

Humanities Sea Year Project

Group C

Fall 2018 | 2020-A sailing

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Theme: “Distance and Difference”

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I. Overview and Course Objectives:

The word “maritime” is not related to the word “time.” In fact, “maritime” was pronounced “*mari-tim*” until the late nineteenth century. But despite the lack of an etymological relationship, perhaps it is a serendipitous coincidence that “time” is now a part of the sound of “maritime.” For is being at sea not productive of an unusual *sense* of time? (Cf. Bowditch, *American Practical Navigator*, Table 19.) Does one not feel a separation of sorts from affairs on land? Does being at Kings Point and *then* going to sea create a sense of being doubly separated from friends, family, and conventional society? How does having been to sea mark one as different (even if temporarily) from those who have not been? And if it is the case that being at sea *produces* difference, should difference itself not be studied through works of literature in which it has been most assiduously investigated and interrogated?

For this project, you will be reading a variety of well-established works in which characters become separated from each other by one means or another. The theme of these readings is “Difference and Distance.” Meaning is produced by the separation and by the search: as characters differentiate from one another, difference becomes the focus

of attention, and learning occurs through the process of comparative study (which involves writing).

You will be asked to make connections between these works and your own experience and thus, to use these works to “theorize” your own experience – to ask how separation and distance has produced difference, which produces meaning. Think about how this is happening to you. (This is value-neutral: it can be good, bad, or as yet undetermined. Or, it can be a combination.)

II. Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

The Humanities Department has specifically designed this project to be done during your sailing period. Your sea year experience should be interwoven with this project to help you conceptualize and reflect upon your time at sea.

Objectives:

1. To engage students in reading historical and literary works while at sea.
2. To foster development of critical and personal reflection of experiences at sea.
3. To expose students to the larger issues of the diverse, global maritime environment.

Outcomes:

By completion of the course, midshipmen will:

1. Think and write creatively, critically, empathetically, and imaginatively about their sea year experience.
2. Explore and analyze connections between their sea year experience and important texts in the humanities.
3. Observe and reflect upon their place in the complex maritime world.

In this course midshipmen will have had the valuable experience of reading important works in a variety of literary genres and traditions, including autobiography, the American novel (and a paragon of the major tradition of the African American “passing” novel), modernist drama, the short story, and contemporary essay. Through the processes of a keeping a journal and writing about the assigned texts in four distinct, specific modes, midshipmen will have made connections between the texts and the new “text” (composed of new characters, sounds, images, themes, plotlines) of their own shipboard experience and their new position in a complex maritime world. Students will have broadened their cultural knowledge base while honing their writing skills in the process. It is hoped that midshipmen will thus understand the value of contemplative reading and

writing for enriching and aiding in the comprehension of future experiences at sea and beyond.

III. Learning Processes: Reading Assignments (please read in order) and Writing Assignments (please complete in order).

Learning Processes: Reading and writing assignments: creative, critical, and in journal format.

Learning Processes Part One: Reading Assignments¹:

complete books²:

1. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* by Benjamin Franklin (1771-90)
2. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* by James Weldon Johnson (1912) (If you are given the Vintage edition, please read both introductions [1927 and 1989] and the preface [1912] for maximum context. If you are assigned the W.W. Norton edition, please read as much as you can from the voluminous documents in the back of the book for maximum context.)

* **Nota Bene:** Johnson’s book is a novel (a work of fiction), not an autobiography. Johnson’s autobiography is called *Along this Way* (1933), and it is remarkable. In your papers, please do not make the mistake of referring to the novel as Johnson’s own personal story, as it is not.

* **Nota Bene:** In Johnson’s novel the term “Negro” appears frequently. It was the most respectful term of the era in which Johnson was writing, and until 2010 it was still a category that one could select on the U.S. Census. Today it is widely considered to be old-fashioned and outmoded. When quoting from the book, please quote the text exactly, but when describing an African American character in your own words, please be sure to refer to him or her as African American or black.

3. *Melville: A Novel* by Jean Giono (1941, translated 2017).

***Nota Bene:** This is a work of fiction about the American mariner-turned-writer, Herman Melville (1819-1891), author such classics as *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*. Giono, in my opinion, captures much about Melville’s character in this enthralling story about

¹ These authors are prolific. Their works can form the basis of a future reading program, if you are so inclined. If you are interested in reading other works by any of them after you have returned, please do not hesitate to ask for recommendations.

² At first glance this may seem like a lot of reading, but it’s really not. If you allot three weeks for each complete short book, five weeks for the PDF (one piece per week), and two weeks for the four essays in the book of essays, it adds up to twenty weeks. There are approximately thirty-two weeks in the sailing period. This is the same amount of reading as previous Group C projects.

taking a chance while waiting between ships. Giono (1895-1970), a French writer, studied Melville's life and work in great depth, and had a strong affinity for him and brilliant understanding of him. Please **SKIP** the introduction by Edmund White – it contains mistakes and is not very sharp. Please read the preface by Giono (pp. 3-5).

4. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* by August Wilson (1987).

***Nota Bene:** Herald Loomis, the protagonist of this play set in 1911, is not a former slave, but a former prisoner on a chain gang, which was a form of imprisonment in the south after the Civil War.

short works in PDF:

5. "Looking for Mr. Green" by Saul Bellow (1951)
6. excerpt from the novel *Elsewhere, California* by Dana Johnson (2012)
7. "Arjun" by Mahasweta Devi (1984)
8. "Interpreter of Maladies" by Jhumpa Lahiri (1999)
9. "Notes on the Exotic" by Andrea Lee (2014)

essays from book:

10. selections from *Known and Strange Things* by Teju Cole (2016). ("Natives on the Boat," "A Piece of the Wall," and two essays of your choice)

***Nota Bene:** Cole was born in the United States, raised in Nigeria, and resides in the United States. He is one of the most interesting and important writers in the world today.

Learning Processes Part Two: Writing Assignments (each is worth 25% of your final grade):

1. **Keep a journal** of your experiences on the ship and interweave your experiences with your reading progress (as reading will be part of your shipboard experience). There is no set format or length, but **a weekly entry of 250-500 words will be expected**. You may perhaps skip a week here and there, but if you do you must make up for it by writing a longer entry the following week. The entries may be creative, funny, intense, or dispassionate, but they must always show that you have been reflecting on your experience at sea, often through the events and characters in the readings. This should be organic and not mechanical. It is not a paint-by-numbers exercise. It's not as if **X** necessarily happens on the ship and **X'** happens in the book. (There could very well be several such scenarios, and there often are, but you don't have to force the comparisons.) There is a lot of leeway here. In one week, you may wish to focus on a specific passage or moment that captured your interest in a given

work, while in another week you may wish to write about something on board the ship. But if you focus the event that happened on board, perhaps ask yourself how any of the characters might perceive it. **Be sure to keep circling back to the assigned works and to discuss each assigned work at some point.** Also, not every aspect of every work has an obvious parallel with life on a ship.

The idea is to reflect on the works in the journal and then sit down to write the formal assignments. Thus, learning in this project follows a process. You take notes on the readings and explore them in an informal/personal way in the journal, then build on those notes and observations in the more traditional academic papers to follow.

For full credit, each assigned work listed in “Learning Processes Part One” must be discussed.

Important Disclaimers:

- The following information must be noted on each entry: date, time, coordinates, approximate location (“middle of Indian Ocean,” “Gulf of Mexico near Texas,” etc.). If you are on a vessel with a classified location, you may simply write “classified” and not give a location.
 - The only people who will read your journal will be Humanities Department faculty. It will remain confidential. Always be professional and use language appropriate to the classroom.
 - Also, keep in mind that this is a required course like any other. If you have complaints, ask yourself how and if you would go about making those complaints if you were in a classroom on land. Complaints will *not* count toward your word count. Each assigned reading was the process of careful selection. They were not selected arbitrarily or capriciously.
 - If you dislike a particular reading, you may feel free to say so and explain why, using details from the text to demonstrate that you have read it carefully and thought about it. That would be a valid response as long as it is done in a professional manner. An invalid response would not demonstrate careful reading. If you feel compelled to complain about the idea of a Humanities sea project in general, please understand that those words will not count for anything. If you feel compelled to critique or complain about every reading, ask yourself if you are perhaps missing something.
2. **Write an essay (1,000 words)** comparing and contrasting Franklin’s autobiography with Johnson’s novel. These are stories of Americans who invented their own identities for complex reasons after separation from their original communities. A valid approach to this assignment, for instance, would be to a comparison of the respective green water (or blue water) sea voyages of each protagonist, and a comparison of how each voyage figures in each story. You may use that as a starting

point, but you do not have to. There are many ways to productively juxtapose these texts. Each protagonist pays a high price for his success. What is the nature of each price? How does each protagonist relate to various temptations? How does each protagonist develop a career in business? Explore their similarities and differences. Pay close attention to how race figures in Johnson’s novel. You may bring your own experience into the essay at certain relevant moments. What sort of sacrifices does the maritime industry ask from its initiates? Did you have to reinvent your identity somewhat at Kings Point? How about on the ship? If you did not feel that you had to adjust to adapt to your surroundings, please think about how you are thus privileged, and what historical factors may be the foundation of that privilege. Overall, this particular exercise should *focus on the books* more than on you.

3. **Write an essay (1,000 words)** on perception and misperception in *Melville: A Novel* and *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*. How do the characters read and misread one another? What could be the reasons? What could be the consequences?

4.

Part 4a) Choose a short story to re-read in-depth and then **write a story (600-800 words)** from the perspective of a minor or marginalized character in that story. For instance, in “Looking for Mr. Green,” how might Winston Field reflect on George Grebe after Grebe leaves? How might he be thinking about Grebe while they are chatting? How does Mr. Kapasi of “Interpreter of Maladies” feel on the way home that day? How does Bobby feel? Each story presents numerous options.

Part 4b) **Write a letter (600-800 words)** to someone (to me, to a former shipmate, to a sibling, to the man in the moon) about Teju Cole’s essays in *Known and Strange Things*, summarizing the two required essays and two more essays, and considering their potential value for thinking about big issues facing our world today. (This assignment assumes that there is some value. If you do not perceive any, then look again.) Cole is very much a global citizen with a flexible, critical, and discerning approach to culture and politics. You must write about “Natives on the Boat,” “A Piece of the Wall,” and **at least two more essays of your choosing**. (Those interested in photography will find a treasure trove here – quite a few essays discuss it. “Memories of Things Unseen,” for instance, is about the paradoxes of loss and preservation vis-à-vis photography, with a conclusion on the peculiar particulars of Snapchat.) You may agree with him, disagree with him (respectfully), or one or the other in different instances, but you must show you have engaged with the essays. There is some room for creativity here. You may bring your own sea year experiences into the letter. The point of this assignment is to study the work of a supremely talented contemporary writer who brings nuance and critical thinking to important topics. Your letter should also be nuanced and should employ critical thinking.

IV. Grading:

A = 95-100

A-	= 90-94
B+	= 87-89
B	= 84-86
B-	= 80-83
C+	= 77-79
C	= 74-76
C-	= 70-73
D+	= 67-69
D	= 60-66
F	= 0-59

A range = Outstanding effort and engagement. Consistently attentive reading proven through writing that is nearly error-free. Consistently thoughtful reflection on the texts and the journey. Demonstration of connections made between texts and between texts and journey.

B range = Solid but inconsistent effort and engagement. Reading was perhaps more attentive at some times than at other times. Writing has some errors but errors are not overwhelming. Sometimes appears to be going through the motions

C range = Satisfactory effort and engagement, but no more than that. Cursory reading, error-filled writing. Often appears dashed-off

D range = Inconsistent and often unsatisfactory engagement. Readings appear not to have been read. Error-ridden writing, appears completely dashed-off.

F range = All-around poor work reflecting a total or almost total failure to have taken the project seriously or made any effort to complete it correctly, or non-submission of project, or non-submission (or practical non-submission) of more than one component.

1. Journal:

30%: demonstrate that the texts have been read and considered thoughtfully

30%: reflection on experience at sea and your place in the maritime world

30%: synthesis and/or connection of thoughts about the required texts with reflections on your experience

10%: grammar, mechanics, syntax, and usage. Journals must be written in complete sentences. Lists or bullet points are not acceptable.

- If you took LITR 101 at USMMA, you should have a copy of the spiral-bound style guide *Rules for Writers*. Bring it on board with you and refer to it when you encounter a grammatical conundrum. If you did not take LITR 101 at USMMA, ask your Humanities sea project coordinator for a writing handbook of some kind before you embark. If there are extra copies, we will try to provide you with one.

- The following applies to **all** assignments: the grading of grammar, syntax, mechanics, and usage will be somewhat lenient. A mistake here and there will be overlooked, but writing that is consistently sloppy, careless, or obviously not at college level will result in a **loss of up to 10% of the final grade for the entire project.**

2. Comparison and Contrast:

This assignment is like a formal paper for an English class. Ask yourself what can be learned by studying these works side by side.

70%: Show the texts have been read carefully and attentively. Make connections between them, paying equal attention to each text.

20%: Make connections between the texts and then between the texts and your experience – show how shining one text onto another, so to speak, makes each appear somewhat different than they would alone – then, find something in that difference and apply it to your own experience.

10%: grammar, mechanics, syntax, and usage

3. Study of Perception and Misperception:

70%: Show the texts have been read carefully and attentively. Answer a combination of the questions in the prompt (there is some flexibility here), paying equal attention to each text.

20%: Make connections between the texts or the questions in the prompt and your experiences at sea

10%: grammar, mechanics, syntax, and usage

4. Short Story (from the perspective of a character in one of the assigned stories) and Letter

45%: Short Story – Demonstrate complete grasp of one work (this will necessitate more than one reading). Use imagination and creativity to convey that the text has been comprehended and pondered. You will be graded on effort and engagement, and **not** on aesthetic quality, as you have not had training at USMMA in creative writing.

45%: Letter – Demonstrate that Cole's essays have been read and that you have pondered them and followed directions.

10%: grammar, mechanics, syntax, and usage

V. Academic Integrity Statement:

All work is expected to be solely that of the student. In completing the writing assignments, remember that plagiarism is both cheating and stealing. Please see the academic policies handbook for a full definition of plagiarism. Please review section 102 of the *Midshipman Honor Manual*. Students who commit any form of academic dishonesty will automatically fail their project. The grader(s) will report all academic dishonesty to the Honor Board. Students are allowed to consult additional works to help them understand/interpret assigned readings. If any information from these outside sources is used in an assignment, it must be cited in MLA 8th edition format.

VI. Submission Instructions:

1. You must submit a **paper copy** of your final project to the Humanities Department on Sea Project Collection Day, which is the day on which you will submit all of your other Sea Projects. Bring your project to the Humanities Department office on the second floor of Fitch Hall. Hand your assignment to the department's secretary or put it in the Humanities Sea Year Project drop box. On Sea Project Collection Day (in July 2019) there will be a checklist. You will place a check next to each part of the assignment you are handing in, and then sign the checklist. ***You must also submit your project to Turnitin.com.*** The paper copy will be the one that is read, but your project must also be submitted to Turnitin.com.

2. Indicate which syllabus you are following. Label the assignments based on how they are numbered above. Your name should appear in the upper right-hand corner of the page along with the page number of the assignment and the name of the assignment. (The way to do this in MS Word is to click "insert," then "page number." Then, after you click "page number," you'll have the option to add words to the left of the page number.)

Each assignment must be stapled separately. All assignments must be placed in one (1) envelope unless your journal is too long to fit in the envelope. Multiple envelopes lead to confusion, so try for one. No paperclips allowed, unless there is a large one holding all the assignments together. Add a cover sheet with your name and other relevant information. All assignments should be double-spaced and in twelve-point font. Please use Times New Roman, Cambria, or Garamond.