



**GESM 120g – Seminar in Humanistic Inquiry  
Rendering the Void: Moby-Dick, Words, and  
Images**

**Section: 35326R**

**Units: 4**

**Spring 2023**

**Meeting time: Monday/Wednesday, 8:30 am – 9:50 am**

**Location: CPA 108**

**Instructor: Professor Martínez Celaya**

**Office: THH 318**

**Office Hours: Monday, 10 am, or by appointment**

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**Course Description**

Through a close reading of *Moby-Dick*, or *The Whale*, by Herman Melville, and an examination of a few of his other books – *Typee*, *Clarel*, *Redburn*, *White-Jacket*, and *Billy Budd* – this seminar explores the relationship between literature, art, and life, and considers the re-occurrence of *Moby-Dick* in the work of 20<sup>th</sup> century artists. Regarded by many as the great American novel, *Moby-Dick* weaves Biblical monumentality, insightful reflections on human nature, humor, and literary innovations into a narrative containing many stories that reads alternatively as an epic, a tragedy, a long poem, an encyclopedic treatise of whaling, a philosophical discourse, and a play. Before many of the authors usually credited with literary innovations were born, Melville's masterpiece was already offering new ways of considering the role of author and narrator and questioning literature's capacity to make sense of the world. Among other things, we will discuss the mightiness and poetry of *Moby-Dick*, as well as how the novel anticipates America's late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century self-image and related issues of morality, race, religion, sexuality, colonialism, and displacement. We will explore the validity of Melville's words, "the great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last," by studying the influence of the novel and its themes on the work of visual artists, including painters, sculptors, illustrators, and filmmakers, and by reviewing many of its illustrated versions, taking our own by Rockwell Kent as a point of departure.

Adjustments to this course and its description may be made during the semester in response to the evolution of the class.

**Learning Objectives**

Expected learning objectives and outcomes include: learning to read and analyze literary fiction, and being able to extract important ideas and themes; gaining an understanding of the mutual influence between literature, philosophy, and art, and their relevance to the world of ideas and life; exploring the value and use of art and literature in the development of the individual and his or her ethical basis; learning to read critically and with careful attention to the use of language, and communicate effectively in class discussion and writing assignments.

In addition to the objectives and priorities of this specific course, the English Department expects that a student with a major in English should graduate with an appreciation for the relations between representation and the human soul; the relations between words and ideas; and the social utility of a sophisticated understanding of discourse. For general education students, working in courses within the English department should help you hone your reading, writing, discussion, and critical thinking skills

### **Required Text**

1. *Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville
2. *Typee* by Herman Melville

### **Course Policies**

1. Attendance and due dates: This course relies on class discussions. Everyone will be called upon to participate in an ongoing critical conversation utilizing active learning techniques and sustained discussion, which will factor into your participation grade. After three absences, your participation grade will begin to decline. Any more than six absences will be a reason for a failing grade in the course. Paper due dates are firm.
2. Participation: Each student should come prepared to contribute to the discussions. Contributions can take the form of asking or answering questions, making comments, and constructively interacting with other students.
3. Graded papers will be returned in person.
4. Regrades: If you think a paper was graded incorrectly, you may seek a regrade. You must provide a written explanation of why you think the paper was graded incorrectly. If a regrade is agreed upon, then the entire paper may be subject to a regrade. Your grade may therefore go up, go down, or remain the same. Regrade requests must be received within one week of when the paper is returned to you.
5. Policy on recommendation letters: I will consider—and usually consent to—writing letters of recommendation for any student who completes two of my courses, and earns an A- or better in both courses.
6. It may be necessary to make adjustments to the syllabus during the semester.

## Assignments

Students are expected to complete all readings **before** the class for which they are assigned, and to arrive in class prepared to discuss that material.

Assignment #1: A 500-word paper on what is a novel and what is poetry (diagnostic).

Assignment #2: A 750-word paper on *Typee*; details to be discussed in class.

Assignment #3: A 5-minute video about a character from *Moby-Dick*.

Assignment #4: A 1,000-word paper on your own single-purpose or monomaniacal pursuit.

Assignment #5: A 500-word Mid-Semester Progress Report. You will write a reflection essay designed to help you articulate what you have learned and to reflect on how you might apply the course content and skills outside of class.

Assignment #6: A 2,000-word final paper focusing on an aspect of *Moby-Dick* of interest to you, and a discussion of how it is addressed by one artist or illustrator of your choice. This paper should reflect your understanding and assimilation of the readings, conversations, and presentations discussed throughout the semester.

### *Explanation of Assignments and Quizzes*

Videos: A 5-minute video about a character from *Moby-Dick*. It can be a reading of a paper or a more creative endeavor. The top six will be uploaded to YouTube. Details to be discussed in class.

Papers: A hard copy of your completed assignment must be turned in at the beginning of the class on the day it is due; an electronic copy must also be submitted to turnitin.com (available through Blackboard) before midnight on the same day. Papers should be formatted as 12-point, Courier font, single-spaced, one-inch margins, pages numbered. References/Works Cited page and in-text citations should adhere to Modern Language Association standards.

Quizzes: There will be 6 quizzes throughout the semester. These are relatively simple, multiple-choice tests intended to verify you completed the assigned readings. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

## Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
1	50	5
2	100	10
3	100	10
4	150	15
5	100	10
6	200	20
Quizzes	200	20
Participation	100	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	1,000	100

## Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale,  
A 95-100; A- 90-94; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C- 70-72; D+ 67-69; D 63-66; D- 60-62; F 59 and below

## Grading Rubrics

In grading, I focus on the sophistication of the writing and of the thoughts presented, as well as the refinement of the student's language, especially word choices. I avoid grading a student's use of grammar unless it significantly impacts the development of arguments. Below are more specific guidelines I will follow when grading essays. Consider using this sheet as a checklist before submitting an essay.

*A is an exceptional essay.* Above all, it is a paper that is thoughtful and original, extremely well-developed, detailed, fluent, and cogent. It may have one or two surface errors. The A essay is characterized by the following:

1. originality and freshness of expression and ideas;
2. logical and effective organization of the full essay;
3. effective structure within individual paragraphs;
4. logical and effective transitions between sentences and paragraphs;
5. mature and varied sentence structure;
6. avoids clichés and pre-packaged ideas;

*B is a good, clear, interesting essay* which is not as thoughtful or original in its conception nor as fluent in its style as an A paper, but it is organized, well-developed, and demonstrates sophisticated thinking. It has a few surface errors, but these errors do not obscure the writer's intended meaning. The B essay is characterized by the following:

1. somewhat less originality and freshness of expression and ideas than is characteristic of the A essay;

2. usually logical and effective organization of the full essay;
3. effective structure within individual paragraphs;
4. logical and effective transitions between sentences and paragraphs;
5. generally mature and varied sentence structure;
6. usually avoids clichés and pre-packaged ideas;

*C is a focused essay* which demonstrates proper handling of the material, but one which lacks the originality and fluency of the A paper, and the development and organization of the B paper. Typically, the major differences between the B and C paper are the quality and quantity of detail used to develop the main idea or thesis, and the sophistication and relevance of the student's topic. Errors in usage and mechanics, misuse of words, and awkward sentences in a few sections are more noticeable in the C paper than in the B paper. The C essay is characterized by any number of the following:

1. somewhat less originality and freshness of expression and ideas than is characteristic of the A or B essay;
2. no more than adequate organization or with minor organizational deficiencies;
3. no more than adequate paragraph structure or with minor structural deficiencies;
4. no more than adequate transitions with a transition perhaps omitted or illogically chosen
5. fairly coherent sentence structure but with occasional awkwardness or lack of variety;
6. some clichés and pre-packaged ideas;

*D is a weak paper* because it is poorly organized and lacks development (detail) in most sections. It is neither thoughtful nor original, and usually wanders from the topic or thesis. Sentence structure is awkward; words are frequently misused; its meaning, for the most part, is unclear, and usage errors are too numerous for the student to be considered a "competent" writer. The D essay is characterized by one or more of the following:

1. almost no originality of expression or ideas;
2. illogical organization, e.g., body paragraphs out of logical order;
3. inadequate transitions, e.g., most transitions omitted or illogically chosen;
4. no more than adequate transitions with a transition perhaps omitted or illogically chosen
5. frequently incoherent or awkward sentence structure with general lack of variety;
6. frequent use of clichés and pre-packaged ideas;

*F is an unacceptable paper.* In addition to lacking development, the paper has not addressed the assignment, is illegible, confusing, and contains flagrant errors of diction, style, and usage. I will not grade work that is clearly careless or lacking. If a student does not take the assignment seriously, I will not waste time grading it. Under some circumstances, I might consider asking the student to revise and re-submit the assignment.

**Schedule:** Adjustments to this schedule may be made during the course of the semester.

Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings (due date)	Deliverable (due dates)
<b>Wednesday January 11</b>	Introduction and explanation of the class. What is a novel? What is poetry? What is art?		
<b>Monday January 16</b>	<b>No Classes: MLK Day</b>		
<b>Wednesday January 18</b>	Antecedents: philosophy, literature, and art in the late 18 <sup>th</sup> and early 19 <sup>th</sup> centuries		Assignment #1 due
<b>Monday January 23</b>	Quiz #1 (Antecedents) Introduction to America in the mid-19 <sup>th</sup> century		
<b>Wednesday January 25</b>	American Renaissance, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau	American Renaissance reading due	
<b>Monday January 30</b>	Quiz #2 (American Renaissance) Melville; The Whiteness of the Whale: Melville's metaphysics		
<b>Wednesday February 1</b>	Discussion of <i>Typee</i>		Assignment #2 due
<b>Monday February 6</b>	Discussion of <i>Typee</i>		
<b>Wednesday February 8</b>	Overview of Redburn and White Jacket		
<b>Monday February 13</b>	American art in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century		
<b>Wednesday February 15</b>	Monster Art and Turner whale pictures		
<b>Monday February 20</b>	Whaling as epic, industry, and idea		
<b>Wednesday February 22</b>	Quiz #3 (Moby Dick 1-72) Introduction to Moby Dick		
<b>Monday February 27</b>	Quiz #4 (Moby Dick 73-Epilogue) Assignment #3: Class presentations		Assignment #3 due: Class Presentations

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics/Daily Activities</b>	<b>Readings (due date)</b>	<b>Deliverable (due dates)</b>
<b>Wednesday March 1</b>	Assignment #3: Class presentations		Assignment #3 due: Class Presentations
<b>Monday March 6</b>	<b>No Classes: Spring Break</b>		
<b>Wednesday March 8</b>	<b>No Classes: Spring Break</b>		
<b>Monday March 13</b>	Moby Dick 1-20		
<b>Wednesday March 15</b>	Moby Dick 21-44		Assignment #4 due
<b>Monday March 20</b>	Moby Dick Illustrations		
<b>Wednesday March 22</b>	Moby Dick 45-72		
<b>Monday March 27</b>	Moby Dick 73-98		Assignment #5 due
<b>Wednesday March 29</b>	<b>No Class:</b> Independent viewing of Moby Dick with Gregory Peck		
<b>Monday April 3</b>	Moby Dick 99-131		
<b>Wednesday April 5</b>	Moby Dick 132-Epilogue		Assignment #6 due
<b>Monday April 10</b>	Quiz #5 (Knights & Squires. Starbuck & Billy Budd. Ahab, Queequeg, Ishmael; discussion of consciences and narrators)		
<b>Wednesday April 12</b>	Discussion of film and the novel as source		
<b>Monday April 17</b>	Moby Dick in other media		
<b>Wednesday April 19</b>	Quiz #6 (When Is a Painting Most Like a Whale? By Wolf) Visual art discussion		
<b>Monday April 24</b>	Pequod as America: the political and social relevance of Moby Dick		

Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings (due date)	Deliverable (due dates)
Wednesday April 26	Quiz #7 (Billy Budd, Moby Dick, and Melville's Legacy)		
Monday May 1	No Class: Study Day		
Wednesday May 3	Final Exam due		

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

### Support Systems

*Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*  
[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*  
[suicidpreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidpreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*  
[engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086*  
[equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

*Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421*  
[studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)



Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*

[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710*

[studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101*

[diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.