

MELVILLE'S MONUMENTAL IMAGINATION

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
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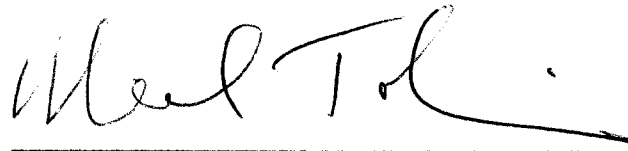
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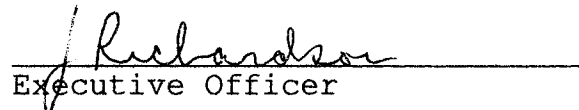
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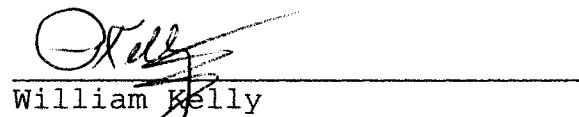
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Abstract

Melville's Monumental Imagination

By

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This dissertation argues that Herman Melville used monumental ekphrasis throughout his novels in an attempt to show the irony, instability, and limitations of narrative form. Melville's novels move the reader through three levels of ekphrastic experience: indifference, fear, and hope. Monumental references in Melville's created worlds show his desire to move his literary art beyond the formulaic and unified and into the infinite and chaotic. Melville's imaginative casting of monuments and memorials displays both the artist's playful and serious considerations of the ongoing national monumental project in nineteenth century America. The fictional use of monuments and memorials reveals the author's skepticism about not only the national monument project but also the ability to create freely as a literary artist. For Melville, the attempt to capture and defy the process of

time in monumental crafting only heightened his awareness of death, decay, and destruction. Melville penned prose monuments in his novels because those types of art works have largely been recognized as lasting, physical reminders of the past. Melville wanted his words to last as monuments for readers to question and reexamine. Instead of having passive receptors of words, Melville was calling for readers to challenge texts that were written or sculpted by artists. In essence, the words on the page, he hoped, would far outlast the physical limits of stones crafted for public memory consumption. This dissertation examines the shifts in Melville's ekphrastic work through a selected sampling of Melville's novels. It begins with the early travel narrative, *Typee*, as a sign of ekphrastic indifference. The dissertation then proceeds through the hopeful fantasy wanderings of *Mardi* and juxtaposes it with the harsh fear of realism in *Redburn*. The pinnacle of Melville's monumental ekphrasis is argued to be *Moby-Dick*, which revels in the fluid forms of Ishmael in stark contrast to the cracked sculpted form of Ahab. The final chapter signals a retreat into decay and forgetfulness in stone and print, as Melville subverts monumental visions through domestic novels, city mysteries and patriotic biography in *Pierre* and *Israel Potter*, respectively.

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Herman Melville stands as one of the great literary geniuses in American culture and in world literature. His work has achieved monumental status worldwide, for it reflects a lifelong interest in probing the deepest and darkest questions of human existence. Melville consistently displayed a deep reverence for human creativity and art. The independent life of the creative mind defined Melville as not only a literary artist but also as a human being. Art, for Melville, was something that he had to wrestle with his entire life. In the poem "Art" from *Timoleon*, Melville describes the process as wrestling with the "angel-Art." This image of physically grappling with the divine is an attempt to display the ongoing metacognitive struggle that Melville engaged with his whole career. For Melville, great literary art drew together disparate elements from various parts of the human mind, soul, and heart. The artist works with the temporality of the world in order to strive for transcendent genius. Melville's literary art functions in quite the same manner; his words wrestle with the artist's need to work within a genre, a form and the artist's desire to push the limits of artistic craft.

The poem "Art" makes clear that this process is one that is difficult, for it fuses a variety of opposite

things. Namely, for art to be successful, the writer must bring together energy and patience, humility with pride and scorn, instinct with study, and love with hate. To use Melville's words from the poem in describing the process of creating art, "What unlike things must meet and mate." This notion of competing ideas and emotions coming together to create art provides a useful glimpse into Melville's own thinking about successful artistic creation. Art was not uniform, neat, and tidy in Melville's vision. It worked between things like form and chaos, in order to provide the fullest example of the scope of the imagination. These disparate elements and passions could cause ruptures or areas of discontinuity, which Melville revealed in as a literary artist.

Melville read about art, thought about it, collected engravings and prints, and he lectured on statuary after his literary career had drawn to a close. The author saw a personal connection between writing and the pictorial and sculptural arts throughout his life, and he used these connections to bring his literary worlds to life for the reader. On a fundamental level, Melville was drawn to use ekphrasis in all of his writing. Melville used ekphrasis, "the verbal representation of visual representation" (Heffernan, "Ekphrasis and Representation"), (Mitchell,

Picture Theory) throughout his novels in an attempt to show the irony, instability, and duality functioning in all works of art.

Melville's ekphrastic vision highlights the shifting nature of narrative form and art in general. The narrators in Melville's fiction attempt to move the reader through the three levels of ekphrastic experience: indifference, fear, and hope. My argument in this dissertation focuses on Melville's representations and allusions to the seemingly most stable of artistic forms, monuments and memorials, throughout his early fiction. Melville's representations and allusions to this most stable form of artistic creation testify to his notions of artistic freedom and the instability involved with creating art as a profession.

I begin with his first novel, *Typee*, and end with his serial novel *Israel Potter*. Examining sculpted representations in these early works gives a clearer sense of Melville's own creative process as a writer of fiction. Melville's use of monuments and memorials indicates his restlessness with all stable forms of artistic creation, and his desire to move art beyond the temporal and solid and into the infinite and the fluid. Melville's use of monuments and memorials sheds light on the types of narrative genres that he was experimenting with. The author

had a strong interest in literary form and genre, for it was only through knowledge of form that he could begin to push the boundaries and experiment with his craft. As Alistair Fowler notes, "Only by knowing the beaten track, after all, can he be sure of leaving it"(32).

True literary art and genius was open and fluid. It realized and yet pushed the boundaries of form and craft, for the key to great literature was the active working, the process, of the creative mind. My dissertation looks to gain better insight into Melville's glimpses of truth through ekphrastic encounters, by examining the places where Melville grapples with sculpted forms and attempts to depart from their sense of order and stability. As Douglass Robillard neatly surmises:

But Melville himself made clear what he was about in his discussion of Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse*, asserting that 'in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly...and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself.' The glimpses, well concealed, are offered, as often as not, by Melville's consistent creation of some persona, obsessed by painterly, sculptural, or architectural images that act upon his imagination (68).

This work hopes to add a new glimpse into Melville's search for truth through a careful analysis of his presentation of sculpted forms and how these images relate to Melville's process as writer.

Herman Melville's writings span a variety of different genres, for he never truly felt comfortable working within the confines of any one of them. Focusing on the crafting of long fiction is important because it allows the reader to see Melville's gradual development and eventual abandonment of a literary form. Melville's narrative work is diverse; each novel defies easy classification. One element, however, that unites the various works is the presence of art artifacts used as symbols or perhaps deeper links to Melville's metanarrative thought process. Melville's use of sculpted form is complex. It is not simply a tendency that can be reduced to simply artistic, social, cultural, historical, or psychological explanations. Each of these areas may inform the discussion of Melville's ekphrastic work. Just as Melville's work breaks boundaries, so too must the scholarship of his work deal with disparate elements, in order to adequately judge the author's oeuvre.

This study will provide a blending of approaches to Melville's presentation of monuments and memorials. The overarching influence will be the notion that Melville was constantly thinking about and revising his personal understanding of the artist working through his craft. Details of the background surrounding Melville will be used

to advance the perception of Melville as literary artist, working within the cultural framework of nineteenth-century America.

Melville's depiction of monuments and memorials is not surprising when we consider the cultural climate of the United States during the writing of Melville's novels. Monument construction in the United States was a burgeoning operation during Melville's span of composition and throughout his entire life. American leaders debated and thought about how public monuments and sculpture would, or ideally should, be seen as embodiments of national values and culture.

Melville's work was informed by these cultural debates. His fiction contains references to monuments and memorials, which reveal both the author's playful and serious considerations of this national endeavor and of representational art in general. Melville's use of monuments has a self-reflexive, authorial quality to it as well. Melville's fictional use of monuments reveals his skepticism about the national monument project and it also displays his own grappling with his ability to create freely as a literary artist in the United States in the nineteenth century. For Melville, true genius in art could not be self-contained and ordered to represent national or

universal qualities. It was always a bringing together of very diverse emotions and subject matters, which had to be carefully considered by the viewer.

The notion of copying the human form repeatedly suggests an early form of image mass production, which would have intrigued and yet puzzled Melville as artist. If we make the connection with writing, mass production of a single entity or type almost appears to be carbon-copying or the absence of originality. Melville himself felt that this was the case with his early travel work, which basically saw him use the same standard formula in telling his tales. It is my contention that these standard formulas for writing practices were constraining for Melville for they limited artistic freedom.

Copying the human form repeatedly in sculpture seems to be yet another example of limitations being placed on the artist, which Melville reacted to in his created literary worlds. Figures like Franklin, Jefferson, and Washington all had their images and likenesses painted and sculpted repeatedly. Their bodies were reproduced in marble or clay and were placed in places of authority and power throughout the new republic.

This replication of the human form is problematic for a variety of reasons. First, the idea of America as a

democracy suggests that we are all created equal. In a democratic society based on a government for the people by the people, public monuments became difficult to construct. If men such as Franklin, Washington or Jefferson were merely mortal, how could Americans raise god-like statues in their likenesses? And if they were constructed, how should they be represented? Classical models looked to create an ideal form of the figure, perhaps copying the grandeur of Roman or Greek statuary. Other approaches placed figures in their natural garb but yet in elevated poses of distinction.

In many cases, these sculptural image debates became heated, for what was at stake was the public perception of the fledgling nation in a global context. Public art projects, such as the construction of the Washington Monument, often generated grand political battles, where major ideological concerns were raised as to the construction of an American public identity. The battle over the Washington Monument itself began before Melville was born and lasted until after his death. Melville was culturally embedded within this struggle, and his fiction attests to his awareness of this national issue.

Instead of Melville's work being regarded as that of an isolated genius, his canon suggests that the author was

quite a product of his environment and times. Melville considered American identity in a larger scale than just simply the advancement of a nationalistic agenda. Sculpture that was uniformly created to idolize or aggrandize national figures or concepts for the buttressing of wholesale national supremacy was an insult for Melville as a citizen. This type of national movement cheapened the role of the artist to simply being the foot soldier of the state and its grand ideas of self-promotion. Without being true to his sense of self and the pursuit of higher truths, the writer would simply become the copyist, doggedly casting out yet another book in a monotonous format.

Melville's fiction portrays characters confronting the problem of memorial stones, monuments, and statuary as narratives and lasting reminders of the past. America in the late eighteenth century and early stages of the nineteenth was starting to determine how it should represent its past to future generations. This was a new and challenging endeavor. America had to create its sense of an epic history; the country looked to develop its own sense of myth and culture, which would rival and perhaps far exceed the time-honored grandeur of Europe. Melville's characters, each in a unique way, confront the difficulties

of monuments and memorials from differing perspectives and on different grounds.

What becomes apparent is that Melville felt deeply ambivalent towards the national project as well as towards stable, so-called universal artistic creations. Melville was looking for his words to gain universal status, but he realized that this type of universal recognition must rise above national agendas and confront the deeper mysteries of the world. Melville's skepticism about America's hubris in monument building can be seen in his characters' fictional encounters, and his repeated ironic use of sculpture is indicative of his inclination towards the fluid and contested nature of artistic creation.

Monuments and memorials are lasting reminders of how a culture or an individual chooses to represent the things it holds to be important. As Arthur Danto relates, "We erect monuments so that we shall always remember, and build memorials so that we shall never forget"(112). In essence, monuments visually represent what a culture holds most important, most worthy of admiration and wonder. Memorials testify to the human need to recall the past, to hold on to things that a culture holds most sacred.

Naturally, agreeing on the appropriateness of a monument has led to controversy and long, drawn-out

arguments. What is at stake in monument construction is the very foundation upon which a society rests. The implications of stone casting are far-reaching. Memorial stones and monuments testify to power, strength, and cultural and social importance. These sites, supposedly, become the bedrock of cultural memory and history.

For Melville, this process was over-simplified. Melville's literary use of these objects was to create spaces for debate, for readers to question origins, and for them to interrogate the sense of orderly succession through national narratives. By fostering controversy and debate, Melville was attempting to keep these spaces vital in public memory. Instead of silent stones, whose stories are ignored, forgotten, or taken for granted by future readers, Melville hoped viewers would actively investigate narratives, as well as monuments, as a duty of active citizenry.

Public memory obviously is a tricky business to examine. Nations pride themselves on orderly succession and well-defined, heroic figures, which are to be emulated and respected by the public at large. Casting figures in stone thus becomes ideologically important, for it creates a unified, unambiguous story of the past. Stone figures suggest permanence and stability, the foundation of a

society's place and importance in a global context. Memory crafted in stone is complex because it cannot suggest fault lines, fissures, or disruptions. As Michael Kammen notes, "Public memory, which contains a slowly shifting configuration of traditions, is ideologically important because it shapes a nation's ethos and sense of identity. That explains, at least in part, why memory is always selective and is so often contested" (13).

Melville wrote during a time when America's historical memory was being crafted and shaped and he was keenly aware of the ironies surrounding the casting of national memory. These white stone images hide the disorder and chaos underneath the surface of the American experience. The smooth surfaces of national figures and monuments suggest that harmony, truth, and virtue emanated from America's heroes, and their virtues stand as beacons of light and clarity for Americans across time.

Melville realized the dangers inherent in this type of thinking and used this as a key component to his literature. In each instance that monuments and memorials are used in Melville's works, they are undercut for a variety of reasons. Race, national hubris, money, stature, and power are critiqued by Melville's ekphrastic work. Melville wished to show the underside, the darkness, and

the rough edges of the American tradition. Instead of providing another smooth story of national perseverance, Melville's ekphrastic work with monuments and memorials sought to show the fissures and breaking points of the nation's efforts for narrative harmony.

Melville understood the paradox at the heart of the traditions of American memory. He saw the vast contradictions in constructing cultural memory as a veiled attempt to manipulate the process of time and change. As Amy G. Remensnyder writes, "Inherent in memory (social or individual) is a paradox. Memory represents an attempt to fix information or an interpretation of it, an effort to freeze time into a crystalline image. But memory itself exists in time; the process of remembering destabilizes the frozen image, changing the contours of what is remembered. This paradox is embodied in the creation and subsequent cultural existence of monuments or memorials..." (884). Freezing moments in stones eradicates irony and instability, which are seemingly keys to Melville's constructed fictional worlds of artistic creation.

Disruptions and disorders were always integral parts of the narratives that Melville constructed. Without these areas of disagreement and the call for further discourse, the role of the Melvillean narrator, and the author

himself, seems undermined. The teller becomes merely a vehicle for promoting a unified story of interrupted development and not a component of the text to be considered, doubted, and examined further. By having his narrators confront stone images, Melville is calling into question the embedded teller of the tale in the construction of memory. Marita Sturken aptly notes the lurking questions that monuments stir in careful observers. She states that,

The forms remembrance takes indicates the status of memory within a given culture. In these forms, we can see acts of public commemoration as moments in which shifting discourses of history, personal memory, and cultural memory converge. Public commemoration is a form of history-making, yet it can also be a contested form of remembrance in which cultural memories slide through and into each other, merging and then disengaging in a tangle of narratives. (118)

The depictions of sculpted art objects were an attempt by Melville to rhetorically continue artistic debates, through the interplay of tangled narratives, attempting to find an audience. Melville's use of monuments and memorials relates both to his narrator's attempt to complicate the passive reception of narrative truth and it also relates to the author's own grappling with artistic form and freedom and the difficulties he had with garnering audiences throughout his career. As Thomas Myers wrote, "A

block of stone may be a powerful text with many subtexts, or it may be an inert simplification of historical reality that assuages memory—it depends on the readership” (192). Being skeptical by nature, Melville used his artistic references ironically many times to test the limits of his readers and call them into deeper contemplation. His job as a writer was to create powerful texts with many layers of subtext.

Clearly, Melville was always critical of how future generations would understand the past. Monuments and memorials that were designed to be lasting reminders of a culture’s important personages and key moments downplayed the important role of the literary figure. As monument builders attempt to provide a way to capture the essence of a unified past, novelists attempt to provides glimpses of past stories that ask for readers to question the narrative’s truth and accuracy. Fiction writers quite simply lie or stretch the truth to stimulate the imagination.

For Melville, the attempt of the monument builder to defy the process of time and provide a sense of the true and beautiful only heightened his awareness of death, decay, and deception. Monuments were often accepted without critical inspection. The reading public that scorned

Melville's books, which often taxed the readers' patience and imagination, also largely accepted and then forgot about the *critical* component of representation itself. Melville wanted his words to last for critical readers to question and return to them. Instead of having passive receptors of words on the page or silent non-judgmental viewers looking at stones erected to memorialize, Melville was calling for diligent readers to challenge texts that were written or sculpted by artists. In essence, the words on his page, he hoped, would become monumental and outlast the physical limits of the stones crafted for public memory consumption.

In his 1850 review of Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Melville provided a now often-quoted line about literary genius: "Whereas great geniuses are parts of the times, they themselves are the times, and possess a correspondent coloring" (Quoted in Post-Lauria xi). This statement implies that authors reveal insights from the cultures they work from. The notion of coloring is important in this reference, for color implies shading, playing with the tones and the levels of light and shadow. The author either subconsciously or willingly paints aspects of his culture to the reader. In other words, as critics such as David S. Reynolds and Sheila Post-Lauria

have suggested, great writers did not simply transcend given societies and formulaic genres of popular writing. They were not timeless geniuses. Great writers absorbed and used many of these genre conventions and popular culture values within their work. But, by presenting these cultural values, the writer attempted to give them color—provide greater meaning through the subtle shading that their particular mode of writing may bring out. Instead of simply acting as a copy or a mirror of the society, the artist is the times because he/she discloses the different shades of meaning that can be revealed, depending on the teller of the tale and how he/she interprets what has been seen.

Memory becomes an important issue for narrators as they relate the story to the reader. Each narrator in Melville's works uses different imagery to display the ongoing process that is at work in the novel's construction. In each of Melville's novels, stone imagery is used to comment on the novel's formation and its relation to society and its readers. Memory becomes a critical ground for inquiry because the narrator is always working between the active workings of the creative mind and the reality of the reading public consuming the novels that are written. Edgar A. Dryden relates the conflict

inherent in Melville's narrators and their interrogations of the past:

It is, however, just this emphasis on memory's ability to authenticate present experience which distinguishes Melville's use of the faculty from many of the earlier discussions of it. For the Melvillean narrator memory is an imaginative act which makes the present a moment of creative understanding of a past adventure that was experienced initially as an unintelligible and frightening chaos of sensations. At the time of writing—often years after the original experience—the mature writer fictionalizes his earlier experiences in an attempt to define his truth or meaning to himself and to his reader. It is the creative remembering in the present which gives meaning to the past. (35)

Melville's presentation of monuments and memorials was an attempt to color the experience of readers, to show the subtle problems, limitations, and beauties of both narratives crafted from words, and those shaped out of stone. The nationalistic question that arises from Melville's art is one that is familiar to readers today. Are dialogue and exchange possible when we attempt to talk about the remembrance and memorialization of the past? The crafting of narrative in stone implies permanence. However, that permanent crafting needs critical readers and perhaps revision across generations. Without careful interpretation, texts can simply lose meaning, decay, or be disregarded entirely. Melville's prose presentation of

stones has meaning for his own art, life, and times, and yet it has meaning for us as readers today as well.

An example that may serve as a useful springboard back into Melville's narratives occurs at the very end of the author's life. Melville left a final enigmatic site, which displays his lifelong interest in monumentality and its connection to his own writing career. Melville's gravesite has become a contested ground for literary scholars, American cultural critics, and gravestone historians. His grave, located in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, depicts a stark blank scroll on his epitaph, with a quill pen resting beside it. No dates and no quotes are listed.

Melville used his final resting place as a signal for his future readers to look back to his art and be critical of his repeated use of sculptural art. Melville left his blank tombstone scroll deliberately. While the scroll, or Book of Life motif, was a familiar one during this period, according to Judy Logan, the blankness of the scroll counteracted the tendencies of the Melville family, whose graves tended to have personal reflections. "The Melville were not ones to leave the wording of gravestone inscriptions to others; they took this responsibility seriously, and their choices tended to be personal...A blank scroll is simply not in keeping with family

traditions" (Logan 9). Like Logan, I believe that Melville chose the marker deliberately. This decision was neither a cruel joke nor a cryptic message. It was a signal for readers to return to his works and to fill the blank epitaph that he left behind. My reading of Melville's grave leads me to see Melville calling for readers to revisit his works, contest their meanings, and foster continual debates.

The gravestone calls readers back to the past and particularly the inter-workings of the pen and stone. The blank scroll links memorial stones with the blank page and pen; it represents an ongoing dialectical relationship that Melville fostered between creativity and destruction, icon and iconoclasm, beginnings and endings. The gravestone is a place that leaves room for further interpretation. The stone calls for the viewer to look into the blankness of the scroll, almost like the whiteness of the whale, and begin to investigate, ponder, and draw our own conclusions. Just as the viewer confronts the memorial, Melville's characters confront varying types of monuments and memorials throughout his fiction. Many characters attempt to read themselves in monumental places; others ignore the signs of destruction as they pass along on their quests; some become subsumed by monumental rhetoric, while others

appear to be crushed under the weight of the stones of memory. Melville himself felt the weight of stones on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land:

We read a good deal about stones in Scripture. Monuments and memorials are set up of stones; men are stoned to death; the figurative seeds fall in stony places; and no wonder that stones should so largely figure in the Bible. Judea is one accumulation of stones-Stone mountains & stony plains; stony torrents & stony roads; stony walls & stony fields; stony houses & stony tombs; stony eyes & stony hearts. Before you, & behind you are stones. Stones to right & stones to left. In many places laborious attempt has been made, to clear the surface of these stones. You see heaps of stone here & there; and some walls of immense thickness are thrown together, less for boundaries than to get them out of the way. But in vain; the removal of one stone serves to reveal there stones still larger, below it. It is like mending an old barn; the more you uncover, the more it grows. (*Journals* 152)

Stones in this passage link creativity and destruction, and they also link the stones of narrative with the stones appearing to the viewer. The reference calls the reader to see a symbol-the stone- which fluctuates between local and universal meaning. For Melville, writing was a bridge between creativity and destruction. Melville ultimately sought to move beyond the limitations of his human existence. His texts look for readers to remove the layers of stone-formal appearances and seek a deeper knowledge, embedded in mystery and questions. By removing one stone, another stone falls into

its place. Impediments and fissure are common in the process, as they are in all of our lives. But, the notion of building through stone and writing was critical for Melville. The stone serves as a lasting image of his lifelong struggle to work between the immediate building of his works and their time-tested durability.

Kenneth Speirs remarks that:

In this way, stones serve as both symbolic expression and material possession. They permit Melville, as symbols, to consider time tested traditions, and to register a few of the ways humans have found to order their lives. Melville notes that stones figure prominently in the central texts of western religion; they help us memorialize our greatest achievements, better comprehend our misplaced aspirations, consecrate our lives, and desecrate our damned. In Melville's hands, stones bear witness to the human experience—life and death, procreation and destruction, achievement and desire, mystery and faith. (31-32).

Speirs's criticism shows the remarkable impact that stone imagery had on Melville's life and work. Deeply important is Speirs's concept that the author "searched for local meanings in abstraction, while at the same time, searching for ways universal verities can lend greater significance to the local" (32). The movement across time, moving between universal and local, is a crucial component to framing Melville's ekphrastic use of monuments and memorials, which directly leads to the critic at work today.

This stone image seems to relate back to the job of interpretation. Stones can be seen as a roadblock, a halt to progress. The job of the critic is to continually remove stone after stone to arrive at a greater depth of truth and understanding. Viewers can be intimidated or crushed by the weight of stones, the accumulation of the past. However, it is critical to continue to uncover those historical stones, for it leads to continual growth for the artist's work and the critic's mind. Melville's entire canon was beset with the struggle to create freely and continually remove stone impediments from his process; and yet, Melville realized the weight of the past and the rigidity of reader expectation. Monuments tell stories, attempt to generate interest, and should leave the viewer with a greater sense of the skill of the artist. Melville's preoccupation with statuary in his fiction has a direct relationship to his fictional crafting and genre bending. When Melville appears to be writing a straightforward narrative, it usually twists into a complex multi-layered text, which could be read and critiqued through a variety of theories and interpretations.

Melville felt the disapproval of the reading public for most of his career; as most critics have contended, he must have felt the disappointment of being virtually

ignored or critically misunderstood in his time. Most of Melville's contemporaries were looking for him to continually repeat his travel performances in early works such as *Typee* and *Omoo*. If Melville was remembered exclusively as the "man who lived among the cannibals," his art would have fallen out of public memory; his words would have been merely glossed by a reading public that did not fully comprehend what his writings were asking of its readers. The process that Melville engaged in was one that ultimately ended in failure, for the author's importance was not fully grasped by his contemporary readers. A quote from the author neatly sums up his foray into the world of writing. "It is better to fail in originality, than to succeed in imitation." This statement speaks not only to Melville's sense of purpose as a literary artist, but it underlies his allusions to monuments and memorials. Art, for Melville, had to take chances and be somewhat unstable, if it was to reach for and attain genius.

CHAPTER 1: Peeping into Polynesian Memorials: Ekphrastic Indifference in *Typee*

In Melville's first published novel, *Typee*, the author found an effective way to incorporate his fictional tendencies into what is seemingly a "truthful" narrative account of a travel experience. Tommo's sojourn in the Marquesas reveals the limitations of the narrator in the travel narrative. Melville employs Tommo as an unreliable narrator, who attempts to present his experience within a tightly framed concept of art and beauty. Tommo's encounters with Marquesean ruins reveal his prejudices and inability to account for memorials, which do not fit his Westernized concept of what art should resemble. The narrator confronts "dumb stones" and "grotesquely shaped logs" which are dismissed as the inferior work of a backward society.

This encounter with the "Other" displays Melville working through ekphrastic indifference. Simply put, ekphrastic indifference is a phase in which the writer realizes the impossibility of the verbal project to present visual details to the reader. With regard to the sense of "otherness," W.J.T. Mitchell writes, "The otherness of visual representation from the standpoint of textuality may be anything from a professional competition to a relation

of political, disciplinary, or cultural domination in which the self is understood as an active, speaking, seeing subject, while the 'other' is projected as a passive, seen, and silent object" ("Ekphrasis and the Other" 2). Tommo attempts to be the active self throughout *Typee*, working to interpret the passive objects he sees in the Marquesas. Melville, even in his early development as a writer, realized that depicting visual material in accurate verbal terminology was impossible. Verbal descriptions simply cannot capture visual images as accurately as physical depiction. As Mitchell remarks, "A verbal representation cannot represent—that is, make present—its object in the same way a visual representation can. It may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the ways pictures do. Words can 'cite,' but never 'sight' their objects" ("Ekphrasis and the Other" 2).

Melville's first narrative assumes that an attempt to describe, visually, the artifacts of the Marquesas would be imprudent for the type of narrative he was constructing. The general reader that would purchase travel accounts was looking for fantastic stories of lands that he/she would never see; this reader of travel narratives was not looking for accurate, detailed verbal depictions of artifacts and

environment. Most readers were looking to peruse travel stories and the imagery employed in them. Melville realized this and adjusted his writing accordingly.

David S. Reynolds points out that, "When Melville wrote that his first novel, *Typee*, was 'calculated for popular reading, or for none at all,' he betrayed his awareness of the native market for sensational adventure fiction. He knew his experiences would have appeal for American readers who since the early nineteenth century had shown a growing interest in South Sea adventure and cannibalism" (*Beneath the American Renaissance* 279). Readers were looking for tales of adventure, escape, and of exotic people. They were not looking to read stories, in order to accept and embrace a given culture for its own aesthetic merits. Melville capitalized on the public desire for sensational stories.

T. Walter Herbert observes that *Typee* "rests upon the encounter, the experience of contact, rather than on the Marqueseans as a thing observed" (158). Art objects lurk in important spots throughout Melville's first narrative, but the genre prevents full description. This inability to describe objects of inquiry led Melville into a conscious yet subtle game to undercut his straightforward narrative through visual representation.

Melville's first travel narrative captures a moment when the author was bound within a tight frame of reference; the travel narrative form was dictated by the forces of the market and the public's desire for truthful renditions of faraway places. Melville used the encounters with Polynesian art to push the strict factual boundaries of the travel narrative genre, but he prevents his narrator from describing the visual details of the art to emphasize the genre's limitations. Melville's indifference to the art of the travel narrative, and his narrator's relegating of Polynesian art to a subservient stature speaks back to his readers' expectations and their desire to gain inside knowledge about cultures other than their own. *Typee* presents itself as a travel narrative, in theory, but Melville reticently undercuts the work of the genre, for it hindered the workings of his imagination.

Monuments and memorials are especially interesting to examine in all of Melville's works, for their general purpose is to show cohesive and coherent visual narratives of a culture or society. As John T. Matteson convincingly writes about the image of sepulchre in Melville's work, "The word together is key, for commemorative objects traditionally function to establish common cultural ground, a task they perform insofar as they strive toward a fixed

content of meaning and away from subjective interpretation. Therefore, while the individual viewer's precise reaction to a monument is always unique and subjective, the monument tries to place that subjectivity within limits so that we truly may be mindful together"(419). In *Typee*, contact with memorials and monuments emphasize the space and distance between cultures. Melville was more interested in the subjective, tenuous position of the individual, realizing and working through his/her limitations as a speaker and viewer. Cohesion and coherence, relating truthful details back to American readers, were impossible because they negated the subjectivity of an individual's perception. The traveling American narrator, in this regard, falsely shapes public consciousness of a faraway place for American readers. But, as Matteson suggests, "In the struggle to shape public memory, the need for cultural continuity and a stable concept of national identity contended against the impulses toward revision and reinterpretation that are essential to art"(420). Melville's first novel shows the author's inclinations to fictional art and his call for readers to begin to take seriously the process of reinterpreting and rereading so-called narratives of cohesion and fact in order to see the signs of instability lurking under the surface.

Melville's first novel works within the frame of ekphrastic indifference, realizing the impossibility of presenting visual truth in verbal descriptions, and it also functions in Hegel's symbolic stage of creation. This initial travel narrative is an exploration into "indistinctness and obscurity." "The first form of art is therefore rather a mere search after plastic portrayal than a capacity of genuine representation" (Hegel 82). Tommo does not understand the character or nature of the Polynesian art that he sees during his stay on the island. Artifacts in the Marquesas appear bizarre, primitive, grotesque, and tasteless to the Western travel narrator. This was precisely how Hegel characterized objects of the East. Most of Melville's first novel displays the narrator vainly attempting to control a story of which he knows very little about.

In a sense, Tommo grapples with images that he is incapable of comprehending and translating into an accurate verbal framework. Tommo's task is impossible, precisely because of the limitations of this narrative form, the stringent demands of its readers, and also because of the impossibility of visually painting cultural objects in precise verbal terminology.

Tommo is employed as an unreliable storyteller because his position was to relate truthful details back to his readers. His tale, particularly in its reading of memorial space, shows the impossibility of presenting an unbiased account of a faraway image in words, in presenting that which is strange and exotic to readers in accurate visual details. Melville eventually felt strangled by the travel genre's limitations. As Sheila Post-Lauria notes, "Travel accounts that related interesting facts of native lives and cultures intrigued literal-minded readers and catered to the decade's demand for realistic portraiture" (6). This demand from the reading audience for realistic portrayal was a farce for Melville. How would it be possible to paint a Pacific culture for fireside, middle-class readers back at home in realistic terms? During the 1840's and even earlier, American readers were generally suspicious of fiction as a literary practice, according to Terence Martin. Melville, on the other hand, always felt the need to explore and push the boundaries of genre. Melville always felt an inclination towards fiction and the free workings of his imagination.

Typee is a peep into Polynesian culture because Melville realized the design of his own work and the impossibility of presenting literal and visual truth to the

audience. In a strange way, the word "peep" suggests a type of carnival peepshow and certainly not an accurate portrayal of a culture and its symbols. The American reading public, at large, wanted reading to act as a simple diversion and not as a link to higher truths. Truth, for Melville, is developed by examining details for oneself and realizing one's own prejudices and limitations. Melville's peep reveals, early on, his desire to cultivate advanced readers that would carefully examine the images and pictures he was presenting to them, and to be cautious of the tellers of factual stories. The rendering of memorial spaces throughout *Typee* functions as Melville's artistic critique of seeing and relating unbiased truth.

Typee is a novel that examines Marquesean culture and its monuments from a unique, shifting level of vision. Tommo's rendering of monuments and memorials has less to do with how the sites actually look and their importance, and more to do with the narrator's sense of order and control. The narrative is structured in a circular pattern; the main character moves from the confines of the ship and the sea, to a paradise of captivity on the island, only to return back to a ship at the end. It is fitting for this novel to revolve in such a pattern for the narrator really never moves forward in his quest for "enlightenment." This

particular word is used frequently throughout the novel; in fact, it is used so often that it begins to call attention to itself. What, after all, is the narrator looking to gain from his experiences? Why the focus on enlightenment? In simplistic terms, Tommo never really advances or learns from his experiences. He returns to the same place that he began, and his journey to return and retell his story is ambiguous for a reason. Melville's subtle goal in the book was to call for readers to be careful in accepting information from a storyteller.

The Preface touches on the novel's predicament: "In his account of the singular and interesting people among whom he was thrown, it will be observed that he chiefly treats of their more obvious peculiarities; and, in describing their customs, refrains in most cases from entering into explanations concerning their origin and purpose" (9). What Melville is making explicit from the opening pages is that this narrative will be about surface details; deep diving into origins will not be a major concern for this narrator. Tommo is simply a young, perhaps somewhat misinformed, storyteller who Melville uses to work through his varied thoughts and readings on cultural difference and history.

Particularly catching is the use of the word "thrown" in the Preface. Clearly, it is a loaded word when we

consider that Tommo chose the direction of the entire narrative. The individual's quest for enlightenment and understanding seems undermined by the notion that he has been set adrift in a world which he knows little about. Melville fictionalized parts of his actual encounter to attract readers of the sensational, but he also did this to satisfy some of his own intellectual curiosities.

Combining Tommo's description of the visual details and confines of Typee customs with the word enlightenment clouds the notion that this work was simply Melville's straightforward, autobiographical travel narrative. Instead of a narrative based on unencumbered individuality, exploration, and freedom, the text can be read as a fictional exploration into social order, public space, and narrative viewpoint.

Much of the criticism surrounding *Typee* rightfully questions its genre, and this is important to establish before considering the visual imagery that Melville employed. Janet Giltrow argues, "Undertaking the travel form early in his career, Melville fully and consciously engaged the complex of ideas in which the genre originates" (18). Giltrow believes that the narrative is an attempt to give a sweeping picture of all the aspects of Typee life. The travel writer thus is more interested in

comprehensive rather than selective information.

Melville's job in the book was to inform his audience, to provide a picture of how life was like in the Marquesas.

The end of the novel is a fitting conclusion for Giltrow, for: "Homecoming is the proper denouement in travel writing: Typee is not a goal, only a stage in a round-trip. Tommo's destination is his original point of departure-America-and the escape from what he sees as the 'fairy tale' enchantment of the valley is the necessary return to a normal, realistic itinerary with its appropriate assurances of departures and arrivals" (26). Other critics contend that *Typee* shows signs of Melville writing fiction. Paul Witherington maintains that ". . . it can be shown that [Melville's] use of materials in *Typee* is that of a novelist quite often in full control of his materials and almost always conscious of them" (137). While both sides have merit, the notion that Melville was using the travel form to work on fiction seems most convincing, when we assay the works that follow this first novel and the general inclination that Melville had towards imaginative literature.

Some current scholars have attempted to place too great an emphasis on Melville's stay in the Pacific. Paul Lyons, for example, strives to find some type of

autoethnographic connection between the Pacific region and Melville. He believes that rewarding readings are those that find "an important entanglement between Melville and the Pacific, and among Pacific practices/history and his writing..."(16). The inaccuracy of these readings is that they move Melville out of his own culture's realm of possibilities, and they distort Melville's authorial position in the novel. Melville was not writing Pacific culture and history; his stay on the islands was simply too short to take on that type of project. The "wall" that Lyons explores is that between Melville scholarship and Pacific-centered scholars. Lyons writes about the Pacific, "Having been there, Pacific Melvilleans would argue, can make a difference in how one sees and says..."(17).

Alex Calder concurs with Paul Lyons. Calder writes that "...Melville knew the Pacific well, at first hand and from books; he learned from his experiences here, and his writings reflect on a history of cultural contact in the Pacific that was then in the making, and that his books would also make"(8). These types of readings lose sight of Melville as a visitor and would-be novelist. Melville's experiences in the Pacific would have a tremendous effect on him throughout his life, but it is a stretch to think of Melville as a Pacific writer. Quite simply, overextending

Melville's connection to the Pacific endangers a responsible reading of the cultural contexts and promotes a type of irresponsible myth-making as to Melville's use of Pacific places.

Typee poses as a Pacific travel narrative; and it works upon the limitations of social ordering and the impossibility of presenting a unified, unencumbered picture of a place. The book rejects the American reading public's insatiable desire for acquiring questionable facts of foreign civilizations. The book pokes fun at this assumption. The novel depicts an American narrator's fruitless, albeit deliberate, attempt to establish a sense of control and order over a foreign environment through narrative. While the narrative complicates Tommo's position, it does not engage fully with the Pacific culture that serves as a backdrop for the story.

Of particular importance in Melville's narratives, as previously noted, is the place of monuments as markers of human achievement and memory. Monuments work throughout Melville's canon as keys to his cultural understandings of history and storytelling. These places of memory are used to explore and complicate the narrator's progress and understanding, or lack thereof. Monuments and memorials tell stories that appear to be, pardon the pun, "set in

stone." What Melville is making clear is that nothing is completely solid; the foundations of our understandings and where we receive our information must be questioned regularly. Narratives, like monuments, must be viewed and questioned with a skeptical approach.

In *Typee*, the reading of monumental space reveals Tommo's lack of cultural awareness and his inability to read or verbally present the environment surrounding him. His incapacity to comprehend Polynesian memorials highlights his own naïve sense of control and ordering. The narrative voice, seemingly the reader's guide to truth and accuracy in the book, is used by Melville to complicate the process of reading both narratives and monumental space. Melville makes clear that the process of reading memorials and monuments is a complicated process which must take into consideration the perception of the viewer at all times.

Tommo's journey to the Marquesas allows Melville the room to critique his own culture's belief in the concept of national progress. As explorers and missionaries spread out to civilize the so-called barbarous heathen worlds of Polynesia, Melville felt the need to express his own sentiments about our cultural hegemony. The author was involved in a tricky game; he wished to be read by audiences, and yet, he also wished to critique his

country's cultural superiority when it came to working with and representing the lives of islanders.

Viewing artifacts become important places, where Melville was subtly able to call into question his narrator's (and perhaps his countryman's) ability to present information fairly and without judgment. Whereas missionaries and explorers simply saw spiritual conversion and conquering as parts of their divine duty to progress, Melville as a literary artist felt that these attitudes could be presumptuous and filled with erroneous miscalculations. Culture and particularly art was not simple and linear. Believing that the artifacts of Western civilization were the fulfillment of ideal aesthetic achievement was a recipe for disaster and setup a misjudgment of entire civilizations. Melville's narrator presents artifacts throughout this first narrative in a naïve and ordered fashion because the author wished to show his inconsistencies and errors to diligent future readers.

Typee thus is the starting point where all the cultural and personal forces surrounding Melville began to develop in print. The book begins as a narrative about shipboard domination, and it turns into a story about freedom, progress, and harmony. Beneath the surface of this novel, the reader finds a story that is concerned with

ordering, structuring vision, and sovereignty. Ultimately, it ends as a story about dominion and control. Tommo may show glimpses of freedom as a storyteller, but he is ultimately bound by the societal forces around him and by his need to order his environment for both his own sense of authorial security as well as the confidence of his readers.

Tommo seems to be driven to move onward and forward in his narrative journey. Tommo's violent casting of the boat hook into one of his pursuers seems contrary to the passive attitudes of Tommo throughout the book. Contrary to Janet Giltrow's simplified reading of homecoming as a proper ending, Melville's first novel appears to be more complex and deliberate than a travel excursion and report. Tommo was created by Melville carefully to negotiate between his desire for fiction and romance, and his need to enter the marketplace and find an audience.

Melville's first book sets up the narrator to be critiqued by careful readers. The narrator's progress in the novel always returns back to an ordered and biased view of the social world. Tommo must return to the violent world of the ship in order for the book to be read. This movement seems to mirror Melville as writer in the book. He gives glimpses and hints into a world of fantasy and fiction, and

yet must always return his audience to the imposed stability of the travel narrative form. Tommo's eventual escape from Typee at the end of the novel brings him back to his shipboard opening. In a sense, his travels lead him back to his starting point. There seems to be more method behind Tommo's careful presentation of the story than simply to give the readers a sense of place and travel. Melville moves his narrator back to the ship to mimic the return to society—a place of order and form, which must be obeyed, in order to be heard.

Melville created Tommo's ordered vision to be challenged by careful readers. The novel is not merely Melville's candid travel adventure of life in the Marquesas. *Typee* is the first step for an author who was concerned his entire literary career with the shifting grounds of memory, tradition, and learning.

To support this assertion, it is important to note that Melville's experiences in Polynesia, and particularly his equating of the place with statuary, would remain in his mind throughout his life. In his *Journal of 1857*, Melville describes his recollections of traveling through the Greek isles. He immediately makes a comparison between the time-worn grandeur of Greece and the freshness of Polynesia:

Contrast between the Greek isles & those of the Polynesian archipelago. The former have lost their virginity. The latter are fresh as at their first creation. The former look worn out, and are meager, like life after enthusiasm is gone. The aspect of all of them is sterile & dry. Even Delos...is a barren moor, & to look upon the bleak yellow of Patmos, who would ever think that a god has been there.—No shoals in the Archipelago; you may sail close to any of the isles, which makes easy navigation. Many of the islands composed of pure white marble. Islanders retain expression of ancient statues (523).

This entry displays Melville's continuing fascination with the Polynesian world. His journals, which are haunted by relics of the ancient past, show his yearning for a simpler, more purified, historical vision. This reference to statuary is important because it shows Melville's recollection of history and memory being shaped and molded through encounters with artifacts. Melville lectured on ancient statuary and used it symbolically throughout his canon. Much of *Typee* is consumed by Tommo's attempts to ground Polynesian landscape and art within an American framework of vision. While Melville himself in his journal seems to value the pleasures and freshness of Polynesia for its own merits, Tommo's goal was to incorporate these artifacts into his own stable mode of inquiry. Western artifacts, for Tommo, simply are more refined, more indicative of taste and cultivation than Polynesian ones.

Melville's journal shows a unique appreciation for the beauty of the islands and its inhabitants, which did not surface in the same fashion in *Typee*. Where Tommo is less learned and more suspicious of the natives, their customs, and art, Melville returns to the natural beauty of the Pacific and an appreciation of Polynesia for its own merits. Polynesia transcends the relics of classical antiquity because of its freshness of expression. If Melville was using *Typee* to make an ironic commentary on artistic images, it is important to carefully review and understand the places where monuments and narrative visions intersect throughout the first novel.

Chapter 1 sets up the difficulties of the entire narrative journey. Tommo, as the narrator chooses to be called, is entombed in a green artificial shipboard environment. He describes his living space in terms of confinement; his bunk is described as being "shut up in little cabinets of mahogany and maple," and the surrounding green color of the walls have a "vile and sickly hue." Tommo's living quarters are arranged in natural terminology, for his mind paints the cabin in terms of trees and natural vegetation; and yet, his descriptions portray a deadened, decaying natural environment. His seaman's duties on the ship seem to lead to decomposition

and stagnation. The introduction of the pig and the cock follows these natural descriptions. The pig, which once chewed away at the interior of the ship, was long ago devoured by the crew. Pedro, the young cock enclosed in its cage, awaits his turn at the captain's dinner table. "His attenuated body will be laid out upon the captain's table next Sunday, and long before night will be buried with all the usual ceremonies beneath the worthy individual's vest"(12). This early cabin scene seems almost to be a precursor to the naturalism of the late nineteenth century.

Pedro's existence is linked to Tommo's feelings throughout the novel; he consistently feels trapped or helpless. He is watched and is always preparing to be consumed by those that watch over him. Both on the ship and in captivity, Tommo loses his sense of being in control or choosing his path to enlightenment. He is merely acted upon by the community in which he resides and peers out from his own caged existence. Tommo, after all, is only a member of a shipboard economy. He does not have authority or a voice in the workings of this sea community. His initial feelings of entrapment on the ship are grounded in a need to see the living earth again. On the surface level, this seems like nothing more than a need to escape the closed quarters of the ship. However, Tommo's journey enacts something

different. The name Pedro references Peter, the Christian saint, the rock upon which Christ builds his church. This link to the West is critical for Tommo's journey and actions.

If Tommo is symbolically linked to Pedro, then we see two creatures caged within the traditions of the West, and particularly the Christian church. Pedro is devoured by the captain; not coincidentally, most of Tommo's time in Typee is spent contemplating his own possible cannibalistic fate at the hands of the tribe. The ironic allusion to the saintly rock of the church hints that all certainties are subject to personal interpretations and the appetites of society. If Pedro represents an ironic allusion to Tommo's fears in the novel, it is important to investigate the allusion closely.

Pedro is Spanish for Peter; Tommo seems to be a derivative of Thomas. It is possible that Tommo symbolically alludes to another one of the twelve apostles, Thomas. This is important because it casts the narrator in the role of one who doubts. Thomas needs accurate visual facts in order to believe and preach about the resurrection of Jesus. It seems more than coincidental that Melville has his narrator act as a "doubting Thomas" and that his choice in name is actually inaccurate in itself. The travel

narrator, like his readers, should be clearly motivated by facts. And yet, the names that Melville uses in *Typee* suggest a stretching of the imagination and a call for a symbolic interpretation. Pedro, the symbolic rock of the church who is devoured, links rocks with consumption. Nothing appears to be bedrock or completely stable in this narrative journey and a close inspection of the art objects reveals further insights into the narrative's instability.

Tommo's viewpoints are grounded in a very set, Westernized view of human action. He is governed by an ordered view of the world. In the early chapters, he notes the presence of "savage woodlands guarded by horrible idols-heathenish rites and human sacrifices" (13), and he is later shocked by the intrusion of young maids onto his ship in the harbor. The reader learns that Tommo has a rigidly formed view of cultural sensibility. His knowledge of the natives is created in large part by legends, by the instruction of captains who fear desertion and by his own sense of decorum and sensibility. These captains are attempting to maintain a connection to the market; they need the sailors to stay on board and fear the islands because they need hands to work the ship.

In a very real sense, Tommo does not have any sort of way to view his world objectively. Because his relationship

to the environment is so restrained by a supply-and-demand shipboard system and by the strict morals of his homeland, he cannot see things clearly. His vision of the world never comprehends larger designs and implications; therefore, his view of the world is always tangled up in surface details. Metaphorically, Tommo views events and scenes from a box, a tightly organized social perspective. This understanding of Tommo is important because it recasts the narrator's importance and function in the story. Instead of being relied upon to give an accurate picture of the travel experience and its details, Tommo's lack of self-awareness and inability to fully grasp his environment calls into question the purpose of the entire narrative. Careful readers can never fully believe his opinions to be factual or worthy of our trust. Each of his detailed accounts must be questioned by readers because we have been given an introduction of a narrator that speaks from a very limited perspective.

Adding to this complicated view of the islands at the opening of the novel is the presence of the French fleet and the involvement of the Christian missionaries. Critics such as T. Walter Herbert, Lee Mitchell, and Faith Pullin have argued that this event makes problematic or protests against the destruction of non-white cultures by white

imperialists. Both of these groups of interlopers in the Marquesean islands distress Tommo for varying reasons. Perhaps, it is possible to read the novel as Melville railing against the abuses of colonialism or the highbrow conversion tactics of the missionaries. But regardless of the political implications involved, these groups disrupt the harmony and unimpeded progress of the scene for Tommo.

The French forces use their military movements in a type of carnivalesque way. The soldiers parade around to dazzle the natives and assert their supremacy and superior culture. Supporting this performance is the presence of the cannons aimed at the huts on the shore. The mechanized, systematic French forces strive to gain control over the island paradise in one of two ways: they will either control by asserting the superiority and dignity of their cultural refinements or they will simply use their military strengths and technology to overpower the native peoples.

The missionaries' tactics rely solely on the idea of bringing God and civilization to the barbarous heathens. Their mission is to change religious and social practices that are foreign to them, and they attempt to recast an entire civilization in terms that are manageable and coherent with their own Christian worldview.

Both groups, the French soldiers and the missionaries, mistake cultural difference for cultural inferiority. This early scene functions as a foreshadowing for Tommo's later journey. Tommo's actions reveal that he too mistakes difference for inferiority, when he attempts to judge the artifacts of Marquesean culture. Tommo may reject the imperialism of the French and the missionaries, but he will fall into similar patterns of imperialistic behavior during his stay.

While Tommo does have difficulty with the imperialist attitudes of the French and missionaries, he does not fully comprehend his own place in the picture. Tommo rejects working within a system: ship, military, religious sect, regardless of what that system entails. Tommo acts as a self-reliant individual who wishes to assemble his own sense of natural order before him. The presence of the social conflict assists the reader to see Tommo's problematic place as interpreter in the narrative.

The decrepit "patriarch sovereign" and the polished Du Petit Thouars symbolize Tommo's problems in interpreting and understanding his place in the environment. The seminude islander and the "polished" commander are locked in a struggle over land control. The narrator's interpretation of their meeting is crucial to understand:

"At what an immeasurable distance, thought I, are these two beings removed from each other. In the one is shown the result of long centuries of progressive civilization and refinement, which have gradually converted the mere creature into the semblance of all that is elevated and grand; while the other, after the lapse of the same period, has not advanced one step in the career of improvement"(40). In this dichotomy of civilized and savage, Melville is coyly setting up Tommo to be duped.

Tommo has no way to accurately judge civilizations. He merely reads the ready-made signs available to his sphere of knowledge. The medals, grand costumes, and trappings of military office are categorized as civilization by the narrator because he cannot interpret the exotic figure of the half-dressed leader. Tommo assumes that this lack of proper Western attire denotes a child-like, and less refined, culture.

The notion of being "polished" with regard to the French leader has a double meaning. Not only does it seem to point to the stately, refined manner of his dress and behavior, but it also functions as one of Melville's sly references to the dignified and honorable monumental figure. Statues are polished; they should be sculpted in the form of military leaders that display this type of

stately bravado. Busts and monuments devoted to conquerors were common worldwide. Melville is using Tommo's "lack of vision," his inability to think about his own perspective, to illustrate the problems and dangers of interpretation, especially when it comes to relating the beauties and importance of different cultures and civilizations.

Tommo is incapable of seeing correctly and accurately because he has never been exposed to cultural differences. Tommo's difficulties as narrator subvert the efforts of the travel narrative genre. Visual contradictions concerning the natural world and Marquesean artifacts display the interpretive discontinuities that will plague Tommo's stay in the Typee valley. At one moment, Tommo is awed by the beauty of the nature or baffled by memorials that he has seen; at the very next instance, he shifts into an attempt to classify and manage his visual experiences. This problem with vision is only heightened during Tommo's ekphrastic encounters later in the novel.

When Tommo finally resolved to quit the ship secretly, his projected destination accents his problems with vision. Tommo wants to ascend into the mountains and, from his lofty position, command an overview of the harbor and the valley. He states:

The idea pleased me greatly. It seemed to combine a great deal of practicability with no inconsiderable enjoyment in a quiet way; for how delightful it would be to look down upon the detested old vessel from the height of some thousand feet, and contrast the verdant scenery about me with the recollection of her narrow decks and gloomy fore-castle! Why, it was really refreshing even to think of it; and so I straightaway fell to picturing myself beneath a cocoa-nut tree on the brow of the mountain, with a cluster of plantains within easy reach, criticizing her nautical evolution as she was working her way out of the harbor(43).

Tommo climbs the mountains to gain perspective. By rising out of the ship and through the dense wilderness, he is attempting to position himself in a place of authority, security, and power. At this higher ground level, he can see over all, chart and criticize the course of the ship, foresee enemies and predators, and live in secluded harmony. After deciding to risk desertion with Toby, Tommo communicates his "design" and heads off to find liberty and freedom. This rise to the security of the top of the island seems to be the course of the travel narrative: a gentle, overarching picture that can be easily criticized and communicated.

When the two companions reach the summit, everything below becomes manageable and ordered. "As we looked down upon the islanders from our lofty position, we experienced a sense of security"(53). The elevated position moves the companions to a point where they are inaccessible to

recovery from the ship, and it also allows them to feel a false sense of power over the islanders and the natural environment. Hidden in the climb is a deep sense of security in the lofty reaches of nature. The lure of perspective functions throughout the entire novel. Escaping to a place above for inspection is what the travelers look for, and yet they continually find their expectations thwarted.

Melville sets up his deserters for disappointment once they reach the elevated plateau. "But here we were disappointed. Instead of finding the mountain we had ascended sweeping down in the opposite direction into broad and capacious valleys, the land appeared to retain its general elevation, only broken into a series of ridges and intervals, which as far as the eye could reach stretched away from us...This was a most unlooked-for discovery, and one that promised to defeat our plans altogether"(55). The "defeat" is one of vision, mapping, and stability. Once the companions reach the summit, they expect a downward slope which can allow them easy access to seeing all sides. When the elevation continues, they realize that their parameters for marking out the wilderness are inaccurate.

The point that Melville is making is that it is difficult to reach a stable position to judge and order

one's surroundings. This idea implicates the narrator and reading public as well, for it questions the narrative's ability to accurately present ordered, reasonable, "factual" details to the reader. When Toby and Tommo decide to descend into the ravine, their original plans to acquire a unified, overarching vision of the landscape is disrupted. The ravine that they will descend into will provide satisfaction from hunger, but it will also produce darkness, fear, and anxiety. It is a dark place that is not effortlessly traversed and not easily depicted to the mind's eye of the reader. Delving into the darkness, the unknown, is a major point of the novel. The reader, like the two companions, must accept the points in the narrative when they are called on to interpret what certain situations actually mean. The travel narrator is literally in the dark and cannot fully fathom his journey. If the journey began as mirroring the pathfinders cutting through the natural world to gain a sense of vision and mastery, it has now shifted into a halted exploration. Tommo's mysterious leg injury, which has been interpreted to mean numerous things, can be seen as a symbolic halt to their unimpeded narrative of facts and progression.

Ultimately, Tommo and Toby must leave the straight and narrow path of the travel journey and cross boundaries to

reach their destination. Sight fails them throughout the journey. Not only do they lose their sense of superiority in the upper reaches of the island, but they also cannot decipher which path will lead them to the Happar or Typee tribes. Instead of keeping to the well-defined paths to places above, they must become acquainted with things that are intimidating and unknown below. Both Tommo and Toby must resign themselves to the fact that they are not in control and cannot arrange the island to their vision. The key for the novel thus becomes the helpless falling of the travelers as an act of volition.

Throughout the expedition, design and progress are linked together. Going backwards is out of the question for the two castaways. Linking this to American culture, Melville appears to be making a point about his country's own Manifest Destiny. Even though it is forever moving forward to conquer nature and place a coherent design on that which is untamed, the landscape prevents total comprehension and linear progress. Just as Tommo and Toby are continually being cast down into the depths of the valley and their progress greatly impeded, so too was the push west for American explorers.

Tommo states that he eventually "inclined himself over towards the abyss" (81). The lurking point in this phrase is

that the explorers must renounce their grand designs of control and allow room for mysteries and uncertainty. This resignation is exactly what Melville was asking his readers to do while reading the book. Instead of searching for order, clarity, and truth, Melville wanted his readers to see the troubled, suspect position of the narrative voice.

What transpires throughout the rest of the journey is a complete reversal of the travelers' intentions from the beginning of the novel. When Tommo and Toby enter into contact with the natives, their progress is arrested. Instead of being the observers from the lofty position, they become the observed. As Tommo relates, "Never before had I been subjected to so strange and steady a glance, it revealed nothing of the mind of the savage, but it appeared to be reading my own" (89). The shift here is important. If Tommo wished to survey and gain an orderly view of the environment at the start of the journey, chief Mehevi turns the narrative around. Tommo and Toby become the observed, the artifacts to be studied, manipulated, and catalogued.

Mehevi's direction in food consumption brings this to the forefront of the narrative. When Tommo unceremoniously dives into his food, it was Mehevi who motioned to the visitors to pay attention to his instructions. Mehevi "dipped the fore finger of his right hand in the dish, and

giving it a rapid and scientific twirl, drew it out coated with the preparation...This performance was evidently intended for our instruction"(92). In this early initiation scene, Melville is giving an ironic twist to a historical situation. The pathfinders find themselves under the control of the semiscientific observers. Tommo perceives them to be merely savages because his cultural training has taught him to do so.

Tommo's thoughts reveal a complex observation process in the making. The "natives eyed us with intense curiosity, observing our minutest motions, and appearing to discover abundant matter for comment in the most trifling occurrences"(92). Melville seems to be having a bit of fun with his narrator and the art of his narrative. This reversal of fortunes calls into question perspectives of truth. The observer becoming the observed signals the difficulty of understanding factual narratives. Each participant has a slant on the story, which colors the event's interpretation. Melville's narrative comes to question the validity of the very practice of travel writing. Are the Typees cut off from civilization, or is Tommo being encased and boxed within their systems of inquiry to prove a point? A quick examination of characters and their curious sculptural descriptions in the novel adds

to the ironies surrounding the tale, and it is Tommo's rendering of memorial imagery that provides Melville with the room to articulate and critique his narrator's questionable place in describing Polynesia.

Fayaway becomes a problematic character throughout the narrative. Fayaway fascinates Tommo because she is not blemished by tattooing. Her form fits Tommo's cultural understanding of beauty. Tommo's attempt to read Fayaway and perhaps to enjoy her erotically displays his shallow and naïve sense of culture. He maps her tattoos quite specifically. "Just upon the fall of the shoulder were drawn two parallel lines half an inch apart, and perhaps three inches in length, the interval being filled with delicately executed figures. These narrow bands of tattooing, thus placed, always reminded me of those stripes of gold lace worn by officers in undress, and which are in lieu of epaulettes to denote their rank"(107). Tommo's charting is awkward because it is governed by the need to appropriate Fayaway in terms of Western imagery. Beauty consequently becomes something that is measured out in inches on purely a surface, skin-deep level. Fayaway is seemingly beautiful and worthy of pursuit because she resembles the perfect form of a classical sculpture, free

of easily-seen tattoos which would identify her as a member of a savage tribe.

Like his westernized fascination with Fayaway, Tommo's exploration of Marnoo is described in fitting terms for his structured conception of beauty and order.

The stranger...had he been a single hair's breath taller, the matchless symmetry of his form would have been destroyed. His unclad limbs were beautifully formed; whilst the elegant outline of his figure, together with his beardless cheeks, might have entitled him to the distinction of standing for the statue of the Polynesian Apollo; and indeed the oval of his countenance and the regularity of every feature reminded me of an antique bust. But the marble repose of art was supplied by a warmth and liveliness of expression only to be seen in the South Sea Islander under the most favorable developments of nature...his face was free from the least blemish of tattooing, although the rest of his body was drawn all over with fanciful figures, which—unlike the unconnected sketching among these natives—appeared to have been executed in conformity with some general design (162).

Tommo's description of Marnoo shows his need to order the people around him in some type of design. The link to statuary relates back to antiquity, and this classical reference is qualified by Tommo as being exceedingly rare in Polynesians. Whether Tommo is sexually attracted to Marnoo is a matter of debate, but regardless of sexual orientation, his molding of Marnoo in sculptural terms shows his inability to move beyond his western system of beauty and form. Even during his captivity, his vision is structured by his cultural upbringing, and he cannot escape

his set need to interpret people and the landscape in terms, which are culturally acceptable to him.

The encounters with Fayaway and Marnoo display a complex rendering of ekphrastic indifference. These two characters are framed by Tommo in Western terms for a distinct purpose. Melville's narrative operates in a realm dictated by the forces of the reading public. The author's choice was to present a picture that was acceptable for publication, even if that meant fictionalizing aspects of characters for effect. Presenting these characters as having beautiful, sculpted forms highlights the narrative's indifference to accuracy of depiction.

The travel narrative was severely limiting for a writer, and Melville had to be cautious of the limits that he attempted to stretch. Melville presents the fictitious Tommo to be critiqued, for the narrator is merely the mouthpiece for what the public desired. Readers wanted to be able to see something that was exotic, and yet they wanted parts of the story to speak to their cultural visions and expectations. Describing Fayaway and Marnoo in Western terms allowed Melville to craft characters that he believed might be familiar to readers. If accurate Polynesian accounts of the characters' countenances were

attempted, the results with the reading public would be questionable, if not disastrous.

Tommo's need to understand and label according to set Western principles is seen most drastically when the narrator comes upon a monument deep in the Typee wilderness. In Chapter 21, Tommo finds a scene that reminds him of Stonehenge "and the architectural labors of the Druid"(184). The terraces of smooth stones are strange to Tommo for "they bear no mark of the chisel"(184). The presentation of this monument has a dual importance. First, the reference to Stonehenge is extremely important. Many readers would visually be able to understand the description; a mental picture of a Stonehenge-like monument would be possible. And yet, the purpose behind the site is mysterious. Scholars today debate what occurred at Stonehenge and its purpose in religious and social affairs. Stonehenge seems to suggest, however, a sense of connection with an older, European history. Nothing like this site appears in the Typee culture that Tommo is visiting. In essence, the presence of the art work may suggest that the islander society is in a state of decline. As John Samson points out, "The Typee Stonehenge that Tommo stumbles upon indicates that the present Typee culture was preceded by a 'more civilized' culture..."(45). The monument demonstrates

to Tommo that perhaps cultural refinement has moved away from the shores of Polynesia and that the progress of civilization has merely been accepted and moved forward by European culture.

Melville has used Tommo to dupe his readers throughout this passage. The Typee Stonehenge bears no mark of chiseling. The work of a human creator is obscured in this passage as a metanarrative strategy. Melville too is attempting to remove his own personal marks with the pen from most of this book, so that it appears to be a factual recapturing of lived experience. And yet, the careful reader recognizes that the reader in this passage is puzzled and cannot accurately understand what is before him after a first glance. Melville's strategy is to draw the readers into the narrative, and yet to provide subtle hints that narrative artistry surrounds the entire creation.

After describing the physical details and the wilderness of vines growing over the Stonehenge terraces of stone, Tommo contemplates their origins. "These structures bear every indication of a very high antiquity, and Kory-Kory, who was my authority in all matters of scientific research, gave me to understand that they were coeval with the creation of the world; that the great gods themselves were the builders; and that they would endure until time

shall be no more"(184). Kory-Kory's response to Tommo's inquiry into the monument thwarts the narrator's expectations. The divine creation of the terrace goes against Tommo's search for logical, rational ordering solely based on human action in the world. As Tommo relates, "Kory-Kory's prompt explanation, and his attributing the work to a divine origin, at once convinced me that neither he nor the rest of his countrymen knew anything about them"(184-185). By dismissing Kory-Kory's explanation of the terraces, Tommo has shown the difficulty he has as a narrator reading histories, artifacts, and cultures. He needs rational explanations. All things that he sees need to fit into an orderly plan for reading images. Quite simply, Tommo would like to think about the orderly succession of artifacts and the perpetual progress of civilization. Divine forces working in the world question man's important place as originator and master of the environment.

Not only does the narrator have to set comparative models with images that he has previously seen, but he also needs to know when, why, and by whom images were constructed. Clearly, this is a naïve assumption at best. Intentions, craftsmen, and completion times are all subject to miscalculations and inaccuracies, just as narratives

are. The following paragraph sheds further light into

Tommo's thoughts:

As I gazed upon this monument, doubtless the work of an extinct and forgotten race, thus buried in the green nook of an island at the ends of the earth, the existence of which was yesterday unknown, a stronger feeling of awe came over than if I had stood musing at the mighty base of the Pyramid of Cheops. There are no inscriptions, no sculpture, no clue by which to conjecture its history: nothing but dumb stones. (185)

Tommo's thoughts here fit with his need for sequence and yet they show some vast contradictions that cohere with the movement of the narrative. Tommo is awed as if he were looking at a pyramid. There is a glimmer of mystery operating in the scene. Ascribing the origin of the monument to a lost tribe displays his need to come up with answers. Divine origins simply cannot be put in a logical framework for reading a culture and its artifacts. The existence of the terrace, which was "yesterday unknown" is extremely problematic. This phrase highlights Tommo's sense of cultural superiority. He does not say that the place was just unknown to him yesterday. His sweeping generalization is filled with meaning. The monument was not unknown yesterday; his discovery of the space, in his mind and in his words, establishes the monument and brings it into historical existence. The space is "dumb stones" for it does not easily reveal its creation origins. It stands as a

mystery, and meanings remain clouded in uncertainty.

Tommo reasons that he must construct meaning out of the senseless stories told by the natives. His reading of monumental space mirrors the problems in the Tommo's narrative journey for order. There are rays of hope that Tommo may be able to experience the mystery of Typee monuments, but these hints usually give way to the narrator's sense of supremacy.

As close readers, we see Tommo's shortcomings revealed by Melville. When Tommo arrives at the monument's location, he comes in a "circuitous path." This is the pattern chosen for the entire novel, as Tommo never moves himself forward to understand that some things cannot be read, fully understood, and that some things simply fall outside his structuring vision and rational capacities. Melville's desire for mystery and uncertainty begins to show itself, as the author fluctuates between mystery and an undercutting of his fictional narrator.

This inability to read or understand the monuments of Typee is developed again in Chapter 22. Kory-Kory leads Tommo through the Taboo Groves and points out "a variety of objects, and endeavored to explain them in such an indescribable jargon of words, that it almost put me (Tommo) in bodily pain to listen to him" (190). Even when

explanations are given about the culture and its values, Tommo rejects them because he lacks insight or even interest in understanding Polynesian culture. The guest wants to enjoy time being pampered and carried around by his hosts. Tommo wants to enjoy the harmonious utopian pleasures of the Marquesas: boat rides with the exotic Fayaway, casual dining with the chiefs, rides on the back of Kory-Kory in order to peruse the islands. Being educated about the subtleties of the islands is meaningless for Tommo, and for the reader, for that matter. Anything that is mysterious and calls for deeper contemplation is quickly dismissed. Tommo must command all experiences in his own terms.

The pyramidal structure in the Taboo Groves, which looks like a "cenotaph of skulls," becomes a piece of "savage crockery" because it frustrates the narrator's interpretation. Even though Kory-Kory makes a futile attempt to explain its meaning to Tommo, the narrator simply gazes at it and ignores his guide's declarations. Kory-Kory "immediately addressed himself to the nature of enlightening me: but all in vain; and to this hour the nature of the monument remains a complete mystery to me" (190).

Tommo does not intend to comprehend Marquesean culture on its own terms. His mission is to read the cultural symbols and manipulate them for his own narrative classification. In the proceeding quote, Tommo's language suggests a sense of irony. There are two key phrases used: "the nature of" and "enlightening me." In both instances, the reader is given clues to dismantle Tommo's aggrandized sense of cultural superiority. Enlightening Tommo is out of the question, for it is both the "nature" of the author and the nature of his American upbringing to remain self-contained in an artificial, constructed sense of wisdom and knowledge. Melville, at this point, underscores the notion that mysteries should abound in a story such as this one, even when order and clarity are vigorously sought.

Idols, like just about everything else, are subject to nature and the passing of time. This notion disturbs Tommo throughout the novel, for it seems to contradict his own traditional understandings of art and monumentality. We usually revere things that last, that hold up throughout the course of time. In Typee, if idols do not hold themselves "pretty straight," the islanders were prone to toppling them over, ignoring them, destroying them, or making a fire out of them.

This activity seems unthinkable for Tommo, but it merely seems to coincide with the passage of time and the superiority of nature. All objects are subject to decay and rot. For Tommo, this means inferiority. It signals the decaying of monuments and memorials, and thus, their cheapness and ineffectual nature.

What is at stake in the narrative is the place of man in the creation of art. Art works, in Tommo's mind, are created to command a sense of cultural stability and longevity. This is particularly important for an American experiencing art in the nineteenth century. As Lillian Miller described, the creation of a solid artistic foundation in the fledgling nation was thought to be critical for the cultural advancement of the American nation. It is not surprising to see Tommo act shocked at idols being toppled over or decaying because of the high and rigid expectations of his country at the time. American art had to be monumental and durable in order to show our progress in the civilized world and also our strength as a national power.

Melville sets up a tension with regard to the art of the Typees in Chapter 24. In this chapter, Melville alludes to the problems of reading cultural symbols. Melville distances Tommo from the haphazard collecting and

speculating of scientific researchers who delve haphazardly into pinpointing the meanings of the mysterious customs and images of the tribes they witness. These reports are improbable and not scientific at all; science, theology, iconology, and narrative all seem to lead the viewer into more questions and less definable fact. The reports are translated to the reading public as truth, but in reality, add up to nothing more than wonderful fiction.

Interestingly, Tommo confesses his inability "to gratify any curiosity that may be felt with regard to the theology of the valley" (202). Yet, he follows this declaration with several encounters with memorials that he attempts to read, think about, and eventually dismiss. However, one encounter with a memorial appears to allow for a less than literal reading. The chief's mausoleum "had a peculiar charm" for Tommo as the warrior in the canoe paddled his way to realms of bliss. Tommo jokingly yields himself to the superstitions of the island, even though he qualifies his visions as being connected to the tribe's "thoughtless" religious matters.

In this meeting, Melville allows Tommo an insight into the working of the imaginative mind, and it provides a point for readers to see the author's search for deeper truths. Tommo's words are important to note: "Aye, paddle

away, brave chieftain, to the land of spirits! To the material eye thou makest but little progress; but with the eye of faith, I see thy canoe cleaving the bright waves, which die away on those dimly looming shores of Paradise. This strange superstition affords another evidence of the fact, that however ignorant man may be, he still feels within him his immortal spirit yearning after the unknown future" (205).

To literal readers, the progress of the deceased chief seems nothing more than a rotting corpse in a decorated canoe. Melville suggests through Tommo that the reading of memorial space in the narrative is to begin to sense the inner push into the unknown and away from the desire for literal depiction. At this juncture, Melville is moving his narrator away from the literal and into the area of the unknown. There is a sense of hope in the depiction, which Melville would return to in *Mardi*. This declaration by Tommo seems promising, and yet it seems to be qualified by the suggestion that the Typees are to be counted among those ignorant groups of people.

Clearly, Melville balances hopeful suggestions of deeper contemplation with numerous instances where Tommo dismisses the Typees as being a backward generation that needs some type of spiritual awakening. At one point in the

journey with Kory-Kory in Chapter 24, Tommo advances to inspect a "grotesquely shaped log, carved in the likeness of a portly man"(210) at close proximity. Tommo supposes that the decaying idol "in despair at the neglect of its worshippers, had been trying to beat its own brains out against the surrounding trees"(211). As Tommo approaches the sculpture, Kory-Kory endeavored to prop up the piece on its own two legs. This action fails and causes Kory-Kory to beat the image with a stick. Tommo is shocked by this behavior, and he eventually dismisses the Typees and their idols as being a "back-slidden generation" that requires a spiritual revival, and that "wood-rot malady is spreading among their idols"(211-212).

This incident is a telling one, for the narrator does not for once question his own assumptions about what had just taken place. Kory-Kory's anger may not have been directed towards the idol; his fury may have resulted from the interloper, who he has been forced to shuttle around his environment for weeks. Tommo's inspections and curiosities are satisfied at the cost of all those around him. Perhaps, Kory-Kory's outburst has less to do with a fallen idol, a scenario that he appears to be accustomed to in his travels, due to the proliferation of such rotting gods, and more to do with the casual inspections of the

American traveler. After all, it does not seem that the Typees put a heavy emphasis on the perseverance and durability of idols under all circumstances. Idols and wooden gods seem to come and go with relative ease. The shock of the falling idols appears to be the domain of Tommo, and it is his dismissals of the idols that may have caused the angry assault by his guide.

The crucial fact is that the imagery that is presented leaves room for further reinterpretation. As readers, we sense that Tommo is only providing a subjective peep into Polynesian memorials. Tommo remains the traveler who is shocked by the impropriety of Kory-Kory, amused by the small Moa Artua idol that is encased in a box, and surprised by the communal graves that he finds throughout the Typee valley. His visions continually search for an order that by its very nature is shrouded in mystery for a visitor to the island. Melville consistently provides clues that Tommo's cultural inspections and orderings only tell half the story; his structuring visions of memorial spaces gradually show his inconsistencies and unreliability as narrator.

The discussion of idols and memorials works between the ordering and limitations that the reading public placed on the writer, and the author's yearning for room to freely

tell the truth through his art. In Chapter 24, Tommo notes that "appearances all the world over are deceptive" (206); this admission calls readers to question the value of the book itself and the narrator's own practices of reading the environment surrounding him. The violent end to the novel and the continual shifting perspectives of perception hinder any one conclusive interpretation of the novel. Tommo's own paranoid fear that his own face may be tattooed by Karky suggests his own attachment to his own form. By saving his face, he retains his ability to be accepted by the public at home. Samuel Otter concurs, stating that "Rather than turning the observer into a 'Statue of horror,' tattooing dispels the observer's fantasy of his own statuesque state" (*Melville's Anatomies* 19).

Typee functions, therefore, as Melville's first ironic commentary on the reading of monumental and memorial space and its relationship to the author's own shifting craft of writing. Throughout the book, Melville has given glimpses of his attachment to fiction through the description of places that seemingly are made for remembrance. After a similar job in *Omoo*, which only provides hints at imaginative reinterpretation, Melville would turn his talents to a full presentation of ekphrastic hope. Instead of catering to the audience and its tireless need for

realistic depiction, Melville turned his attention to a world of his own casting and to imaginative monuments and memorials, which would display his true longing for an advanced reading public that would see the act of reading and interpreting imagery as a process that required a drastic departure from so-called facts.

CHAPTER 2: Plodding through *Mardi's* Monuments: The
Imaginary Voyage into Ekphrastic Hope

Mardi and *Redburn* are two very different novels, which express both a mixture of enthusiasm and concern with the process of monumentality and memorialization. In these two novels, Melville's narrators encounter very different sculptural objects, which are dedicated in some fashion to devotion, subservience, and slavery. The shift in memory's representation in print is critical. In *Mardi*, Melville's free-flowing allegorical fantasy, the purpose of the task was to create room to tell the truth, to paint a vivid picture. Taji hopes that the free play of his creative mind will provide readers with enough material to abandon their need for accuracy, facts, and detailed presentations of foreign shores. The novel moves from the ekphrastic indifference of the travel narrative into the world of ekphrastic hope in fantasy literature. The narrative begins with the assumption that it is impossible and pointless to attempt to provide an accurate, reliable picture of an environment to the mind's eye of the reader. Therefore, the journey that is undertaken relies on the hope that the reader can use his/her imagination to bring the images and messages of the text to life.

The images that the reader invokes in reading *Mardi* would lead to a greater understanding for the place and use of the imagination in America's state of affairs at home and abroad. Fantasy, as Christopher Sten notes, "is a healthy and natural response to an unendurable situation, the first step toward one's emotional equilibrium after an upset or imbalance of some kind. Fantasy offers a world where the ground rules of life are diametrically reversed...It points the way toward some scheme for corrective action"(73).

Melville's goal in *Mardi* was to challenge readers to think for themselves, by leaving behind the obsessive need for factual narratives. By leaving the world of the land, the known world, he was offering his readers a chance to gain a unique perspective. The wide-ranging sea voyage was designed to give readers a distanced point of view in order to look at life on the land with new, fresh eyes. The images that the reader evokes in reading *Mardi* were an attempt by Melville to deepen the use and place of the imagination. Statuary that is encountered in *Mardi* is designed to seem as if one is encountering a dream world; once again, Melville's plan was to be able to move away from fact finding and reporting in travel narratives in order to move into a more fantastical world of his own

creation, where he could feel free to roam and comment on issues that concerned him.

Instead of rejecting the realities of his own world, *Mardi* sought to address issues of the age through the fresh perspective of fiction. Hyland Packard concurs, stating "*Mardi* is filled with Melville's attempt to discuss the hardest realities of the age by transcending verisimilitude" (243). Melville was attempting to use allegory and fantasy as ways to reveal the interrelationship between local problems of the time period and the representation of universal difficulties that transcend specific eras. For example, when Melville presents the arch of Vivenza, which textually excludes the tribe of Ham, his design was to give his readers a sense of the impermanent and contested nature of our cultural heritage. The arch displays the problems of slavery to the American men and women of Melville's generation; it also leaves a textual trace of slavery transcending a specific moment in time. In other words, Melville's text ekphrastically brings to mind the power of monuments and novels to cast certain people in subservient roles throughout human history.

Mardi asks readers to observe and understand what is constructed in stone and print, for the advancement of our

civilization. What we construct in stone and put down in print has deep implications for culture and society.

Regardless of what the art looks like, its aesthetic beauty or even accuracy of detail, it may misconstrue social and cultural values to viewers and lend itself to be deconstructed or fall to ruin.

The accuracy of Melville's verbal representation matters little; the hope is that readers and viewers will question the messages that all types of art leave behind. In other words, *Mardi* hopes that readers and viewers will take their roles as readers of texts seriously. The book operates with the ekphrastic hope that words, language, metaphors, and symbols may overcome ekphrastic indifference. By creating different and unique pictures in the mind's eye of the readers, the text and its representations can be taken to a deeper and more personal level of understanding in the minds of readers.

Melville's idea was to connect imaginative literature with imaginative sites of cultural memory. Just as genres could be fluid and multi-faceted, narrators unreliable, so too could our erected sites of cultural memory be places that show incongruity and send out a call for vigilant readers. Melville used the arch and other stone imagery to coyly critique the problems inherent in his own American

society and those abroad as well. Melville's challenge to his readers, as has been extensively noted, fell on rocky ground.

Mardi's failure signaled Melville's return to more realistic depiction in his following novel. Instead of the intertwining dream vision and social commentary of *Mardi*, Melville turned to *Redburn* as a book that would force readers to confront the realities of monumentalized injustice both in stone and print. Melville's shift in *Redburn* is an instance of ekphrastic fear. Instead of relying on the workings of the imagination, Melville was forced to present a depiction, which was unsatisfying for him as a creative writer. His mind resorted to a representation, which could actually be seen and compared by the reading public. Instead of the reader giving his/her mind to Melville's created vision of a monument and its interpretation, *Redburn* presents monuments and ruins that physically could be viewed by readers.

The fear lurking in this ekphrastic encounter is that the writer's words may not measure up to the actual picture. The depiction of the Nelson monument in Liverpool leads the narrator to think about the Southern slavery system. This monumental presentation was problematic for it devalued the role of the fiction writer in creating

literary worlds to tell the truth of the imaginative mind. With a devaluing of the imagination, and an inability to move away from factual narrative, Redburn's ekphrastic encounter with the Liverpool monument marks Melville's fear that the reading public required a firm presentation of realistic pictures in order to take the act of reading and interpretation earnestly. This book was torturous for Melville as an author, for the writing process dismantled his hopes that the audience would allow him the creative space to operate in a world of his own crafting.

The frustration that comes from examining these two works is that the critic can witness a key transition into authorial alienation on Melville's part. Melville referred to the two books that followed *Mardi* ironically: "They are two jobs, which I have done for money-being forced to it, as other men are to sawing wood." Melville undercuts the value of *Redburn*, but it seems impossible to resist discussing the novel's far-reaching implications. Examining these two novels is critical for Melville's development as a literary artist. These two novels display the struggle that Melville had with crafting literary images throughout the rest of his career. The fluctuation between imaginary and realistic depiction would follow Melville throughout his writings.

Mardi, quite appropriately, begins with a casting off: "We are off!" The journey that Melville presents in this novel is one of fantasy, a trip deep into the imagination. Whereas *Typee* and *Omoo* were travel narratives, with glimmers of fictional recreation, *Mardi* exists exclusively in the world of fantasy. Taji, the narrator, hopes that the roving of his own creative mind will be enough for readers, and that these readers would abandon their need for accuracy and factual reportage. *Mardi* operates exclusively in the world of ekphrastic hope.

Melville notes the nature of *Mardi* in a letter to John Murray.

To be blunt: the work I shall next publish will [be] downright earnest a "Romance of Polynesian Adventure"—But why this? The truth is, Sir, that the reiterated imputation of being a romancer in disguise has at last pricked me into a resolution to show those who may take interest in the matter, that a *real* romance of mine is no *Typee* or *Omoo*, & is made of different stuff altogether. This I confess has been the main inducement in altering my plans—but others have operated. I have long thought that Polynesia furnished a great deal of rich poetical material that has never been employed hitherto in works of fancy. . . . However, I thought, that I would postpone trying my hand at anything fanciful of this sort, till some future day: tho' at times when in the mood I threw off occasion, occasional sketches applicable to such a work.—Well: proceeding in my narrative of facts I began to feel an incurable distaste for the same; & a longing to plume my pinions for flight, & felt irked, cramped & fettered by plodding along with common places,—So suddenly the thing altogether, I went to work heart & soul at a romance which is now in fair progress, since I had worked at it under an earnest ardor. . . . It

opens like a true narrative-like Omoo for example, on ship board-& the romance & the poetry of the thing thence grow continually, till it becomes a story wild enough I assure you & with a meaning too (Letters 70-71).

The distaste for the travel narrative forced Melville to progress into something different.

By putting his heart and soul into this new work, Melville was taking a chance with his audience, career, and ability to write freely. The meaning lurking at the end of Melville's letter links the wildness of his depiction with its purposefulness. It is a departure from the known, but it is not a haphazard trip. As Paul Lyons states about *Mardi's* purpose, "Internal evidence certainly suggests that he meant the experiment to seem calculatedly uncontrolled-that *Mardi* portrays the artist trying out given forms as a way of discovering creative potential"(Melville and his Precursors 459). The use of images in this regard relates to Melville's sense of freedom as an artist. Richard Brodhead states, "...the value of *Mardi* for its author lies not in what it is but in what his composition of it could bring into being-his own mature creative self"(Creating the Creative 41). Melville's portrayal of art objects thus has less to do with actual physical monuments and memorials existing in time and space. They have more of a connection

with Melville's sense of process and the object's implications in the development of the imaginative mind.

In Chapter 2, Taji presents his desire to escape the Arcturion and voyage on his own. Boundaries and charts, the useful mapping tools of the voyager, are dismissed early in the narrative. "To his alarmed fancy, parallels and meridians become emphatically what they are merely designated as being: imaginary lines drawn around the earth's surface"(669). This casting off of the tools of charting the seas is indicative of the whole book. Just as Taji cuts ties to reality in voyaging, Melville sets off away from any attempt to describe the world using realistic depiction. As mentioned, this journey wants to move its readers away from maps and charts—physical mapping tools—towards the subjective, and into the infinite. "Thoughts of eternity thicken. He begins to feel anxious concerning his soul"(669). As Taji delves into the workings of his soul and imagination, the hope is that the reader will also cast off doubts and allow the narrator room to show us the complexities and depths of a quest into the mind.

Taji's companion, Jarl, gives the reader an early insight into Melville's artistic renderings in the novel. Jarl is described as being descended from royal lineage, but Taji makes the case that we all share in this royalty.

All of us are monarchs and sages for kinsmen; nay, angels and archangels for cousins; since in antediluvian days, the sons of God did verily wed with our mothers, the irresistible daughters of Eve. Thus all generations are blended: and heaven and earth are one kin: the hierarchies of seraphs in the uppermost skies; the thrones and principalities in the zodiac; the shades that roam throughout space; the nations and the families, flocks and folds of the earth; one and all, brothers in essence—oh, be we then brothers indeed! All things form but one whole(672).

This impassioned fraternal speech seems to draw all into brotherhood. The writer colors the world, so that we can all exist on an equal footing. This is critical in the book, for lurking in this description is the notion that all of us can be sovereigns. Clearly, Taji controls the narration of the book, but the reader is called on to think about the monuments that follow and our sovereign ability to interpret the world we encounter. That sense of royalty, of being able to make powerful decisions in judging representation and narration, will be called upon throughout the narrative journey.

The journey westward thus becomes complex. Going toward the west suggests multiple things. This could be a quest into religious thought, philosophy, art, or perhaps even into political movements to push the western limits of the United States. Taji's attitude toward the journey shifts drastically. When he confronts the immensity of the

watery world, he begins to think differently about the ocean. "Ere this, I had regarded the ocean as a slave, the steed that bore me whither I listed, and whose vicious propensities, mighty though they were, often proved harmless, when opposed to the genius of man. But now, how changed! In our frail boat, I would have fain built an altar to Neptune"(690).

The shift in attitude towards the ocean is important. Instead of taming the ocean through charts and maps, thus attempting to enslave it to the will of men, Taji begins to see himself at the mercy of nature and powers that are greater than men. The might and the majesty of the ocean gradually change Taji's perception of the powers of the human being over the environment. Instead of having a high reverence for the power of man over the environment, Taji hints at building an altar to the god Neptune, for he is awed by the power of the sea.

This altar that is briefly mentioned is interesting, for it is the first reference to an art artifact and it operates as a subtle critique of casting pillars, altars, and monuments to the power of men. In Taji's mind, the altar must be reserved for something much more powerful and awe-inspiring than the work of men. Neptune suggests that the power of myth and story—the workings of the

imagination-are truly worthy of monumental casting, rather than simply the voyagers, monarchs, and generals of the known world. This initial reference to monumental art links the power of story, Melville's process of writing, with stone. The narrative appears to posit that true devotion should be given to those stories, which raise our consciousness and challenge our assumptions about life.

Taji's role as narrator is also complex, for we begin early on, to question his abilities to portray an accurate, unbiased picture of the world. In Chapter 11, Taji longs for some sense of human communication or creativity to burst upon him. "I longed for something enlivening; a burst of words; human vivacity of one kind or another. After in vain essaying to get something of this sort out of Jarl, I tried it all by myself; playing upon my body as an instrument...and I myself paused to consider whether I had run crazy or no"(695). Taji's sanity as narrator is crucial because Melville wants his readers to question the accuracy of his tale, to look through the narrative voice and look at events and objects cautiously.

In Chapter 13, Taji ponders human limitations and links this activity to the work of nations: "Though America might be discovered, the Cathays of the deep are unknown... There are more wonders than the wonders rejected, and more

sights unrevealed than you or I ever ever dreamt of"(699). This casual address to the reader of the romance aims to move the reader's attention below the surface of our realities. Taji is alluding to the problems of representation; truth does not exist in plain sight to be counted upon eternally. All images and solid foundations must be considered alongside the mysteries and ironies that exist beneath the surface of human creation.

Taji's unreliability as the guide of the narrative is subtly brought to the surface in Chapter 29. "...I felt no little importance upon assuming for the first time in my life, the command of a vessel at sea. The novel circumstances of the case only augmented this feeling; the wild and remote seas where we were; the character of my crew, and the consideration, that to all purposes, I was the owner, as well as commander of the craft I sailed"(758). Taji's control over the vessel is a metanarrative strategy; like the ship, he is also in control of the story itself and what gets depicted. The "novel circumstances" is a play on language used by Melville to situate our understanding as readers of the text. Melville challenges his readers to look critically at all stories and art that are related to us as viewers and responders. Even in solid representations such as statuary, the viewer

must be aware that a narrative agenda is being used to present a slant or interpretation of the truth. Taji is not exempt from the critical views of the reader, for this is his first time in charge of a work. His naivety and the focus of his quest will repeatedly be challenged throughout the narrative.

Taji's presentation of characters in the book delves into the critical component of responding to statuary imagery. Jarl's doom in the story is foretold because of how he is represented by Taji through stone descriptions. Jarl is always relatively silent: "Silently he nodded like the still statue in the opera of Don Juan. Indeed he never spoke, unless to give pithy utterance to the wisdom of keeping one's wardrobe in repair" (707). Jarl's weaknesses as a character, his immobile statue-like pose and silence, show that his concerns are mostly surface deep. Jarl is presented as a statue prop in a drama and not as an actual character. He becomes a piece of the scenery to be brought out and then moved off-stage. Jarl discusses wardrobe and protection from the elements, and he occasionally discusses spirits taking over the ship. In each instance, Jarl's concerns foreshadow his departure.

If *Mardi* is concerned with narrative freedom and with careful readers closely inspecting fantastical situations,

then Jarl becomes dispensable for he is concerned only with the surface of things and that which cannot be spoken upon with any certainty. Jarl represents the surface values of the skimmers of pages and the irrational concerns that many readers bring to the texts they read. Jarl becomes a statue in the process of narrative development. He speaks his lines and is subsequently moved offstage by the director of the drama, when his exit is required. Wai-chee Dimock asserts that, "...Melville must lord over what he creates-he must deploy his creativity as a means of dominion. This explains why they tend to be faceless and unresisting" (49). Figures such as Jarl lose any sense of characterization, for their purpose is to remain as instruments to the author's sense of freedom in creativity.

Samoa too becomes a victim to Taji's statuary speculations. When Samoa and Annatoo enter the narrative, they become instruments of Taji's will. The narrator's characterization of Samoa, in particular, is important to look at because Melville returns to the subject of his portrayal again in *Redburn*. Because Samoa has a wounded arm that needs to be amputated, he foreshadows characters associated with the mangling of limbs, such as Ahab and Dr. Cuticle in *White Jacket*. Taji presents Samoa as a fragment of a man. "For myself, I regarded Samoa as but a large

fragment of a man, not a man complete. For was he not an entire limb out of pocket? And the action at Teneriffe over, great Nelson himself-physiologically speaking-was but three-quarters of a man"(738).

After referring to Samoa in company with Nelson, Taji proceeds to list other monumental figures, which had lost limbs in battle. He concludes the short list by saying, "Ah! but these warriors, like anvils, will stand a deal of hard hammering"(738). By equating Samoa with Nelson, Taji is making a reference to those we immortalize in monuments. Melville hints that he will hammer away at some of these figures throughout the work. These battle heroes lost parts of their bodies, just as Samoa lost part of his own body. Both Samoa and the heroes of distant wars will be challenged in Melville's imaginative voyage.

Monuments, by their very nature, occasionally do not represent the full truth. They often idealize their subject for the viewing public. Nelson would not be represented missing a limb because that would be against public taste and decorum. Taji's heroic depiction of Samoa is filled with irony and lurking questions. The narrator relates that he has fallen in with a hero, but he proceeds to relate that: "Samoa was a most terrible fellow to behold"(758). Samoa's features eventually become merely an abstraction

for Taji. "Like any man of mark, Samoa best speaks for himself; but we may as well convey some idea of his person. Though manly enough, nay an obelisk in stature, the savage was far from being sentimentally prepossessing" (759). Samoa is linked to the obelisk for a variety of reasons. His physical features are said to be ugly—he simply would not be the ideal figure to be cast by an accurate sculpted model. This is important in the narrative because Taji acts as a mediator for what is deemed acceptable for sculpture.

Obelisks make grand statements but they remain ambiguous, just like the narrative remains ambiguous at most points. Samoa may well be heroically inclined and worthy of admiration, but Taji will not allow his body—his actual self to be presented in the text. He is an obelisk because his representation is mediated and obscured through Taji's crafted words.

The reference to Nelson will be returned to in *Redburn*, but one reference to victory seems appropriate to bring up. Taji notes later on in the novel: "All victories are not triumphs, nor all who conquer, heroes" (796). Taji's words undercut heroic representation and ask the readers to examine just what it means to display heroic virtue in a public forum. Victory and heroism become abstractions many

times, their realities pushed to the margins of human memory by those that relate the history of events.

Obelisks would become crucial in representing very different American heroes, notably in the Washington and Bunker Hill Monuments, which will be discussed in *Moby-Dick* and *Israel Potter*. What Melville is making explicit in Taji's narration is that his reference to stone imagery is not accidental. The characters that come and go in the narrative bear witness to self-formation and the power of crafting in stone. If Samoa is cited as an obelisk, and yet can be driven forcefully from the narrative, perhaps Taji is making an ironic commentary on the use of ambiguity in stone and print. Both Jarl and Samoa, who at times seem to suggest companionship and heroic virtues, are later subsumed in stone metaphors which signal their subservience to the narrative voice.

The voyage through the seas continually comes back to an inability to acquire solid foundations. The eastward drift of the ship is yet another instance where we are shown the inability to acquire a solid footing in our narrative journey. "Whence they come, whither go, who knows? Tell us, what hidden laws regulate their flow. Regardless of the theory which ascribes to them a nearly uniform course from east to west, induced by the eastwardly

winds of the Line, and the collateral action of the Polar streams; these currents are forever shifting"(772).

Including this notion of forever shifting currents relates back to the narrative movements of the novel. Hidden forces push the book back and forth and building firm theories is fruitless. The reader is called to flow with the narrative voice and decipher the mysteries of the narrative as they arise.

Taji's quest for Yillah becomes just such a mystery to be deciphered. Taji achieves a sort of victory by killing the high priest and freeing Yillah. But what does it accomplish? Does the act have any meaning attached to it or does it simply allow the story to continue into different realms of the imagination?

Yillah is presented as a sacred goddess in the text. "Enshrined as a goddess, the wonderful child now tarried in the sacred temple of Apo, buried in a dell; never beheld of mortal eyes save Aleema's"(800). Yillah seems like an idol that Taji would like to inspect, perhaps enjoy, and subsequently relate or withhold her beauties to the reader. Aleema's concealment of her beauty is just another hindrance to the message of the text. Representation must be brought out into the open for clear inspection. All

things that remain hidden to the narrator and the audience must be followed extensively.

The question that remains in the story is whether or not the narrator wishes to bring the image of Yillah to life for the readers. He refuses to give the reader a clear sense of her beauty. "Of her beauty I say nothing. It was that of a crystal lake in a fathomless wood: all light and shade; full of fleeting revealings; now shadowed in depths; now sunny in dimples; but all sparkling and shifting, and blending together" (814). This refusal to depict the physical details of Yillah, the object of admiration and the focus of the quest, is critical.

Melville moves his readers into the world of ekphrastic hope. Telling the readers what Yillah looks like will only spoil the image that they have conjured in their minds. Taji presents his readers with an option. You may follow the journey by using your imaginative faculty or you can stop because of the unreliability and instability of the narrative voice. The choice remains largely in the reader's hands.

The difficult question then becomes: is this a book written solely to display the creative abilities of the author at play? Richard Brodhead believes that the entire novel is not really about characters, setting, or events

but rather functions as an allegory of the creative artist. Brodhead suggests that Melville came "...to see that [*Mardi's*] true actions is not his characters' adventures but his own creative process; that its real voyage is the imaginative one he has undertaken in conceiving *Mardi*, that the real object of its quest is nothing his characters seek but the mental world he himself discloses through the act of creating his book" ("Creating the Creative" 39).

Whereas Brodhead believes that the book is an attempt by Melville at "creating the creative," Wai-chee Dimock moves that assumption one step further. She states, "It is also an attempt to elevate the author from a mere writer to a sovereign creator, someone whose jurisdiction is exclusive and undisputed, someone who, thanks to his 'freedom and invention,' is able to reign, 'like many a monarch,' in his fictive domain: reign supreme, and reign alone" (Dimock 44). While Dimock is correct in asserting that freedom and reign are critical components of the novel, she does not seem to see the place of the reader as sovereign in the text. In the early chapters, Taji relates that each one of us has a bit of royalty within. This hidden royalty brings us into the text and does not simply relegate us to a subservient position outside the boundaries of the page.

Taji's god-like stature in the novel, itself, is meant to be a comic joke. "In a word, we were all strolling divinities"(828). Clearly, the narrator uses a sentence not a word. He gets the details wrong from time to time to test the reader's ability to be a careful judge and interpreter of the text. Taji takes the role of one of these divinities in Chapter 54, right before we catch our first glimpse of the temple of Odo and its carved divinities. When he arrives in this village during the journey, he approaches Chamois, one of the kings, who appears stunned that the god Taji has presented himself at that particular time in history. The dialogue that ensues shows the comedy and frailty of human images.

Taji has taken the name of a Polynesian demi-god. Chamois addresses Taji in a comic fashion: "Is this indeed Taji? He, who according to a tradition, was to return to us after five thousand moons? But that period is yet unexpired. What bring'st thou hither then, Taji, before thy time? Thou was but a quarrelsome demi-god, say the legends, when thou dwelt among our sires. But wherefore comest thou, Taji? Truly, thou wilt interfere with the worship of thy images, and we have plenty of gods besides thee"(828). This questioning of the narrator is both comical and filled with

meaning. Taji realizes that he does not have accurate detailed information to explain the situation fully.

Melville realizes that all travel literature comes up short in this regard. The keys to unlocking the mysteries of a society always have to be weighed by interrogating the provider of the information. The narrator realizes that he does not know enough about the culture and its gods to provide a solid response to questions. The question of image portrayal is noteworthy as well. Chamois believes that if Taji presents himself and breaks the traditional stories surrounding him, then the images that the village has created would be undermined.

Melville is subtly duping the accuracy of representation in all cultures. Instead of having the actual existing figure, Chamois wonders about the interference of their rites and rituals. Image making thus becomes a complex, heated issue, which is shown to be at the very core of all cultures and societies. Challenges to the truthfulness of the image portrayal may lead to disaster. Taji plays off the naivety of the society and simply tells Chamois not to question the validity of his message. This turn relates right back to the narrative question and the problems with representation. In this short episode, Taji has played with the false desire for

unencumbered representation and taken a slight poke at the travel narrative in general. Taji keeps narrative control for himself, but he invites us to see the transparencies of both the image and the narrative he constructs.

In Chapter 55, Taji is brought into the temple and invited to participate in prayer. Media places Taji in the position of his own carved idol. This procedure puts Taji's game to the test. He must go along with his newly acquired divinity at all costs. The action at the Temple of Odo displays the precarious situation of the narrator and his presentation of images. If he has assumed the role of the god in this encounter, can he dine? Media and Taji assume roles on the altar, only to have the narrative question them.

Taji's thoughts about food and gluttony in this short chapter once again are tied to the question of representation. Even though these idolized figures are gods, they are still subject to appetites. Their participation in the feast is questionable, for it seems to relegate them back into earthly concerns. They no longer seem to have the qualities of a divinity. The replacement of idols with humans highlights the emptiness of both. Each one is hollow and subject to displacement.

This temporary nature of the gods is emphasized in the following chapter, where we encounter the jolly Josh image. In this case, the idol is reproduced throughout the grove, whose jaws "are replenished, as a flower-vase in summer"(834). The food replaced, as flowers would be in a vase, brings to mind rot and physical deterioration. The glorified image, in this retelling, becomes nothing more than something that has to be constantly appeased with food. Taji's narration shows that idol construction is earth-bound. These constructed gods are subject to the forces of time and decay, just like humans are subject to mortality and physical degeneration.

Taji takes counsel with himself about idol construction throughout Chapter 57. He finds it amusing that he shares an altar with Media, but he buttresses his compliment by noting the presence of a deified maker of plantain pudding. Taji's inspection reveals that images of gods seem to be based on questionable circumstances. Do we crown gods because they function well in the kitchen? There is a hint that the whole process of deification is merely a confidence game of chance and fun.

The proliferation of idols in the grove combines comedy with a biting satire. "For be it known, that in due time we met with several decayed, broken down demi-gods:

magnificos of no mark in Mardi; having no temples wherein to feast personal admirers, or spiritual devotees. They wandered about forlorn and friendless" (837). The many gods that inhabit Mardi seem to gain followers merely due to physical feasting and their incorporation into ceremonies. Currying favor and remaining vital in the public's memory seems to be transient, subject to whim or the powers of the leaders. Taji notes, "Upon the whole, so numerous were living and breathing gods in Mardi, that I held my divinity but cheaply. And seeing such a host of immortals, and hearing of multitudes more, purely spiritual in nature, haunting woodlands and streams; my views of theology grew strangely confused...I now perceived that I might be a god as much as I pleased" (838). Taji's views about the sculpted idols and the construction mask a deeper truth about the world.

While Taji tries to impress upon the people of Mardi and his readers an expansive view, he realizes that readers, just like the Mardians, have shortcomings. "My surprise at these things was enhanced by reflecting, that to the people of the Archipelago the map of Mardi was the map of the world. With the exception of certain islands out of sight and at an indefinite distance, they had no certain knowledge of any isles but their own" (838). The people of

Mardi remain ignorant to worlds outside their own. Like many people, they consider only their customs, images, and practices, while ignoring other cultural traditions that may enhance or deepen self-reflection. Taji resists delving into this too much because he realizes the futility of trying to change people's ways by showing them the errors inherent in their own society. Castigating the idols of Mardi will only lead to frustration in the narrative. "Be not a 'snob,' Taji" (839) is what the narrator reminds himself. This self-referential phrase hints at the sovereign problem of the narrator that Brodhead and Dimock sought to address. Embedded in the tale is Taji's own drama of telling: what he feels the audience is ready to listen to and understand or not. His attempt to move the readers away from the biases that structure their worlds cannot be overdone. The narrator must always temper his probing into the culture and not seek to be heavy-handed with his attack on representation to the audience.

However, even after Taji admonishes himself for preaching, he returns to situations where he harshly critiques images and customs for careful readers to recognize. In Chapter 63, Taji decides to relate a bit more about Media's island, its customs, its people. The world is framed as a world within itself, a microcosm. The notion of

toil being most humans' lot in life is intriguing because it is framed by a discussion of death and its relationship to the people of the island. "But when man toils and slays himself for masters who withhold the life he gives to them—then, then, the soul screams out, and every sinew cracks. So with these poor serfs. And few of them could choose but be the brutes they seemed" (853). A darker, sinister side of the island is revealed, and the history of the poorer people is brought into the story in order to inform readers. Once again, Taji presents the image, and then asks the readers to pass along with the details of the story. In other words, he seems to suggest the option of ignoring him when he begins to preach about injustices he witnessed.

In the midst of his discussion, however, is another clue, which suggests that readers must pay careful attention. Taji begins to explain about signs of death among the people. This seemingly pointless detail is important when examining representation. If the gods of Mardi were rotting, subject to whim, and overpopulating the island, why are there no signs to remember the actual people?

But else than these, no sign of death was seen throughout the isle. Did men in Odo live for aye? Was Ponce De Leon's fountain there? For near and far, you saw no ranks and files of graves, no generations

harvested in windrows. In Odo, no hard-hearted nabob slept beneath a gentle epitaph; no *requiescat-in-pace* mocked a sinner damned; no *memento-mori* admonished men to live while yet they might. Here Death hid his skull; and hid it in the sea, the common sepulcher of Odo. Not dust to dust, but dust to brine; not hearses but canoes. For all who died upon that isle were carried out beyond the outer reef, and there were buried with their sires' sires...But why these watery obsequies? Odo was a little isle, and must the living make way for the dead, and Life's small colony be dislodged by Death's grim hosts...This earth's an urn for flowers, not for ashes(854).

The absence of graves in Odo is important because it shows the culture's belief in continual progress with nature rather than faith in stone memories. Burials take place in the sea—a continual flowing link with the generations past and present. Memorials constructed of stone, which dot the landscape of America, suggest links to the need for individual memory. These sites would seem to be a stagnation to progress in this faraway culture. Taji's narrative attempts to get readers to think about their own culture's practices in memorials and graves. Instead of accepting cultural practices, even the links to the rather macabre Puritanical traditions of many American gravestones, Taji presents a scene to the reader designed to question our often-ignored social practices of memory. Judgment is not cast in either direction in the absence of graves.

Two possible interpretations seem to be available. First, this lack of individual stone memorials could be a sign of a collective, group endeavor. But, this practice could also suggest that people in Mardi lose their sense of identity and are swept away, back into the seas for their identity means little outside the collective whole. *Mardi*, at times, seems to suggest an almost Emersonian connection with the natural world; then, at other points, individual identity is championed when masses of people are used solely as cogs in a machine line. Representation in stone presents a complex question to the reader concerning identity, which needs to be thought about further by the reader. The tension between the collective sites of cultural memory and the importance of individual markers of human memory became an important debate throughout America's monument-making genesis. This debate would continue to surface throughout Melville's work.

Taji's meeting of Mohi, Babbalanja, and Yoomy only add to the imaginative questionings of the novel. The historian, philosopher, and poet, respectively, join the narrative to deepen Melville's discussion of ekphrasis. The first destination reached by the companions is the Isle of Yams, Valapee. Peepi, the ruler, is a ten-year old child, who was believed to be the inheritor of souls. Officials

leave Peepi's throne by walking with their heads between their thighs. Comically, the dignitaries bow their heads through their legs in order to keep the monarch in sight, while showing respect.

This initial journey is important because it calls into question the bowing down to custom. Taji notes that, "All objects look well through an arch"(865). This ironic allusion references arches and power, and the arbitrary narrative power that leaders can have over their people. Arches will be returned to later in the narrative, but at this point, Taji appears to be delivering a satirical assault on humans arching themselves to fit the prescription and dictates of those in power. It seems no accident that the companions' first island landing takes place, where "all was legislative uproar and confusion; advance and retreat; abrogations and revivals; foundations without superstructures; nothing permanent but the island itself"(865). The encounter calls into play the role that humans have in shaping the memory and environment. Power and lordship are presented as arbitrary in a foolishly extreme manner, in order for readers to see the gradual levels of convention that operate in all societies.

As the journey through Mardi continues, the proliferation of idols and memorials continues to deepen.

In all instances, these references deny any sort of accurate visual depiction. They operate in a world of allegory and ideas, in the hope that readers will picture the details through their imaginative capacities.

In Chapter 75, "Time and Temples," Melville moves the reader to a critical point in the narrative journey by seemingly halting the progress through the islands for a discussion of monument building and time. The allusion links creation with time and transcendence. Taji relates that "great towers take time to construct" and follows that directly with: "And so of all else" (890). Towers take time-as do narratives and all other things. The question that remains is what type of time do they operate within? Frank Kermode distinguishes between *kairos* and *chronos* in discussing the concept of time in fiction. Melville's stance in this novel is towards *kairos*, the notion of a moment of crisis in time. The narrative itself signaled a moment of building for the novelist, which would have implications for Melville's whole career. The departure for Melville was from *chronos*, the gradual, sequential passing of time. Melville's created world was a stab into a new type of fictional reality, a movement to defy the processes of time and place.

Chapter 75 brilliantly shows the disruption of time and place taking place through the equation of construction and writing:

And that which long endures full-fledged, must have long lain in the germ. And duration is not of the future, but of the past; and eternity is eternal, because it has been; and though a strong monument be builded to-day, it only is lasting because its blocks are old as the sun. It is not the Pyramids that are ancient, but the eternal granite whereof they are made; which had been equally ancient though yet in the quarry. For to make an eternity, we must build with eternities; whence, the vanity of the cry for any thing alike durable and new, and the folly of the reproach—Your granite hath come from the old-fashioned hills. For we are not gods and creators; and the controversialists have debated, whether indeed the All-Plastic Power itself can do more than mold. In all the universe is but one original; and the very suns must to their source for their fire; and we Prometheuses must to them for ours; which, when had, only perpetual Vestal tending will keep alive. (890)

Melville as author seems to shake away from Taji's passing quest to find the elusive Yillah, in order to deliver a glimpse into his quest for the novel. All greatness lies in the past. The working of monument builders today reveals the strengths of materials, in dialogue with the achievements of the past. Building with eternities suggests that Melville was thinking about the historical implications of monumental works throughout human history, not merely in stone, but also those on the page. All these constructions take time and effort, and each one is a

gamble with time. Only distance will tell whether the creation has been successful. The "All-Plastic Power" could rot or be brought back down to the earth. The narrative could fail and be forgotten by readers. In each case, Prometheus, the author-creator, is bound to seek material that brings forward the mythic longings of eternity, while constructing with the reality of the tools of the present.

Following the discussion of Prometheus is a long list of natural and artificial monuments. The main point of the list seems to be that "No fine fabric ever yet grew like a gourd" (891). Our creations are all subject to time and must be recognized as artificial creations. Many of the places mentioned have been consumed back to the earth. At the end of his discussion, which ranges from famous columns, mounds, houses, temples, pillars, towers, pediments, he references the work of Homer in the *Iliad* and its relationship to effort and time. "Nor were the parts of the great *Iliad* put together in haste; though old Homer's temple shall lift up its dome, when St. Peter's is a legend" (891). Narrative genius will outlast the beauties of stone. Homer's narrative will stand as a monument long after even St. Peter's is but a memory. The essence of Melville's ekphrastic work is being brought to the surface. Images in print will outlast the physical limitations of

stones, for they can be copied and evade consumption by nature and earth. Stone monuments and memorials are fixed in time and space. The book can be recopied; its fluidity secures its ability to persist and thrive in the future.

Once Taji relates his linkage of time, stone, and words, he continues his questioning and his hope in the powers of imagination. New knowledge of our physical world continues to develop; our foundations may be compromised by increased wisdom. Time then becomes the "mightiest mason of all." This chapter foreshadows the creation of the free spirit of Ishmael and keeping the open independence of the individual soul. The narrator working through time becomes the vehicle for building towards the future. Hope shifts to the forefront in this chapter, as the grandeur of architectural and monumental masterpieces are compared to the monumentality of the book. Once again, Melville creates a metanarrative comparison, which links page and stone, and the hope for readers to see the majesty and timelessness of the page.

The dispute between Mohi and Yoomy also tells the story of time, building, and imagination. Mohi's chronicles attempt to pinpoint founding moments throughout time. He believes in facts, dates, and precise information. Yoomy, the poet, stands as his counterpoint, calling for a

reevaluation of the role of the poet as a source of information. Babbalanja, the philosopher stands as a mediator between them. Melville's sympathies lie with the poet and philosopher, and for a breaking away from history's reliance on solid facts and so-called reliable information. The proliferation of images in the text would simply be impossible for a historian to know and monitor. Stories and idols around the lives and actions of deities become difficult to track in the narrative. There are so many instances of arguments surrounding idols and their stories that one blurs into the other.

Keevi, for example, is an idol that is examined in Chapter 92. Mohi speaks part of the legend of the place and the idol. Rebel warriors ascended to this spot, where the god descended from heaven. The god had five eyes, ten hands, and three pairs of hands. The idol has an immense mass of body parts, a grotesque form to be feared. Travelers cannot ascend to the divinity; they leave offerings at the base of his precipice. Mohi appears to believe in the story of warriors falling from the reaches of Keevi's memorial. Yoomy remains silent, as Babbalanja asks, "Let me look at it closer" (938), when he sees an artifact from the history of the story. The philosopher asks the reader to look closely at all images in the text,

with the hope that the reader will recognize the problems surrounding Mohi's chronicles. The images and the stories that he relates to be filled with meaning need to be prudently examined and not simply passed off as absolute truth and facts.

In each incident where we confront images, we must diligently question its importance in the building of the creative mind. In the following chapter, Babbalanja positions himself between the historian and the poet. His deliberation in the discussion is important:

"Mohi," said Babbalanja, "truth is in things, and not in words: truth is voiceless; so at least saith old Bardianna. And I, Babbalanja, assert, that what are vulgarly called fictions are as much realities.. for things visible are but conceits of the eye: things imaginative, conceits of the fancy. If duped by one, we are equally duped by the other." (944)

Babbalanja notes that both things of the visible world, objects, and words are subject to imagination and fancy. He posits that image and word must be judged prudently by the viewer and reader. Fiction thus becomes a key to reality. If truth lies in things, it is a truth structured around ideas and thinking. The eye can be deceived by things that appear to be visible and truthful. The key to knowledge is realizing that people can be duped equally by matters of fact as well as the imagination.

Later in the narrative, a character referred to simply as "the boy" enters the story to question the accuracy of images. His actions and quick departure in the narrative illustrates the danger of questioning the validity of images within crowds. The act of questioning has profound consequences, which must be considered. Images call for devotion from crowds, which may lead to a blockage of personal interpretation and freedom.

As the travelers visit the great Morai in Chapter 109, they see several monuments and memorials. Mohi collects stones to throw at objects that he wishes to discuss. Stoning is foreshadowed—men crushed to death by the weight of stones and the power of the crowd. The historian relates that if a place of sepulcher were to be opened, a resurrection of a line of priests would occur. And, he further proceeds to tell a legend, told in hieroglyphics, that a dipping a hand in the sacred spring of Morai would lead to amputation. Images in this chapter are to be feared. Humans can be dismembered if they challenge or question the strength and power of the gods' images.

At one point, the travelers meet the image of Doleema, "dark-hued stone, representing a burly man, with an overgrown head." This idol must receive human sacrifices; it ingests people as a part of its divinity. However, an

argument quickly ensues as to whether the object is made of stone or tree and more importantly, whether the representation is Doleema or Ananna, the dead tree idol. Confusion reigns in the chapter, and pilgrims debate which story to believe about the idols. Image-crafting is shown to be a dangerous and yet contradictory practice. The guides cannot decide which image relates to which god. A conflict between the blind man and the young boy develops, as the old man insists that Doleema is really not made of stone, but rather a deadened tree god. Guides, elders are questioned once again, and the vision of the boy, the innocent, seems to be championed by Taji's narrative.

The pilgrims accuse the boy of moral corruption for questioning the interpretation of the shrine by the elders. The boy concludes to follow his own interpretation and to perish while pursuing the truth of his own dreams. His words are prophetic: "I may perish there in the truth," said the boy, with sadness; "but it shall be in the path revealed to me in my dream. And think not, oh guide, that I perfectly rely upon gaining that lofty summit. I will climb high Ofo with hope, not faith"(993). Climbing the lofty heights of an imaginary location occurs only with hope.

Once again, Melville underscores the notion that *Mardi* must be journeyed through the realm of ekphrastic hope.

Journeying with faith or with a heavy reliance on the guides that come before you will lead the viewer astray. The boy hopes, just as Melville hopes that the reader will, to reinterpret images for himself, without relying utterly on narratives or guides that have come before it. The boy begins to see Oro as a spirit, as the unknown, and as something that may exist within the human soul. His questions probe the divine existence of the idol-the image. The boy must quit the Morai after being denounced a blasphemer in Chapter 109; he is escorted away by the angry pilgrims in Chapter 112. His departure comes and goes like many others, signaling his role is usurped by the narrative voice. But, his anonymous presence in the text leaves a ghostly shadow of loss for those that dare to challenge established norms and authority.

The guide, Pani, in Chapter 109 then begins to question his own assumptions about sculpted images. Pani's speech questions the masks that humanity wears and he appears to hint at Ahab's metaphysical speculations on the masks we attempt to see through. He accuses himself of blindly following, where he appears to lead, and he ultimately acknowledges that the boy's thoughts are his own suspicions. Leaders and castoffs question images and what lies behind them throughout this chapter, and this scene

seems to serve as precursor to the deep uncertainty of images in *Moby-Dick*. The carved images of divinities highlight the dramatic questions of interpreting images and the shifting foundations of authority in interpretation. Danger lurks beneath the surface of interpretation, for the prophetic boy is cast aside from the narrative, taken away by the mob, and does not return in the book.

The foundation of images is further undermined in Chapter 114 with the introduction of the artisan, Hevaneva. Babbalanja relates that his business is with "the essence of things; the mystery that lieth beyond." This frames the introduction of Hevaneva, whose lucrative business was to replicate idols for public consumption. Hevaneva's job centers on economics; his profession makes image-making a profit-oriented affair, rather than one that seeks divine answers. The market seems to cheapen the effect of the idols throughout Mardi. Hevaneva's processes are described as an assembly line of noses, mouths, and ears. The artisan describes the demand for certain gods, like Arbino-the fishing god-which has been thriving, as well as the god of wine, Nadam.

Idols are crafted for the call of the market; devotion is attached to the monetary growth, not only for Hevaneva's business, but for the villagers purchasing the images as

well. Babbalanja questions Hevaneva about his practices; he "was minded to learn from him, what he thought of his trade; whether the images he made were genuine or spurious; in a word, whether he believed in his gods"(1009). The artisan's response is critical because it makes a connection between image and text, and whether it is necessary for the creator to fully believe in the truth of his works for them to be effective.

"When I cut down the trees for my idols, "said he, "they are nothing but logs; when upon those logs, I chalk out the figures of my images, they yet remain logs; when the chisel is applied, logs they are still; and when all complete, I at last stand them up in my studio, even then they are logs. Nevertheless, when I handle the pay, they are prime gods, as ever were turned out in Maramma"(1010).

Hevaneva's words link market with meaning. His work has meaning only in the public sphere of economic growth. Melville is making a connection here to the process of writing that he felt a strong distaste for. Travel works could be sold rapidly, based on much of the same material. As Hevaneva notes, "each tree stands us in full fifty idols"(1010). Melville did not want the market to dictate the value of his work.

The depiction of the idol factory is a metanarrative reference to Melville's own crafting of literary objects.

Does public consumption alone dictate meaning? Cindy Weinstein believes that, "Such frequent detailed images of production are...highly significant, especially once we understand them as versions of Melville's own literary production"(248). The idol factory thus issues a challenge to the complex societal issue of laborers doing unoriginal work on an assembly line, while allowing Melville the needed room to discuss his own work. As Weinstein argues, "Rather than effacing the traces of his own work, Melville calls attention to *Mardi* as a product of hard labor by including an allegory about his making of the novel"(251).

Writing and images come together in this chapter, and they provide a wonderful point of reference for the departure that Melville was attempting at that point in his literary career. Hevaneva's idol production cheapens the meaning and value of the objects in the minds of the travelers and the readers. And, quite appropriately, Melville does not end his subtle critique of the loss of critical readers of representations in print and wood. Hevaneva's secondary occupation is the building of canoes. This is filled with meaning, if we consider what Melville was rebelling against in his crafted literary worlds. Besides trying to break the notion of an assembly line of books, which look exactly the same, Melville was rebelling

against the accurate, detailed picturing of the far-off voyage. Canoes signal travel; assembly-lines destroy the value of meaning in constant reproduction. Melville's assault seems to be on the carbon-copied travel narratives, written about distant shores from the big canoes of the western traveler.

Taji reenters the narrative in dramatic fashion in Chapter 119, "Dreams." This chapter is integral because it foreshadows the nationalistic discourses to follow. Taji starts off by delving into the vast regions of the world, from Sicily to Antarctica, to China; he begins to wildly reason that, "all the worlds are my kin"(1021). And, he evokes them to "stay in their course"(1021). The narrative voice returns here powerfully, and moves the reader through a listing of not only nations and other worlds, but also to great writers in debate with others. Directly following this, Taji makes references to the United States. Gradually, he begins to move the reader to see an interrelationship between America and the world. The reader is being called to consider what is presented later in the text within a global framework.

The visit with Oh-Oh, the antiquarian, who is described or "painted" extensively by Taji becomes a curious departure to examine. Oh-Oh is undercut by the

narrative voice for he collects Mardian artifacts. The notion of the museum was drastically taking shape in the nineteenth century and it seems to be the object of satire in this chapter. Oh-Oh's collection is framed in death and decay. The artifacts to him "were dear as the apple of his eye, or the memory of his departed days"(1035). Theodor Adorno notes the link between museums and death. "The german word, 'museal' [museum-like], has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying..Museum and Mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic associations. Museums are like the family sepulchers of works of art"(175). Jonah Siegel comments on Adorno's work noting that "One presents the museum as housing (and therefore identifying) work that no longer has a vital (meaning living) relation to culture. By this account, the museum is a house of the dead, due whatever honor we reserve for the deceased, but not looked to for any further active role in life"(6-7). Melville presents in subsequent chapters, lists of objects housed by Oh-Oh, followed by lists of texts. The purpose is to once again link objects with texts, in order to show what can occur if we lose the vital role of examining representation in society. Without an inspection and understanding of the

relationship that both objects and texts continually have in society, they may simply deaden and become mere antiquated materials, rotting in the library or in the vaults of the museum.

Melville was not critiquing the roles of libraries or museums in this passage; he was presenting an extreme case for enhanced cultural inspection of our artifacts. Eventually, Babbalanja brings the old volume "A Happy Life" out of the museum and resurrects sections of it for his companions. Babbalanja reads, "I will look upon the whole world as my country...I will govern my life and my thoughts, as if the whole world were to see the one, and to read the other"(1045). The concept of the whole world as country displays the necessity of a global perspective and of valuing the task of reading texts and objects as being important to framing our journeys, wherever they may lead. Instead of boxing knowledge and keeping it hidden from sight, the notion is that by bringing these artifacts out of storage and bringing them into use in the world, they become vital instruments for creating a more global, transnational sense of knowledge.

The journey of the companions reaches a summit when Babbalanja discusses the key to his perceptions in the text. As Emerson noted, "A foolish consistency is the

hobgoblin of little minds." Babbalanja's discourse abounds with Emersonian allusions. The philosopher lives with a consciousness that is not his own, seemingly a reference to the Over-Soul working through him in nature and that a tree has sensation in being a tree (1113). The questions of being revolve around consistency. Babbalanja's possession throws light upon fluids and solids. "That we move, make a noise, have organs, pulses, and are compounded of fluids and solids. And all are these are in this Mardi as a unit"(1113-1114).

Fluidity is brought out as a central tenet of reading this work. Solid objects have been questioned; all character foundations are subject to disruptions. In essence, the book asks its readers to move about in uncertainty and to abandon any attempt at fixed readings. Babbalanja notes that "...the sum of my inconsistencies make up my consistency. And to be consistent to one's self, is often to be inconsistent to Mardi. Common consistency implies unchangeableness; but much of the wisdom here below lives in a state of transition"(1114-1115). The center of the text and its reading of objects lie in that statement. Instead of relying upon the certainty of things and the fixed application of a foolish consistency in reading and interpreting, Babbalanja champions the open, fluid nature

of reading as being one of constant flux and reinterpretation.

Not surprisingly, the allegory of Vivenza follows Babbalanja's advocating for inconsistency. In Chapter 146, Vivenza is introduced to the readers. The story of the imaginary country, allegorically America, is linked to the prophetic St. John in the wilderness (1128). The trope of St. John was a popular one at the time, particularly when we consider images done by Thomas Cole, such as *Landscape Composition, St. John in the Wilderness*, painted in 1827. In this image, St. John stands in the painting, arms out, seemingly dwarfed by the landscape. However, next to him in the painting is the symbol of the cross. The cross stands above the figure of St. John. John, like America, cries out triumphantly in the wilderness. Cole uses the prophet as a symbol for America, but more importantly, the picture links man with symbol. The cross seems to give man the right to tame the landscape for his own purposes.

Bryan J. Wolf writes of the picture, "By a gesture as simple and complex as placing two sticks together, the objects of the landscape become vehicles for human expression. They cease to function as elements of the landscape and operate instead as signs within a signifying system" (159). Melville's narrative links man, object, and

text together. The reason that Melville does this is to challenge the role of the readers. How complacent are we in the symbols that are used to designate the paths of our country? The narrative undercuts the link to St. John quickly, by stating: "Oh Vivenza! know that true grandeur is too big for a boast; and nations, as well as man, may be too clever to be great" (1129). The prophetic voice in the wilderness and the symbols it uses to perpetuate its greatness will be called into question by the story as it continues.

King Bello, a fictional recreation of George III, also stands in the way of easy characterization. George's statues and images were defiled and destroyed during the Revolution, particularly the dismantling of his statue in Bowling Green, and yet he is not demonized by Taji's narrative. What becomes clear is that objects and images must be weighed for their own value and not be swept up by nationalist rhetoric. Bello is aptly characterized in unique sculptural terms, quite unlike castaway characters like Jarl and Samoa. Bello is described as leaning like the Pisa's Leaning Tower. This is a unique depiction for it shows a fault line, and yet not something that should be toppled over. High culture and society value this as sight to be seen and valued, not ridiculed for its slant. The

slope actually makes it culturally important and vital. Melville's sculpted imagery once again calls for interpretation, perhaps a rereading of or a new slant on our nation's history and stories. This was not the last time that George III appeared in Melville's literary worlds. *Israel Potter* too presents the monarch, but in a vastly different manner.

In Chapter 157 and 158, the travelers reach Vivenza, a fictional recreation of Washington D.C. Before reaching the city, they meet with the symbol of a helmeted female deity contained within a temple and arch. The woman wears a helmet yet is contained within the framework of the temple. In a sense, her militant image is tempered and dictated by her place in the sanctuary of the nation's temple. But, more importantly, the inscription on the arch outside the open temple is critical. At first, it states: "In-this-republi-can-land-all-men-are-born-free-and-equal"(1169). The text on the stone slyly excludes women, for they are merely objects to be protected and encased by the free. Further on, the minute hieroglyphics tell a more sinister story. "Except-the-tribe-of-Hamo"(1170). Melville emphasizes the interrelation of stone and text by breaking up the words of the stone onto the page. This is significant because the physical layout of the page undermines the very continuity

of the text in question. The stone message is laid out in such a fashion that it becomes deconstructed by dashes and interruptions. Those dashes signify the breaks occurring between the iconography of both stone and page. The pages of *Mardi* attempt to visually show the discontinuity of historical narratives placed in arches and monuments.

Centrality and grandiosity are key components of the design of the capitol, as they were in the actual historical creation of the city. The irony brought out in this chapter lies in the question of sovereignty. Earlier, Taji's text posited that we are all sovereigns, and yet the dominating focus of the chapter is on subservience. After seeing the Temple of Freedom, the painful mark of slavery enters the text in bodies rather than simply stone markings.

Upon the summit of the temple was a staff; and as we drew nigh, a man with a collar round his neck, and the red marks of stripes upon his back, was just in the act of hoisting a tappa standard—correspondingly striped. Other collared menials were going in and out of the temple...Near the porch, stood an image like that on top of the arch we had seen. Upon its pedestal, were pasted certain hieroglyphical notices; according to Mohi, offering rewards for missing men, so many hand high (1171).

Playing in this description is the critical reevaluation of texts in stone and print. The slave wears the stripes of the flag on his back. The posters, calling for the reward

money for the return of slaves, are hieroglyphs. These printings have entered the public sphere of discourse; they constitute a certain part of Vivenza's history. Taji's narrative looks at these texts with equal distrust because both the stone and textual markers relate stories that dismantle the very foundations from which the country was built. Taji's narrative fictionally recreates a historical narrative about the dialectical relationship between injustice portrayed in stones and through print.

Taji's satire on abuses of power in discourse continues when he mockingly portrays the grand council of Vivenza rebuking King Bello for his encroachments. His comparison of the nations of Vivenza and Dominora calls for mediation, further inspection into the causes of the conflict between them, for they are of the same blood. Babbalanja notes that "One is full of the past; the other brims with the future" (1177). The philosopher wants his readers to pay attention to learning from the mistakes of the past. Dominora is filled with the memories of a glorious past, and yet Vivenza seems to entrap itself in a not too stable identity of imperial glory, taken from the empires of old.

Babbalanja's prophetic voice calls for the nation to be cognizant of its haste to move forward at all costs and

to be ever aware of the future troubles it is building for itself in its iconography. Clearly, the freedom that the nation prides itself upon is built on the shaky grounds of the slavery system and the iconographic representation of subservience. The philosopher states:

Time is made up of various ages; and each thinks its own a novelty. But imbedded in the walls of the pyramid, which outrun all chronologies, sculpted stones are found, belonging to yet older fabrics. And as in the mound-building period of yore, so every age thinks its erections will forever endure. But as your forests grow apace, sovereign-kings! overrunning the tumuli in your western vales; so, while deriving their substance from the past, succeeding generations outgrow it; but in time, themselves decay (1181).

The warning against Vivenza's hubris is plainly stated. The speech warns against empire and against thinking that the monuments that a culture builds to itself will last forever. Babbalanja's warning to Vivenza is to be wary of thinking about its future and its sculpted creations as being beyond the sweep of time. Empires crumble, and the symbols we erect, such as the pyramid or the sculpted stone may tell tales of the builders that shake the society's very foundations. This case was certainly alluded to throughout the chapter on Vivenza with its references to Native and African Americans. The nation's Manifest Destiny policies are attacked throughout the chapter as being yet one more incident, where a

developing society does not foresee the evils lurking in the narratives they are creating.

Thomas Cole vividly depicted this type of transformation in his *The Course of Empire* series. The movements from savage state, to pastoral, to consummation, to destruction, and finally to desolation, pictorially assemble Melville's warning in *Mardi*. Sculptural images are used in Cole's paintings and Melville's text to show not only the hubris of monument making, but also to provide a moral warning to empire builders. Nature can consume all that you build your hopes upon. Barbara Novak's point about Cole's didactic purposes is valuable, "Cole implies that, seen with the guiltless eye, nature would be perceived as perfection, as Eden. The flaws are not in nature, but in ourselves"(10). Melville too would lead the reader to see that the problems of monumental construction have to do with how we perceive these sites. Cole, like Melville, is calling the reader and viewer to see what can occur if critical readers do not see the human culpability in Manifest Destiny policies and particularly America's imperial tendencies in monumental projects.

Angela Miller makes a perceptive point about the final installment of Cole's series: *The Course of Empire: Desolation, 1833-1836*:

The sun, long an icon of imperial will, has been eclipsed by a feminine symbol of nature. The surface of the bay is once again serene. No human presence is evident anywhere. History has been superceded by the cycles of nature. The escarpment, outlined against the dimly lit sky, has recovered its original monumentality. Around its base are clustered frail architectural remains that now mimic the forms of nature. In the foreground a single column, a token of the fallen human order, rises to the sky. A symbol of cultural arrogance, it is now a resting place for birds. (31-32).

Miller makes a wonderful point about the fall of empire in Cole's vision. Melville also realized the power of nature to destroy man's ordering capabilities. If *Mardi* was a starting point for Melville's anxiety about man's hubris, then *Moby-Dick* would be the ultimate exploration of man's desire to monumentalize his own creations over the natural environment. In both Melville and Cole, writer and painter, monuments provide the aesthetic backdrop, the textual space, to critique aspects of American culture that both artists felt to be disturbing and contradictory to the study of America.

The absence of the human being in Cole's vision displays Melville's own cultural fear of human destruction and annihilation. If America could not see the errors of its own sculpted representations of itself, then the country was poised for a drastic fall from grace.

The sculptures surrounding the U.S. Capitol graphically show the problems that Melville was alluding to in the Vivenza section of the text. Two particular examples display the intense hubris and cultural misunderstandings that were translated into stone during the development of our nation's central city. All of these examples can be seen in Jeffrey F. Meyer's study titled: *Myths in Stone*. Luigi Persico's *Discovery of America*, which is now in storage, displays a cowering female figure next to the triumphant figure of Columbus. Columbus holds a globe, a sign of intense power and superiority. He is refined, confident; the Native American woman looks to him for guidance and she is presented as a seminude exotic. This exotic and perhaps semi-erotic picture of the woman was one of the things that Melville was moving away from in the travel narrative.

Travel pieces painted mental pictures of women from different cultures. Yillah eludes the narrator throughout because she defies visual representation. She cannot be vividly portrayed to the mind's eye of the reader because this would devalue her imaginative casting in the novel. The narrative prevents her from being pictured, for it retains her mysteriousness, her true essence, rather than

being a mere molded form for cultural representation and exploitation.

Another piece, once again in storage, that presents similar controversial narratives in stone is Horatio Greenough's *Rescue*. This piece of sculpture, which was once outside the Capitol, presents a white pioneer holding the arms of a fierce, almost demonic-looking Native American figure. A woman, grasping her helpless child, cowers in the background. Once again, the message translated into stone is quite explicit. The Capitol's imagery suggests that the white man's duties in the founding of the nation included subduing the wild, barbarous savages and protecting the virtue of the helpless family. As icons, they remain morally questionable, at best.

These representations are the product of national narrative that does not allow for critical reinterpretation. Melville's *Vivenza* section seemingly casts the difficulties that will follow when narratives in stone and print are reexamined and deconstructed. The presence of slaves in the capitol and prominently in its arches was also a major aesthetic problem that occurred frequently throughout the nineteenth century, which has been explored most fruitfully by Kirk Savage (*Standing*

Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves). Melville implies in these chapters that the headstrong push to finalize, concretize our national values is fraught with peril. It is difficult to erase injustices from the national memory crafted in words and images. But even more troubling is the inability of the viewer or the reader to find a neutral ground to judge the appropriateness of the narratives presented to them as representative of their past.

Babbalanja continues his exploration of Vivenza throughout Chapter 161, noting the fiery impulses that drive it and the difficulty in restraining the drive for more power. His impassioned words denounce once again all absolute positions. Strangely, his speech seems to call for its very own preservation. He reminds the reader: "monarchies are not utterly evil" (1184). Babbalanja's usurpation of the narrative seems to signal Melville's own hope that the reader will allow him to rule the story.

If we are to follow Babbalanja's guidelines while reading, we must begin to ignore some of the other competing voices of the text. This can occur only provisionally. The philosopher, essentially, becomes our monarch, our reasonable guide throughout the novel. Interestingly, his speeches are presented amidst of a variety of competing voices, almost akin to Mikhail

Bakhtin's sense of heteroglossia. Melville's continues to use the hapless, questing Taji, but he makes it clear that his quest is only one of a variety of plotlines to sort through in the text. The competition, while confusing at times, enhances the author's point about inconsistency and the need for readers to look at objects, sculpted and printed, through a variety of different viewpoints.

The journey into the Southern part of Vivenza becomes an unmistakable point where the slavery system is being read and dismantled before the reader's eyes. As the nation prepared itself for Civil War, Melville's narrative asked its readers to think about the human implications in the struggle. Unfortunately, for many, the toil of reading *Mardi* prevented them from actually making it to this part of the travels. The picture of degradation and soulless slaves is poignant throughout Chapter 162.

The telling aspect of the chapter occurs at the close when the discussion centers upon men not knowing what they are. This question resonates with all the crafted imagery of the period, and it would be a question that would take generations of scholars to reinterpret. "The future is all hieroglyphics. Who may read?" The hieroglyph known for being a textual, yet unreadable marker of the pyramids is mentioned in conjunction with slavery for a distinct

purpose. The mystery surrounding the emancipation of the slaves had yet to be determined, and yet the icons of the nation abounded with subservience. Hidden in the representations is the question of the reader. Melville's narrative attempts to look forward to the reader, who will have the advantage of perspective in rethinking the nation's narratives with regards to the awful institution of the slave system.

As *Mardi* draws to a close, Melville shifts his narrative into a mock dramatic mode in Chapter 180. Once again, attention seems to fall on Babbalanja's speeches throughout the scene. The philosopher makes references to the human mind and a connection back to the writing of the book is made once again. "Our minds are cunning, compound mechanisms...our brains should be round as globes...We have had vast developments of parts of men; but none of manly wholes. Before a full-developed man, Mardi would fall down and worship"(1253). These lines, delivered in a soliloquy-like fashion, testify to the incomplete nature of man. Whole beings are what the book questions, looks forward to, and promises to worship, if found. The play between appearances and reality was a theme that Melville fully immersed himself with throughout his fiction. It was a central question concerning human nature and art at the

very core of his entire canon. *Mardi's* hope for people to see the hollow nature and the gaps of human experience that need to be recognized, fell on deaf ears and eyes.

CHAPTER 3: *Redburn's* Realistic Journey of Ekphrastic Fear

The realization that the reading public was not ready to consider their activities in judging representation left Melville with little other options but to resort back to realistic depiction. His following narrative moves drastically from ekphrastic hope to ekphrastic fear. Writing in a mode similar to *Typee* and *Omoo* was what the reading public expected from Melville. Instead of an attempt to mine another travel narrative from his South Seas experience, Melville turned to a different type of voyage, which drew the author closer in narrative voice to his own private sense of self.

If Melville was mining material quite close to his own authorial self, then his subtle hints at representation should be examined closely. This "job" was a retreat in many respects. Melville realized that he was not entirely free to let his creative imagination conjure up free-floating images to be digested by an informed reading public. Wai-chee Dimock aptly notes the conflict Melville was facing between *Mardi* and *Redburn*: "If *Mardi* represents Melville's accession to sovereign authorship, *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* mark an ignominious retreat, a hateful surrender to the reader" (76). Dimock views the book as an attempt to "figure forth the 'persecuted' artist" (77). This

failure and surrender to the reading public seems to have deep, personal connections to Melville and his life as a writer. Readings by Herbert, Tolchin, and Rogin display the deep conflicts that Melville was experiencing with regard to his patrician background, unresolved family grief, and complex relationship with his family relations, respectively. Redburn's first-person narration seems to signal a shift in Melville's career as a writer; he was moving his writing into a world that was closely associated to personal issues from his home and past.

A closer inspection of the art objects that Redburn encounters highlight Melville's fear of being trapped as a writer. The realistic journey and its subsequent visual images were difficult because they could be viewed. Like the author's disclosure of himself, this type of writing removed the possibility of crafting worlds of fiction and romance, and shifted the writer to the forefront of the text. Clearly, the fear lurking is that the writer cannot live up to the readers' expectations and that the personal encounters might expose parts of the person to a harsh, reading public.

The first important detail that *Redburn* begins with is a discussion of clothes. Jackets clearly define the narrator of *White-Jacket* as well. This is an important

framing device for the novel. The silly shooting jacket that Redburn discusses in Chapter 1 is from his family and it establishes the narrator as a greenhorn among the crew; but, more importantly, the notion of clothing hints back to a character such as Jarl in *Mardi*. Jarl was a meaningless character in the unfolding drama of *Mardi*, who was described as a statue prop, concerned mainly with costume. Melville harshly positions Redburn as a character as well that is manipulated by his own hand and his family relations. Taji moves Jarl around and casts him as a statue; Redburn tells his own tale, and yet he too seems to be the designer of his own inconsequence, through the details of dress.

Redburn is shown to be an artificial skimmer of pages, who never accurately knows his place within the drama of events. The romantic charm that Redburn possesses seems to foreshadow the problems of representations that the book will grapple with. Redburn is not a careful reader; he does not accurately see his place in the realistic picture that will follow. When he reads announcements of voyages, his mind fastens itself on clever phrases and words from the paper, which are meant to deceive. The advertisements are enhanced not by his realistic understanding of actual voyages, but by "certain shadowy reminiscences of wharves,

and warehouses, and shipping, with which a residence in a seaport during my early had supplied me"(8). Most of Redburn's "thoughts of the sea were connected with the land; but with fine old lands, full of mossy cathedrals and churches, and long, narrow, crooked streets without sidewalks, and lined with strange houses"(9). These references show the errors of Redburn's ways of understanding of what will follow. The trip to the sea in *Mardi* was free, an attempt to give readers a better sense of the land from a fresh perspective. Redburn sees the sea only through the eyes of one rooted on the land. He cannot ever be free in the journey, for he sees representations of reality from a tightly organized perspective. Examining the occurrences of sculpted objects in the novel will lead to a better understanding of Melville's shifting use of ekphrasis and its development of key themes in Melville's works.

Before Redburn relates any description or mention of sculpture in the novel, he sets up the reader by giving a sense of Redburn's artistic background in his home environment. Fine oil paintings from Europe adorn his walls, portfolios of French prints, and pictures of natural history all have their place in Redburn's house. All of these images are important, for they detail a very

sheltered, yet cultivated mind. The paintings of the sea depict romantic scenes, and Redburn rightly attributes the pieces to a painter such as Froissart. His attention to these details shows his familiarity with art education.

Then, he mentions the gardens of Versailles and the pictures of natural history. There is a connection being developed in these references. Versailles is an ordered, French garden. Unlike the somewhat wild English gardening tradition, which allowed vegetation to seem august and somewhat unruly, French gardens placed higher importance on the symmetry and structure of cultivated nature. Man manicures and contains nature. The garden is placed in order to produce a sense of man harmoniously cultivating and taming the natural world. The natural history paintings perform the same types of duties; the paintings order nature for the viewer; the paintings pacify that which is wild and threatening to the imagination.

These art analogies are brilliantly incorporated if we consider exactly where Redburn will be voyaging. He is not headed to France and an ordered tradition of nature; he is destined for Liverpool and the sprawling, seemingly uncontained garden of England. This symbolic allusion here is important, for Redburn believes that his training has prepared him for his sea voyage. Melville undercuts his

narrator's vision with his artistic references in the early framing chapter. Not only does his costuming signify a character to be manipulated, but his family's art as well connotes order and precision in the natural world, whereas the narrative constantly shows something quite different.

The connection between painting and natural history seems oddly reminiscent of a work done by Charles Wilson Peale, titled *The Artist in his Museum*. This painting, which is brilliantly analyzed by Christopher Looby in his formulation of America's cultural genesis in politics through the manipulation of nature, shows the viewer the irony embedded in Peale's work. Peale paints himself in front of his collection of natural artifacts in the Natural History museum. Death is on display and ordered in the background through the boxes of taxonomic artifacts. In the forefront, however, Peale pulls back a red curtain. His gesture seems to be like a circus ringmaster, pulling back the curtains of his fictional creation. It is an ironic painting, which shows the artist thinking about the interplay between his creative process and that of the repetitive collection.

The painting sheds light on Melville's process in this early chapter of *Redburn*. Melville uses references to natural history throughout his work. In this early

instance, he may be calling viewers to see his own transparencies as artificer in this textual encounter. The signal may be to look behind the curtain at these artistic references, in order to think about what the artist is attempting to show us as readers.

As the narrative proceeds, Melville subtly works his way toward sculpted representation. Intervening between painting and sculpted representation is a curious description of a library. What is critical in the description of the library is that it resembles a "small house; it had a sort of basement, with large doors, and a lock and key"(11). The library is closed off to interlopers; it is locked off from the amateur reader. Ironically, as Redburn describes the volumes kept within the curio cabinet, he notes the presence of a fine edition of the Spectator and some other travel volumes. Redburn, essentially, is a spectator of the books encased within; he does not have free access, so he peers at them from an outsider's perspective. The closed off-sealed library serves as a bridge to his first description of an encounter with a sculpted object.

The old-fashioned glass ship has received much attention from critics, as an important symbol for Redburn's life and journey in the book. "But that which

perhaps more than anything else, converted my vague dreamings and longings into a definite purpose of seeking my fortune on the sea, was an old-fashioned glass ship, about eighteen inches long, and of French manufacture" (12). The ship, which happens to be of French manufacture, is not a coincidence. The sculpted ship is the strongest, most important art link that Redburn notes, concerning his desire to go to sea. The object is linked to his father, who brought it home and to a great-uncle of the narrator, Senator Wellingsborough.

The glass ship is an important symbol because it links the narrator to his professional interests, as well as with his family's storied past. And yet, the symbol is immediately undermined because it shows an ordered, see-through world. As Edgar A. Dryden argues,

The glass ship is a perfect symbol for Redburn's great expectations and for his eventual disillusionment. This 'curious ship'...suggests permanence and stability. With its pure and rigid lines it is a falsification of a world where things are heaped up and confused. To the child its careful design seems to hide and protect some wonderful treasure, the cause and essence of its attractive form. 'Indoors,' however, is no plunder but the same darkness which is found behind all of society's empty forms. (61)

Melville's travel narratives attempted to bring the world of the sea to light in a clear, unobstructed way. In the author's vision, this was a fiction, which he carefully

worked around throughout his first book. Redburn's chief symbol of the ship exposes the dangers of the entire novel. It is reversion back to realistic depiction, seen at the mercy of the public. The ship acts a metanarrative reflection of Melville's difficulties of authorship in the novel. Inside the creation, there is no treasure, just an empty hollow form, surrounded by fragile glass.

The narrator's description of the vessel sheds light on its important position in the book, as a vehicle for thinking about the connection between sculpted representations and writing. First, the ship is the delight of all the family's neighbors. "The ship, after being the admiration of my father's visitors in the capital, became the wonder and delight of all the people of the village where we now resided"(12). The ship and the book become one; the public wants to read realistic depiction. The villagers come to the home because of the realistic depiction the ship offers. "In the first place, every bit of glass, and that was a great wonder of itself; because the masts, yards, and ropes were made to resemble exactly the corresponding parts of a real vessel that could go to sea"(12). The sculpted piece is of interest because of correspondence with real ships.

It is only Redburn, who begins to have doubts about the hidden values of its representation. His thoughts of trying to "peep" inside the portholes to see what was actually inside, to pry open the hull to find guineas hidden below, display Melville's desire to show the fallacies of the realistic picture. He wants to probe the inner, hidden depths of so-called truthful depictions and expose their transparencies. His goal, in doing this, was to simply find some money. And yet, buried within this silly attempt is another truthful portrait to the glaring public eye.

Crucial to this opening stage of the novel is the notion that Redburn wishes to smash the object, "to be the death of the glass ship, case, and all, in order to come at the plunder"(12). The encased ship relates back to the books, also encased in glass. The "temporary madness," as Redburn terms it, is explained to stem from reading a storybook of pirates looking for treasure. His reading is of fairy-tales and children's stories, not reading of substance. The narrator seems right to have his destructive impulses, but Melville undercuts his rebellion because he is working within the realm of ekphrastic fear. The reading public desired straightforward images to work with, not free flowing attacks on the reader's consciousness.

Ironically, the name of the ship is *La Reine*, the Queen. If this ship stands as a representation of the novel and the place of images within it, this title takes on a greater significance. Once again, the link to French ordering is suggested. But more importantly, it refers to queens, women in control. It is important to note that popular reading at the time of Melville's composition centered on domestic sentimentalism. The novels of the hearth, home, and heart were the best sellers of the age. It seems ironic that Melville would refer to an art object as the queen in this regard. It is possible that this was an off-handed remark to the power of female readers in the world of the book market.

The glass figure of the Queen is noteworthy: "And this Queen rode undisputed mistress of a green glassy sea, some of whose waves were breaking over her bow in a wild way, I can tell you, and I used to be giving her up for lost and foundered every moment, till I grew older, and perceived that she was not in the slightest danger in the world"(13). Melville's smashing of the ship thus becomes problematic, for it seems to be a violent overthrow of not merely the realism of the travel narrative, but also the sentiments of the domestic novel. *Pierre* would reexamine this connection in more detail, but Melville appears to be laying the

groundwork for that assault in his depiction of Redburn. The narrator seems to secretly wish the destruction of both ship and narrative, and yet at the same time, realizes that the desire for these factual or sentimental journeys will only live on.

As the narrator concludes his discussion of the ship, he now notes that much of the pieces have been broken, but he insists that he will not have them mended. Redburn makes a curious connection between himself and the figurehead in the piece. This "gallant warrior in a cocked hat, lies pitching head-foremost down in the trough of a calamitous sea under the bows-but I will not have him put on his legs again, till I get on my own; for between him and me there is a secret sympathy; and my sisters tell me, even yet, that he fell from his perch the very first day I left home to go to sea on this *my first voyage*"(14). The figurehead alludes to the author in his precarious position of representing the world to the reader.

The book is a bildungsroman, for it frames the formative process of a young narrator. Redburn, like the broken figurehead, breaks off from a world encased in glass. It is a fragile world, but one that shows the problems of representation in print. The break occurs because this journey must be taken back into a realistic

account, even when the narrator dreams of worlds of his own romantic inclinations. Melville seems to dash the hopes of *Mardi* as being somewhat naïve. Hoping for freedom in narrative to do as you like and create freely is not a completely realistic hope for a writer. The writer needs to understand the orders of his own environment and upbringing, the limitations of the reading public, and yet be fully aware of the ironies surrounding the voyage he is casting his narrator into.

The description of the glass ship encounter frames the picture of representation of the entire narrative journey. The author resorts back to something that may have deep inner secrets that only he wishes to smash and erase from the sight of the viewer and reader. It is transparent for the most part, but the critical part is the identification that is made between narrator and figurehead. The central point of conflict is whether he can separate his role in the story from the glass ship. What happens when he falls off of the fictional encased world of the so-called realistic depiction? The encounters with sculpture and ruins deepen the interplay between the workings of the page and the sculpting of forms, and they have deeper implications for Melville's career than simply his writing for economic gain.

Redburn's sea journey through the Narrows of New York is filled with grave thoughts, which need careful examination. As the narrator sets to work on the ship, he attempts to ease his own personal pain with the thought that the telling of his adventures on his return will provide delight to his family. This "delight" distances Redburn from the voyage from the very beginning of the novel. The trip seems to be less about his own fulfillment than that of his relatives. Redburn, like Melville himself, is basing the trip, and the writing of it, on those around him. It is a job, just as Redburn's is, which is done for money and for other people's pleasure. This idea is cast off for "...it would not do at all" (40). As the reality of the arduous trip becomes apparent, Redburn contemplates the possibility of falling overboard and drowning.

This idea leads to two very interesting images, which become noteworthy for what they lack. "And then, I thought of lying down at the bottom of the sea, stark alone, with the great waves rolling over me, and no one in the wide world knowing that I was there" (41). Redburn thinks about a death that would not be memorialized or remembered. The waves rolling over the character suggests that it would be better that life rolled on without any recognition of his person. His imagined watery death seems to foreshadow the

eerie fate of the Pequod and its doomed resting spot at the bottom of the sea. Redburn continues, "And I thought how much better and sweeter it must be, to be buried under the pleasant hedge that bounded the sunny south side of our village grave-yard, where every Sunday I had used to walk after church in the afternoon; and I almost wished I was there now; yes, dead and buried in that church-yard(41).

Redburn's images of two final resting places in nature are telling. First, there is a call back to the common burial grounds of *Typee*, which seemed strange to Tommo. Redburn welcomes a grave without marking; he yearns to be taken back, consumed back into watery nature or hidden under a simple bush, perhaps providing fertilizer for a church hedge. He is also utterly morbid at his own prospects for recognition at this point. Melville himself has abandoned his character because of ekphrastic fear. Redburn seems set on a course to discuss things that could be seen; Melville here recognizes a hopeless connection between his character and himself, as both appear to be victims of the market and desire to be swept away by the forces of nature.

As Redburn heads to sea on the *Highlander*, Melville provides a further glimpse into the narrator's predicament when he makes mention of the fort in the Narrows of Staten

Island, which was built by Governor Tompkins. This beautiful place is in ruins and Redburn recalls walking through an arch in the wall, "which was dark as night; and going in, you groped about in long vaults, twisting and turning on every side..."(43).

Redburn muses that he would like to build a house within the fort's walls. The remembrance of this romantic scene eventually turns to despair because it brings to mind memories of trips with his father and uncle. "But I must not think of those delightful days, before my father became a bankrupt, and died, and we removed from the city; for when I think of those days, something rises up in my throat and almost strangles me"(44).

The romance of days long since passed gives way to a realistic, grim picture of tortured days of mourning and loss. Clearly, the personal links between Melville and Redburn are important to note. Just like Redburn, Melville's own father died a bankrupt and deathbed maniac, as Neal Tolchin has richly explored.

The author's personal losses and memories enter the text quite prominently and clearly. The romantic fort image, with its winding walls and twists, seems to suggest a link back to Melville's ill-fated romance of *Mardi*. After all, Melville wished to reside in the workings of the

imagination; he too, like Redburn, wanted to set himself up in the middle of a romantic ground of his own creation, such as *Mardi*. The sadness of the scene is noted by John Seelye: "As Redburn is swept through the Narrows to still another world, he would like to return to the past, to the simple world of memory...Pushed out of the Narrows towards the unknown, carried by necessity along the line decreed by Fate, Redburn passed the circular garden to which he can never return, the contentment he must abjure forever" (50). What Redburn is symbolically leaving is the guarded, romantic grounds of his free-roaming imagination.

Whereas many visitors would label the Fort Tompkins space as being nothing more than dilapidated ruins, Redburn feels that its dark spaces and vaults would make for a perfect home of romantic contemplation. This "charming" spot, with its wild animals roaming about, and particularly its anthropomorphic black goat looking out to sea, is an established place geographically and yet resides mostly in the mind of its creator. The romantic space of his youth is transformed into a place that seems to rise up and strangle the narrator. Melville's metanarrative point here is that perhaps he was childish to think that he could survive in a world without having a full adult understanding of the market. The candy reference in Chapter 7 leads into his

somber declaration: "How different my idea of money now!" (44).

The Staten Island ruins are a casting off point for Redburn and Melville. The scenes of the ship passing through the Narrows imply that the call for the Romantic, imaginative work of the writer still had a bearing on the author's mind. He is squeezed, metaphorically, through the Narrows in order to provide for himself and for others in his family.

The signal that Melville is giving through Redburn is a sense of defeat, and yet he reminds readers that even though realistic depiction is provided, that still does not tell the full story. The Fort Tompkins ruins remain vital for Redburn because of their Romantic associations, and he will hold on to that memory for the entire journey.

Ruins are important symbols to consider, for they operate between the space of the past and the present. This symbol is a Romantic one that remains in Redburn's mind during the journey. A ruin lingers as a lasting reminder of that which has past, but yet has lost its physical form. The internal structure has collapsed, leaving one only to surmise at once was and what it will turn out to be in the future. The ruins in the Narrows are a perfect symbol for Melville's authorial anxiety with regard to the

presentation of ekphrastic material. His narrator contemplates dissolution, just like the ruins; he wishes for absorption into the infinite sea and out of sight from viewers. The pain comes from realizing that the absorption back into nature comes over time, and that readers and viewers will be able to see and chart his gradual dissolution.

Donald Crawford, however, points to a hopeful attitude with regard to ruins. "On the *romantic* conception, the ruin stirs the perceiver's sense of the past and awakens associations with mystery...They may provide the occasion for the same fascination with decay that is part of the romantic view, a pleasure in perceiving the results of mortal edifices" (212-213). Crawford's comments on ruins may provide a glimpse into Redburn's imagination. The sight of the ruins could either be a link to his own sense of decay and destruction, or they may be regarded as comforting, for Redburn could thus see that all things are subject to the same forces. The ruins, in either case, call for the reader to make an interpretive decision.

Redburn's passage across the Atlantic is marked by some astute comments regarding appearances. While listening to the stories and songs on board, Redburn remarks, that "During the greater part of the watch, the sailors sat on

the windlass and told long stories of their adventures by sea and land, and talked about Gibraltar, and Canot, and Valparaiso, and Bombay, just as you and I would about Peck Slip and the Bowery. Every man of them almost was a volume of Voyages and Travels around the World. And what struck me was that like books of voyages they often contradicted each other" (54). Melville here is invalidating factual stories; contradictions appear throughout the sailors' narratives. Appearances are deceptive, and accounting for truth and clarity becomes difficult. Once again, Melville is trying to subtly critique literal minded readers of his culture, by noting the discrepancies of tellers of tales.

On the voyage, Redburn's encounter with Jackson hints at appearances and deceptions. Andrew Jackson, rumored to be a distant relative of the sailor, looms as a monumental yet controversial figure. Andrew Jackson has been depicted in monuments, busts, and sculpture repeatedly. His public grandeur in the public sphere stands in stark contrast to the ferocious deeds that he performed throughout history against Native Americans. Melville's choice to name his character Jackson is a means to return to his investigation of the problems between appearances and reality. The character, Jackson, is a hideous looking man, whose frame suggests nothing more than a shadow. It is the force of

Jackson's will and personality that resonates with Redburn.

History and storytelling create Jackson's stature; that is, the pen and the chisel have left indelible images of the general which reality cannot approach. Redburn's fear of Jackson relates back to Melville's fears in this novel. Reality can be ugly and is to be feared, especially since it can be easily glossed over by the mere skimmer of pages or the non-judgmental citizen, quietly revering the heroes that have been carefully crafted for public consumption. Both Jackson figures, the historical general and literary counterpart, suggest to Melville the vast contradiction between appearance and reality, and it is through the character of Jackson that we begin to see human depravity and evil come to the forefront of the writer's imagination.

Redburn fears Jackson, but Melville sets up an interesting art link between the two characters. Redburn finds a strange attraction or association between himself and the glass miniature figurehead on the mast of the glass ship. Jackson too is described in terms of figurehead sculpture in Chapter 55. After Redburn notes that Jackson could appear in the dark, brooding paintings of Salvator Rosa, he states, "...this Jackson's would have been the face to paint for the doomed vessel's figure-head, seamed and

blasted by lightning"(300). Jackson acts a precursor to Ahab as figurehead in *Moby-Dick*.

Douglass Robillard writes, "Figurehead sculpture, by its very nature, is a far from delicate art, but for Melville it carried the weight of prophecy. In the tiny glass ship *La Reine*, the figurehead, 'a gallant warrior in a cocked-hat,' tragically falls from its optimistic place ahead of all other figures aboard, signaling the stormy accumulation of life's blows. The Jackson figurehead is seamed and blasted by lightning, again the victim of storms"(54).

Robillard's connection of figureheads is interesting, especially when we consider that Redburn learned to pity Jackson during the voyage. Redburn, the symbolic embodiment of the glass figurehead, feels transparent and amputated from the real world. He is watched and prodded by the parlor society surrounding him, which dictates his downfall. Jackson, strangely, is the figurehead for a dark, romantic ship, which seems unfettered by the sinister realities of the market or the home. Redburn and Jackson are polar opposites; and yet, the Romantic associations that are hinted at in Jackson, and reach their pinnacle in Ahab, seem to be more enchanting for Melville than the transparency of the woeful Redburn.

Redburn's problems between appearances and reality, darkness and transparency are highlighted throughout the voyage. Melville coyly links books and monuments when Redburn reaches shore at Liverpool and begins to tell readers of his father's guidebooks. The titles of many his father's volumes are French, but one of them in particular is noteworthy for it is a general description of the antique monuments of Rome and contains lists of remarkable painting and sculpture of that celebrated city. Once again, the reader is called back to the incompatibility between French-English, and the differences between the two lands, which have been previously noted.

More importantly, the title suggests the foreign experience of looking at and understanding sculptures and monuments. This art guidebook sits alongside another title: *The Picture of Liverpool*, which Redburn uses in his journey throughout the city. The irony is that everything that Redburn looks back on to help him read and understand his surroundings is useless. He cannot read about the monuments of Rome because he cannot decipher French, just as his father's old guidebook is useless because it provides him with a dated, erroneous picture of Liverpool.

As Redburn pines away at the guidebook and his childhood memories of it, the reader begins to see that the

book stands as a cenotaph rather than as a means to illumination. The physical presence of the title page in Chapter 30 looks like the rendering of a grave memorial. Melville is playing on the notion that these reality based books lead to nothing more than early graves and useless wastes of time. Redburn hopes and believes that his father's books will assist him in his journey to the foreign shore, and yet Melville repeatedly seems to punish his narrator by ironically casting his means to enlightenment. Lurking in this chapter are references to Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. Walter Redburn's list of expenditures resembles Franklin's lists in his work. There is also Franklin's own casting of his tombstone in print, which seems to strangely cohere with the placement of the Liverpool title page. What Melville is hinting at is the fraudulence of creating a life for public consumption, as Franklin attempted. Franklin's *Autobiography* should not be taken at face value; but for many, it became the guidebook to a successful American way of life. This push for realistic depiction and facts solely for materialistic self-improvement was not writing for Melville. It signaled the death of literature.

The equating of tombstone and writing is interesting, for while Franklin designed his own tomb, placed it in

print as a means to equate stone and page—memorial and book—as mirroring ways to construct a public appearance for consumption, Melville scorned this notion at all costs. Revealing aspects of his self on the page was painful. Melville's gravestone, unlike Franklin's, remained simple and stark. It hid more than it revealed. Redburn's search for realism is being thwarted for it is a false impression of reality, which only shows the shifting fiction of lived experience. What endured for Melville was the active role of the imagination and not the maddening search for accuracy and verisimilitude in print and stone.

Redburn's stroll through Liverpool with his father's guidebook shows the incompatibility between both his print source and the sculpted statuary he sees. Redburn is disappointed to find that a great deal of the sites in his father's volume have disappeared or changed. This is a source of pain for the narrator repeatedly. Redburn is reduced to tears when thinking about how much has changed since his father's time in Liverpool. Strangely however, as Redburn notes and laments the changes in Liverpool, he notes the exactitude of the stone imagery. The stone monuments appear to be exactly where they were from the guidebook. "It was correct to a pillar" (169), Redburn notes as he gazes up from guidebook to monument. There was only a

"slight subsequent erection" which had been made to the guidebook's description of the site. In a story filled with lament, loss, and change, it seems noteworthy that statuary sites remain unchanged.

The addition to the monumental site is important to examine:

The ornament in question is a group of statuary in bronze, elevated upon a marble pedestal and basement, representing Lord Nelson expiring in the arms of Victory. One foot rests on a rolling foe, and the other on a cannon. Victory is dropping a wreath on the dying admiral's brow; while Death, under the similitude of a hideous skeleton, is insinuating his bony hand under the hero's robe, and groping after his heart. A very striking design, and true to the imagination; I never could look at Death without a shudder (169).

Redburn describes the sculpted representation of Nelson in Liverpool, which could be viewed. His description develops an interesting problem. The sculpted vision that resonates in the narrator's words is allegorical. It is a complex representation of death and victory, which presents the reader with a somber yet glorified, portrait of Nelson as national hero. Quite ironically, Melville has his narrator respond to a piece of statuary that displays complex imagery. His narrator responds to this imagery in a fascinating way; Redburn shudders at the depiction of death and reasons that it is true to the imagination. The statuary generates a response from this viewer that sends

shivers. Strangely, it has been Redburn's imagination that has been questionable and problematic throughout the narrative journey. In most instances, he has proven to be an artificial skimmer of pages, a strict adherer to the moralistic and over-simplified young gentleman's life tracts, and a non-observant viewer of situations surrounding him.

His shudder therefore is important. While we can only speculate at the cause of Redburn's shudder, it is possible to think about the irony surrounding it. Melville may be questioning his narrator's own ability to judge and account for memorials that he sees. He may simply be making an ironic commentary on the messages that surround the construction of the memorial. The Nelson monument and its construction were surrounded with controversy, and Melville's narrator may be taking a subtle stab at the not-so-subtle allegorical vision surrounding the monument of Nelson's death. Richard L. Stein notes, "Even when we turn to the various projects for the Nelson Memorial itself, the signs of uncertainty persist. The design competition is marked by diversity—in conceptions of Nelson, and of heroism as such, and in expressed notions as to precisely what form a memorial should take"(180). It is interesting that Melville has his narrator speak plainly about a

monument that stirred debate, going all the way back to 1808.

The ongoing problem with the site was what it was to stand for and represent. Many commentators believed that the site should single out only a large scale Nelson; some believed that the memorial should emphasize the naval achievements of Britain; some wished to emphasize the universal, mythic qualities of gods of the sea; still, others believed that the monument should serve as a place to celebrate the national victory that Nelson brought forth.

The Liverpool monument shows how difficult artistic construction can be for the artist, particularly with the competing voices swirling around the creator's vision. In a sense, the competing voices could lead to a metaphorical death. Without the possibility of a true creative rendering, the narrator and the memorial designer become tied to the demands of others, rather than seeking to voice their creative thoughts and emotions. Redburn's shudder at the vision of Death could speak back to the work he is encased in and the author's own fear of having to craft for the masses and popular tastes.

One of Melville's favorite artists, J.M.W. Turner also ran into difficulty when he painted a memorial to Lord

Nelson, which showed his ship being pulled into harbor. This is interesting because of the focus on the ship. Turner was criticized for his memorial painting because it did not attempt to paint a glorifying image of Nelson. His work was more somber and predicated on the notions of motion and change, as Richard L. Stein points out. Interestingly, Melville's narrative work was also repeatedly looking for fluidity and movement, a space to freely describe and comment on the world of the imagination, which was free from restrictions. Melville's work appears to equate itself more with painting, namely because of the subtleties used with brush strokes and color, and the apparent contrast with the hard, unerring materials of sculpture.

As Redburn continues his description of the statuary, he begins to probe further into the disturbing imagery it presents:

At uniform intervals round the base of the pedestal, four naked figures in chains, somewhat larger than life, are seated in various attitudes of humiliation and despair...These woe-begone figures of captives are emblematic of Nelson's principal victories, but I never could look at their swarthy limbs and manacles, without being involuntarily reminded of four African slaves in the market-place. (169-170)

The statuary overtly shows a distorted picture of reality, which strikes Redburn immediately. The fast movement in this description of statuary is from an allegorical vision of Nelson within the grasp of the personified figures of Victory and Death to the realistic picture of slaves in a stature of subservience. The casting of the slaves at the pedestal leads Redburn directly to think about "Virginia and Carolina; and also to the historical fact, that the African slave-trade once constituted the principal commerce of Liverpool" (170).

This juxtaposition is filled with meaning, for it demonstrates Melville's own movement as novelist from *Mardi* to *Redburn*. Melville has moved from his own allegorical vision into hard, realistic description. The drastic shift moves from hope to fear. It also begins to show a movement of intention. The Liverpool monument, safely on British soil, allows Melville the room to begin to use memorials to make artistic commentary without the fear of arousing American nationalistic pride. The telling shift, however, is that the narrator's thoughts lead back to home. Redburn's thoughts on the memorial lead him to make a direct connection to the questionable practices of slavery that would lead the country into Civil War.

The young narrator also notes his father's different slant on the subject. Redburn recalls his father's concern with the "unhappiness that the discussion of the abolition of this trade had occasioned in Liverpool"(170). This quick admission hints that Redburn's father was more concerned with the economics of the trade, rather than the human side of the slave practice. Once again, a subtle divide or crack has been exposed, which may link Melville's personal connections with his father with that of his narrator.

Nelson's statue becomes a central point of the novel because it recounts a statue that was situated in time and space. Melville as author and Redburn as narrator openly bring monumentalized injustice to the forefront of the text. *Mardi's* subtle crafting of monuments and memorials, and its asking for readers to imaginatively respond and think about sculpted places of fantasy have been cast aside for a particular monument in a particular city, which could be seen and recollected by readers. Instead of the reader giving his/her mind to Melville's verbal dream vision of a monument and its meaning, Redburn presents a disturbing monument that could be viewed by readers. The fear lurking in this ekphrastic encounter is that the words can never measure up to the picture seen. Melville's project is

cheapened in his estimation because he was forced to convert his own experience back to the page.

As Redburn continues his thoughts on the Nelson statuary, he relates:

How this group of statuary affected me, may be inferred from the fact, that I never went through Chapel-street without going through the little arch to look at it again. And there, night or day, I was sure to find Lord Nelson still falling back; Victory's wreath still hovering over his sword-point; and Death grim and grasping as ever; while the four bronze captives still lamented their captivity. (170)

The persistence of the images on the narrator's mind is coupled in this chapter with the stark realization that the world of his father's guidebook has passed. "Here, now, oh Wellingsborough, thought I, learn a lesson, and never forget it. This world, my boy, is a moving world...it never stands still; and its sands are forever shifting" (171-172). The irony, of course, that is embedded is that the Nelson monument remains, even though it represents the horrors of slavery to the mind of the viewer. The text lives on even though the hope is that the world will continue to move and progress to a deeper understanding of all human lives and cultures. The monument stands as a glorifying, yet controversial tribute to Nelson, which is subject to misreading. A thoughtless viewer could merely see the site as a fitting and just tribute to a fallen leader and would

not possibly think of the injustice lurking within the monument's casting of subservient figures.

Melville places the guidebook and monument together for a distinct purpose. The so-called realistic pictures of travels and times are subject to dismantling. The public's insatiable desire for real pictures of distant lands can lead to disappointment or misinformation. "Every age makes its own guide-books, and the old ones are used for waste paper" (172). *Redburn* itself was a guidebook that Melville felt was worthy of waste paper. It guides the reader unsatisfactorily, in Melville's reading, straight through the downtrodden streets of Liverpool, without any true sense of imaginative freedom or development.

Wellingsborough convinces himself that "there is one Holy Guide-Book, that will never lead you astray, if you follow it aright; and some noble monuments that remain, though the pyramids crumble" (172). This strange admission on the narrator's part asks numerous questions. What is the Holy Guide-Book? And can you follow any book blindly? Melville's previous work in *Mardi* suggests that all texts are to be questioned regularly and are subject to inconsistency. Even the bible hints at error, human miscalculation and the need for careful reinterpretation.

The reference to the "noble monuments" that remain seems to be highly ironic when we consider that Nelson's monument is filled with ignoble human depictions and a highly rhetorical staging of power. Is this the type of noble monuments that the narrator was referring to? When Melville hints that this type of monument is noble and will remain, and yet the pyramids will crumble, he seems to be casting a rather dim and pessimistic eye on what he valued in artistic creation.

Melville sought to recreate pyramids in print; his calling as an artist was towards mystery and indeterminacy. Redburn's firm and flat presentation of the visible monument seems to be an acceptance of ekphrastic fear. The power is in the hands of the forces of the market; all imaginative power seems stripped from the writer and his narrator.

Redburn may read the monument, think of the horrors of slavery, but he is doomed by the narrative to face the harsh facts of the public's indifference to art on his own. His only resort in this novel is to simply forget the starving family in Launcelott's Hey, renounce Harry Bolton, and be consumed by the forces surrounding him. Redburn's transparency and glass-like ability to shatter under

pressures leave him as quite simply an unacceptably weak narrator in Melville's assessment.

With a devaluing of the power of the imagination and an inability to move away from factual, lived experience narrative, Redburn's ekphrastic encounter with the Liverpool monuments marks Melville's fear that the reading public required a firm, transparent presentation of realistic pictures and places in order to take the act of reading seriously. This book was torturous for Melville as an author, for it dismantled his hope that the audience would allow him the creative space to work in a world entirely of his mind and crafting, which dabbled in the dark spaces of human life and creativity.

It was only after *White-Jacket* that Melville would turn his mind back to ekphrastic hope in his audience, which would be gauged carefully with just enough realistic depiction to make it seem believable. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville would reach the pinnacle of his creative talents by telling his story through a free-roaming narrative voice, and yet grounding his novel in some verifiable markers from everyday life surrounding him and his readers. Melville would turn his free-wheeling experiment of *Mardi* and painful realism of *Redburn* into a masterpiece of epic

proportions, through the carefree telling of Ishmael and the dark casting of Ahab.

CHAPTER 4: *Moby-Dick* and the Fluidity of Monuments and Memorials

Moby-Dick signaled Melville's finest statement on the promise of ekphrastic hope. As a narrator that brings into question the truthfulness of his narrative, Ishmael destroys ekphrastic indifference and fear by reveling in his own crafting and dismantling of artistic foundations. Instead of voyaging exclusively in the world of the imagination, as Melville had in *Mardi* and then painfully submitting to realistic depiction in *Redburn*, he created a world that operates between both realistic depiction and imaginative recreation. It is the unique mixture of fantasy, fact, and fiction that make *Moby-Dick* Melville's unquestioned classic and his finest statement on the fluid, ambiguous nature of great art.

Throughout *Moby-Dick*, Melville employs monuments and memorials as a solid, static comparison point to be used as a contrast to the beauty of literary art's fluidity. Melville joined the description or allusion to monumental art works that were concrete and stable with free-flowing words that were unstable and subject to discontinuity. Melville was calling his readers into reinterpretation, in order to show the necessity of judging all forms of art with a critical eye.

In his presentation of characters such as Ishmael, Queequeg, and Ahab, Melville made an effort to reexamine the nature of casting the heroic figure. Monuments and memorials, which aggrandized the efforts of political heroes, often neglected the efforts of the common man. *Moby-Dick* recasts reader expectations by showing the underside of America's monumental casting and the ascendancy of the narrative artist, seemingly over the powers of leaders and heroes constructed for public consumption. Ishmael's ascendancy in the novel displays the important role of the narrator, and the spectator for that matter, in creating meaningful monumental and memorial space.

The beauty of Melville's novel is that it calls all of our assumptions into question. It is my contention that Melville wished to challenge his readers to be skeptical of unencumbered places of public memory, which were rapidly being constructed across the American landscape. Melville wanted his readers to begin to see the contested nature of heroic virtue. By pinpointing the memorials of the forgotten within the confines of the text, by making a comparison of a cultural "other" to our nation's most monumentalized leader, and by allowing only the sly narrative artist to survive the Pequod, Melville was

presenting his hope that art would not be viewed in terms of stability, facts, and national order but more about openness, inclusiveness, and imaginative reinterpretation.

In the very opening chapter, "Loomings," Ishmael presents himself as a role-player. As a reader, we can never quite be sure who this character actually is. The question of identity becomes important for the entire novel. By having Ishmael openly present himself in the opening chapter as an unreliable narrator, Melville asks his readers to operate under the hope that the storyteller can be trusted to guide them through the developments of the text.

By doing this, Melville is making a subtle point about the reliability of all stories that get told. Mark R. Patterson states, "Identity for Ishmael is unstable, for it exists only in relational terms. His initial claim to an identity can be completed only by the reader, thus linking his authority to our mutual loss of autonomy and the creation of identity" (219). Patterson's point about the reader completing Ishmael's claims is important, for it shows that active reading must be engaged in order to grapple with the complex questions and symbols that are set forth in the text.

Ishmael's opening line of the novel "Call me Ishmael" disrupts and challenges reliability. As Edward Said has demonstrated, "The necessary creation for a beginning is also reflected in the act of achieving discontinuity and transfer; while in this act a clear break with the past is discernible, it must also connect the new direction not so much with a wholly unique venture, but with the established authority of a parallel adventure"(33). The parallel adventures and stories of Ahab and Ishmael exist side by side; it is the job of the reader to see the divergent views expressed by the two characters but also to make the connection with some other established sense of authority. In the case of *Moby-Dick*, the established sense of authority would be the monomaniacal Ahab—the leader of the ship of state, while the subversive voice in the novel would be the always doubtful, ever-probing voice of Ishmael.

Moby-Dick is clearly concerned with the politics of America in the 19th Century, as Alan Heimert and Michael Paul Rogin have aptly demonstrated, but it is just as concerned with the universal questions of human nature. It is important to think of the novel as a challenge to unambiguous stories of national harmony and progress. *Moby-Dick*, itself, operates on divergent levels of meaning; much

of the novel works between universal and local understandings, the world and the United States, the grandiose and the meek. Melville saw the fissures and breaking points that would send the United States reeling into the Civil War, and he realized that these same issues within his home country were operating abroad as well. He wanted to address these questions, both local and universal, in his writings.

Melville's project was to create, quite simply, a great American novel, whose symbols could fluctuate between different worlds and different states of mind. As Leo Bersani states, "It as if the great American novel had constantly to be measuring itself against the highest achievements of other cultures, and in *Moby-Dick* this means testing the American book's capacity to appropriate a vast field of cultural reference" (Quoted in Selby 133). One field of cultural reference, which operated between America and other nations, was monument and memorial construction.

It was through the continuation of his ekphrastic project, which clearly shows that Melville was fully aware of the complexities of the culture surrounding him. Melville's imagery shows him grappling with national issues on a universal level. As David S. Reynolds writes, "It was precisely Melville's *openness* to images from various

contemporary cultural arenas—not, as is commonly thought, his *alienation* from his culture—that accounts for the special complexity of *Moby-Dick*. Melville's narrative art was one of wide-ranging assimilation and literary transformation" (Quoted in Selby 138). While Reynolds focuses his attention on Melville's transformation of dark popular forms in his works, such as temperance novels and radical democratic texts, it is clear that Melville's openness to all forms of nationalistic imagery was crucial to the composition of *Moby-Dick*.

As large towering monuments were being cast towards the heavens to revere America's historical leaders of the Revolution, America itself was perched at the brink of disaster. The country's industrial growth, particularly through fields such as whaling, were allowing Americans to see themselves as invincible masters of the world. The hubris of the country was leading it to think of itself as an empire. In "Nantucket," we notice that Ishmael presents the people of the island, perhaps ironically, as those that have "...overrun and conquered the watery world like so many Alexanders; parceling out among them the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans, as the three pirate powers did Poland" (70). Throughout the chapter, references to America's Manifest Destiny abound. The Nantucketer appears

at home on the sea, using it to become rich and "ploughing it as his own plantation" (70).

The beauty of Melville's language throughout "Nantucket" stands in stark contrast to the message being portrayed. Without caution and prudence, the islander, like his fellow American citizens, could exceed the boundaries of human limitations and begin to see themselves as superior beings, colonizing all parts of the world, under the guise of a narrative agenda such as Manifest Destiny.

Melville realized the dangers of America's hubris, but he understood that the way to provide a critique was through the subtleties and plays of language. By emphasizing the beauty of the natural description in "Nantucket," Melville underscored the hidden, yet troublesome agenda that was driving it. The message of such a chapter is that Americans are in danger of overextending their projected power over the natural world, but it is a tendency that reaches far beyond the geographical boundaries of the United States. The hubris of the empire builders in attempting to conquer the seas led to major artistic constructions designed to herald the empire's achievements. Clearly, Melville's novel suggests that such notions foreshadow disaster and reintegration back into nature.

On a more personal, humane level, Melville also saw the developing problems that America had to face with regard to slavery and multiculturalism. If we examine the early chapters, such as "The Carpet Bag" and "The Spouter Inn," we realize that Ishmael has a very skeptical, provincial view of people of color. He seems a bit shocked by the "Black Angel of Doom" in the "The Trap." And most famously, his prudish notions of cannibals are displayed when he must share a bed with Queequeg. Racial discrimination and slavery were issues that troubled Melville his entire career, as Carolyn Karcher has duly noted.

Instead of having Ishmael as a single-minded protester against racism and stereotyping, Melville allows Ishmael to go through a conversion to stress a point. Truth comes about through glances or snatches. What Melville does is provide the reader with details that show the possible flaws of both his narrator and the land that the story departs from.

It is with these notions in mind that a careful examination of Melville's ekphrastic work can be attempted. After all, the white, smooth marbles of dignified American leaders pushed the stories of people of color to the background or simply off the margins of the text. Ishmael's

job in the text is to bring these issues into the minds of readers. Instead of being complicit with the country's exercise of power and translation of that power into sizeable monuments, Ishmael draws the readers' attention to those that are forgotten or dismissed. His narrative voice itself forces readers to consider all stories that get told and accepted.

Ishmael is not unlike many readers. He notes during the course of the journey that he too is swept up in rhetoric, by the powerful words of Ahab. "I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul"(194). Ishmael's language in these sentences is peppered with images of the forge and sculpting terminology. The words of the leader convince him to weld his will with the cause; he hammers his oath with the rest. Ishmael's identity is temporarily subsumed by the monumental rhetoric.

The key point that Ishmael shows is how easy is it, even for a perpetually skeptical tale teller to be swept along by the forces of history, powerful speakers, revenge, and social contracts, originating from size and force. The genius of Ishmael's character is that he consistently fuses

things together; he is never unanimously taken with a one-sided narrative agenda. His swaying in the novel between extremes, welding different ideas together in order to come up with the soundest possible judgment is exactly what Melville was asking of his readers. When viewing the grand statements made to buttress our American ship of state, Melville was calling viewers to be aware of points where we are carried away by the excesses and the excitement of the national journey forward. And, likewise, he was calling our attention to points where we should be critical outcasts, questioning the images that the nation decides on for its own self-perception. As individual voices and visions, we, like Ishmael, are the nation, and our views must be welded, or more appropriately patched together to create a sense of national unity.

The fusing of opposites is a critical part of *Moby-Dick's* genius. Melville was attempting to write something that was monumental. Ironically, in order to do that, he was drawn to dismantle the monumental symbolism that was rising up as a testament to national strength and progress. This polarity defines the work of the entire novel. Melville was interested in the rethinking of literary craftsmanship, the dismantling of truthful tales of harmony, and the blind acceptance of national symbolism.

Ishmael's probing into monumental imagery shows fissures, arguing points in the discussion, and it certainly, at times, appears to be contradictory.

David S. Reynolds aptly categorizes Melville's imagination at the time of *Moby-Dick's* composition: "By the time he wrote *Moby-Dick* Melville's imagination was bristling with the polarities of American radical democracy...He could proclaim himself simultaneously the greatest democrat and the greatest misanthrope. He had arrived at the very core of the popular paradox that fused criminality and goodness, iconoclasm and patriotism" (Quoted in Selby 142). The blending of opposites becomes crucial for investigating Melville's monumental imagination. Instead of a melting pot tradition, Melville viewed American identity in terms of opposites, maintaining their unique characteristics and yet adding color and texture to the picture.

In Melville's vision, as it is translated through Ishmael, America's prosperity depended upon thinking individuals looking at and realizing the points of the American tradition that fused incongruities. America's monuments just so happened to be key places that caught Melville's attention and shed new creative light on his artistic endeavors in print.

In beginning to discuss Melville's epic, it is crucial to investigate the opening fusion of life and death, forgetting and remembering. Death and memory are brought to the forefront of "Loomings." "Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet...then I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can"(3). In this opening paragraph of the novel, Ishmael displays the dark depression that weighs heavily on his mind and soul. He must forget, or push away from the grip of the past, if he is to head off on a new journey.

Ishmael's pauses become important to note. He mentions stopping in front of coffin warehouses and bringing up the rear of funerals. In these two instances, the narrator fixes upon the image of the actual box that will be placed into the ground. Instead of rising above the ground as a marker of human achievement and memory, the coffin disintegrates into the earth; it is literally consumed back into nature. This is important because it displays the fluidity of human life and experience. Ishmael is consumed by that which is underneath--that which can not be seen. His "bringing up the rear" of funerals is also recognition

of process and a foreshadowing of his "bringing up the rear" of the Pequod's funeral procession down into the ocean vortex. In this ironic casting, the last becomes first, for it is only Ishmael that survives to tell the tale; his affinity for being in the background eventually leads to his salvation.

Many times man works and manipulates the workings of the land in an attempt to slow the progress of time. Human beings are always attempting to capture moments of memory, in essence to freeze those memories in time and space. This can especially be seen in the processes of building monuments and memorials. Ishmael's pauses, while they could be construed as morbid, are actually calling into question the inevitable processes of death, mourning, and memory. The narrator goes along with the tide, but pauses to look at things that are involved in the process of reintegration into nature or into the spiritual unknown. That should be the nature of man. We are all left to contemplate our fragile place in the chain of human nature. Ishmael notes that he has to prevent himself, from "methodically knocking people's hats off," and with this admission, he realizes that he must get to sea.

Melville is providing a clue to his narrative agenda in these early lines. Knocking a hat off will only cause

resentment, anger, and misunderstanding. Melville's agenda through Ishmael is to coyly critique the fixed nature of citizens and not to beat readers over the head with an agenda. Artistry and imagery become the keys for his project, rather than trying to bluntly knock the message through a reader's head. It is impossible to wake people up to the deeper, darker truths of existence. Being blunt about an agenda such as this one would be foolhardy. It is only through careful use of language and imagery, and allowing readers the space to reenter the text for closer inspection that truth can be reached or at least touched upon.

Melville's attempt to educate and perhaps challenge his readers to think about life's deeper secrets came about through his careful use of imagery, which was designed for a second look. Melville's use of monuments and memorials is linked to his imagination and his abilities to create freely as a literary artist. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville reached the pinnacle of his talents; he was able to recast and recapitulate the sculpted imagery that he had used before, through the lens of a skillful and deceptive narrative voice. It was through the calculated literary creation of Ishmael that Melville's ekphrastic work in monumental and

memorial imagery would reach new heights and push the reader into a created world of hope in fiction.

Ishmael's departure from Manhattan is an important geographical location, when we begin to think about Melville's use of monuments. At the opening, Melville leaves the reader with the picture of hundreds of people posted "like sentinels all around the town...thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries"(4). The insular city of Manhattan, a city that seems to possess enormous possibilities for change, has people posted like statues, staring out at the watery world. Melville's narrative immediately challenges fixed notions—motionless gazing and acceptance.

The Battery area that Ishmael describes calls the reader back into American history. In 1770, a life-sized sculpted version of King George III was erected by Joseph Wilton in Bowling Green. It depicted the leader in a Roman emperor's garb. When the Declaration of Independence was read in New York on July 9, 1776, citizens tore the statue down and eventually melted it to use for bullets in the Revolutionary War, as Donald Martin Reynolds points out (27). Progress and change were a part of the history of the Battery and Bowling Green. The Revolutionary figures of New York were ready to tear down the veiled presence of

authority and use the monument for practical purposes. They took the initiative to literally recast the monument for their militant purposes. While change was certainly good, the wholesale destruction of art for a nationalistic agenda could be questionable. The ground of the Battery seems to suggest stagnation, and yet it also presents a scene of mob-rule, which would have been troubling for Melville as author.

As readers, we must remember that Melville, even with his beliefs in America's possibilities, was a firm supporter of art in a universal sense and not just that which supported America's nationalistic ventures and ideas. Melville signed the petition to allow the classic Shakespearean actor William Macready to perform at the Bowery Theatre, in spite of the threat of violence from anti-British supporters, in the days leading up to the infamous Astor Place Riots. Dennis Berthold has previously explored this connection with Melville's writings. Nationalistic frenzy was certainly perceived as another form of barbarism by Melville. His art, if it was to find success, had to succeed on a universal scale or none at all. Melville wished to stir readers and viewers to change themselves and change the way they see their worlds. It was

not an attempt to buttress his nation's aggrandized sense of self or a desire for empire.

It seems ironic therefore that Ishmael is presenting figures stuck in ocean reveries on the Battery. These people are unable to move. These background figures cast themselves away from movement and change, and their reveries suggest stagnation, perhaps staring at a world before them instead of acting in it. The monumental history of the Battery suggests that change and movement are necessary; Ishmael's narrative symbolically hints that many are grounded like statues and need to take to the water, instead of watching the water, and perhaps their lives, progress slowly by.

What is lurking in this phrase is the notion that perhaps the country itself is posted too firmly in a state of inaction. The changes that Revolutionary figures acted for, and promised for future generations, are being forgotten as Americans stand silently as statues as the world passes them by. Perhaps, America's landlocked people have forgotten a larger mission in the world beyond nation building. Ishmael's narrative will force the reader into the act of the human journey itself and away from the unchanging values of the American shore.

By going to sea as a simple sailor, Ishmael positions himself as a man among the people. His mind speculates that fate has led him to play the part in his whaling voyage, as some are cast for tragedies, while others resigned to farces. He leaves the roles of ship leaders to others. "I abandon the glory and distinction of such offices to those who like them"(5), and he reasons that "everybody else is one way or other served in much the same way..."(6). Ishmael's views establish the common bonds of humanity as keys to the voyage. Instead of worrying about leaders and workers, Ishmael lets the narrative rectify all the discrepancies, so that all may be content with the roles they occupy. His question: "Who aint a slave?" serves as a starting point for Melville's ekphrastic work in the novel. By positioning his narrator as a somewhat carefree, yet occasionally conflicted teller, Melville calls his readers into interpretation. Slaves and masters are questioned from the beginning; the ability to rule because of representation and power is always put as a counterpoint to Ishmael's narrative agenda, which attempts to place all power positions and all reliable orders into doubt.

Ishmael's stay at the Spouter-Inn deepens the allusions to coffins, which were previously alluded to in "Loomings." Peter Coffin is the landlord, who provides a

respite from the storms in New Bedford. The landlord's highly symbolic name references both the saintly Peter, on whom Christ built his church. And at the same time, the reference to coffin suggests the impermanence of our earthly station.

The name "Coffin" appears ominous to Ishmael at first glance. His view changes, when he examines the place. "As the light looked so dim, and the place, for the time, looked quiet enough, and the dilapidated little wooden house itself looked as if it might have been carted here from the ruins of some burnt district, and as the swinging sign had a poverty-stricken sort of creak to it, I thought that here was the very spot for cheap lodgings..."(11). Ruins and coffins combine here to show that Ishmael finds meaning in those things that have passed, that may have lost their luster.

It is through the ruins and the dim light that he believes he has been destined to carry himself through. Once again, as readers, we see images of death, darkness, and process as keys to the journey. Peter, in the biblical story, denied Christ three times before his Crucifixion. The dark implication of the landlord's name raises an atmosphere that may have saintly implications but is not without its faults and fissures.

Expectations for the traveler remain clouded, when he enters the inn. And it is in the parlor entrance to the Spouter-Inn that Ishmael provides a beautiful ekphrastic piece of description. That description comes when Ishmael views a painting on the wall.

But what most puzzled and confounded you was a long, limber, portentuous, black mass of something hovering in the centre of the picture over three blue, dim, perpendicular lines floating in a nameless yeast. A boggy, soggy, squitchy picture truly, enough to drive a nervous man distracted. Yet was there a sort of indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity about it that fairly froze you to it, till you involuntarily took an oath with yourself to find out what that marvelous painting meant. (13).

Painting becomes the ekphrastic vehicle that seems most appropriately comparable to the narrative work of *Moby-Dick*, explored most comprehensively by Douglass Robillard. In the very opening pages of the narrative journey, Ishmael uses the inn painting as a metanarrative link to his own work in the novel. It is dark, not clear, and subject to a great deal of interpretive freedom. The narrator speculates that the picture may represent the sea, the elements, a heath, or perhaps even the whale. Unlike statuary, painting seems more open to the role of the interpreter. However, Melville's imagination would bridge his inclination towards painting with numerous sculpted images, which would only add to the unique role of perceiving art in the novel.

The first meaningful glimpse into sculpture comes a bit further in "The Spouter-Inn" chapter. Bulkington receives a detailed, almost sculptural description from Ishmael. "He stood full six feet in height, with noble shoulders, and a chest like a coffer-dam. I have seldom seen such brawn in a man. His face was deeply brown and burnt, making his white teeth dazzling by contrast; while in the deep shadows of his eyes floated some reminiscences that did not seem to give him much joy"(17). Ishmael notes Bulkington's aloofness, and the narrator returns to this character once the Pequod has shipped from Nantucket. Ishmael hints at the nobility of Bulkington. Readers expect from the exact description that Bulkington will play a major role in the development of the narrative. In essence, his monumental figure appears to be worthy of being cast in more depth throughout the story.

"The Lee Shore" succinctly rejects the audience's intuitions about Bulkington. When we find this character aboard the ship and we learn that the land was scorching to Bulkington's feet, we begin to feel that his heroic nobility will continue far into the story's plot. And yet, immediately following this, we learn: "Wonderfullest things are ever the unmentionable; deep memories yield no epitaphs; this six-inch chapter is the stoneless grave of

Bulkington" (116). Ishmael's epitaph chapter disrupts the readers' expectations and assumptions for a purpose. We have been given a foreshadowing of Melville's monumental imagination. Things or characters that appear worthy of high regard, perhaps even statues and monuments, are torn down for the narrative agenda. Ishmael takes us from a close description of features to Bulkington's perishing in order to show the need to be wary of sculptured projects and planting our hopes on that which appears in form to be noble.

Bulkington's life will yield only an epitaph on paper; his importance leaps far beyond the sculpted terms of his physical description. The distinction that Melville is making is that independence of the mind is crucial for artistic growth. "Glimpses do ye see of that mortally intolerable truth; that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore?" (116-117). Language used in this passage sets forth a key point in the novel, which is described through allusions to statuary.

Keeping your mind open and independent is crucial for evaluating writing as well as all pieces of art. The

ambiguity of the word "cast" leaves room for interpretation. Not only does the word mean thrown onto shore, but it also could be viewed as an allusion to sculpture's exactness and permanent nature. It was Bulkington's desire to escape from the shore and away from those silent sentinels that made him follow his will to sea and independence. He literally escapes even Ishmael's physical casting of all his features in the earlier chapter.

Melville's point seems to be that the truth of his writings lies in dismantling narrative assumptions, by breaking down the reader's expectations and desire for pinpoint accuracies, and by reveling in the subjectivity and whims of the text's indeterminate colorings.

When we reexamine Bulkington's departure scene, we notice that it is followed quickly by the introduction of Queequeg, who becomes an infinitely more important character in the novel, despite his physical description. The white mountaineer gives way to the tattooed islander, who would be the most inconceivable subject to cast in stone or print as hero. When Peter Coffin comically describes Queequeg to Ishmael, he makes a point of telling the narrator that his potential roommate is out peddling heads, a point that Micheal T. Gilmore explores with its

relationship to the American market system. The comic routine of exposing and playing off Ishmael's greenhorn gullibility is filled with meaning, if we reconsider the situation in terms of sculpture.

Queequeg's ventures around town, attempting to sell shrunken heads as curiosities, create a tension in the narrative. The dialogue between Coffin and Ishmael is important.

"Can't sell his head?-What sort of a bamboozling story is this you are telling me?" getting into a towering rage. "Do you pretend to say, landlord, that this harpooneer is actually engaged this blessed Saturday night, or rather Sunday morning, in peddling his head around this town?"

"That's precisely it," said the landlord, "and I told him he couldn't sell it here, the market's overstocked."

"With what?" shouted I.

"With heads to be sure; ain't there too many heads in the world?" (19).

The dialogue between landlord and naïve narrator sheds light on a major issue of the novel. If we take the conversation to be a metaphorical rendering, it is Queequeg attempting to sell his own, tattooed head throughout the novel. He is trying to sell his heroic virtue and abilities to a market overstocked with sculpted, talking heads.

If we think about Melville's narrative agenda to question heroic virtue in sculpted forms, Queequeg's quest throughout the novel is to find a suitable place in the

public sphere. He is attempting to embark on a journey into American public consciousness. This is a difficult business to attempt. Ishmael himself is shocked by a mention of "peddling" your head on a Saturday or Sunday. Queequeg's cannibal, Pacific island heritage places him outside the normal role of classic hero. Most readers would prescribe that role to the sculpted form of someone such as Bulkington. Melville's plan was to get readers to see that we have become a culture built upon the image consumption of great, white men; there were quite simply too many "heads" out there to emulate. Our canon of founding fathers, being cast in stone, bronze and marble was overstocked, and it simply did not leave enough room for someone such as Queequeg, a cultural and religious "Other."

Ishmael fires into an ironically put "towering" rage over the discussion of selling heads in the marketplace. It is the play of Melville's language that leaves room for different interpretations. Ishmael's rejection is described as "towering" because it implies taking to a higher moral ground. The comic repartee between Ishmael and Coffin is filled with ironic allusions and possibilities for interpretation.

The busts of heads that became popular in America stand in stark contrast to the human heads that Queequeg

sells in New Bedford. The popular busts of politicians and presidents were artificial recreations, subject to the skill of sculptors or perhaps to the whims of the subjects being sculpted for consumption. These curios may not be accurately depicted; the busts may tamper with realistic features in order to provide a more idealized form of the subject.

In a strange sense, even though Queequeg's trophies could be interpreted to be gruesome tokens of dismemberment, they still are considered to be objects to be revered and collected in Queequeg's estimation. They connect the world of the dead with that of the living and create a sense of affinity between the two; the embalment preserves the actual figure without the manipulation of the artist's hand. The sculpted bust, on the other hand, could be argued to deaden the features of the subject, for it was an attempt to artistically recapture an essence that simply could not be duplicated. Queequeg's heads seemingly link the vital role of preserving the memory of actual figures, without the impediments of art. His simple collection, which appears to be gruesome, could actually be a testament to enemies and a way to preserve the memories of those fought in battle.

When Queequeg returns, there are several incidents which intensify Melville's staging of the varying levels of monumental figuring. Queequeg's "bald purplish head now looked for all the world like a mildewed skull," and "these covered parts of him were checkered with the same dark squares as his face" (24). Ishmael judges Queequeg solely by his appearance, and readers can begin to see his prejudicial and perhaps inaccurate modes of narrating the story.

Ishmael's visions and retelling of his experiences are structured by a provincial view of the world. He is shocked by the appearance of the "ghastly" New Zealand head and taken aback by the "curious little deformed image with a hunch on its back, and exactly the color of a three days' old Congo baby" (24). When Ishmael compares the head to the idol, he "almost thought that this black manikin was a real baby preserved in some similar manner" (24). Ishmael's labeling of the head as being from New Zealand and the idol as a three day old Congo baby is comical, and these pinpoint classifications call for readers to be skeptical of the narrator's information. How could Ishmael know the head was from New Zealand or what a three day old Congo baby looked like? Ishmael's naivety is being brought to the forefront of the text.

Melville is setting up his audience to be deceived or to take control of the narrative classifications; it is a test to see how literal minded his readers were. Melville was attempting to wave realistic depiction in front of the readers' eyes, while providing enough information to advocate his narrator's unreliability.

Peter Coffin's intervening during the first night between Queequeg and Ishmael is important because once again it is a coffin reference that recasts and reassures Ishmael's doubts in the narrative. The coffin intervenes to take Ishmael down from his lofty, moralistic tower or perch. What Coffin does is to intercede in creating a union of opposites. The trick is that Peter Coffin's name suggests both permanence and instability. Melville's narrative, like this intervening figure, moves between the world of physical absorption back into nature and a call for the solidifying of human experience in stone imagery, which raises itself up from the narrative. The rock that Peter cements in the narrative is the bond of human relations, particularly between Ishmael and Queequeg. As these two characters become sleeping mates, Ishmael's prejudices shed and readers begin to see his progress away from a naïve simpleton. The two become companions for the narrative journey.

A critical point comes when the two men find themselves in the Whaleman's Chapel. Both sit apart from one another; they arrive separately, but the chapel stands as a crucial place, which brings them together through memorial imagery. In the chapel, "Each silent worshipper seemed purposefully sitting apart from the other, as if each silent grief were insular and incommunicable"(39). All worshippers eye the marble tablets on the chapel walls, dedicated to those lost on the high seas. The chapel scene is imperative for Melville's monumental castings in the novel. The marble tablets are the only times when an actual, physical attempt was made to visually reproduce an art work inside the text of Melville's narrative.

Ishmael's copying of the marble epitaphs bridges the depiction of the tablet with an actual, marked off physical presence in the text. The reason for this textual placement is complicated. By bringing to life early in the text the markers of those lost at sea, Ishmael is attempting to make readers move beyond their ekphrastic indifference and fear of the unknown. The monuments are simple and yet live on in the physical pages of the text. Ishmael's purpose is to bring hope that the artist may live on in words through the imaginative workings of the mind. The reason for the textual placement of the marker is to show the true nature

of a democratic people and the permanent nature of classical literature. In essence, Ishmael's textual markers hope to far exceed the reaches of the particular tablet memorials in the Whalemens' Chapel.

It is this place that solidifies Ishmael's own sense of death and fear of life's processes with Queequeg, for both men worship apart but together. The printed marble tablets, on a surface level, seem to isolate worshippers in silent, personal mourning. Ishmael's reinterpretation of the space demonstrates the need for common bonds of humanity when facing life's tribulations. An analysis of the marbles reveals deeper insights in the workings of Melville's monumental imagination, but it is critical to note that both Ishmael and Queequeg find companionship and brotherhood sanctified by either reinterpreting the tablets or by not reading them at all.

In the first marble tablet, dedicated to the eighteen year-old John Talbot, Ishmael establishes the loss of the individual overboard. The lost sailor's sister dedicates the memorial. He was lost on All Saints Day, November 1, 1836. His body was swept overboard near the isle of Desolation. The link to the family establishes a type of bond, which has been severed. Ishmael, by taking on the name of an orphan, can sense his own personal sense of

loss. The memorial stands as a lost reminder of a relationship; it offers little solace to the viewer, but it hints at the young man's link to the workings of saints.

The second tablet consecrates the memory of one of the boat crews of the ship, Eliza. These men were towed out of sight while hunting a whale on December 31, 1839. The last night of the year eerily suggests the dire possibility of never seeing the New Year or not being able to experience the new day. The surviving shipmates erect this tablet. The movement from family relationship to strong work relationship is another example of the various ties that we seek to memorialize and hold dear.

In the final tablet, the dedication is to a captain, Ezeikiel Hardy, who was killed in the bow of his boat by a whale near the coast of Japan. The dedicator of the marble is his widow. With this recreation, we have seen another important human relationship mentioned, and that is of husband and wife. The date of the man's death, August 3, 1833 is important in this regard, for it does not provide a fitting closure to the dates listed in the previous two tablets. Instead of complementing the All Saints Day and New Year's Eve reference, the date is ambiguous. It does not have an immediate symbolic allusion to rank its importance. In a certain sense, as close readers, we begin

to look for patterns in the tablets, just as in narratives. Melville disrupts the flow and provides a date that does not suggest a symbolic allusion for a reason. The work of the captain stands apart, at least in terms of the memorial. It does not gain meaning from an allusion. Perhaps, this slight detail makes sense if we think about the captain that will follow. Ahab will widow his wife and attempt to break all connections with his fellow men throughout the narrative. It seems fitting that the memorial tablet for the lost captain, he too bitten by a whale, would stand differently than those of the others.

The positions of the marbles and their designations suggest an interesting recasting of memorializing, when put through Ishmael's gaze and recapturing. We move from the orphaned sister remembering her brother, then to a company of men, and finally to the captain. The memorial order disrupts the flow of the ship's hierarchy, which normally would flow from captain down to common seamen. The last becomes first in Ishmael's recopying of the tablet forms. This is crucial, for the entire narrative wishes to reorder and reexamine hierarchies. It is through these tablets that we can begin to see the grander ambitions of Melville's ekphrastic work in the novel.

The placement of the memorials and the worshippers staring in amazement also provides a space for Ishmael to connect with Queequeg. When speaking of Queequeg in the chapel, Ishmael states: "Affected by the solemnity of the scene, there was a wondering gaze of incredulous curiosity in his countenance. This savage was the only person present who seemed to notice my entrance; because he was the only one who could not read, and, therefore, was not reading those frigid inscriptions on the wall"(41). Queequeg's wondering gaze shows that he is actually seeing the scene before him. Instead of being fixed, reading the memorials, he notices the rest of his surroundings.

The "frigid" inscriptions are designed for remembrance, but ultimately they should serve as a reminder to move beyond the rigidity of mourning and begin to see the process of moving forward. Those "bleak tablets sympathetically caused the old wounds to bleed afresh"(41). Instead of serving as a support to grieving, the worshippers stare ahead, forgetting the call to move past remembrance and back into the world of relations. Queequeg's wonder at the scene allows him to see beyond the words and beyond literal rereading of the tablets, in order to sense the symbolic power of the memorials. Unlike the mourners who stare fixedly on the tablets, Queequeg soaks

up the atmosphere of the place and allows it to stir his curiosity. The place for him becomes a site to raise questions, move forward on his journey, rather than remain posted in the gloom of melancholy. It seems no accident that Queequeg's hopeful reaction signals yet another reason for his connection with Ishmael.

As Ishmael progresses through the chapter, awaiting the arrival of Father Mapple, he muses about the mourners examining the epitaphs.

Oh! Ye whose dead lie buried beneath the green grass; who standing among the flowers can say—here, here lies my beloved; ye know not the desolation that broods in bosoms like these. What bitter blanks in those black bordered marbles which cover no ashes! What despair in those immovable inscriptions! What deadly voids and unbidden infidelities in the lines that seem to gnaw upon all Faith, and refuse resurrections to the beings who have placelessly perished without a grave. As well might those tablets stand in the cave of Elephanta as here. (41)

Ishmael's thoughts here show his grappling with the question of loss and memory. The survivors attempt to affix meaning to a flat tombstone that has no actual substance to it; the physical body is absent from the signification. The open sea consumed their relatives and they are left with the prospect of trying to account for their grief. The human tendency is to attempt to halt, slow down the process, to find some way to permanently remember the dead

with a space of their own. Clearly, the tablets leave a darker sense of the void; the "black-bordered" tablets leave only room for despair and depression. Hope appears lost in the markers, for the space designates the somber mood of tranquil reflection that must be joined to it. The "immovable" words on the tablet are fixed in time and space; they are unable to be edited and cannot be critiqued freely by the roving minds of the viewers. The "deadly voids" and "unbidden infidelities" "gnaw upon Faith" for they leave little room for anything but gloom and darkness.

It seems fitting that Ishmael turns his thoughts to human nature after viewing the gloomy tablets. "Methinks we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death. Methinks that what they call shadow here on earth is my true substance...In fact take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me"(42). Ishmael's thoughts question the form of the body on earth and the grand attention that is paid to recovery, interment, and memorialization. The narrator's questionings leave a sense of the futility of these human processes. Ishmael, preparing himself for a voyage into the unknown, sees a developing conflict between sites of memory and the flux of the oceanic world. Both Ishmael and Queequeg distinguish themselves in the chapel, for both characters are counteracting the typical,

prescribed way of reading and viewing the memorials. Queequeg wonders and his mind wanders, while Ishmael begins to question and doubt the healing power of such a site. His vision throws light on stagnation, inaction, and more posted sentinels, viewing scenes without movement.

Father Mapple's entrance into the chapel and ascent into the pulpit becomes important because of its ambiguity. Ishmael grapples with the idea of faith as he sits in the chapel. Deliberately, Melville mentions a framing device for Mapple's entrance: "Between the marble cenotaphs on either side of the pulpit, the wall which formed its back was adorned with a large painting representing a gallant ship against a terrible storm off a lee coast of black rocks and snowy breakers"(44-45). The pulpit is a place of story and interpretation; it leads the world, according to Ishmael, "for the pulpit is ever this earth's foremost part; all the rest comes in its rear..."(45). The messages of the pulpit are bordered by dark, fixed places of meaning. The worshipers are encased in places of grief; they hear the sermons from the pulpit only within the context of their own personal losses.

To the back of the pulpit is a painting, showing a ship, beating on against the waves. Strangely, as close readers, we see the ambiguity of positioning in this

chapter. If the pulpit is the prow of the ship, then it may be leading worshippers astray. It is an important setting device that the wall that forms the back of the pulpit displays a painting. As it was stated earlier, paintings, such as the one in the Spouter Inn, are ekphrastically more compatible with Melville's novel because of their plays of light and shadow. Mapple faces an audience that is framed by immovable, black-framed cenotaphs. Melville's continual play on the first become last is being used again quite forcefully.

Mapple's sermon foreshadows that man must remain faithful to God's commandments and that the will of God cannot be avoided. The sermon could be misread, if you happen to be an Ahab and see that God has fated you to follow the darkness of your soul to a fixed fate. If the world and the fate of men can be read as squarely as a marble cenotaph, then the mission of the Pequod is predetermined. Mapple's drastic isolation at the end of the sermon leaves him apart from the worshippers in the chapel, who cannot inquire or ask questions about fate and predestination. The sermon can be open to misinterpretation and misreading, just as the frozen marble messages can be misread, if you do not pay careful

attention to their details and question their signification.

In the following chapter, "A Bosom Friend," Ishmael uses his experience in the chapel, by not isolating himself in the impregnable melancholy reading of death in the marbles. Ishmael chooses to follow the message of the painted ship, seeing life as beating on against the waves, by pursuing a friendship with a man that counteracts the staunch prejudices of society surrounding him. Melville develops the friendship through a play of different sculpted images. Whereas Ishmael and Queequeg begin their journey by seeing the flat, black-rimmed tablets of lost lives in the chapel, their voyage and friendship is sanctified by a little, portable Negro idol. The shift is important. We move from fixed areas of mourning, which exist only in relation to one single place to an idol that seems sacrilegious and profane in comparison. Queequeg holds, moves, crafts, and totes his idol along with him. The "black" sculpted image stands in stark contrast to the "black" rimmed tablets of solitary grief. One of the symbols requires a strict adherence to place and form. Queequeg's idol allows room for flexibility—human crafting and negotiation.

Melville is creating an area of disruption to question polarities. As Queequeg whittles away at the idol in the Spouter Inn, Ishmael's prejudices begin to fade. He reasons that, "You cannot hide the soul"(55). Queequeg and his idol challenge Ishmael's understandings of sculpted forms and lofty bearings. It was Mapple that appeared lofty in the previous chapter, and yet he was completely isolated and apart from the people. His message was delivered without a chance for dialogue and he appears to exist as a type of caricature, stationed amidst and functioning only within the strict confines of the church's pulpit. Queequeg's lofty bearing comes with approachability and the ability to move in different circles of the world. That is a critical difference in Melville's imaginative world.

Ishmael's vision of Queequeg begins to deepen as he examines and relates his figure to the reader. "It may seem ridiculous, but it reminded me of George Washington's head, as seen in the popular busts of him. It had the same long regularly graded retreating slope from above the brows, which were likewise very projecting, like two promontories thickly wooded on top. Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed"(56). Connecting Washington with Queequeg is a major and important step in Melville's developing monumental vision.

The cannibalistically-developed Washington in Queequeg played off of the fact-finding readers of travel narratives. On a first read, the reader is given the description that seems to be a literary joke by the comic narration of Ishmael, which merely attempts to show how grand Queequeg appeared to him. But Queequeg has been shown peddling heads in the marketplace, has been depicted as being ferociously tattooed, and has an accumulation of wild idols and superstitious practices. His physical description and social practices contradict the mind's eye vision of what a noble figure should resemble and how that figure should act in society.

Melville has set up a unique comparison, which asks the reader to ponder difficult questions. If Queequeg is just as heroically molded as Washington, then what separates human beings from being cast in heroic form in stones and print? Why should the democratic spirit of America be translated through the vision of one man's form?

Busts and sculptures of Washington were being crafted throughout the country and being placed in places of high importance in cities like Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and New York. Washington was created as a type of national myth; he was a figure of incredible importance to early America, for he brought a sense of unity and order to the

nation. His frequent appearances in painting, sculpture, verse, narrative, religious sermons, oratory, fiction, drama, and biography are unprecedented. Washington became a saint-like founder of truth, justice, and authority. He was unquestionably a personification of all that was good and beautiful in America's fight to gain independence.

Melville's allusion to Washington is fascinating, for by linking Queequeg with Washington, he was opening up the text to severe criticism by literary nationalists. How could a Pacific islander resemble the noble poses of our great national leader? Melville's questioning of who gets placed in positions of authority, of who deserves the respect and worship of people, is vital for the novel's development. Melville has placed the cultural "Other" as being worthy of heroic contemplation; he placed Queequeg on the same par with a national hero, who had seemingly united the nation and secured our national freedom, on the battlefield as well as in the political arena.

Melville subverts public opinion in this quick comparison. *Moby-Dick* will demonstrate that Queequeg is worthy of being cast and honored for his duties. What might have appear as a joke at the onset of the novel becomes an important basis for investigation. The American public's insatiable desire to relegate certain cultures to the

margins of national memory and commemoration was being debated openly by Melville.

Melville's skepticism with the American monumental tradition reaches a high point in the Queequeg/Washington debate. Different cultures and races were builders of America as a nation; a reader can merely glance over the chapters of *Moby-Dick* in order to see Melville's celebration of the conglomeration of different nationalities, races, and cultures that must combine to make America's mission successful in the world. The two chapters of "Knights and Squires" may display a sense of hierarchy on the ship, but it is "Midnight, Forecastle" which gives a more complete picture of how the ship is structured. This chapter allows readers to see the incredibly diverse set of voices operating on the decks of the ship. The tension between masters and workers is displayed, and Ishmael's narration allows all to fill the space of the page. As readers, we are gradually called into questioning leaders and followers. Melville uses the allusion to sculpted forms to highlight the question of what constitutes the backbone of America as a nation.

The monumental tradition in America suggests that there are individuals, whose experience makes them extraordinary. Their examples shine as models for all the

common people to see. Ishmael's analogies and thoughts on this subject call the time-honored practices of monumental figuring into question. The noblest figure throughout the book is someone who will never have a statue cast for his achievements in America. Queequeg, the Pacific island prince, appears at each turn of the story to be the monumental figure, tackling the prejudices and ineptitude of others in "Wheelbarrow," demonstrating his vast skills in the open market in "His Mark," and deepening the readers' sense of religion in "The Ramadan." On several levels, Queequeg's character demonstrates vital components of heroic virtue. He is an unfailing friend, skilled harpooner, noble prince, tolerant religious worshipper, and even a skilled craftsman.

And yet, every reader realizes that there are severe limitations to Queequeg's ascendancy as hero in the novel. He can only rise so high before he is brought back to earth. Queequeg himself seems to realize his own demise in the narrative: "So with poor Queequeg, who, as harpooneer, must not only face all the rage of the living whale, but—as we have elsewhere seen—mount his dead back in a rolling sea; and finally descend into the gloom of the hold..." (519-520). Queequeg's battle against the whale, the overarching symbol of the entire narrative, is "mounted." Ishmael's

language here turns back to monumental figuring, for throughout the novel, Queequeg has been battling a symbolic battle against the forces around him. The mounting is the ascendancy of his heroic figure against the whale and the rolling sea.

In "Queequeg in His Coffin," Queequeg commissions the building of his final resting place; it is a coffin that will be ornamented by the character's own hand. "Many spare hours he spent, in carving the lid with all manner of grotesque figures and drawings; and it seemed that hereby he was striving, in his rude way, to copy parts of the twisted tattooing on his body" (524). It does not seem an accident that Queequeg is carving and painting figures from his own body on the final, lasting symbol of the narrative. After all, it was Queequeg's body that caught the attention of the narrator, and it would be the symbolic body of Queequeg, which will provide the art for Ishmael to rest upon.

The mysteries of Queequeg's coffin are of vast importance for Melville's ekphrastic vision. We can merely speculate at the wild carvings and symbols that get translated on to the coffin. And yet we are drawn back to a symbol that opened the narrative. Ishmael's dark, depressed stopping at coffin warehouses will take on a new meaning.

The dark symbol of the utilitarian coffin in the opening chapter that seems tied to an industrial line of the process of death, decay, and consumption back into nature, has been transformed into a work of sculpture.

And this tattooing, had been the work of a departed prophet and seer of his island, who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth; so that Queequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them; and these mysteries were therefore destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last(524).

The link between writing and sculpture is developed fully and imaginatively in this passage. Queequeg cannot interpret the markings on his body, his theory of knowledge to the world. He brings out his significance ekphrastically through the sculpting of the coffin. As readers we speculate on the image of the coffin—its features and the skill of Queequeg's hand as carver. But we realize that having a mind's eye picture is crucial for the theories that the art work contains to come alive. Visual depiction is impossible, for we are told that the coffin, much like the body of Queequeg will be consumed eventually back into nature. It is only through the vehicle of Ishmael's

narrative, which rests directly on top of this work of art, that the true message of the text can be revealed.

Queequeg's art-his body transformed into a sculpted work- is the key symbol for revealing the mysteries of the novel. The hope that Melville is balancing his novel on is that readers will move past their desire for literal depiction and into the world of uncertainty. The metanarrative point is that Queequeg's crafting is something that will not last forever. Melville was aiming to focus on something unlike a towering monument to individual achievement. Ishmael's development as narrator is gauged by his incorporation of symbolic thought; he is able to transform the mundane things of life and death into symbols for reinterpretation. Ishmael's realization is that true art was fleeting and fluid and not static and unmoving.

Queequeg's coffin, which survives the vortex of the Pequod is the perfect ekphrastic symbol of *Moby-Dick* because it is everything that a stone monument is not. By moving and by showing a comprehensive, albeit undecipherable mystery, it provides the fullest statement on Melville's aesthetic genius. Whereas the monument rises from the ground, never moves, and stands as a symbol of power over the environment surrounding it, Queequeg's

memorial will only be temporary. It will only survive if readers see the hope that the symbol provides for the novel, for the country that the story originated from, and for humanity in general.

The hieroglyphic marks on the coffin suggest that Melville's monumental tradition does not encompass or conquer the world. Queequeg's theory of the heavens and the earth remains to be read or understood, but yet it leaves the hope and possibility for new fields of inquiry, a constant moving process that would be keys for the expansion of America. With different races, cultures, and ideas flowing into America's shores, this conglomeration and openness to symbols from all over the world was a central aspect of Melville's artistic vision.

Of course, standing in stark opposition to Queequeg's monumental casting is the figure of the "grand, ungodly, god-like man, Captain Ahab" (88). Ahab's physical description is told through sculptural allusions:

He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness. His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus. (134).

Ahab is a sculpted form. The high broad form makes him resemble a bronze monument that has been cut and will be

perched high atop all it surveys. The form is "unalterable" because it fits well with Ahab's monomaniacal personality. His vision is straightforward and utterly set, just as a piece of statue's eye-like glance looks forward until eternity, or until its features break down in nature.

The reference to Cellini's Perseus is intriguing, for it is a dramatic classical form of the human body. The link is made between myth and sculpture. And yet, directly following this analogy, which could be drawn distinctly in the mind's eye of readers, is an undercutting:

Threading its way out from the among his grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish. It resembled that perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight, lofty trunk of a great tree, when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it, and without wrenching a single twig, peels and grooves out the bark from top to bottom, ere running into the soil, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded. Whether that mark was born with him, or whether it was the scar left by some desperate wound, no one could certainly say. (134)

This passage is crucial for Ahab's ekphrastic depiction. Ahab becomes a piece of broken sculpture. The fissure comes from its top and runs down the side of his frame. Like all pieces of art, there is the possibility for destruction and for being consumed back into nature. The reference to the great tree blasted by lightning, which runs into the soil

displays the fate of all art works. Over time, all things can break and become drawn back into nature.

Ahab's scar, and of course, his whalebone leg make him unable to stand on his own two feet. As a piece of art, he is dangerously close to collapse.

Ahab's ship, the *Pequod*, also seems to bear some similarity to its captain. "She was apparelled like any barbaric Ethiopian emperor, his neck heavy with pendants of polished ivory. She was a thing of trophies. A cannibal of a craft, tricking herself forth in the chased bones of her enemies" (78). Ahab's ability to stand, both physically and metaphorically, derives from the bones of whales, his prey. He wishes to destroy something that he, in fact, has to rely upon. That refers to both ship and self. A comparative glance between the man and the ship displays the drastic problem between Ahab's personal vendetta and its merging with the purposes of the *Pequod*. Elizabeth A. Schultz writes convincingly that "Through Ahab's physical scars-the leg of whalebone and the brand of livid white-as well as through the wrinkles on his brow reflecting the navigational markings on his charts and his awareness of 'both chasing and being chased to his deadly end,' Melville spells out the correlation between Ahab's subjective vision and his objective goals" (146). The tension between these

seemingly incompatible visions is what leads the Pequod to its end.

Ahab's cracked form, his inability to maintain the statuesque perfection of form in the public eye degrades his leadership and lofty position above the members of his ship. If Ahab was forced to stand upon something that was a common ship decoration, then he was pushed to acknowledge not only his personal imperfection, but also his reliance on those around him, who shared a common goal in whaling.

Throughout Melville's depiction of Ahab, we see glimpses of tension between Ahab's determination and statue-like vision and Ishmael's dream-filled wonderment. A particularly powerful example of this occurs in "The Pacific." At the opening of the chapter, Ishmael begins with a meditation on loss and memory.

There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath; like those fabled undulations of the Ephesian sod over the buried Evangelist St. John. And meet it is, that over these sea-pastures, wide-rolling watery praires and Potters' Fields of all four continents, the waves should rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly; for here, millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, still; tossing like slumberers in their beds; the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness (525).

The beauty of Ishmael's language and thoughts stand in stark contrast to the iron-will of Ahab's demonic quest.

What is haunting about the passage is that it calls to mind all of those lost on the high seas—all people from all around the world have been consumed back into the sea. Ishmael sees nature rolling along with the dreamers and sleepers beneath the waves. No graves, no memorials call the viewer to be mindful; Ishmael's dream-like prose calls the reader into a greater, deeper sense of remembrance. The pantheistic quality of the description breaks down borders, limitations, and forms in order to sense the greater mystery lurking in all things and beings. This passage stands as an interesting counterpoint to the memorials of the Whaleman's Chapel. It appears that Ishmael has found harmony by being swept along with the thoughts of natural harmony and pantheistic memorials.

Ishmael's vision comes first in this chapter, but it is followed by a vision of Ahab. "But few thoughts of Pan stirred Ahab's brain, as standing like an iron statue at his accustomed place beside the mizzen rigging.." (526). The brilliant contrast shows Melville's unique melding of opposites in his ekphrastic work. There is no mention of memorial or art in Ishmael's wandering mind. The viewer sees a blank picture of the Pacific waters, which Ishmael moves us to contemplate as perhaps the most fitting memorial available to man. This depiction is followed by

the vision of the firm Ahab. He is the firm, yet perhaps cracked statue that drives forward all costs. It is a definitive analogy—made explicitly to a classical statue by Cellini. The contrast is clear; in one vision, the reader's mind is an absolute necessity to make it come to life. In the vision of Ahab, the parameters of the picture, much like the course of the character's will, are iron set. We simply wait for its collapse, unable to mend the broken fragment.

The beauty of "The Pacific" is followed by the reality of "The Blacksmith." The irony of Ahab is that he never realizes how much he relies on others in the journey. Two men, in particular, "make" Ahab during the course of the novel: the blacksmith and the carpenter. Two working men craft him diligently throughout the journey, for a particular purpose. Melville's design was to carefully show just how Ahab relies on the work of others. Instead of the picture of the towering sculpted figure rising above the mass of men aboard the ship, Ahab consistently relies upon the hard work of men to literally keep his fragmented pieces together.

At odds here is not only a sense of Ahab's isolation and superiority from the crew, but also the production of art itself. Ahab's mythic, classical form is not cast and

developed by one masterful artist, who creates him as a Prometheus. Ahab is forged by a hard-working blacksmith and careful carpenter.

In "The Blacksmith," the reader learns that one of Ahab's principal sculptors is concerned with several different layers of production on the ship. He takes orders for harpoons, lances, boat-spades, and furniture. He toils with "...a patient hammer wielded by a patient arm" (527). Perth is a common man, whose story is one of loss. Like many popular stories from the time, Perth has fought a battle with temperance. "He had been an artisan of famed excellence..", but his drinking and eventual financial collapse has led him to find refuge at sea. The fascinating part about the blacksmith is that he seems to possess a woe that rivals the captain. He plods on and performs his duties. Ishmael's narrative at the end of the chapter celebrates the common man, by having mermaids sing to him: "'Come hither! put up *thy* grave-stone, too, within the churchyard, and come hither, till we marry thee'" (529). The narrator's words foreshadow the death of the carpenter, but they openly celebrate the man to cast his own imaginative gravestone. The emphasis placed on the word *thy* shows another instance of Ishmael celebrating the achievements of

workers, artisans, and those generally considered beneath the collective memory of the nation.

Another character that Ishmael uses to undercut Ahab is the carpenter. Like the blacksmith, the carpenter commands attention in the narrative, even though he appears to be a mere worker in the ship's production chain. Ishmael's figuring of the character is noteworthy: "But from the same point, take mankind in mass, and for the most part, they seem a mob of unnecessary duplicates, both contemporary and hereditary. But most humble though he was, and far from furnishing an example of the high, humane abstraction; the Pequod's carpenter was no duplicate; hence, he now comes in person on this stage"(508).

The carpenter is an original, even though he performs standard duties of repairing, reforming, and inserting objects for the ship. Among his common places duties, of course, is the "re-forming" of Captain Ahab. Ishmael's narration leads the reader into reexamining Ahab's monumental stature because of the importance he places on Ahab's craftsmen. Like Ishmael, the carpenter is a wanderer, "...a stript abstract; an unfractioned integral; uncompromised as a new-born babe; living without premeditated reference to this world or the next"(510). It is the indefinite quality of the character that makes him

so interesting. Ishmael's celebration of characters focuses on indeterminate qualities. Quite unlike the rigidly formed Ahab, the carpenter seems to be both a democratic hero and an ungraspable image of a collective humanity.

In "Ahab and the Carpenter," the comic exchanges between the two characters show the tension between Ahab's idealized, aggrandized vision of his own form, and the carpenter's puzzled, and yet more practical, sensibility of craft. Ahab terms the carpenter a "manmaker," and he muses that Promethean qualities are at work in his leg's construction and proper fitting. He is buttressing his failed image with a mythic undercurrent. The speech that Ahab gives is comical:

Hold; while Prometheus is about it, I'll order a complete man after a desirable pattern. Imprimis, fifty feet high in his socks; then, chest modelled after the Thames Tunnel; then legs with roots to 'em, to stay in one place; then, arms three feet through the wrist; no heart at all, brass forehead, and about a quarter of an acre of fine brains; and let me see shall I order eyes to see outwards? No, but put a sky light on top of his head to illuminate inwards. There, take the order, and away. (512)

The description of the figure is Ahab in monumental form. He gives the strange order for a being that does not have eyes to see, only a light on top of its head to display its inner-workings. The description is not a far cry from many modern dictators' commissioning large images in their

likenesses to be placed in positions of command for all their subjects to see.

The response from the carpenter is extremely funny. "Now, what's he speaking about, and who's he speaking to, I should like to know? Shall I keep standing here?" (512). The carpenter's practical response ignores the fantasy-like creation of the towering figure. He masterfully plays off of Ahab's absurdity. Shining the lantern into Ahab's face also disrupts his metaphorical flourish. In each instance, the carpenter brings the lofty meanings of Ahab to earth—a recasting, perhaps, of Ahab lacking the low enjoying power. Ahab's references to casting in clay are turned around by the carpenter's idea that clay is left for ditchers.

The sneezes that periodically occur during the chapter also bring human work into Ahab's self-conception. Once again, the god-like self-image that Ahab constructs in his mind is being subjected to the worker's nose. Instead of cowering and dimming his personality to Ahab's whims and desires, the carpenter throws a comic light on Ahab's madness. In a strange sense, the bungling and questioning of the carpenter, as it is told through dramatic staging, suggests that Ahab is a fool. Ahab's final response before exiting is meaningful:

Bungle away at it then, and bring it to me. Oh, Life! Here I am, proud as a Greek god, and yet standing debtor to this blockhead for a bone to stand on! Cursed be that mortal inter-indebtedness which will not do away with ledgers. I would be free as air; and I'm down in the world's books. I am so rich, I could have given bid for bid with the wealthiest Praetorians at the auction of the Roman empire (which was the world's); and yet I owe for the flesh in the tongue I brag with. By heavens! I'll get a crucible, and into it, and dissolve myself down to one small, compendious vertebra. So. (514).

The key to this chapter is that it dismantles-dismasts Ahab's monumental rhetoric and ascendancy to a lofty symbolic status. Simply put, the carpenter throws a practical workmanlike side to Ahab's built, constructed inflation of his self-indulgent status. The carpenter is just doing another job by putting together Ahab's new leg. For Ahab, he envisions the project as just another example to buttress his own symbolic self as the central towering monumental example of leader. Like statues meant to buttress a single nationalistic agenda, Ahab pushes his own emblematic figure to the forefront of the text.

The carpenter resumes his work and goes on, which is exactly the critical, hopeful message of the entire text. Ishmael dreams on and rescues his own freedom from Ahab's monumental mission. The carpenter simply places Ahab's recasting and refiguring of his body into a practical task, which has no real connection to the work of the ship. The

chapter "Ahab and the Carpenter" is comical for the readers, but it is clearly a humiliating one for Ahab, for his aggrandized sense of himself as the mythic, monumental leader of the crew has been subverted. This chapter shows a clear example of Ahab being unmanned, which has been explored richly by David Leverenz and Neal Tolchin. The very telling words of Ahab come at the end of his speech. He thinks about dissolving himself in a crucible, melting his sculpted figure down into one small, human-like part. He leaves the scene with the ambiguous word, "So," which leaves the entire chapter with a sense of loss and incompleteness. The carpenter has the last word, and he continues to work, seemingly oblivious to Ahab's weighted words.

In a subtle way, Melville has undermined the foundations used to justify the promotion of monumental figures cast in large form throughout the country. Ahab thinks of his form in grand scale; he sees himself constructed for the world to see. And yet, the carpenter brings his ambitions back to earth. Ahab can only be constructed or brought to life by artisans, the blacksmith and the carpenter, who both appear to be common American men.

These characters are important, for they add a great deal to the novel's monumental imagery. The blacksmith appears to be a stock character of the dark novels of American popular culture; the carpenter seems to be a comic, non-descript character, oddly resembling one of Shakespeare's comic figures. Naturally, these comic figures, through their very practical responses to heroic aspirations, bring a better, more complete sense of the human condition. Their human-like foibles bring about a greater message of the totality of life.

Melville's point in these character descriptions shows that Ahab needs these men in order to be the constructed over-arching symbol of power. Ahab's realization of his indebtedness to common men angers him, but it is unavoidable. The genius of Melville's narrative is the bridge between the readers and Ishmael's narration. If men such as Ahab were constructed as god-like towers of man's powers and rights to rule over others, it was the readers' duty to recognize and understand that the people have the right and authority to build and also dismantle those deemed worthy of monumentalization. Ishmael's narrative undercuts Ahab's statue-like self-conception and recasts it in the minds and words of wanderers, workers, and readers.

It is not surprising to see Ahab's inflated sense of his monumental figure be subtly ridiculed, for Ishmael's narration has given the reader ample evidence for such an undercutting. "The Mast-Head" explores the vast history of standing the masthead. Ishmael begins by noting the history, speculating that the Egyptians were the first standers of the masthead. In each instance, Ishmael is calling the reader's attention to the idea that attempts to gain lofty perspectives seem to go back far into time. The link between the masthead sailors and standing on pillars throughout the course of time is a very interesting narrative development. In certain cases, such as Saint Stylites, people built pillars and dwelt upon them, perhaps to signify a departure from earthly concerns. In other instances, pillars were built by the people of Babel in order to test their power against God's wrath. The Egyptians, it is speculated by Ishmael, built pyramids and towers for astronomical purposes. These historical instances of towers and masts seem to display man's innate desire to appeal to powers above and perhaps even to push the limitations of human ingenuity.

Ishmael turns his attention to modern instances of masthead standers as the chapter progresses. This is a crucial point in the narrative with concern to

monumentality, for Ishmael exposes the artificiality of sculpted figures.

Of modern standers-of-mast-heads we have but a lifeless set; mere stone, iron, and bronze men; who, though well capable of facing out a stiff gale, are still entirely incompetent to the business of singing out upon discovering any strange sight. (168)

These lifeless men are statues, made from various materials, which stand high above the people. The chapter's focus on sculpting leaders exposes the flaws of Ahab. As Elizabeth A. Schultz also noted, "Often constructed as the evil at the center of *Moby-Dick*, Ahab is connected with metals throughout the novel. For example, Melville refers to his iron way, his steel skull, and his 'his whole broad form...made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould'" (143). In Ishmael's words, Ahab is another lifeless statue perched atop the mast.

"The Mast-Head" further explores the connection to Melville's world with its references to political figures. Ishmael is setting up a fascinating ekphrastic parallel within the chapter. At the start of the chapter, Ishmael delves into statues and monuments that could be viewed by readers. He makes allusions to important pieces in Europe and the United States, and he frames these sites as lifeless and far removed from the world that they spoke to and speak for:

There is Napoleon; who upon the top of the column of Vendome, stands with arms folded, some one hundred and fifty feet in the air; careless, now, who rules the decks below...Great Washington, too, stands high aloft on his towering main-mast in Baltimore, and like one of Hercules' pillars, his column marks that point of human grandeur beyond which few mortals will go. Admiral Nelson, also, on a capstan of gun-metal, stands his mast-head in Trafalgar Square; and even when most obscured by that London smoke, token is yet given that a hidden hero is there; for where there is smoke, must be fire. But neither great Washington, nor Napoleon, nor Nelson, will answer a single hail from below, however madly invoked to befriend by their counsels the distracted decks upon which they gaze; however, it may be surmised, that their spirits penetrate through the thick haze of the future, and descry what shoals and rocks must be shunned! (168).

Ishmael presents direct references to Washington, Napoleon, and Nelson in a reversion to ekphrastic fear. Like his extended description of Trafalgar in *Redburn*, Melville is turns his attention momentarily to realistic depiction that could be pictured in the mind's eye of the readers, only to create a more powerful effect. The entire passage, with its discussion of the monuments, leading viewers through the haze, removed and utterly isolated from the public at its feet is ironic. All the monuments dwarf the people they are supposed to reach. Instead of providing an inspiring message to their populations, these figures appear like grand gods and certainly not like human beings that could be emulated. Their very position, high above the

public squares, testifies to their incommunicability and aloofness.

These sculpted figures do not stretch people to extend their minds and imaginations. Melville is using ekphrasis here to emphasize the static qualities of citizenry that these types of monuments represent. Without an ability to actually see the monuments up close, how could the citizen be inspired? The artistic merits of the sculpture are presented as being other-worldly, and therefore almost impossible to reach or think critically about.

As "The Mast-Head" draws to a close, Ishmael provides a fascinating counterpoint to his discussion of monumental figures planted high above the people. Ishmael climbs the mast of the ship and admits that he keeps "but sorry guard" (171). The key distinction is that the mast-header on the ship must constantly keep his vision trained on what is ahead. Like the statue atop the column, the mast-header must always be searching the horizon for what is directly in front of the ship. Ishmael is exactly like the "many romantic, melancholy, and absent-minded young men, disgusted with the carking cares of earth, and seeking sentiment in tar and blubber" (172). Ishmael's concerns are with the open expanse of life, seeing the vast and limitless possibilities before him. He is a polar opposite

to the statues who seem not only fixed in their statue-like stance, but who also in life were firmly entrenched in the advancement of a single political agenda.

Ishmael's dreaming on the mast-head is the type of artistic reading that he was calling for his readers to follow with. Instead of a single determined focus on moving continually forward to the end, Ishmael underscores the importance of reexamining possibilities, digressing, and basically allowing oneself to be swept away in the dreams of the moment. As Ishmael muses when questioned about his tendency to drift away from the task of finding whales at hand:

Perhaps they were; or perhaps there might have been shoals of them in the far horizon; but lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves and thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some indiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it. (173)

The intense beauty of Ishmael's language in the chapter is linked to the quite formulaic appearance of the statues presented previously in the chapter. It is the indescribable nature of the scene that makes it so

enchanting for the reader. The scene allows ample room for the reader's imagination to capture its essence by picturing the narrator high above on the masthead, gazing out at the mysteries of the world. At its core, Ishmael's vision pushes the reader towards ekphrastic hope, in that he presents scenes for the reader to explore the reaches and depths of his/her imagination in creating the picture before him/her.

Ishmael's vision is carefully balanced with the suggestion that dreaming too much can have disastrous effects because the dreamer can lose footing and "slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror"(173). This final parting notion in the chapter reminds the reader that all images, symbols, and ideas must be gauged or else you run the risk of losing your place within the chain of the world. Ishmael's vision celebrates hope, but it never completely loses sight of indifference and fear.

"Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish" also raises the question of being fixed and static as opposed to be fluid and open. "I. A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it. II. A Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it"(433). Just as in the "The Mast-Head," this chapter gives credence to be fluid and open and never holding fast to a single mode of vision. Throughout the novel, we

realize that Ahab is a Fast-Fish, always attached to a single line of inquiry, while Ishmael is clearly the Loose-Fish, who is free to roam in and out of interpretations and speculations.

This chapter also brings back Melville's political unrest with sculpted forms, for the end drastically reconsiders nations and nation building: "What was America in 1492 but a Loose-Fish, in which Columbus struck the Spanish standard by way of waiving it for his royal mastr and mistress?...What at last will Mexico be to the United States? All Loose-Fish" (435). Melville has worked the United States into his questioning of being too stuck in a motionless stance. The Manifest Destiny policy, along with America's full-forward drive to monumentalize, to concretize a canon of unquestionable heroes is being called into question. "What are the Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World but Loose-Fish? What all men's minds and opinions but Loose-Fish? What is the principle of religious belief in them but a Loose-Fish?...What is the great globe itself but a Loose-Fish? And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?" (435).

Ishmael's discourse in this passage ends with the reader because the critical point of the narrative project is to get people to take their jobs as readers and viewers

seriously. Melville was asking his readers to see interpretation as a something crucial for building thinking citizens and not ones governed by a Fast-Fish in order to provide unwavering dedication or wholesale acceptance of a narrative or artistic agenda.

With Ishmael's overwhelming concern with the open independence of the mind in reading and viewing, it seems no accident that Ahab's focal point is something that defies his very reason for being. Many critics have focused on the fact that Ahab wished to break through to some greater, deeper form of understanding. A closer examination of whales throughout the novel may provide an innovative new explanation to Ahab's frenzied pursuit and its relation to monumentality.

For Ahab, the whale is a monumental symbol of everything that a leader attempts but simply cannot be. In "Moby Dick," we learn of Ahab's demonic quest:

The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east revered in their statue-devil;--Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. (200)

The transference of the idea from statue to whale is essential for understanding Ahab's mission. The whale is a moving statue—which people from all cultures sense as being monumental. It is always moving, and it seemingly always has people that stand in awe of its effortless power, majesty and beauty. Its monumental figure holds everything that Ahab cannot. Ahab believes that "All visible objects, man, are but pasteboard masks...If man will strike, strike through the mask!" (178). Ahab's task is completely impossible, for the whale is an elusive symbol that appears to exist on several levels of shifting signification.

However, throughout *Moby-Dick*, the reader watches Ishmael present the whale through numerous lenses. "The Advocate" seems to be a self-justification for the respectability of whaling, where Ishmael notes that the "whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard" (122). In "Cetology," the reader delves into natural science and numerous folios of evidence concerning the study of the whale. And in "The Honor and Glory of Whaling," Ishmael provides some of the mythic and historical narratives that involve whales. Throughout numerous chapters, Ishmael explores, thinks about, and rethinks the image of the whale.

During "The Whiteness of the Whale," Ishmael confesses "that I almost despair of putting it in a comprehensible form. It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me"(204). The indefinite quality of the whale is what fascinates Ishmael. Whereas Ahab only sees the object as something that can be torn down, broken through, Ishmael surmises that perhaps "by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe..."(212).

Ishmael's vision senses the painting of nature, the subtleties of colors that are laid upon the visible world. He foreshadows Ahab's demise, for Ahab and many others in "pondering all this, the palsied universe lies before us like a leper; and like wilful travellers in Lapland, who refuse to wear colored and coloring glasses upon their eyes, so the wretched infidel gazes himself blind at the monumental white shroud that wraps all the prospect around him"(212). Ahab never sees shades of meaning—he refuses to wear colored glasses like Ishmael. His only concern is getting to the bottom of "the monumental white shroud." In essence, Ahab wishes to destroy the white monument of his dreams and vision. The monumental whale, a symbol perhaps of universal or national powers, has disabled him and

proven to be much more powerful and indefinable than he can ever become.

In "The Sperm Whale's Head-Contrasted View," we are given a clue, which dismantles Ahab's designs. Whereas Ahab must continually look forward for his eyes are consistently set forward, the whale's eyes occupy a "peculiar sideway position" (360). The whale's vision allows him to see pictures on either side, and his eyes allow him to see a greater scope of the environment as opposed to man. "The whale, therefore, must see one distinct picture on this side, and another distinct picture on that side; while all between must be profound darkness and nothingness to him" (360). The speculation concerning what the whale actually sees is a direct contrast to the vision of human beings. It is a mystery that we can only guess upon. "This peculiarity of the whale's eyes is a thing to be borne in mind in the fishery; and to be remembered by the reader in some subsequent scenes" (360). Vision in the novel, in this world of fishery, is what is being called to the mind of the reader. Thinking about dual pictures and seeing a greater scope of space around you counteracts the limited visionary scope of staring directly ahead and only considering that which is directly before you.

Ishmael's depiction of whales seeks to dismantle all firm, static visions. In "Of the Monstrous Pictures of Whales," Ishmael destroys the notion of standing firm in any type of pictorial or sculptural presentation. "I shall ere long paint to you as well as one can without canvas, something like the true form of the whale.." (285). In this chapter, Ishmael paints with words; his ekphrastic project demonstrates that imagination is imperative in order to create a vision in the mind's eye of the reader. "It is time to set the world right in this matter, by proving such pictures of the whale all wrong" (285). Sculptural images of whales deceive and create delusions throughout the chapter. It is by the whale's elusiveness that it becomes a desirable object to be crafted. Throughout the chapter, Ishmael catalogs different sculptural images of the whale dating back to Hindoo, Egyptian, and Greek marble panellings, pedestals, shields, medallions, cups, and coins. The critical point that Ishmael raises is the mistakes in representation. Human craft can never be exact when attempting to depict the whale realistically. The attempt to capture the essence by creating the form of the whale dates far back in time, but the quest is always futile.

The metanarrative point being raised relates back to sitting still. In order for any type of sculpted image to be done about the whale, it must stay still in order to be sculpted. Melville is positing that his book, just like the whale, is always in the process of moving on.

For all these reasons, then, any way you may look at it, you must needs conclude that the great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last. True, one portrait may hit the mark much nearer than another, but none can hit it with any very considerable degree of exactness. So there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like. And the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a whaling yourself; but by so doing, you run no small risk of being eternally stove and sunk by him. Wherefore, it seems to me you had best not be too fastidious in your curiosity touching this Leviathan (289).

This passage displays the genius of Melville's ekphrastic work in the book. The author dismantled the reliance on realistic pictures and the fear in not living up to the accuracy of the thing depicted. Ishmael casts this aside. The moving object, the whale, remains the symbol that is unpainted to the last, for no one can fully, once and for all, capture its likeness. The call to the whaler to voyage is a metanarrative call for the reader to voyage through the book on his/her own. Exactness and precision, the tools of the sculptor, are cast off for the hope of indeterminacy.

It seems no accident that a proceeding chapter, "Of Whales in Paint; in Teeth; in Wood; in Sheet-Iron; in Stone; in Mountains; in Stars" would follow because this is the essence of the novel. Melville's ekphrastic work calls the reader to see the symbol of the whale as one that can exist on several different levels of signification and through several different mediums. The sculpted image of the whale provides the most profound counterpoint to the American monumental tradition and to fixed readings in general. In this chapter, which suggests that the image of the whale exists comfortably not only in human tools for artistic creation, but also in nature and the stars, we see a beautiful call for deeper reading, reinterpretation, and perhaps recreation.

Melville's call for careful readers to see the push in *Moby-Dick* for something beyond realism and frozen imagery has been captured by numerous painters, sculptors, and writers, who have been inspired by the message of Melville's ekphrasis. Elizabeth Schultz charts the tremendously divergent reinterpretations of the novel in different media. But it is Frank Stella's "Moby-Dick" series that can most clearly be seen as a testament to the fullness of Melville's monumental imagination. In his series, Stella crafted sculptures for each of Melville's

chapters, which seem to defy easy classification and interpretation. Robert K. Wallace's book-length study on the series testifies to its grand scope and ambition. What is clear is that Stella listened to the call of Melville. When asked by Wallace about *Moby-Dick*, Stella stated that he admired Melville for his ability "to see and to think at the same time. When you read that book, the sensations, the physical sensations are strong, at least for me. At the same time, it's a very cerebral book, it's very heady, and it's very clever. It's clever without losing the physicality"(Quoted in Wallace 12-13). Stella alludes not only to the strength of Melville's words to create shapes within the reader's mind, but also Melville's ability to act like the whale-eyes that see and also think. Stella's project was "to try to get the spirit of the whole adventure. The real issue for me is not the detail, but the momentum, to make the imagery flow...I'm capable of working more in a trance, of trying to get the spirit, and then hope for the best"(Stella, Quoted in Wallace 13). Stella's words speak of spirit and hope, seemingly the keys to Melville's ekphrastic project. In artistic terms, Melville's words did their duty; in Stella's case, as in many other thinkers, writers, and artists, the words, shapes, and images brought the reader into the process of

reinterpreting the book, dragging them off to sea and away from the stasis of the land.

Melville's monumental imagination reaches its fullest potential in *Moby-Dick* precisely because it defied easy classification. All of the various sculpted images in the text challenge the reader to stop thinking in literal terms and ask us to question the nature of great art. Melville's words have inspired a whole generation of people because of their indefiniteness and fluidity. Through Ishmael's ambiguities and probing, the reader is asked to think about art in terms of subjectivity, abstraction, and mystery. It is no wonder that the reading public's rejection of the book's messages led Melville to react fiercely. With *Pierre* and *Israel Potter*, Melville would pull far away from the ekphrastic hope of *Moby-Dick*, and his words would fatalistically submit to broken fragments and forgotten heroes encased in futile towering monuments.

CHAPTER 5: *Pierre* and *Israel Potter*: Fragments and
Forgotten Heroes in Stone and Print

The failure of *Moby-Dick* to gain literary fame and prestige for Melville was followed by a deliberate change in direction and an assault on popular literary forms. This drastic shift can be charted in Melville's ekphrastic use of monumental and memorial figures. Instead of the epic quality and sweep of *Moby-Dick*, Melville turned to two popular literary genres and attempted to subvert their intentions through sculpted imagery. *Pierre* represents a memorial to failed aspirations and dreams, while *Israel Potter* stands as a failed biographical monument to individual and nationalistic success.

In *Pierre*, Melville first turned his attention to the sentimental domestic romance and directed it into a nightmare city mystery of incest and death. While in *Israel Potter*, the author focused on biography and attempted to subvert the idea that anything definitive can be gained by reading so-called truthful lives. In both of these novels, Melville carefully used sculpted forms to critique the reading public and its inability to read between the lines.

Both *Pierre* and *Israel Potter* begin with noteworthy dedications. Carolyn Karcher concurs, stating "Setting the tone of both novels are florid dedications that mock the

nostalgia for royalty shown by the heirs of the American Revolution and insinuate that the Revolution's egalitarian ideals do not really animate the nations"(93). *Pierre* is dedicated to "The Most Excellent Purple Majesty of Greylock." Dedicating the book to a mountain is both sad and noteworthy if we consider the dedication in terms of ekphrasis. The mountain is a towering majestic symbol of nature, more particularly to the nature of Melville's Berkshire home. Greylock stands directly in the line of vision from Melville's Arrowhead home. Instead of a celebration, the dedication submits the novel to the foot of nature. "But since the majestic mountain, Greylock—my own more immediate sovereign lord and king—hath now, for innumerable ages, been the one grand dedicatee of the earliest rays of all the Berkshire mornings, I know not how his Imperial Purple Majesty (royal born:Porphyrogenitus) will receive the dedication of my own poor solitary ray"(3).

Melville's words display his submission to powers beyond himself—not only to nature, but to the local reading public as well. In this opening of the novel, Melville leaves the novel to be consumed back into the natural environment. Like statues that get consumed back to the earth, Melville's novel anticipates its own fate.

Israel Potter, quite ironically, is dedicated to "To His Highness, The Bunker Hill Monument." The irony embedded is clear. Melville's project in *Israel Potter* is to question the focuses of biography in general but also to provide a biting critique of monumental casting. Potter's tale is recovered from a "sleazy gray paper" edition found among the rag-pickers. The Bunker Hill Monument is related to be "...somewhat prematurely gray" (viii). Melville connects page and stone as both being gray. His project is "...something in the light of a dilapidated old tombstone retouched" (vii). America's cultural amnesia by disregarding stone and print is brought to the surface by Melville. He ironically brings an entire novel to print, which outright questions the validity and truthfulness of monumentality. Gray suggests that the novel, perhaps like the monument, is a blending of white and black. It seems ambiguous for it leaves the reader to see the book and the monument in different shades of meaning and not in clearly definable terms.

The opening pages of *Pierre* mock the popular genre of the sentimental romance. The flowery prose and stilted actions of the characters makes reading difficult, for a purpose. The fate of Pierre Glendinning seems predestined

from the onset, if we carefully weigh through the excesses of language in order to examine the statuary allusions.

Pierre takes deep pride in his family's history and their rightful place as heirs to the edenic American countryside of Saddle Meadows. Melville casts Pierre ironically from the beginning. "It had been his choice fate to have been born and nurtured in the country, surrounded by scenery whose uncommon loveliness was the perfect mould of a delicate and poetic mind..."(9). The ironic link between sculptural molding and the physical disintegration of matter is made early.

Sculptural terminology in the novel highlights Pierre's limitations. His mind has been molded by stories of an exalted past and inclinations that he is to assume his rightful place in a storied progression of future greatness. And yet, throughout the story, the reader is given clues that dismantle the title character's hopes and desires. His destiny appears to mould, to be drawn back into the earth.

Early in the novel, Pierre sees himself and his family in terms of clearly defined sculpted representation. His mother is a "pedastalled" figure. His father is pictured in an imaginary shrine in Pierre's dream world. A. Carl Bredahl, Jr. notes that "Pierre idolizes-and knows only-

beauty and health. He stands upon a 'noble pedestal' from which he gazes in rapture at his background, his sweetheart Lucy, and his mother. Each is in turn pedestaled and revered by the romantic Pierre" (40). Melville uses Pierre as a personification of a poor and unstable romantic reader, who cannot see that their idealized and stable, sentimental visions can crumble quickly to the ground, if those images and situations are not read carefully and prudently.

Throughout Book I, Pierre yearns for a sister to display his chivalric qualities. In essence, having a sister would allow him to recreate in his mind the storied past of his Revolutionary ancestors. Pierre sees himself as the male heir to glory and honor:

A powerful and populous family had by degrees run off into the female branches; so that Pierre found himself surrounded by numerous kinsmen and kinswomen, yet companioned by no surnamed Glendinning, but the duplicate one reflected to him in the mirror. But in his more wonted natural mood, this thought was not wholly sad to him. Nay, sometimes it mounted into an exultant swell. For in the ruddiness, and flushfulness, and vaingloriousness of his youthful soul, he fondly hoped to have the monopoly of glory in capping the fame-column, whose tall shaft had been erected by his noble sires (12).

This passage gives several hints into Pierre's quest for family distinction. Pierre's desire is to ascend the column that his family has erected in history. Strangely, the

imagery presented seems to coincide with the sculpted shaft columns that had become so prevalent for heroes in numerous American city squares. The push for fame, for rising to the top of the column suggests not only the vanity of Pierre, but it also foreshadows his doom. This was clearly not the first time that Melville had made reference to columns, with silent, solitary figures perched upon them. "The Mast-Head" chapter of *Moby-Dick* had referenced this as well.

By attempting to ascend some type of imaginary column, Pierre will isolate himself from reality. His goals and desires will lose touch with all forms of life. It is no accident that Melville's narrative voice quickly dismantles his hopes.

In all this, how unadmonished was our Pierre by that foreboding and prophetic lesson taught, not less by Palmyra's quarries, than by Palmyra's ruins. Among those ruins is a crumbling, uncompleted shaft, and some leagues off, ages ago left in the quarry, is the crumbling corresponding capital, also incomplete. These Time seized and spoiled; these Time crushed in the egg; and the proud stone that should have stood among the clouds, Time left abased beneath the soil. Oh, what quenchless feud is this, that Time hath with the sons of Men! (12-13).

The narrative voice immediately brings Pierre's designs back to earth. Metaphorically, Pierre wishes to be the capital that caps off his family's fame-column. The anonymous narrator points out that not only is his family's

column in tatters but that the capital is incomplete. Pierre is not a whole; he functions more as a fragment. The title character desires to stand among the clouds, but his journey will drive him directly into the earth. Peter J. Bellis agrees, noting: "It is Time, and its destructive, fragmenting power, that has been excluded from Pierre's enclosed 'marbleized' world" (*No Mysteries* 71).

Pierre's demise is foreshadowed throughout the opening scenes in Saddle Meadows through discussions of nature and statuary. America's belief in the sublime through the freshly verdant qualities of its landscape is called into question, for a variety of reasons. Samuel Otter notes that "The American land is represented not as the site of historical struggle between competing interests, not as the arena in which entire populations were displaced and enslaved, but as an Eden paradoxically urging its own manipulation and destruction" ("Landscape and Ideology" 57). Otter situates the American landscape in *Pierre* and the Hudson River school painters as a place of harmony and peace, which was a free space for thinkers and artists to create anew. In essence, the "Landscape is cleared of historical 'associations' and prepared for future inscriptions..." (Otter, "Landscape and Ideology" 61). The lurking problem is that Pierre is being framed within the

novel as a character that is always weighed down by historical associations and cannot possibly write his way into the landscape.

Pierre is a long, drawn-out spectacle of pushing its lead character off of his imaginary fame-column. "Now Pierre stands on this noble pedestal; we shall see if he keeps that fine footing; we shall see if Fate hath not just a little bit of a small word or two to say in this world"(17). Melville is acting devilishly here, for he controls the fate of the character and appears to relish a created imaginary world, where he can systematically drag a lofty-minded character down from atop his precarious perch.

The very name "Pierre" is a French variation of Peter, which has been used previously by Melville. In *Typee*, Pedro was consumed by the crew of the Dolly. Peter Coffin intervened between Queequeg and Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*. Now, the final variation of Peter seems to act as the ultimate subversion of the rock, upon which Christ built his church. Pierre represents the foppish appearance of sophistication and elegance. Throughout the novel, he becomes the embodiment of subversion; his name signals the very shaky grounds of equating names with foundations. The narrator reinforces this by stating, "It is nonsense to talk of France as the seat of all civility...The Americans, and not

the French, are the world's models of chivalry" (32). Pierre's character evidently will be undercut; he will serve as the central ambiguous figure in Melville's monumental imagination. Pierre's name and nationality combine to show the tension embedded at the very core of his character. He is the ironic embodiment of a questing figure, attempting to find his monumental foundation in the world.

The undercutting of Pierre is seen most drastically in the florid conversations that the character engages in throughout the novel. Perhaps the difficulty with the conception of Pierre's place atop the column has to do with the style of the novel that was being constructed. As a sentimental romance, *Pierre* oversteps its boundaries. It is too false of a world to be taken seriously. Melville perhaps was railing against the popularity of domestic, sentimental fiction. Gilliam Brown argues that we may recognize "...*Pierre* as a keynote address to the program of literary individualism and as a key text in the development of the domestic hostility that has so long characterized American foundations of the literary" (137). Brown's reading is noteworthy, but it does not adequately address the self-destructive nature of the entire scope of the text. *Pierre* reacts against the popular conventions of the domestic

romance, but it also annihilates the convention of the dark, gothic romance along with it. At its core, *Pierre* is a novel that is concerned with dismantling a variety of different foundations, in both print and in stone.

Pierre destroys his imagined world around him: Saddle Meadows, Lucy, Isabel, and Mrs. Glendinning, because he is haunted by the specter of his father and the tangled stories of women. "Himself was too much for himself...Pierre wrestled with his own haunted spirit; and at last, so effectually purged it of all weirdnesses, and so effectually regained the mastery of himself, that for a time life went with him...and with new zest threw himself into the glowing practice of all those manly exercises" (61-62). Pierre's internal wrestling match that is being described in this passage has to do with masculine behavior. Linking this admission with Pierre's fascination with rising to the top of the column can be viewed as the character grappling with a gigantic phallic symbol. The phantoms haunting Pierre have to do with his initial questioning of his own gender identity in the public sphere. His search to root out his sister's identity may mask Pierre's own deeper question about his own sexual orientation.

In Book IV, the narrator offers an extended discussion of the importance of memory, weighing on Pierre's mind and its direct relationship to memorials.

There had long stood a shrine in the fresh-foliaged heart of Pierre, up to which he ascended by many tableted steps of remembrance; and around which annually he had hung fresh wreaths of a sweet and holy affection. Made one green bower of at last, by such successive votive offerings of his being; this shrine seemed, and was indeed, a place for celebration of a chastened joy, rather than for any melancholy rites. But though thus mantled, and tangled with garlands, this shrine was of marble—a niched pillar, deemed solid and eternal, and from whose top radiated all those innumerable sculptured scrolls and branches; which supported the entire one-pillared temple of his moral life; as in some beautiful gothic oratories, one central pillar, trunk-like, upholds the roof. In this shrine, in this niche of this pillar, stood the perfect marble form of his departed father; without blemish, unclouded, snow-white, and serene; Pierre's fond personification of perfect human goodness and virtue (82-82).

This long passage testifies to a pure picture of the father that Pierre worships in his mind and soul. He has created a perfect internal monument, which stands as his guidebook for his moral development. By worshipping and laying down wreaths to an internal mind's eye picture of his idealized father, Pierre attempts to ignore all forms of reality by living exclusively in the world of the mind. The slightest hint to counteract this idealization of the father will cause the destruction of the shrine.

Melville's description is beautifully done, for the image leaves room for the reader to interpret its effect on Pierre on several levels. Each one, however, draws us into a dark space, where hope has been lost. If the ekphrastic work of Ishmael was to draw readers into the text to question the reliability of voice and push the reader into a cosmic inclusiveness, then Pierre's work is the direct opposite. Pierre's ekphrastic scenes lead us into a dark vortex circling around the mind of the character exclusively.

We can speculate as to the causes of Pierre's monumental problems of mind, but we cannot escape that the world presented is a closed one, existing and operating within the mind of one character. "Judge, then, how all-desolating and withering the blast, that for Pierre, in one night, stripped his holiest shrine of all overlaid bloom, and buried the mild statue of the saint beneath the prostrated ruins of the soul's temple itself"(84). Pierre's stripping down of his father's shrine occurs because he has naively placed all his hopes and desires into a single, untouchable mental image. If that image even appears to be tainted, the entire mind of Pierre becomes haunted by its loss. The statue of the father becomes buried within the

son, and the reader is left to pursue the mental process of disintegration.

Even though the narrative voice castigates Pierre to rebuild the image of the father, the fate of the character and the novel appears set in stone. "On all sides, the physical world of solid objects now slidingly displaced itself from around him, and he floated into an ether of visions..."(103). As readers, we are lured into the darker side of the imagination, in which neither the character nor the reader can be entirely comfortable.

The drastic and sudden abandonment of the idealized form seems to imply a rejection of our nation's fathers as well. Throughout the scenes of Saddle Meadows, we have learned that Pierre's relatives, like Melville's, were involved in Revolutionary skirmishes and were even noted for their brave acts in fighting Native Americans. The smooth marbles of noble Americans fighting off the evil-doing savages were quite prevalent in nineteenth century America. Pierre's break with the idealized, father-figure form could also be a symbolic link to his wholesale acceptance of a nationalistic agenda. Evidence of Pierre's acceptance of his rightful place within the idealized chain can be seen in Pierre's claim to own the land. "But whatever one may think of the existence of such mighty

lordships in the heart of a republic, and however we may wonder at their surviving, like Indian mounds, the Revolutionary flood; yet survive and exist they do, and are now owned by their present proprietors..."(16-17).

Pierre and other landed gentry assert ownership over the Indian burial mounds around Saddle Meadows. According to Samuel Otter, "Here the features of the landscape are enduring monuments to the tenacity of privilege and the destruction of civilizations"("Landscape and Ideology" 69). Quite interestingly, the land that Pierre seamlessly owns has underground ripples such as the mounds. These mounds, the communal spaces of internment, serve as a fitting symbol to disrupt the unambiguous story of Pierre's orderly succession of the land and particularly his dream-like monument to his own self-importance. What lurks beneath the surface rises up, almost like ghosts from the past, to disrupt and perhaps rewrite the present.

Pierre's grappling with the ghosts of the past always brings him back to himself. A sculptural question foreshadows his demise: "She loveth me, ay;--but why? Had I been cast in a cripple's mold, how then?"(110). Destruction in the novel, which can be gleaned from the sculptural allusions all seem to revolve around the emptiness or the distortion of identity at the core of all forms of

idealization. Beauty for Pierre becomes just another lie, which subverts seeing things plainly. "Welcome then be Ugliness and Poverty and Infamy, and ye all other crafty ministers of Truth, that beneath the hoods and rags of beggars hide yet the belts and crowns. And dimmed be all beauty that must own the clay; and dimmed be all wealth, and all delight, and all the annual prosperities of earth, that but gild the links, and stud with diamonds the base rivets and the chains of Lies"(110). Pierre's doomed recognition of the fissure in his own vision leads him to become a jailer of his own self. His mind begins to tear down his own marbleized image, in favor of a sort of demonic alter-ego.

At one point in the novel, as Pierre drifts forward on his quest deeper into himself, he comes across a mammoth rock, which he terms the Memnon Stone. Giving the rock the title of Memnon is fascinating and important, for it shows the ineptitude of Pierre's vision. The natural monument in the woods is equated with a symbolic Egyptian reference. "When in his imaginative ruminating moods of early youth, Pierre had christened the wonderful stone by the old resounding name of Memnon, he had done so merely from certain associative remembrances of that Egyptian marvel, of which all Easterns speak"(161).

John Carlos Rowe makes several pointed connections between Memnon of Egypt and Pierre's imagination. Rowe shows the fissures in Pierre's naming of the stone, for his association ignores the realities of the monumental process at work. He writes:

The monumental projects undertaken by such coordinated labor forces are generally made possible by large state surpluses often generated by military conquests. These monuments are thus testaments to the surplus value on which the ancient despot based his political power—the 'capital' of domination. Indeed, the labor force is itself often composed of just such a 'surplus,' insofar as the slaves committed to such great works were often the spoils of war. In addition, the monuments built by such despots often serve no other purpose than to represent that arbitrary power in the form of such purely ceremonial structures as tombs, pyramids, and obelisks. ("Romancing the Stone" 215)

Rowe brilliantly compromises Pierre's naming of the stone, by showing the underside of the Egyptian pyramid programs. Instead of the grand celebration of might and force, the name suggests subservience, discrimination, and a complicated construction process. This naming reveals something darker about Pierre's personality, for it reveals not only that he cannot see historical implications of naming, but that he also sees the stone as some type of grand testament to self.

If the novel has become a journey deeper into the self, then the trip deep into the woods is significant.

This "smoothed mass of rock...was shaped something like a lengthened egg, but flattened more; and, at the ends, pointed more; and yet not pointed more, but irregularly wedge-shaped"(157). The confusing language of the description mirrors the confusing developments within Pierre's character. The reference to the egg appears to combine a fertility symbol with a large phallic symbol, planted deep within the woods of Pierre's imagination. The stone site seems to juxtapose two gender qualities, which may be the defining cause of Pierre's instability as a character.

As a "discoverer" of this stone in this remote portion of the woods, Pierre realizes that others may have seen the rock, but it is his language, in his mind, which brings the site into existence. In an odd sense, Pierre acts like an explorer claiming the land again and giving titles to landmarks. As explorer, however, his vision of places and sites only exposes the memorial amnesia that has plagued so many of our early discoverers.

The discovery of space through language seems to reenact the acts of the early American discoverers and settlers. The explorers recorded events dutifully to provide fresh information of faraway distant worlds for readers. Naturally, this process of fact-finding and

reporting has come to seem more like fantasy than fact, when viewed through the eyes of natives to the land. Wayne Franklin states, "Like the medieval knight who returns from his quest to tell the tale of his adventure (for part of his duty was to relate what he has seen and undergone), the discoverer relays his account of the strange world he has entered to an audience which remained at home"(23). Pierre thinks of himself in terms of knighthood and adventure; he naively sees himself as a sort of knight-errant out to save the world from injustice and immorality. Pierre wants to act like a questing knight or explorer finding and making foundation claims on the Memnon Stone for future generations.

Eventually, the space of the Memnon Stone destroys his oversimplified narrative intentions. One day, "...Pierre happened to brush aside several successive layers of old, gray-haired, close cropped, nappy moss, and beneath, to his no small amazement, he saw rudely hammered in the rock some half-obliterate initials"(158). Pierre realizes that he has not been the only one to discover the natural monument; the slight carving of someone else's initials destroys his sense of individual discovery, and he is once again reminded about the etchings of the past on his own mind. "Pierre pondered long, but could not possibly imagine; for

the initials, in their antiqueness, seemed to point to some period before the era of Columbus' discovery of the hemisphere" (158-159). The quest to find an original relationship with the forms surrounding Pierre seems to continually be cast aside, in light of the haunting process of memory.

Pierre's connection between the stone and the time before Columbus complicates the discovery of America and bringing the New World into existence through language. It seems to challenge and recast historical memory and monument-making as being a spectacle of fiction and fantasy, rather than an act of natural discovery.

Violence also lurks in the historical memory and monument-making of America. The rippled mounds of Native Americans dot the landscape and prevent Pierre from creating his fantasy world of discovery and initiation. Pierre's relatives have placed their mark on history, but more importantly, on the mind of Pierre. Richard Slotkin notes that the founders of American tradition and myth used violence to create America's sense of itself in the wilderness. Instead of placid statesmen and landed gentry founding the nation peacefully, a different picture is exposed:

Rather they were those who (to paraphrase Faulkner's *Absalom! Absalom!*) tore violently a nation from the implacable and opulent wilderness—the rogues, adventurers, and land-boomers; the Indian fighters, traders, missionaries, explorers, and hunters who killed and were killed until they had mastered the wilderness...Their concerns, their hopes, their terrors, their violence, and their justifications of themselves, as expressed in literature, are the foundation stones of the mythology that informs our history. (Slotkin 4)

Perhaps, the truly haunting problem with Pierre's vision is that he must come to terms with the darkness and than less-than-ideal circumstances that brought his family name into a place of memory and tradition in America. Throughout the novel, Pierre must confront the shadows and the ghosts from his past and realize the foundations from which he built his identity have been structured around loss, violence, deceit, and death.

After the discovery of the initials, Pierre begins to see the stone in numerous different ways. Each thought, however, leads him to darker visions. At first, he thinks that he would like to have the massive stone as a headstone. This admission is perhaps the most monumental deficiency in Pierre's character, and it shows that Pierre has placed himself in a very curious position. At one point, Pierre crawls into a recess under the stone, seemingly mimicking the place of the headstone. This odd

movement is perhaps one of the most significant portions of the novel.

The Memnon Stone acts as a mediator between the crafted stone monuments that have appeared in American culture and the processes of nature. Pierre situates himself beneath the rock that he has named. Nature pays no attention to man's claims for supremacy; the rock will far outlast the tiny manmade etchings and Pierre's own desire to be the discoverer and conqueror of the space. Melville is making clear that man's desire to somehow have their greatness and durability imposed upon the natural environment will only lead to disaster, ruin, and frustration.

Metaphorically, Melville has placed the character in a position of danger. He has cast himself as a self-imposed ruler of nature, and yet the rock is poised to crush his intentions. Pierre, like the historical Memnon who was killed in a "rightful quarrel," wishes to be remembered in some grand, unique way. The statue that Memnon's subjects erect in his honor gives forth a mournful sound each day. Pierre's hubris and his desire to stand apart from all around him turn out to be his greatest flaws. What he desires most is to be remembered in some way as a man worthy of his own monument and memorial.

Pierre senses a connection between his fate and that of Memnon and Shakespeare's Hamlet.

Now as the Memnon Statue survives down to this present day, so does that nobly-striving but ever-shipwrecked character in some royal youths (for both Memnon and Hamlet were the sons of kings), of which that statue is the melancholy type. But Memnon's sculptured woes did once melodiously resound; now all is mute. Fit emblem that of old, poetry was a consecration and an obsequy to all hapless modes of human life; but in a bantering, barren, and prosaic, heartless age, Aurora's music-moan is lost among our drifting sands, which whelm alike the monument and the dirge. (162)

Pride seems to be the downfall of both Memnon and Hamlet.

Hamlet dies because he is never comfortable in taking action; he weighs his options heavily, sees the fate of the world resting upon his shoulders, and then dies, leaving his final words to Horatio to have his story told to future generations. The foreshadowing in this passage is that Pierre will suffer the same fate. He is a shipwrecked character, a bantering, prosaic heartless figure.

Throughout his life, Pierre has never taken any forward action nor seen things around him correctly. His true desire is to be deemed worthy of his family name, and perhaps his idealized nation's past. The reality is that his memory of these things from the past is not solid and as monumental as Pierre had once hoped. Cracks have appeared in the pedestal on which he stood, and the rest of

the novel follows through with disintegrating the idealized image entirely.

Pierre eventually burns all the relics and monuments of his past—the relics of his home. Yet, the Memnon Stone lives mutely on into the future. Melville has used Pierre to make a last futile assault on the reading public's inability to act as critical readers. Pierre's undying belief in the supremacy of his own mind and will over others is a frightening reminder of how powerful images can be on the human consciousness. John Carlos Rowe emphasizes this, by noting that, "For Melville, the only genuine nobility derives from our involvement in the process of constructing a human community, not from those apparently ahistorical 'images' that monumentalize the family or the self" ("Romancing the Stone" 217-218). Rowe beautifully notes Melville's project of casting Pierre's descent through imagery. Pierre's problem is that he self-identifies his fate in the world with powerful, towering images which isolate him from the realities of the world.

The final haunting image of statuary that *Pierre* reveals is the dream vision of Enceladus. Pierre has moved himself to the city, along with his female companions, in what appears to be a dystopia of writing and family. Pierre plunges his attention to the process of writing. Before the

appearance of Enceladus, Pierre appears as a forlorn writer, winding through the city streets, driven by a fanatical desire to see the social castaways of the city's labyrinths. His search leads him into a dizzying, vertigo-like trance, and eventually to confront the shattered image of his own self.

The vision of Enceladus comes to Pierre in a state of "semi-consciousness, or rather trance, a remarkable dream or vision..." (396). The physical world around Pierre disappears as he is drawn into the recess of his mind. The scene that unfolds "assumed very familiar features to Pierre" (397), and it presents a distorted vision of Saddle Meadows. The narrative voice provides a very acute glimpse into the workings of Pierre's mind. "Say what some poets will, Nature is not so much her own ever-sweet interpreter, as the mere supplier of that cunning alphabet, whereby selecting and combining as he pleases, each man reads his own peculiar lesson according to his own mind and mood" (397). By reading his own mind and mood into the environment, Pierre runs the risk of annihilation and destruction, for he has misread nature all throughout the text.

Pierre's dream vision leads the reader into the darker recesses of nature and then to see:

...as among the rolling sea-like sands of Egypt, disordered rows of broken Sphinxes lead to the Cheopian pyramid itself; so this long acclivity was thickly strewn with enormous rocky masses, grotesque in shape, and with wonderful features on them, which seemed to express that slumbering intelligence visible in some recumbent beasts—beasts whose intelligence seems struck dumb in them by some sorrowful and inexplicable spell. (398)

The broken images of the Sphinxes and the pyramid strewn with natural foliage testify to Pierre's state of mind. We see that the Memnon Stone, its historical memories have been broken or overgrown in Pierre's mind. Pierre himself has become the beast, stuck in some type of spell.

Strangely enough, the passage seems to call the reader to think about Percy Shelley's "Ozymandias." The disintegrating form of the leader that stands in the desert calls forth for viewers to "Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!". Irony in the poem comes from the fact that the pedestal and the cold sneer in the king's facial expression have been dismantled by nature and by the sands of time. Nothing really exists to show his grandeur. The sculptor feeds the passions of pride for Ozymandias, and what the artist leaves behind for viewers and readers to see is the broken fragments of an enormous ego.

Melville seems to be like the sculptor throughout *Pierre*. He has carefully created a mocking bust of his hero and underscored his cracks through the use of sculpted

space. Among the fragments of figures of his dream, Enceladus stood, "...fixed by a form defiant, a form of awfulness"(400). The statue is "writhing from out the imprisoning earth;--turbaned with upborne moss he writhed; still, though armless..."(400). This wondrous figure was a thing of interest to Pierre; it had "intelligibly smitten him"(400). Readers learn that the figure was unearthed by college students near Saddle Meadows and became something enchanting to Pierre's imagination. The figure seems to be drawn into the earth; it is being subsumed back into the ground, which it emphatically fights against. As a metanarrative point, it is interesting to note that the statue is dug up by collegians that eventually give up the quest to fully unearth the fragmented statue. This revelation may be a calculated reference by Melville to those who would later pick up his book in an attempt to cipher through, or dig up, the buried references lurking just beneath the surface of the text.

Enceladus appears as the sculptural embodiment of Pierre's sense of self. The fragmented figure, son of an incestuous relationship, is forever rooted not only in the soil of Saddle Meadows, but more importantly, in Pierre's mind. The statue is armless, for it signifies Pierre's inability to communicate to the world through writing.

Perhaps much like Melville, his creator, Pierre struggles in vain to escape the demons of his own mind and past through the workings of the pen. But the eventual result is cast through the image of the shattered Titan of Enceladus. The armless trunk of the man becomes a thing of haunting dreams; it shows quite graphically the character's inability to escape the nightmares of his own mind. The fragmented statue may glare up at the sky cursing its own fate, just as man may curse his inability to transcend the human condition. The critical point is self-awareness and realizing limitations, which is exactly Pierre's problem throughout the ill-fated novel.

Melville's use of sculpture in *Pierre* is a powerful ekphrastic tool. Its power comes from its inexplicability. Melville has torn himself away from ekphrastic indifference, hope, and fear, and he has methodically drawn his readers into a world without hope. Throughout the novel, Pierre has gradually drawn himself back into the earth, closer towards death, for he has failed to see, carefully weigh, and consider the world around him. He has misread himself and the images around him, and he is left as nothing but a shattered fragment of a man, at the edge of being consumed by nature surrounding him.

Clearly, the authorial allusions to Melville's own position as writer are very easy to draw throughout the comparison. The journey into the sculpted images of *Pierre* led the reader far into a darker realm of Melville's ekphrastic project. Fear and alienation take hold of the artist as he realizes that the reading public simply was not ready for a prolonged personal or national introspection and the murky, self-destructive impulses of the narrative artist. The following novel would also be a dark stab into the readers' consciousness, but this attempt would lessen the psychological drama of *Pierre* for a more overt observation of national symbols and character.

Israel Potter signals an ironic turning point in Melville's ekphrastic quarrel. By dedicating an entire book to a monument that could be viewed by his readers, Melville was attempting to show the indifference that American viewers had to both art works and books. Ekphrastic fear is not an issue in the quarrel, for Melville's reading public takes neither writing nor art seriously enough to question them. The biography of the forgotten patriot was originally found on sleazy, gray paper. The Bunker Hill Monument is somewhat prematurely gray. The connection that Melville is making is that narratives and monumental art are in the same condition.

The American public shows utter indifference to both narrative and monument, and naturally the public forgets to remember the subjects represented in both of these forms. The reading public does not understand, nor wish to look into the ironies of its own past. Ekphrastic indifference is a literary snag to overcome; indifference to how the nation remembers and represents itself is a more serious offense. Melville employs a pseudo-biographical form in *Israel Potter*, in order to mock the reader's insatiable desire for truth and to show that both biography and monumentality are each specialized forms of fiction and tall-tales.

The opening of *Israel Potter* makes a connection between the crafting of the Bunker Hill Monument and the life of the forgotten patriot, Israel Potter. Both monument and narrative have been weathered, either by nature or misuse. This admission displays Melville's growing skepticism with both monuments and narratives, and their ability to display the truth. The whiteness of both page and stone are sullied into obscurity. The flaws of both narrative and monument are exposed by Melville in order to show the underside of both biographical truth and monumental casting. Thus Melville's novel will explore the process of both deliberate amnesia and the impossibility of

attaining unambiguous pictures in stone and print. Russ Castronovo suggested the importance of monumental history on *Israel Potter*: "Monumental history once again works its democratic wonders of time, space, and status: barriers of time, centuries long, evaporate, and spatial divisions of low and high, common and noble, forgotten and remembered, dissipate in a sublime homogeneity of subject, biographer, and national history" (*Fathering the Nation* 142). It is this mixture of cultural elements, which would lead Melville back into an ironic undercutting of monuments, memory, and narrative.

Melville had parodied popular forms such as the sentimental novel and the dark, city mystery in *Pierre*, and he performs a similar type of undercutting in *Israel Potter*. In this case, the popular form of the biography is used. In the dedication, along with the ironic dedication to the Bunker Hill Monument, the "Editor" mentions the popular volumes of American biographer Jared Sparks. Biographies in nineteenth century America were widely read. They served a variety of different purposes, from didactic to patriotic inspiration.

Scott E. Casper traces the development of the form and its implications for American culture quite well. Casper plots the development of the form as a form of cultural

production, and he notes, "Most American biographies served to inculcate morality and patriotism, eulogized their subjects, and promulgated historically inaccurate legends about our noted men. Biographies were not good literature and they were bad history..."(10-11).

Casper's study of biography provides a solid background for situating Melville's concerns with biographical form. Biography sold well, and yet it was mainly a genre filled with gaps and inconsistencies. Not only were most American biographies poorly written as literature, they were also poor representations of history. And yet, the American reading public devoured these texts, for readers believed they were able to get detailed factual information of great people, who would thus serve as models of our national character. Melville would have seen this process as a fiction, and it makes sense that he would devote an entire narrative to subverting the easy process of assimilating truthful narratives into the minds of the readers.

The dedication to Bunker Hill is followed by an ironic casting of the subject to follow: "Biography, in its purer form, confined to the ended lives of the true and brave, may be held the fairest meed of human virtue—one given and received in entire disinterestedness—since neither can the

biographer hope for acknowledgment from the subject, nor the subject at all avail himself of the biographical distinction conferred" (vii). The disinterested reader was Melville's enemy throughout his writing career. Many readers of biography were disinterestedly receiving what they believed to be the truth of great human lives. What is lost in the picture is hope for both acknowledgment and active remembrance. The passive reader soaks up and accepts the pages without ever considering the text's indeterminacy, inconsistencies, or lies.

This same practice of reading and forgetting about being a critical reader applies to American citizens' readings of monumental space as well. Bunker Hill was a grand monument constructed as an obelisk. It was raised above the grounds of the Bunker Hill battlefield in an effort to remember and revere the accomplishments of patriots, who lost their lives serving the cause of American independence. Instead of a place dedicated to solemnly remember the lives lost, the site became a vehicle for national superiority and cultural unity. The visual obscurity of the site disintegrated a sense of a collective American unity, in Melville's recollection.

Daniel Webster's speeches at Bunker Hill in 1825 and 1843 celebrated the United States in a line of succession

from the glories of the Greek empire. All of the elements in Webster's speeches from the start of monumental construction in 1825 to the celebration of its completion in 1843 testify to the unity of America's progress and the Manifest Destiny policies in history. As Paul D. Erickson states about Webster's "The Completion of the Bunker Hill Monument" speech:

North and South, Webster argued, had a national *character* forged by their past, a cultural mission, and even a blood relationship. Webster referred occasionally to the 'Anglo Saxon race' in his late speeches, borrowing the language of Manifest Destiny not to justify expansion but to pull the dissident sons together in their common undertaking. He explicated this Romantic nationalism—a sentimental patriotism...for his Bunker Hill audience. (71-72)

Webster sought to increase a sense of unity and downplay any divisions or fissures in the national character. In an odd sense, many of the patriotic biographies of the day did much of the same thing. The idea was to provide didactic and inspiring effects on the audience. These harmonious narratives and inspiring monumental sites were meant to pacify the audience's sense of anxiety over the future.

Undoubtedly, what Webster's speech left out was a sense of the contested identity of power in representation. The Manifest Destiny policies of the United States relegated people of color and the middle-class to the margins of the nation's self-identity. These narratives and

monuments smoothed and simplified a complicated and contentious history that needed to be re-inspected more carefully. Biographies could not fully explain the significance of all the important players in our nation's history. Even in that short span of time, biography could be seen as self-advancement and a tool of powerful people, who were attempting to provide answers that were suitable for their interpretation of history.

Melville's fascination with the combination of Bunker Hill and biography can best be explained by noting the author's dissatisfaction with all forms of harmonious and unambiguous stories. In Israel Potter's narrative, he was turning his attention to a patriot who had been cast aside from the glories and honors of the past. And this was done solely because of the progressive movements of history. Potter's tale was not a straightforward tale of heroism and an ascent into the realm of patriotic glory. His story was a series of poor choices, wrong turns, and missed chances. It was not an ideal story of harmonious, didactic progression. Melville's telling of the tale was an attempt to bring Potter, a man who had fallen between the cracks of memory, into the public consciousness. Potter's story stands in stark contrast to the biographies of Stark and the rhetoric of Webster. Melville's combination of stone

and print and the fissures in both forms would be a fitting ironic conclusion to his ekphrastic work in novel form.

The artificial dedication of the novel to the monument stands in opposition to the simple beauty of natural monuments described in Israel's Berkshire home. In the opening pages, Melville's beautiful description of nature and even fragmented hearths shows his inclination to Romantic images that must be conjured up by the reader's imagination. Unlike the lifeless form of Bunker Hill, whose form could be readily seen, the different stone images of the Berkshires ask the reader to think and create. The reader will find "...ample food for poetic reflection in the singular scenery of a country, which, owing to the ruggedness of the soil and its lying out of all public conveyances, remains almost as unknown to the general tourist as the interior of Bohemia"(3).

One of the reasons why the place leaves room for poetic reflection is its rugged soil and its remoteness. The soil resists manipulation by man; it destroys images that attempt to rise above the land and tower over it. Monuments, seemingly, do not work in this environment. Interestingly, the remoteness also signals that the form of the land remains unknown to tourists. This appears to be a metanarrative point that Melville is making about his text.

It will resist the monumental, in favor of those that appear on the margins. The text will also require critical readers, who do not operate like fast-moving tourists or biographical scanners, looking to quickly move on to the next page.

Melville's text celebrates the efforts and forgotten achievements of the common man. Houses weather the storms of nature and the changes of history throughout the narrative. The beautiful, elegant prose of the first chapter calls the readers attention to walls, houses, and simple stone. Each piece of stone moves the reader away from the high towers of falsely monumental heroes to the close-to-the-earth strengths of settlers. Melville rejoices in the houses whose modeling "...enables them long to resist the encroachment of decay"(4). The walls that dot the landscape show that the "...very Titans seemed to have been at work"(4). Man's works combine beautifully with the workings of nature in this early scene.

Clark Davis convincingly argues that Israel Potter's quest in the novel is for home and hearth, and this reading seems fortified by Melville's language in the opening chapter. Instead of an abstract advancement of patriotism and heroic deeds, the novel seems to display the need to memorialize and perhaps monumentalize the very human

desires of having a secure home and a rooted connection to the environment surrounding you. Davis writes, "It is Israel's return to the hearth, the book's final resurrection, that reemphasizes the novel's bitter criticism of American fickleness—its notation of the ironies of patriotic fervor—and restates the centrality of home and hearth in the quest pattern of Israel's life"(54). Davis believes that Potter's return to the Berkshires at the end of the novel signals some sort of completed journey.

Ironically, time in the opening chapter appears to have lapsed. The reader moves through a timeless period of imagination, harmony, and beauty, with the end result that readers are floating through a world of natural simplicity. "Content to drink in such loveliness at all your senses, the heart desires no company but nature"(5). For a biography supposedly designed for a patriot, this admission seems contradictory. Most biography readers would be looking to develop a type of social connection with Potter, in order to progress through the narrative. Melville is deliberately creating a sense of disconnection from the particular character to forge a greater general connection with the workings of all human nature.

The only disruption of the natural harmony arrives with the mention of an impediment in the roadway at the end of the first chapter. The traveler, or reader, "...sees some ghost-like object looming through the mist at the roadside; and wending towards it, beholds a rude white stone, uncouthly inscribed, marking the spot where, some fifty or sixty years ago, some farmer was upset in his wood-sled, and perished beneath the load"(6). This "menacing scene" is quite natural, designating a simple human memorial. The simple stone with the barely visible writings on it is seen through the mist and is shrouded in mystery. The monument's minimal, unknown beauty contrasts the artificiality of the towering monument of the dedication. The "ghost-like" object foreshadows Potter's life and death; it is the reader's duty to see through the mists and mysteries of the novel to see the simple "rude white stone" of Potter's life.

It does not seem an accident that Melville's most glorious prose in the entire novel comes during the first chapter, culminating in a simple memorial to an unknown farmer. The rest of the novel leads us into examining the complexities and ambiguities of the seamless monument, dedicated to a forgotten hero from Bunker Hill. Melville's game has to been to show the artificial construction of

heroic identity, which is separated from the simple, natural pleasures of Israel's birthplace.

Potter's life and involvement in the Revolutionary War is a sweeping epic told in the form of one solitary chapter. Strangely enough, the narrator of Potter's life makes a strange admission when the reader proceeds to Chapter 2. "Imagination will easily picture the rural days of the youth of Israel. Let us pass on to a less immature period"(7). Imagination is left behind as we head into the telling of Israel's less immature days. The reader is given a broad general picture of Israel as a jack-of-all-trades. He throws off the will of his father, who prevented him from marrying his sweetheart, and he embarks on a career of numerous adventures. Potter's adventures are not given any extended attention. Israel's life is presented quickly. The reader's desire to hear more about his individual accomplishments as hunter, sailor, or trapper is prevented for a purpose.

Melville's pseudo-biography hints that Israel's life has no meaning to readers outside of his involvement in the rhetoric of the American Revolution. It is only his association with the nation that lends itself to biographical casting. Melville coyly sets up his readers for a satirical assault. The author is questioning the

importance of our heroic narratives, for they seemingly smooth out the features that make us individual human beings. All of Israel's achievements before the Revolution are glossed because they matter little to readers looking to see a buttressing of national affairs, through the eyes of an actual patriot. What is lost is the beauty of individuality; mass identification usurps the importance of independent human lives. Forms such as monuments and biographies eventually aid in the forgetting of individualism for the sake of a clear-cut narrative agenda. Propaganda takes the place of the beauty of individual perception, uniqueness, and mystery.

Memory is very tricky, for it sometimes promotes a sense of forgetting the subtleties of lived experience and digression, in lieu of a sweeping story of unambiguous progression. Melville wanted his readers to be drawn into stories that halted their progress and asked them to reexamine things they took for granted. In essence, Melville's work in *Israel Potter* was to halt the business of memory production in print and stone, so that readers could be jolted into reacquiring the senses of wonder and imagination. Potter comes to realize his own impotence too late. His monumentality in stones and print is a forgery. The casting in stone will smooth out the rough edges of his

life and narratives will carefully gloss his life for the design of popular reading.

Phillip Fisher aptly notes the destructive powers of memory. "In a preliminary way we can see just how destructive memory can be for thought when we realize that at every step if we are reminded of something we are in effect distracted from pure and complete intellectual attention" (130). Melville's ironic goal in creating *Israel Potter* was to get readers to see the disorders of memorialization in print and stone. Readers had become indifferent to the actuality of lived experience, in favor of neat, ordered sites in books and monuments. These ordered texts eased the harsh realities of life and placed them into a stable representation for memory consumption. Melville's writings consistently challenge readers to be active, to use their imaginations and never accept easy alternatives. It is not accidental that Melville would cast monuments in his fiction as a tool to support this reading agenda.

Critiquing national memory, naturally, is a very dangerous game to pursue. In *Israel Potter*, Melville reached a point where he directly challenged readers to see ambiguity in America's national stories and sites of memory. Overtly combining the Bunker Hill Monument with the

life of Israel Potter was a way for Melville to confront the indifferent attitudes that readers had towards national remembrance. Melville was never comfortable with the truths of experience, in any human activity. Art, particularly, that was marketed as a unified space to promote a national consciousness would have been troubling for Melville, for looming in the background was some sense of authority. Who authorized the stories of our national memory? As Phillip Fisher writes, "Memory is essential if you believe that we already know everything knowable because in that case every uncertainty must be solvable by remembering it ourselves or by asking an authority who does remember it"(130-131). Fisher's ideas shed light on Melville's resistance in writing.

Melville always sought to challenge accepted authorities and readers. Richard Brodhead argued that Melville's writings go a step further and contain "brutal assaults on his readers and on American literary culture"(Hawthorne and Melville 191). Whether a challenge or assault, it is evident that Melville wanted readers to think about the inconsistencies and fissures that appear upon closer examination of all artistic renderings. Melville desired for his readers to question tellers of tales. Authority figures throughout Melville's canon, from

Amaso Delano in "Benito Cereno" to the Lawyer in "Bartleby" are unreliable. Perhaps, Melville's goal was to prevent his readers from exclusively relying on memory or on authority figures for knowledge and understanding.

Not surprisingly, the battles of Bunker Hill are passed over quickly, for as the narrator notes, "But every one knows all about the battle"(13). The sweep of history forces amnesia. The narrator keeps us moving away from the actuality of the battle, for the point of the narrative is to move past the horrors to get to the fictional construction of an American identity. Israel is cast in the clichéd role of the farmer who turns his ploughshare into a sword. His identity is subsumed by the Revolutionary cause, and his biography is more like a fiction. Strangely, the biographical narrative operates like the monument. Both provide one representation of heroic virtue; it is a form that seeks to downplay close examination and introspection, for a single, unified sweep of interpretation.

Melville's goal in *Israel Potter* was to make the monumental and narrative goals of the nation ironic. Potter's shifting identities and costumes make him seem like an everyman figure. Potter wholeheartedly gives himself to the service of America's independence, and he loses all sense of self. His life becomes one long series

of costume changes and role reversals. When Potter is taken prisoner and heads to England, Melville attempts to play off the American reader's gullibility. British characters such as Sir John Millet and even King George III are depicted throughout the narrative. Israel, like most biography readers in America, had predetermined visions of British figures. These men were the visible forces of evil and repression and were not to be trusted.

Melville asks readers to see the power of monumental rhetoric. Millet and King George are depicted nobly. They attempt to help Israel Potter by providing jobs and advice. In no way do they persecute the wandering American patriot. Melville's desire was to subvert the logic of American ascendancy. By showing these men in a positive fashion, Melville was asking his readers to reexamine history, biography, and monuments more carefully. Powerful rhetoric allowed the American revolutionaries to pull down the King George monument in Bowling Green and turn the monument into bullets; the revolutionaries believed they were turning art into a product. Art was turned to an instrument of the war industry. Melville's characterization of George asks for readers to be careful of demonizing or monumentalizing figures wholesale. Occasionally, the figures we cast

heroically or tear down ceremoniously may have deeper qualities lurking beneath the surface of representation.

Potter's responses to these two men show the power of national rhetoric on character. Potter cannot prevent himself from referring to Sir John Millet as Mr. Millet. Potter's language testifies to his being cast as an American stock character. Ideas of killing George float through Israel's mind, while in the service of the king. Israel appears programmed to only see himself as a tool of his country and not a careful reader, who seeks understandings on his own. Potter mirrors the ungrateful reader that Melville was satirizing in the construction of his story.

The narrator of *Israel Potter* makes a noteworthy admission that Israel "...went away with very favorable views of that monarch. Israel now thought that it could not be the warm heart of the king, but the cold heads of his lords, that persuaded him so tyrannically to persecute America. Yet hitherto the precise contrary of this had been Israel's opinion, agreeably to the popular prejudice throughout New England" (31-32). Melville plays off popular prejudice in this passage; the picture of George III contradicts much of the picture that America had formed in Israel's impressionistic mind. Melville's goal was to force

readers to reexamine absolute depiction and unwavering acceptance of literary or visual truths.

Following Melville's recasting of British anti-heroes, are several meetings with noteworthy American historical figures. These meetings disrupt the idealized, monumental figures of America's Revolutionary past. Israel's meetings with Benjamin Franklin, John Paul Jones, and Ethan Allan highlight Melville's project to show fissures and disruptions. Throughout the narrative, Melville wanted to his readers to be critical readers and not to just expect certain standard outcomes from meetings with historical figures.

Potter's meeting with Franklin shows Melville's fascination with the inconsistencies of monumental figuring. Through history and narrative, Franklin appears to be someone worthy of casting. His figure had already been the subject of numerous sculpted casts and busts. Franklin's personality was synonymous with American success in the marketplace. His writings testify to his ability to cross boundaries. Franklin's *Autobiography* was considered an American guide to entrepreneurial success. The text became a literary monument, an epic construction of an American hero. *The Autobiography* became a literary blueprint for the journey of the so-called common man to a

life of high social standing. This public event poses as a real life account of success, and yet under the surface, prudent readers realize that each sentence and scene is structured for a desired authorial effect.

R. Jackson Wilson aptly points out the disingenuous rendering of character in Franklin's hands. Wilson convincingly argues that Franklin meticulously mapped out his public persona in terms of art and writing. The painted portraits that Franklin sat for created a desired effect for the target audience. As Wilson states, "Like any good publicist...Franklin arranged things carefully"(21). Wilson makes a comparison with the carefully structured *Autobiography* and the art works that Franklin commissioned. In an engraving done in 1777 by Augustin de Saint Aubin, Franklin appears slightly like a country bumpkin in a raccoon skin cap. He wished for his French audience to think of him as an enlightened savage figure, in order to think of Americans during the Revolution as exotic figures. Nine years earlier, David Martin depicted Franklin differently. In the Martin portrait, Franklin appears thoughtful, meditative, and scholarly. Most importantly, a bust of Newton appears poised above Franklin, as he intently reads papers before him.

The two portraits demonstrate Franklin's awareness of constructing an identity carefully in public forum of art. At one point, Franklin presents the picture of an exotic, half-tamed figure, with a timid look on his face. In the Martin portrait, the idea is to see how rational and enlightened Franklin's character was. R. Jackson Wilson interestingly equates Franklin's conscientiously constructed portrait sittings with the crafting of his *Autobiography*. Whereas most Americans believed that they were simply receiving the life of Franklin in print, Wilson's reading rightly displays the artifice involved in crafting a life for public consumption.

Michael Warner takes Wilson's idea a step further, by focusing his attention on Franklin's manipulation of the public sphere through print discourse. Warner's argument begins by drawing the reader into seeing a connection between monuments and writing. Warner discusses Franklin's writing of his own epitaph and the placement of that epitaph in the body of his writings. Here is the text of Franklin's epitaph:

The Body of
B. Franklin,
Printer;
Like the Cover of an Old Book,
Its Contents torn out,
And stript of its Lettering and Gilding,
Lies here, Food for Worms.

But the Work shall not be wholly lost.
For it will, as he believ'd, appear once more,
In a new & more perfect Edition,
Corrected and amended
by the Author.

Franklin's epitaph brings together print and memorial stone. While this was written when Franklin was only twenty-two years old, it provides a wonderful insight into his thinking about character development. Franklin edits and controls his destiny in print and stone. He is clearly the authority behind how his life is to be perceived by viewers. Franklin describes his life as a book to be corrected and edited by his own guidelines throughout the course of his life. The gravestone writing signals the literary project to follow. By signaling his death to the viewer or reader of the epitaph, Franklin is pointing the reader to his more perfect edition, his *Autobiography*.

The corrections to the text of the gravestone are the same as those in the *Autobiography*. Franklin is admitting that he is crafting his life in print and stone for a calculated sense of memory construction. Michael Warner argues that the gravestone inscription is designed exclusively for a print audience. Warner finds "the epitaph is disturbing because it treats print and life in equivalent terms: to live is to be published. At first glance the gesture of the epitaph defies the termination of

death; on closer inspection, it poses a grave question about what it means to live"(74). Franklin's writings attempt to persuade public memory and make it difficult to develop an understanding of his character outside of his own constructed terms. In essence, as Warner suggests, "One's life can be repeated in the form of a book because life is already understood to have some of the features of books: authorial design, durability, corrigibility, and exposure before a public"(75). Franklin encloses his own memory in a tightly organized way; and therefore, a judicious reader is called to question the purposes behind crafting a life in such terms. When we read both tombstone and *Autobiography*, the reader must remember that the narrative space has been controlled and molded deliberately by the writer.

This combination of stone and print melding into one caught the attention of Herman Melville. Melville realized the dangers of casting a life exclusively for the public sphere. Most readers simply were not experienced enough to read through Franklin's slyly molded persona. It does not seem an accident that Melville would pair Israel Potter with Benjamin Franklin in the novel, for they appear on opposite ends of the both the narrative and monumental spectrum.

Franklin manipulates narrative to suit his desire to live a life in print. Details or "errata" can be edited out of the life for they do not fit the sculptured form that Franklin wished to cultivate for the public sphere. This correcting of Franklin's life has also taken its toll on biographies of Benjamin Franklin. William Shurr argues: "Franklin biographers often purge all events that cast doubt on Franklin's status as American saint" (446). Potter, on the other hand, exists in the original narrative as a poor soul, looking for a pension. He tries to use print to reconstruct some resemblance of a life. Franklin uses his narrative as a type of "how-to" guide for American success. Unlike Potter, Franklin does not need writing to be successful. He has already achieved notoriety and fame for a variety of different services. Narrative serves as a way to secure and protect his identity; while for Potter, storytelling is a means to reacquire a sense of identity.

Melville played off this dichotomy in his novel. This character dichotomy also functions in sculptural terms. Franklin had been painted and sculpted repeatedly. His figure had become a prominent symbol for the burgeoning nation and its intellectual development. Busts of Franklin had been done, like Washington, by numerous artists, and Americans would clearly have been able to identify his

features in nineteenth century America. Potter remains an abstract, anonymous figure, consumed by the towering monument of Revolutionary history. The closest image that relates stone to Potter's figure would be the Bunker Hill Monument. Clearly, the long monumental shaft gives no impression of personhood. It blurs individuals in the service of the nation's collective identity.

Melville realized the irony of these sites of memory throughout his career, and his writing in *Israel Potter* provides a space to question the American viewer. Russ Castronovo concurs, stating: "Melville resurrects forgotten history and argues for its placement within monumental culture even as he reveals the political pitfalls of figuring history within nationalist discourse" (*Fathering the Nation* 141). Melville's goal was to bring to mind the wonder and beauty of each individual experience within our nation's history and to realize the gaps that were filled and forgotten in our construction of national monuments and narratives.

If *Israel Potter* is an artistic rendering of a common American man, then his story is a testament to the difficulties of human existence on an international scale. Potter's adventures lead him to see figures like Franklin,

Jones, and Allan as self-enclosed individuals, who simply desire to achieve fame and notoriety in the public sphere. Melville breaks down accepting monumental figures from American history based solely on tradition. The purpose of *Israel Potter* was to open the possibility for debate and for reinvestigating individuals that have been termed worthy of monumental stature. Potter's life has all the markings of being a great one; he has seen a variety of lands, served in various positions, and he showed courage and fortitude throughout his narrative journey. The lurking question is: what prevents him from being thought about in terms of honor and grandeur?

Potter's interactions with figures in the narrative display Melville's undercutting of history and monumentality. When Potter is commissioned to carry correspondence to Franklin in France, a series of statuary references are used, which aid Melville's narrative development. While crossing Pont Neuf on his way to visit Franklin, Potter encounters a shoeshine near the equestrian statue of Henry IV. Potter knocks over the man's box, for he cannot read the situation accordingly. He has papers in his boots and fears that the stranger may understand and compromise his mission. The Henry IV statue brings the situation to life inside an international public square.

Melville's point is subtle. As an American, being crafty and reading cautiously defies national borders. Potter does not realize this; he is being used by Melville to make a point about reading.

When Potter reaches Franklin, it is the wise old sage that educates Potter about the innocent exchange with the shoeshine. Ironically, it is Franklin himself who misreads the situation. For when he realizes that Potter is carrying letters in his shoes, he realizes, "I was mistaken this time...your high heels, instead of being idle vanities, seem to be full of meaning"(40). This incident is a paradox, for it displays the problems of sweeping generalizations on both Potter's and Franklin's part. Both characters are prone to misreading and inaccuracy. This small plot detail is filled with meaning when considered in the context of Melville's monumental project. Both characters, within an international public space, are susceptible to erroneous ideas and miscalculations. Melville's point is to show the fissures of even the very soundest of our Revolutionary heroes, thus closing the boundaries between the high and low. Melville's narrative attempts to reverse the process of monumentality by showing the inconsistencies of both leader and ordinary citizen.

This idea is underscored by Franklin's living situation. Franklin appears in a wizard-like robe. "There he sat quite motionless among those restless flies...It seemed as if supernatural lore must needs pertain to this gravely ruddy personage" (39). Franklin appears as a conjuror and he is, strangely, not moving. His character, in Melville's hands, becomes someone who is quick to manipulate others but yet unable to see the benefits of process, of moving beyond his well-formed character stasis.

Melville openly quarrels with Franklin's characterization throughout the meeting with Israel Potter. Franklin demonstrates everything that Melville feared for America. He was always in control, believing in a Deistic universe, ready-made with a clockmaker divinity and trumpeting the ordering powers of human reason over all affairs. This belief in order and systems was precisely what Melville had reacted against throughout his fiction. Life was filled with mysteries and questions in Melville's mind. Even the human body was an area that Melville seemed to see as an imperfect form for artistic contemplation. Franklin championed a world that merely appears to be ordered and safe; in reality, Franklin attempted to situate himself atop a chain of being that was constantly in flux.

Israel Potter reads Franklin's imperfections in both form and print. He realizes that Franklin is a sly man, who seeks to manipulate the fates of those around him. Potter becomes a captive to Franklin's will during his stay in Paris, with nothing but Poor Richard's Almanac and a guidebook to Paris to keep him company. What is clear is that neither one can give a good, honest sense of its subject. The guidebook and the almanac are just flat verbal representations of the vivid movements of life. The book cannot come close to the mysteries and excitements of Paris, just as the almanac does not come close to the complexities of Franklin's character.

While Melville's narrative establishes that Franklin was a man of talent, it makes an important distinction. When referring to Franklin, we learn that he was a "Jack of all trades, master of each and mastered by none—the type and genius of his land. Franklin was everything but a poet"(48). Melville distinguishes that Franklin is not a poet, for it creates a space for readers to grapple with. Why distinguishes the poet in Melville's mind? Poets use words carefully, but they do so to create a variety of different effects. Poets may use ambiguity or irony to create a sense of the beauty and mystery of words. The poet calls for others that follow to analyze and reexamine those

words without attempting to prescribe how those words should be received. This is opposed to Franklin's intentions in using words, for his desire was to use words to create a unified vision of a life, which could only be corrected and amended by the author himself.

Potter's journeys in the narrative lead him to serve under John Paul Jones and shed new light on monumental discourse. While Jones appears to wear the savage tattoos of Queequeg, he is careful not to get too close to Israel Potter. Just like Franklin who instructs without allowing insight into his true character, Jones maintains a distance from others to preserve some sense of his own uniqueness. This is evident in the bedroom scene, when Potter suggests that Jones share a bed with him. With what seems like the counterpoint to the Ishmael and Queequeg sharing in *Moby-Dick*, Jones resists. His answer is a telling one,

I had for a hammock-mate a full-blooded Congo. We had a white blanket spread in our hammock. Every time I turned in I found the Congo's black wool worked in with the white worsted. By the end of the voyage the blanket was of a pepper-and-salt look, like an old man's turning head. So it's not because I am notional at all, but because I don't care to, my lad. (62)

Jones's response to Potter's inquiry is a bizarre hint at racist ideology. He refuses to sleep in the same bed as Potter for fear of contamination from a common man, just as he feared racial mixing with the sailor from the Congo.

Once again, Melville has provided a space to critique our narrative and monumental history through an undercutting of a monumental figure. The whiteness of American monuments preserved a sense of the superiority of white people. Racial mixing is dastardly in Jones's opinion for it questions his own purity and that of his untouchable white, American identity.

Potter bounces from wars to points of captivity in the text, in a vain attempt to create an identity or to secure some solid place in an ever-changing world. A highly symbolic section of *Israel Potter* occurs when Potter meets Squire Woodchuck in Chapter 12. While in Woodchuck's company, Potter is forced to seek asylum in a hidden apartment in the Squire's mansion. The space appears "just like the marble gate of a Tomb" (67). Potter is enclosed in the space, which is formed by "...the sculptured mouths of two griffins cut in a great stone tablet decorating that external part of the dwelling" (67-68). In essence, Potter is buried alive in a tomb for three days, awaiting word from Woodchuck to depart.

The crucial part of this scene is that Potter realizes that the origin of the cell dated back to the Templars. The description given of the Templars' use of the space sheds new understanding on its function in the narrative:

The domestic discipline of this order was rigid and merciless in the extreme...In this place, from time to time, inmates convicted of contumacy were confined; but, strange to say, not till they were penitent...It was deemed a good sign of the state of the sufferer's soul, if from the gloomy recesses of the wall, was heard the agonized groan of his dismal response. (71)

Potter is entombed in a place that links history and torture. Symbolically, the narrative has enclosed him in various levels of historical signification. In an odd sense, he has been driven to become a product of history before his time on earth has elapsed. Like the Templar forced into the cell to work on his penitence, Potter is basically framed as a man forced into a tomb. Metaphorically, he is being buried alive by the forces of history at work.

This entombment gives the reader a forceful image of paralysis in life. Ironically, all this occurs in the center of a house, seemingly the center of domestic life and activity. Perhaps, the idea of Potter's burial alive is similar to the message left by the Templar history. "The penitent being then usually found numb and congealed in all his extremities, like one newly stricken with paralysis"(71). The process causes death in life, but the key point is that Potter rebels against this mummification process. "With this history ringing in his solitary brain, it may be readily conceived what Israel's feelings must

have been"(71). Potter senses a connection between himself and the early tomb that stretches across generations.

While Potter escapes from the tomb, he cannot right the course of the past. He is literally a ghost in the world of the present. His frequent changing of costume, particularly his donning the scarecrow costume testifies to his lack of identity. Potter may only temporarily escape the confinement of the past, which wishes to eradicate him from acting in the world. But, ultimately, he is not given a chance to raise his identity above the shadows for very long, for he has been defined, through sculpted images, as an entombed human being. He may escape Woodchuck's Templar cell, but his life has been symbolically entombed in the Bunker Hill Monument.

Potter lives forty years in London in poverty, raising a family and living in complete obscurity. In Chapter 25, the reader is given an odd reference to a London monument. We learn that Potter has been wandering in the wilderness of London. "In that London fog, went before him the ever-present cloud by day, but no pillar of fire by the night, except the cold column of the monument; two hundred feet beneath the mocking gilt flames on whose top, at the stone base, the shiverer, of midnight, often laid down"(161). This oddly placed passage displays Potter's knowledge of

the power of monuments. Melville placed this passage innocently in front of readers in order to see the ironies surrounding Potter's situation. Israel Potter realizes that history has forced him to bow to the powers of the cold column. He, himself, has laid down most of his life for their construction. Whether in England or America, monuments display power and symbolically demonstrate the sweep of history that has controlled Potter's life. This passage demonstrates that the problem with monuments did not rest solely with the hubris of the United States. Potter is forced to serve and eventually to see that powerful monumental forces, depicted in cold stone, have towered above his existence in both England and America.

In a final effort to confront the monuments towering above him, Israel Potter returns with his son to America in Chapter 26. Ironically, he is nearly run over by a parade car, "flying a broidered banner, inscribed with gilt letters:-'BUNKER HILL. 1775. GLORY TO THE HEROES THAT FOUGHT!' The irony of the situation is unmistakable. History's progress runs over the actualities of battles and history, in favor of rhetoric and glorious celebrations of patriotic fervor. Melville's choice of words in describing the banner is crucial. The word "gilt" is used to describe the London monument and the Bunker Hill banner. Monument

and writing are joined by Melville in order for viewers to recognize the power that each one has over the individual. The play on "guilt" also resonates. Melville is attempting to show the guilt that should be brought to the attention of all people, who allow historical agendas and indiscriminate acceptance of monumental ideals to blur the beauty, mystery, and uniqueness of individual stories.

Throughout *Israel Potter*, Melville's quest was to get readers to see biographies, monuments, and historical stories as large-scale fictions, which overshadowed and sent to exile the true stories of common people.

The final actions of the novel drive home Melville testing the grounds of indifference. Potter's placement on his return on the Fourth-of-July is key for he distances himself quietly from the pomp and circumstance surrounding monumental celebrations:

It was on Copp's Hill, within the city bounds, one of the enemy's positions during the fight, that our wanderer found his best repose that day. Sitting down here on a mound in the grave-yard, he looked off across Charles River towards the battle-ground, whose incipient monument, at that period, was hard to see, as a struggling sprig of corn in a chilly spring. (167).

Potter takes up a position, from which the enemy stood during the Revolutionary War. There is meaning behind this, for the distance allows Potter to see the other side. Like

his encounters with King George III and Sir John Millet, Potter is beginning to look around and not be easily swept away by the force of American rhetoric. As Russell Reising also observes, "...Melville deploys notions of character and of history and historical analysis from a decidedly oppositional stance"(123).

Seeing the Bunker Hill monument as a "sprig" underscores the developing process of America's monumental tradition. It is rising up from the ground, but it is "hard to see." The monument struggles to raise itself naturally, but Potter realizes its artificiality. From the enemy's position, Potter carries himself back to the Berkshires to die simply in nature; in effect, he returns to the simple beauty of his beginnings. While this may appear to be the last line of defeat for a forgotten patriot, the end rejects the monumental for the simple beauties of the common and ordinary.

Potter's end asks readers to look at things from different angles of vision. Instead of simply rejecting the monumental vision, the story of Israel Potter asks readers to interpret, to become involved, and to think about the values of interpretation. Russ Castronovo convincingly writes, "Yet Melville's purpose was not to destroy monumental history and make the American public an

unhistorical herd, but to democratize implacable icons and make them subject to the participation of human interpretation"(155-156). Castronovo's point is a fitting end to *Israel Potter* because it presents Melville thinking about readers to follow and it calls for reinterpretation.

Melville's monumental imagination in the novel ends with a call for readers to reenter and reexamine his works closely in order to see the lurking connections between monuments, memorials, and the workings of Melville's pen. As *Israel Potter* closed, Melville challenged his readers' indifference to the fragments that he saw ignored and passed over in his culture and throughout his own written pages.

Melville's imagination was monumental, for he was able to incorporate an enormously diverse amount of elements from his culture, ranging from the globular exploration of *Typee* to the homespun monumental growth of *Israel Potter*. And, Melville was also able to push the limits of the solid world by employing his powers of the imagination to their fullest potential. In each instance that Melville employed a monumental image, he was providing a glimpse into his own process of writing and perhaps a reentry point for those interested in exploring the interconnectedness of the written page and stone monument. Melville's writing,

therefore, can be seen as an artist carving out and casting a unique niche in the literary space of America and the world.

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