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Please note: This is a late draft of an essay to be included in a collection of essays in honor of Charles Olson's centennial, currently in progress. For now, please do not cite without the author's permission.

**“Some men ride on such space”:
Call Me Ishmael and the American Baroque**

“Beginner—and interested in beginnings”: An Introduction

Call Me Ishmael, Charles Olson's 1947 study of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, is an anomaly.¹ It is at once a foundational text of Melville Studies and a bizarre recasting of Melville's work which helped to transform the image of the writer at the time, a moment in which early practitioners of American Studies were consolidating a specifically national imaginary with respect to literature and history. Olson's odd little study, which somehow manages to take part in that project and to undermine it at the same time, still resonates in our postnational epoch, after “the American Century.”² Following the Melville Revival on the 1920s, which heightened awareness of Melville's work and canonized *Moby-Dick* in particular as an American masterpiece, a widespread cottage industry of Melville criticism and scholarship emerged. Although the early interventions of Raymond Weaver, Van Wyck Brooks, Carl Van Doren, Lewis Mumford, and others laid a substantial groundwork, one might say that academic criticism on Melville did not really begin in earnest until the publication of F.O. Matthiessen's landmark *American Renaissance* in 1941, which, despite its subtitle's declaration of purported topic (“Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman”), actually established Melville as the representative man of the era. Into this arena comes Olson, with a foot in each camp as it were, and his extraordinarily bold re-vision of Melville, even as Melville's legend is just being composed, both refines and transforms Melville Studies. But Olson, unlike the majority of his contemporaries and those that followed closely in the wake of Matthiessen, recognized that Melville was not really the representative of the American Renaissance, but something else entirely. Melville belonged to an *American Baroque*.³

With *Call Me Ishmael*, Olson sought to rethink Melville's leviathan, considering how Melville not only responded to the world of 1851, but projected an almost cosmological universe in which art and experience blended together in a project of mapping a world, as well as exploring possible worlds. As Olson notes, Melville was a “Beginner—and interested in beginnings,” one who “had a way of reaching back through time until he got history pushed back so far that he turned time into space.”⁴ This manipulation of time and space is another aspect of Melville's baroque vision, as I will discuss below. In *Call Me Ishmael*, Olson blurred the lines between artist and critic, writer and reader, in order to show how *Moby-Dick* participated in a seemingly national

project while transcending, or transgressing, its limits in order to fashion a global narrative or representation, one that might actually encompass “the whole circle of the sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and mastodons, past, present, and to come, with all the revolving panoramas of empire on earth, and throughout the whole universe, not excluding its suburbs.”⁵ In the process, Olson cartwheels along a tightrope between the nascent but swiftly developing American Studies and a proleptically postnational—or to use Olson’s own innovative notion, *postmodern*—condition that allows both Melville and Olson to escape, exploring an alternative trajectory from that of a nationalist literary tradition. Olson wrests Melville from the hands of an American Studies that would establish Melville as its spokesman and as the representative figure of an American renaissance, and projects a baroque Melville whose *extravagance*—literally, “wandering out of bounds”—guides him beyond the circles of this imagined world, into worlds still to be imagined. As Olson puts it in a letter to Robert Creeley: “my assumption is any POST-MODERN is born with the ancient confidence that, he *does* belong. So, there is nothing to be *found*. There is only [...] search.”⁶

“The Melville people are rare people”: From Revival to Renaissance

Melville Studies replaced whaling as New England’s biggest industry. So goes a joke told among Melville scholars and other Americanists, but ascendancy of Melville, especially among academic critics, was not inevitable. “In 1900,” as David R. Shumway has pointed out, “*Moby-Dick* would not have been recognized by many as American literature; those who did recognize it as such would not have accorded it a privileged position.”⁷ Melville’s fame waxed and waned throughout his lifetime, from his early celebrity as “the man who lived among the cannibals” (a label he complained bitterly about in a famous letter to Hawthorne)⁸ to his relative anonymity in later life. Although his 1891 death occasioned a small flurry of interest, the Melville Revival can be said to have begun with the centennial celebration of Melville’s birth in 1919, along with Raymond Weaver’s 1921 biography *Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic*, as well as the publication of “Billy Budd” in 1924, which provided the additional boost of a “new” work by a “classic” American writer.⁹ The Melville Revival restored, or perhaps for the first time promoted, the writer to a central place in American literary discourse. However, as Shumway makes clear, it is not only the visibility of an author’s work or having books back in print that makes one a canonical presence, but also the interplay of various institutional forces. Between the initial Melville Revival of the 1920s and the canonization, or perhaps “hypercanonization” of Melville by the 1950s,¹⁰ the energies of the Revival had to translate into a kind of renaissance (conveniently set in motion by a work named *American Renaissance* as well as in others that followed), which established and was sustained by a new academic discipline, American Studies. Olson, who was only ten years old when Weaver’s biography appeared and who was still a graduate student when Matthiessen field-establishing study went to press, turns out to be a crucial figure in the process, albeit a mysterious figure.

In a definitive, if provocative, history of the Melville Revival, Clare L. Spark notes that the principal figures involved in promoting Melville had diverse agendas.

Many were deliberately reacting to political and cultural debates that bore little direct relation to the work of a mid-nineteenth-century romance writer. Frequently this involved disputes between various factions of left-wing radicals, populist progressives, and cultural conservatives. As Melville's work became a dominant touchstone for these debates, Ahab in particular becomes a shape-shifter, transmutating from the Shakespearean tragic hero to the Byronic romantic to a Hitler- or Stalin-like dictator, all within a few years. Referring to these often conflicting interests, Spark notes that the "Melville Revival, then, is only tangentially about the author of *Moby-Dick*."¹¹

Moreover, as William V. Spanos has observed with some irony, the modernist sensibilities of those critics involved in the Melville Revival informed their decisions in canonizing Melville, and *Moby-Dick* in particular. Paradoxically, then, Melville's centrality to an emerging American literary canon was based on *exactly* the same criteria that would have previously disqualified him: namely, the extravagance that made Melville and *Moby-Dick* so unrepresentative of the cultural norms of his own time. For example, Carl Van Doren made a virtue of *Moby-Dick*'s unpopularity, stating that it was "too irregular, too bizarre" for the popular audience, but that its "immense originality" warrants its inclusion among the great romances of world literature.¹² "The Modernist revival, that is, chose to celebrate precisely that differential speculative extravagance of style, form, and content which, in the eyes of Melville's early critics, interrupted the promise latent in the documentary veracity of his first romances and disqualified him from a place in the emergent American canon."¹³ In what Fredric Jameson might call a "dialectical reversal,"¹⁴ or perhaps a good old Hegelian "ruse of history," the biographical critics of the Melville Revival established Melville as a powerful national icon by virtue of his distance from the everyday life of the nation's people. That is, unlike, say, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or other narratives more directly engaged with matters of national importance, *Moby-Dick* did *not* participate in such matters directly, but transcended them to establish a kind of individual, mythic, and essentially "American" spirit. As Spanos puts it, "This shift in evaluative emphasis from 'low' to 'high' culture resulted in the apotheosis of *Moby-Dick* not simply as Melville's 'masterpiece' but as an American 'masterpiece.'"¹⁵ In sum,

The Melville revival inaugurated by such biographers and critics as Raymond Weaver, John Freeman, Van Wyck Brooks, and Lewis Mumford was not, in other words, simply a revival of interest in Melville; it was also an ideological victory over the problematic of a previous generation of critics. It went far, if not the whole way (a project fulfilled by the next generation of Americanists), to reverse the judgment of the earlier critics, without, however, disturbing the *logos* informing the earlier representation of American's cultural identity and its canon. These critics of the revival apotheosized *Moby-Dick* as an American masterpiece because it intuited and expressed an essentially *human* "spiritual" Real that, in its integral and universal comprehensiveness, transcended the ideological partiality [...] of American sociopolitical existence."¹⁶

Of course, the "next generation of Americanists" would include Olson himself, although Olson would hardly be representative of the American Studies to come.

The establishment of Melville's proto-modernist and canonical credentials during the Melville Revival was not uncontested. As Shumway has discussed, the essentially elitist perspective of a Van Doren was vigorously countered by other critics, including Fred Lewis Pattee, who "reflects an older, populist conception of the canon."¹⁷ Indeed, Pattee took issue with the enshrinement of relatively minor literary figures, writers (like Melville) who did not register much popular success and who therefore could not be said to be representative of the American spirit. Pattee, in fact, was repulsed by the critical attention given to such writers at the expense of bestsellers like *Little Women*. "Melville, I prophesy, will wane back to the fifth magnitude to which his own generation adjudged him."¹⁸ Notwithstanding Pattee's unfulfilled prophesy, the initial successes of the Melville Revival did not assure Melville's canonicity or lasting influence. That would require the academic institutionalization of Melville Studies, and Olson himself would function as a rather bridge between the biographical Melville enthusiasts like Weaver and Van Doren and the rigorously academic critics like Matthiessen, Henry Nash Smith, Perry Miller, Richard Chase, and others who followed in that line, who may or may not have been "Melville people."

Olson says that "The Melville people are rare people," curiously and pointedly in "A note of thanks" placed a good third of the way into *Call Me Ishmael*, rather than in a more traditional "Acknowledgements" sections (which is where Matthiessen explicitly acknowledges Olson's contributions to *American Renaissance*). As if to highlight this decision further, Olson's "rare people" sentence continues, "and this is the right place to tell," before a colon and a list of those "Melville people" deserving of his gratitude. This placement is fitting, insofar as it introduces a section of Olson's study devoted most thoroughly to Melville's own, physical books, and especially to Olson's analysis of some of Melville's handwritten marginal notations and underlining. Hence, Olson places his acknowledgements to Melville's family in close proximity (literally) to the argument derived from the fruits of their generosity. But, in addition to thanking Eleanor Melville Metcalf, Henry K. Metcalf, and "another granddaughter, Mrs. Frances Osborne," Olson also thanks Weaver, Henry A. Murray, Jr., and "those early criers of Melville," Van Doren and Brooks.¹⁹ That is, Olson's "Melville people" includes personal relatives, biographers, and "early criers," an extended family or perhaps a (not-so) secret society or guild, well suited to establishing a special presence previously absent. The Melville Revival, as Spanos and others have observed, was not simply a rediscovery of an unjustly forgotten writer, but an almost incantatory, mystical, Promethean rebirth-through-resurrection. Although it may at first seem to be a rebirth of one author in particular, the Melville Revival was actually a collective project of renaissance that heralded and made possible the invention of an "American Renaissance."

Of course, even had he not written a word on Melville himself, Olson's contribution to this emerging field would have been immense. "Had he chosen, Olson could have dominated Melville studies, for he had the support of important allies in American letters (besides the devoted friendship of [Melville's granddaughter] Eleanor Metcalf and her family)."²⁰ By contacting Melville's granddaughters, he was able to gain access to Melville's own library, which in turn allowed him to analyze handwritten marginalia in those volumes that Melville read and reread with such intensity. Such marginal notations became the source of Olson's groundbreaking essay on Melville and

Shakespeare (which also forms the central section of *Call Me Ishmael*). Matthiessen himself acknowledged what a tremendous boon to his own scholarship this had been, expressing gratitude for “Olson’s generosity in letting me make use of what he has tracked down in his investigation of Melville’s reading.”²¹ Originally based in part on an M.A. thesis and drafted in connection with his Ph.D. research in Harvard’s American Civilization program—ground zero of the coming American Studies—*Call Me Ishmael* is a book whose scholarly rigor is apparent on every page, but it is also a bewilderingly poetic work, juxtaposing Freudian theories (from *Moses and Monotheism*) with Frederick Jackson Turner’s “frontier thesis,” mixing mythology and history, scientific data and pure, fanciful speculation. Coming out of the Melville Revival, Olson makes his own entry into the discourse of the American Renaissance, which really took off, not with Matthiessen’s title, but with the academic domestication of Melville by a more formalized American Studies in the 1950s, which went on to become a kind of not-so-secular religion for many practitioners and devotees (but not for Olson).²² Olson’s bizarre little book also goes well beyond this renaissance, taking Melville with him on a baroque exploration of American, and perhaps post-American, space.

“I take SPACE to be the central fact”: From Renaissance to Baroque

Olson’s notorious beginning to *Call Me Ishmael* announces a matter of “fact” (as he calls it), while also establishing a new way of thinking: Using all-capital-letters for the keyword of the entire study, Olson writes: “I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America [...] I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy.”²³ As he continues, “It is geography at bottom, a hell of wide land from the beginning [...] Something else than a stretch of earth—seas on both sides, no barriers to contain as restless a thing as Western man was becoming in Columbus’ day.”²⁴ Olson then suggests a fundamental opposition at the heart of the American experience: “Some men ride on such space, others have to fasten themselves like a tent stakes to survive. As I see it, Poe dug in and Melville mounted. They are the alternatives.”²⁵

Leaving aside for the moment whether the nomadic, peripatetic Edgar Allan Poe really did “dig in” and fasten himself to space (there are an awful lot of “premature burials” in Poe’s work, and perhaps a few of them also come well after Poe’s death, as when he is buried by Olson here), one might say that the key to Olson’s reading of Melville lies in this alternative, that Melville did not dig in, but “rode” such space. “Melville went to space to probe and find man,” and, as noted above, “Melville had a way of reaching back through time until he got history pushed back so far he turned time into space.”²⁶

It is important to see that this space-riding, this pushing back of time until it becomes space, is in no way a sense of re-birth. Olson, writing just a few years after *American Renaissance*, already disputes the claim that Melville takes part in such a national and re-birthing project. Although Matthiessen had conceded that re-birth was not really the best term for the literary movement of Melville’s day (and we later learn that Harry Levin is apparently responsible for the categorical title, as Matthiessen himself wanted to call the book *Man in the Open Air*, “after an apt phrase in Whitman”),²⁷ the

word *renaissance* stuck, both in the field of American Studies and in university course catalogues around the country.

Matthiessen was well aware that the word *renaissance* was a loaded term. As Jonathan Arac has pointed out, “Ever since the historiographic notion was elaborated by Michelet and Burckhardt—in 1845 and 1860, exactly bracketing Matthiessen’s period—‘renaissance’ has carried with it a glamorous freight of secularism, progress, and preeminent individuality.”²⁸ In other words, the notion of an American Renaissance fit well into a larger national narrative, one developed during the nineteenth century and extrapolated in the twentieth by practitioners of American Studies.²⁹ Perhaps against his own wishes, Matthiessen’s label helped establish a profoundly nationalist enterprise. Applied to the rhetoric of an intensifying nationalism in the nineteenth-century United States, the term *renaissance*, with its particularly positive or even celebratory ring to it, becomes a vote of approval for a nationalist literary project. In the mid-twentieth-century, the phrase carries an almost evangelical nuance, as the study of American literature comes to be associated with the proselytizing mission of transmitting American ideals and values to the rest of the world. As I have noted elsewhere, the nationalist literary project forms the basis for a well nigh religious belief in America, for good or for ill, in the discourse of American Studies established in the immediate post-World War II years and still visible in the discourse of new Americanists critical of the discipline.³⁰ Notwithstanding the secularism implied by the term, who does not *believe* in a renaissance? It is almost universally positive.

Not so the term *baroque*, which since its original coinage has almost always carried a negative connotation. Originally a jeweler’s term—referring to “a rough or imperfect pearl” (a lovely description, I believe, for both *Moby-Dick* and Olson’s *Call Me Ishmael*)—the word *baroque* was applied to the arts at least as early as 1765, and it was not used as a term of praise. As René Wellek relates, “In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the adjective ‘baroque’ was widely used as an equivalent of ‘bizarre,’ and the noun ‘baroque’ became established as a term for ‘bad taste’ in architecture.”³¹ By the late nineteenth century, German historiography had consolidated the meaning of the term, giving it an inherent sense of artistic decadence, specifically with respect to the period during which the unity of Renaissance art and architecture seemed to disintegrate. As Heinrich Wölfflin put it in his 1888 *Renaissance and Baroque*, a book which effectively standardized the use of the term, “It has become customary to use the term *baroque* to describe the style into which the Renaissance resolved itself or, as it is more commonly expressed, into which the Renaissance degenerated.”³² Such usage would be expanded to encompass any period of aesthetic decadence; however, the *baroque* largely remained associated (and unfavorably contrasted) with the *renaissance*. Whereas the renaissance calls to mind formal ingenuity, rules, models, science and progress, the baroque is defined by excess, extravagance, anarchy, and ridiculousness. “Unlike the Renaissance, the baroque style is not accompanied by theoretical rules: it developed without models.”³³ The relative formlessness of baroque productions, or better, the *inscrutability* of the baroque forms, underscored the negative impression of the baroque in general. Although the term no longer refers to “bad taste” *per se* by the late nineteenth century, *baroque* still carried an unfavorable connotation, if not denotation. “As an art-historical term *baroque* has lost its

suggestion of the ridiculous, but its general use it still carries a suggestions of repugnance or abnormality.”³⁴

These characterizations of the baroque apply also to Olson’s view of *Moby-Dick*, including that novel’s rather bizarre formal make-up. Just Van Doren had marked that the novel was “too bizarre” to be popular, a contemporary reviewer of *Moby-Dick* declared that the novel was “distressingly marred by an extravagant treatment of the subject.”³⁵ Like baroque art and architecture, Melville—and Olson—did not play by the rules, least of all by those regulating spatial limitations. In language well suited to a discussion of Olson’s and Melville’s projects, the art historian Henri Focillon said of the baroque:

In the life of forms, the baroque is indeed but a moment, but it is certainly the freest and most emancipated one. Baroque forms have either abandoned or denatured that principle of intimate propriety, as essential aspect of which is a careful respect for the limits of the frame, especially in architecture. They live with passionate intensity a life that is entirely their own; they proliferate like some vegetable monstrosity. They break apart even as they grow; they tend to invade space in every direction, to perforate it, to become one with all its possibilities. This mastery of space is pure delight to them.”³⁶

Melville’s delightful “mastery of space” takes him to a new conception of the Pacific, the liminal space in which Western Civilization has become Eastern again. As Olson recounts in his conclusions, the three great stories of the West are Homer’s *Odyssey*, Dante’s *Commedia* (in which Odysseus—now consigned to Hell for his sins of deception, including the ruse of the Trojan Horse—recounts his further voyages west of the Pillars of Hercules and south of the equator), and Melville’s own *Moby-Dick*, with its “full stop” in the Pacific.³⁷

Notwithstanding some of the imperial pomp of his language, Olson’s Pacific, which he refers to as one of Melville’s “inventions” in *Moby-Dick*, is not simply the American imperium extended westward towards Asia. As James Zeigler has argued persuasively, Olson “anticipates the Pacific Ocean will become a kind of space of exchange between the U.S. and the nations of Asia until such national designations cease to signify the world’s dominant political agencies.”³⁸ Somewhat like C.L.R. James, who declared (in his own magisterial book on Herman Melville) his hope that “all the problems of nationality” would evanesce before 1970,³⁹ Olson’s baroque Melville finds in the Pacific a thoroughly postnational space. Thus, at the very moment when the Melville Revival gives way to an American Renaissance, which characterized a Melville and *Moby-Dick* as paradigmatically national, Olson boldly yet subtly projects an alternative trajectory.

“The creative act of anticipation”: From Baroque to the Future

If, as Focillon would have it, baroque forms have no respect for the limits of the frame, then the extravagant work of Melville and of Olson, or of the Olson-Melville complex of

Call Me Ishmael, is another testament to their baroque sensibilities. Etymologically—and surely both Melville and Olson give us license to reflect on the origins of words, as they so often and so enthusiastically do—*extravagance* refers to a “wandering out of bounds” or movement across boundaries or limits. Such transgressive movement also characterizes both Melville’s art and Olson’s vision of Melville’s broader project, a project that graphs onto an even larger project, one extending for “3,000 years.”⁴⁰ Melville’s originality, and Olson’s, derive and project outward from this overall project, whose genealogy Olson traces back to Homer.

In the closing pages of *Call Me Ishmael*, Olson discovers that Homer—with Odysseus in particular—had already begun to map the baroque spaces of Melville’s world, which is to say, our own. “Homer was an end of the myth world from which the Mediterranean began. But in Ulysses he projected the archetype of the West to follow. It was the creative act of anticipation.”⁴¹ This anticipation, this *prolepsis*, registers that foresight and the headlong rush of Melville’s own baroque fiction. It is not only that Odysseus started the wandering, which was then taken up by others, eventually leading to a temporal future and a spatial end (in the Pacific), although it is that too. But it is also that the *projection*, into the future and outside of the boundaries, that becomes for Olson “the central quality of the men to come: *search*.”⁴²

Olson finds that there are three great odysseys that have successively established the collective *search* of postmodern man. The first is that of Odysseus, both *within* the seemingly vast but closed Mediterranean world, and *outwards* right to the very limits and liminal spaces (as with his visit to the land of the dead) of that world. The second, with a familiar face, is the Ulysses of Dante’s *Inferno*, who could not “quench in myself the burning wish to know the world,” who “set out on the deep and open sea,”⁴³ west past the Pillars of Hercules and into the Atlantic—as Olson reminds us, Plato’s philosophical cartography had located Atlantis beyond those pillars—before sailing south past the equator, only to be swallowed up by the sea, much like the Pequod later. This “Atlantic” Odysseus points to a Columbus and the other explorers, eventually leading to Ahab, whose odyssey “lay around the Horn, where West returned to East,”⁴⁴ and the endless quest for the setting sun’s horizon leads to yet another sunrise. For Olson, “Ahab is full stop,” the end of a 3,000-year project into the “UNKNOWN which Homer’s and Dante’s Ulysses opened men’s eyes to.”⁴⁵ But, of course, Olson does not really believe this, else he would not given the final word, or image, to Proteus, the shape-shifting sea god. Flux, change, transgression, movement. Ahab’s “full stop” is Heraclitus’ river: never the same thing twice.

The originality of all this lies in a poetic resistance to the stasis that American Studies and national literature would impose upon this baroque extravagance. Despite the enthusiastic claims of “early criers of Melville” in praise of the writer’s originality, the effect—sometimes the *intended* effect—was to fix or freeze Melville’s originality into an “image repertoire” of national narrative.⁴⁶ For all of the lip service given to *movement* in that nationalist literary ideology—all the apparent, westward movement of Turner’s frontier thesis, for instance—the discourse and the practice of American Studies really celebrates *settlers*, not nomads. American national narrative, and the disciplinary field that engenders and supports that narrative, relies on a people’s *immobility*, on *not moving*, on sticking to a place and settling in for good. Olson, despite the influence of his

professor (and Turner acolyte) Frederick Merk, knew that “some men ride on such space,” and do not simply plant their tent stakes in a suitably stable spot. The movement of such nomads as Melville and his “originals” is perpetual motion, radiating throughout space. In a famous passage from *The Confidence Man*, which Olson also cites, Melville reported that only three “original characters” have ever been written, each—and this does not surprise me—from works of the seventeenth century, the historical epoch sometimes labeled “The Baroque.” The characters are the wandering Don Quixote, gloomy Hamlet, and the fiery Satan of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. The essence of this originality lies, for Melville, in the way it affect everything else, projecting a world, a new creation, *genesis*: “the original character, essentially such, is like a revolving Drummond light, raying away from itself all around it—everything is lit by it, everything starts up to it (mark how it is with Hamlet), so that, in certain minds, there follows upon the adequate conception of such a character, an effect, in its way, akin to that which Genesis attends upon the beginning of things.”⁴⁷ The “creative act of anticipation” thus becomes a world-making, baroque projection over that “SPACE” on which Melville rides.

Olson and Melville grappled with such space, each in his own time, moments of great “moment” in U.S. and world history, with developments of the market and the postwar experience creating greater international relations among workers of the world over an increasingly global space. I think that Olson-Melville’s baroque energies are particularly significant in the postnational era of globalization, in which the suppression of distance has not dulled the acute awareness of that spatial anxiety sometimes associated with the postmodern condition. Olson’s baroque Melville in *Call Me Ishmael* thus re-emerges, with even greater urgency than in its own time, as a vital force for a post-American Studies in the twenty-first century.⁴⁸

Notes

¹ Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1947).

² See, e.g., John Carlos Rowe, ed., *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Lawrence Buell, “Are We Post-American Studies?” in *Field Work: Sites in Literary and Cultural Studies*, eds. Marjorie B. Garber, Paul B. Franklin, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (London: Routledge, 1996), 87–93. On the role of American Studies after the American Century, see also my forthcoming “Post-American Literature,” *49th Parallel: A Journal of North American Studies* 25 (Fall 2010).

³ Without specifically focusing on Olson, I discuss the Melville’s “American Baroque” in my *Melville, Mapping and Globalization: Literary Cartography in the American Baroque Writer* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), especially 1–18.

⁴ Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 14.

⁵ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale*, edited by Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1988), 456.

⁶ Quoted in Ralph Maud, *Charles Olson’s Reading: A Biography* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 91.

⁷ David R. Shumway, *Creating American Civilization: A Genealogy of American Literature as an Academic Discipline* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1994), 1–2.

⁸ See Herman Melville, *Correspondence*, edited by Lynn Horth (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1993), 193.

⁹ It is not clear that “classic” is an appropriate term for Melville’s (or any American’s) writing, but D.H. Lawrence boldly used inserted it the title of *Studies in Classic American Literature*, which included two chapters on Melville (one on *Typee* and *Omoo*, another on *Moby-Dick*). See Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Viking, 1923), 131–161.

¹⁰ On “hypercanonization,” see Jonathan Arac, *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target: The Functions of Criticism in Our Time* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), especially 133–153.

¹¹ Clare L. Spark, *Hunting Captain Ahab: Psychological Warfare and the Melville Revival* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2001), 11.

¹² Carl Van Doren, *The American Novel* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 74.

¹³ William V. Spanos, *The Errant Art of Moby-Dick: The Canon, the Cold War, and the Struggle for American Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 16.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), 561.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

¹⁷ Shumway, *Creating American Civilization*, 188.

¹⁸ Fred Lewis Pattee, Review of *American Literature: An Introduction* by Carl Van Doren. *American Literature* 5 (1934): 380. Partially quoted in Shumway, 189.

¹⁹ Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 40.

²⁰ Spark, *Hunting Captain Ahab*, 269.

²¹ F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), xviii.

²² See my “‘Believing in America’: The Politics of American Studies in a Postnational Era.” *The Americanist* XXIII (2006): 69–81.

²³ Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁷ See Matthiessen, vii; see also Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1958), vii–viii.

²⁸ Jonathan Arac, “F.O. Matthiessen: Authorizing the American Renaissance,” in *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, edited by Walter Benn Michaels and Donald E. Pease (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 94.

²⁹ On the term *national narrative*, see Donald E. Pease, “National Identities, Postmodern Artefacts, and Postnational Narratives,” in *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives*, ed. Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 3–5.

³⁰ See my “‘Believing in America’.”

³¹ René Wellek, *Concepts in Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 116.

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- ³² Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, trans. Kathrin Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), 15.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 23.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.
- ³⁵ See Jay Leyda, *The Melville Log*, vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt, 1951), 477.
- ³⁶ Henri Focillion, *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. Charles B. Hogan and George Kugan (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 58.
- ³⁷ Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 119.
- ³⁸ James Zeigler, “Charles Olson’s American Studies: *Call Me Ishmael* and the Cold War.” *Arizona Quarterly* 63.2 (Summer 2007): 70–71.
- ³⁹ C.L.R. James, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2001), 2.
- ⁴⁰ Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 117.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 117–118.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 118.
- ⁴³ Dante, *Inferno*, trans. Mark Musa (New York: Penguin, 1984), 308; Canto XXVI, lines 97, 100.
- ⁴⁴ Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 118–119.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.
- ⁴⁶ See Pease, “National Identities,” 4.
- ⁴⁷ Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Stephen Matterson (New York: Penguin, 1990), 282; see also Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 66.
- ⁴⁸ I am grateful to Stephen Collis and to other participants at the Charles Olson Centennial Conference in Vancouver, June 4–6, 2010, for their helpful and encouraging comments on an early version of this essay.