

M.A. Seminar
Herman Melville: Writing America
Thurs. 16.15-18.00
Prof. Elisabeth Bronfen

Pursuit of happiness and prosperity, as well as the freedom of continual self-definition according to one's needs, fantasies and desires are the core promises of the American Dream. Yet from its inception something went awry, and Herman Melville is perhaps the author most persistent in exploring what is tragically at stake, when, as Stanley Cavell has argued for the case of Ahab, one tries to harpoon the meaning of life into something external to it.

(1./ 25 Feb). Introduction: The American Dream

-- Sacvan Bercovitch: "Introduction,"* "The Ritual of Consensus"*

-- Philip Fisher: "Democratic Social Space"*

(2./ 3 Mar). "I and My Chimney"

(3./ 10 Mar). "Bartleby, The Scrivener"

-- Giles Deleuze: "Bartleby oder die Formel" (suggested reading)

-- Giorgio Agamben: "Bartleby oder die Kontingenz" (suggested reading)

(4./ 17 Mar). "Benito Cereno"

-- Philip Fisher, "Transparency and Obscurity: Melville's *Benito Cereno*" (suggested reading)

-- Eric J. Sundquist, "*Benito Cereno* and New World Slavery" (suggested reading)

(5./ 7 Apr). *Billy Budd*

-- Barbara Johnson: "Melville's Fist: The Execution of *Billy Budd*"*

-- Eve Sedgwick: "Some Binarisms (I). *Billy Budd: After the Homosexual*" (suggested reading)

(6./ 14 Apr). Two Cinematic Versions of Billy Budd

-- Peter Ustinov: *Billy Budd* (1962)

-- Claire Denis: *Beau Travail* (1999)

(7./ 21 Apr) John Huston: *Moby-Dick* (1956)

-- Leslie Fiedler: "Moby-Dick: The Baptism of Fire and the Baptism of Sperm"*

-- D.H. Lawrence: "Herman Melville's Moby Dick"*

-- Lawrence Buell: "Moby Dick: From Oblivion to Great American Novel"*

(8./ 28 Apr) Moby Dick – The Novel and/ of the Nation

-- Michael Rogin, "*Moby-Dick* and the American 1848"*

(9./ 12 May) Moby Dick – Ahab and the White Whale of Evil

(10./ 19 May) Moby Dick – The Whale as Text

(11./ 26 May) Moby Dick – The Textuality of the Narrative

(12./ 2 June) What I have learned

-- James Chandor: *A Most Violent Year* (2014)

Requirements for the class:

° All students must prepare a one-page preliminary discussion for each class session. These are to be posted on Olat (course forum) by Wednesday, 9 am of the respective week. This can entail a thesis, a series of questions, comments or associations. This will count towards your class participation. Writing this preliminary discussion is, thus, compulsory for each session. **Neglecting to hand in (or upload) 10 thesis papers will result in a fail.**

° So as to keep a collective 'log book' of class discussions, all students must compile written minutes (*Sitzungsprotokoll*) for one of the class sessions (to be sent to my assistant Hannah Schoch hannah.schoch@es.uzh.ch one week after the respective session at the latest).

° Finally, students taking the class for 9 KP must write an essay to be handed in on October 1, 2016 (hard copy in my pigeonhole in the secretary's office, and a pdf version to my assistant Hannah Schoch). It is wise to use the class discussions to test your ideas for this written assignment.

Selected Bibliography

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- Boone, Joseph Allen. "Moby-Dick: The Great American Love Story," and "Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative). The Death of the Handsome Sailor." In: *Tradition Counter Tradition. Love and the Form of Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Dream of the Great American Novel*. Cambridge, Ma.; Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Cullen, Jim. *The American Dream. A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Kritik und Klinik*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1993.
- De Tocqueville, Alexandre. *Democracy in America*. New York: Library of America, 2004.
- Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. New York: Criterion Books, 1960.
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- Girard, Rene. *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.
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- George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi. *America. A Narrative History*. New York: Norton 1984.