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**Electronic version**  
URL: https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/20494  
DOI: 10.4000/ejas.20494  
ISSN: 1991-9336

**Publisher**  
European Association for American Studies

**Electronic reference**  
DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.20494

This text was automatically generated on 16 September 2023.

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In American literature, the name and works of Herman Melville are considered quintessential to understanding and interpreting the American cultural landscape of the nineteenth century. Melville’s corpus of literary works continues to generate vibrant discussions and traverse new vistas of scholarly investigation and intellectual inquiry. Damien Schlarb’s *Melville’s Wisdom: Religion, Skepticism, and Literature in Nineteenth-Century America* charts a new direction in Melville scholarship by reconsidering “how we think about Melville’s engagement with the Bible, how we inscribe him in literary and cultural history, and how we perceive literature’s ability to address issues of theology and the history of the Bible” (18). Schlarb’s central argument in *Melville’s Wisdom* is that “Melville responds to the moral, spiritual, and representational challenges of modernity by developing a contemplative reading attitude toward the Bible and religion” (18). In delving into the relationship between skepticism, religion, and biblical authority in Melville’s literary productions, Schlarb interrogates the “simultaneous displacements and affirmation of biblical language and culture” (2). In *Melville’s Wisdom*, Schlarb undertakes the task of understanding the process by which the Bible became a part of literary and cultural history in American society and its moral prescriptions became an integral part an ethical vision of the United States.
Melville’s Wisdom grapples with the elusive and promethean character of the Bible in American culture. Melville’s Wisdom explores the Bible’s central place as a foundational element in structuring and enlivening the moral character of American culture, but also serving as a resistive force to rationality, reason, and empiricism in American society. Schlarb explicates Melville’s literary work to describe his complicated relationship with the Bible and contextualizes the secularization process in American society that informed his reliance on biblical authority as a moral guide. Schlarb adeptly crafts this narrative through the prism of Melville’s invocation of the wisdom books of the Bible. In Melville’s Wisdom, the wisdom books of the Bible include the book of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Schlarb develops his narrative of Melville’s literary writings by dedicating a chapter in Melville’s Wisdom to each of the three biblical wisdom books. These chapters elucidate Melville’s engagement with biblical exegesis coupled with his commitment to applying intellectual scrutiny to the Bible. Melville’s Wisdom excavates Melville’s intention to reconcile the moral utility of the Bible modernity and its intellectual traditions.

Melville’s Wisdom’s makes a seminal contribution to Melville scholarship by demonstrating the intellectual vitality Melville drew from explicating the limitations and meaning of biblical wisdom and its implications for guiding moral behavior and ethical conduct. Moreover, Schlarb challenges Melville scholars to reconsider the process of secularization in American society and reevaluate the presence of religion and biblical authority in the literary work of Herman Melville. Melville’s Wisdom’s provides a complex and nuanced account of Melville’s ambivalence for the Bible and his attempts to afford it a moral currency from ethical praxis rather than dogmatic obedience to religious belief.