

Melville Society CFP

Panel Title: Melville and Authorship

Herman Melville repeatedly characterized authorial personae. For Melville, authorship is a “ditcher’s work,” whereby the author “dig[s] in [his] soul for the fine gold of genius.” It’s also a practice of architecture that leaves “the crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower.” It’s also a kind of weapon that the author aims at a reading public, “every canto a twenty-four-pound shot.” The list goes on, but as generations of feminist scholars have shown, Melville’s authorial labor was also deeply unequal, relying on the uncompensated and unrecognized work of the women in his life. Over the past two centuries, the author has been differently characterized as a tormented genius, a commercial failure, a grieving father, an abusive husband, a poet who wrote novels, a novelist who wrote bad poems, and in the words of one reviewer: “HERMAN MELVILLE CRAZY.” Considering all this, it’s unclear whether Melville’s authorship should be understood as one thing (or even the work of one person).

This panel solicits new approaches to studying Melville and authorship, whether in terms of race, gender, sexuality, age, collaboration, market influence, or any other related approach. We invite proposals from a variety of methodologies and critical perspectives, including but not limited to book history, labor history, queer theory, gender and sexuality studies, history of the field and discipline, literary biography, critical race and ethnic studies, or the history of authorship, reading, and publishing.

Send abstracts of 200-300 words and a brief bio to Adam Fales at afales@uchicago.edu by December 15, 2021. When submitting your abstract, please include the phrase “Melville Society ALA” in the subject line of your email.