English 642, Fall 2015
Topics in Genre: Women's Travel Writing

This course fulfills the following distribution requirements:
Literature 1660-1900; Concepts, Issues, or Themes; English without Borders

Course description:

While women's access to travel historically has been delimited by social and economic factors, many women who had the opportunity to travel wrote innovative, self-reflective and politically engaged works about their experiences. This course explores the ways in which women have adapted and critiqued travel writing conventions. Women’s writing of the long nineteenth century is our main focus. We conclude by examining postcolonial responses to such texts. The selections cover a wide geographical range, including Europe, Egypt, the Crimea, America and Africa. We will discuss how women’s travel writing enacts negotiation for power, agency and self-determination within these different geographical as well as historical contexts.

The course draws upon literary criticism related to women's other autobiographical forms, such as diaries and letters. It is centrally concerned with women's role supporting or critiquing concepts of race and nationhood through their contact with other cultures. Therefore, we will read criticism regarding gender and empire. Students will have the opportunity to discuss and practice methods of archival research related to women's travel writing.

Readings:

Primary works may include selections from Mary Wollstonecraft's Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (1796), Mary Shelley's Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842 and 1843 (1844), Florence Nightingale’s Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850, Mary Secaole's Wonderful Adventures in Many Lands (1857), Louisa May Alcott's Hospital Sketches (1863), Isabella Bird’s A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains (1879), Mary Kingsley's Travels in West Africa (1897), Mary Gaunt’s Alone in West Africa (1912), original life writing materials by colonial nurses and missionaries, and Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea (1966).

The secondary readings are concerned with women’s autobiography, travel writing as a genre, and gender and empire, and may include selections by Anne McClintock, Mary Poovey, Elizabeth Bohls, Sara Mills, Sidonie Smith, Kristi Siegel, Indira Ghose, Elleke Boehmer, Cheryl Fish, Tom Youngs, Carl Thompson, Mary Louise Pratt and David Spurr.