Herman Melville
(1819-1891)
Childhood

- Father went bankrupt, then died when Melville was 12
- Melville taken out of school and sent to work
- Was a bank clerk, a farm hand, a store clerk, a bookkeeper, a school master
At age 19, signed on as a cabin boy on an English ship from Liverpool.

In 1841, at age 21, sailed on whaling ship, *The Acushnet*, for the South Seas.

Jumped ship in 1842 and lived with a native tribe in the Marquesa Islands for several weeks.
And More Adventure…

- Picked up by an Australian whaler
- Participated in a revolt
- Went to prison in Tahiti for a period
- Shipped aboard a Nantucket whaler
- Discharged at Honolulu where he stayed for several months before sailing back to Boston in 1844 when he was 25
Early books *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847) were fictionalized accounts of his South Sea adventures.
Experimental Work

- *Mardi*, his third book, was more experimental.
- Received poor reviews, so returned to simple money-making adventure stories in his next two books.
Moby-Dick

- His masterpiece
- Published in 1851 to mixed reviews—some appreciated it, some didn’t understand it
- Disappointing sales
Next book was the very dark, satirical *Pierre*

At least one reviewer wrote that Melville had gone insane
Reputation

- Underappreciated in his own life
- Died virtually unknown in the U.S., though his reputation was being slightly revived in England
- In 1919, on the centennial of his birth, strange Melville revival began
- Elevated by the Modernists from obscure to loftiest ranks of American writers