



American Legends: The Life of Herman Melville

Charles River Editors

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- *Includes pictures of Melville and important people and places in his life.
- *Explains the real-life experiences that inspired Melville's most famous works.
- *Includes some of Melville's most famous quotes and letters to people like Nathaniel Hawthorne.
- *Includes critics' quotes about Moby Dick and some of Melville's other famous works.
- *Includes a Table of Contents.

“Melville was a born romancer. One cannot account for the success of his early romances by saying that in the Great South Sea he had found and worked a new field for romance, since evidently it was not his experience in the South Sea that had led him to romance, but the irresistible attraction that romance had over him that led him to the South Sea. He was able not only to feel but to interpret that charm, as it never had been interpreted before, as it never has been interpreted since.” – Eulogy Editorial in the New York Times, 1891

A lot of ink has been spilled covering the lives of history's most influential figures, but how much of the forest is lost for the trees? In Charles River Editors' American Legends series, readers can get caught up to speed on the lives of America's most important men and women in the time it takes to finish a commute, while learning interesting facts long forgotten or never known.

The life and legacy of Herman Melville have taken on various incarnations in the nearly 200 years since he was born. When he died in 1891, Melville was remembered for his series of well-received works back in the mid-19th century, particularly his first novel *Typee*, a bestseller when it was initially published. But his death followed over four decades of general obscurity, which was noted in an editorial eulogy for Melville that appeared in the New York Times: “There has died and been buried in this city, during the current week, at an advanced age, a man who is so little known, even by name, to the generation now in the vigor of life that only one newspaper contained an obituary account of him, and this was but of three or four lines. Yet forty years ago the appearance of a new book by Herman Melville was esteemed a literary event, not only throughout his own country, but so far as the English-speaking race extended.”

Melville's name may have been almost completely forgotten during his own lifetime, but there was a “Melville Revival” in the early 20th century, thanks to Raymond Weaver's biography on him in 1921 and several works reviewing American literature in the years following. But while those works can be credited with resurrecting Melville's name, over the ensuing decades Melville became almost synonymous with one of his novels: *Moby Dick*.

Now considered one of the quintessential “Great American Novels”, *Moby Dick* is ostensibly about Captain Ahab hunting a whale named Moby Dick, with a sailor named Ishmael narrating the story. However, throughout the novel Ishmael speculates upon concepts such as good and evil, society and religion, and by the end of the novel it is apparent that *Moby Dick* is an open-ended allegory full of metaphors that Melville leaves for the reader to determine for himself.

In that sense, *Moby Dick* is a fitting legacy for Melville, an extremely cerebral man who impressed contemporaries like Nathaniel Hawthorne, who Melville dedicated his famous novel to. And like the novel, there were few concrete answers to the questions Melville held throughout his own life, particularly the

spiritual ones that greatly interested him.

American Legends: The Life of Herman Melville examines the famous author's works, including the seminal Moby Dick, but it also profiles the life of the man himself and analyzes his lasting legacy. Along with pictures, you will learn about Melville like you never have before, in no time at all.

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