



# The Weaver-God, He Weaves: Melville and the Poetics of T/Novel

*Christopher Sten*

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## **The Weaver-God, He Weaves: Melville and the Poetics of T/Novel** Christopher Sten

Melville has long been regarded as an author of raw genius who knew, or cared, little about the art of the novel, and even harbored hostility toward its conventions. In *The Weaver-God, He Weaves*, Christopher Sten sets out to correct this widespread view, showing not only what Melville knew about the novelist's craft but how he appropriated and transformed a whole series of distinct genres: *Typee* is presented in the context of the popular romance, with its paired themes of sex and violence; *Omoo* is viewed in the framework of early Spanish and later French examples of the picaresque novel; and *Mardi* is seen as an instance of the once widely popular genre of the imaginary voyage. Sten also reveals how Melville radically transformed certain existing genres—the epic novel in *Moby-Dick* and the historical novel in *Israel Potter*—or forged profound new directions for genres still in their early stages; the psychological novel in *Pierre* and the experimental novel in the *Confidence-Man*. Sten speculates that it is because Melville was so idiosyncratic and inventive that so few critics have understood his close relationship to the various novelistic forms. While individual chapters provide discussions of the genre principles Melville employed, Sten's introduction offers valuable theoretical insight into the importance of genre study (encompassing recent work by Todorov, Hirsch, Hernadi, Jauss, Culler, Scholes, Fowler, Rosmarin, and others), both in the evaluation of literary texts and in the still more fundamental enterprise of determining their meaning. *The Weaver-God, He Weaves* thus exposes for the first time the extent of Melville's contribution to the novel. This work will be of interest to readers of Melville, 19th-century American literature, literature of the sea, experimental fiction, and to those who work in the field of genre studies.

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