Topics in Anglophone Literary Studies
THAR SHE BLOWS!
MOBY-DICK MEETS THE DIGITAL GENERATION
Spring 2018
Wednesdays, 5–6.30 p.m., SR34K1 (Attemsgasse 25, basement)
Dr. Michael Fuchs

1. About the Course
"Call me Ishmael." Even if you haven't read *Moby-Dick*, you will probably know the novel's iconic open-ing line. Likewise, even if you haven't read *Moby-Dick*, you will have a rough idea as to what its story is about—Captain Ahab's frantic hunt of a white sperm whale. The very fact that people know *about Moby-Dick* without knowing *Moby-Dick* testifies to the book's cultural relevance and power. Indeed, as we will see, *Moby-Dick* is about so much more than the mere conflict between man and nature.

This undergraduate seminar will consist of two main parts: In the first half of the semester, we will engage in a close reading of what many literary scholars and also the general public consider one of the (if not *the*) "great American novels." In the second half of the semester, we will look at the presence of *Moby-Dick* in popular culture. Accordingly, we will watch movie adaptations, read comic adaptations, listen to music adaptations, but also explore some other texts in which *Moby-Dick* (and/or Moby Dick) plays a dominant role.

Since the first part of this undergraduate seminar will pursue a close reading of *Moby-Dick*, the main objective here will be that students gain a deeper understanding of *Moby-Dick* and its socio-economic environment; in particular, students will come to understand (and appreciate) what might be termed *Moby-Dick*'s postmodernism *avant la lettre*, its rhetorical strategies, its ecological subtexts, its engagement with scientific discourse, and nineteenth-century whale-hunting. The primary goal of the second half of the semester is for students to make sense of the continued cultural presence of *Moby-Dick*. Since we will discuss different media in this context, students will also attain an under-standing of the operating principles of different media. In addition, frequent writing tasks will allow students to fine-tune their rhetorical strategies and their critical engagement with texts, while the final project will provide students insights into how literary and cultural studies scholars may find links to the digital humanities.

Please note: Since the title of this seminar is "*Moby-Dick* Meets the Digital Generation," be prepared to **produce a digital final project (academic or creative) at the end of the semester** instead of a traditional essay/paper. This digital project may, for example, be a video essay (or some other sort of digital commentary), a mash-up composed of different *Moby-Dick* adaptations (which should communicate an idea to be made explicit in a written attachment), a wiki, an annotated website, etc.

And a second note: The schedule laid out a few pages later is a suggestion. If you would like to discuss a specific adaptation (I am using this term in a broad sense here) of *Moby-Dick*, or a particular topic related to the White Whale, please contact me early on that I can adjust the schedule.

2. Course Resources
The primary resource for this undergraduate seminar is the course website at http://www.fuchsmichael.net/courses/digitalmobydick/. You will get your user data in the Holy Week, as I won't activate the website before then (as you'll have to read *Moby-Dick* first). On the website, you will find the required readings (other than the ones you are asked to acquire—see below), other downloads, and the course blog (see below). The files will be made available as password-protected rar archives. On Windows, please use the latest version of WinRAR (it's shareware, but can be used indefinitely); on Mac, the latest version of UnRarX to extract the files. **The password for all down-loads is 'd1G1T4lM0bYD1cK'** (without the inverted commas).

However, I still ask you to **acquire** some books and other materials:

- Hershel Parker & Harrison Hayford (eds.), *Moby-Dick* (Norton Critical Edition, 2001 edition)
- Nick Selby (ed.), *Herman Melville,* Moby-Dick*: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (Columbia Critical Guide)
- China Miéville, *Railsea* (2013 Pan edition)

3. Grading
900–1,000 points = A
800–899 points = B
700–799 points = C
600–699 points = D
0–599 points = F

Grade breakdown:

final project	max. 250 points
online participation	max. 250 points
participation in class	max. 250 points
focus essay	max. 150 points
quizzes	max. 100 points
total	max. 1,000 points

There are **no minimum requirements for any of the grading pillars**. In other words, you may decide not to submit a final project, but you **may** still accumulate 750 points (i.e., a C) for the entire course.

You may not submit extra work to make up for e.g. missed assignments. Late assignments will receive a zero. The only exception to the "no late assignments" rule is your final project (see below).

4. Grade Breakdown
4.1. Final Project
Your final project should be some **digital work** related to *Moby-Dick*. I don't want to curb your creativity here, so you may do anything within these vague parameters—it should be digital and be related to *Moby-Dick*. But knowing that students expect clearer guidelines, there are two main routes you may take—an academic or creative route (and there's actually a third one if you just want to pass the course). Please note that you may collaborate on your final projects. The accepted group size depends on the scope of your project—please contact me well in advance.
   The **deadline** for final projects is **August 16, 2018, 11.59 p.m. CEST**. Do yourself a favor and finalize your project idea at least a month prior to that deadline (you may, of course, still adapt/tailor that idea, but the general idea should be in place). You may submit your project until **September 15, 2018, 11.59 p.m. CEST (extended deadline)**, but for each week you hand in your project after August 16, you'll lose 25 points.

a) Academic
A final project with a scholarly approach will make use of digital technologies to produce something "more" than a mere final essay/paper. There are several routes you may take. For one, you may compose a **video essay** rather than a written essay (i.e., a video with voiceover and/or on-screen text). Video essays may convey critical and analytical ideas more directly, as you can simply show (rather than tell) your audience what you want them to see. In other words, this form would be an excellent way to, for example, explore the presence of *Moby-Dick* (and/or Moby Dick) in audiovisual

media, explore *Moby-Dick* adaptations, or discuss an illustrated edition of *Moby-Dick*. Now, like a written essay, a video essay should include a thesis statement, a main part (the 'analysis'), and a conclusion. (Recommended readings for those interested: Christian Keathley & Jason Mittell, *The Videographic Essay: Criticism in Sound & Image* [2016] and *The Audiovisual Essay: Practice and Theory in Videographic Film and Moving Image Studies* [http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/audiovisualessay/]).

Another option would be an annotated **hypertext edition** of *Moby-Dick*. You definitely wouldn't have to deal with the entire novel here, but rather select chapters—number depending on group size.

Another option would be to set up an **archive** of *Moby-Dick* adaptations. So, if you were to look at film adaptations, in particular, you might include trailers and plot synopses.

These are just three ideas, however. If you have an idea (that seems doable), just contact/approach me.

b) Creative Project

Instead of an academic piece, you may also **opt for creative work** and show your skills as a filmmaker, writer, comics artist, etc. Your options are practically endless here, so if you want to do a creative work (especially for film projects, large groups are welcome), just talk to me.

Generally, final projects (both creative and academic) may be solo-projects or group projects.

4.2. Online Discussions

You're required to contribute **about 300 words to online discussions per week, starting after the Easter Break** (i.e., your first discussion post won't be due until April 11—you may write it earlier, though). Basically, you may write about anything related to *Moby-Dick*, the course, and the secondary texts. However, it would be great if you tried to focus on the weekly topics.

This should go without saying, but since I expect everyone to have prepared the assigned texts, your posts are **not meant to be summaries, but responses to, or critical engagements with, the primary and secondary texts**. What did you like about the assigned text(s)? What did you not like? Write about your reading experience. What elements triggered further reflection? Connect (a) primary text(s) to (a) secondary reading(s) to show that you've understood the theoretical texts and/or concepts. The best posts point out aspects that others in the class (your instructors included) might not have thought of. Use **quotes and/or (audio)visual material to supplement and/or support your arguments**.

Most importantly, however, I expect you to **interact with the rest of the class**. This implies several things: For one, I expect you to read the contributions by your fellow students. What goes hand in hand with the previous expectation is: **Do not open a new thread to reiterate what one of your fellow students has already 'said'**. Post responses to the threads in question. Disagree with your fellow students and/or add new dimensions to their arguments. And if responses have been posted to 'your' thread, you're expected to at least try to respond to them in a meaningful way. Maybe some of the responses trigger further ideas, who knows?

You may use a rather informal tone online; as long as we can decipher the meaning of your posts, you should be good. However, please come up with **meaningful titles** for your entries; make sure that the majority of threads is not titled 'my thoughts on [enter title of week's assigned reading]'. Also, even though you can find the phrase "you're required to write" above—and given the general idea behind this seminar, in particular—I am not a lingophile, so **all sorts of responses by not-only-verbal or even nonverbal means are welcome** if you think they are equal to the workload of writing 300 words (which ain't much). In other words, you may draw an image; you may submit video or audio responses; you may create a mash-up video in response to the week's topic, etc.

The **deadline for new threads is Tuesday noon**. From then on, you may still collect points by posting replies to existing threads, but any thread that's opened after Tuesday noon will not get the thread starter any points (responses to these threads, however, still count).

In the course of the semester, you are also expected write at least **three somewhat elaborate responses** to threads opened by your fellow students (i.e., more than "I think you've raised an interesting question. I agree with [name of student who's already posted a response]'s argument that [paraphrase of that argument]"). If you fail to write these responses, **you'll lose 20 points for each missing response at the end of the semester**.

You may collect **22 points every week**, i.e., between right after class and the following week (however, keep the deadline for new threads in mind). If you write a practically perfect entry, comment, or raise an incredibly interesting question, that may be enough. However, you will not know how good your entry was until I have 'graded' it, so, if you want to make sure to score the max number of points, you might want to write one or the other response to other students' entries to collect additional points. If you do the math, you'll see that you may, in fact, collect more than 250 points, thus allowing you to use the online discussions to make up for other aspects of your performance. Please note that only **your two best responses** (plus the thread that you might have started) **count in a given week**.

I will **update your discussion 'grades' on a weekly basis**; these updates should usually be online by Friday evening. Generally, I will not provide any feedback on your discussion forum posts other than awarding you points. However, if you'd like to get specific feedback on how to improve your contribution(s) to online discussions, feel free to contact me—I am more than happy to clarify your strengths and weaknesses.

4.3. Participation in Class

Your active participation in class will make or break this seminar, as it will be **primarily discussion-based**. On the other hand, I believe that, at the end of the day, **it's your choice to attend class**. As a result, I don't (directly) punish absences. I thus also don't necessarily care as to whether you will come to class (i.e., there is no point in sending me an excuse that you won't be attending class). However, there will be **positive rewards for coming to class**—your **mere presence will get you 11 points per unit**. In other words, if you only attend all classes, you'll get more than 125 points on in-class participation. **Active participation** in class may net you **another 11 points per unit**.

Class starts at 5 p.m. Being late (which means entering the room after I've called the roll in the first few weeks or after 5.00 once I've gotten to know your names) and leaving early results in reducing your max. points by 4 points each. Since this is a seminar, you are expected to **prepare the assigned texts/watch the assigned movies etc.** Preparing the primary and secondary materials does not only mean reading (or watching) them, but thinking about them, looking up words you don't understand (of course, not necessarily every single one of them), and annotating the texts/taking notes while watching the movies. **You must bring your annotated texts/notes to class** (printed or digitally, doesn't matter). If you don't, I must assume that you are not prepared for class, which will result in -5 points. (In other words: **If you're not prepared, better stay home** …)

You may bring laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc. to class in order to take notes, etc. However, if you're using an electronic device in class, you are expected to be using it for the course. If I catch you freely surfing the web, you'll be punished by 'earning' -5 points; being on Facebook, any other kind of social network, having some instant messaging program (Skype et al.) running, or texting/Whatsapping/whatever will result in -25 points (see above: if you attend class, I assume you want to). Also note that if I repeatedly see (or hear) you chatting in a class, I will just record minus-points; I won't say anything (unless it's really bugging me), but you'll see the results.

Finally, I **reserve the right to ask students to leave a specific class** if they are not prepared, chat tirelessly, and/or distract other students. Should that happen, the respective student(s) will be given the choice of either losing 50 points or submitting a 1,500-word essay on a topic related to the class s/he was thrown out of, which is to be submitted within 48 hours from the end of the class. Again: If you are in class, I assume you want to be there.

I will **update your participation points every week**.

4.4. Focus Essay

Since the spring term is always interrupted by the Easter Break and I'll be repeatedly out of the country between mid-March and mid-April, I thought that it would be useful to start off the semester by simply assigning a (first) read-through of *Moby-Dick*. Accordingly, **please read *Moby-Dick* between our first class and our second meeting**, which will only take place after the Easter Break.

To show that you have, in fact, read *Moby-Dick*, I ask you to write **a short essay, which is to be submitted by April 10**, 11.59 p.m. CEST. This essay is a kind of hybrid between a reading journal entry and an actual essay. It should be **about 1,000 words** and **start off from a small textual fragment of *Moby-Dick***—a sentence or a paragraph (a chapter at the most). To give you the most apparent example: the famous opening line, "Call me Ishmael"—what does this line do? "What expectations does it set up? What are the line's implications? Why does *Moby-Dick* start this way? Why is this sentence significant? Of course, these questions open up the larger textual body of *Moby-Dick*, but your starting point should be—as indicated above—a sentence or a paragraph (maybe a chapter).

You do not have to use any secondary sources in these essays. They should be rather personal introspections, your own journeys into (and with the) text. However, if you feel the need to use (academic) sources, do not incorporate more than 3 of them. Please note that this focus essay should, of course, still follow the standard structure of an essay—introduction (including a thesis!), main part, and conclusion. As a rule of thumb, the introduction and conclusion should each make up about 10–15% of the essay's total word count.

4.5. Quizzes

In addition to the short essay, there will be **a quiz on *Moby-Dick***. This quiz will be on Moodle and will be open between April 11, 6 a.m., and April 17, 11.59 p.m. It will consist of a mix of multiple-choice and short "essay" questions. You won't be asked to interpret anything in this quiz; the questions will be on story and discourse, as a narratologist would say. This quiz will be worth 50 points (i.e., 5% of the overall points).

Once we get to part two of the semester, there will be **two more pop quizzes on the primary and secondary texts** assigned for the class in question. These will take place at the very beginning of class.

5. Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism equals instant fail—no matter whether you plagiarize in your final project, your focus essay, or in online discussions. Whenever you quote (from) or paraphrase someone else's ideas, you must mark your quotation/paraphrase in some way to emphasize that these ideas are not yours (online: at least quotation marks and the source—i.e., a name—in the case of quotations and the source in the case of a paraphrase).

6. Communication Policy

All students are issued a **university email address**. I will use this email address to communicate with you. You are expected to read emails sent to your university account on a regular basis. Failure to do so does not absolve you from knowing or complying with the content of my emails.

I address students on a first-name basis (and 'du' in German). I don't expect you to treat me differently—it's Michael/Mike/Michi (whichever). Still, I know that there are students who are not comfortable with addressing me by my first name (let alone 'duzing' me in German, which appears to be a totally different issue), so if you can't get around that uncomfortable feeling, call me 'Mr. Fuchs' or 'Dr. Fuchs', if really need be, but please **don't 'professor' me**, because that title is reserved to a select crowd.

As I will be repeatedly out of the country in the course of the spring term, I won't offer regular student hours. Please keep an eye on my 'business card' on UGO, as you'll see when I'll be abroad,

and when official student hours take place. However, when I'm in Graz, I try to follow an open-door policy (i.e., you may come in when my door is open), which is complicated by the fact that you'll actually have to ring the bell in order to get to our offices and the fact that I am only employed part-time. I am usually in the office Mon, Tue, and Fri between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. Note that my office is in **Heinrichstraße 18** (that's the same building as Zu den 3 goldenen Kugeln and that bike shop), first floor, opposite the 'Betriebsrat'. I generally respond to emails very quickly—if you don't receive a response within 48 hours (including breaks and weekends), you may assume that your email hasn't reached me. My email address is m.fuchs@uni-graz.at. You may also call me in the office (extension 2464), Skype at fuchsmichaelbiz, or we can make an appointment outside the official office hours.

7. Feedback/Problems

For some reason, students seem to think that getting feedback would only be desired at the end of the semester. Wrong—after all, what's your use of giving feedback once the class has come to an end? I appreciate any feedback (in person, publically on the discussion forums—you'll get points for feedback) at any point of the semester.

In addition, if you have any needs, difficulties, or frustrations related to the course, I urge you to contact me. We can talk about more or less anything. Please don't wait until the end of the semester to approach me with any problems you might have.

I also welcome all sorts of suggestions as to how the course can be made more enjoyable—in my opinion, you should enjoy this seminar (at least to a certain degree).

Tentative Schedule

March 7, 2018:   Course Overview
                  read: syllabus
                           Nathaniel Philbrick, "Foreword to *Moby-Dick*" (2001)
                           Nathaniel Philbrick, from *Why Read* Moby-Dick? (2010)

read *Moby-Dick* for a first time and write your focus essay (see 4.4)

April 11, 2018:   Contexts I: The American Whaling Industry
                  read: Owen Chase, *Narrative of the Whale-Ship* Essex (1821)
                           J. A. Ward, "The Function of the Cetological Chapters in *Moby-Dick*"
                           (1956)
                           M-D, ch. 24–25; 27; 32–33; 48; 55–70; 72–80; 82; 85–88; 92; 94–98;
                           102–105; 116–117
                  sugg.:   Margaret S. Creighton, Rites and Passages: The Experience of American
                           Whaling, 1830 – 1870 (2008)
                           Eric Jay Dolin, Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America (2008)
                           Into the Deep: America, Whaling, and the World (2010)
                           Moby-Dick: Heart of a Whale (2015)
                           Dishonored (2012; Neo-Victorian video game which highlights the signif-
                           icance of the whaling industry in the nineteenth century)

April 18, 2018:   Contexts II: Culture and Politics
                  read: Alan Heimert, "Moby-Dick and American Political Symbolism" (1965)
                           Selby, ch. 4
                           from Susanne Hamscha, The Fiction of America: Performance and the
                           Cultural Imaginary in Literature and Film (2013)
                           Robert S. Levine, "Melville and Americanness: A Problem" (2014)
                  sugg.:   from Donald E. Pease, Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writ-
                           ings in Cultural Context (1987)
                           from William V. Spanos: The Errant Art of Moby-Dick: The Canon, the
                           Cold War, and the Struggle for American Studies (1995)
                           from Wai-chee Dimock, Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of
                           Individualism (1989)

April 25, 2018:   Contexts III: (American) Romanticism
                  read: Selby, ch. 3
                           from Aidan Day, Romanticism (1996)
                           from F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance Art and Expression in
                           the Age of Emerson and Whitman (1941)
                           Jonathan Arac, "A Romantic Book: Moby-Dick and Novel Agency" (1990)

May 2, 2018:   Postmodernism *avant la lettre*?
                  read: from Christopher Stern, Sounding the Whale: Moby-Dick as Epic Novel
                           (1996)
                           from Richard Appignanesi, Chris Garratt, Ziauddin Sarder, and Patrick
                           Curry, Postmodernism: A Graphic Guide (2013)

from Mary Klages, Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed (2006)
M-D, "Etymology"; "Extracts"; ch. 32; 36–40; 42; 99

May 9, 2018: Down the Belly of the **WHALE**
read: Philip Armstrong, "What Animals Mean, in *Moby-Dick*, for Example" (2005)
Elizabeth Schultz, "Humanizing Moby Dick: Redeeming Anthropomorphism" (2011)
M-D, ch. 32; 41–42; 55–57;

May 16, 2018: Open Questions & Unresolved Debates

May 23, 2018: Recent Cinematic Adaptations
read: Thomas Leitch, "Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads" (2008)
watch: *Moby Dick* (2010)
Age of the Dragons (2011)

May 30, 2018: Comics and the Whale
read: Will Eisner, *Moby Dick* (1998)
Adventure Comics #332 (1965)
Moby Dick: The Graphic Novel (2010)

June 6, 2018: Re-Writing the Whale
read: China Miéville, *Railsea* (2012)

June 13, 2018: Lecture by Dr. Steve Rabitsch, "White Cetacean Contours Off the Starboard Bow: *Moby-Dick* in Outer Space"
read: Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, "*The Wrath of Ahab*; or, Herman Melville Meets Gene Roddenberry" (1997)
watch: Star Trek, "The Doomsday Machine" & "Obsession" (both 1967)

June 20, 2018: In the Heart of the Sea
read: Nathaniel Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea* (2000)
watch: *In the Heart of the Sea* (2015)

June 27, 2018: Playing (with) the Whale and Wrap-Up
play: *Moby Dick: The Video Game* (2010)
watch: scenes and sequences from *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* (2013) and *Metal Gear Solid V: Phantom Pain* (2015)