



Mermaids

ECL 305: Literature and the Environment

Spring 2025 | Professor Pressman

Day 3: Building the foundation| History via Mermaids

ADMIN

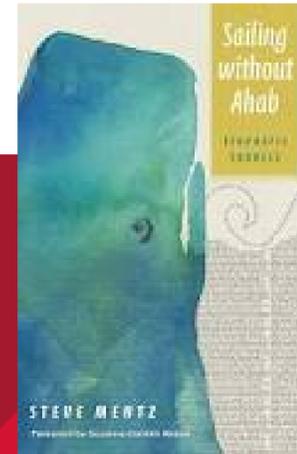
- Wordpress? Adding password...
- I will be posting class slides to the Wordpress site
- Blog posts— focus on a quote and develop an idea/interpretation/question.

Steve Mentz

Pioneer in Blue Humanities, Shakespeare scholar, poet, and ocean swimmer.



Dr. Mentz will be in conversation with Professors Jessica Pressman and Diana Leong (ECL) about Ecocriticism, the Blue Humanities, *Moby-Dick*, and more. He will answer your questions about interdisciplinary creative-critical research from all in attendance.



Location:
Digital Humanities
Center (Love Library,
lower level)

Date:
Tuesday,
Sept. 16

Time:
3:30 - 4:45 p.m.

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Extra Credit

New Digital Humanities Center Installation!



The Digital Humanities Center will be featuring an installation from School of Art and Design Professor, Matthew Herbert, also known as his studio name, **eleet warez!** ([Artist site](#))

The installation will run from August 25th to November 21st, so make sure you head down to the DHC (LA 61) and check it out before it's gone!

Questions from Canvas

- -In the syllabus, it says that there is up to 1% extra credit. How can we receive that extra credit?
- -In the syllabus, it says that using AI to write content is prohibited. Would it still be acceptable to use AI for brainstorming, proofreading, or research support?
- -How is participation graded? Are there certain elements or expectations that we will be expected to meet?
- For the short discoveries that are due, it says to "make or find" a mermaid text that isn't in our syllabus. When you say "make", can we quite literally create our own story to then analyze, or what does this mean?
- - For the final essay requirements, the syllabus states that it must include "engagement with (not just citation of) 2 scholarly sources". What exactly does that mean?
- -The curriculum states that the final essay may take creative forms (including online art, video, or hypertext) as long as it includes a thesis, close reading, and interaction with scholarly sources. Please would you clarify whether the assessment parameters of these novel formats are varied or whether they will be assessed with the help of the same rubric as that of a standard essay?
- Can we revise our weekly blogposts if we see that they didn't meet the content component expectations for a better grade? For example, let's say we've completed all the blog posts, but the content for some is not necessarily a good close reading (more of a summary that does not contain a thesis).
- Can we make up points for the grade we want if we completed the blogs before the due day (Sunday)?

Group Discussion

- First impressions of the reading: what interested you? What do you want to discuss?

From your blogs— narrative as power

- KELLY: What I found most interesting from Chapter 1 of *Merpeople: A Human History* by Vaughn Scribner was how the author focuses on gender to showcase how mermaids can reveal the sentiment and values of a certain time period. ...By creating a feminine creature who represents a plethora of sins and vices, the church has a reason to keep women out of positions in power and to lower their position in society
- SIERRA: Merpeople are anthropomorphized myths that people fantasize as a way to reach parts of the world we have yet to discover....Whether one classifies them as sirens, selkies, mermaids, or mermen these hybrids may be myth but, like any form of story, they are also a reflection on humans and humanity.

From your blogs— historical context matters

- OMAR: Traveling back to a time where the only form of communication was through word of mouth and written forms/letters, it seems almost impossible not to have any historical accounts of mythological creatures such as dragons, unicorns, and cyclopes.but after completing the reading, the concept of the mermaid does not seem completely absurd especially after viewing various different marine organisms that do seem fictional like the colossal squid.

From your blogs— hybridity

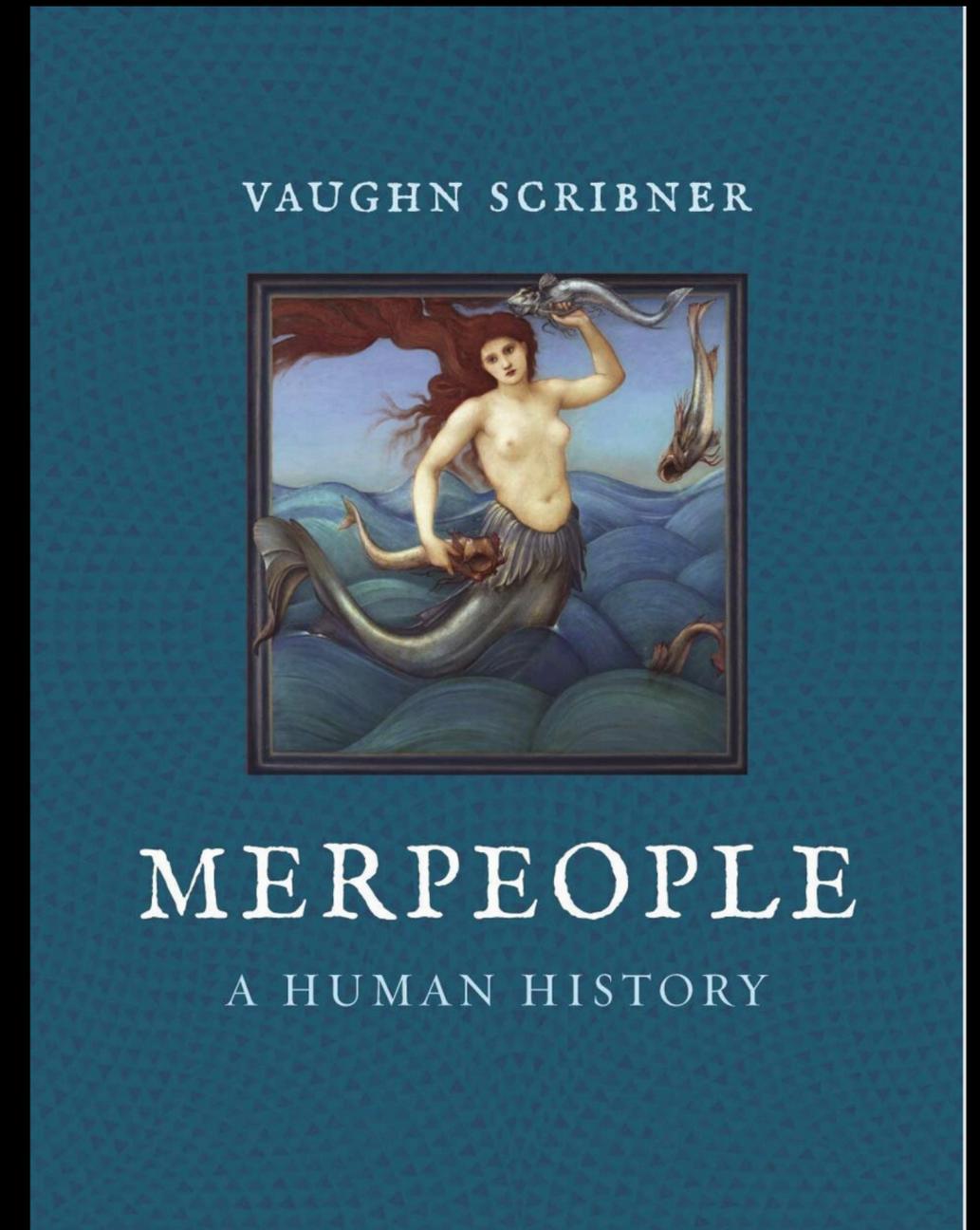
- ANNIE: But the human interest in mixed things doesn't stop at these mixed children like myself; we see it in cultural/regional fusion dishes, domesticated dog breeds (most dogs nowadays are hardly ever pure-bred), even academic disciplines (Interdisciplinary Studies?), and many more I can't think of off the top of my head. I think humans are naturally drawn to this mashing up of two different things because we crave uniqueness and originality, with the mermaid and other hybrid mythical creatures satisfying this craving thousands of years ago to today. Scribner goes on to solidify this, writing, "Monster theory and hybrid studies are imperative for *Merpeople: A Human History*, especially in their ability to reveal the humanity in such seemingly foreign, incongruous manifestations of the natural world" (8).

Merpeople: A Human History

Vaughn Scribner

Chicago UP, 2020

“from roughly 1000 BCE to the present, Westerners’ changing perceptions of mermaids and mermen (also called tritons) reveal deeper understandings of myth, religion, science, wonder and capitalism” (7)



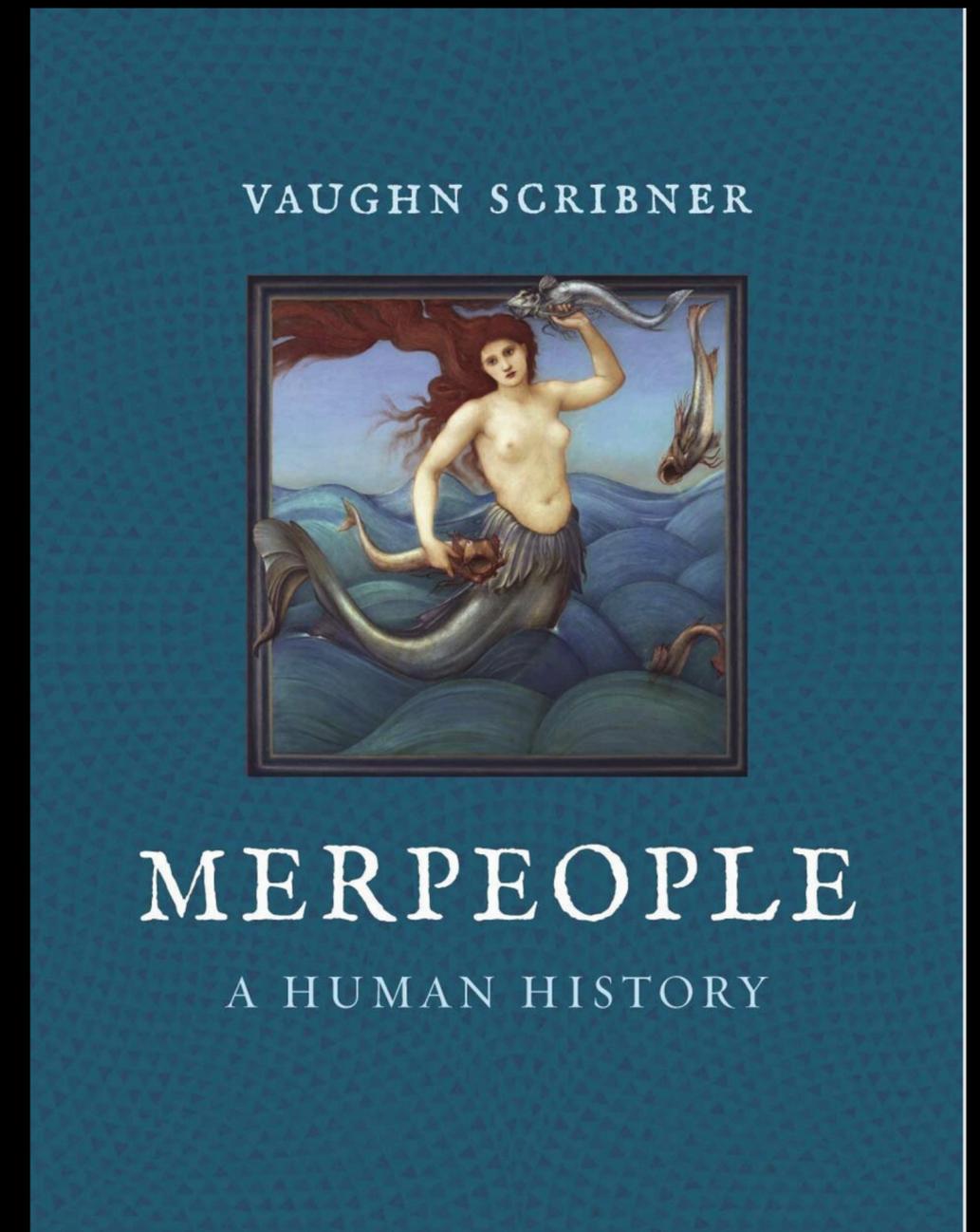
Merpeople: A Human History

Vaughn Scribner

Chicago UP, 2020

“They were unnatural manifestations of a realm that humans did not fully understand”

Merpeople, after all, were more than simply animal or monster; they were also part human” (8)

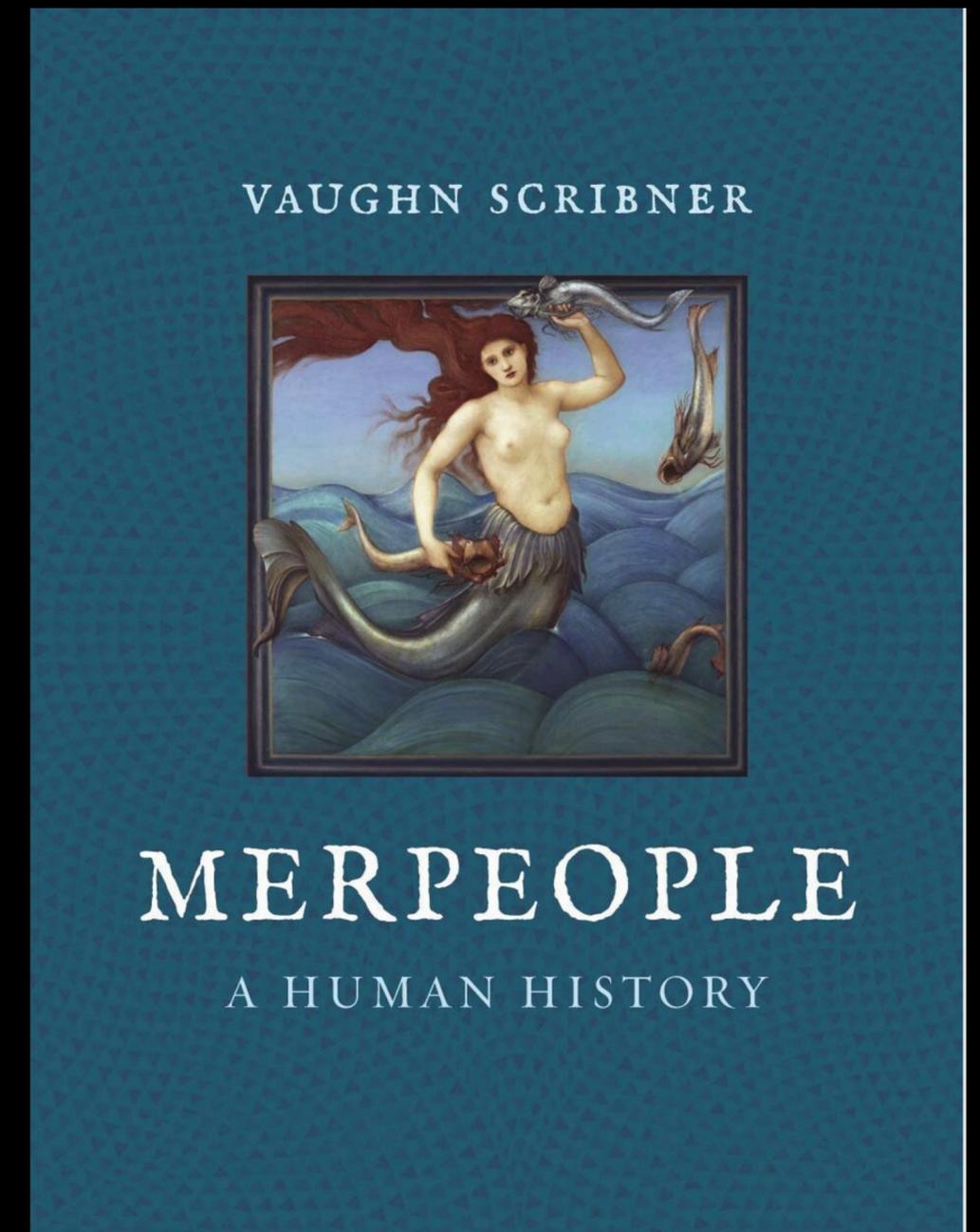


Merpeople: A Human History

Vaughn Scribner

Chicago UP, 2020

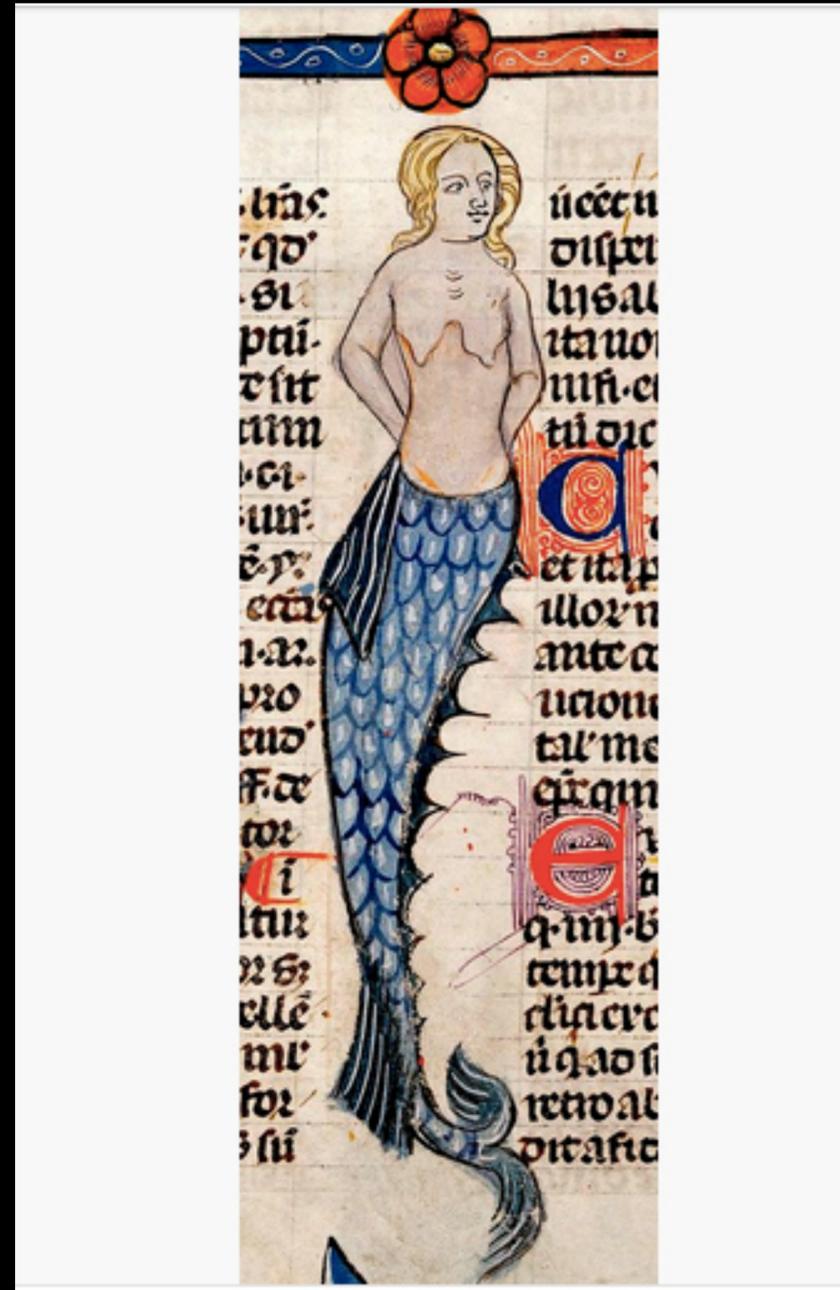
“like the mirror which the medieval mermaid often clutched in her delicate hand, merpeople serve as a symbolic reflection of humankind’s changing conceptions of myth, religion, science, and capitalism” (27).



Merpeople: A Human History
Vaughn Scribner
Chicago UP, 2020

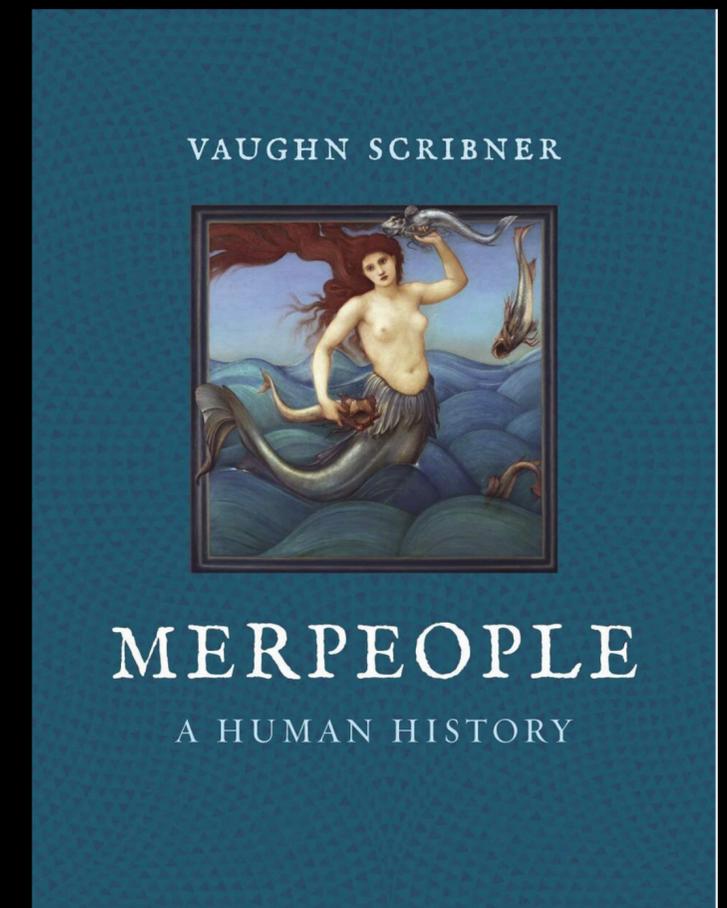
“Beginning in the third to fifth centuries CE, Church leaders simultaneously adopted, transformed, and harnessed ancient pagan symbols of merpeople to assert notions of poetry, faith, and self-control” (11)

“The Christian Church deliberately adopted and adapted pagan symbols in its holy spaces, there binding the gap between the supposedly ‘savage’ and the civilized; the past and the present” (15)



Found on flickr.com

Mermaid. detail. France 13-14th cent. Roy... by tony harrison on Flickr



115

Sporta inferi. Km.

Converte dñe auribus tuis. v.

Credo videre bona domini. Km.

In terra iudicium. ps.

Deprofundis clamavi ad te
dñe: domine exaudi vocem
meam.

Auribus tuis intendes in vo-
cem deprecationis mee.

Si iniquitates obseruaueris
dñe: domine quis sustinebit.

Quia apud te propitatio est et
propter legem tuam sustinuit te do-
mine.

Sustinuit anima mea in uer-
bo eius: sperauit anima mea in do-



Pierpont Morgan Library.
MS M.453.

environment

NOUN

1. † The action of circumnavigating, encompassing, or surrounding something; the state of being encompassed or surrounded. Cf. **environ** *v.* 3, 2. *Obsolete.*

1603–1888

1603 I wot not what circumplexions and environments [French *environnements*; Greek *περιελεύσεις*].

P. Holland, translation of Plutarch, *Morals* 1009 ...

...

1888 A similar blow on the other side, or a close environment of the heavy guns of the other ship, would have captured or sunk the ram.

Factsheet

Meaning & use

Etymology

Pronunciation

Frequency

Compounds & derived words

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“ Cite  Historical thesaurus ▼

CONTENTS

1. † The action of circumnavigating, encompassing, or...
- ▶ 2. The area surrounding a place or thing; the environs...
3. Phonetics. The context in which a speech sound occurs.
4. The social, political, or cultural circumstances in which a...
5. Computing. The overall physical, systematic, or logical...
6. Art. A large three-dimensional artwork designed to be...

QUOTATIONS

Show all quotations

- 2.a. The area surrounding a place or thing; the environs, surroundings, or physical context. Also *figurative*.

1725–

1725 If we examine into Anatomy, we shall find a perfect Environment of Glands and Emunctories all around the Neck, both internally and externally, which attract and drain off the imperfect and excretory juices.

J. Sedgwick, *New Treatise on Liquors* xviii. 345 ...

...

1989 The detection of small movements produced by forces acting in the environment of the ear's sensory cells.

B. Alberts et al., *Molecular Biology of Cell* (ed. 2) xix. 1102 ...

[Show more quotations](#)

Etymology of “environment”

Originally < **Middle French** *environnement* (**French** *environnement*: see below) action of surrounding something (1487; earlier in senses ‘proximity’ (first half of the 12th cent. in **Anglo-Norman** as *avirounement*) and ‘surroundings, periphery’ (c1200 in **Anglo-Norman** as *envirunement*)) < *environner*, *envirunner* **environ** *v.* + *-ment* **-ment** *suffix*.

In later use < **environ** *v.* + **-ment** *suffix*.

Compare earlier **environ** *n.*, **environing** *n.*, **environry** *n.*

Revised 2003 (details)

More entries for "nature"

Nearby entries

“ Cite

Contribute

Tabbed view



nature

NOUN

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CONTENTS

I. Senses relating to physical or bodily power, strength, or...

▶ I.1. The vital or physical powers of a person; a person's...

▶ I.2. Excrement. Chiefly in to do one's nature and the burden of...

I.3. † The female genitals, esp. those of a mare. Obsolete.

II. Senses relating to mental or physical impulses and...

▶ II.4. The power or force which is fundamental to the physical and...

I. Senses relating to physical or bodily power, strength, or substance.

I.1.a. † The vital or physical powers of a person; a person's physical strength or constitution. *Obsolete.*

c1275–1592

c1275 þe nature of Man is of greater strengþe and of greater hete ine þo age.

Kentish Serm. in J. Hall, *Selections Early Middle English* (1920) vol. I. 222 (Middle English Dictionary)

...

...

1592 Any such corrasie, sharpe or eager medicine..as the said H. shal think his nature is vnable to suffer.

W. West, *Symbolæography: 1st Part* §102 b ...

Etymology of “nature”

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nature

NOUN

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< (i) **Anglo-Norman** and **Old French, Middle French, French** *nature* active force that establishes and maintains the order of the universe, group of properties or characteristics that define objects (early 12th cent.), sort, species, race (early 12th cent.), attributes, innate disposition of a person (late 12th cent.), constitution, principle of life that animates and sustains the human body (early 13th cent.), genitals (early 13th cent.; also in **Anglo-Norman** in specific senses ‘menstrual discharge’, ‘semen’),

and its etymon (ii) **classical Latin** *nātūra* birth, constitution, character, the genitals, the creative power governing the world, the physical world, the natural course of things, naturalness in art, in **post-classical Latin** also the divine and human nature of Christ (5th cent.), the need to defecate and urinate (1300 in a British source) < *nāt-*, past participial stem of *nāscī* to be born (see **nascent adj.**) + *-ūra* **-ure suffix**¹.

Monster

NOON

CONTENTS

NOON

1. Originally: a mythical creature which is part animal and...
2. † Something extraordinary or unnatural; an amazing event or...
3. A malformed animal or plant; (Medicine) a fetus, neonate...
4. A creature of huge size. In early use frequently: a sea...
5. A person of repulsively unnatural character, or exhibiting...
6. gen. An ugly or deformed person, animal, or thing.
7. Originally U.S. An extraordinarily good or remarkably...

ADVERB

the manner of a monster. Only as the first element in...

- 1.a.** Originally: a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally: any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening. c1375-
- The centaur, sphinx, and minotaur are examples of 'monsters' encountered by various mythical heroes; the griffin, wyvern, etc., are later heraldic forms.

- c1375** Was neuere wight sith that this world bigan That slow so manye **monstres** as dide he [sc. Hercules].
G. Chaucer, *Monk's Tale* 3302 ...
- 2000** Want to know where Hollywood gets the inspiration for its outer space and sci-fi **monsters**?
Popular Photography July 76/2 ...

[Show more quotations](#)

“ Cite  Historical thesaurus ▼

mythology

Etymology of “monster”

Summary

A borrowing from French.

Etymon: French *monstre*.

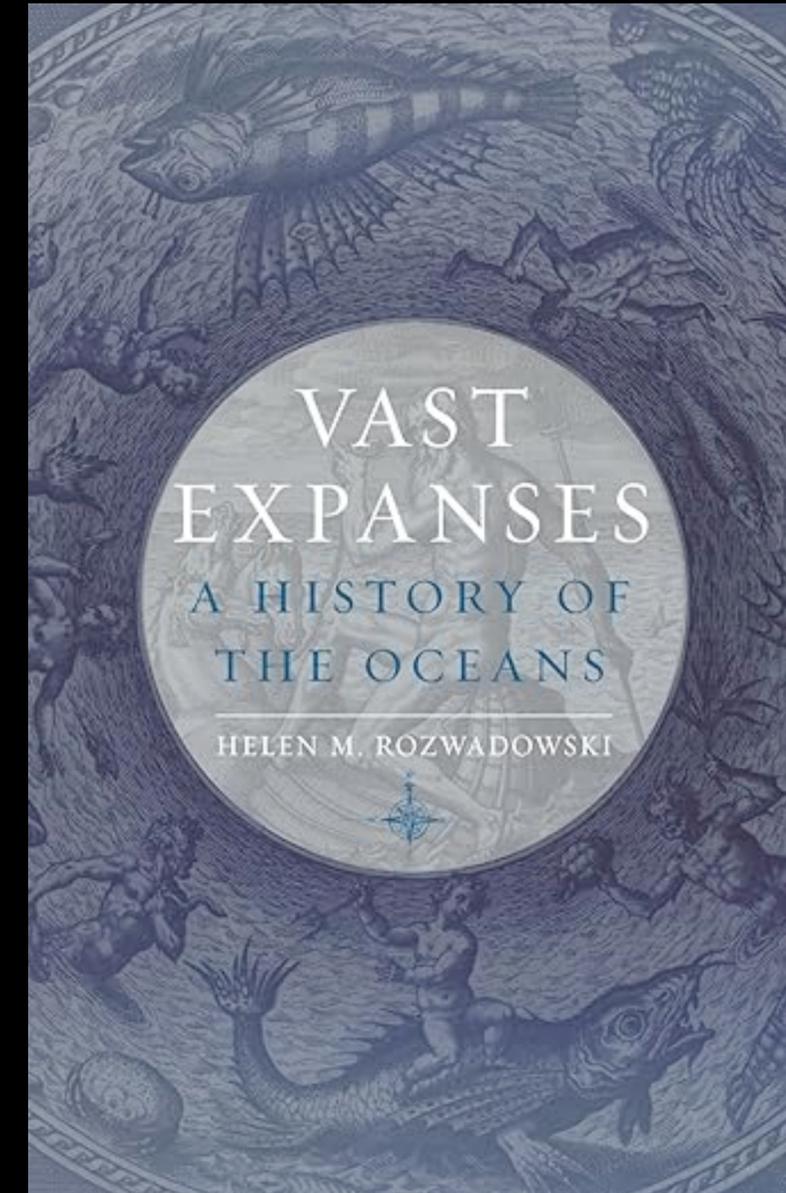
< **Anglo-Norman** and **Middle French** *monstre, moustre*, **French** *monstre* (mid 12th cent. in **Old French** as *mostre* in sense ‘prodigy, marvel’, first half of the 13th cent. in senses ‘disfigured person’ and ‘misshapen being’, c1223 in extended sense applied to a pagan, first half of the 18th cent. by antiphrasis denoting an extraordinarily attractive thing) < **classical Latin** *mōnstrum* portent, prodigy, monstrous creature, wicked person, monstrous act, atrocity < the base of *monēre* to warn (see **moneo** *n.*; for the formation compare perhaps *lūstrum* **lustrum** *n.*).

Compare **Italian** *mostro*, †*monstro* (1282), **Spanish** †*mostro* (c1250; compare **Spanish** *monstruo* (< a **post-classical Latin** variant of **classical Latin** *mōnstrum*)), **Portuguese** *monstro* (1525 as *mōstro*).

The role of language, literature, and the Humanities

“The importance of the humanities, and the very power of metaphors, such as ‘frontier’ or ‘wilderness’, hold out hope. We must jettison our perception of the ocean as a timeless place, apart from humans. We must transform our understanding of the sea to one bound with history and interconnected with humanity.” (227)

—Helen M. Rozwadowski, *Vast Expanses: A History of the Oceans* (Reaktion Books, 2018)



Questions/ Take aways?