Herman Melville: How Authors Mental Health Impacted On Novels

Herman Melville was an amazing author. He made many incredible works such as “The Piazza Tales”. The most famous of his works would be “Moby Dick”. He worked long and hard to produce these works, but people just did not appreciate them. Most of the tales written by Melville came from personal experience. He thought that people during this time period would enjoy it, but that just was not the case. In this essay I will be looking at Melville’s decline into despair.

Most of Melville's young adult life was spent on the open seas. The experiences he had then inspired his books, such as “Typee”. The events that occured in this book come from Melville's life near the Polynesian islands. While there he experienced horrible things, such as being captured by cannibals. He persevered through all of his hardships and eventually returned to begin his writing career. As I said earlier though, people did not take kindly to his writings.

I said earlier in this paper that “Moby Dick” is Melville's most famous work. At the time it was created though, along with his novel “Pierre”, they were attacked by critics and people more or less ignored them. After his failure with “Moby Dick and “Pierre”, Melville withdrew into himself. His books and farming were no longer enough to support his family, so Melville moved his family around in search of work. Eventually he found work as a customs official in New York. Melville went on to write some short stories and poems such as “Bartleby the Scrivener”. These last writings do not just illustrate the adventures of the protagonist, but also Melville's mental state.

As I have said, Melville’s mental state declined over the course of his career as a writer. In his works later on in his career it becomes very noticeable where his mind is at. Just take a look at his short novel “Billy Budd”. This novel is about the sailor Billy Budd who is accused of attempting to start a mutiny. He is wrongfully hung for the crime he did not commit. Billy goes to his death willingly. His death became an emblem of good.

If you take a look at the way his later books are worded you will notice how sad and depressing the stories are. You can also see this in the settings that Melville places his characters in. Such as “Billy Budd”, which I mentioned just now, whose death was unnecessary. His earlier books weren't exactly light hearted, but they were certainly a step up from death around every corner. “Billy Budd” was, as far as I can find, Melville's last work. What I find sad is that Melville, who is on of America's most celebrated authors, only had evoked a single obituary notice. In life based on material standards he was not very successful. You could not consider him as very happy either.

If you look at his grasp on reality, however, you could say he was exceptionally rich. He never strayed to the side of fictions deceptiveness. You could, arguably, compare Melville to Shakespeare. Both of their writings grew from “visible facts”. With Melville it could be seen in the wood of a ship or whale blubber from “Moby Dick”. I think it is undeniable that Herman Melville was one of Americas and maybe even the world's best authors. Although it all really does depend on the genre of literature you like.