ENG 2130: The Shorter Works of Herman Melville

Meeting Times: W 9:00-11:30

Instructor: Owen Cantrell

Room: Education Building, Phillips State Prison

“Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges.” *Billy Budd*

“At present, I would prefer not to be a little reasonable.” “Bartleby the Scrivener”

*Seguid vuestro jefe* (‘Follow your leader’) “Benito Cereno”

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| **Course Description** |

This course will discuss three shorter works by Herman Melville: “Bartleby the Scrivener,” “Benito Cereno,” and *Billy Budd*. These texts have in common a number of important themes including justice, punishment, and civil disobedience. These themes can also lead us to discuss larger philosophical questions of the limits to knowledge (and reason), what counts as truth (and for whom), and agency as defined as various classes of personhood.

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| **Required Texts** |

Melville, Herman. 1853. “Bartleby the Scrivener”

---. 1855. “Benito Cereno.”

---. 1888. *Billy Budd*, *Sailor*. Published 1924.

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| **Response Essay Assignment** |

For your response essay, I want you to trace a major theme, image, keyword, or concept through at least two of the three texts. For example, you could trace the concept of truth as it appears in both “Bartleby the Scrivener” and “Benito Cereno”. Or you could trace the concept of justice as it appears at the end of “Benito Cereno” and *Billy Budd*. There are endless possibilities, but the goal is to note the differences and similarities between the ways the texts deal with a central concept and if you think that resolves into a consistent theory we could attribute to Melville. Ideally, we could learn through your essay what you think Melville has to say about a specific topic as portrayed in the texts read throughout the course based on evidence from the text. This essay will be due one week after the last day of class.

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| **Course Schedule** |

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| Date | Topics Covered | Reading #1 | Reading #2 |
| July 30th | What’s Wrong with Bartleby (Or What’s Wrong with Everyone Else)? | “Bartleby the Scrivener” (1853) | Michael T. Gilmore, “‘Bartleby the Scrivener’” and the Transformation of the Economy,” *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* |
| August 6th | Who’s in Charge of the *San Dominick* (And Does Captain Delano Know)? | “Benito Cereno” (1855) | Eric Sundquist, “*Benito Cereno* and New World Slavery” |
| August 13th | Melville Recap; Brainstorm Paper Topics |  | “The Worker as Criminal and Artist: Herman Melville,” H. Bruce Franklin, *The Victim as Criminal and Artist: Literature form the American Prison* |
| August 20th | Why Does Everyone Like Billy (And Why Does He Have to Die)? | *Billy Budd* (1888) | Barbara Johnson, “Melville’s Fist: The Execution of Billy Budd” |
| August 22nd | **Writing Studio Visit** |  |  |
| August 27th | ***Final Response Essay Due*** |  |  |

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| **Phillips State Writing Studio** |

The Phillips State Writing Studio, located in the Education Building on every third Friday of the month, provides personal, one-on-one service for students to help them at all levels of the writing process. You can walk-in to sign up for an appointment for twenty to thirty minutes at a time. Come to the appointment prepared to talk about your writing, with sample in hand. The more prepared you are for your appointment, the more productive it will be for you and the tutor.