

CFP: MELVILLE'S ORIGINS (UPDATED)

New York University, New York, NY

June 17-20, 2019

Deadline for proposals: October 1, 2018

The Twelfth International Melville Society Conference will take place at New York University to celebrate the bicentennial of Herman Melville's birth in lower Manhattan in 1819. The conference will commemorate Melville's life, work, and legacies through a series of papers and conversations devoted to the theme of "origins" broadly conceived. We invite proposals for individual papers or panels organized around MELVILLE'S ORIGINS as it relates to historicist, theoretical, textual, biographical, and pedagogical approaches to Melville's writings and to the history of their reception in criticism, adaptation, the digital world, popular culture, and the fine arts.

We are delighted to announce that our keynote speakers will be Rodrigo Lazo, Professor of English at UC-Irvine, and Wyn Kelley, Senior Lecturer in Literature at MIT. In addition to the regular panels and roundtables at New York University, there will be a number of special events and Melville-related excursions around New York City. We are also planning an optional post-conference daytrip to Mystic, CT, to tour the historic seaport and see the 1841 whale ship, *Charles W. Morgan*, on Friday, June 21.

For those traveling to New York City, we are working to procure reasonably priced suites in a residence hall on campus. More details will be available at our conference website, www.melville2019.weebly.com, scheduled to go live the last week of September.

Please submit proposals by October 1, 2018 to melvillenc@gmail.com. Paper proposals should not exceed 300 words, and panel proposals should not exceed 1000 words. In addition to submissions for traditional panels and individual papers, proposals for roundtables, workshops, and sessions using new presentation formats are particularly welcome. Proposals for anything involving more than one person should indicate the names of all participants and the nature of their contributions. In the subject line please use the format ["proposal type, surname," e.g. "Paper, Smith"] and name the file using the format ["surname, first name," e.g. "Smith, John"].

We welcome proposals from independent scholars, creative artists, and academic scholars of diverse institutional affiliation, academic rank, and disciplinary background. We can accept two proposals from an individual so long as they involve two different roles (e.g. paper presenter as well as panel chair or roundtable discussant).

* Papers might focus on Melville's works in relation to the terms "origins" and "original" as they were understood in various nineteenth-century discourses: for example, political and ethnological debates about national origins, racial lineage, or indigeneity; philosophical formulations of an essential or "aboriginal" self (to use Emerson's phrase); scientific theories about the genesis of the cosmos, life-forms, and new species; proto-anthropological conversations about human origins, the origins of language, and the role of animals as intercessors between humankind and a primeval past; theological debates over "original sin" and human depravity; proto-psychological theories about the roots of morality, sexual desire, mental faculties, and personality traits.

* "Originality" is also a hallmark of the Romantic artist, and papers might explore Melville's attitudes regarding this aesthetic. What do we make of Melville's claim that "it is better to fail in originality, than to succeed in imitation," especially in light of his own penchant for borrowing from other writers? Papers might explore Melville's views of intellectual property and the publishing industry, his thinking about "original characters" in fiction, or his varied responses to Evert Duyckinck and Young America's call for an original American literature. Likewise, papers might examine the importance assigned to artistic originality in popular and scholarly assessments of Melville's writing.

* We also encourage papers that deploy "origins" as a key term for current theoretical approaches to Melville's works. As a designation of both temporal and spatial starting points, the concept of origins might help us think about the commencement of narrative ("Call me Ishmael") or the commencement of movement within an imagined geography—both of which might also be visualized through digital mapping. Scholars engaged in textual historiography, history of the book, or manuscript editing might discuss the problems of discerning an original text from the multiple versions and editions of Melville's works as well as explore the possibilities of using digital technology to present textual variants.

* We hope papers will use this anniversary to reflect on the nineteenth-century response to Melville's works and on the origins and development of Melville Studies since its inception a century ago, to assess the current state of the field, and to think speculatively about new directions for scholarship and teaching. What new insights might be gleaned from revisiting Melville's origins in New York City—a beacon for global migration and a center of arts and letters—as well as the myriad materials from which he derived ideas and inspiration?

* Scholarship has often worked in tandem with creative responses to Melville by artists of various media, and accordingly, we also invite papers that think about the role of Melville-inspired contemporary art in opening new avenues of interpretation. How do such artistic appropriations suggest the relationship of an adaptation to its original, and how are Melville's works transformed by such borrowings, filmic, fictional, artistic, and otherwise?

Please direct any questions to Jennifer Baker at jbaker@nyu.edu or Tony McGowan at gerard.mcgowan@usma.edu.