

# ENGLISH 581

## NEW WORLDS AND OTHER WORLDS

This course will explore how peoples and cultures interact with one another on a global scale in three different time periods: Antiquity, the Renaissance and the Postmodern World. We will begin with the destruction of Troy, which was considered the ancient capital of the Asian world. In fact, when Mehmet II, The Ottoman Sultan, captured Istanbul/Constantinople in 1453, he proclaimed that it was revenge for the Greeks having sacked Troy in antiquity. We will also look at the figure of Medea who combined the three parts of the world, Asia, Africa, and Europe, in her own person.

The course will then shift to the Renaissance, and we will read Christopher Marlowe's two plays on Timur or Tamerlane, the great conqueror from the Central Asian Steppe. Marlowe was an atheist, who admired Tamerlane for the way in which he defied both Christianity and Islam. Yet Tamerlane also embodied the threat of the "East," which could irrupt into the "West" at any time. This threat was also the reason why Christopher Columbus and other Europeans originally sailed to the New World. We will read the letters of Hernan Cortez, documenting the life and death of Moctezuma and the destruction of the Mexica capital in what is today Mexico City. These letters will be supplemented by the narrative of Bernal Diaz del Castillo, who accompanied Cortez, as well as sources from the indigenous peoples whose culture and way of life was almost destroyed. We will pay particular attention to the figure of *La Malinche*, a native Nahuatl woman who worked with the conquistadors. We will then read William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a summary document of colonialism, which combined a variety of other peoples and figures, such as Medea and *La Malinche*, into the Other.

The surveillance employed by Prospero against Caliban in *The Tempest* anticipates the surveillance culture of the postmodern world. We will examine that culture in several works, most notably the novel *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro and *The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia. We will supplement our reading of the literary texts with short pieces of critical theory by feminists and post-colonialists.

