

THE LITERATURE OF THE SEA

ENGLISH 276

Fall 2009
MWF 11am-11:50pm
Kirby 207
1 Unit

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Office hours: M 3-4pm, WF 1-2pm & by appt.

The sea is the great barrier, and the great meeting place, of the world's nations. As governments have sought to control the sea and science has struggled to understand it, literature has reflected on the power of the ocean and its meaning for the human experience, even as those reflections often circle back to questions of scientific inquiry and political power. This course will explore a range of literature from several Anglophone traditions, from 1800 to the present (the period of time when the word "environment" has referred to the natural world). While we will take brief looks at earlier literary treatments of this largest of terrestrial subjects, the focus of the course will be to track ideas, images, and stories across space and time, as we use new angles of vision to explore a world that takes up 70% of our planet, and yet still resists being known.

COURSE GOALS

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Identify and analyze concepts of the environment and the sea through imaginative literature
2. Use techniques of literary criticism to examine a literary work in a variety of discourses
3. Contextualize literary treatments of the sea within and beyond national literary traditions
4. Reflect on the relationship between the ecology of the marine environment and human experiences of that environment

REQUIRED TEXTS

Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (Dover)
Stephen Crane, *The Open Boat and Other Stories* (Dover)
Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (Scribners)
Linda Hogan, *People of the Whale* (Norton)
Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, 2nd ed. (Norton)
John Steinbeck, *The Log of the Sea of Cortes* (Penguin)
Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (Penguin)

RECOMMENDED TEXT

Joel Meyerowitz, *Cape Light* (Bulfinch)

Additional readings available on Moodle (marked with an asterisk [*] on schedule below)

ASSIGNMENTS

Field Trip Reading (20% of total grade)

As we will see in this course, writing literature about the sea involves many varied subjects and discourses, and we will see further material in many of these areas on our field trip to Mystic, CT. For this essay, you will use observations and reflections from the field trip to interpret anew one of the works that we have read up to that point. The essay is to be 1200-1500 words, posted on the course blog by 5pm on **Monday, October 5** and will go through peer review before final submission.

What Is *Moby-Dick*? (25% of total grade)

Moby-Dick is often called the great American novel, but as we will see, it's also involved in many discourses (e.g., cetology, higher criticism) and literary traditions (classical, Hindi, British) that aren't bound by the borders of the US. This essay will revolve around the question: if you were to argue that *Moby-Dick* is something besides an American novel, what would you say it is? You will need to develop your argument through close reading of passages of the text, as well as research into context that will help you make your larger claims for the book's place in the world. You should also incorporate the marine setting in some way (though it need not be central) into your argument. This essay will be 6-8pp. double-spaced, and will go through one draft before final submission by 5pm on **Wednesday, October 28**.

Environment as Concept (20% of total grade)

In lieu of a midterm exam, you will write a 4-5pp. double-spaced essay examining how the environment is conceptualized in one or more of the texts that we have read through Week 8. Keep in mind also the etymology and definitional history of the word "environment": from French meaning to turn around something, used as a military term, etc. Refer to the *OED* for information on this aspect, but you need not do any further research; the essay should be grounded in close reading and reasoning from the text(s). We will go through a series of short writing prompts to help you build ideas and material for this essay; the final version will be due at 5pm on **Friday, November 20**.

What's the Fun in the Literature of the Sea? (25% of total grade)

As I've prepared this course, conversations with others have often sounded like this:

CP: I'm developing a course on the literature of the sea.

Other person: What a fun course!

While many people (presumably including you) think that there's something inherently attractive about this topic, by the time we reach the end of the course, you will certainly have more informed ideas about what makes this topic so interesting to people—and especially to you. In a 6-8pp. essay, you will develop an argument for the reasons why the literature of the sea is fun/engaging/interesting. This essay, like the others before it, will be grounded in close readings of texts, and you are to discuss 2-3 texts from our course, including one which you haven't written about yet. We will have a "working dinner" workshop over drafts, where each person briefly presents what they're doing, and the class as a whole will offer feedback and suggestions. This essay will be due at 5pm on **Monday, December 14**.

PARTICIPATION (10% of total grade)

This class's work will focus on class discussion rather than me lecturing at you. In order to make the seminar format work, everyone must be 1.) present, 2.) on time, 3.) prepared, and 4.) willing to join actively in the work of the class. I won't keep an attendance sheet, but this is a small class, and we'll all notice when you're not here or show up late—so be here on time, have things to contribute to our discussions and other activities, and you'll be 10% of the way to a perfect grade. If you cannot attend class due to illness or a serious emergency, let me know before the class you have to miss. As part of this requirement, you are to attend the following events:

Field trip to Mystic, CT—visits to aquarium, Mystic Seaport Museum, **Sept. 12**
Film screenings of *Moby-Dick*, *Whale Rider* (**dates TBA**)

A few words about grading policy:

- I don't keep an attendance roster, but I notice when people are absent or frequently late. More than one unexcused absence will affect your participation grade; every two absences beyond the "free one" will result in a reduction of one letter grade from your participation grade. Class events such as the field trip count as a class meeting. An absence can be excused for a personal medical emergency, a family emergency, or a dean's excuse; in all cases, you must notify me before class that you will not be able to attend that day.
- Late work will be penalized one letter grade for every day beyond the due date. The first day past the due date starts one hour after assignments are due. Late forum postings will count as one-half credit.
- I calculate grades based on the point system used for GPA on your Lafayette transcript. Thus, an A=4, an A-=3.7, B+=3.3, and so on. F counts as a 0.
- If you wish to contest a grade, you must do the following: 1.) wait 24 hours after you have received the graded assignment, 2.) write and send me a brief argument as to why I should reconsider your grade, and 3.) come see me in person to discuss what you wrote. Keep in mind that if I decide to reconsider the grade, you may wind up with a lower grade than you had before.

A word about **Academic Honesty**: All students must read and follow the guidelines of academic honesty as outlined in the section entitled "Principles of Intellectual Honesty" in the Student Handbook of Lafayette College. Any infraction of these principles will be referred immediately to the Office of the Dean of Studies for adjudication.

In compliance with Lafayette College policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability.

Requests for academic accommodations need to be made during the first two weeks of the semester, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students must register with the Office of the Dean of the College for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations.

SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction; Jonah*; Homer, from *The Odyssey**; Crane, “The Open Boat”

Week 2: Melville, *Moby-Dick*; Phillips, “Mapping Imagination and Experience”*

Week 3: *Moby-Dick*; Coleridge, “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”*

Week 4: *Moby-Dick*; excerpts from Mary Chipman Lawrence’s journal*

Week 5: *Moby-Dick*

Week 6: *Moby-Dick*

Week 7: Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (no class Monday)

Week 8: *Cape Cod*; Carson, from *Under the Sea-Wind**

Week 9: Conrad, “The Nigger of the *Narcissus*”

Week 10: Steinbeck, *The Log of the Sea of Cortes*

Week 11: *Log of the Sea of Cortes*

Week 12: Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*; Auden, from *The Enchafèd Flood**

Week 13: Hogan, *People of the Whale* (no class Wednesday & Friday)

Week 14: *People of the Whale*

Week 15: *Whale Rider* (film screening); Buell, “Global Commons as Resource and Icon”*

Specific page numbers for each day are available on the Moodle schedule. Asterisks indicate that readings are available on Moodle.