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Class: MWF, 3-4  
225 Wheeler Hall  
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## **R1B, Fall 2014: Obsession**

### **Course Description:**

This course will give you a framework to think (and write) more critically about the things you can't stop thinking about anyway. Throughout the semester, we'll pay attention to the role of monomania as a coping strategy for a world bewilderingly overburdened with significance. We will ask how and why the seemingly random or arbitrary interest—a flower, a particular girl, a sperm whale—consumes the attention of literary characters and readers. We will consider why certain objects, hobbies, and texts tend to cause monomaniacal absorption while others do not. We'll look into ways that obsessions have been theorized: as signs of madness, creative brilliance, or both; as addictions; as fixations, fetishes, and projections; as commodities, collections, and collations; and as “possessions” that own or inhabit us even while we think we control them.

Gradually, we will turn our attention to the question of academic obsession, asking what differentiates research from monomania. As we refine our own investigative projects, we will keep in mind Barbara Tuchman's observation that “research is endlessly seductive, but writing is hard work.” Eventually, we'll use our insights into the nature of obsession to help manage the transition from investigation to application.

### **Required Texts:**

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale*. ISBN# 0393972836  
Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*. ISBN# 9780679723165  
Susan Orlean, *The Orchid Thief*. ISBN# 044900371x  
Edgar Allan Poe, *Great Short Works*. ISBN# 9780060727857

### **Grading Breakdown:**

#### **Written Work: 65%**

**Close reading essay: 10%**

**Topic proposals, research question, annotated bibliography: 15%**

***Moby-Dick* in class exam: 10%**

**Final research paper: 25%**

**Wikipedia edit: 5%**

#### **Attendance, Participation, and Quizzes: 25%**

#### **Presentations: 10%**

*Overall breakdown: roughly 60% devoted to research project, 40% to the readings.*

**Peer Editing:**

You will be assigned to groups of three to four students and will be responsible for giving both written and oral feedback to your group members.

**Attendance Policy:**

The English Department mandates an attendance policy in R&C courses. You are allowed two absences without any penalties. Each subsequent absence (except in the case of medical or family emergencies) will result in the loss of a full letter grade for the attendance and participation portion of your grade. I take attendance at the beginning of class; if you are late it is your responsibility to speak with me at the end and make sure that I mark you as present. If you are absent more than five times over the course of the semester, you will not be able to pass the course.

**Reading Quizzes and Participation:**

I will assign somewhere between 15 to 20 short reading quizzes over the course of the semester (roughly one each week, though distribution will be random). Each quiz will cover only material due the day it is administered. Quizzes will be distributed at the beginning of class and should only take five minutes. If you arrive late or are absent, you will not have the chance to make up a reading quiz. You will get a free pass your two lowest scores on reading quizzes (absences count as a 0). Because active participation in class can also show that you are keeping up with the reading, if you regularly contribute to discussion in particularly exemplary ways, I will raise your reading quiz average slightly.

**Presentations:**

You will be responsible for three short presentations. a five-minute introduction of your research topic, and when you have progressed farther in your research, a 12 minute presentation of some of your most interesting findings. You will also lead class discussion with one or two of your peers once during the semester.

**Office Hour Appointments:**

I will schedule mandatory office hour appointments twice during the semester: once to meet with you to decide on a research topic, and once in November to discuss your progress. You are welcome to drop by as much as you want during office hours, however.

**Late Work:**

Unless we agree to alternative arrangements in advance, late work will be docked a letter grade daily until I receive it.

## **English Department Statement on Plagiarism**

All written work submitted in this course, except for acknowledged quotations, is to be expressed in your own words. It should also be constructed upon a plan of your own devising. The Berkeley Campus Code of Student Conduct defines plagiarism as “the use of intellectual material produced by another person without acknowledging its source” and stipulates that plagiarism includes:

- 1.) Copying from the writings or works of others into one’s academic assignment without attribution, or submitting such work as if it were one’s own;
- 2.) Using the views, opinions, or insights of another without acknowledgment; or
- 3.) Paraphrasing the characteristic or original phraseology, metaphor, or other literary device of another without proper attribution.

Unacknowledged use of the words or ideas of others from any medium (print, digital, or otherwise) is plagiarism. The submission of plagiarized work will, under University rules, render the offending student subject to an F grade for the work in question or for the whole course, and will also make him/her liable for referral to the Student Judicial Affairs Office for further disciplinary action.

## **Course Schedule**

### **Week I: Monomanias**

Friday, August 29: Course Introduction.

### **Week II: Collections**

Monday, September 1: *No Class—Labor Day*

Wednesday, September 3: *The Orchid Thief* p. 1-85.

**Turn in brief introductory survey**

Friday, September 5: *The Orchid Thief* p. 86-152

### **Week III: Thefts**

Monday, September 8: *The Orchid Thief* p. 153-243

**Handout for topic proposals distributed**

Wednesday, September 10: *The Orchid Thief* p. 244-282

Friday, September 12: Close reading film activity—no reading due.

### **Week IV: Doublings and Second Order Obsessions**

Monday, September 15: Close reading film—no reading due.

**Close Reading Paper Prompt Distributed**

**3 Potential Paper Topics Due (1 page)**

Wednesday, September 17: *Adaptation* (film)

Friday, September 19: *Adaptation*, “William Wilson” in Poe Anthology p. 238-261.  
*Student Led Discussion*

### **Week V: Naming**

Monday, September 22: *Moby-Dick* p. 517-532 (Hawthorne and His Mosses);  
Dedication; p. 7-17.

Wednesday, September 24: *Moby-Dick* p. 18-43. Genesis 15-22 (p. 14-24; online).

Friday, September 26: *Moby-Dick* p. 43-54. *The Craft of Research* p. 35-48 (online).  
*Student Led Discussion.*

**Final Topic Proposals Due**

**Week VI: Classifying**

Monday, September 29: *Moby-Dick* p. 54-90.

**Close Reading Paper Due (3 pages)**

**Introductory Topic Presentations Begin (5 minutes)**

**Editing Cohorts Announced**

Wednesday, October 1: Library day (tentative). *The Craft of Research* p. 84-100 (online).

**Handout on Annotated Bibliography**

Friday, October 3: *Moby-Dick* p. 90-125.

*Optional Reading:* “Classifying”, by Michel Foucault (online).

*Student Led Discussion.*

**Week VII: The Hunt**

Monday, October 6: *Moby-Dick* p. 115-136. *Breaking Bad* episode “Fly”.

Wednesday, October 8: *Moby-Dick* p. 136-165.

Friday, October 10: *Moby-Dick* p. 165-189. *Student led discussion.*

**Two Annotated Sources (One *Moby-Dick* essay and one from your research) and Research Question Due.**

**Week IX: Sources and Revisions**

Monday, October 13: *Moby-Dick* p. 190-233.

**Peer response to annotated source and research question due.**

Wednesday, October 15: *Moby-Dick* p. 233-267.

**End of introductory presentations.**

Friday, October 17: *Moby-Dick* p. 267-288; p. 565-574 (on whaleship Essex).

*Student led discussion.*

**Week X: Knowing When to Quit**

Monday, October 20: *Moby-Dick* p. 288-322.

Wednesday, October 22: *Moby-Dick* p. 322-344

Friday, October 24: *Moby-Dick* p. 344-363.  
*Student Led Discussion.*

### **Week XI: Hauntings**

Monday, October 27: *Moby-Dick* p. 363-390.

Wednesday, October 29: *Moby-Dick* p. 390-407.

**Annotated Bibliographies Due (6-8 p.)**

Friday, October 31: Poe stories: tentatively “The Tell-Tale Heart” (384-389), “The Cask of Amontillado” (496-503), “Man of the Crowd” (262-271), “The Imp of the Perverse” (472-478).

*Student Led Discussion*

**Begin student 12 m. presentations (one presentation)**

### **Week XII: Investigations**

Monday, November 3: *Moby-Dick* last day. p. 407-427. Excerpts from Job (online).  
*One Presentation.*

**Study sheet for MD exam distributed.**

**Peer-editing Response to Annotated Bibliography Due.**

Wednesday, November 5: Poe: “The Purloined Letter” (430-451) and “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (272-312).

*One Presentation*

Friday, November 7: Film: *The Conversation* or *Blow-Up*.

*One Presentation*

### **Week XIII: Gendered Obsessions**

Monday, November 10:

**Moby-Dick exam in class.**

Wednesday, November 12: *Start Lolita*—p. 3-15. *The Yellow Wallpaper* (online).  
*One presentation.*

Friday, November 14: *Lolita* Ch. p. 15-40. Poe, “Annabel Lee” (88-92)

**Outline Due.**

*Two presentations.*

**Week XIV: Fetishes**

Monday, November 17: *Lolita* Ch. p. 40-79. Freud on fetish (online).  
*One presentation.*

Wednesday, November 19: *Lolita* p. 79-109.  
*One presentation.*

Friday, November 21: *Lolita* p. 109-142 .  
*Two presentations.*

**Week XV: Conundrums**

Monday, November 24: *Lolita* p. 142-202.  
*One presentation.*

Wednesday, November 26: *Lolita* p. 202-222 . *The Craft of Research* p. 232-248 (online).  
*One presentation.*

**Partial Rough Draft Due.**

Friday, November 28: *No Class—Thanksgiving*

**Week XVI Controversies and Conclusions**

Monday, December 1: *Lolita*— p. 222-309.  
*One presentation.*

**Peer response to partial rough draft due.**

Wednesday, December 3: *Lolita* (*Kubrick film*). Poe, “Ulalume” (78-80).  
*One presentation.*

Friday, December 5: Wrap up.  
*Two presentations.*

**Wikipedia edit due.****Week XVII: Reading/Review/Recitation (No Class)**

Wednesday, December 10: **Final papers due.**