“Reading and Rereading Moby-Dick”

Course Time: TTH 11:30-1:20
Lathrop 292
Instructor: Morgan Day Frank
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Office Hours: Wednesday 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM
Margaret Jacks Room

For many, Herman Melville’s Moby-Dick is the greatest novel in all of American literature, an undisputed classic. “It is a great book, a very great book,” D.H. Lawrence declared. “It moves awe in the soul.” E.L. Doctorow once proclaimed that American literature begins with Moby-Dick, “the book that swallowed European civilization whole.” When Moby-Dick was first published, however, it was a critical and commercial failure. This class will encourage students to reflect on the nature of literary experience by staging an initial reading of Moby-Dick followed by a somewhat abbreviated second reading. We will consider why readers overlooked Moby-Dick when it was originally published, and why readers later, after a second closer inspection, gained a greater appreciation for the novel. We will think about what happens when we encounter a text for the first time, and how different kinds of meaning might accumulate over multiple readings. We will also watch film adaptations of Moby-Dick in an attempt to comprehend how filmmakers over the course of the twentieth century have re-presented the novel to audiences. In the end, this course offers students the chance to study a literary classic in depth. We will read and reread Moby-Dick to better understand how literature works, and how American literary history has taken shape.

Primary Text

Herman Melville, Moby-Dick; or, The Whale (1851)
ISBN: 9780199535729

Possible Supplemental Texts

D.H. Lawrence, “Herman Melville’s Moby Dick” in Studies in Classic American Literature (1923)
Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville (1929) (excerpts)

Adaptations

Moby Dick (1930) starring John Barrymore
Moby Dick (1956), starring Gregory Peck, directed by John Huston
Moby Dick (1971), unfinished Orson Welles version
Moby Dick (1998), miniseries starring Patrick Stewart
Moby Dick (2011), miniseries starring William Hurt
Assignments

For this class I ask you to produce weekly writing responses and one 6-8 page final paper, along with some other, more informal assignments. Believing, as I do, that good writing practices emerge out of good reading practices, and that good reading practices emerge out of good writing practices, the goal of these assignments is to maintain constant contact between your own composition and the novels you are reading.

Weekly Responses

Each week you will be asked to produce a 100 word essay that reflects on the assigned reading. Sometimes I will offer a prompt for the response, highlighting a certain passage or a thematic and asking you to think critically about the relationship between that passage or thematic and the larger topics raised in the classroom. Other times, I will let you write about whatever interests you, the aspects of the reading you find particularly interesting, perplexing, or problematic. They will be graded on a check/check +/check - basis.

Final Paper

The final paper (minimum 1,500 words) is meant to allow you to go further in-depth in your analysis of the course’s themes. The parameters of this assignment will be pretty flexible: I encourage you to write about any of the text(s) in the course that inspire you.

Informal Assignments

During this course, you will also be asked to complete a variety of informal assignments, including short presentations and seminar recaps. Although these assignments are informal, they are not optional. You will receive credit for this work, in the form of a letter grade.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. If you need to miss a class for religious holidays, school activities, illness, or emergencies, please let me know as soon as you can. All other absences will be unexcused and affect your final grade.

Grade Breakdown

Attendance/Participation 20%
Informal Assignments 20%
Weekly Writing Responses 30%
Final Paper 30%

Late submissions incur a 1/3-grade deduction per day (e.g., A- to B+, B+ to B).
Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations.

OAE contact information:
563 Salvatierra Walk
650-723-1066
http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae

Honor Code
The Honor Code is the University's statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work:

The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:
that they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
that they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.

The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.

While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

Class Schedule

Week 1
June 21 Introductions
June 23 Moby-Dick, Etymology, Chapters 1-3
Week 2

June 28  *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 4-23

June 30  *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 24-33

Week 3

July 5  *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 34-49

July 7  *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 50-56

Week 4

July 12  *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 57-80

July 14  *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 81-87

Week 5

July 19  *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 88-107

July 21  *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 108-123

Week 6

July 26  Finish *Moby-Dick*

July 28  *Moby-Dick*, Etymology, Chapters 1-3

Week 7

August 2  *Reread Moby-Dick*

August 4  *Reread Moby-Dick*

Week 8

August 9  *Reread Moby-Dick*

August 11  *Reread Moby-Dick*

***Final Papers Due 10 am August 11th ***