

# Herman melville research paper

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Herman Melville stands among America's greatest authors. Most people recognize Melville as the author of *Moby Dick*, one of the most well known American novels, one that he did not receive appreciation for until many years after his death. Almost all of Melville's masterpieces included blends of symbolism, adventure, fact, and fiction. He based many novels on past experiences (primarily long sea explorations) and personal adventures. Not only did he capture the reader with his intense, vivid imagination, but he also conveyed his own philosophies and beliefs through quotes from the Bible and exceptional symbolism.

Although Melville is widely known as an extraordinary author today, he was not considered to be as exceptional back then. He was born into a middle class family in New York City on August 1, 1819 (South). Herman's father was a merchant from New England while his mother came from an old New York Dutch family. A little over ten years into his life, Melville's father died shortly after experiencing financial and mental breakdowns. Now the "man of the house," Melville had to take on the challenge of providing the family with a stable income to keep them healthy.

He took on a variety of jobs for the next nine years, including being a clerk for his brother's hat store, working in his uncle's bank, teaching school in Massachusetts, and, perhaps the most impactful job in his early life, sailing to England as the cabin boy on a merchant ship. Instantly falling in love with the sea, Melville wrote about his voyage as a cabin boy in his novel *Redburn*. This "adventure" inspired Melville to continue his career at sea. When he returned to America, he joined the crew of "Acushnet," a brand new whaling ship, soon to set sail in the Pacific Ocean (South).

This voyage was perhaps the most influential expedition Melville ever took part in. Using the experiences, newly learned whaling knowledge, and stories from this specific adventure, Melville created several novels that were published later on in his life, including the world-famous *Moby Dick*. In all of his works, Melville reveals his own life in his creative writing style. His passion for whaling and sea voyages is presented in many of his novels, along with his internal desire to “unfold” himself and his whaling experiences, and also the portrayal of the man he wishes to be, through the descriptions of the major characters in his novels.

Perhaps the most influential experiences in Melville’s life occurred on whaling ships. Ever since he was young, he was fascinated with sea life, and he eventually found “his way onto the whaling ship *Acushnet* in 1841 that would provide the experiences detailed in most of Melville’s repertoire” (“Melville”). He “spent a considerable amount of time on the seas as a sailor, and much of it in the South Seas’ whaling industry. Hence Melville’s favorite stories had that maritime orientation” (“Herman”).

He spent many years of his life on ships traveling to and from several different countries; thus, his extensive experiences as a seaman was certainly brought out in his novels. Melville often wrote about his own journeys, like his “second book entitled, “*Omoo, A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas*”, published in 1847 which was based on another whaling journey Melville took part in” (“Herman”). Melville, on another adventure, “was captured and held for several months by the *Typees*; when he returned unscathed, friends encouraged Melville to write the escapade down” (“Herman”).

On several of these expeditions, Melville had many near-death incidents that almost cost him his life, but inspired him to record them first-hand in his novels using dramatic sentence structure that captures the reader's attention. Melville was the type of writer that wrote whatever came to his mind, " however, it was his adventures as a seaman in 1845 that inspired Melville to write" (" Herman"). His " experience on the island as a prisoner of the Typees caused Melville to write his first novel based on that experience" (" Melville").

Melville loved to entertain his readers with exhilarating stories about his struggles at sea, and also the near-death encounters he experienced on his journeys. Overall, Melville was greatly inspired by his sea voyages throughout his life, and based most of his novels around his passion, whaling. On the other hand, Melville also had the desire to " open" and examine himself, and perhaps the human race itself, in writing his novels. Melville was highly impacted by his courageous adventures aboard ships, but ultimately " it was his desire to " unfold" himself that drove him to a writing vocation" (" Melville").

Nathaniel Hawthorn, the author of *The Scarlet Letter*, aided Melville in his writing and " was very taken with Melville's ability to delve deep into the human psyche and find what lay there and was very supportive in Melville's continual unfolding..." (" Melville"). Not only did Melville capture the reader with intense drama, but he also grabbed the reader's attention by " unfolding" his own opinions and beliefs in his writing so as to challenge the reader's previous views on issues in life. Melville was so extensive in " the

use of mythic figures, stories, and analogues, that his novels are inevitably interpreted as allegories" (" Billy").

He frequently " made the stories allegories instead of strict whaling adventures" (" Melville"). One specific goal that Melville deeply valued was to make readers examine themselves and question concepts people commonly do not consider, by secretly placing a hidden meaning, usually a moral, in his novels. Melville believed that " crucial to the structure and meaning was symbol. Melville, a thorough and serious Bible reader, dwells on biblical symbolism" (" Billy"). In *Billy Budd*, one of Melville's most popular novels, the main character, Billy, was sent to be executed, but just before he dies, he utters his last words, " God bless Captain Vere!" (Melville).

This is meant to symbolize Christ's cry of forgiveness in the book of Luke - " Father forgive them for they know not what they do. " Religion played a major role in Melville's life, and he dedicated several excerpts from his novels to reveal biblical themes or stories. All in all, Melville's writing was not meant to just entertain the reader, but also to challenge the reader's own views by " unfolding" his own philosophies through the use of symbolism and rhetorical devices.

Lastly, the life of Melville shows up in his own writing through the descriptions and analyses of the major characters in his novels. He was thought to bring out his own ideas in the major characters from his stories and also to be " absorbing character traits from some of those visitors which later took life in his fiction" (L'Etoile). The major characters that Melville brought to life caused critics to speculate that he " adopted the " poignant, special" power in the narrator's voice from another source" (L'Etoile).

Melville was in many ways similar to the major characters he brought to life in his novels, primarily because he aspired to be like them, and thus shared comparable qualities. People have gone “ a long way toward explaining the “ special” character of the narrative voice as well as the compelling quality of the story that, to so many, has seemed so elusive” (L’Etoile). Melville’s “ artificial sentence construction parallels the narrator’s style of indirectcommunication” (Kemp).

Through his unique sentence structure and characterization of important individuals in his stories, Melville alludes to the type of person he is and also the being he wants to become using indirect communication within his characters’ actions and words. Basing the majority of his masterpieces on sea life, Melville could easily express his inner self and philosophies through the creations of the characters in his novels. Throughout his life, Melville created many masterpieces and brought to life many characters. His own life is noticeably brought out in his works through his repeated ocean oriented novels.

His novels like Moby Dick and Billy Budd challenged the ways people thought back then and today by relaying hidden morals to the audience. His analyses and descriptions of major individuals in his stories are indications of how Melville thought and who he was/wanted to be as a person. His desire to share his beliefs with the world led him to expand his writing career and create some of the most well known pieces today using exceptional symbolism, allusions, and plots. Melville changed American literature with his famous books and continues to be studied by students around the world today.