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THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
HERMAN MELVILLE

The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville is intended to provide a critical introduction to Melville's work. The essays have been specially commissioned for this volume and provide a comprehensive overview of Melville's career. All of Melville's novels are discussed, as well as most of his poetry and short fiction. Written at a level both challenging and accessible, the volume provides fresh perspectives on an American author whose work continues to fascinate readers and stimulate new study.

Robert S. Levine is Professor of English at the University of Maryland, College Park. He is the author of *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville* (1989) and *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (1997).

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CHRONOLOGY OF MELVILLE'S LIFE

- 1819 Born New York City, August 1, third child of Allan Melvill, merchant and importer, and Maria Gansevoort Melvill, daughter of American Revolutionary hero General Peter Gansevoort. Brothers and sisters: Gansevoort (1815–46), Helen Maria (1817–88), Augusta (1821–76), Allan (1823–72), Catherine (1825–1905), Frances Priscilla (1827–85), Thomas (1830–84).
- 1825 With Gansevoort, enters New-York Male High School.
- 1828 Named best speaker in the high school's Introductory department.
- 1829 Enters the grammar school of Columbia College, joining Gansevoort.
- 1830 After Allan Melvill liquidates his failing business, the Melvills move to Albany. With Gansevoort, Herman enrolls at the Albany Academy. Lemuel Shaw, Allan's friend and Herman's future father-in-law, named Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts.
- 1831–2 For financial reasons, Herman is withdrawn from the Albany Academy in October 1831. Allan journeys to New York in late November 1831 to take care of business matters. On his return to Albany, on December 10, he's forced to cross the frozen Hudson River on foot. Feverish, delirious, and in debt, he dies on January 28, 1832. Herman begins clerking at the New York State Bank. Sometime between 1832 and 1834, perhaps to dissociate the family from the father's failures, Maria adds the "e" to "Melvill."
- 1833–7 Continues with his bank job until spring 1834, when he begins working at Gansevoort's cap and fur store. Attends the Albany Classical School in 1835 and then the Albany Academy (1836–7). Continues working for his brother until the

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- business fails in 1837. In the fall of that year he teaches at the Sikes District school near Pittsfield.
- 1838 Publishes in the March 24 issue of the *Albany Microscope* satirical remarks on the area's young men's debating clubs. In November, after the family's diminished finances force a relocation to Albany, Melville enrolls at Lansingburgh Academy, where he studies surveying and engineering.
- 1839 Under the pseudonym "L.A.V.," publishes two sketches, "Fragments from a Writing Desk," in the May *Democratic Press and Lansingburgh Advertiser*. On June 4 he signs on as a "boy" with the merchant ship *St. Lawrence*. Sails from New York to Liverpool and back from June 5 to October 1. Shortly after his return, he begins teaching at the Greenbush and Schodack Academy in Greenbush, New York.
- 1840 Leaves his position at Greenbush because of the school's inability to pay him. Teaches in the spring in Brunswick, New York, and then, accompanied by his friend Eli James Murdock Fly, visits his uncle Thomas Melvill in Galena, Illinois, to explore vocational possibilities in the West. Returning East, he signs on with the whaling ship *Acushnet* in New Bedford after failing to find a job in New York.
- 1841-4 Departs for the South Seas on the *Acushnet* on January 3, 1841. On July 9, 1842, he jumps ship with Richard Tobias Greene at Nukahiva Bay in the Marquesas Islands, remaining among the islanders of Taipi Valley for four weeks before signing on with the Australian whaler *Lucy Ann*. At Tahiti, he is sent ashore and nominally imprisoned as a mutineer, only to escape in October with John Troy. He then signs on with the Nantucket whaling ship *Charles and Henry* in November 1842. (At around the same time, his first cousin Guert Gansevoort is involved in putting down the "mutiny" on the U.S. brig *Somers*.) Discharged in May 1843 in the Hawaiian Islands, Melville works at various jobs – pin setter in a bowling alley, clerk in a store – until enlisting in the United States Navy in Honolulu and sailing as an ordinary seaman aboard the frigate *United States* on August 20, 1843. He returns to Boston on October 3, 1844, and soon after his discharge rejoins his family in Lansingburgh.
- 1845-6 Writes a narrative of his adventures among the Typee islanders, which is rejected by New York's Harper & Brothers in May or June 1845. Gansevoort, after stumping for Polk

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- in 1844, is rewarded in spring 1845 with the position of Secretary of the American Legation in London. Once there, he helps to place his brother's Typee manuscript with John Murray, who publishes it in his prestigious "Colonial and Home Library" in late February 1846 under the title *Narrative of a Four Months' Residence Among the Natives of a Valley of the Marquesas Islands*. On March 17 the book, now titled *Typee*, is published by New York's Wiley & Putnam. After meeting Toby Greene in Rochester, who "authenticates" the facts of *Typee*, Melville prepares a "Revised Edition" with an appended "The Story of Toby," which is published later that year. Gansevoort dies in London on May 12, 1846.
- 1847 Attempts to find a government job in Washington, D.C. *Omoo* published by Murray in London (March) and by Harper & Brothers in New York (May). On August 4, Melville marries Elizabeth Shaw, daughter of Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw. After honeymooning in New Hampshire and Canada, they move into a large row house in Manhattan purchased with the help of Lemuel Shaw. Living with Herman and Elizabeth are Allan Melville and his wife, the four unmarried Melville sisters, mother Maria Melville, and (on occasion) brother Tom Melville. Writes for the *Literary World*, edited by Evert A. Duyckinck, and for *Yankee Doodle*, edited by Cornelius Mathews.
- 1849 Rejected by Murray, *Mardi* is published by Richard Bentley in London (March) and by Harper in New York (April). *Redburn* is published by Bentley (October) and Harper (November). Birth of son, Malcolm, on February 16. In October, Melville departs for a trip to London and the Continent, returning January 31, 1850.
- 1850 *White-Jacket* published by Bentley in London (January) and by Harper in New York (March). On August 5, Melville, while vacationing in Pittsfield, meets Hawthorne and they quickly become friends; later that month he publishes "Hawthorne and His Mosses" in the *Literary World*. In September, with money borrowed from his father-in-law, Melville purchases a 160 acre farm in Pittsfield, which he names "Arrowhead," and moves there with his family.
- 1851 Dedicated to the "Genius" of Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Whale* published by Bentley in London (October) and, with

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- the title changed to *Moby-Dick*, by Harper in New York (November). Birth of second son, Stanwix, on October 22. In a famous test of the Fugitive Slave Law, Chief Justice Shaw, in April, orders Thomas Sims returned to his southern owner (in 1854, in another famous case, he orders the fugitive slave Anthony Burns returned to his owner).
- 1852 Rejected by Bentley, *Pierre* published by Harper in New York (August) and by Sampson Low in London (November).
- 1853 Between 1853 and 1856, Melville publishes fourteen tales and sketches in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* and *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. Birth of daughter, Elizabeth, on May 22. Melville's family makes an unsuccessful effort to secure him a consulship. Evidence suggests that he completes a book manuscript, *The Isle of the Cross*, which the Harpers choose not to publish.
- 1855 Serialized in *Putnam's, Israel Potter* published by Putnam in New York (March) and by George Routledge in London (May). Birth of second daughter, Frances, on March 2.
- 1856 *The Piazza Tales*, which collects five of the pieces in *Putnam's*, including "Bartleby, The Scrivener" (1853) and "Benito Cereno" (1855), published by Dix & Edwards in New York (1856) and distributed in England by Sampson Low. Concerned about his son-in-law's health, Shaw finances Melville's travels to Europe and the Holy Land (October 11, 1856, to May 20, 1857). Melville visits Hawthorne in Liverpool in November 1856.
- 1857–60 *The Confidence-Man* published by Dix & Edwards in New York (April 1857) and by Longman in London (April 1857). Between late 1857 and 1860 Melville undertakes three lecture tours, speaking first on "Statues in Rome" (1857–8), next on "The South Seas" (1858–9), and finally on "Traveling" (1859–60). In 1860 he fails in his efforts to publish a poetry manuscript. With his brother Thomas at the helm, he embarks for California on May 30, 1860, aboard the clipper ship *Meteor*. Shaken by their perilous journey around Cape Horn, Melville in November returns via Panama to New York without his brother.
- 1861 Journeys to Washington, D.C., in another failed quest to obtain a consulship. Lemuel Shaw dies in Boston on March 30.
- 1862 After returning to Pittsfield, Melville is severely injured when thrown from a wagon.

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- 1863 Purchases his brother Allan's home at 104 East Twenty-Sixth Street and moves to New York. Allan purchases Arrowhead.
- 1864 Visits Civil War battlefields on the Virginia front with Allan. Hawthorne dies May 19.
- 1866 Publishes four Civil War poems in *Harper's. Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, a collection of Melville's war poetry, published by Harper in New York (August). On December 5, he assumes the duties of District Inspector of the United States Customs Service at the port of New York.
- 1867 Unhappy in her marriage and evidently fearful of her husband, Elizabeth Melville discusses with her minister, Henry Bellows, the possibility of a legal separation. In May, Bellows proposes a kind of kidnapping scheme to help Elizabeth obtain sanctuary with her Boston relatives, a scheme which she and her family eventually reject. On September 11, the Melvilles' son Malcolm dies from a self-inflicted gunshot to the head.
- 1872 Maria Gansevoort Melville dies April 1 at the age of eighty-two.
- 1876 *Clarel* published in New York by Putnam (June). Melville's uncle Peter Gansevoort pays for the publishing expenses.
- 1885 Resigns from his position as District Inspector of Customs (December 31).
- 1886 The Melvilles' son Stanwix dies in San Francisco on February 23.
- 1888 Privately publishes *John Marr and Other Sailors* in an edition of twenty-five copies after receiving a bequest of \$3,000 from his sister Frances Priscilla.
- 1891 Privately publishes *Timoleon* in an edition of twenty-five copies. Dies September 28. An unpublished volume of poems, titled "Weeds and Wildings Chiefly," the sketch "Daniel Orme," and *Billy Budd* are left in manuscript. The first published version of *Billy Budd* appears in 1924.