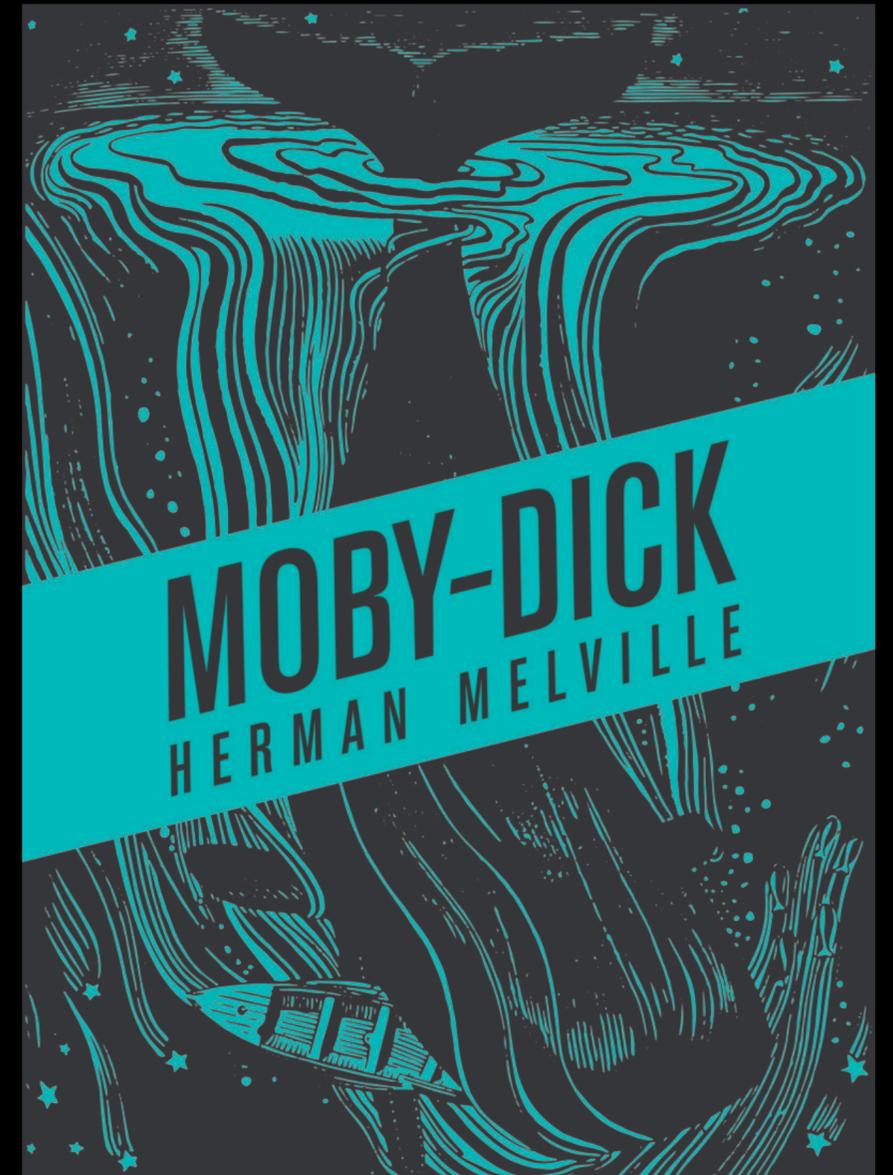


Moby-Dick

ECL 522: American Lit 1800-1860
Professor Jessica Pressman
Fall 2025



Day 3: Context and Conversations-
Emerson's "The American Scholar" (1837)

ADMIN

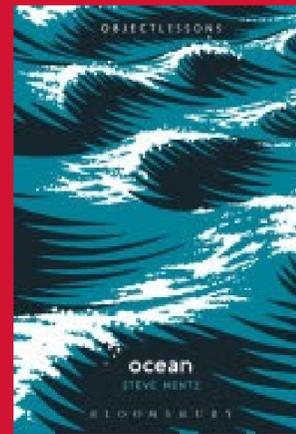
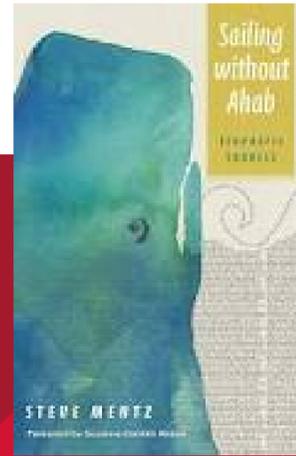
- Wordpress — all good? Password added soon.
- I will be posting class slides to the Wordpress site
- Blog posts suggestion: focus on a quote and develop an idea/interpretation/question.

Steve Mentz

Pioneer in Blue Humanities, Shakespeare scholar, poet, and ocean swimmer.



Dr. Mentz will be in conversation with Professors Jessica Pressman and Diana Leong (ECL) about Ecocriticism, the Blue Humanities, *Moby-Dick*, and more. He will answer your questions about interdisciplinary creative-critical research from all in attendance.



Location:
Digital Humanities
Center (Love Library,
lower level)

Date:
Tuesday,
Sept. 16

Time:
3:30 - 4:45 p.m.

SPONSORED BY:

SDSU

College of Arts and Letters
English and
Comparative Literature



Extra Credit

New Digital Humanities Center Installation!



The Digital Humanities Center will be featuring an installation from School of Art and Design Professor, Matthew Herbert, also known as his studio name, **eleet warez!** ([Artist site](#))

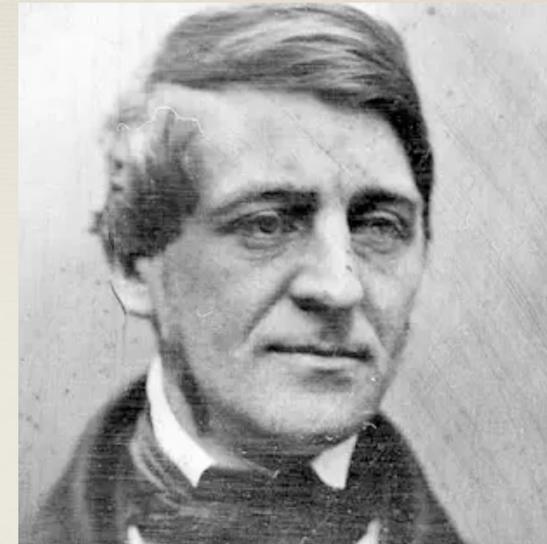
The installation will run from August 25th to November 21st, so make sure you head down to the DHC (LA 61) and check it out before it's gone!

Questions from Canvas about syllabus

- Extra credit— For the extra credit, would doing just one additional post give the full 1% of extra credit? Or would we have to earn up to that amount with multiple posts?see website
- Deadlines- see READING SCHEDULE
- What on campus resources are there for writing?
- Are there any other optional reading materials, beside *Why Read Moby Dick?* that you would recommend? Are there any study guides and/or companion works that you would recommend reading along with the book?
- . For the readings, lets say on week 6 we have to read chapter 1-4, can we go past chapter 4 or do you want us to stay pretty intoned with those chapters?
- BLOGS DUE SUNDAYS— see WEBSITE NOT PDF

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1888)

- * American philosopher, essayist, lecturer. Central public figure and thinker of the 19th C.
- * descended from clergymen and merchants. Harvard graduate.
- * Articulated and argued for American self-reliance and intellectual/individual independence, spirituality= Transcendentalism
- * 1832-33 trip to Europe: met Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle. Merged Romanticism into a spiritual and philosophical perspective for Americans.
- * Published *Nature* (1836): essence of transcendental revolt from rationalism, in line with Romantics
 - * manifesto-like doctrine of “American Scholar” (1837) and “Self-Reliance” (1841)
- * 1840s lyceum lecturer— shared ideas widely. Became America’s most prominent thinker



Transcendentalism

- * New England movement that was philosophical, religious and literary movement. Reading based movement, led by readers and writers: Emerson, Theoreau, Margaret Fuller, William Ellery Channing, Amos Alcot, etc. Sought to define spirituality based on new readings of biblical texts from East and West. Believed that all people had access to divine inspiration. Emerson= chief literary voice of this movement, with *Nature* (1836) as core text
 - * *The Dial* journal (1840s) as main periodical of publication
- * A focus on intuition and individual invention, not religious leaders and texts. God in in Nature and needs to be seen, read, recognized— so man needs to learn to read....
- * Reading Nature, Techniques of close realistic observation in poetry, Social experiments: utopian villages, communes (Brook Farm 1840s)

American Renaissance

(1830-1865)

- * Period from roughly 1830s roughly until the end of Civil War in which American letters blossomed in ways that established a national spirit and culture through literature.
- * art of the past could provide inspiration and sources for a national American art.
- * connection between ancient Grecian democracy and new American one
- * Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Emily Dickinson

Provocation:

Moby-Dick is Melville's response to Emerson

- Ishmael= poet/scholar/individual
 - “A whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard”
 - The experimental novel as an act of creative reading/writing that pursues links between books and nature, everyday life. Explores the question of Emerson's “whole man” and “man thinking”

1837

THE
AMERICAN
SCHOLAR

*An Address
Delivered by*

RALPH
WALDO
EMERSON

*Before the
ΦBK SOCIETY
AT CAMBRIDGE
August 1837*



The
LAURENTIAN PRESS
New York 1901

- * **“The American Scholar” (1837)**
Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. called it America’s “Intellectual Declaration of Independence”
- * speech given to the Phi Beta Kappa Society in 1837

Quick discussion

- What did you think?
- What stood out at you?

Mr. President and Gentlemen,

I greet you on the re-commencement of our literary year. Our anniversary is one of hope, and, perhaps, not enough of labor. We do not meet for games of strength or skill, for the recitation of histories, tragedies, and odes, like the ancient Greeks; for parliaments of love and poesy, like the Troubadours; nor for the advancement of science, like our contemporaries in the British and European capitals. Thus far, our holiday has been simply a friendly sign of the survival of the love of letters amongst a people too busy to give to letters any more. As such, it is precious as the sign of an indestructible instinct. **Perhaps the time is already come, when it ought to be, and will be, something else; when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids, and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close.**

The Whole Man [human]

- * “The old fable covers a doctrine ever new and sublime; that there is One Man,--present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man. **Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all.**” (para 5)
- * “The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters,--a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man”
- * “In this distribution of functions, the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state, he is, *Man Thinking*. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he

“Man thinking” = gerund, action

“In this distribution of functions, the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state, he is, *Man Thinking*. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking” (Para. 7)

What is “Man thinking”? = Nature

“I. The first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature. Every day, the sun; and, after sunset, night and her stars. Ever the winds blow; ever the grass grows. Every day, men and women, conversing, beholding and beholden. The scholar is he of all men whom this spectacle most engages.” (Para. 10)

The Thesis

“Yet hence arises a grave mischief. **The sacredness** which attaches to the act of creation,--the act of thought,--**is transferred to the record.** The poet chanting, was felt to be a divine man: henceforth the chant is divine also. The writer was a just and wise spirit: henceforward it is settled, the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. **Instantly, the book becomes noxious: the guide is a tyrant.** The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having once so opened, having once received this book, stands upon it, and makes an outcry, if it is disparaged. **Colleges are built on it.** Books are written on it by thinkers, not by Man Thinking; by men of talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles. **Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views,** which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given, forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries, when they wrote these books” (para. 15)

What is “Man thinking”?= Historically- focused, but...

“II. The next great influence into the spirit of the scholar, is, the mind of the Past,--in whatever form, whether of literature, of art, of institutions, that mind is inscribed. Books are the best type of the influence of the past, and perhaps we shall get at the truth,--learn the amount of this influence more conveniently,--by considering their value alone.” (Para. 12)

...

But not stuck in history.

...

“Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this.” (Para. 14)

Thinking &/vs Books

- * **“Hence, instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm.** Hence, the book-learned class, who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as making a sort of Third Estate with the world and the soul. Hence, the restorers of readings, the emendators, the bibliomaniacs of all degrees.” (Para. 16)
- * **“Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst...** they are for nothing but to inspire... The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they, — let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward.” (Para. 17)



The duty of the Scholar: one *in* the world

“III. There goes in the world a notion, that the scholar should be a recluse, a valetudinarian,--as unfit for any handiwork or public labor, as a penknife for an axe” (para. 23)

“It is the raw material out of which the intellect moulds her splendid products.” (Para. 24)

“Life is our dictionary.” (Para. 27)

His role: “He is the world's eye...He is the world's heart” (para.

Why now? (In 1837)

- * “Another sign of our times, also marked by an analogous political movement, is, the new importance given to the single person.”
- * Ending: **“We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds.** The study of letters shall be no longer a name for pity, for doubt, and for sensual indulgence. The dread of man and the love of man shall be a wall of defence and a wreath of joy around all. **A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.”**

AGAIN, Provocation: *Moby-Dick* is Melville's response to Emerson

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Discussion

- What do we learn about the American intellectual consciousness of that time?
- Why might this be relevant to approaching *Moby-Dick*?

Questions/ Take Aways?