



Public Lecture Offerings

Mapping the Arctic: Empire, Ice, and Indigenous Knowledge

Beginning in the early nineteenth century, imperial powers raced to discover a northwest passage across the Arctic. Russian, British, and later American expeditions transformed northern coasts into laboratories for natural history, cartography, and resource extraction. This talk moves from Russian-born artist Louis Choris, who sailed with Otto von Kotzebue from 1815 to 1818 and produced vivid visual records of Haida Gwaii, the Aleutians, and St. Lawrence Island, Alaska to the late nineteenth-century moment of U.S. imperialism and manifest destiny, when Presbyterian missionary Sheldon Jackson and other American observers framed Alaska's peoples, landscapes, and biota as objects of stewardship and control. Using maps, drawings, and photographs alongside Tlingit, Haida, and Inuit art and oral histories, the lecture contrasts Enlightenment modes of mapping with Indigenous epistemologies. Native cultures of southeastern Alaska, especially Tlingit place-based knowledge systems, refuse to accept the nature–culture divide underpinning imperial science. Choris's natural history and later American missionary writing exported imperial ways of knowing into the polar regions, which continued to reshape and resist them.

Raven's Flight through American Literature

American literary history looks different when read from Raven's Land—the archives and ecologies of the Pacific Northwest. This talk follows a late nineteenth-century corridor between Alaska and the northeastern United States, tracing the belongings of Tlingit, Tsimshian, and Haida people removed by missionaries and geologists and now held in East Coast museums. Moving from the Book of Genesis to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," from Washington Irving's ghost stories to Leslie Marmon Silko's storyteller, the lecture interweaves Tlingit and Haida raven stories to uncover obscured connections between Euro-Christian and Indigenous traditions. Raven's non-linear "to and fro" flight becomes a template for rethinking literary origins as entangled Black and Indigenous archives of creation, catastrophe, and survival rather than a single point of national beginning.

Inside Other Minds: Fiction, Cognition, and Neurodivergence

Nineteenth-century novels are famously preoccupied with getting "inside" people's heads, developing narrative techniques from Jane Austen's free-indirect discourse to Henry James's stream of consciousness. This talk asks what happens when fiction encounters minds that do not fit presumed norms, and how narrative voice registers different ways of thinking and perceiving the world before modern psychology and psychiatry. Focusing on Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, with its shifting narrators and experimental forms, the lecture explores how literary technique both reflects and resists cultural pressures toward cognitive conformity. In conversation with contemporary discourses of neurodivergence, the talk considers how the novel has shaped—and can challenge—what counts as a "normal" mind.

Classroom Discussion Topics

Story as Survival: Native American Fiction and Nation

1. Leslie Marmon Silko opens her novel, *Ceremony* (1977), by defining story less as entertainment than as a means of survival. This discussion contrasts that understanding with Western traditions that frame the story primarily as leisure or aesthetic pleasure. We explore which narratives become central to national myth-making and which are relegated to folklore, "mythology," or supposedly "atavistic" entertainment. Together, we consider how Native American novels reshape ideas of story, nation, and historical memory in American literature.

Unsettling Archives: Early America and Ecology

2. Traditional narratives of early America revolve around discovery, settlement, and colonial success along the eastern seaboard, leaving out enslaved Africans, Indigenous peoples, and many women. This discussion reconsiders the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries by asking how Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans experienced land and sea from Barbados to Boston. By placing people, animals, plants, earth, and water in relational frameworks, students experiment with a critical practice of "unsettlement" that loosens the tie between writing and empire and imagines the colonial archive as a set of competing possible futures.

From Collection to Relation

3. After the 1868 Alaska Purchase, Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian belongings were taken from southeastern Alaska to U.S. East Coast museums, where many remain. These objects reflect enduring histories of broken knowledge and relationships. Following a brief overview of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), the discussion explores how Tlingit cosmology, ecology, and oral tradition—and collaboration with contemporary artists and scholars—can reframe museum collections as living expressions of land and kinship rather than static displays.