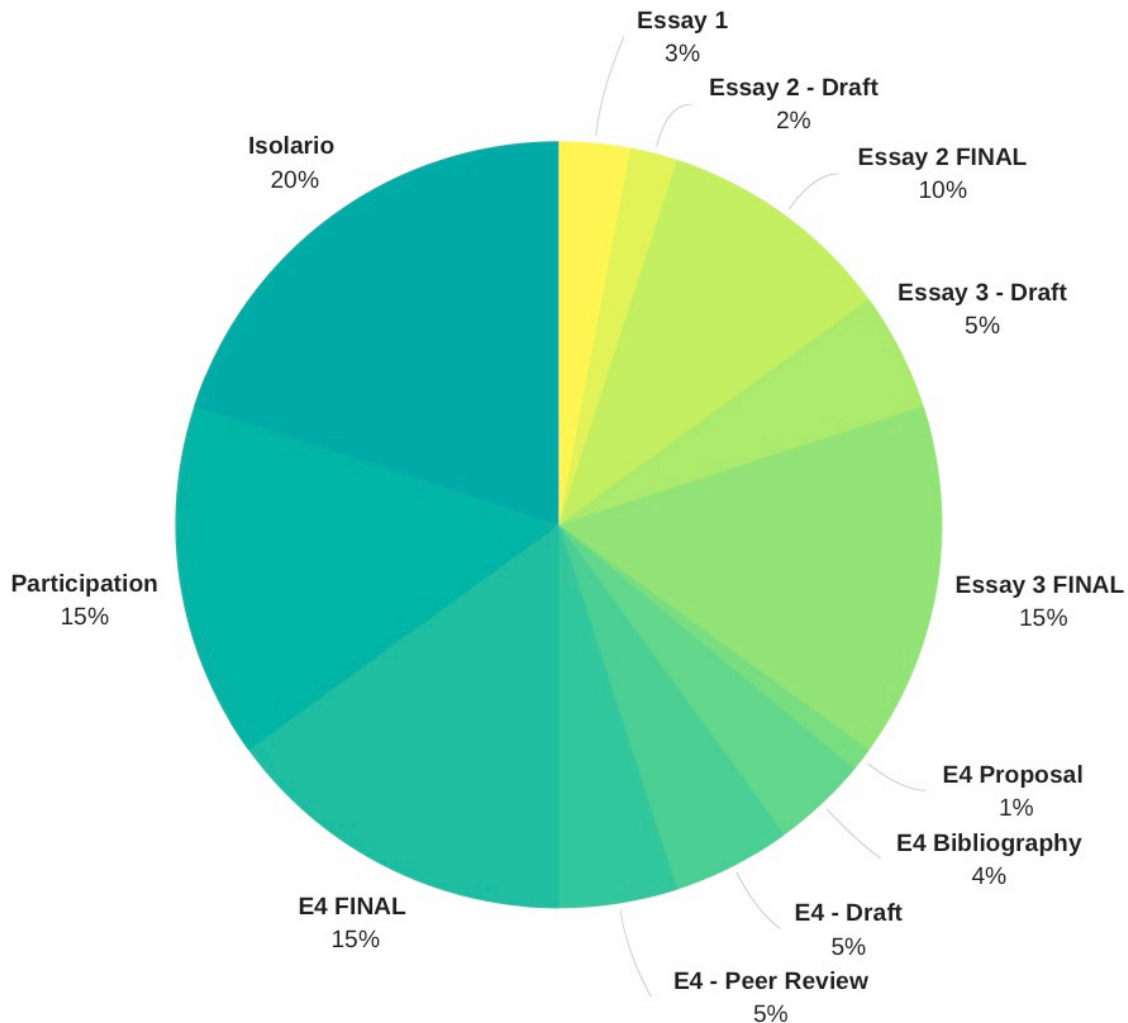
In Class Participation 15%

Weekly Isolario Entries 20%

- The shape style and content of many entries will be determined by you. Occasionally, I will give you a specific prompt (for instance: the campus as island or archipelago)

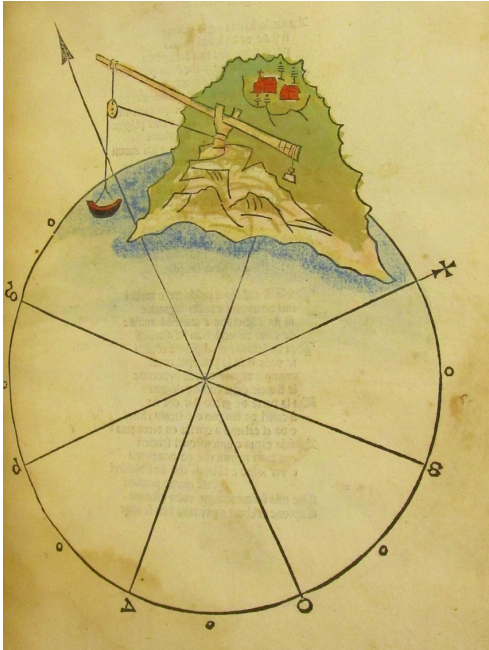


Grade Distribution



Your grade in the course depends on a number of factors:

1. Arriving to class prepared to discuss the readings of the day. This means completing your reading in advance of class.
2. Arriving prepared to share your Isolario entries on the days those are due
3. Brining full essay drafts on the days they are due. Having no draft will results in zero points, which is a significant impact on your overall grade.
4. Engaging generously, rigorously, and constructively as a peer reviewer
5. Providing peer reviews on time
6. Revising your drafts thoroughly, sometimes from the ground up, having taken into consideration the feedback you receive from your peers and from me
7. Participating actively in all aspects of the course



Isolario – Commonplace Book

This image is taken from an early 15th century Venetian isolario, or ‘book of islands’—the first of its kind in the history of print. The ship captain, Bartolomeo dalli Sonetti, depicted single islands and single sonnets, side by side on facing pages. The island represented here, like so many we’ll visit this semester, is a mythical one. It was believed, Sonetti tells us, that monks lifted pirates from the sea and offered them safe harbor in their monastery.

Throughout the semester, each student will maintain an “Isolario - Commonplace Book.” This assignment pulls together two textual collecting traditions from the Renaissance. The compiler of an isolario, or ‘book of islands,’ collected myths and stories, navigational information, maps and narrative descriptions of islands around the globe. A commonplace book served as a place where readers could copy quotations and passages from other sources and organize them according to topics of interest. As you read for this course, you will create an isolario – commonplace entry for each week of reading (when you are not working on an essay). For instance, you might organize passages and quotes under the category ‘monstrous women’ or ‘otherworldly encounters’ or ‘utopia’, and so on. For each week, you will create an entry that collects key quotations or passages that you find particularly interesting or perplexing. You will first isolate these quotations and treat them as islands unto themselves: analyze them in detail, ask questions about them, and pair them with relevant images/drawings/other media. You will then put these quotations in the larger context of the text, the course, and our critical readings. How would you move from your ‘island’ insight to a more archipelagic idea? As you create more entries, you will be able to draw more connections across texts and refine your ideas about islands. Throughout the term, you will discover increasingly interesting ways of addressing our central question: why are islands good to think with?

Your isolario – commonplace book will be the collected fragments you have at hand as you set out to navigate your way toward a research paper at the semester’s end. You can create the Isolario to your taste: you can do it on paper, creating a kind of scrapbook, or you can maintain a blog. I am open to all kinds of media as long as you are purposeful and are able to turn in your entries at any time for my feedback and share with the class on days they are due. You should use these entries as an opportunity to prepare for class discussions.

LOST
THE ISLAND OF ATLANTIS

W 9|26 Plato's Atlantis. Selections from Timaios & Kritias in Lost Continents: The Atlantis Theme in History, Science, and Literature, trans. Jowett. pp. 280-293. (M)

Edwin Ramage, Atlantis: Fact or Fiction: 1-22 & map on page 40

Denis Cosgrove, Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination (2001): 1-5

John Gillis, 'Ancient Mariners of the Mind' in Islands of the Mind: 5-10 & 12-22.

Due: Isolario 2

WEEK 5

ISLAND ORIGINS

M 10|1 ALBION Geoffrey of Monmouth: *The History of the Kings of Britain* – 2 pp.
The Albina Story: Britain's forgotten Syrian roots – 7 pp.

Tamar Drukker, 'Thirty Three Murderous Sisters: the Pre-Trojan Foundation Myth in the Middle English Prose Brut Chronicle,' *Review of English Studies* 54.216 (2003): 449-463

AINU Japanese creation story - 1 p.

CHEROKEE 'The Three Worlds' Cherokee Myths and Legends 2014 – 2pp

[MAUI](#) Island Creation Story

Due: Isolario 3

W10|3 **Writing Lab 2**

✍️ Due: (Draft) Essay 2: CLOSE READING

F 10|5 ✍️ Due: Peer Reviews due back to Authors

WEEK 6

AMERICA: A NEW | FOUND | ISLAND?

*T | 9

John Donne "To His Mistress Going to Bed"
Andrew Marvell "Bermudas"
& other poetry and prose readings in Moodle Folder "America"
Explore:

[How 16th-Century European Mapmakers Described the World's Oceans](#)

['The 15th-Century Monk Who Crowdsourced a Map of the World: Fra Mauro was the Google Earth of the 1450s'](#)

W | 10

Rare Book Library Tour – Meet in the Lobby Entrance of Du Bois Library promptly at 2:30

F | 12

 **Due: Essay 2**

WEEK 7

NO / GOOD PLACE

M 10|15

Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*

Terry Eagleton ['Utopias, past and present: why Thomas More remains astonishingly radical'](#) *The Guardian*

*T 10|16

You're invited to the Kinney Center for Interdisciplinary Renaissance Studies for a lecture by Prof. Mazen Naous: 'The Lure of the Moor: *Othello* in an Arab American Setting' (4pm)

W 10|17

Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*

Due: Isolario 4

WEEK 8

OVER THERE IN HERE

M 10|22

Michel de Montaigne, "On Cannibals" (from John Florio's translation)

John Donne, 'No Man is an Island' MEDITATION XVII Devotions upon Emergent Occasions


Richard Grove, 'New worlds, nature and the discourse of islands' in *Green Imperialism* (1995): 32-42.

Judith Shalansky, *Pocket Atlas of Remote Islands: Fifty Islands I have not Visited and Never Will* – select 10 islands fictions of your choice to read

NO MAN IS AN ISLAND: THE LIMITS OF METAPHOR

W 10|24 Ian Smith, 'We are Othello: Speaking of Race in Early Modern Studies' *Shakespeare Quarterly* (2016): 104-124

Writing Lab 3

 Due: Essay 3, Part 1


WEEK 9 OF HERE AND EVERYWHERE? ADRIFT & HOME

M 10|29 Shakespeare's *Othello* Act 1

Kim Hall *Othello*: "Introduction" pp. 1-18

W 10|31 Shakespeare's *Othello*, Act 2-4


Kim Hall Chapter 1: "Race and Religion" pp. 171-209

 Due: Essay 3, Part 2

WEEK 9 FROM INSULARITY TO 'WE'



M 11|5 Shakespeare's *Othello* Act 5
Kim Hall, 'American Moor: Review' *Shakespeare Bulletin* 2016

 Due: Essay 3, Part 3

W 11|7 *** LIVE PERFORMANCE of AMERICAN MOOR at Mt. Holyoke College ***
Complete information will be sent on Moodle & announced in Class
Busses will take you to/from UMass campus. Your tickets have been paid.

S 11|10 *** American Moor Actor's Studio and Roundtable ***
Complete information will be sent on Moodle & announced in Class
Attendance is required & feeds into Essay 3, Part 4

WEEK 10

O
IMAGINED FUTURES

M 11|12 No class (holiday)

W 11|14 * Keith Hamilton Cobb's *American Moor Campus Residency* *

Details of our discussion with Keith Hamilton Cobb will be announced in class and posted to Moodle.

Writing Lab 4 (a Conversation Lab)

 Due: Essay 3, Final Critical Analysis Portfolio (inclusive of Parts 1 – 4)

Holiday Break

WEEK 12

ISLAND IMPERIALISM

M 11|26 Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Acts 1-3

W 11|28 Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Acts 4-5

Roland Greene, "Island Logic" pp. 138-145

Steve Mentz, "Isle of Tempests" in *Shipwreck Modernity: Ecologies of Globalization, 1550-1719* (2015): 51-74

Due: Isolario 5

WEEK 13

COLONIAL LEGACIES OF THE CARIBBEAN


M 12 | 3 Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

Very short selections from Derek Walcott, *Omeros*

Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*

W 12 | 5

Writing Lab 5

 Due: Essay 4, Parts 1 & 2

WEEK 14

THE OCEAN'S REPLY

M 12 | 10 Selections from: Sylvia Earle, Sea Change: A Message of the Oceans (1996)

Read: N. Rich, '[Losing Earth: The Decade we almost stopped climate change](#)' *The New York Times*. Aug 1, 2018

Watch Film: Chasing Ice (2012)

Visit Online: [National Geographic on the Marshal Islands](#)

[Iceberg tourism \(Newfoundland and Labrador\)](#)

Icebergfinder.com

<https://icebergfinder.com/>

W 12 | 12 **Writing Lab 6**

 Essay 4, Part 3

F 12 | 15 Office Hours. One-on-one consultation regarding your research papers in progress.



**Due Wed Dec 19th by Noon:
Essay 4 with your
Final Research Portfolio**

Celebrate the Ice this Holiday!