

Veranstalter	Prof. Dr. Jan D. Kucharzewski
Thema	“Nothing Exists in Itself”: The Works of Herman Melville [ENG-7, ENG-7a, ENG-13, AA7, AA11, LAA10, LAA13, AA-MA3, AA-MA4, AA-WB]
Art der Veranstaltung	Seminar II
Veranstaltungsnummer	53-565
Zeit	2st, Mo. 10-12 Uhr
Raum	Ü35 - 01016
Beginn	15.10.2018
Sprechstunde während der Vorlesungszeit:	Nach Vereinbarung

In one of the most famous quotes taken from Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851), which is commonly considered the original ‘great American novel,’ the narrator Ishmael concludes that “there is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself.” This profound philosophical observation is certainly indicative of the metaphysical ideas and discourses that run through *Moby-Dick* and which have given the novel the notorious reputation of being difficult, dense, and serious.

However, one only needs to consider the context of the quote in order to understand that Melville loved to mess with his readers. Ishmael’s insight actually occurs in an extremely cold hotel room where he lies tucked in bed with the ‘cannibal’ and potentially gay lover Queequeg, only their heads jutting out from under the pillows. Ishmael realizes that he is able to enjoy the warmth of the bed and his friend because his head is cold. Hence, “nothing exists in itself.” This passage demonstrates that in spite of all the weight and baggage associated with Melville’s fiction, his texts are much more playful, ironic, and funny than they are often made out to be. Yes, Melville’s is a complex writer, but he is not an incomprehensible or unreadable writer.

This class will therefore take on Melville’s fiction on its own terms as texts that in the middle of the 19th century addressed what it means to be an American, an American writer, and, above all, a human being. We will tackle a few of his short stories, two novellas, and, of course, the Big One.

There are people who read *Moby-Dick* once a year because the novel continues to surprise them, to speak to them, and to provide perspective. This class will give you the unique opportunity to read *Moby-Dick* (in its entirety!) at least once in your lifetime.

Course Requirements

Besides the “doh!”-requirements of attendance and participation as well as of actually reading and preparing the texts, students will be asked to produce guided reading responses (ca. 300 words) for each session which will be collected or read out in class. There will not be oral presentations in this course. The course will be

completed with a term paper.