

*Terra Incognita:*

MAPS, EXPLORERS AND ENCOUNTERS 1595-1900

D. GRAHAM BURNETT

*Give me a map; then let me see how much  
Is left for me to conquer all the world...*

Marlowe



This course explores exploration: its history, uses, representations and meanings. We will read narratives written by European explorers from the age of discovery through the high imperialism of the 19th century, and look at visual sources (including maps, drawings and photographs), in an effort to understand the changing character and context of expeditions by Europeans into regions they considered unknown.

Who are explorers? How do they construct unknowns, discoveries and pursuits? How do they represent themselves, the places they have been and the people they have encountered? Answers to these questions will help us understand the impact people can make when they seek *terra incognita* equipped and intending to return home.

What was *terra incognita* to enterprising Europeans was seldom so *incognita* to the people they found there. This meant misunderstandings and, often, violence. Although explorers used maps and narratives to represent themselves in control of their passages and the places they measured, recorded and remembered, these "contact zones" could quickly become volatile. Stable social and intellectual order was hard-won in the wake of an exploration. Failure, madness and death were never far off. This course will examine these encounters, reading the work of anthropologists and ethnohistorians who have tried to capture the multiple perspectives of the contact zone.

At the same time, we will think about how certain explorers were able to use their passages through these contested areas to make personal and sometimes national claims to knowledge and authority. What negotiations, ideologies and technical practices enabled some European explorers to get into and out of the contact zone? What did they take with them, and how did it help them see and make sense out of the unfamiliar? What new communities and systems of authority took shape in the process? To answer these questions we will have to look at the daily discipline of exploring: how to plot a course, punish a muddled guide, sketch a plausible map, chat up a gouty colonial governor, measure the cranium of an uncooperative Arawak, and the like. By examining what explorers did and how they represented themselves and their labors to different audiences, diplomats to botanists, we will begin to understand their entanglement in the European projects of possessing the land and people of the globe. Understanding exploration offers unique insights into the inner workings of European imperialism.

Much of this course developed as part of a series of field lectures I presented in the fall of 1995 to the participants in a British land expedition through Guyana, South America, a project linked to my PhD dissertation on 19th century scientific expeditions in that area. This project was made possible by Raleigh International Ltd. and grants from the Wyse Foundation for Anthropology, Trinity College, Cambridge.

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## MAPS, EXPLORERS AND ENCOUNTERS, 1595-1900

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COURSE OUTLINE AND SYLLABUS



### PART I: (Weeks 1-6) Exploration History, 16th-19th century

The first half of the course presents a roughly chronological introduction to the history of European exploration. With this groundwork in place, we are free in the second half of the semester to focus on particular themes and problems.

*Assignment: Students are expected to bring written "think pieces" to each seminar weeks two through twelve (with the exception of the week in second term in which they present). The form of these essays will be discussed in our first meeting (one page will suffice); I am looking for creative questions and exploratory insights more than proof you slogged through the reading. Styles can be experimental and even informal, provided the operation of Mind is discernible.*

### WEEK 1 Introduction: Questions and Themes

What is exploration? Kinds of travel, contexts of travel. What is the unknown? How is it imagined and represented? The motivations of the explorer: social advancement, social outcast, booty, beauty, knowledge. Presentation of the central tensions confronting the explorer: arriving and departing; going in to see and yet staying out enough to get perspective; scorning the alien and yet affirming its power. Explorers make places; places make explorers. Introduction to treating a map as a text.

#### Visual Material:

In-class examination of 3 maps (Tamnan, RGS route map, British Empire).

#### Readings:

Conrad, Joseph, "Landfalls and Departures" in The Mirror of the Sea, London: Methuen, 1950.

Walcott, Derek, "Guyana" in Collected Poems 1948-1984, London: Faber and Faber, 1986.

## **WEEK 2** Raleigh and El Dorado: Rumors, Riches and Quests

Claiming territory and seizing spoils. Colonial reconnaissance and tall tales of savagery. Travel and truth-telling. The broader political and economic context of early European presences overseas. The structure of exploration narratives: establishing goals, marking the unknown, turning around. Travel narrative and "transculturation."

### **Visual Material:**

Compare Raleigh's sketch map of Guyana with Hondius, 1598.

### **Readings:**

#### Primary:

Sir Walter Raleigh, The Discovery of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana with a relation of the great and golden city of Manoa, 1596. Selections.

#### Secondary:

Schama, Simon, Landscape and Memory, London: Harper Collins, 1995. pp 307-320.

Leed, Eric J., The Mind of the Traveller, New York: Basic Books, 1991. Through chapter 3.

#### Recommended:

Nicholl, Charles, The Creature in the Map: A Journey to El Dorado, London: Cape, 1995.

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## **WEEK 3** The Learned Journey: Scientific Exploration Part I

Early modern science and the scientific expedition. Enlightened circumnavigations. The authority of eye and instrument. Systems of classification: plants, rocks, waters, people.

### **Visual Material:**

La Condamine, "Amerique Meridionale," 1745.

### **Readings:**

#### Primary:

Bacon, Francis, The New Organon, 1620. Part I. Selections.

Boyle, R., General Heads for the Natural History of a Country Great or Small, London, 1692. Selections.

La Condamine, Charles Marie de, Journal of a Voyage to the Equator..., 1751. Selections.

#### Secondary:

Livingstone, D.N., The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a contested Enterprise, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. Chapters 1-4.

- Smith, Anthony, Explorers of the Amazon, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992. Chapters 5-6.
- Leed, Eric J., The Mind of the Traveler, Part II.
- Pratt, M.L., Imperial Eyes: travel writing and transculturation, New York: Routledge, 1992. Chapters 1 and 2.
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#### **WEEK 4** Achieving Oversight: Scientific Exploration Part II

Alexander von Humboldt and Humboldtians: romantic naturalist-geographers. The geography of regions and forces. Imperial reconnaissance, economic botany and mountain "prospects."

##### **Visual Material:**

Stafford, Barbara, Voyage into Substance, Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1984. Illustrations.

##### **Readings:**

Primary:

Humboldt, Alexander von, Personal Narrative, London: Longman, 1822. Selections.

Secondary:

Cannon, S. F., Science in Culture: the early Victorian period, New York: Science History Publications, 1978. pp 73-110.

Pratt, Imperial Eyes, pp 112-197.

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#### **WEEK 5** Commissions and Omissions: Explorers and Authority

A look at the webs of exploration knowledge and geographical societies. What gave certain explorers' passages the power to mark maps? Interlopers and wanderers, explorers without commissions or permissions. Different forms of inscriptions and different techniques for marking passages. Consideration of missionary explorers.

##### **Visual Material:**

Hortsman's sketch map and facsimile journal, 1745.

##### **Readings:**

Primary:

Waterton, Charles, Wanderings in South America, London: Macmillan, 1885, (new edition). Chapters 1-3.

Excerpts from Murchison's annual addresses to the Royal Geographical Society.

Secondary:

Livingstone, D.N., The Geographical Tradition, Chapters 5-7.

Dening, Greg, Islands and Beaches. Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas 1774-1880, Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1988. Part I.

## WEEK 6 The Explorers' Wake: Passages and Scars

The "contact zone." What are the environments of cross-cultural encounter? Who controls them? The implications for encounter, trade, interdependence. The passage "across the beach." Ethnohistory in theory and practice; travelers and those "traveled upon."

### Visual Material:

Smith, B., European Vision and the South Pacific: 1768-1850: a study in the history of art and ideas, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985 (2nd edition). Illustrations.

### Readings:

#### Primary:

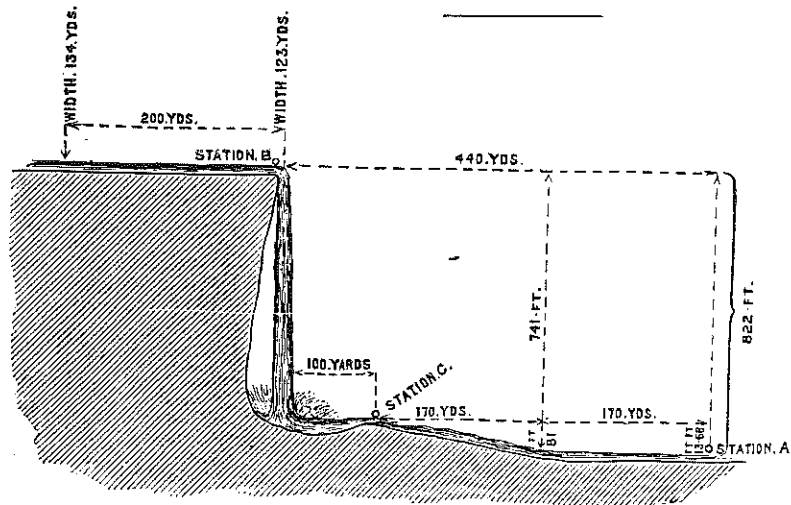
Cook, Captain James, The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery, J.C. Beaglehole et al., eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1955. Selections.

#### Secondary:

Dening, Greg, Islands and Beaches. Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas 1774-1880, Part II.

Dening, Greg, Mr. Bligh's Bad Language. Passion Power and Theatre on the Bounty, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. The short chapter entitled "Sharks that Walk on the Land."

Crosby, Alfred, Ecological Imperialism, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Chapters 6-10.



*Section through the Fall.*

Scale. 200 yards to an inch.

## **PART II: (Weeks 7-13) Imperial Entanglements: Encounters and Apprehensions**

In this half of the course we will focus on explorers' "encounters," with foreign places, foreign peoples and potentially foreign selves.

*Assignment: Students will be asked to present and help lead discussion in the following six weeks. Presentations will run around ten minutes and are aimed at allowing students to introduce the independent work that will lead to their final papers. Topics by arrangement with instructor.*

### **WEEK 7 Encountering Place I: Making Maps**

The evolution of geographical practices in relation to exploration. Route maps, sounding lines, triangulation. Proposal maps. An examination of how astronomical navigation went ashore in the 19th century. Surveying practices and territorial claims.

#### **Visual Materials:**

Wilme, B.P., A Handbook for Mapping, London: by the author, 1846. Selections.

#### **Reading Materials:**

##### **Primary:**

Herschel, Sir John, A Manual of Scientific Enquiry, London, 1849. Chapters on Astronomy, Geography and Hydrography.

Belcher, Edward, A Treatise on Nautical Surveying, London, 1835. Particularly section on the sextant.

Schomburgk, Sir Robert, Reports on Boundary Expedition, London: Colonial Office, 1844. Selections.

##### **Secondary:**

Woodward, David, ed., History of Cartography, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming. (This may need to be replaced if it is not yet available).

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### **Week 8 Encountering Place II: Thinking About Maps**

The philosophy of cartography. Maps manufacture a predictable relationship between expectation and experience. They are the intersection of narrative and position. The elements of a map: boundaries, landmarks, routes, etc. The passage of an explorer makes a map. The power of maps. Maps as imperial instruments.

#### **Visual Materials:**

Presentation and discussion of several maps in class, including Hilhouse, 1828.

#### **Readings:**

##### **Primary:**

Excerpts from Brazil boundary dispute (1902) over authority of maps and the explorers and cartographers who made them.

Secondary:

Winichakul, Thongchai, Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995. pp 37-139

Barnes and Duncan, eds., Writing Worlds, London: Routledge, 1992. The superb introduction and the articles by Pickles and Harley.

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## **WEEK 9** Encountering the Other I: The Anxiety of Meeting Strangers

Examination of the intellectual impact of the encounter with non-European people. Cannibalism, witchcraft and the projection of explorers' fears. Social theory and "nature's children."

**Visual Materials:**

De Bry illustrations.

**Readings:**

Primary:

DeBry. (Selections with illustrations).

Bougainville, Louis Antoine de, Comte, A Voyage around the World, Forster, J.R., trans., London: Nourse and Davies, 1772. Selections.

Diderot, D., "Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville," in Mason and Wokler, eds. and trans., Denis Diderot: Political Writings, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Secondary:

Pagden, A., The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. Try to get through the whole text, focus on chapters 3 and 4.

McCormic, Sabina, in: Greenblatt, S., ed., New World Encounters, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Greenblatt, S., Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. Chapters 1 and 2.

**Recommended:**

Pagden, A., European Encounters with the New World, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

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## **WEEK 10** Encountering the Other II: Exploration and Anthropology

An account of the rise of the "sciences of man" in the 19th century in relation to exploration. Monogenesis, polygenesis and comparative mythology. Measuring bodies and recording tongues. Race, Darwin, gorilla hunters and Victorian anxieties.

### **Visual Materials:**

Goodall's "Sketches of Amerindian Tribes," (instructor's slides).

### **Readings:**

#### Primary:

Excerpts from anthropometry expedition, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*.  
Huxley, T.H., Man's Place in Nature, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959 (1863). Chapters 1 and 2.  
Prichard, J.C., (See below).

#### Secondary:

Stocking, George, "From Chronology to Ethnology: James C. Prichard and British Anthropology," in Stocking's recent edition of: Prichard, J.C., Researches into the Physical History of Man, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.  
Bowler, P.J., History of the Environmental Sciences, New York: W.W. Norton, 1993. Chapters 6-10.  
Gould, S.J., The Mismeasure of Man, New York: W.W. Norton, 1981. Chapters 2-4.

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## **WEEK 11** Encountering the Self I: Romanticism and the Anti-conquest.

The explorer as romantic hero. Solitude and sentiment. Popularized travel writing in the 19th century.

### **Visual Material:**

Plate from the Stedman Journals.

### **Reading:**

#### Primary:

Stanley, H.M., Stanley's Dispatches to the New York Herald, Bennet, N.R., ed., Boston: Boston University Press, 1970.  
Stedman, John Gabriel, Narrative of a Five-Years Expedition..., Price, Richard, ed., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1988. Selections.

#### Secondary:

Pratt, Imperial Eyes, Chapters 3 and 4.  
Leeds, The Mind of the Traveller, Part III "Travel and Identity"

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## **WEEK 12** Encountering the Self II: Madness, Conqueror Conquered.

Exploration, fear and risk. Collapsing into the place. The edge of objectivity and the edge of the map. The "peculiar sensation" of civilization. The limits of narrative. How to return.

### **Readings:**

#### **Primary:**

Schomburgk, Richard, Travels, Roth, ed., Georgetown: Argosy, 1922. Excerpt on the madness of Hamlet.

Humboldt, Personal Narrative. Passage on the transformation of his body.

#### **Secondary:**

Burnett, D.G., "Terra Incognita."

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## **WEEK 13** Place Knowledge and Displacement

Summary and extensions. The problem of scale. The domestication of the unknown. Ecotourism and the post-imperial legacy. Exploration as metaphor. Geographical homogeneity and the nostalgia for local knowledge.

### **Reading:**

Conrad, J., Heart of Darkness, New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1988.

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