UE030: Making *Moby-Dick*

**Course Descriptions**

What is *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*? Is it an adventure story, a revenge story against a monster whale? Is it a novel investigating American identity in race and in national promise and revolution? And what about the tragedy of this tale? Only one whaleman lives. Does Melville write a tragedy in the vein of Shakespeare? How does this book matter? *Making Moby-Dick* takes on a series of critical questions in four crucial settings. The first setting is the New England contexts of American literature in the 1840s—seen in the writings of Emerson, Hawthorne, and Melville—while the second setting turns to Edgar Allan Poe’s and Mary Shelley’s model adventure tales, of the sea and of the ‘monster.’ Our third setting is the *Moby-Dick* itself and our extended reading of the tale. The fourth and final setting lays out the argument that there are actually ‘two Moby-Dicks’ and that Melville’s reading of Shakespeare’s tragedies plays an essential role to deciphering the novel’s composition. Students gain the critical skills needed to interpret, and to answer, what the novel *Moby-Dick* is, or does.

**Class Requirements**

Reading and participation are essential for a course like this one. Students will be required to give in-class presentations to help organize and prompt discussions. A first paper, on a subject set by me, will be due in Week 4 and account for 25% of the grade. A second essay, which will account for 25% of the grade, will be due in Week 9; here again there will be a topic announced during the term. The long *Moby-Dick* paper (10-12 pages, exploring some issue in relation to the topics and literature discussed in the course) will be due in finals week; this paper is worth 50% of your grade. Please consult with me before choosing a topic. I will be making and circulating a list of potential topics, for the undecided: there is plenty of work to be done in the area we are considering.

**Texts**

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*
Herman Melville, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature and Selected Essays*
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Mosses from an Old Manse*
Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket, and Related Tales*