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From the Mast-Head

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The year 2019 marks not only the 200th anniversary of Melville's birth but also the 100th anniversary of the renewed critical attention—what has come to be called the “Melville Revival”—that intensified with the observances of the author's centennial. Melville's reception and reputation have certainly advanced since 1919, when Raymond M. Weaver concluded his essay “The Centennial of Herman Melville,” which appeared in *The Nation* on August 2, the day after Melville's birthdate, by wondering about his prospects: “If he does not eventually rank as a writer of overshadowing accomplishment, it will be owing not to any lack of genius, but to the perversity of his rare and lofty gifts.” Those rare, lofty, and perverse gifts have been abundantly examined in the hundred years since Weaver's essay in venues across the profession (when I served on the editorial board of *American Literature*, I was told that they received more submissions on Melville than on any other author), not to mention a Melville Society founded over 70 years ago, with members inside and outside the academy, and a journal whose pages you now are reading.

Literary birthdays are strange events, taking the occasion of rotund anniversaries (aesthetically pleasing but also arbitrary numbers) to commemorate writers no longer alive, whom readers know not personally but through their words. 2019 is also the bicentennial year for other nineteenth-century US writers such as Walt Whitman, Julia Ward Howe, James Russell Lowell, and Susan Warner. Of these, only Melville and Whitman have prompted national tributes, although the 150th publication anniversary of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* has given rise to conferences, exhibits, and lectures. (The year 2018 produced an extravaganza of homages to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, 200 years after its first appearance). Such anniversaries undoubtedly have a market dimension—publishers, for example, view the dates as commercial opportunities—and they may risk myopia: Why this writer and not another? Why this writer apart from others? But anniversaries also provide occasions for pause, reflection, and projection, for considering the value and impact of specific writers. Anniversaries bring together professional and popular audiences. They furnish opportunities to both express and assess literary devotion.

With the approach of Melville's bicentennial, the editors of *Leviathan* distributed a call for submissions under the title “Melville at 200.” We sought contributions that advanced understanding of Melville's writings and life and also

addressed their wider significance: literary, political, aesthetic, historical, contemporary, global. Each of the special issues of *Leviathan* over the next year will contain material submitted in response to this call or solicited in relation to it.

This first special issue begins with Elizabeth Schultz's "The New Art of *Moby-Dick*," whose author surveys artistic responses to *Moby-Dick* in the decades since 1995, when she published her *Unpainted to the Last: Moby-Dick and Twentieth-Century American Art*. Schultz once again, and this time with an international scope, shows how vast and varied those responses have been. They form an aesthetic tradition of interpreting *Moby-Dick* and a persistent, astonishing reply to Melville's challenge to "Read [or Picture] it if you can" (ch. 79). Schultz's essay and her 50 images, including 20 reproduced in a color section, incite reflection on the allure of Melville's obsessive book: not only the artists' fascinations but also hers, mine, and possibly your own.

Adam Fales and Jordan Alexander Stein, in "Copyright, 1892, by Elizabeth S. Melville': Rethinking the Field Formation of Melville Studies," remind us of the scholarly attention that has been paid to the women in Melville's family, the support they provided and the sacrifices they made for his literary efforts, and Fales and Stein also remind us that this attention seems periodically to be forgotten and has rarely proved to be consequential. Drawing on archival evidence, they substantiate an earlier "Melville Revival" in the 1890s, when Elizabeth Shaw Melville deftly endeavored to return several of her husband's books to print and to promote his literary recognition after his death in 1891. Fales and Stein aim to shift regard from the individual author to the contexts in which his books were produced, circulated, and received. Such arguments are not typically found in author-centered journals, but we welcome the provocation in this inaugural "Melville at 200" issue.

Alex Benson, in "'Bartleby' on Speed," slows down and dilates our consideration of Melville's scrivener and also scenes in *Typee* and *Moby-Dick*, in order to analyze how Melville portrays the temporal and spatial dimensions of work: sequence, simultaneity, synchronization. Analyzing verbal and scenic details in "Bartleby" and drawing on recent critical approaches to literary time, Benson enables us to see Melville's inordinately analyzed story in new ways. He asks us to think about the relationships between diction and time, about the specific actions that Bartleby prefers not to do (for example, Benson considers the differences between copying and proofreading), and about larger issues of temporality, affect, and work, including the work of reading.

This issue also contains reviews of recent books about Melville's philosophical realism, the periodical contexts of his short fiction in the 1850s, and maritime studies, as well as an "Extracts" section reporting on events occurring in this anniversary year.

In the three special issues to come (two further anniversary-year numbers and also the March 2020 issue featuring material from “Melville’s Origins,” the June 2019 Melville bicentennial conference in New York), the pages of *Leviathan* will contain an array of essays, book reviews, and Melville-related news, written by critics senior and junior, domestic and international, spanning the range of his career and taking the measure of “Melville at 200” and beyond. Focusing on a writer can be parochial, but it also can offer a depth of perception and a locus of convergence. And it is difficult to be parochial about a writer such as Melville, given the scope, range, complexity, provenance, resonance, and circulation of his words, the reach of his limits.

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