Though there have been pirates for as long as there has been seafaring trade, the image of the pirate that has entered popular culture dates to a period from roughly the late sixteenth through the late eighteenth centuries—the very period in which European countries sought to extend the reach of their commerce to all corners of the world. The exploits of figures like Blackbeard or Captain Kidd provided material for the popular press of their own day, and subsequent re-tellings of pirate stories (from Treasure Island to Pirates of the Caribbean) have frequently, almost compulsively, revisited that historical moment. The pirate, we might say, has haunted the dreams of globalized society since its inception.

Quite apart from the feats of this or that particular pirate, however, “the pirate” has become a figure—a metaphor, a personification—for imagining that which seeks to elude regulation: we speak of “pirate” radio stations, for example, and refer to the downloading of copyrighted songs or movies as “piracy.” Whether imagined as a rapacious predator on legitimate commerce or as a romanticized figure of anarchic resistance to authority, the pirate has come to stand for all that lies beyond the verge of law and order within which most of us live our lives.

This class will examine the figure of the pirate as a fixture of the modern cultural imagination. On the one hand, we will explore the figure of the seafaring pirate as he (or, sometimes, she) appears in a range of literary and non-fictional texts, both from the “golden age” of piracy itself and in following centuries, down to our own time. We will also consider the ways that piracy is transformed and metaphorically extended into a pervasive cultural trope, both in the eighteenth century and our own day. The syllabus for a past version of this seminar is available online at <www.easternct.edu/~pauleyb/teaching.html>; the 2012-13 version of the course will be similar, though not identical to that earlier offering.