Dr. Alaimo

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Fall 2020

ENG 469 (16907) + 569 (16908): Literature and the Environment: Ocean Life in Literature and Film

Undergraduate/469 students: Tuesdays will be asynchronous; Thursdays we will meet on Zoom, 10:15-11:45.

[Graduate/569 students: Thursdays will be asynchronous; Tuesdays we will meet on Zoom]

Course Description
How can literature, film, science, or environmentalism represent the unfathomably vast and varied global ocean and what are the effects of these representations? How do we, as terrestrial humans, imagine, understand, or feel affinities with or sympathy for creatures of the sea, which may seem so remote and bizarre as to be alien? Although environmental studies has focused on terrestrial environments, the concern for ocean ecologies and the interest in ocean life—from jellyfish to octopus to whales—is rapidly expanding. This class will explore ocean science and aesthetics in literature, film, and theory, from monstrous figures in classical mythology, through Jules Verne’s 19th-century novel, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, to the weird surrealist short films of Jean Painlevé, to Nnedi Okorofor’s Afrofuturist SF novel *Lagoon* and Rita Indiana’s queer Caribbean SF novel *Tentacle*, to contemporary poetry, to films about ocean science and encounters with ocean life. We will discuss the environmental implications of how marine species are depicted—for example, as monstrous, alien, intimate, and dazzlingly beautiful—as well as the effects of futuristic and sometimes apocalyptic narratives. We will also discuss the genre of SF (science fiction/speculative fiction), its importance for ocean literature and environmentalism, and the ethical implications of different epistemologies, concepts, and aesthetics. As the science, literature, and film about the
ocean are always immersed in cultural dynamics, the class will grapple with gender, race, sexuality, and colonialism. (Please note that the readings and films are not censored and at least one is sexually explicit. Please consider dropping the course if you do not want to read anything explicit or controversial.)

Remote course structure
This remote class will be \( \frac{1}{2} \) asynchronous and \( \frac{1}{2} \) synchronous. The course is divided into three parts, each with the same structure: the first week with readings or films but no written assignments; the second with reading responses, the third with an essay exam. Each week is structured like this: a lecture will be posted at the beginning of the week; on Tuesdays the 569 students will meet from 10:15-11:45 and on Thursdays the 469 students will meet from 10:15-11:45. (On week 8 there will be a combined zoom class on Thursday and no class Tuesday; on week 9 there will be a combined zoom class on Tuesday and no class Thursday.)

Required Books
- Nnedi Okorofor, *Lagoon*
- Rita Indiana, *Tentacle*
- Also required for 569/Graduate Students: Melody Jue, *Wild Blue Media*, (chapters may be accessible via Project Muse, from the U of O library)

Access to the following films
- *Mission Blue* (Netflix)
- *My Octopus Teacher* (Netflix)
- *Blue Planet II*—Episode 2: “The Deep” ($2.99 for one episode on Amazon)
- Other short films and videos available for free online.
  [I apologize for requiring two Netflix films, but I’m hoping you or a family member or friend may already have Netflix. Ordinarily we could schedule an in person, lively, screening of films.]

Virtual Office Hours
Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:00-3:00, and by appointment. Via Zoom or by phone. Email me for appointment, zoom info, or phone number. (I may have exams or meetings or conferences during some of those days.) I’m happy to talk with you on the phone or meet with you on Zoom.

Contacting the Professor
Email: Feel free to email me at any time! The Canvas email is clunky and often delayed, so it is best to use my regular, direct email: salaimo@uoregon.edu. Please address me as “Dr. Alaimo” or “Professor Alaimo” --never as “Mrs.” If you have general questions about the class, please post in Canvas, Discussions, “Questions about Procedures.”

Learning Objectives
1. Develop an understanding of significant questions, topics, theories, frameworks, and concepts pertaining to the blue humanities, environmental studies, and science studies.
2. Develop your own interpretations of the literature and film in the course, as they pertain to the topics of the class. Develop your ability to analyze and interpret the literature and film in terms of genre, narrative, form, perspective, mise en scene, style.
3. Develop your ability to analyze the social and political forces that shape, provoke, and inspire the literature and film, and consider environmental concerns through multiple lenses, cultures, and perspectives.
4. Improve your reading, critical thinking, and writing skills through the written assignments, and your public speaking skills through the discussions.

Course Assessment: 469/569
- Reading Comments and Responses: Post reading comments and respond to 3 of your classmate’s comments, during the second week in each of the three parts of the course: Weeks Two, Five, and Eight, 10% each, 30% total.
- Three exams: Weeks Three, Six, and Finals Week. 20% each, 60% total.
- Participation in synchronous Zoom discussions: 10%

Graduate students in 569 will be expected to read, discuss, and write about the additional scholarly and theoretical texts, listed in the syllabus like this: [569: . . .]. (Undergraduates in 469—especially those interested in graduate school—are welcome to read some of those texts, of course, but they will not be required.) The expectations regarding quality and length of written work and quality and quantity of participation in zoom discussions will also be higher for graduate/569 students.

Grading Scheme
The final grade will be weighted according to the percentages listed above. The class uses a standard, 100 point grading scale, in which, A+ is 97-100, A is 94-96, A- is 90-93, B+ is 87-89, B is 84-86, B- is 80-83; etc., with Cs as 70s, Ds, as 60s, and F as 59 and below. Grading will be done a 100 point scale.

Incomplete Policy
If you find yourself in an emergency that keeps you from completing the work in the course, please consult with an official U of O Advisor about your situation and then contact your instructors. U of O has a special policy for firefighters (see below).

Assignments
469: Reading (and Watching) Comments and Responses: Due Tuesdays Weeks Two, Five, and Eight.

Please post a 300-350 word commentary on the readings and films from the first two weeks of that part of the course, by Tuesday at 10pm. Then write a short response (3-5 sentences) to 3 people’s comments by Wednesday at midnight. (It is really important
that you post your comments by Tuesday night so everyone will have time to respond on Wednesday.)

For the commentary, analyze, interpret, compare, contrast, and pose questions about the readings and films from the first two weeks of that section of the course. Make connections between specific aspects of the literature and film and content from the lectures and other works in the class. Conclude with discussion questions, that we may discuss in the zoom class. The lectures should help you identify some key questions and themes that you could develop.

When responding to your classmate’s commentaries, start by identifying specific positive aspects of what your classmate has written (what new perspectives, interpretations, analyses or arguments does their comment offer, what does it do that is valuable?), then politely point out something in their comment that you don’t understand or give a contrasting example or another possible way of thinking about the topic.

[569: Graduate students: Reading (and Watching) Comments and Responses: Due Mondays, by 9:00 AM, Responses due Tuesdays by 8am. Weeks Two, Five, and Eight. 500 word commentary + three 7-10 sentence responses to your colleagues’ posts, which Canvas will assign. It’s important that graduate students engage with the extra scholarly/theoretical readings in their responses. You can: 1) trace through lines and pivots across two or more of the theoretical works that we’ve read to that point; 2) engage more deeply with one of the scholarly readings; 3) apply a concept, question, approach, or argument from one of the scholarly readings to a work of literature or film; 4) focus on one of the works of literature or film, analyzing and interpreting in a way that is informed by some of the theory and scholarship. Please conclude your response with a discussion question that we will take up in class on Tuesday.

When responding to your classmate’s commentaries, start by identifying specific positive aspects of what your classmate has written (what new perspectives, interpretations, analyses or arguments does their comment offer, what does it do that is valuable?), then politely point out something in their comment that you don’t understand or give a contrasting example or another possible way of thinking about the topic. Bring other scholarship or theory that we’ve read to bear on their argument or point out examples from literature or film that provide comparisons. Conclude with a discussion question for the class, something for further exploration.

Three Exams: The exams may contain some definition or other short answer questions, but most (or maybe all) of the points will be from essays that ask you to compare and contrast the readings and films as you argue for your own thesis about the question. The exams will be posted by Fridays and due on Sundays, giving you ample time to write. These will be more like take home essays, rather than timed, in class exams. I hope this will minimize your stress level and provide you with a positive experience of engaging with the thought provoking and significant texts and media in the course.
**Participation:** The participation grade will be based mainly on your active contribution to the synchronous portion of the class, on Zoom. Please bring questions, ideas, connections, comparisons, analyses, and speculations to our zoom class. I will frequently ask you to come up with discussion questions, especially for breakout groups. It is in your best interest to attend these sessions, since actively participating in the synchronous portions of the class will help you to engage with the material and do well on assignments and exams. Due to concerns about student privacy, and the way in which being recorded can hamper participation, the Zoom classes will not be recorded. I look forward to seeing all of you in real time, if not real space!

**Attendance:** 469: Given the strange circumstances we find ourselves in, I won’t be taking or requiring attendance for 469. But beware that participation will be graded, so it is important that you come and participate in the zoom sessions. [569:English department rules require that graduate students miss no more than one class.]

Please treat your classmates with respect and consideration in all your written and spoken conversations. This is a difficult time for everyone and the political divisions in this country are extreme and volatile. Nonetheless, university classrooms should be models of respectful engagement, even when there is disagreement. And in a class that includes topics of race, gender, sexuality, and environmentalism—we can expect much disagreement! Ideally, we will create a learning community where we think with and learn from every person in the class, where we can interpret, analyze, evaluate and question in a curious, open, calm, and accepting manner. Please help make this a positive and illuminating class for everyone!

(At the far negative extreme, it must be said that personal insults, disrespectful or disruptive behavior will absolutely not be tolerated and may result in an F grade for participation or worse.)

**Resources and Help:** The combination of the global covid19 pandemic, the wildfires, and enduring social, economic, and environmental concerns has made this an unprecedented and difficult time. You may be recovering from illness, grieving from the loss of family or friends, or grieving the loss of your home or the devastation of your town or region. Your family may be suffering from financial troubles. You may be anxious or depressed about the state of the world. And you may find that it is harder to concentrate on your academic work given these events, especially since all of us are expending cognitive and emotional energy, as well as time, in processing all that has happened.

- Please be kind and compassionate toward yourself and try to take care of your physical and mental health, whether that means exercise, yoga, meditation, the support of family and friends, or professional support.
- U of O offers mental health resources and self care resources: [https://counseling.uoregon.edu](https://counseling.uoregon.edu).
- U of O also offers wildfire resources and support for those affected by, or actively fighting the fires. [https://www.uoregon.edu/wildfire](https://www.uoregon.edu/wildfire) Please notify the Provost if you will be absent because you are fighting fires: [courseconcern@uoregon.edu](mailto:courseconcern@uoregon.edu). The Provost’s office will notify instructors. Various
policies are in place to help. (And my sincere thanks to you, if you have been bravely fighting the fires!)

- If anyone needs help with food, transportation, finances, healthcare, and more, see: [https://blogs.uoregon.edu/basicneeds/](https://blogs.uoregon.edu/basicneeds/)
- Help with technology: [https://service.uoregon.edu/TDClient/2030/Portal/Home/?ID=bf51cccd-fd92-4083-b8a3-b47d8a0ed6b6c](https://service.uoregon.edu/TDClient/2030/Portal/Home/?ID=bf51cccd-fd92-4083-b8a3-b47d8a0ed6b6c)

**Official University of Oregon Policies [verbatim from U of O administration]**

**Accessible Education** - (see [https://aec.uoregon.edu/best-practices-faculty](https://aec.uoregon.edu/best-practices-faculty) for more information) “The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 360 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoeac@uoregon.edu.” “Please let me know within the first two weeks of the term if you need assistance to fully participate in the course. Participation includes access to lectures, web-based information, in-class activities, and exams. The Accessible Education Center ([http://aec.uoregon.edu/](http://aec.uoregon.edu/)) works with students to provide an instructor notification letter that outlines accommodations and adjustments to class design that will enable better access. Contact the Accessible Education Center for assistance with access or disability-related questions or concerns.”

**Academic Misconduct** - (See [https://dos.uoregon.edu/academic-misconduct](https://dos.uoregon.edu/academic-misconduct) for more information) “The University Student Conduct Code (available at conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students’ obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at [https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism](https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism).”

**Inclement Weather** “It is generally expected that class will meet unless the University is officially closed for inclement weather. If it becomes necessary to cancel class while the University remains open, this will be announced on Canvas and by email. Updates on inclement weather and closure are also communicated in other ways described here: [https://hr.uoregon.edu/about-hr/campus-notifications/inclement-weather/inclement-weather-immediate-updates](https://hr.uoregon.edu/about-hr/campus-notifications/inclement-weather/inclement-weather-immediate-updates)”
**Academic Disruption due to Campus Emergency:** “In the event of a campus emergency that disrupts academic activities, course requirements, deadlines, and grading percentages are subject to change. Information about changes in this course will be communicated as soon as possible by email, and on Canvas. If we are not able to meet face-to-face, students should immediately log onto Canvas and read any announcements and/or access alternative assignments. Students are also encouraged to continue the readings and other assignments as outlined in this syllabus or subsequent syllabi.”

**Reporting Obligations:** “I am a [designated reporter/student-directed employee]. For information about my reporting obligations as an employee, please see Employee Reporting Obligations on the Office of Investigations and Civil Rights Compliance (OICRC) website. Students experiencing any form of prohibited discrimination or harassment, including sex or gender-based violence, may seek information and resources at safe.uoregon.edu, respect.uoregon.edu, or investigations.uoregon.edu or contact the non-confidential Title IX office/Office of Civil Rights Compliance (541-346-3123), or Dean of Students offices (541-346-3216), or call the 24-7 hotline 341-346-SAFE for help. I am also a mandatory reporter of child abuse. Please find more information at Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect.”

**UO COVID-19 Regulations & Prevention:** (see https://coronavirus.uoregon.edu/regulations and https://coronavirus.uoregon.edu/prevention#sick-stay-home for more information)"The University of Oregon (UO), in accordance with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, Oregon Health Authority, and Lane County Public Health requires faculty, staff, students, visitors, and vendors across all UO locations to use face coverings, which include masks (note: masks with exhaust valves are discouraged), cloth face coverings, or face shields, when in UO owned, leased, or controlled buildings. This includes classrooms. Please correctly wear a suitable face covering during class. Students unable to wear face coverings can work with the Accessible Education Center to find a reasonable accommodation. Students refusing to wear a face covering will be asked to leave the class.

- Students should maintain 6 ft. distance from others at all times. Classrooms tables and seats have been marked to accommodate this distance. Please do not move any furniture in the classroom or sit in areas that have been blocked off or otherwise marked as unavailable.

- Students should obtain wipes available outside of classrooms before they enter class and use them to wipe down the table and seat they will use.

- Please conduct regular symptom self-checks (https://coronavirus.uoregon.edu/regulations#self-check-procedures) and do not come to class if you are experiencing symptoms. I will work with you to make sure you can stay caught up with the class.
Use this self-check log: https://coronavirus.uoregon.edu/sites/coronavirus1.uoregon.edu/files/2020-08/self-monitoring.pdf to track your symptoms.

In addition, familiarize yourself with these exposure scenarios and guidelines to determine if you should come to class after suspected exposure to someone with the virus. https://coronavirus.uoregon.edu/covid-exposure"

**Mental Health and Wellness** "Life at college can be very complicated. Students often feel overwhelmed or stressed, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationships, or just need help navigating challenges in their life. If you're facing such challenges, you don't need to handle them on your own--there's help and support on campus. As your instructor if I believe you may need additional support, I will express my concerns, the reasons for them, and refer you to resources that might be helpful. It is not my intention to know the details of what might be bothering you, but simply to let you know I care and that help is available. Getting help is a courageous thing to do—for yourself and those you care about. University Health Services help students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. If you need general resources on coping with stress or want to talk with another student who has been in the same place as you, visit the Duck Nest (located in the EMU on the ground floor) and get help from one of the specially trained Peer Wellness Advocates. Find out more at health.uoregon.edu/ducknest. University Counseling Services (UCS) has a team of dedicated staff members to support you with your concerns, many of whom can provide identity-based support. All clinical services are free and confidential. Find out more at counseling.uoregon.edu or by calling 541-346-3227 (anytime UCS is closed, the After-Hours Support and Crisis Line is available by calling this same number)."

**Basic Needs:** Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students Office (346-3216, 164 Oregon Hall) for support. This UO webpage includes resources for food, housing, healthcare, childcare, transportation, technology, finances, and legal support: https://blogs.uoregon.edu/basicneeds/food/
Class Schedule

Please note: Film titles are underlined and book titles are italicized. Please note that the books, the web links, and other things are listed here in the syllabus but may not appear in the “Module” on Canvas. The Canvas “Modules” only contain the readings that are available there, along with assignments. This syllabus is your best guide to all the texts of the course.

Part I: Ocean Exploration in Literature, Film, and Science

Week One. September 29 & October 31
Listen/Read: Lecture
Check out: Ocean Exploration Timeline: http://www.seasky.org/ocean-exploration/ocean-timeline-5000bc-1bc.html; and History of Oceanography: https://divediscover.whoi.edu/history-of-oceanography/
Read: excerpts from The Odyssey, trans. Emily Wilson, Book 5, “From the Goddess to the Storm,” and Book 12, “Difficult Choices.”
Read: Alice Te Punga Somerville, “Where Oceans Come From”
Watch: Mission Blue (Netflix)
[569: Melody Jue, Preface and Introduction to Wild Blue Media]
[569: Tuesday: Discuss readings on Zoom]
469: Thursday: Discuss readings on Zoom.

Week Two. October 6 & 8
Listen/Read: Lecture
Read: Jules Verne, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea
[569: Richard Maxwell, “Unnumbered Polypi”]
[569: Tuesday: Discuss readings on Zoom]
469: Thursday: Discuss readings on Zoom.

569: Reading Comments and Responses Due Mondays, by 9:00 AM, Responses due Tuesdays by 8am.

469: Reading Comments Due Tuesday by 10pm. Responses due Wednesday by midnight.

Week Three. October 13 & 15
Listen/Watch: Lecture
Read: Excerpts from Melville, Moby Dick
Watch: Jean Painlevé, excerpts at his archives (Click on “Work” then “Films” in upper left): https://jeanpainleve.org/films: “The Octopus,” “The Sea Urchins,” “Hyas and
Stenorynchus,” “The Sea Horse,” “Sea Urchins,” “How Some Jellyfish Are Born,” “The Love Life of the Octopus,” “Acera or the Witches’ Dance.”
[569: Alaimo, “Your Shell on Acid” from Exposed]
[569: Tuesday: Discuss readings on Zoom]
469: Thursday: Discuss readings on Zoom.

First Exam: Due Sunday

Part II: Alien Seas

Week Four. October 20 & 22
Listen/Watch: Lecture
Watch: Blue Planet II—Episode 2: “The Deep” (Amazon)
[569: Stefan Helmreich, “Moorings” and “Introduction” from Alien Ocean: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas]
[569: Tuesday: Discuss readings on Zoom]
469: Thursday: Discuss readings on Zoom.

Week Five. October 27 & 29
Listen/Watch: Lecture
Read: Nnedi Okorofor, Lagoon, Act I +II

[569: Reading Comments and Responses Due Monday, by 9:00 AM, Responses due Tuesdays by 8am.]

469: Reading Comments Due Tuesday by 10pm. Responses due Wednesday by midnight.
[569: Tuesday: Discuss readings on Zoom]
469: Thursday: Discuss readings on Zoom.

Week Six. November 3 & 5
Listen/Watch: Lecture
Read: Nnedi Okorofor, Lagoon, Act III
Read: for 469 and 569: Melody Jue, “Intimate Objectivity”
[569: Alaimo, “Violet Black”]
[569: Tuesday: Discuss readings on Zoom]
469: Thursday: Discuss readings on Zoom.

Second Exam: Due Sunday

Part III. Being Ocean, Becoming Ocean
**Week Seven.** November 10 & 12
Listen/Watch: Lecture
Read: Epeli Hau’Ofa, excerpts from *We Are the Ocean*
Read: Derek Walcott, “The Sea is History” and Craig Santos Perez, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Glacier”
Read: Brenda Schaunessy, “There Was No Before.”
Watch: Marina Zurkow, “Slurb,” 18 min: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8k_jY7xCPYY
[569: Melody Jue, Chapters 1 + 2 “Interface,” “Vampire Squid Media”]
[569: Tuesday: Discuss readings on Zoom]
469: Thursday: Discuss readings on Zoom.

**Week Eight.** November 19
Listen/Watch: Lecture
Read: Rita Indiana, *Tentacle*
469/569: Combined Zoom class on Thursday; no class on Tuesday.

[569: Guellermina de Ferrari: “Science Fiction and the Rules of Uncertainty”]

[569: **Reading Comments and Responses Due** Mondays, by 9:00 AM, Responses due Tuesdays by 8am.]
469: **Reading Comments Due** Tuesday by 10pm. **Responses due** Wednesday by midnight.

**Week Nine.** November 24. (November 26 is Thanksgiving)
469 + 569: Combined zoom class on Tuesday: no class Thursday.

Listen/Watch: Lecture
Watch: *My Octopus Teacher* (Netflix)
Read: Godfrey, “On Being Octopus”
Watch the following short videos:
- “Immensity in Minuteness”: (2 min.) https://www.pri.org/stories/2013-02-14/synergy-artists-take-ocean-science
- Sea Whisperers” (24 min.) https://www.viddsee.com/video/sea-whisperers/4zi4t?locale=en
- “One Breath Around the World” (12 min.) https://vimeo.com/335874600
- “Narcose,” (13 min.) http://www.lesfilmsengloutis.com/en/films/narcose/?fbclid=IwAR3sJzivxZyYja2g1vxCO8HZ
[569: Melody Jue: Chapter 4 “Underwater Museums” + Hsuan Hsu, “Put an Octopus on It!” https://www.salon.com/2012/07/05/put_an_octopus_on_it/]

469: Thursday: No Zoom class: *Thanksgiving Break*
Finals Week: Third Exam Due: Tuesday, December 8, by midnight.