



**Herman Melville (1819-1891)**, American author of such famed literary works as *Typee* (1846) and its sequel *Omoo* (1847) also wrote *Moby Dick, or; The Whale* (1851);

Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. But not my master, man, is even that fair play. Who's over me? Truth hath no confines.--Ch. 36

Herman Melville was born into an eminent family claiming war heroes and wealthy merchants on 1 August 1819 in New York City, New York State, son of Maria Gansevoort (1791-1872) and Allan Melville (1782-1832). As a successful import merchant, Allan afforded all the necessary comforts and more to his large family of eight sons and daughters. He loved to tell his children sea-faring tales of terror and adventure, and of places far away. After his death at the age of forty, his wife and children moved to the village of Lansingburg, on the banks of the Hudson River.

In 1835 Melville attended the Albany Classical School for a year, then moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts to work at the farm of his uncle, gentleman farmer Thomas Melville. It was not long however that Melville travelled back to New York and secured his place as cabin boy on a ship bound for Liverpool, England. Upon return to New York he held various unsatisfying jobs until he next set sail on the whaling ship *Acushnet* in 1841. His stay in the Marquesas Islands (now French Polynesia) with his friend Richard Tobias Greene would provide much fodder for his future novels. First published in England, *Typee* and *Omoo* (1847) are based on Melville's sea-faring adventures and stays in Polynesia and Tahiti. His next novel *Mardi: and A Voyage Thither* (two volumes, 1849)

is 'a romance of Polynesian adventure', again reflecting much of Melville's own life on ships and the South Seas. Another semi-autobiographical novel *Redburn: His First Voyage* was published in 1849.

On 4 August 1847 Melville married Elizabeth Shaw, with whom he would have four children: Malcolm (b.1849), Stanwix (b.1851), Elizabeth (b.1853), and Frances (b.1855). In 1850 the Melvilles moved to what would be their home for the next thirteen years, 'Arrowhead' (now designated a National Historic Landmark) in Pittsfield, Berkshire County, Massachusetts. It was here that Melville made the acquaintance of fellow New Englander Nathaniel Hawthorne--he would become a great friend to Melville, and to whom he dedicated *Moby Dick*. It was the beginning of a prolific period of writing for Melville. He wrote sketches for such journals as *Putnam's Monthly* including "The Piazza" and "I and My Chimney", and started on his masterpiece *Moby Dick*. The surrounding Berkshire Hills provided the necessary peace and quiet, but as Melville writes to Hawthorne in June of 1851, he was also busy with other projects--'Since you have been here I have been building some shanties of houses (connected with the old one), and likewise some shanties of chapters and essays. I have been ploughing and sowing and raising and printing and praying.

After the publication of *Moby Dick* in October of 1851, Melville was seeing positive reviews of his works in England and America, readers captivated by his authentic story telling of exotic adventures, although he struggled with self-doubt. While he wrote many other works including *White Jacket* (1850), *The Encantadas; or, Enchanted Isles* (novella, 1854), *Israel Potter* (1855), *Piazza Tales* (1856), and *The Confidence Man* (1857), it was with *Moby Dick* that Melville had reached his peak as writer and observer of human nature in all its strengths and weaknesses. Many of his works are steeped in metaphor and allegory, at times cynical, others satirical. In previous years he had travelled throughout Europe and the Holy Land; in 1857 he launched into a three year lecture tour of major North American cities where he spoke of his writings and travels.

In 1863 the Melvilles gave up country life and moved to New York City and the home of Herman's brother Allan at 104 East Twenty-Sixth Street. Melville soon obtained a position with the New York Custom House where he remained for the next twenty years. Almost ten years since his last published novel, Melville was now writing poetry; *Battle Pieces* (1866) was well-received. *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876) was followed by his collection *John Marr and Other Poems* (1888), and *Timoleon* (1891). While they are appreciated now, by the time of Herman Melville's death he had slipped into obscurity as a writer. He died at his home on East 26th Street on 28 September 1891 and now rests beside his wife Elizabeth in Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, New York.

"Oh, seems to me, there should be two ceaseless steeds for a bold man to ride,-- the Land and the Sea; and like circus-men we should never dismount, but only be steadied and rested by leaping from one to the other, while still, side by side, they both race round the sun."--Ch. 26, from *Pierre: or, The Ambiguities* (1852)

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