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OFFICE HOURS: t.b.a.

*Melville*  
English 379  
Spring 2015  
MW 10:00-11:15 am  
location t.b.a.

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Though a superstar during his early career, Herman Melville watched his reputation decline as his literary ambitions escalated. One review of his seventh novel bore the headline, “Herman Melville Crazy.” Not until the 20th century did even his best-known work, *Moby-Dick*, attract considerable attention, but it now stands at the center of the American literary pantheon. Melville’s work merits intensive, semester-long study not only because he is a canonical author of diverse works—from maritime adventures to lyric poems to philosophical allegories—but also because his career and legacy themselves constitute a narrative of central concern to literary studies and American culture. Through reading and discussion of a few major works—primarily *Moby-Dick*—and scholarly studies of them, we will explore Melville’s imagination, discover his work’s historical context, and think critically about literary form.

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## REQUIRED TEXTS

• available at Trinity College Bookstore

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker & Harrison Hayford (Norton Critical Edition, **2nd ed.**, 2001). ISBN 978-0393972832  
----, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, ed. John Bryant (Modern Library, 2002). ISBN 978-0375757129

• additional required readings available on Moodle or in a course packet

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## COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES

### Attendance and Participation

A seminar thrives on the interaction of its members, and your contributions to the class enrich every other student’s experience. At the end of the semester, I will evaluate your engagement with our collective intellectual enterprise, bearing in mind that different students manifest such engagement in different ways. If you ever need to miss a class, arrive late, or leave early, please inform me at least one day in advance. Note that this course entails your attendance at a few events outside scheduled class time: a public reading of *Moby-Dick* (April 29) and a screening of *Beau Travail* (t.b.a., late April).

My fundamental rule of the classroom is that you must exhibit faithful respect for discussion. I expect that you will listen to your peers as attentively as I listen to you. That means you may never leave the classroom while someone is speaking (and between me and your peers, someone *will* be speaking virtually the entire time we’re in class together, so use the bathroom before arriving) and that cell phones must be silenced throughout class.

Communication

I sometimes will make important announcements to the class via email. You are responsible for checking your Trinity email account at least once each weekday. You may in turn expect me to reply with reasonable promptness to questions you direct to me via email. Please communicate to me any difficulties you encounter in your work for this course, so that we can address them together. If inclement weather forces me to cancel a class meeting, I will notify you of the cancellation via email no later than 7:00 a.m. on the day of class (and earlier if possible).

Written Work

You will complete several types of written assignments in this class, as described below. Your written work should exhibit clarity in its reasoning, proficiency in English usage, complexity of thought, and earnest engagement with the intellectual content of the course. ‘A’-quality work integrates all these features in a sophisticated manner. Extensions will be granted only in extraordinary circumstances and only if you discuss the matter with me at least two days before the appointed deadline. Late work may be accepted, but it will receive no feedback from me—only a grade, subject to a 5-points-per-day late penalty.

**Very Short Essays:** In 500-750 words (approx. 2 double-spaced pages), elaborate a single, focused insight about a single chapter from *Moby-Dick*. The deadlines for these essays are not fixed; they are due on whichever day we are scheduled to discuss the particular chapter on which you have chosen to write. (You have an incentive, therefore, to keep well on top of the reading. Additionally, you should start writing as soon as something strikes you as worth writing about.)

In addition to **three** Very Short Essays about *Moby-Dick* (Weeks 3-8), you also will write **one** about a single Melville poem (due April 14), and **one** about anything you wish in *Billy Budd* (due April 23), for a total of **five** Very Short Essays across the semester.

**Scholarly Essay:** Choose one of the three Very Short Essays you wrote about *Moby-Dick*, and in 800-1000 words reevaluate your analysis in light of another literary critic’s work. Note that this assignment is not a *revision* of a previous essay. You should write a new essay in which you discuss the ways your previous essay’s claims are validated or challenged by something you read in a scholarly essay about *Moby-Dick* from Weeks 9 and 10 of our syllabus. Explain what aspects of your own previous essay you think about differently now as a consequence of reading someone else’s essay. Be specific in explaining what the scholarly essay says, in your understanding, and exactly how that bears upon the issues you were initially writing about.

**Research Project:** Throughout the semester, you will be embarked on a research project that gravitates around Melville’s work but also allows you significant latitude to pursue your own curiosity. You begin your assignment by choosing a single artifact germane to *Moby-Dick*. An “artifact” could be a book, a painting, a song, a historical document, an object in a museum, etc. This artifact’s relationship to *Moby-Dick* may be either *contextual* or *ephiphenomenal*. That is, it might have been a part of the pre-1851 world in which Melville wrote the novel, and thus illuminate something about its creation; or it might be a part of the post-

1851 world in which readers have reacted to and made sense of the novel, and thus illuminate something about its reception and afterlife. Once you've chosen your artifact (no later than **February 20**), you will work on the project's three essential components: (1) *research* everything you can about the artifact: how, where, when, why, and by whom was it created? (2) *analyze* what this artifact tells us about *Moby-Dick*, its composition and/or reception; and (3) *situate* your analysis in relation to other scholars' interpretations of *Moby-Dick* (which will entail additional research): how does your exploration and consideration of your artifact challenge or extend specific developments in the ongoing critical conversation about Melville's novel? We will discuss this assignment at length in class, and you are advised to work closely with Sarah Watson, our T.A., and Jeff Liszka or Erin Valentino, our research librarians, throughout the process.

### Oral Work

In addition to your responsibility to participate in class discussions, you have three comparatively formal assignments involving speaking. Each contributes to your participation grade.

**Passage Discussion:** On each of the days we discuss *Moby-Dick* (weeks 3-8), one or two of you will be designated to identify a short passage from the novel you would like to discuss. You do not need to prepare a presentation. Simply come to class ready to talk about, and answer questions about, your passage. You need not, and probably should not, choose a passage you think you understand completely; better to choose one that intrigues or even confuses you.

**Criticism Presentation:** During weeks 9 and 10, we will read a half-century's worth of critical interpretations of *Moby-Dick*. Paired with one of your classmates, you will present the argument of one assigned essay. Explain what distinguishes your particular critic's interpretation, how he or she builds on or departs from a previous view, and why you do or do not find the argument helpful for thinking about the novel. Assignments of partners and readings will be made randomly.

**Public Reading:** On April 29, all of us will read at least one chapter of *Moby-Dick* out loud in some public location on campus. Your attendance at a substantial portion of this marathon reading is required, but of course the reading of your chapter will be scheduled to accommodate your other classes and commitments that day.

### Academic Integrity

Of course, academic integrity is expected in all student work. You are responsible for acquainting yourself with college rules on Intellectual Honesty in the Student Handbook (see <http://www.trincoll.edu/SiteCollectionDocuments/StudentHandbook.pdf>). If you have questions about these rules, I encourage you to discuss them with me.

### Computation of Final Grades

|                                                                                |                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Class Participation                                                            | 15%            |
| • <i>incl. passage discussion, criticism presentation &amp; public reading</i> |                |
| Very Short Essays                                                              | 50% (10% each) |
| Scholarly Essay                                                                | 10%            |
| Research Project                                                               | 25%            |

## CALENDAR OF READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS

Readings with an asterisk (\*) will be available in a course packet; those with a dagger (†) are posted on Moodle.

### WEEK 1

- Tues 20 Jan — introduction  
Thurs 22 Jan — Andrew Delbanco, “Melville: From His Time to Ours,” introduction to *Melville: His World and Work* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 3-16. †

### WEEK 2

- Tues 27 Jan — “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” (1855), in *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, pp. 147-67.  
Thurs 29 Jan — *Moby-Dick, or The Whale* (1851), “Etymology” and “Extracts”  
**class meets at Watkinson Library**

• **three very short essays due** at appropriate class meetings during weeks 3-8

### WEEK 3

- Tues 3 Feb — *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 1 through 19  
Thurs 5 Feb — *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 20 through 31

### WEEK 4

- Tues 10 Feb — *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 32 through 50  
Thurs 12 Feb — *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 51 through 60

### WEEK 5

- Tues 17 Feb — *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 61 through 86  
Thurs 19 Feb — *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 87 through 96

### WEEK 6

- Mon 23 Feb — **research artifact write-up due** on Moodle by 9:00 a.m.  
Tues 24 Feb — **class meets at Phelan Library Learning Center** (LITC A48)  
Thurs 26 Feb — no class, Trinity Days

### WEEK 7

- Tues 3 Mar — *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 97 through 114  
Thurs 5 Mar — *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 115 through 122

### WEEK 8

- Tues 10 Mar — *Moby-Dick*, Chapters 122 through 131  
Thurs 12 Mar — *Moby-Dick*, Chapter 132 to the end

~ Spring Break ~

WEEK 9

- Tues 24 Mar — Carl van Doren, excerpt from “Contemporaries of Cooper,” in *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (New York: Putnam’s, 1917), 320-323.\*
- F. O. Matthiessen, excerpt from “The Revenger’s Tragedy,” in *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), 440-466.\*
- C. L. R. James, excerpt from *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: the Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (1952; rep. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2001), 3-68.\*
- Thurs 26 Mar — Carolyn Karcher, “A Jonah’s Warning to America in *Moby-Dick*,” chapter 3 in *Shadow over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville’s America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1980), 62-91.\*
- Sharon Cameron, excerpt from “Identity and Disembodiment in *Moby-Dick*,” chapter 1 in *The Corporeal Self: Allegories of the Body in Melville and Hawthorne* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1981), 15-35.\*
- Michael Paul Rogin, “*Moby-Dick* and the American 1848,” chapter 4 in *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983)\*
- Wai-Chee Dimock, “Ahab’s Manifest Destiny,” in *Macropolitics of Nineteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1991)\*

WEEK 10

- Tues 31 Mar — John Michael, “Ahab’s Cannibals: Vicissitudes of Command and the Failure of Manly Virtue,” chapter 2 in *Identity and the Failure of America from Thomas Jefferson to the War on Terror* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008)\*
- Donald Pease, “Pip, *Moby-Dick*, Melville’s Governmentality,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 45.3 (Fall 2012): 327-342.\*
- Thurs 2 April — Caleb Crain, “Melville’s Secrets,” *Leviathan* 14.3 (October 2012): 6-24.\*
- Samuel Otter, “Reading *Moby-Dick*,” in *The New Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), 68-84.\*
- Mon 6 April — **scholarly essay due** on Moodle by **12:00 noon**

WEEK 11

- Tues 7 April — *Battle-Pieces*, in *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, pp. 335-371
- Thurs 9 April — *Battle-Pieces*, cont’d.

O L D   S Y L L A B U S — S U B J E C T   T O   C H A N G E

WEEK 12

Tues    14 April— *John Marr and Other Sailors*, in *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, pp. 393-404  
**poetry V.S.E. due** at class

Thurs    16 April— research assignment check-in; **bibliography due**

**film screening:** *Beau Travail* — time & location t.b.a.

WEEK 13

Tues    21 April— *Billy Budd*, in *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, pp. 449-521

Thurs    23 April— ***Billy Budd* V.S.E. due** at class

WEEK 14

Tues    28 April— *Billy Budd* and *Beau Travail* (dir. Claire Denis, 1999)

Wed    29 April— **public reading** (various times)

EXAM WEEK

Mon    4 May — **research project due** (details t.b.a.)