

"It is an affront to treat falsehood with complacency." Thomas Paine

CAMPUS REPORT

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ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

By Spencer Irvine

Environmentalists are now going back to find environmental messages written in classics published long before the first Earth Day was commemorated.

A panel at the Modern Language Association's annual meeting in Chicago on environmental sustainability and its role in English literature featured Foothill College's Scott Lankford, Geoffrey Martin of the Harry S. Truman College, Moravian College professor Theresa Dougal and University of New Hampshire graduate student Molly Hall.

Lankford called the Chicago River "a nexus for a thousand years" for environmentalists. He brought up a slideshow presentation where he outlined a timeline of the river's discovery and settlement by Europeans. Just like the Chicago River, Lankford believed that two-year colleges "have been an environmental nexus as well." He felt that he was "the Rip Van Winkle of the sustainability group" at the MLA and mentioned that twenty years ago, this was an issue at the MLA's annual convention. He also saw professors as "a lighthouse of social change." The MLA has to rally around the environmental sustainability issue to push it forward, he argued. Foothill College in California, he pointed out, has its own "Center for a Sustainable Future," which aims to:

- "Foster ecoliteracy across the curriculum;"
- "Revitalize and re-envision general education through sustainability education;"
- "Cultivate sustainable values and practices on campus;" and
- "Collaborate with the greater community toward a sustainable future."

He said, "We've worked hard to partner with other institutions" and explained that Foothill worked "on reducing the energy usage in our district" as a part of their million kilowatt challenge. Lankford concluded, "We use this leverage that we have... as the lighthouse of American education...to move the game forward." He wanted the audience "to wake up with more leadership from MLA to address this crisis."

Martin claimed that the "metacognitive" work at community colleges remains important as the community college is now in a position to change education. He admitted that employability needs to be a bigger part of a college education

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Director's Corner

By Malcolm A. Kline, Executive Director of AIA



March 2014

Dear Reader,

As you can see, we've devoted most of this issue to the Modern Language Association (MLA)'s annual convention. With about 7,000 members, this is probably the largest association of pedagogues in the world. Indeed, most English departments at American universities are represented at the annual meeting. In fact, many professors are hired there.

In 800 panels stretched out over 4 days, thousands of professors showcase existing courses and provide coming attractions of new classes. We try to make as many of these as we can. In three days at the Chicago convention this year, we went to about 30 panels featuring more than 100 professors from across the country.

Out of this, we wrote 35 stories featured on our website. This issue showcases some of these, which we have supplemented with new information. For example, I've now written about *Moby Dick* so much that it seems that I've spent as much time with that damned whale as Captain Ahab did.

You can see what academics are doing to this classic on page 5 of this newsletter. Yet, if the panels we attended seem off the charts, you should see the ones we missed. One of these latter meetings was entitled, "Interracial, Cross-Species, Cross-Gender: The Political Value of Queer Coalition."

English professors, it seems, want to teach anything but English. Hence the plethora of studies explored at the Modern Language Association's (MLA) annual convention in Chicago this January: gender studies, disability studies and aging studies.

MLA members are putting out a new journal focused on the latter. Really, if they wanted to study the deterioration that comes with advanced age, the 127-year-old MLA might want to do a self-appraisal. Reacting to recent media coverage of aging, E. Ann Kaplan asked the panel, "Was the concern over age a smokescreen for what humans, largely white corporations, are doing to the planet?"

Kaplan is a Distinguished Professor of English and Cultural Analysis and Theory at Stony Brook University. At the MLA, she told the crowd that "We need alternative cultural lenses to view climate change." One wonders if she noticed the below average, and below-freezing, temperatures on Long Island, where SBU is, when she got home.

All the best,

Mal Kline,
Executive Director

Voodoo Anyone?

How to Understand Economics Without Really Trying



by
Christopher T. Warden

Forewords by M. Stanton Evans & Malcolm A. Kline



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and the possibility of enabling “students to move across disciplinary boundaries” should be considered more than ever. He felt there was too much “segregation between the sciences and the humanities” within the learning community and wanted to emphasize “relationship between mind, body and spirit.”

He promoted his definition of a learning community, complete with environmental sustainability as a core part, because it “speaks directly to...current issues... that benefit our student body.” One of his courses, “Food Matters,” traced the food history of Chicago, as a way to teach students about those boundaries and distinctions.” He asked, “What is the value of looking at food from a cultural versus a scientific perspective?” Martin said that his method of teaching was influenced by something called “disciplinary literacy,” where “necessary political access needs to accompany” change and reform. His “hardly radical revisionary education” fosters “a cooperative learning environment,” but to teach this learning curriculum is “a dance of virtue [and] value.” Martin actually complained that his courses are prerequisite classes at his college, where students would find out about it after-the-fact. He wanted to be selected by popular demand

He said, “We can’t run with the narrow ideology of what sustainability is,” and explained that it is up to the professors to “connect those emerging fields to scholarship and learning” in order to eventually give students “political power in debates.” He sought out to “debunk the myth that sustainability is bourgeoisie and whiteness,” although Martin confessed that there is an “overrepresentation of whiteness and portrayals of environment.” He called this the “reality of environmental non-white engagement with the world” and said that “students need to see themselves and their communities as stakeholders in these debates” and “need to be pushed” to that knowledge.

Theresa Dougal declared that she has tried to “integrate my longstanding environmentalism into my teaching,” even when it proves difficult. She proudly “emphasizes the admirable canon of environmental literature” in her classroom, but was disappointed about the “deficiency” of “ecologically literate” students. Dougal provided

anecdotes about her environmentally-conscious students becoming movers and shakers in the environmental industry, without citing statistics. She wondered aloud that “if what Al Gore said was true”, then why are the “sustainable humanities” failing to gain traction?

She pushed her students to “articulate difficult dilemmas for themselves,” such as “where to live, how to transport oneself, what energy to consume, whether to become vegetarian or vegan” in her courses and said she provides this education because “they need to think differently about life.” Dougal said she “recognizes the problematic nuances of the term environmental sustainability” because it is technocratic in nature, but proclaimed victory when many of her students felt “the environment is our most pressing moral concern.”

Molly Hall, a graduate student at the University of New Hampshire, told the audience that “eco-criticism” is an important field that should not be forgotten or ignored in today’s sustainability education debate. She implored attendees and the panel to “teach at the intersection” of subjects like gender studies and environmental sustainability to help teach future generations. She criticized a Wall Street Journal opinion editorial that mocked humanities majors hypothetically working as Starbucks baristas, citing a New York Times article as a source for her rebuttal. She championed the “economic viability of such degrees in today’s economic environment” and said that a humanities education contains “everything we value.” The two major crises facing Americans, Hall said, are the “environmental crises and the economic crises”. She pushed for “teaching sustainability in our literature classes” in order to focus on “collaboration between the sciences and the humanities” in the near future. “Eco-criticism offers us a way to bring ecological pedagogy” until the world becomes environmentally sustainable.

Professors and scientists must find “more environmental ways for manufacturing” because, she said, “Scientists can develop and research all they want, but without engaging” others, it will fail. Hall ended her remarks and concluded that there is “a way to remain relevant in an academic culture that insists on our worthlessness.”

If Molly is looking for a job, and most graduate students who come to the annual MLA meetings are, she made a great pitch, given the make-up of academia. Some skeptics might wonder what place environmental activism has in the study of literature.

By the way, “In a joint press conference NOAA [the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] and NASA have just released data for the global surface temperature for 2013,” David Whitehouse of The Global Warming Policy Foundation stated on January 21, 2014. “In summary they both show that the ‘pause’ in global surface temperature that began in 1997, according to some estimates, continues. Statistically speaking there has been no trend in global temperatures over this period. Given that the IPCC estimates that the average decadal increase in global surface temperature is 0.2 deg C, the world is now 0.3 deg C cooler than it should have been.”

Greening Dickens @ MLA

By Malcolm A. Kline

Apparently Rachel Carson no longer provides enough inspiration to environmentalists. They are now going back to find environmental messages in classics written long before the first Earth Day was commemorated.

In Charles Dickens’ novels, “Cities are ugly and dangerous and the country is pastoral and idyllic,” Troy Boone of the University of Pittsburgh pointed out in a panel on Dickens and the Environment at the Modern Language Association’s (MLA) annual meeting in Chicago this year. “Dickens himself asks us to think of him as a social



novelist,” Boone noted.

Sophie Christman-Lavin of the State University of New York at Stony Brook offered an “ecofeminist reading of *Hard Times*.” The problem Christman-Lavin faced, that she did not admit to, is that there are scant ecological or feminist references in Dickens’ novels.

Perhaps this is why she spent most of her time quoting Rob Nixon and “James Hansen, the world’s pre-eminent climate scientist.” I swear, every time Hansen’s name was uttered at the MLA (and I counted three such references in as many panels), the mention was followed by a moment of silence.

Nixon is the Rachel Carson & Elizabeth Ritzmann Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and a global warming alarmist. Last year, The New York Times reported that “Hansen, the climate scientist who issued the clearest warning of the 20th century about the dangers of global warming, will retire from NASA this week, giving himself more freedom to pursue political and legal efforts to limit greenhouse gases.”

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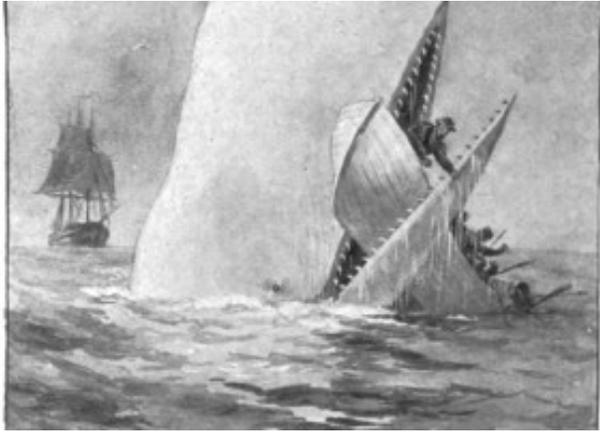


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Moby Dick @ The MLA

By Malcolm A. Kline



If the Modern Language Association (MLA) had done to Moby Dick what they did to Herman Melville, Captain Ahab might have kept his leg.

While we mere mortal readers might see Melville's novel as the greatest fish story since Jonah and the Whale, speakers at the MLA convention in Chicago found symbolism that doesn't exactly jump off the page of the original text. Of Ahab, Alexander Erik Larsen of Notre Dame said, "Melville must construct a robust character not castrated and Oedipalized."

"What investment do we have in a Cold War interpretation of Ahab?" Meredith Farmer of Wake Forest asked. For her part, Farmer may be closer to the author's original intent with her study of weather patterns of the time period portrayed in *Moby Dick*.

"I do not know where I can find a better place than just here, to make mention of one or two other things, which to me seem important, as in printed form establishing in all respects the reasonableness of the whole story of the White Whale, more especially the catastrophe," Melville himself wrote in *Moby Dick*. "For this is one of those disheartening instances where truth requires full as much bolstering as error."

"So ignorant are most landsmen of some of the plainest and most palpable wonders of the world, that without some hints touching the plain facts, historical and otherwise, of the fishery, they might scout at Moby Dick

as a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory." One wonders what Melville himself might have thought of the MLA's attention to his opus.

Indeed, Melville provided broad hints as to what he was driving at. Believe it or not, he spends most of the 569 pages of a novel about men in a large boat chasing a big fish discussing, well, boats and fish.

Thus, we have chapters in *Moby Dick* entitled:

- "The Lee Shore;"
- "Cetology (the study of whales);"
- "The Specksnyder (an officer on the ship);"
- "The Mast-Head;"
- "The Whiteness of The Whale;"
- "Of the Monstrous Pictures of Whales;"
- "Of the Less Erroneous Pictures of Whales and the True Pictures of Whaling Scenes;"
- "Of Whales in Paint; in Teeth; in Wood; in Sheet-Iron; in Stone; in Mountains; in Stars;"
- "Squid;"
- "The Line;"
- "The Dart;"
- "The Whale as a Dish;"
- "The Right Whale's Head-Contrasted View;"
- "The Honor and Glory of Whaling;" and
- "Jonah Historically Regarded."

Yet and still, the search for Moby Dick metaphors is not confined to MLA panels. "And it's easier to teach 'Meaning, Sense, Clarity' than old literature and intellectual history," Eric Bennett wrote in an article which appeared in *The Chronicle Review* on Valentine's Day. "Pyramid building fosters the hope that we can arrive at the powerful symbol of a white whale, not by thinking it up ahead of time, but

by mastering the sensory details of whaling.”

Bennett is an assistant English professor at Providence College. “The thing to lament is not only that we have a bunch of novels about harpoons and dinghies (or suburbs or bad marriages or road trips or offices in New York),” Bennett wrote. “The thing to lament is also the dead end of isolation that comes from describing the dead end of isolation—and from using vibrant literary communities to foster this phenomenon.”

If one is actually looking for context in *Moby*, it is hard to ignore, as the MLA panel did, the numerous religious

references Melville provides. For example, he devotes a good ten pages to quoting Father Mapple’s sermon in its entirety. “In this world, shipmates, sin that pays its way can travel freely and without a passport; whereas Virtue, if a pauper, is stopped at all frontiers,” the seaman-turned preacher told his congregation.

Orson Welles re-created the sermon in director John Huston’s film version of *Moby*. Reportedly aided by several drinks, he pulled it off in one take. One wonders how many belts he would have required to sit through an MLA convention.

SQUEAKY CHALK

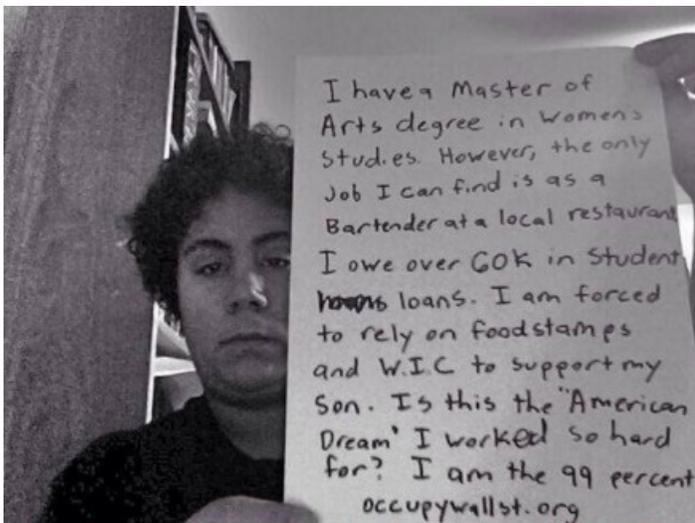
by Deborah Lambert



WHY NOT TO MAJOR IN WOMENS’ STUDIES

The College Fix recently highlighted one more reason why it’s not a good idea to major in Womens’ Studies – and as they say, a picture – or in this case a poster – is worth a thousand words.

(h/t: [Revolutionary Communications](#))



And you had intended on doing WHAT with that M.A. in Women's Studies?

Please "like" Revolutionary Communications

CENSORS ON CAMPUS

Considering the mindset in the hallowed halls of higher learning these days, it’s not surprising that nearly “60 percent of campuses in 2013 substantially abridged the First Amendment Rights of faculty and students,” according to the Wall Street Journal.

In a recent report on more than 400 schools, The Foundation for Individual Rights (FIRE) found “250 speech codes that were unconstitutional.” Not surprisingly, these policies are mandated by schools where speech is far from free, and “any controversial viewpoint is potentially punishable.”

Two schools that “earned the dubious honor” of receiving FIRE’s 2013 “Speech Codes of the Year” awards are Alabama’s Troy University and Virginia State University.

Troy’s code “prohibits any comments or conduct consisting of words or actions that are unwelcome or offensive to a person in relation to sex, race, age, religion, national origin, color, marital status, pregnancy, or disability or veteran’s status.”

This policy is even more unnerving when one considers that the “definition of offensiveness hinges solely on an accuser’s subjective feeling, although the First Amendment doesn’t distinguish between offensive and inoffensive speech.”

SEX, HEALTH AND AIDS



Students at the University of Arizona (UA) recently gathered to plan a school-wide “Condom Olympics” in conjunction with their three-credit “Sex, Health, and AIDS” class, according to the student newspaper, *The Daily Wildcat*.

In addition to “athletic events such as a condom-wrapped egg toss,” *The Wildcat* reported that “students can also see and make condom art and join a condom scavenger hunt.”

Professor William Simmons, who teaches the class, has noted that he prefers “action learning assignments” instead of term papers, adding that “hopefully this will get students comfortable knowing what condoms are.”

“Sex, Health, and AIDS” is a three-credit undergraduate course which “sets out to explore this social and disease phenomenon from a number of perspectives,” according to the description on the official course listing website. The events were part of the school’s SexTalk Week Resource Fair, which the school recently hosted, according to Campus Reform.

The event flyer stated that a “special appearance by ‘Mr. Condom,’ the giant walking condom, will occur throughout the fair.”

While some schools limit their students’ expression of free speech to miniscule squares of space on campus that must be reserved months in advance, other schools make it difficult to impossible for students to even locate the free-speech rules.

At Texas Tech, the “Acceptable Use Policy” for IT systems such as email is “password protected.” And at Connecticut College, students who would like to know how the school handles “bias incidents” discover that the only explanation lies buried in a section of the Student Handbook called “Bias Incident Protocol,” which is only handed out once a year during enrollment.



ATTEND WHITE PRIVILEGE CONFAB FOR CREDIT

Students at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, will not only be able to attend this year’s white privilege conference, they’ll get credit for doing so. The event, which will be held in Madison, Wisconsin this month, will reportedly attract nearly 2,000 attendees, many of them students as young as middle school. In order to receive academic credit for attending the confab, high school students have been asked to read *Privilege, Power and Difference* by Allan G. Johnson and *Understanding White Privilege* by Frances Kendall.

While the conference is self-described as an “event that examines challenging concepts of privilege and oppression” and “is not designed to attack, degrade, or beat up on white folks,” *National Review* reported that “the 2011 conference in Colorado Springs was meant to support the ongoing work to dismantle this system of white supremacy, white privilege, and oppression.”

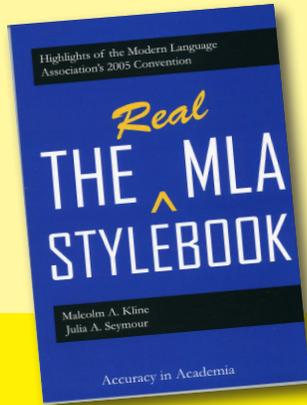
“Whites need to acknowledge and work through the negative historical implications of ‘whiteness’ and create for ourselves a transformed identity as white people committed to equity and social change,” states a scholar on the conference website.



The REAL MLA Stylebook

To show what college and university English Departments are really teaching, Accuracy in Academia compiled *The REAL MLA Stylebook*, filled with quotes from a recent convention of the Modern Language Association (MLA) where thousands of English professors gather to push their politically correct, radical agenda. Outsiders who attend this event expecting to learn more about Chaucer, Milton and Shakespeare are in for a rude awakening when they discover that panels are more likely to focus on topics such as “Marxism and Globalization;” “What’s the Matter with Whiteness;” and “Queering Faulkner.”

This book is must-reading for anyone interested in learning more about the mindset of faculty members who are tasked with teaching the great works of the English language to our nation’s students.



You can order your copy of *The REAL MLA Stylebook* using the coupon below or order online at the AIM store: www.ShopAIM.org

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