

Course: Herman Melville (American Studies 05.866.512)	Instructor: Dr. Damien B. Schlarb
Semester: Summer 2023	Email: schlarbd@uni-mainz.de
Class Time: F 14:15 – 15:45	Office Hours: Mondays 14:00 – 16:00
Class Room: Philosophicum, P205	Office: Philosophicum II, room 02-230
Moodle Course	

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar explores the writings of Herman Melville (1819-1891), an American literary writer whose career spanned most of the nineteenth century and encompassed literary movements like the so-called American Renaissance (ca. 1830-1865), American romanticism, as well as realism. Firmly ensconced in the literary canon since his scholarly “rediscovery” in the 1930s, Melville remains a controversial and provocative figure in American literary and cultural history. Scholars have celebrated Melville at different times as America’s greatest novelist, a writer of sharp, penetrating short magazine fiction, and, lately, as a prolific poet. His professional success was limited in his own time, yet his penchant for addressing questions of philosophy, history, religion, aesthetics, race, sexuality, and politics with his characteristic brand of encyclopedic references and irreverent humor have earned him a following among readers all over the world. His personal life was marked by tragedy and struggles—his father’s suicide and that of his son Malcom, depression, and alleged physical abuse of his wife Elizabeth have become a focus of contextual scholarly investigation. Melville remains a fascinating observer and commentator of American culture and continues to speak to us in ever-new ways. His discerning literary commentary on America—its beliefs, politics, and prejudices—make him a productive guide through U.S. cultural and literary history. Melville’s works will help us explore the cultural space of nineteenth-century America, but we will also be interested in his aesthetics. That means that we want to examine *how* Melville accomplishes literariness by discussing how he integrates literary form and thematic contents. Our methodology will be hermeneutical as well as historicist: we will critically close read texts (textual analysis), using critical and postcritical reading techniques as well as historical contextual information, to hypothesize and argue for literary and cultural meaning. Students are encouraged to bring their own selection of critical theories to bear on the texts. We will supplement our readings with recent critical, methodological, and theoretical scholarship in the field of American Literary Studies.

READINGS

- Please purchase authoritative, critical editions of the texts. Most of the primary readings are available in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Vol. B. 10th ed. New York: Norton, 2022. You may also get critical editions from Norton or (recently) Oxford UP:
 - Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick*. Ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford. 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 2001
 - *Melville’s Short Novels*. Ed. Daniel McCall. New York: Norton, 2002
 - *The Confidence-Man*. 2. Ed. New York: Norton, 2005
- You can use older or newer editions than the ones listed here
- I will distribute additional critical readings via our Moodle
- Readings and assignments will be due on the day they are assigned (see schedule)

Further Reading

[Bryant, John. *Herman Melville: A Half Known Life*. 2 Vols. Blackwell, 2020.](#)

Levine, Robert S., editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*. Cambridge UP, 1998.

Kelley, Wyn. *A Companion to Herman Melville*. Blackwell, 2006.

[- - -, and Christopher Ohge, editors. *A New Companion to Herman Melville*. Blackwell, 2022.](#)

[- - -. *Herman Melville: An Introduction*. Blackwell, 2008.](#)

Yothers, Brian. *Melville’s Mirrors*. Camden House, 2011.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of the course, students will be able to...

- Name and discuss critically pertinent works by Herman Melville
- Contextualize his works in American cultural and literary history (historicist competency)
- Discuss his works in the context of C19 literary and aesthetics movements
- identify and name relevant literary themes, stylistic devices, and motifs of Melville's writing
- perform critical analysis of Melville's works (analytical competency)
- compare and critically discuss texts based on their treatment of said themes, devices, and motifs

To reach these goals, students will...

- learn about and critically respond to recent critical theories and criticism on the course subject
- research independently historical contexts of the period
- relate theories and contexts to primary texts via original critical readings
- explore their own thinking on these text through writing assignments
- articulate relevant research questions, based on historical and literary analyses
- conceptualize an original research project that addresses those questions
- perform written and oral critical literary analysis, alone or in class, based on textual evidence

ASSESSMENT

To receive credit for this course, you must satisfy all requirements set forth in the [Prüfungsordnung](#) that is applicable to your degree program. Regardless of your degree program, **all** students must meet the active participation requirements (*aktive Teilnahme*) for the class (see below). Visit the [Studienbüro](#) online help pages for information about program requirements and course registration. You will receive assignment sheets for all assignments. Please inform me **immediately** if your requirements differ from the descriptions below.

Active Participation (*aktive Teilnahme*)

The following assignments prepare you for the final paper. The assignments assess whether you conscientiously and continuously participated in the class (see "Workflow"). You must successfully complete **all** requirements (grade of 4,0 or better) listed below to receive "active participation" for the course. Assignments must be turned in on time (see schedule below). I do **not** accept late work. Should you fail an assignment (mock grade 5,0) you get a **one-time** chance to redo it (only good for **one** assignment). Do-overs do **not** apply to late work. If you fail an assignment **twice** or fail to turn it in, your status will be changed to "inactive." Each assignment comes with a detailed assignment sheet that explains the purpose and the requirements. Read these carefully (see Moodle).

Response Paper

All students will complete **one** short response papers (1000 words each). These papers focus on critical textual analysis, no additional research will be required. Students attending this course purely as an elective (not *Modulprüfung*) must **only** satisfy the active participation requirements.

Paper Proposal (only for paper writers)

You will compile a project proposal that outlines your plan for the final research paper. The proposal includes

- (1) a 350–500-word exposé that explains your argument and states your thesis claim
- (2) a table of contents that illustrates the structure of your paper and argument
- (3) an annotated bibliography that lists and briefly comments on criticism you plan to use

Modulprüfung Requirements

Since this course is cross-listed under several modules, credit requirements vary depending on your degree program and whether you are taking your *Modulprüfung* in this class (see below).

Master of Education (M.Ed.) and Wirtschaftspädagogik (WiPäd)

Depending on which module requirements you are trying to complete with your participation in the course, M.Ed. and pedagogy students may either write [1] an argumentative research paper (Module 8) OR [2] give an oral presentation (Module 12) to obtain credit for the course. You must inform me of your chosen credit assignment by **28 April**.

[1: Module 8] Final paper (see below)

[2: Module 12] Oral Presentation (approx. 60 mins.)

You will lead our discussion during **one** class session. This means that you will

1. Summarize and critically discuss one piece of recent criticism or critical theory
2. Propose an interpretation of the assigned readings based on said critical text
3. Discuss your interpretation with the rest of the class
4. prepare a one-page handout to accompany your talk

You must meet with me at least **two weeks** prior to the date of your presentation to discuss your plans. Any supplementary materials must also be presented to the class one week ahead of time. The handout will be due one week after your presentation.

Master of Arts

If you are taking your *Modulprüfung* (Module 2 Early American Studies) in this course, you will submit a final argumentative research paper (see below).

Final Argumentative Research Paper (M.A. / B.Ed.)

To receive credit for this course, you will produce a final argumentative research paper (4000 words M.Ed. / 6000 words M.A.) that deals with our course materials. In addition to completing the active participation requirements, **all** students who write final papers must submit a **paper proposal**. Remember to **register** for the final paper via JoguSTINE during the [*Prüfungsanmeldephase!*](#) Papers must follow MLA-style formatting and must meet the [minimum word requirement](#) of your study program (+/- 10%). Papers that do not meet these minimum requirements will fail. Refer to the assignment sheet for details.

Submitting Assignments / Feedback

All active-participation assignments must be submitted via Moodle. The final paper must be submitted **in print** form (see schedule below). You can submit assignments any time before the due date. In case of technical difficulties, submit the assignment via email, indicating the course number, your name, and matriculation number. You will receive written feedback, including a mock grade, on the response paper and the paper proposal. You will receive verbal feedback on the oral and written presentations. I will explain assignments and answer questions in class the week before the assignment is due.

Academic Honesty

All assignments you hand in must be your original creations. It is mandatory that you consult the **plagiarism policy** (see Moodle) as well as the corresponding section in the [MLA Handbook, 8th ed.](#) (ch. 1.6) before turning in your assignments. Both sources contain detailed definitions on what constitutes plagiarism. I will assume your familiarity with those documents, when grading your work. Students caught plagiarizing **automatically fail** the paper and the course.

ATTENDANCE, CONDUCT, COMMUNICATION

Attendance

Attendance for this class is not mandatory but **strongly encouraged**. Participating in class discussions and activities strengthens your ability to complete assignments successfully. Whether you show up or not, I will assume your familiarity with announcements, discussions, and assignments. There will be no special concessions made to absentees and I will not reiterate class discussions during office hours (see “Office Hours”).

Workflow / Class Preparation

Readings and assignments must be completed for the day they are assigned (see schedule). You should read all assigned materials carefully, look up unfamiliar vocabulary, and note down critical responses to what you read as well as any questions that emerge. Take (digital) marginal and research notes on readings and texts/objects as well as during class sessions, to keep track of your thoughts and ideas throughout the semester, then, refer back to those notes when you complete assignments. Bring your notes and texts to class. Raise questions and final paper ideas during class discussion or during office hours. I advise you to work continuously and keep up with readings and the online responses to avoid crunch and stress. Plan your semester schedule realistically. Take advantage of the [free courses the university library](#) offer on organizing your work, research techniques. If you need help with academic writing, you can schedule an appointment with [PHILIS](#).

Class Conduct

The classroom is a place to develop and test ideas, get feedback, and solve problems. Doing these things together is key and it is one of the reasons you would want to enroll in a university course in the first place. We should all strive to create the best possible working environment and group dynamic: We will treat each other with courtesy and respect as we earnestly and critically engage complex, multi-faceted, and controversial issues. We will concede to each other the ability to make mistakes (either out of ignorance, unsound reasoning, or linguistic limitations) as long as those mistakes are made in good faith. I reserve the right to eject from the classroom those who refuse to abide by these rules.

Communication

Your student email account (*yourname@students.uni-mainz.de*) is the **only** eligible way for us to communicate. Emails sent from other email addresses may not reach me (university server filters). I will circulate course-related information and announcements via email or Moodle, but I will not communicate grades via email. I will check my email weekdays between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Please check your email regularly to keep up with announcements. It is **your** responsibility to ensure that you have access to all materials via JGU’s LMS and that your student account is fully functional. If you experience technical issues, please [contact the ZDV](#).

Office Hours

Mondays 14:00 – 16:00 (in person); MS Teams (online) **by appointment**
Email: Anette Vollrath (anette.vollrath@uni-mainz.de)

Consultations during office hours are by appointment only. To schedule an appointment, please contact my assistant, Mrs. Anette Vollrath. Be courteous and state your name and course affiliation when you contact her. You are welcome to visit office hours any time to discuss questions relating to the class or final paper ideas. Please respect your time and mine:

- Consult the syllabus and the assignment sheets **before** contacting me
- Ask specific questions regarding course materials or assignments
- I will discuss ideas for writing projects, answer questions concerning materials, respond to concerns about the overall structure and focus of the course
- I will **not** reiterate or summarize assigned readings or class discussions
- I will **not** read complete assignment drafts

Learning Groups

I encourage you to form (virtual) learning groups outside of class by exchanging contact information or using other social media. You can form groups around shared interests and questions that come up in the discussion forum. You may share research and ideas, and critique each other’s work/writing, but you **cannot** co-author papers (see “Academic Honesty”).

READING SCHEDULE

Date	Session	Readings / Topics	Criticism / Critical Theory	Dues
21 April	1	Syllabus and Assignment Sheets		
28 April	2	Bryant, "Melville the Life" Kelly, "Melville's Life"	Chronology (Cambridge Companion) Marrs, (Optional)	credit assignments declared / presentation dates set
5 May	3	"Bartleby, the Scrivener"	Graeber, from <i>Bullsh*t Jobs</i>	Presentation
12 May	4	<i>Moby-Dick</i> , Ch. "Etymology"; "Extracts"; 1, 3, 10, 26, 27,	Otter, "Reading <i>Moby-Dick</i> "	Presentation
19 May	5	<i>Moby-Dick</i> 28, 36, 41, 42, 89, 93	Sanborn, " <i>Moby-Dick</i> "	Presentation
26 May	6	Independent Study Day	No class. Prepare Readings and Response-Paper Assignment	
2 June	7	Independent Study Day	No class. Prepare Readings and Response-Paper Assignment	
9 June	8	<i>Moby-Dick</i> 94, 96, 99, 102, 107, 119, 132, 135, Epilogue	Coleman, "Religion and Secularity"	Presentation
16 June	9	<i>The Confidence Man</i> (Chs.1-3)	Smith, "The Art of the Scam" Guerra, Introduction (Optional)	Response Paper Presentation
23 June	10	<i>The Confidence Man</i> (Chs.14 - 18)	Murison, "Paranoid Reading, Surface Reading, Deadpan Humor"	Presentation
30 June	11	<i>The Confidence Man</i> (Chs. 39-45)	Lee, "Skepticism and <i>The Confidence-Man</i> "	Presentation
7 July	12	<i>Billy Budd</i> (Ch. 1 - 15)	Jonik, "Melville and Philosophy"	Presentation
14 July	13	<i>Billy Budd</i> (Ch. 16 – 30)	Crane, "Judgment in <i>Billy Budd</i> "	Presentation
21 July	14	Review Day	Final Paper writers meet to discuss proposals, all others are off.	Paper Proposals
16 August	The paper must be submitted in print form ("hard copy") by 16 August 2023, 12:00h to the Obama Institute, Jacob-Welder-Weg 20 (Philosophicum II), 2nd floor, room 208 (Mrs. Vollrath's office). You can also mail your paper to that address (arrival by submission date) or leave it in the mailbox next to the door. Mrs. Vollrath will date-stamp papers upon receipt. Remember to attach the department cover sheet (front) and the grading rubric (back). Late work will not be accepted.			