Maritime Literature and Culture  
ENAM 0243  
Middlebury College  
Fall 2010  

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Texts  
1) Moby-Dick, Herman Melville  
2) The Oxford Book of the Sea, ed. Jonathan Raban  
3) Cod, Mark Kurlansky  
4) The Unnatural History of the Sea, Callum Roberts  
5) Typhoon and Other Stories, Joseph Conrad  
6) Under the Sea-Wind, Rachel Carson  
7) Cannery Row, John Steinbeck  
8) The Old Man and the Sea, Ernest Hemingway  
9) Far Tortuga, Peter Matthiessen  
10) Sylvanus Now, Donna Morrissey  

Course Description  
Writers have long found the sea and the modes of human interaction with it a cause for wonder and reflection. A mirror for some, for others a desert, the sea has influenced the imaginations of writers throughout history in vastly different ways. The sheer variety of literary genres with which writers have reflected upon the sea and its meanings suggests that writing and voyaging on the water share a deep affinity. The sea in The Odyssey is full of dangers and wonders; in The Bible it is an instrument of the wrath of God; it is the hostile space of exile and despair in Old English poems. In stark contrast, the sea is the space of self-discovery in many modern writings. In this course we will read a variety of English and American literature in which the sea acts as the setting, a body of symbolism, a mystery, the agent of divine wrath, an epistemological challenge, a means of escape, and a reason to reflect on the human relationship to nature. As we do so we will engage with concepts from marine ecology, oceanography, marine policy, and marine environmental history.  

Classes and Written Work  
This course will involve a mix of lecture and discussion. Generally I will lecture for half an hour and then move to discussion, but I will not follow this format strictly. Please come to class prepared to ask questions and to answer them. Each week we will address a different text. I will also assign supplementary readings from the course-pack. Attendance, participation, and the occasional pop quiz will constitute 20% of your grade. There will be three essays, an initial response paper of 2-3 pages (10%), a mid-semester critical essay of 4-5 pages (30%), a final essay of 6-8 pages (40%). If you find yourself having any sort of difficulty keeping up with the reading, please let me know right away. If you must miss a class, be let me know as well. Each absence after the first three absences will lower your grade five percent.
**CLASS SCHEDULE**

**WEEK 1**
- Tues. Sept. 7: Introductory; *Genesis, The Odyssey*, Byron
- Thurs. Sept. 9: Coleridge, “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

**WEEK 2**
- Tues. Sept. 14: Melville, through Chapter 20; Roberts, Chapter 7
- Thurs. Sept. 16: Melville, Chapters 21-41

**WEEK 3**
- Tues. Sept. 21: Melville, Chapters 42-90; Roberts, Chapter 8
- Thurs. Sept. 23: Melville, Chapters 91-114

**WEEK 4**
- Tues. Sept. 28: Melville, Chapters 115-finish
- Thurs. Sept. 30: Roberts, Chapter 13; **PAPER 1 DUE**

**WEEK 5**
- Tues. October 5: Morrissey, *Sylvanus Now*; Kurlansky, *Cod*
- Thurs. October 7: Morrissey, *Sylvanus Now*; Kurlansky, *Cod*

**WEEK 6**
- Thurs. October 14: *Typhoon*, Joseph Conrad

**WEEK 7**
- Thurs. Oct. 21: Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*

**WEEK 8**

**WEEK 9**

**WEEK 10**
- Tues. Nov. 9: Sea Chanties (Handout)
- Thurs. Nov. 11: Sea Chanties; **PAPER 2 DUE**

**WEEK 11**
- Tues. Nov. 16: *Far Tortuga*, Peter Matthiessen, pages 1-164
- Thurs. Nov. 18: *Far Tortuga*, Peter Matthiessen, pages 165-304

**WEEK 12**
- **THANKSGIVING BREAK! CLASS CANCELLED ALL WEEK**

**WEEK 13**
- Tues. Nov. 30: Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (entire)
- Thurs. Dec. 2: Last day!
- Mon., Dec. 6: **PAPER 3 DUE**
Martime Literature and Culture
1st Class

1) Attendance

2) Syllabus

3) Discussion: What draws you to Maritime Literature?

4) Handout: Bible and “The Seafarer”.

5) Major Themes of the Course:
   a) Sea as Instrument of Divine Purpose: Punishment / Providence; cleansing / renewal
   b) Sea Voyage a Spiritual Quest: leaving society to gain perspective or rebirth
   c) Humanity’s Relationship to Nature (The Sea as Nature): fishing—are we managing our resources well? Storms—do we know what we’re doing on this planet?
   d) Sea as the Site of Heroic Action—by individuals or classes
   e) Sea as the Primordial, the Essential, Being itself

6) End: Read “Ancient Mariner” for Thurs. Ask yourself: What does this poem have to say about the relationship of humanity to the marine environment?
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For your final paper you have the choice to write about one of the following works:

1) Captains Courageous
2) Typhoon
3) The Old Man and the Sea
4) Far Tortuga
5) Omeros

In an essay of five or six pages in length, respond to the following question. What, ultimately, is the most important message of this book?
ENAM 243: Maritime Literature and Culture

Essay One

In an essay of three to four pages, respond to the following.

Context or Not?

Explain why knowing a particular context—scientific, historical, political, environmental, legal, or anything else you can think of—is important to understanding and appreciating a work of maritime fiction or poetry. Contexts may include History, Marine Biology or Ecology, Oceanography, Policy or Political Science, or any combination of these fields. You are also free to choose a different contextual category. Whatever your particular field of interest, your goal will be to explain how your understanding of a literary work is enriched or depends on contextual knowledge. You may also choose to argue against this topic, instead claiming that a literary work should stand alone and needs no contextual understanding to make sense and be powerful. You may choose to write about *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Moby-Dick*, or both. Pay close to attention to the language and structure of the text you choose. Be as specific as you can in defining the terms of your discussion. Quote and analyze the text at every opportunity!
In an essay of three to four pages, respond to the following.

1) What is the significance of the marine environment in *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* or *Moby-Dick*? In other words, what about the sea and its inhabitants did the poet or novelist find particularly meaningful? What aspect of marine life or maritime culture (or the aesthetics of water) did either writer capture best in his *magnum opus*? Could the poem or novel just as well have been set on land, or not? Why or why not? Be sure to use textual evidence to support your claims.

2) What is the relationship between human life and marine life in *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* or *Moby-Dick*? You should focus on a particular passage, or several short passages, to develop and support your argument.

3) Does either literary work, *Rime* or *Moby*, make a case for environmental ethics? If so, in what way and where does it do so? Be as specific as possible.
Maritime Literature and Culture
Second Paper Topic

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Respond to one of the questions below in an essay of approximately four pages. You may choose to write about one of the following works:

1) *Sylvanus Now*, by Donna Morrissey
2) *Cannery Row*, by John Steinbeck
3) *Under the Sea Wind*, by Rachel Carson
4) *Typhoon* or “The Secret Sharer,” by Joseph Conrad

Option A: What, ultimately, is the most important message of this book (or poem)?

Option B: What is this book’s (or poem’s) greatest achievement as a work of literature?

Option C: What is the significance of the marine environment in this work?

**Guidelines**

In my view all scholars in all disciplines, and at every level (undergraduate, graduate, and professorial), share a responsibility to do the following things:

1) Define a topic clearly in the introductory paragraph and, in the same paragraph, identify a problem or new possibility;

2) Present evidence and analysis (in this case quotations from the text followed by your own commentary on what those quotations mean);

3) Offer a brief outlook on the implications of your discoveries/analysis and point to new horizons.