Bard College Summer Fest 2024

Literature Studies

Course Title: Chasing Melville, Part 1

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Course Delivery: In Person

Dates: June 7, 14, 21, 28

Room: Olin TBA

Time: 1:00-2:30 p.m.

Produced by: Fern Fleckman

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Description:

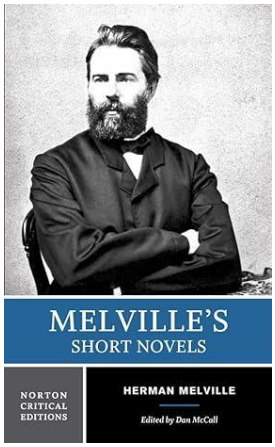
This four-week seminar will focus on one of the greatest--and at one time most under-appreciated--American writers, Herman Melville. In **Chasing Melville, Part 1**, we will examine and explore three of his most famous works *after* Moby Dick.

Melville had two prose writing periods in his life, which spanned only 12 of his 72 years from 1845-1857. He had an auspicious start to his career, retelling tales of his experiences on board whaleships and warships on the Pacific Ocean. These travelogs, as they came to be known, were quite popular because they introduced the reading public to exotic locales and to taboo concepts like cannibalism and "the labial melody of the native girls that held him [Melville] in captivity" (Qtd. From Delbanco 5).

The tormented Melville soon outgrew writing these titillating adventure stories, however and turned to writing about more social, philosophical, and psychological topics, referring to his personal torment as the "tornadoed Atlantic" of his being (Delbanco 6). As he attempted—through his writing—to prove the unprovable, solve the unsolvable, and answer the unanswerable issues of his day, he lost his audience, his financial security, and his bearings in life.

In **Chasing Melville, Part I,** we will explore the literature of this fraught period in Melville's life from 1851-1857: *Bartleby the Scrivener* (1853), *Benito Cereno* (1855), and *Billy Budd* (unfinished in 1891, published in 1924) and see how existential and contemporary his themes are for a modern audience.

Required Text:
Melville's Short Novels: ISBN: 0-393-97641-6



Literature Course Rationale

The main purpose of any literature course is not simply to analyze literature but to see its relevance and to appreciate it as a guiding force or influence in your life. To experience the range of conflicts and choices in these characters' lives as like those we face every day. Reading literature with the correct attitude will engender *empathy*, the ability to understand the feelings of others.

Literature Course Components

Analyzation

To examine texts critically, using guided questions to probe for nuance and meaning.

Visualization

To use various media as a supplement to classroom discussions

Utilization and Application

Kelly Mays says, ". . . literature awakens us to the richness and complexity of language. As we read more and more, seeing how different writers use language to help us feel their joy, pain, love, rage, or laughter, we begin to recognize the vast range of possibilities for self-expression."

Learning Outcomes:

At the completion of Chasing Melville, Part I, the participants will

- Have read 3 Melville novellas.
- Have a deeper understanding of Herman Melville's personal life.
- Have a deeper understanding of the metaphysical nature of Melville's later works as compared to his earlier ones.
- Have a deeper understanding of the influences in Melville's life, including his social, political, and religious conscience and his idolatrous friendship with fellow author Nathaniel Hawthorne

Date	In-Class Reading	Next-Class Reading
June 07, 2024	Bartleby	Benito Cereno
June 14, 2024	Benito Cereno	Billy Budd
June 21, 2024	Billy Budd	Billy Budd
June 28, 2024	Billy Budd	

Brief Melville Biography

Herman Melville: His Life, His Work, His Themes

For a more in depth look at these stories, see Criticism, pages 239-406 in the text.

Disclaimer: Please note that to present the reader with realistic depictions of African American slaves, slavery, and the prevailing 19th century attitudes towards slaves and slavery, Melville's novels include what some might deem unflattering portrayals of African Americans. You cannot expose the horrors and humiliations of institutionalized enslavement without such references.

Bibliography

DelBanco, Andrew. Melville: His World and His Works. Vintage Books, NY, NY. September 2006.