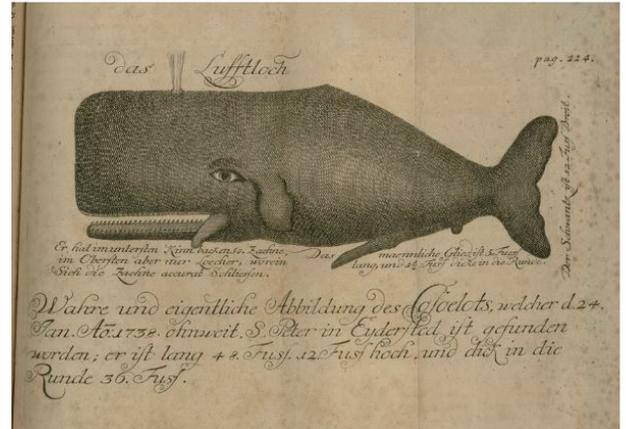


ENGL 392: Studies in a Major Figure: Herman Melville Spring 2021

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This course will introduce you to selected works in various genres by Herman Melville (1819–91), one of the major figures of nineteenth-century American literature. Although it is impossible to read all of Melville’s works in a single term, we will study one of his early, reputation-making books (*Typee*), three major novels (*Moby-Dick*; *The Confidence-Man*; and *Billy Budd, Sailor*), and examples of his stories, poems, and essays. In seeking to come to terms with Melville’s complex works and their reception, we will sample the historical and biographical approaches that have been central to Melville studies, and attend to the immediate context of literary Transcendentalism. We will also grapple with the uncanny relevance of Melville’s works today. *Moby-Dick*, for instance, bears upon contemporary concerns about economic scarcity and resource extraction, the rights of animals, and American imperialism, while *The Confidence-Man* has a peculiar political resonance. You will be encouraged to explore the many adaptations of Melville’s works, and in particular *Moby-Dick*, which has remarkable popular currency; those who watch *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982) will have travelled from the “insular city of the Manhattoes” all the way to the Final Frontier. No prior knowledge of nineteenth-century American literature will be presumed, but you should be willing to learn to tell the bowsprit from the mizzenmast.



Cachalot Sperm Whale by Johann Anderson (Wikimedia)

Tentative reading list:

- *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*
- *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*
- *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*
- *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*
- “Benito Cereno”
- “Bartleby, the Scrivener”
- “Hawthorne and His Mosses”
- Selected poems and letters by Melville
- Selected critical essays

Tentative assignments:

- In-class reading quizzes
- Essay proposal and bibliography
- Major research essay or project
- Final examination