



Sport Literature
ENGL 238
Mercy University

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Hours: Tuesdays, 11:00-11:30am, 5:45-6:15pm, and by appointment

Course Description

Why do we tell stories about sport? Why does sport so readily offer itself to storytelling? What is sport? What is literature? How do these distinct cultural spheres interact and inform one another?

Sport is arguably the most popular cultural sphere in contemporary society. Sport means so much to so many yet so few have come to terms with the meaning of sport. If sport reveals character (ethos) that is because we make meaning of sport through narrative conventions. While we process sport as literature with the stories we tell, of our heroes and/or ourselves, this mimetic impulse uses narrative to represent and interpret sporting events as well as inspire texts of creative nonfiction and fiction that extend sport beyond the physical action in time and space to the imagined action in the space of literature.

Often sport and literature are viewed as antithetical cultural modes. The ontotheological tradition is grounded in the binary opposition of the spiritual and physical. Consequently, representations of the body and its actions are viewed as a corruptive influence, distracting from spiritual/intellectual concerns. Sport literature challenges this binary, rejecting the dualism of mind and body as reductive and simplistic, rejecting the prejudice of high and low culture.

What methodologies might sport studies mimic or borrow from literary criticism? Are there unique and/or dominant narrative trends or concerns that appear in literary texts that address sporting subjects? How have representations of sport changed through time? Do certain sports lend themselves more readily to literature than others? Do certain sports inspire certain types of literature? Should sport literature be understood as a distinct genre and how might genre studies facilitate the scholarly engagement with sport literature?

Objectives

After completing this course, the student should be able to:

- 1) Identify major themes and trends as well as major authors and texts of sport literature;
- 2) Recognize narrative structures and trends in literary representations of sport;
- 3) Compare representations of sports in distinct historical epochs and genres;
- 4) Produce an interesting and engaging text of sport criticism, creative nonfiction or fiction.

Outcomes

- 1) Select appropriate topics for critical and/or creative texts, using sport as a context or central thematic concern;
- 2) Formulate informed opinions on various literary texts and sporting events;
- 3) Integrate other disciplinary approaches to inform the critical engagement with sport literature;
- 4) Present critical/and or creative texts that process and/or generate meaning/s from sport;
- 5) Evaluate creative and critical texts about sport and sport's role in contemporary culture.

Attendance, Engagement, and Time-on-Task

According to the New York State Department of Education Commissioner's Regulations, a semester hour "means a credit, point, or other unit granted for the satisfactory completion of a course which requires at least 15 hours (of 50 minutes each) of instruction and at least 30 hours of supplementary assignments," or 135 hours of total learning time. Because this is a 3-credit course, the minimum time commitment required would be 9-hours weekly if scheduled over 15 weeks.

<http://www.nysed.gov/college-university-evaluation/education-law-rules-and-regulations>

Since this is an asynchronous distance learning section, classroom discussion, in the form of an online message board, constitutes attendance (minimum of three significant discussion posts per week required, with the week running roughly Wednesday-Tuesday), and is meant to simulate live face-to-face classroom interaction. So please do not simply answer initial questions that start a thread but engage with any prior posts – as if they were spoken in your presence. Strive to use correct standard written English or, in other words, consider proper usage good manners. Posts must be your own words/ideas, not taken from other sources without proper citation.

No more than three absences are allowed. A fourth absence will result in the reduction of the final grade one full letter (e.g. "A" to "B"), with each subsequent absence a further full letter grade reduction.

Requirements and Graded Assessment

Three critical essays on texts we discuss (roughly 900-1500 words, MLA Style) and a presentation of one of the three with a brief essay explaining why the essay was selected (roughly 300 words) are required. An extra credit essay will be accepted. The final grade will be determined by the average of the four (highest) grades.

Percentage to letter grade conversion: 94-100: A, 90-93: A-, 87-89: B+, 83-86: B, 80-82: B-, 77-79: C+, 73-76: C, 70-72: C-, 67-69: D+, 63-66: D, 60-62: D-, <60: F.

An act of plagiarism will result in failure from the course.

Schedule

Week One - INTRODUCTION

Week Two – Ancient Greece: Homer, *Iliad* (funeral games for Patroclus) and *Odyssey* (Phaecian games), Pindar, “Olympian 1”; Bacchylides, “Ode 5”

Week Three – Ancient Rome: Virgil, *Aeneid* (funeral games for Anchises); Martial, *On the Spectacles*; Tertullian, *On the Spectacles*; Augustine, from *Confessions*; Pliny the Younger, XCVII, “To Calvisius on the Circensian Games”; The Greek Anthology XVI, Three Charioteers

Week Four – Scott, “The Lifting of the Banner”; Hogg (the Ettrick Shepherd), “To the Ancient Banner of the House of Buccleuch”; Harriott, “The Fir and the Heather; or, the Souter and Shepherd”; Hogg (of Hawick), “Carterhaugh Ba”; Love, *Cricket: An Heroic Poem*; Hughes, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*; de Coubertin, *Olympism*; Newbolt, “Vitaī Lampada”

Week Five – EXAMINATION 1

Week Six – Hornby, from *Fever Pitch*; Peace, from *Red or Dead*

Week Seven – Clark, “The Timin o the Run”; Mackintosh, “Mind the Time”; Watt, “Diddy Cups”; MacDonald, “Turn on the Floodlights”; McNeill, “Love Street”; Kilpatrick, *Obrigado: A Futebol Epic*, “Wee Willie on the Wing (Patient No. 23902),” “Montevideo Blues (26 July 1930),” “Canajoharie at Mayfield (23 October 2021),” “In My Tribe”

Week Eight – *Ted Lasso*

Mar 25-31 – SPRING BREAK

Week Nine – EXAMINATION 2

Week Ten – Thayer, “Casey at the Bat”; Norworth, “Take Me Out to the Ball Game”; Abbot & Costello, “Who’s on First?”; Kinsella, “The Thrill of the Grass”

Week Eleven – Ackerman, “Patrick Ewing Takes a Foul Shot”; Russell, “Sports”; Meschery, “Bill Russell”; Rader, “Sphere of Influence or Praise Song for the Warriors”; Ferry, “Courtesy”

Week Twelve – Exley, from *A Fan’s Notes*; Kilpatrick, “A Fan’s Fumble”; Sabol, “The Autumn Wind (Raiders)”; Nemerov, “Watching Football on TV”; Coleman, “American Football”

Week Thirteen – Harrison, “Roller Ball Murder”; *GGO Football*

Week Fourteen – EXAMINATION 3

Week Fifteen – PRESENTATION