



SUBVERSIVE GENEALOGY

Michael Paul Rogin

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In this major reconsideration of Herman Melville's life and work, Michael Paul Rogin shows that Melville's novels are connected both to the important issues of his time and to the exploits of his patrician and politically prominent family—which, three generations after its Revolutionary War heroes, produced an alcoholic, a bankrupt, and a suicide. Rogin argues that a history of Melville's fiction, and of the society represented in it, is also a history of the writer's family. He describes how that family first engaged Melville in and then isolated him from American political and social life. Melville's brother and father-in-law are shown to link *Moby-Dick* to the crisis over expansion and slavery. *White-Jacket* and *Billy Budd*, which concern shipboard conflicts between masters and seamen, are related to an execution at sea in which Melville's cousin played a decisive part. The figure of Melville's father haunts *The Confidence Man*, whose subject is the triumph of the marketplace and the absence of authority.

A provocative study of one of our supreme literary artists.



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