

Negotiating Waters: Seas, Oceans and Passageways in the Colonial and Postcolonial Anglophone World

ILCEA 4 – University of Grenoble Alpes & Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN)
February 15th and 16th, 2018

In close collaboration with Memorial University of Newfoundland (Canada), the University of Grenoble Alpes is organizing an international conference on February 15-16, 2018 on seas and oceans in the Colonial and Postcolonial World. This conference seeks to examine how seas and oceans have shaped and reshaped cultural identities, spurred stories of reunion and separation and redefined entire nations. In the history of human migration, entire communities have crossed seas and oceans, voluntarily or not, to settle in foreign lands and undergo identity, cultural and literary transformations. Deleuze and Guattari once wrote that, even though the sea has often been considered a smooth space, it is nevertheless a space that humans attempt to striate, transform and submit to the land. As a result, seas and oceans have always been at the heart of political (narratives of exploration, cartography), international (maritime law), identity (insularity) and literary issues (survival narratives, fishing stories).

The conference is organized around four thematic clusters:

1) *Crossing*. Many colonial and postcolonial novels explore crossings between the Old and the New World. The oceans crossed are an intermediary space where travelers and migrants alike find themselves in a liminal space, always between a departure and an arrival. In the context of postcolonial literature, one only needs to recall Alice Munro's *The View from Castle Rock* (2006) or Jane Urquhart's *Away* (1993) to realize to what extent the Atlantic Ocean has played a prominent role in the discursive formation of nationhood that is rooted in an "elsewhere," an original place that is constantly reimagined and rewritten, along with novels by Amitav Ghosh (*The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *The Ibis Trilogy* (2008-2015)) which reveal the tight connections between Indian culture and the ocean, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's work where crossing the ocean enables the writer to rethink cross-cultural exchange and conflict. Canada and India are but two examples, we welcome papers devoted to all settler and postcolonial countries (e.g. Australia, the Caribbean, South Africa, New Zealand and more).

2) *The harbor*. As a passageway, the harbor is a liminal space where travelers and migrants lie in wait. It is also the contact zone between the continent and its hinterland on the one hand, and the oceans and the distant horizon that it suggests on the other. The port or the harbor is a chronotope of encounter, a passageway where routes, paths and itineraries intersect and mingle (Bakhtin, 243). The port is that place of heterogeneity and linguistic plurality where travelers and migrants would never have met, had they been in any other place.

3) *The island*. As John Donne writes in his Seventeenth meditation, "no man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." The island, a place between passage and settlement, often rhymes with isolation and insularity. Islands are often seen as different spaces, spaces that are on the margins of standardized national narratives. What may easily pass on the continent finds obstacles with the island where regional cultures conflict with national discourses.

4) *The environment*. It is needless to say that seas and oceans are at the heart of various environmental concerns. Our modern world is depicted as a transitional world between an age

of thoughtless exploitation (fish stock depletion, offshore drilling, pollution, etc.) and a future that is yet uncertain. Ecocriticism, for instance, stems from this problematic relationship that humans have with their own environment (oceans, natural environment, animals, etc.). Over the past few years, such concerns have been voiced in Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010), Elizabeth DeLoughery and George B. Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011), or Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2012) to name but a few.

We encourage proposals from scholars in all disciplines: History, Literature, Environment Studies, Images, etc.

Deadline for abstracts (300 words) and bio: October 15th 2017

Abstracts are to be sent to the organizers:

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