

# Syllabus

Fall 2010  
LLSL 3504  
M, W 8-9:40

*Moby-Dick*

Nicholas Birns

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I check e-mail frequently and should respond to student e-mails within hours.

## A. Description

Seen as an artistic failure or an overgrown children's book until the 1920s (perhaps as a children's' book even now; the Amazon page for the Longman Critical Edition says, reading level, 'ages 9 to 12) , Melville's *Moby-Dick* has since become seen as the greatest single work of American literature, with Captain Ahab's hunt for the great white whale aboard the *Pequod* being seen in almost every conceivable symbolic and allegorical significance. This course will provide an intensive focus on the book, reading it closely and also looking at other works by Melville, comparable sea stories of the era and later revisionist takes on Melville's audacious modern epic.

Though this class is oriented towards one text, *Moby-dick*, we will also read an account of the real-life voyage that helped inspire the novel, two important modern commentaries on the book plus , at the end, *Pierre*, Melville's second greatest novel, to see how, and if, Melville is any different on land (and when he has female characters to write about).

## B. CONDUCT OF THE CLASS

### I. REQUIREMENTS AND GRADE BREAKDOWN

10% attendance and participation

30% each of four major papers, 5-6 pages each

The first will be why a book about whaling takes so long to get to sea, and what Melville's purport is in this (possibly\_ strategic delay; the second will be on one of the 'minor characters on the ship (Queequeg, Fedallah, Starbuck, Tashtego, even Bulkington) and how they contribute to the story; the third will involve considering either the James or Olson book and assessing their interpretation of *Moby-Dick*; the

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fourth will be either a 'pro-Ahab or 'anti-Ahab' paper, depending on your point of view,

### 2. Atmosphere of the Class

The class will be conducted as a seminar, with everybody getting a chance to contribute. Inevitably, there will be times when the instructor will lecture in order to give basic exposition. But students should expect to hear their own voices and those of others frequently in the class. No one will be asked individual-specific questions unless the instructor feels the student has established a record of expertise/interest on a particular subject. Furthermore, no one will be compelled to talk, although the general expectation of the college is that students will freely and vocally participate in classes.

Students are expected to be respectful of each other's opinions and to understand that the class will be run, as far as possible, as a democratic polity and that the class's participants will be expected to exercise an appropriate sense of civic responsibility.

The class will start on time and end on time. I understand that, given the early hour of the class, transportation issues may impede students from coming on time, and will be lenient about lateness. Students may bring food or drink of any sort of class and consume it as long as it is not too distracting. I might occasionally bring some food for everyone although I cannot promise this will be a regular practice. Unless absolutely necessary, leaving the classroom during class period is strongly discouraged.

I will pass around a sign-in sheet each class as a means of taking attendance.

### 3. Pacing

I have built a lot of room into the syllabus, and I suspect what will happen is that our pace of reading the novel will slow down and we will take the four extra days nominally allotted to the James and Olson books to muse over the novel in greater detail, reading the critical books concurrently or as needed. I intend to use the chapter as the syntactic unit for the class—in other words, I want to discuss the book chapter by chapter, and if we don't finish the allotted chapters, we will spill over into the next class. The major goal of this class is to read *Moby-Dick*, and to read it with sufficient attention may mean giving less time to the other books—I would not buy *Pierre* or *Pym* until we are sure we will get through *MD* which is our top priority (I guess Ahab said the same thing).

### C. ORDER OF DISCUSSION

**August 30 Introduction**  
**September 1, *Moby-Dick*, Front matter**  
**September 6, Labor day, no class**  
**September 8 Ch 1-8**  
**September 13 Ch. 9-18**  
**September 15 Ch. 19-25**  
**September 20 Ch. 26-32. Paper1 due.**  
**September 22 Ch. 33-38**  
**September 27 Ch. 39-44**  
**September 29 Ch. 45-54**  
**October 4 Ch. 55-65**  
**October 6 Ch. 66-72**  
**October 11 Philbrick, *In The Heart of the Sea***  
**October 13 *Moby-Dick*, Ch. 73-80**  
**October 18 Ch. 81-86**  
**October 20 Ch. 87-93. Paper 2 due.**  
**October 25 Ch. 94-105**  
**October 27 Ch. 106-118**  
**November 1 18. Ch. 119-126**  
**November 3 Ch. 127-135. Paper 3 due**  
**November 8 James**  
**November 10 James**  
**November 15 Olson**  
**November 17 Olson**  
**November 22 Pierre, books 1-8**  
**November 29 *Pierre*, books 9-15**  
**December 1 *Pierre*, books 16-21. Paper 4 due**  
**December 6 *Pierre*, books 22-26**  
**December 8 Poe, *Pym***  
**December 13, Poe, *Pym***  
**December 15 Conclusion**

## D. REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED BOOKS

### REQUIRED BOOKS

Available from **Shakespeare and Company**, . 716 Broadway, New York - (212) 529-1330

Edgar Allan Poe, *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. ISBN 978-0486440934. Dover.

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, Longman Critical Edition, ISBN 978-0205514083.

C. L. R. James, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*,: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live IN . Dartmouth, ISBN 978-1584650942

Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 978-0801857317

Nathaniel Philbrick, *In The Heart of the Sea*. Penguin. ISBN 978-0141001821.

### E. Outcomes

- 1) To gain a sense of the scope and significance of *Moby-Dick*.
- 2) To understand different ways of approaching literature
- 3) To be able to perform close readings of the single text on which we are concentrating our efforts.
- 4) To be able to understand *Moby-Dick* in its various contexts
- 5) To write competent critical prose.

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### F. IMPORTANT COLLEGE POLICIES

#### **Policy on Attendance and Lateness**

- Absences justify some grade reduction and a total of four absences mandate a reduction of one letter grade for the course.
- More than four absences mandate a failing grade for the course, unless there are extenuating circumstances, such as the following:
  - an extended illness requiring hospitalization or visit to a physician (with documentation)
  - a family emergency, e.g. serious illness (with written explanation)
  - observance of a religious holiday

The attendance and lateness policies are enforced as of the first day of classes for all registered students. If registered during the first week of the add/drop period, the student is responsible for any missed assignments and coursework. For significant lateness, the instructor may consider the tardiness as an absence for the day. Students failing a course due to attendance should consult with an academic advisor to discuss options.

Some instructors might stipulate different guidelines for attendance based on the nature of the course assignments (such as studios, laboratories, workshops) or the course schedule (half-semester classes, classes meeting once a week). For additional information about attendance and lateness, please refer to the syllabus.

#### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's work as one's own in all forms of academic endeavor (such as essays, theses, examinations, research data, creative projects, etc), intentional or unintentional. Plagiarized material may be derived from a variety of sources, such as books, journals, internet postings, student or faculty papers, etc. This includes the purchase or "outsourcing" of written assignments for a course. A detailed definition of plagiarism in research and writing can be found in the fourth edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, pages 26-29. Procedures concerning allegations of plagiarism and penalties are set forth in the Lang catalog.

#### **Disabilities**

In keeping with the University's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student requesting accommodations must first meet with Student Disability Services. Jason Luchs or a designee from that office will meet with students requesting accommodations and related services, and if appropriate, provide an Academic Adjustment Notice for the student to provide to his or her instructors. The instructor is required to review the letter with the student and discuss the accommodations, provided the student brings the letter to the attention of the instructor. This letter is necessary in order for classroom accommodations to be provided. Student Disability Services is located at 79 Fifth Avenue - 5th Floor. The phone number is (212) 229-5626. Students and faculty are expected to review the Student Disability Services webpage. The webpage can be found at <http://www.newschool.edu/studentaffairs/disability/> and the office is available to answer any questions or concerns.