

INFORMATION TO USERS

While the most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this manuscript, the quality of the reproduction is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted. For example:

- Manuscript pages may have indistinct print. In such cases, the best available copy has been filmed.
- Manuscripts may not always be complete. In such cases, a note will indicate that it is not possible to obtain missing pages.
- Copyrighted material may have been removed from the manuscript. In such cases, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, and charts) are photographed by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each oversize page is also filmed as one exposure and is available, for an additional charge, as a standard 35mm slide or as a 17"x 23" black and white photographic print.

Most photographs reproduce acceptably on positive microfilm or microfiche but lack the clarity on xerographic copies made from the microfilm. For an additional charge, 35mm slides of 6"x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations that cannot be reproduced satisfactorily by xerography.



8708271

Askins, Justin

MELVILLE'S NATURAL WORLD: A VOYAGE TO THE METAPHYSICAL

City University of New York

PH.D. 1987

University
Microfilms
International 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106



MELVILLE'S NATURAL WORLD: A VOYAGE TO THE METAPHYSICAL

by

JUSTIN ASKINS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
English in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
University of New York.

1987

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 10, 1986
Date

Irving Howe
Chair of Examining Committee

10 December, 1986
Date

D. L. [Signature]
Executive Officer

Herbert Leibowitz
Herbert Leibowitz

Irving Howe
Supervisory Committee

Acknowledgements

There are many people who influenced my dissertation. Besides my parents and the rest of my family, William Alicea and John O'Brien provided the friendship which gave me the confidence to proceed. Gyorgyi Voros read parts of my work and was a sustaining force throughout. Most of all, three of my professors deserve special thanks. Professor Herb Leibowitz has been and remains a teacher whose continual guidance has been invaluable. The original idea of the dissertation owes itself to Professor Alfred Kazin, whose love of literature has had a profound and lasting effect on me. Finally, and most importantly, this dissertation came about through the gentle support and constant inspiration of my adviser Professor Irving Howe.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|--------|
| Introduction | p. 1 |
| I. "Cooper and Melville: Embracing the Ocean" | p. 16 |
| II. "A Paradise of Cannibals" | p. 24 |
| III. "The Vagabond Dream" | p. 55 |
| IV. "The Allegorical Excess of <u>Mardi</u> " | p. 77 |
| V. "Growing up on the Atlantic" | p. 109 |
| VI. "The Whiteness of the Jacket" | p. 134 |
| VII. "The Ultimate Ambiguity: <u>Moby-Dick</u> " | p. 156 |
| Conclusion | p. 222 |
| Works Cited | p. 232 |

Introduction

When Herman Melville turned to writing as a young man fresh from almost four years as a common sailor, the literary atmosphere around him favored Romance. Starting from Sir Walter Scott's Waverly, the historical Romance had taken hold in America, with the popular outpourings of James Fenimore Cooper and William Gilmore Simms ample evidence that the readership of the young country craved tales of adventure played out in the depths of its celebrated wilderness, or, after Cooper published The Pilot in 1823, on the great oceans. The American Gothic strain of Romance, which had its first major proponent in Charles Brockden Brown and which culminated with Poe, added a more disturbing flavor, with the natural setting becoming a remarkable vehicle for conveying the darker side of personality. Even the travel literature of the times, ranging from the whimsical flights of Washington Irving's Alhambra to the drier reportage of Mungo Park's Travels in the Interior of Africa, contributed to the Romance sensibility, as travelers brought back evocative descriptions of exotic lands. Romance was in the air, and Melville could hardly avoid its influence on such early writings as Typee and Omoo.

While the influence of both travel literature and the Gothic Romance can be traced through Melville's work, it is more provocative, as a starting point in observing his

development, to understand the conventions of landscape in the historical Romance. For it is in the natural settings of that genre that a decided realism could be joined with dramatic natural forces. Travel literature gave Melville plentiful information for his books, and the Gothic Romance gave him the freedom of the supernatural. But only historical Romance offered Melville the more enticing possibility of realistic characters in contact and often conflict with a heightened natural world. Melville starts out with marked sympathies for historical Romance tradition, and in substituting his own adventures for the three concerns of American historical Romance (the Revolution, the Settlement, and the Frontier)¹ he creates, what amounts to, an autobiographical Romance.

The benefits of such a substitution are imposing. By sticking to the events in his own life, Melville gains an immediacy unavailable to Cooper or Simms. Even Cooper's most lasting character, Natty Bumppo, remains an externalized and completed figure, a man who represents a fixed view of nature and God rather than a character who is seeking to find out what his views are. In addition, since Melville's plot lines are not tied into an immutable historical occurrence (such as an incident in the Revolution), he is much freer to expand imaginatively. Up to Moby Dick (but excluding Mardi), this loosening is relatively limited, the fictional never overly contesting the autobiographical. But with Moby Dick, some-

thing much beyond autobiographical Romance results--something even further removed from historical Romance.

What happens is that by the time we reach Moby Dick, two crucial events have had a major effect on Melville: he reads and meets Hawthorne and immerses himself in the darker characters of Shakespeare. Richard Chase writes, "The fact is that the word 'romance' begins to take on its inevitable meaning, for the historically minded American reader, in the writing of Hawthorne." Melville, writing Moby-Dick even as The Scarlet Letter was being published, is not far behind. In the preface to The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne writes about the Romance:

When a writer calls his work a romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former--while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart--has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation.

In this focus on "the truth of the human heart," Hawthorne's statement virtually redefines Romance. And Moby Dick lives up to his redefinition.

What Melville achieves in Moby Dick is an imaginative outpouring without parallel in American literature. In it, he weaves together a number of thematic considerations (all revolving about a sense of man's ultimate isolation, his doubtful relation to any higher world) and creates, in effect, a meta-Romance of mythic proportion. Why the natural settings are so fundamental to the mythic amplitude is apparent: at the center of Moby Dick is the disquietingly uncertain relation of man to nature and God. Irving Howe points out that in this novel Melville most tellingly appears as "a metaphysician of doubt" (American Newness, 83). Nowhere is this more visible than in Ahab's and Ishmael's contact with the natural world.

Melville's concentration on nature, therefore, brings us back to the historical Romance, for in the historical Romance the natural settings took precedence. It was the land- and seascapes of historical Romance--especially those of Cooper and Scott--that inflamed Melville's mind when he encountered them as a young man. Besides admitting Cooper's influence (Leyda, 440), Melville speaks of a thorough acquaintance with Scott when he writes in White-Jacket that the "noble" Jack Chase had read "all of the romances of Scott" (361). Even more direct evidence of Melville's familiarity with Scott

comes in a letter to John Murray in 1848, where Melville admonishes the Englishman with these words, "will you Britons not credit that an American can be a gentleman, & have read the Waverly Novels, tho every digit may have been used in the tar-bucket?" (Leyda, 275).

Historical Romance, perhaps more than any other form, relies on the natural setting as background for the presentation of character and plot, with man's relation to the natural world often serving as a thematic substratum. As Perry Miller points out, the Romance--and particularly the historical Romance--had as its object "Nature with a capital N--Nature as meaning both universal human nature and natural landscape." While it is hard to conceive of any Romance or social novel not concerned with "universal human nature," the Romance emphasis on "natural landscape" is especially important in Melville, most of all in the works through Moby-Dick.

In the historical Romances which preceded Melville, the natural landscape served as a supportive backdrop to the highly charged events being played out, moving from the rugged Highlands of Scott's Waverly to the dark conifer forests of James Fenimore Cooper's The Last of the Mohicans, from the mysterious Carolina swamps of William Gilmore Simms The Partisan to the dangerous coastal waters of the Atlantic in Cooper's The Red Rover. Yet in some passages, the natural world takes on a more potent oppositional role, becoming an emblem of deeper, more mysterious forces. It is this depth

that was especially attractive to Melville, particularly the storm scenes at sea. Melville certainly did not accept the American historical Romance notion (ultimately derived from the Puritans) that the sprawling wilderness, despite its obvious hardships, was God's gift to God's chosen people. But he did appreciate the enormous natural power that resided in many Romance settings. Melville starts with a degree of empathy, and then, as he comes to instill the natural setting with an increasingly complicated and tremendously reflective capacity, further removes himself from historical Romance convention.

It is in this developing reflectiveness that Melville's relation to Emerson becomes most apparent. Emerson wrote that "nature always wears the colors of the spirit"--and then, in his early optimism, forgot that men can hate. Melville, understanding men better, created Ahab--and a natural environment suitable for a man of such savage passion. Emerson, it is true, in his later essays and in his journals addressed the dark fever in men more directly, and Melville praised him for it. But Melville, from the start of his writing career, knew evil as a much more penetrating and pervasive force than Emerson ever would. Irving Howe writes convincingly that

Melville's ultimate darkness is more extreme,
probably more profound than that of the aging Emerson.
It occurs at a higher pitch of despair and is sustained

over a longer stretch of neglect; it yields demonisms and nihilisms, grim refusals of all compensation, the force of which Emerson knew but which he often repressed beneath his glittering sentences. At the end both still want to "strike through the mask." Both are still stirred by the restlessness of an idealism reaching toward transcendence while bereft of a personal God. (82)

Melville's first novels, Typee and Omoo, are adventure stories, tales of a young sailor whose fascination with the native life around him is the pulse of the books. While Typee is by far the better novel in terms of narrative and psychological unity, both involve retreats away from the restraints of civilization to the freedom of the primitive--a freedom Melville found attractive but was never able to fully accept.

In Typee the retreat is centered on the dangerous descent into the Typee valley, a birth-like movement (as D.H. Lawrence has pointed out in Studies in Classic American Literature) into an existence that is, on the surface, Edenic. Underneath this paradisaical exterior is the constant uneasiness of living with cannibals, a warranted and considerable fear and one that makes the escape from paradise more than justified. In Typee the narrator--and Melville is hovering just behind him--is intensely curious about the Typees (as the numerous chapters on their customs and their

personal characteristics indicate) but he is also powerfully repelled by their attempts to make him join completely in the tribal community (most clearly in his alarm at their wanting to tattoo him). The landscapes are well handled in Typee, and the overall effect is of a character first struggling against an unyielding natural setting, and then consistently probing beneath its idyllic surface.

But something else goes on in Typee, a change which illustrates how far Melville had already come from his predecessors. Despite the narrator's cautions, life in the Typee valley is an extremely desirable alternative to civilization. No previous novelist had created such a captivating world. Even Natty Bumppo, Cooper's natural man, lives in a wilderness that is ultimately one of conflict and continual alertness. Indians and other enemies abound, and it is the rare moment when Natty simply enjoys nature. In Typee, at many points, the narrator joins in with the natives' indolent contentment. The bewitching description of Fayaway serving as a sail for the narrator's canoe is only one instance where the landscape celebrates the primitive over the civilized. Although the natural world will soon become more menacing and mystical, Melville's praise for primitive harmony is something which will continue throughout his next five novels.

Omoo, a much more autobiographical work (as Charles Roberts Anderson shows in Melville in the South Seas), is a

lesser book than Typee. But here there is again a sense of the desirability of contact with a hidden primitive culture, particularly when the narrator and Doctor Long Ghost, the central characters, journey to the village of Tamai in one of their many peregrinations. There, in a chapter called "A Dance in the Valley," they are allowed to see a "genuine pagan fandango" or "hevar," a rare event for foreigners since the missionaries had started to take control. That Melville rails against the pompous and misguided missionaries is not surprising. He sensed, even in these two early novels, that any vision of life which cut itself off from the primal quality of the natural world would be an eviscerated vision. This is made particularly clear in the brief but powerful sketch of a spearfishing incident:

I shall never forget the night, that old Marharvai and the rest of us, paddling off to the reef, leaped at midnight upon the coral ledges with waving torches and spears. We were more than a mile from the land; the sullen ocean, thundering upon the outside of the rocks, dashed the spray in our faces, almost extinguishing the flambeaux; and, far as the eye could reach, the darkness of sky and water was streaked with a long, misty line of foam, marking the course of the coral barrier. The wild fishermen, flourishing their weapons, and yelling like so many demons to scare their prey, sprang from ledge to ledge, and sometimes darted

their spears in the very midst of the breakers. (595) Later the "wild fishermen" will be three pagan harpooners, but in the above passage there is already a vigorous interaction with the sea. Unfortunately, except for a few instances, the natural world in Omoo is treated too much as an external presence, the landscapes hampered by a rambling plot. Like much of the travel writing of the day, there is no necessity to what is seen, no cumulative interest. The psychology of why the writer is there is relatively simple: curiosity founded on the physical experience of exploration.

With Mardi Melville is consciously trying to write a "real romance," a work of imagination rather than one predominantly recollective. Melville sensed, at least while writing Mardi, the limitations of doing still another autobiographical novel. Thus Mardi, after opening in a sputtering attempt at a sea adventure, turns into something else, taking a problematic path into uneasy allegory. Harry Levin writes, "Once he leaves the literal plane, Melville is caught between an allegory which is too narrowly topical in its allusiveness and a symbolism so transcendent that it bodes forth no more than a 'spirit's phantom's phantom'" (175). What Melville does in Mardi is to settle into an allegorical format, even while trying to open the work up into an imaginative Romance. The landscapes suffer from the same indecisiveness, rarely gaining the interactive quality of Typee and parts of Omoo.

Despite the genre problem in Mardi, there are certain important new developments in this failed work. In the character of Taji, the demi-god role that the sailor/narrator takes on, the restless and obsessive search is fully exposed for the first time in Melville's fiction. Mardi is a testing ground for the idea of Ahab, and though the quests are different--one for his kidnapped lover, the pale and lovely Yillah (a figure who comes back as Lucy Tartan in Pierre), the other for the White Whale--at the core their mental outlook is the same. Ahab and Taji have both lost a precious part of themselves--a vital part of their humanity (just as characters like Benito Cereno and Bartleby have lost something)--and are doomed to wander in an attempt to find the unfindable. The major difference, of course, is that Taji's loss is mainly physical, whereas Ahab's loss is relentlessly psychological and spiritual. Mardi fails, but without it I think Moby-Dick would have required much more energy to achieve, an energy that Melville might not have been able to expend fully in his increasingly troubled life.

After Mardi, in an attempt to regain his flagging popularity, Melville wrote Redburn, a clearly autobiographical work of considerable power. Melville wrote it in ten weeks and considered it "beggarly," but it is not. It is another novel (like Typee and Omoo) where one senses the importance of Melville writing out his experience, this time of his first voyage. If Ahab has kinship with Taji, then

Redburn is in many ways a young Ishmael, as he comes to admit early on in the novel: "At last I found myself a sort of Ishmael in the ship, without a single friend or companion" (114). But even this separation is somewhat misleading because all Melville's major characters up to Moby-Dick are wanderers, in quest of a personal and increasingly metaphysical truth. The energy and attractiveness of the romantic journey (as W.H. Auden defines it in The Enchaféd Flood) is obvious throughout Melville, and Redburn, though a novel of education and, in part, of social criticism, still has as its central thrust the desirability of being freed from any shoreside considerations. The interplay of Redburn and the natural world, though briefly presented, can be seen as a preliminary to the profound encounters of Moby Dick.

White-Jacket, Melville's next novel, is a rather provocative work which foreshadows, in the symbolic concentration of the white jacket, much of Moby Dick. The white jacket is a flawed but effective device for capturing both physical and psychological constraint. However, it lacks the incredible flexibility that Melville gains with the White Whale, a creature which, besides manifesting the tremendous power of the natural world, comes to serve as a representative of the terrifyingly inscrutable intentions of the world beyond us. The white jacket is threaded throughout the book, but except for the great description of White Jacket's fall from the mast, its resonance is mainly limited to

activities aboard ship. This focus on ship-board affairs also affects the seascapes. Melville does not firmly establish White Jacket's connection with the ocean. This limits any inspired degree of metaphysical expansion, since without a basis in the natural world, Melville's inquiries often lose their rich texture of primitive authenticity--even though in White-Jacket the sense of voyaging in a sea which ranges from the serenely beautiful to the life threatening adds a potent if underutilized background.

When Moby-Dick begins it is more or less another autobiographical work, this time based on Melville's eighteen months aboard the whaler Acushnet. But soon after Ahab enters, one realizes that he is an awesome character, one of Promethean defiance engaged on a mythic but insane quest. Told simply as a narrative of Ahab's obsession, the story would be an adventure of both vitality and magnitude. But told through the eyes of Ishmael--in all Melville's earlier fiction the first person narrator concentrates on the events and perceptions of his own life--Ahab's quest becomes a splendid occasion for Ishmael's meditations. Ishmael's position in the book works two ways. It allows him to tell Ahab's story with an understanding that only a crew member of the Pequod could have had. Yet by maintaining enough distance--in that the narrator never meets Ahab--Ishmael's speculations are untarnished by personal encounter. Considering each character's status on the ship, any actual

contact would necessarily have been detrimental to Ishmael's role as a transcendent observer.

Since Ahab is so consumingly attached to a natural object of immense proportion, it is not surprising that the natural settings around *Moby Dick* come to take on tremendous importance, especially since we see them through the eyes of Ishmael, the contemplative center of the book. Chapters like "Moby Dick" and "The Whiteness of the Whale" create a sublime sense of the White Whale and of nature in general, and this sense is continued in chapters like "The Prairie," "The Grand Armada," and "The Doubloon." By the time we reach chapters like "The Quadrant" and "The Candles," where Ahab is clearly challenging all of nature (and whatever lurks behind the face of nature) to do its worst, the natural world has become an antagonist of marvelous dimension. With its lingering sense of maddening indifference--and this indifference, at its height, is the indifference of the Creator--nature's alternate faces of beauty and serenity, terror and turbulence are superbly effective in providing an adversary to the Promethean Ahab.

Melville's use of natural settings changed significantly throughout his career. His earliest novel Typee displays an exuberant fascination with a people directly involved in a natural existence. In Omoo this fascination lessens, and in Mardi virtually disappears. Nature also comes to play a secondary part in Redburn and White-Jacket as Melville

concentrates on the social interactions aboard the two vessels involved, even while keeping the natural setting in the background. But in Moby-Dick all the earlier fascination with nature, all the earlier working out of character and relationship, all the earlier necessity for voyaging come to fruition. There, Ahab's obsession with an inscrutable and probably impassive White Whale leads us on a voyage of epic momentum. The pictures that remain in one's mind after reading Moby-Dick confirm the spectacular vividness of Ahab's insatiable quest. They also are the striking conclusion to what Alfred Kazin calls "the most imaginative single span of the earth in American writing" (An American Procession, 140).

Notes

¹ Carl Van Doren, The American Novel (New York: MacMillan, 1922) 17.

Cooper and Melville: Embracing the Ocean

To trace Herman Melville's complicated literary heritage is to take in Sir Thomas Browne and Tobias Smollett, Washington Irving and Edgar Allen Poe, Richard Henry Dana and Mungo Park. Other more important influences could be mentioned: Hawthorne and Shakespeare for their background of "mystical blackness," which allowed their characters to speak with the "sane madness of vital Truth"; Emerson for his emphasis on the divine potency of nature, a divinity Melville could never fully accept, but a potency that he came to know first-hand; the Bible for its rhythms and trials and visions. However, if these authors and writings, especially the last four, came to resonate in Melville's mind when he began and as he continued writing, there is one author, James Fenimore Cooper, who provided a vision of America--both of its oceans and its inland wilderness--no other writer could provide.

Cooper's early novels, particularly his early sea novels--The Pilot (1824), The Red Rover (1827), and The Water Witch (1830)--and his first three Leatherstocking tales--The Pioneers (1823), The Last of the Mohicans (1826), and The Prairie (1827)--were those which had, as Melville recalled at Cooper's death in 1851, "an awakening power" on his mind when he read them as a young boy.

What this "awakening power" was is open to debate, but Cooper's romanticizing of the forest and the ocean--mainly

through the heroics of Natty Bumppo, and the Pilot, the Red Rover, and the Skimmer of the Seas--had a lasting effect on Melville's writing. For instance, in a review of The Sea Lions on April 28, 1849, not long before he began Moby-Dick, Melville wrote, "few descriptions of the lonely and the terrible, we imagine, can surpass the grandeur of many of the scenes here depicted" (The Literary World, 370).

About this awakening, Perry Miller wrote that "In America, the romance vindicated nature's nation, land of Natty Bumppo, against the artificiality of Europe. Melville was prisoner of the theme no less than Cooper, for to an awareness of it Cooper awakened him" (185). The untamed wilderness of Leatherstocking and the unconquerable ocean of the sea novels must have seemed, to a genteel youth who at the age of twelve saw his father fail completely in business and then die in madness, an enticing respite from the plunderings of reality. Among other influences (such as his cousin Thomas Wilson Melville, who had visited Nukuheva), the early Cooper novels contributed to Melville's decision to go to sea. Moreover, it is easily shown that Melville's greatest character, Captain Ahab, traces his lineage from the Byronic figures of the Pilot, the Red Rover, and, to a lesser extent, the Skimmer of the Seas. Cooper's portrayal of the sea as, in Thomas Philbrick's words, "a living being" of tremendous destructive possibility may have also been a formative element in Melville's creation of the White Whale,

a creature of almost equal capacity. And even though a character like Natty Bumppo is not directly evident in Melville's fiction, it would be hard to suppose that the great friendship in Cooper, the pairing of Leatherstocking and Chingachgook, had no effect on producing the remarkable meeting of Ishmael and Queequeg.

But while the Romantic spectacle of "an impervious boundary of forests" treaded by silent Indians and canny woodsmen, and "exquisitely graceful" sailing vessels led by superb and disdainful captains over the most tempestuous waters must have opened imaginative vistas to the young Melville, clearly Melville's fiction is a firm rejection of much of Cooper's overall social and moral picture. Cooper's vision is overridingly aristocratic and chivalrous, one where even the most Byronic characters, like the Red Rover and the Pilot, are ultimately aligned in some overwhelmingly nationalistic and God-reverencing hierarchy. In The Pilot the title character, a thinly disguised John Paul Jones, is revealed to be intimately involved with the struggle for American independence. Likewise, in The Red Rover, in a forced and flimsy ending, the Rover returns to aid in the revolutionary cause. Though several instances could be cited throughout the first three sea novels, it is in the preface to The Sea Lions (1849), by which time even Cooper had been influenced by the growing realism of American sea fiction, that Cooper makes his definitive statement on the background

of his novels, one which differs so markedly from the blackness of background Melville admired in Shakespeare and Hawthorne:

If anything connected with the hardness of the human heart could surprise us, it surely would be the indifference with which men live on, engrossed by their worldly objects, amid the sublime natural phenomena that so eloquently and unceasingly speak to their imaginations, affections, and judgments. So completely is the existence of the individual concentrated in self, and so regardless does he get to be of all without that concentrated circle, that it does not probably happen to one man in ten that his thoughts are drawn aside from this intense study of his own immediate wants, wishes, and plans, even once in the twenty-four hours, to contemplate the majesty, mercy, truth and justice of the Divine Being that has set him, as an atom, amid the myriads of the hosts of heaven and earth.

The physical marvels of the universe produce little more reflection than the profoundest moral truths. A million of eyes shall pass over the firmament on a cloudless night, and not a hundred minds shall be filled with a proper sense of the power of the dread Being that created all that is there--not a hundred hearts glow with the adoration that such an appeal to

the senses and understanding ought naturally to produce. This indifference, in a great measure, comes of familiarity; the things that we so constantly have before us becoming as a part of the air we breathe, and as little regarded.

One of the consequences of this disposition to disregard the Almighty Hand, as it is so plainly visible in all around us, is that of substituting our own powers in its stead. In this period of the world, in enlightened countries and in the absence of direct idolatry, few men are so hardy as to deny the existence and might of a Supreme Being; but, this fact admitted, how few really feel that profound reverence for him that the nature of our relations justly demands! It is the want of a due sense of humility, and a sad misconception of what we are, and for what we were created, that misleads us in the due estimate of our own insignificance, as compared with the majesty of God.

For Melville such submission to God in his life or in his fiction would have been impossible. For the turbulence of his early life--the financial hardships, the differing religious beliefs of his parents, the four and a half years of voyaging--combined with a naturally skeptical and inquisitive mind to produce a writer who starts out with no set vision except the necessity for questioning all

second-hand accounts and beliefs, a writer whose fiction was going to be first-hand even if it meant that no definitive answers could be given. Perry Miller saw this exactly, when he wrote:

Melville, unlike Cooper, employed the pattern of the romance to explode the Romantic thesis. The inner history of his mind, from 1846 to 1852, seems to be a mounting loathing of his own premises, until at last he is flagrantly abusing those very devices by which other romancers attained proper endings. Pierre thus appears to be the climax of satanic rebellion; because Moby-Dick marks a stage halfway between Mardi and Pierre, it rises far enough out of the formula to be free of the stereotype, and yet is not so far gone into conceptualism as to become a rigidified tract: hence, on this assumption, its success. (185)

The difference between Melville and Cooper becomes particularly apparent when their respective landscapes are examined. In Cooper, writes Blake Nevius, the landscape is often used for "moral or philosophical commentary" (18) that ultimately remains within the Christian tradition: "Not for him the inward turning eye. His sight is keen and active and, after the fashion of his age, amenable to training, but his moral responses to nature impress us, sooner or later, as conditioned reflexes" (33). Melville, lacking such a trust in traditional Christianity, never uses landscape so

didactically. Instead, there is an enormous flexibility with Melville, where particular landscapes lead into unexpected digressions and disturbances against the Christian calm.

Nevertheless, reading and delighting in Cooper--whom he called "our national novelist" (The Literary World, 370)-- was important to Melville's development because the Romantic energy, of fleet ships and harmonious crews and indomitable captains, was a crucial counterbalance to the often brutal realism that began appearing in the 1840s, and that Melville himself had observed directly. When Melville began writing Typee in 1846, this realism had become the most attractive trait to the American reading public (Philbrick, 63, 194-7). They were tired of reading the many ill-wrought romances that modeled themselves on Cooper or the "heavily costumed historical melodramas" (8) that deviated from Cooper. Instead, they wanted more of how the sailors and adventurers actually lived, and the popularity of Richard Henry Dana's Two Years before the Mast, a book Melville called "unmatchable," is ample testimony to that changing taste. But for Melville, even though authenticity was a consummate concern, there was a need for something more, and this need, for an imaginative freedom that would blend fact and fiction into the archetypal, was heightened by his early absorption in Cooper.

However, once Melville actually began writing, his distance from Cooper becomes clear. Typee, Perry Miller

wrote, is "a flight from civilization, and is saturated with Cooper" (192). But none of Cooper's characters ever fly from civilization the way the narrator, and almost all of Melville's characters, do. Even Natty Bumppo, who clearly escapes civilization, has a stability markedly non-Melvillean. Typee starts out as another hard-luck sailor's tale, of ill-treatment by an abusive captain, but soon changes into an almost unbelievable account of a sailor's visit among the cannibals, told, it is true, with accurate observation of the native life, but forming what amounts to a quest for the idyllic and the innocent. The complete extent of James Fenimore Cooper's influence on Herman Melville is difficult to say, but it is clear that Cooper's romances were an essential ingredient in Melville's initial vision of both wilderness and ocean. As Thomas Philbrick concludes, "Indeed, in all likelihood, Melville's literary career itself owes its inception to Cooper and his contemporaries, who, by establishing and sustaining the vogue for sea fiction in the first half of the nineteenth century, enabled Melville to turn his maritime experience into the materials of art" (266).

A Paradise of Cannibals

After the Christianized landscapes of Cooper, to enter into the first person enthusiasm of Melville's first novel, Typee, is a movement of considerable distance. After the Dolly, the whaling vessel the young sailor/narrator is aboard, has almost run out of provisions, its "arbitrary and violent" captain begrudgingly decides to head for the Marquesa Islands for reprovisioning. Here the narrator announces the effect of that decision:

"Hurra, my lads! It's a settled thing; next week we shape our course to the Marquesas!" The Marquesas! What strange visions of outlandish things does the very name spirit up! Naked houris--cannibal banquets--groves of cocoa-nut--coral reefs--tattooed chiefs--and bamboo temples; sunny valleys planted with bread-fruit trees--carved canoes dancing on the flashing blue waters--savage woodlands guarded by horrible idols--heathenish rites and human sacrifices. (13)

The narrator here (and Melville's authorial intervention is clearly felt) is a combination of circus barker and sailor, enticing the reader to pay the price of admission and stay to the end of his strange tale. It is a technique that Melville will use again, the most notable instance being Ishmael's grandly undercut advertisement for the voyage of the Pequod. The socially proper and polished characters from Cooper would

never have been overtaken with such an excited outburst (even Natty Bumppo, though rawer than most of Cooper's major figures, still reacts to the sublimity of the natural world with appropriate reverence). But the narrator (and in Typee it is not particularly important to separate narrator from author, for the pendulum between fact and fiction never swings too far either way), in recapturing the approach to the Marquesas, is intimately involved:

Although I could not avoid yielding in a great measure to the general languor, still at times I contrived to shake off the spell, and to appreciate the beauty of the scene around me. The sky presented a clear expanse of the most delicate blue, except along the skirts of the horizon, where you might see a thin drapery of pale clouds which never varied their form or color. The long, measured dirge-like swell of the Pacific came rolling along, with its surface broken by little tiny waves, sparkling in the sunshine. Every now and then a shoal of flying fish, scared from the water under the bows, would leap into the air, and fall the next moment like a shower of silver into the sea. Then you would see the superb albacore, with his glittering sides, sailing aloft, and often describing an arc in his descent, disappear on the surface of the water. Far off, the lofty jet of the whale might be seen, and nearer at hand the prowling shark, that

villainous footpad of the seas, would come skulking along, and, at a wary distance regard us with his evil eye. At times, some shapeless monster of the deep, floating on the surface, would, as we approached, sink slowly into the blue waters, and fade away from the sight. But the most impressive feature of the scene was the almost unbroken silence that reigned over sky and water. (18-19)

This lyric description is more than competent--it is already showing a mind that works towards a blending of opposites much more than Cooper's. To place a "shoal of flying fish... like a shower of silver into the sea" with "the prowling shark, that villainous footpad of the seas," a creature that came to "regard us with his evil eye," is an instance of this subtle mixture. As Melville recreates the scene, he already has a sense of intermingling natural good and evil that goes far beyond the simple equations of Christianity evident in his predecessor. Not surprisingly, when the first view of Nukuheva finally looms ahead, it is drawn to show the contrast between reality and a preconception of it.

From the vague accounts we sometimes have of their beauty, many people are apt to picture to themselves enamelled and softly swelling plains, shaded over with delicious groves, and watered by purling brooks, and the entire country but little elevated above the surrounding ocean. The reality is very different; bold

rock-bound coasts, with the surf beating high against the lofty cliffs, and broken here and there into deep inlets, which open to the view thickly-wooded valleys separated by the spurs of mountains clothed with tufted grass, and sweeping down towards the sea from an elevated and furrowed interior, form the principal features of these islands. (21)

In almost every novel of Melville's that follows, the nature of reality is what is questioned and probed. In the first pictures from Typee, we can see Melville's concern emerging. Cooper was also concerned in his sea novels with an accurate rendering of a sailor's life (he was particularly critical of the technical inaccuracy in Sir Walter Scott's The Pirate), but once Cooper removed the unrealities of Scott's romantic vision, he was quick to insert another established social vision, one almost as static and self-perpetuating. Melville never does this, preferring instead to question rather than to answer, eventually settling for no permanent social fabric except the companionship of the voyagers.

As the Dolly enters Nukuheva bay it is "captured" by a horde of vivacious native girls: "Their appearance perfectly amazed me; their extreme youth, the light clear brown of their complexions, their delicate features, and inexpressibly graceful figures, their softly molded limbs, and free unstudied action, seemed as strange as beautiful" (25). How

far away from the howling Huron women of Cooper, and how clearly, as the narrative proceeds, the role of the savage is reversed:

Our ship was now wholly given up to every species of riot and debauchery. (Not the feeblest barrier was interposed between the unholy passions of the crew and their unlimited gratification.) The grossest licentiousness and the most shameful inebriety prevailed, with occasional and but short-lived interruptions, through the whole period of her stay. Alas for the poor savages when exposed to the influence of these polluting examples! Unsophisticated and confiding, they are easily led into every vice, and humanity weeps over the ruin thus remorselessly inflicted upon them by their European civilizers. Thrice happy are they who, inhabiting some yet undiscovered island in the midst of the ocean, have not been brought into contaminating contact with the white man. (25)

While the sailors are directly guilty in this instance, they are not the real culprits. Instead, Melville is initiating his criticism of the "European civilizers," an attack that runs through Typee and led to considerable outrage--and a revised American edition--when the novel was originally published. While Typee is nowhere comparable to the ethical complexity of Moby Dick, it is already clear that

in this novel traditional Christian standards are being scrutinized with an eye towards exposing hypocrisy which would never have appeared in the pages of Cooper. Newton Arvin writes, "Young as he still was, Melville had already experienced in his own feelings that revulsion from the Western, the modern, the complex, which in one way or another half the imaginative spirits of the nineteenth century underwent....Like most of them he called what revolted him 'civilization,' but it is not the word that very much matters; it is the emotion animating it" (54). In Typee part of this "revulsion" takes the form of sharp diatribes against the missionaries. But while the criticism is for the most part justified, it remains mainly a surface representation of Melville's complicated feelings toward Western civilization.

Typee continues with the narrator, no doubt aided by the Edenic landscape before him, deciding that he can stand no more of the brutal treatment of the captain:

From the verge of the water the land rises uniformly on all sides, with green and sloping acclivities, until from gently rolling hill-sides and moderate elevations it insensibly swells into lofty and majestic heights, whose blue outlines, ranged all around, close in the view. The beautiful aspect of the shore is heightened by deep and romantic glens, which come down to it at almost equal distances, all apparently radiating from a common center, the upper extremities of which are lost

to the eye beneath the shadow of the mountains. Down each of these little valleys flows a clear stream, here and there assuming the form of a slender cascade, then stealing invisibly along until it bursts upon the sight again in larger and more noisy waterfalls, and at last demurely wanders along to the sea. (34)

But behind the mountains to which he will be forced to flee because of bounties placed on runaways, are two valleys, one of which will be the final and unknown destination. First there is "the lovely valley of Happar, whose inmates cherish the most friendly relations with the inhabitants of Nukuheva" (35). The other possibility is the "magnificent valley of the dreaded Typees, the unappeasable enemies" (35) of both the Nukuhevans and the Happars. More ghastly is that "typee" signifies "a lover of human flesh" (35).

This dilemma does not dissuade the young sailor, and as he readies himself for his attempt, he finds himself allied in his enterprise with one Toby Greene, a shipmate who was "active, ready, and obliging, of dauntless courage, and singularly open and fearless in the expression of his feelings" (43). Their decision to jump ship together, "ratified...with an affectionate wedding of palms" (45), is the first instance of the binding friendship that comes to play such an essential part in Melville's fiction--in some ways replacing the relationship to a deity. It will lead to the great brotherhood of Ishmael and Queequeg, and after

Moby Dick, though there is an increasing distortion, friendship still serves as a deep, almost desperate need for many of the characters.

The two make their escape, at one point having to battle through a dense thicket of canes. The narrator captures the exertion with much more sensuousness than Cooper would have exhibited:

On we toiled, the perspiration starting from our bodies in floods, our limbs torn and lacerated with the splintered fragments of the broken canes, until we had proceeded perhaps as far as the middle of the brake, when suddenly it ceased raining, and the atmosphere around us became close and sultry beyond expression. The elasticity of the reeds, quickly recovering from the temporary pressure of our bodies, caused them to spring back to their original position, so they closed in upon us as we advanced, and prevented the circulation of the little air which might otherwise have reached us. Besides this, their great height completely shut out from the view of surrounding objects, and we were not certain but that we might have been going all the time in a wrong direction. (51-52)

Throughout the Leatherstocking tales, Natty Bumppo would never be so discomfited. In The Deerslayer, where he patrols the forests as a young man who has yet to kill another human, his gifts as a woodsman are already remarkable. And

Leatherstocking, even at the earliest age we see him, has a God-centered thankfulness and respect in everything he does. The two young sailors in Typee are exploring the unknown, and, ill-prepared and ill-equipped, they are struggling without any guidance from above.

The pair finally reach the top of the ridge they have been heading for, and now are safe even if the prose description is nearly fatally cliched, like a tourist exclaiming over a view:

We must have been more than three thousand feet above the level of the sea, and the scenery viewed from this height was magnificent. The lovely Bay of Nukuheva, dotted here and there with the black hulls of the vessels composing the French Squadron, lay reposing at the base of a circular range of elevations, whose verdant sides, perforated with deep glens or diversified with smiling valleys, formed altogether the loveliest view I ever beheld, and were I to live a hundred years, I should never forget the feeling of admiration which I then experienced. (54)

Their enthusiasm quickly diminishes when they observe that they are nowhere near the valleys of Typee or Happar, the terrain being "broken into a series of ridges and intervalles, which as far as the eye could reach stretched away from us, with their precipitous sides covered with the brightest verdure, and waving here and there with the foliage

of clumps of woodland" (55). More important, there are none of the fruit trees the two had relied on for sustenance. Despite these obstacles, the two decide to continue on, and the scene carries a potent timelessness:

In this direction, as far as our vision extended, not a sign of life, nor anything that denoted even the transient residence of man, could be seen. The whole landscape seemed one unbroken solitude, the interior of the island having apparently been untenanted since the morning of the creation; and as we advanced through this wilderness, our voices sounded strangely in our ears, as though human accents had never before disturbed the fearful silence of the place, interrupted only by the low murmuring of distant waterfalls. (58)

Throughout the *Leatherstocking* tales, Natty Bumppo again and again offers praise to his creator; here, "the morning of the creation" is without particular homage, almost Darwinian in its matter-of-fact tone. In a conversation which follows, something of Melville's own resolve to look deeper into everything around him comes out, as Toby advises his excited partner as he returns from reconnoitering:

"I'll tell you what, my pleasant fellow," rejoined Toby quickly, "if you are going to pry into everything you meet with here that excites your curiosity, you will marvellously soon get knocked on the head; to a dead certainty you will come bang upon a party of

savages in the midst of your discovery makings, and I doubt whether such an event would particularly delight you." (59)

The two struggle onward for a number of days, but finding the terrain unyieldingly difficult as they descend and reascend one ravine after another, they opt to follow the stream in front of them down into whichever valley it goes, their sufferings--especially a "decidedly suspicious"¹ leg injury to the narrator--making them heedless of the dangers of entering Typee valley. As they slowly lower themselves down the side of one dangerous waterfall after another, the interaction with the landscape is captured with intense precision, although, it must be admitted, with just a hint of Gothic melodrama:

As one after another of the treacherous roots yielded to my grasp and fell into the torrent, my heart sank with me. The branches on which I was suspended over the yawning chasm swang to and fro in the air, and I expected them every moment to snap in twain. Appalled at the dreadful fate that menaced me, I clutched frantically at the only large root which remained near me; but in vain; I could not reach it, though my fingers were within a few inches of it. Again and again I tried to reach it, until at length, maddened with the thought of my situation, I swayed myself violently by striking my foot against the side of the

rock, and at the instant that I approached the large root, caught desperately at it, and transferred myself to it. It vibrated violently under the sudden weight, but fortunately did not give way. (78-79)

Throughout this life-and-death descent, there is a marked self-reliance and even the "devout ejaculation of thanksgiving" is rather impersonal and a matter of convention. Perhaps Melville had already begun his "quarrel with God," as Laurance Thompson puts it, but the more important concern Melville is touching on is the enigmatic nature of appearances. And even if, in reality, this descent was not as harrowing as Melville paints it--something Charles Roberts Anderson suggests (115)--the psychological accuracy is imposing. Perhaps Melville is "bathing the plain truth in a medium of imaginative intensity" (Arvin, 84). But without this freedom, the sense of the narrator's complete separation from civilization, and a complete reliance on his own and Toby's judgment, would have been seriously diminished. Which valley they are dropping down into is the crux of the situation: "Typee or Happar? A frightful death at the hands of the fiercest of cannibals, or a kindly reception from a gentler race of savages?" (84).

The dauntless Toby won't allow for the possibility of their falling into the hands of Typees: "It is impossible that the inhabitants of such a lovely place as we saw could

be anything but good fellows" (87). But the narrator continues to ponder the question. Through a number of varied characters throughout his fiction, Melville will create similar situations which question appearances, and here, in his first novel, the concentration on determining the truth behind superficial appearances is well in evidence.

As it turns out, the pair have dropped into the dreaded Typee valley. The natives, in order to test their visitors, cleverly give no hints as to which tribe they are, and as the two sailors are questioned by "eight or ten noble looking chiefs," who looked upon the sailors with "stern and fixed attention" (89), a decision of utmost importance must be made:

Typee or Happar? I asked within myself. I started, for at the same moment this identical question was asked by the strange being before me. I turned to Toby; the flickering light of a native taper showed his countenance pale with trepidation at this fatal question. I paused for a second, and I know not by what impulse it was that I answered "Typee." The piece of dusky statuary nodded in approval, and then murmured "Mortarkee?" "Mortarkee," said I, without further hesitation--"Typee mortarkee."

What a transition! The dark figures around us leaped to their feet, clapped their hands in transport, and shouted again and again the talismanic syllables, the

utterance of which appeared to have settled everything.

(90)

Accordingly, the two are embraced into the heart of the tribe. After a few days of rest and feasting, however, it becomes clear that though their treatment is to be quite hospitable, for them both to leave would not be tolerated. The natives agree somewhat reluctantly to let Toby head back to Nukuheva for medical aid for his friend's mysterious leg inflammation (the native shaman having had no luck in treating it himself). But for the narrator to depart is clearly forbidden. In light of this leg injury, perhaps D.H. Lawrence is right when he says, "If you prostitute your psyche by returning to the savages, you gradually go to pieces. Before you can go back, you have to decompose" (16). After one attempt by Toby to return is thwarted by a near fatal attack by the supposedly friendly Happers, Toby finally gets off and the narrator is alone. Even while the two remained together, their thoughts often fixed on their eventual fate: "Might it be that beneath these fair appearances the islanders covered some perfidious design, and that their friendly reception of us might only precede some horrible catastrophe?" (95). And when Toby fails to return after the determined four days, and the narrator's injury continues to plague him, his spirits drop to their nadir.

For some weeks, the narrator remains in melancholy spirits, until the unexpected healing of his leg injury

produces a lessening of his gloominess. He is now able to move about on his own in the magnificent Typee valley, although still prohibited from journeying to the sea:

Returning to health and peace of mind gave a new interest to everything around me. I sought to diversify my time by as many enjoyments as lay within reach. Bathing in company with troops of girls formed one of my chief amusements. We sometimes enjoyed the recreation in the water of a miniature lake, into which the central stream of the valley expanded. This lovely sheet of water was almost circular in figure, and about three hundred yards across. Its beauty was indescribable. All around its banks waved luxuriant masses of tropical foliage, soaring high above which were to be seen, here and there, the symmetrical shaft of the cocoa-nut tree, surmounted by its tuft of graceful branches, drooping in the air like so many waving ostrich plumes. (157)

He now sets the life of the Typees against the life of the Europeans, and it is no contest: "As I extended my wanderings in the valley and grew more familiar with the habits of its inmates, I was fain to confess that, despite the disadvantages of his condition, the Polynesian savage, surrounded by all the luxurious provisions of nature, enjoyed an infinitely happier, though certainly a less intellectual existence, than the self-complacent European" (149). This

conflict is one which will linger in Melville's mind, a central point in Omoo and of import later on in certain passages, most notably in the Ishmael/Queequeg relationship. In painting the above landscapes, Melville taps into a archetypal undercurrent, where only a primitive people can live in harmony with the natural world. Internalized and obsessively "self-complacent," civilized man is excluded from this sympathetic bond. For the European--and for Melville--nature becomes polarized, both attractive and repulsive. This is a decisive split which continues throughout Melville's first six novels, and out of it comes the tormented Ahab.

The narrator settles into this indolent and sensuous life, aided by his attendant Kory-Kory and his island love, the bewitching Fayaway, where this strikingly picturesque description occurs on the aforementioned lake:

This lovely piece of water was the coolest spot in all the valley, and I now made it a place of continual resort during the hottest period of the day. One side of it lay near the termination of a long, gradually expanding gorge, which mounted to the heights that environed the vale. The strong trade wind, met in its course by these elevations, circled and eddied about their summits, and was sometimes driven down the steep ravine and swept across the valley, ruffling in its passage the otherwise tranquil surface of the lake.

One day, after we had been paddling about for some

time, I disembarked Kory-Kory, and paddled the canoe to the windward side of the lake. As I turned the canoe, Fayaway, who was with me, seemed all at once to be struck with some happy idea. With a wild exclamation of delight, she disengaged from her person the ample robe of tappa which was knotted over her shoulder (for the purpose of shielding her from the sun), and spreading it out like a sail, stood erect with upraised arms in the head of the canoe. We American sailors pride ourselves upon our straight clean spars, but a prettier little mast than Fayaway made was never shipped aboard any craft.

In a moment the tappa was distended by the breeze--the long brown tresses of Fayaway streamed in the air--and the canoe glided rapidly through the water, and shot towards the shore. Seated in the stern, I directed its course with my paddle until it dashed up the soft sloping bank, and Fayaway, with a light spring, alighted on the ground; whilst Kory-Kory, who had watched our manoeuvres with admiration, now clapped his hands in transport, and shouted like a madman. Many a time afterwards was this feat repeated.

(160-161)

This passage, in its evident sexual implications--the naked girl as phallic mast--touches a deeper region of primitive release. Here the sense of sexual satisfaction ("shot

towards the shore") shows another profoundly attractive quality of the Typees. Yet this Edenic contentedness will never overwhelm the narrator. Instead, it is continually set off by the foreboding sense of captivity: behind the appealing landscape lies a vague horror of cannibal rituals. By maintaining this ambiguity, Melville, besides revealing his Western heritage, is able to continue exploring the complex nature of appearances, the central concern of almost all his fiction.

After Marnoo, a taboo native who has free access to the Typee valley appears, the narrator's desire for freedom surges up again. Astonished when Marnoo, after conversing for some time in the native tongue, turns to him and speaks brokenly but intelligibly in English, the narrator quickly begs Marnoo to plead his case to the Typees. Reluctantly, since he realizes that his intercession will be seen as interference, Marnoo does explain the sailor's desire for freedom. For his efforts, Marnoo's own safety comes into question, and shortly thereafter Marnoo leaves the village, all hospitality toward him gone.

The ill feeling the narrator's request brought about diminishes quickly, and he once again falls into the tropical rhythms around him. More and more of native behavior is shown as the narrator continues in the good graces of the Typees. Having pretty well debunked the efforts of the missionaries earlier in Typee, the narrator (here the

presence of Melville as author is especially felt), after attending "The Feast of the Calabashes," decides to attack some more misconceptions about the natives, again stressing his own ability to see clearly and correctly:

The fact is, that there is a vast deal of unintentional humbugery in some of the accounts we have from scientific men concerning the religious institutions of Polynesia. These learned tourists generally obtain the greater part of their information from the retired old South-Sea rovers, who have domesticated themselves among the barbarous tribes of the Pacific.

Melville speaks of one of these rovers who, with "a natural desire to make himself of consequence in the eyes of strangers" (201), pretends to a knowledge much greater than he really has. Melville then moves to the returning "scientific voyager":

Instead of representing them as a community of lusty savages who are leading a merry, idle, innocent life, he enters into a very circumstantial and learned narrative of certain unaccountable superstitions and practices, about which he knows as little as the islanders do themselves. Having had little time, and scarcely any opportunity to become acquainted with the customs he pretends to describe, he writes them down one after another in an off-hand, haphazard style; and

were the book thus produced to be translated into the tongue of the people of whom it purports to give the history, it would appear quite as wonderful to them as it does to the American public, and much more improbable. (202)

While the narrator is careful to admit that the religious theories of the islands were "a complete mystery" to him, he also observes that "their practical everyday operation could not be concealed" (205). Melville, through the narrator, is striving to sketch as accurately as possible the religious happenings before him, the best he can do with a people whose language he does not really understand and whom he has known for only a number of weeks.

One of his most memorable observations concerns a primitive mausoleum he often visits:

On all sides as you approached this silent spot you caught sight of the dead chief's effigy, seated in the stern of a canoe, which was raised on a light frame a few inches above the level of the pi-pi. The canoe was about seven feet in length; of a rich, dark colored wood, handsomely carved and adorned in many places with variegated bindings of stained sennate, into which were ingeniously wrought a number of sparkling sea-shells, and a belt of the same shells ran all around it. The body of the figure--of whatever material it might have been made--was effectually concealed in a heavy robe of

brown tappa, revealing only the hands and head; the latter skilfully carved in wood, and surmounted by a superb arch of plumes. These plumes, in the subdued and gentle gales which found access to this sequestered spot, were never for one moment at rest, but kept nodding and waving over the chief's brow. The long leaves of the palmetto drooped over the eaves, and through them you saw the warrior holding his paddle with both hands in the act of rowing, leaning forward and inclining his head, as if eager to hurry on his voyage. Glaring at him for ever and face to face, was a polished human skull, which crowned the prow of the canoe. The spectral figure-head, reversed in its position, glancing backwards, seemed to mock the impatient attitude of the warrior. (203)

It is during one of these visits that we feel Melville's presence quite directly, an instance which gives a glimpse into his own inner beliefs: "This strange superstition [the funeral rite] affords another evidence of the fact, that however ignorant man might be, he still feels within him his immortal spirit yearning after the unknown future" (205).

As the narrator observes more, he comes to the conclusion that despite some signs of religious observance, spiritual affairs in Typee were at a very low ebb, noticing "mouldy fruit spread out upon a rude altar, or hanging in half decayed baskets around some uncouth jolly looking image"

(205). Here again the narrator's critical comments indicate something about Melville's own spiritual feelings. In his sharp attacks on the hypocritical missionaries and in his gentle chiding of the Typees' religious laxness, Melville reveals, despite an overall skepticism, a considerable involvement with matters of the spirit.

Typee, overall, is "more symbolically complete and profound than the books between it and Moby-Dick" (Chase, 42), but it is the early parts of the book that grip the reader most intensely, both in the pace of the narrative and the vividness and complexity of the landscape presented. The latter third of the book is somewhat lessened, particularly by the plethora of technical information about the Typees: fishing habits, tattooing methods, musical instruments, the many uses of the coconut, etc. The novel becomes, at points, little more than a travelogue, Melville trying to put in as much information as possible without any real narrative velocity.

One can, however, defend some of this inclusiveness because of its contribution to intensifying the fiction of the narrator's captivity. Newton Arvin writes of Typee and Omoo that they both "hint at the freer and more plastic form of fiction" (83). In Omoo, this is not particularly true, but Typee more than hints at fiction: the entire accumulation of detail adds considerably to the psychological intensity of the captivity; the factual encourages the reader to accept

the more fanciful, which is the essence of much early American Romance. Instead of simply relating a relatively brief incident of captivity (Melville probably spent less than three weeks in the valley), the weight of detail allows the resonance of the captivity to lengthen almost naturally into a fictionalized stay of almost four months. A short visit becomes a profound psychic and creative interaction with a primitive culture.

Of this information, the weakest part is Melville's continual attack on the missionaries. At one point he writes, somewhat preachily:

Ill-fated people! I shudder when I think of the change a few years will produce in their paradisaical abode; and probably when the most destructive vices, and the worst attendances on civilization, shall have driven all peace and happiness from the valley, the magnanimous French will proclaim to the world that the Marquesas Islands have been converted to Christianity! and this the Catholic world will doubtless consider as a glorious event. Heaven help the "Isles of the Sea!"--The sympathy which Christendom feels for them has alas! in too many instances proved their bane....

Let the savages be civilized, but civilize them with benefits and not with evils; and let heathenism be destroyed, but not by destroying the heathen. The Anglo-Saxon hive have extirpated Paganism from the

greater part of the North American continent; but with it they have likewise extirpated the greater portion of the Red race. Civilization is gradually sweeping from the earth the lingering vestiges of Paganism and at the same time the shrinking forms of its unhappy worshippers. (230)

All this is true, no doubt, but it seems less effective than simply letting the interaction of the natives with the missionaries speak for itself. Melville is much more effective when he gives a concrete example. He tells of a missionary's spouse, "a robust, red-faced and very lady-like personage" who uses two of the natives as "a pair of draught bipeds" to pull a small cart she uses to take her "regular airings" (232). Here again Melville is using a powerful depiction to show that despite the intents and superficial results of the missionaries (that most of the natives are now nominally Christian), there is a terrible injustice in the missionaries' complacent and manipulative workings. Of course, such an attack--even though the narrator does try half-heartedly to give the missionaries some credit--would prompt the ire of the more conservative, but it also prompted this early and enticing review by Hawthorne: The author of Typee, he wrote, "had that freedom of view--it would be too harsh to call it laxity of principle--which renders him tolerant of codes of morals that may be little in accordance with our own; a spirit proper enough to a young and

adventurous sailor, and which makes his book the more wholesome to our staid landmen" (Melville Log, 207).

A much more important way Melville maintains some suspense in the latter third of the book is by letting the narrator get further glimpses into the cannibalism of the Typees. On returning unexpectedly to the Ti (a native meeting house), he catches "a glimpse of three human heads," one of which he "distinctly saw" (269):

It was in a state of perfect preservation, and from the slight glimpse I had of it, seemed to have been subjected to some smoking operation which had reduced it to the dry, hard, and mummy-like appearance it presented. The two long scalp-locks were twisted up into balls upon the crown of the head in the same way that the individual had worn them during life. The sunken cheeks were rendered yet more ghastly by the rows of glistening teeth which protruded from between the lips, while the sockets of the eyes--filled with oval bits of mother-of-pearl shell, with a black spot in the centre--heightened the hideousness of its aspect. (269-70)

Horrifying as the sight was, even more disturbing to the narrator is that one of the objects was the head of a white man.

A week later, after the Typees carry back three palm-covered bodies, the spoils of a victory over the

Happars, the narrator is restricted to one of the native houses. The reason is obvious to the young sailor: the bodies of the victims are to be eaten. His feelings are confirmed when, after his restriction is removed, he finds "a curiously carved vessel of wood, of considerable size, with a cover placed over it" (276). The vessel is surrounded by a low bamboo railing, and before the nearby chiefs can stop him, the narrator lifts up one end of the cover: "my eyes fell upon the disordered members of a human skeleton, the bones still fresh with moisture, and with pieces of flesh clinging to them here and there" (276). This view does little to assuage his own foreboding that, despite the Typees' continued considerate treatment, his own fate is likely to be the same.

Another way of maintaining tension is the return of Marnoo. He offers the sailor a plan of escape, whereby the sailor will sneak away one night while the natives sleep, take Marnoo's waiting canoe, and paddle to Nukuheva. This plan is foiled by the continued watchfulness of the natives, and there is a return of his possibly psychosomatic leg ailment that puts this mode of escape completely out of the question. It is at that point, with the restless need for escape forestalled, that the narrator speaks in a curiously Emersonian manner, describing the effect, during his debility, of a scene before him:

Just beyond the pi-pi and disposed in a triangle

before the entrance to the house, were three magnificent bread-fruit trees. At this moment I can recall to my mind their slender shafts, and the graceful inequalities of their bark, on which my eye was accustomed to dwell day after day in the midst of my solitary musings. It is strange how inanimate objects will twine themselves into our affections, especially in the hour of affliction. Even now, amidst all the bustle and stir of the proud and busy city in which I am dwelling, the image of those three trees seems to come as vividly before my eyes as if they were actually present, and I still feel the soothing quiet pleasure which I then had in watching hour after hour those topmost boughs waving gracefully in the breeze.

(282)

This "soothing quiet pleasure" is a genuine Transcendentalist experience, where nature carries away all everyday concerns.

Typee reaches a climax when the news comes that Toby has returned to Typee. He has not, in fact, but the natives, in the ensuing confusion, allow their captive to approach the harbor. What has occurred is that a whaleboat from the Julia (whence Omoo, his second novel, begins) has come to try to ransom the narrator, the Julia being short on crew. Once at the harbor, the natives become embroiled in an argument concerning the propriety of the sailor's presence, a controversy which allows him to make his escape. It is a

harrowing moment, as the natives cease their arguing and, led by one of their chiefs, attempt to cut off at a nearby headland the fleeing whaleboat:

Shouting loudly to his companions, and pointing with his tomahawk towards the headland, he set off at full speed in that direction, and was followed by about thirty of the natives, among whom were several of the priests, all yelling out "Roo-ne! Roo-ne!" at the very top of their voices....The wind was freshening every minute, and was right in our teeth, and it was one of those chopping angry seas in which it is so difficult to row. Still the chances seemed in our favor, but when we came within a hundred yards of the point, the active savages were already dashing into the water, and we all feared that within five minutes' time we should have a score of the infuriated wretches around us. If so, our doom was sealed, for these savages, unlike the feeble swimmers of civilized countries, are, if anything, more formidable antagonists in the water than when on land. It was all a trial of strength; our natives pulled till their oars bent again, and the crowd of swimmers shot through the water despite its roughness, with fearful rapidity. By the time we had reached the headland, the savages were spread right across our course. Our rowers got out their knives and held them ready between their teeth, and I seized the

boat-hook. We were well aware that if they succeeded in intercepting us they would practise upon us the manoeuver which has proved so fatal to many a boat's crew in these seas. They would grapple the oars, and seizing hold of the gunwale, capsize the boat, and then we should be entirely at their mercy.

After a few breathless moments, I discerned Mow-Mow. The athletic islander, with his tomahawk between his teeth, was dashing the water before him till it foamed again. He was the nearest to us, and in another instant he would have seized one of the oars. Even at the moment I felt horror at the act I was about to commit; but it was no time for pity or compunction, and with a true aim, and exerting all my strength, I dashed the boat-hook at him. It struck him just below the throat and forced him downwards. I had no time to repeat my blow, but I saw him rise to the surface in the wake of the boat, and never shall I forget the ferocious expression of his countenance.

Only one other of the savages reached the boat. He seized the gunwale, but the knives of our rowers so mauled his wrists, that he was forced to quit his hold, and the next minute we were past them all, and in safety. (290)

Besides giving a deeply authentic color, the landscapes in Typee serve the vital function of background for

Melville's philosophical inquiries. In this novel, Melville has already moved away from Cooper's landscapes to a more philosophically complex and skeptical usage. In Typee, and it is most apparent in the earlier parts of the novel, Melville amplifies the value of the landscape by building into it contrasting values, a polarization which essentially rejects the harmonious overview of Cooper.

If Typee does not succeed completely, it is a remarkable debut. While the autobiographical authenticity contributes much to the final effect of Typee, it is the expansion of these actual events through imaginative reworking that shows the direction Melville will take in his later fiction. As it stands, the autobiographical overlay is so strong in Typee that the plot and the various settings seem almost reined in by fact. Later, in the failed Mardi and supremely in Moby-Dick, an obsessiveness of character will come to carry the central energy of the narrative. But in Typee, the autobiographical element controls and confines any loosening up of character. When freed--in Moby-Dick through the speculative forays of Ishmael as he watches the great battle before him--this tortured necessity allows Ahab's quest to loom into the mythical, where, as Ahab's burning need for revenge overpowers the lives of Ishmael and the rest of crew, there emerges an archetypal pattern of the self-consumed man battling a supremely indifferent and preternaturally potent Nature. Typee is already evidence of Melville's personal

obsession with finding and recording the truth of his experiences, of his feelings, and of his beliefs. As such, Typee is significant in tracing Melville's growth as a writer. It is, in its own right, a fascinating adventure story, and to read it is to begin to understand the fervent inquisitiveness of a man who was never able to achieve psychological and creative security, but would never give up the quest.

Notes

¹ in a letter of September 28, 1985

The Vagabond Dream

Omoo is a continuation of the events in Typee, but is a lesser work by comparison. Throughout the fictionalized atmosphere of Typee, there is a tension between various appearances and their underlying realities: the enchanting hillsides of Nukuheva lead to a nightmare of hunger and exposure; the zeal of the missionaries turns out to be savage abuse; the allure of an Edenic valley hides captivity at the hands of cannibals. The more closely autobiographical Omoo has no such complicating stress. D.H. Lawrence wrote that "perhaps Melville is at his best, his happiest in Omoo. For once he takes life as it comes" (207). Newton Arvin, in agreeing with Lawrence, goes on to say that "on the whole the book is as close to what must have been the emotional truth as it is known to be to the 'facts'" (62). But neither happiness nor "emotional truth" guarantee memorable fiction, particularly for a writer whose strength was greatest when the natural setting was an active and intimate part of the novelistic action. In Omoo, in an effort to maintain the emotional accuracy of the picaresque narrative (which is rather trivial for the most part), the natural landscapes become almost inconsequential snapshots: the creation of character through consistent perceptual and contemplative involvement with the natural world is neglected for a tepidly realistic accounting of rather purposeless wandering. The

incidents in Omoo are eminently believable--Charles Roberts Anderson in his superb tracing of Melville's actual voyages in Melville in the South Seas concludes that the adventures in Omoo "were drawn almost literally from actual experience, in this perhaps the most strictly autobiographical of all Melville's works" (199). But stripped of much of the archetypal patterning which unified Typee, Omoo moves along at a much too superficial level.

Omoo opens on the Julia, the narrator having signed on as a crew member after his rescue from the Typees. Even before it becomes apparent that life on the "Little Jule" (333) is worse than aboard the Dolly, the narrator is uncomfortable: "Safe aboard of a ship--so long my earnest prayer--with home and friends once more in prospect, I nevertheless felt weighed down by a melancholy that could not be shaken off. It was the thought of never more seeing those, who, notwithstanding their desire to retain me a captive, had, upon the whole, treated me so kindly. I was leaving them forever" (331). And once the real condition of the ship emerges--that of sickness and low morale due to the cowardly incompetence of Captain Guy--the narrator seems continually involved in an attempt to return to his earlier paradisaical situation. Newton Arvin writes that "a certain deep sense of kinship with Polynesian man was never to leave [Melville]...but it was a kinship he wanted to feel on an ideal level, not at the sacrifice of his own wholeness, and

both Typee and Omoo make it clear that, conflicting as his feelings were, the longing to get back was the strongest of them" (59). That "kinship" is a lasting influence on Melville, but in Omoo the desire to return to civilization is felt much less strongly than in Typee.

The first landscape in Omoo consists of one quick phrase, "the blue, looming island of St. Christina" (345). Fearful that the crew would desert en masse if allowed to land, Captain Guy refuses to let them ashore. That night a number do desert and the next day the narrator catches the mood of those remaining: "And all the morning long our sick men limped about the deck, casting wistful glances inland, where the palm-trees waved and beckoned them into their reviving shades. Poor invalid rascals! How conducive to the restoration of their shattered health would have been those delicious groves!" (347). The detachment of the narrator is worth noting, for this contributes to the vagabond tone that pervades the book.

Later that day the deserters are captured and the Julia sails on, her sprightly movements captured with precision: "the prancing Julia, suddenly arrested in her course, bridled her head like a steed reined in, while the foam flaked under her bows" (349). Here Melville, in a very Cooperian way, is playing with language, enlivening the contact of ship and sea.

When the ship reaches the island of La Dominica, it

enters the bay of Hannamanoo:

On one hand was a range of steep green bluffs hundreds of feet high, the white huts of the natives here and there nestling like birdsnests in deep clefts gushing with verdure. Across the water, the land rolled away in bright hillsides, so warm and undulating, that they seemed almost to palpitate in the sun. On we swept, past bluff and grove, wooded glen and valley, and dark ravines lighted up far inland with wild falls of water. A fresh land-breeze filled our sails, the embayed waters were gentle as a lake, and every blue wave broke with a tinkle against our coppered prow. (352)

This is a full and picturesque description, but little more, its resonance fading immediately as the next view comes into sight. It seems a kind of filler.

The night of leaving Hannamanoo, however, brings a more revelatory passage, one which shows an increasing contemplativeness in Melville:

Toward morning, finding the heat of the forecastle unpleasant, I ascended to the deck where every thing was noiseless. The Trades were blowing with a mild, steady strain upon the canvas, and the ship heading right out into the immense blank of the Western Pacific. The watch were asleep. With one foot resting on the rudder, even the man at the helm nodded, and the

mate himself, with arms folded, was leaning against the capstan.

On such a night, and all alone, revery was inevitable. I leaned over the side, and could not help thinking of the strange objects we might be sailing over. (360)

Phrases like "immense blank" and "all alone, revery was inevitable" read like anticipations of the "dead, impregnable, uninjurable wall" (1154) of Moby-Dick and the meditational drifting of "The Masthead." It is interesting, also, that the narrator's thoughts here are interrupted by dawn's "gray, spectral shadow cast over the heaving billows." In "The Masthead" the dreaming is broken by an almost rhapsodic terror at the consequences of such psychic loosening:

There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life imparted by a gently rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God. But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch, slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Cartesian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists! (962).

How much more potent is the second passage, where the simple act of standing watch surges like the tides into a great moment of philosophic revelation.

On the way to its next destination, the Julia encounters a "spicy gale," and it is revealing how Melville handles the storm. The first line gives a key to the tone of the entire scene: "We soon found ourselves battling with the waves, while the before mild Trades, like a woman roused, blew fiercely, but still warmly, in our face" (386). The "brave little Jule" and her crew weather the gale admirably save the "old black cook" Baltimore. Baltimore's problem is that the heavy seas continually inundate his "caboose" or cookhouse. Afraid of being washed overboard, the "gale-suit" clad cook ties himself with a short line to a ring-bolt in the deck:

One evening, just as he was getting supper, the Julia reared up on her stern, like a vicious colt, and when she settled again forward, fairly dished a tremendous sea. Nothing could withstand it. One side of the rotten head-bulwarks came in with a crash; it smote the caboose, tore it from its moorings, and after boxing it about, dashed it against the windlass, where it stranded. The water then poured along the deck like a flood, rolling over and over pots, pans, and kettles, and even old Baltimore himself, who went breaching along like a porpoise.

Striking the taffrail, the wave subsided, and washing

from side to side, left the drowning cook high and dry on the afterhatch: his extinguished pipe still between his teeth, and almost bitten in two.

The few men on deck having sprung into the main-rigging, sailor-like, did nothing but roar at the calamity. (387)

In *Cooper*, a character like the cook would never have been the center of such a situation. More than likely, the storm would have been used to prove the prowess of one of the major characters. Here the scene is funny but it serves as little more than a droll incident aboard the hapless Julia. In contrast, the events in Typee lead almost inevitably to the Typee Valley. Likewise, in Moby-Dick the narrative moves inescapably to an encounter with the White Whale. In Omoo the action leads in no particular or necessary direction; it is assumed, questionably, to be self-sufficient.

Onward they sail, passing the Coral Islands, briefly sketched, and then on to Tahiti. Here Melville is working hard to create a paradisaical setting, but the almost tangible longing felt at the beginning of Typee is missing:

Two round and lofty promontories, whose mountains rise nine thousand feet above the level of the ocean, are connected by a low, narrow isthmus; the whole being some one hundred miles in circuit. From the great central peaks of the larger peninsula--Orohena, Aorai, and Pirohitee--the land radiates on all sides to the

sea in sloping green ridges. Between these are broad and shadowy valleys--in aspect, each a Tempe--watered with fine streams, and thickly wooded. Unlike many of the other islands, there extends nearly all round Tahiti, a belt of low, alluvial soil, teeming with the richest vegetation. Here, chiefly, the natives dwell.

Seen from the sea, the prospect is magnificent. It is one mass of shaded tints of green, from beach to mountain top; endlessly diversified with valleys, ridges, glens, and cascades. Over the ridges, here and there, the loftier peaks fling their shadows, and far down the valleys. At the head of these, the water-falls flash out into the sunlight as if pouring through vertical bowers of verdure. Such enchantment, too, breathes over the whole, that it seems a fairy world, all fresh and blooming from the hand of the Creator. (393)

There is a certain gracefulness here, but none of the attraction of escaping into the landscape, as in the first view of Nukuheva.

What gains prominence in Omoo, at least in the first half of the novel, is the exploration of the rights of the sailors, a theme which will engage Melville in much of his work, especially White-Jacket and Billy Budd. In Cooper rank was an important distinction, and though a sailor like Long Tom Coffin might act admirably and even heroically, his

overall status was inferior to his captain. Melville discards the strict hierarchies of rank in Omoo, and Captain Guy is seen as inferior to both Dr. Long Ghost and to the narrator. Even the common sailors, though rough-edged, are manly and honest, something that can't be said about Guy. This conflict between the captain and the men has certain possibilities, but by keeping to more or less what actually happened, Melville loses any fictional momentum.

The events aboard the Julia once it anchors off Tahiti are a continuing illustration that rank is no longer a guide to respectability. In Omoo, the correctness of a cause, in this case the inhuman prohibition of the crew (many of them suffering from scurvy) from going ashore, demands an action which amounts to mutiny. The sailors rightfully refuse to do anything except bring the Julia in to Papeete harbor and land. It is not unexpected, therefore, that the ludicrous attempts by Captain Guy, first mate Jermin and Consul Wilson, the government representative, to coerce the crew to go out on another whaling voyage are blatantly unsuccessful.

In one effort to intimidate the sailors, they are shifted to a French frigate, where this description of Papeete Harbor takes place:

The village of Papeete struck us all very pleasantly. Lying in a semicircle round the bay, the tasteful mansions of the chiefs and foreign residents impart an air of tropical elegance, heightened by the

palm-trees waving here and there, and the deep-green groves of the Bread-Fruit in the background. The squalid huts of the common people are out of sight, and there is nothing to mar the prospect. (430)

Later in the description we come across the "condemned hull" of an old American whaler. The narrator eventually comes to examine the hull, and finding that the name of the ship was identical to the name of "the noble stream on whose banks I was born," moves into this reverie: "In an instant, palm-trees and elms--canoes and skiffs--church spires and bamboos--all mingled in one vision of the present and the past" (431). The actual painting of the picture is rather unimpressive, but the psychic reverberation--one event leading to a recollection of another--is worth considering because such reverberatory moments come to play an increasing part in Melville's fiction.

Once in the harbor, the crew is summarily arrested, but since the men see through the cowardly threats of Wilson, nothing of consequence is done to them. Eventually, as they maintain their resistance to returning to the Julia, the rebellious sailors are sent off toward the English jail or "Calabooza Beretanee" (444), where this sketch of the surroundings occurs:

The scenery around us was delightful. The tropical day was fast drawing to a close; and from where we were, the sun looked like a vast red fire burning in

the woodlands--its rays falling aslant through the endless ranks of trees, and every leaf fringed with flame. Escaped from the confined decks of the frigate, the air breathed spices to us; streams were heard flowing; green boughs were rocking; and far inland, all sunset flushed, rose the still, steep peaks of the island. (442)

This is an undeniably poetic description--"every leaf fringed with flame" demands attention--but it serves only as a pleasant touch to jog the narrative along.

The men eventually reach their destination, about a mile from the village:

It was a beautiful spot. A mountain stream here flowed at the foot of a verdant slope; on one hand, it murmured along until the waters, spreading themselves upon a beach of small, sparkling shells, trickled into the sea; on the other was a long defile, where the eye pursued a gleaming sinuous thread, lost in shade and verdure.

The ground next to the road was walled in by a low, rude parapet of stones; and, upon the summit of the slope beyond, was a large, native house, the thatch dazzling white, and, in shape, an oval. (444)

A line like "It was a beautiful spot" needs no comment. The rest of the passage is adequate, but once again, the coloring is uncharged and stationary. In Typee the descriptions often

amplify the psychic state of the narrator; here there is a much more removed quality.

After a final attempt by Captain Guy to get the men to return to the Julia, the ship sails and Omoo loses the little remaining suspense concerning the mutiny. The narrative for a number of chapters stops cold. Though we learn some valuable information about the somewhat corrupted life of the Tahitians, and are again subjected to Melville's "slightly oafish philosophizing" (Chase, 176) about the missionaries, the beginning of part two is filler, with the barest pulse of narrative keeping it going. Newton Arvin argues that "Typee and Omoo owe much of their vitality to their apparently unpoetic ballast of facts" (80). About Typee Arvin is right, for there the "ballast of facts" serves to make Tommo's predicament much more tangible. In Omoo the cultural information is not well integrated into the narrative, remaining, all too often, mere padding. Similarly, in White-Jacket and Moby-Dick, there is much technical information (about the navy and about whaling) but in both books the facts help create the atmosphere for the actions aboard each ship, and in Moby-Dick the factual chapters help to slow the demonic haste of Ahab.

As it becomes clear to the sailors that they are no longer going to be confined or sustained at the Calabooza, the solidarity which held them together begins to dissipate. After a last appeal for supplies from Wilson, who technically

is still in charge of the prisoners, the men realize that they are on their own.

At this juncture, the narrator and Doctor Long Ghost decide to head off on their own, curious to see the surrounding area. They hire themselves out to an American and an Englishman trying to make a go of farming at the nearby island of Imeeo, and the next day they sail for the island. Here is their entrance into Imeeo harbor: "At last we heard the roar of the Imeeo reef; and gliding through a break, floated over the expanse within, which was smooth as a young girl's brow, and beached the boat" (527).

This is adequate enough for the beachcomber appeal of their present adventure, as is the description of the valley they enter:

We were in the valley of Martair; shut in, on both sides, by lofty hills. Here and there, were steep cliffs, gay with flowering shrubs, or hung with pendulous vines, swinging blossoms in the air. Of considerable width at the sea, the vale contracts as it runs inland; terminating, at the distance of several miles, in a range of the most grotesque elevations, which seemed embattled with turrets and towers, grown over with verdure, and waving with trees. The valley itself, is a wilderness of woodland; with links of streams flashing through, and narrow pathways, fairly tunneled through masses of foliage. (528)

One has only to remember the vines and canes in Typee to see that in this admittedly picturesque passage the narrator is decidedly uninvolved.

The two sailors begin to work desultorily as farm hands, but, quickly gaining the friendship of the farmers, their work is interrupted by a hunting excursion to the nearby mountains:

At the foot of the mountain, a steep path went up among rocks and clefts, mantled with verdure. Here and there were green gulfs, down which it made one giddy to peep. At last we gained an overhanging, wooded shelf of land which crowned the heights; and along this, the path, well shaded, ran like a gallery.

In every direction, the scenery was enchanting. There was a low, rustling breeze; and below, in the vale, the leaves were quivering; the sea lay, blue and serene, in the distance; and inland the surface swelled up, ridge after ridge, and peak upon peak, all bathed in the Indian haze of the Tropics, and dreamy to look upon. Still valleys, leagues away, reposed in the deep shadows of the mountains; and here and there, water-falls lifted up their voices in the solitude. High above all, and central, the "Marling-spike" lifted its finger. Upon the hillsides, small groups of bullocks were seen; some quietly browsing; others slowly winding into the valleys. (539)

One feels that the scene was indeed "enchanted," but there is no particular psychic richness involved.

Another hunt occurs, and as the natives carry the quartered bullocks on their backs, there is a touch of something deeper and more primitive: "It was a wild sight. The torches, waved aloft, flashed through the forest; and, where the ground admitted, the islanders went along on a brisk trot, notwithstanding they bent forward under their loads. Their naked backs were stained with blood; and occasionally, running by each other, they raised wild cries, which startled the hillsides" (550).

Soon after the second hunt the vagabonds decide that the laborer's life is not for them, so they bid farewell to the planters. Having heard that Tamai, an inland village, "had been so much less affected by recent change than other places" (562), they proceed to walk to it, along the way stopping at a "green cool hollow among the mountains" where, the narrator matter-of-factly claims, "the utter solitude and silence were oppressive" (565). For contrast, one has only to remember the powerful passage in Typee where Toby and Tommo with great difficulty reach the top of the mountain they have struggled against for many hours. There the "unbroken solitude" and "fearful silence" are felt as resonant forces, as both physical and mental attributes.

The two men spend several days at Tamai, where they are allowed to see the Lory-Lory, a native dance now forbidden by

the missionaries. A group of girls enters, forming a ring for two of the girls:

Presently, the two girls join hands overhead; and, crying out, "Ahloo! ahloo!" wave them to and fro. Upon which, the ring begins to circle slowly; the dancers moving sideways, with their arms a little drooping. Soon they quicken their pace; and, at last, fly round and round: bosoms heaving, hair streaming, flowers dropping, and every sparkling eye circling in what seemed a line of light.

Meanwhile, the pair within are passing and repassing each other incessantly. Inclining sideways, so that their long hair falls far over, they glide this way and that; one foot continually in the air, and their fingers thrown forth, and twirling in the moonbeams.

"Ahloo! ahloo!" again cry the dance queens; and, coming together in the middle of the ring, they once more lift up the arch, and stand motionless.

"Ahloo! ahloo!" Every link of the circle is broken; and the girls, deeply breathing, stand perfectly still. They pant hard and fast, a moment or two; and then, just as the deep flush is dying away from their faces, slowly recede, all round; thus enlarging the ring.

Again the two leaders wave their hands, when the rest pause; and now, far apart, stand in the still moonlight, like a circle of fairies. Presently,

raising a strange chant, they softly sway themselves, gradually quickening the movement, until, at length, for a few passionate moments, with throbbing bosoms and glowing cheeks, they abandon themselves to all the spirit of the dance, apparently lost to every thing around. But soon subsiding again into the same languid measure, as before, they become motionless; and then, reeling forward on all sides, their eyes swimming in their heads, join in one wild chorus, and sink into each other's arms. (569)

A "quite wonderful picture" (81), Arvin correctly calls it in comparing Melville's sketch with a similar one from Mungo Park's Travels. But as one reads it there is no inner participation such as there is when Tommo watches the native rituals in Typee, no sense that the narrator and Dr. Long Ghost are anything but tourists. Typee has a past and a future always weighing on the present. In Omoo the past and future are never particular pressures on a pathless present. In Typee the narrator is integrated into the tribe during the three months he claimed to have remained there; in Omoo when the dance ends, the tour simply moves on.

The next day, in order to escape the "inglorious circumstance" of being "apprehended as runaway seamen" (573), the narrator and Dr. Long Ghost are forced to flee Tamai. They return to Zeke and John, the planters, for the night. There they decide that the best course is to try and

ingratiate themselves with Queen Pomare Vahinee I, the titular head of Tahiti, who is reputed to be quite gracious to foreigners. They head out of the valley at dawn, a moment captured in this sentimental effusion:

The morning only showed itself along the lower edge of a bank of purple clouds, pierced by the misty peaks of Tahiti. The tropical day seemed too languid to rise. Sometimes, staring fitfully, it decked the clouds with faint edgings of pink and gray, which, fading away, left all dim again. Anon, it threw out thin, pale rays, growing lighter and lighter, until at last, the golden morning sprang out of the East with a bound--darting its bright beams hither and thither, higher and higher, and sending them, broadcast, over the face of the heavens. (580)

Along the way, at the hospitable village of Loohooloo the narrator goes exploring, an adventure which concludes with this rhythmical sketch of a grove of cocoa palms:

At noonday, this grove is one of the most beautiful, serene, witching places that ever was seen. High overhead, are ranges of green rustling arches; through which the sun's rays come down to you in sparkles. You seem to be wandering through illimitable halls of pillars; everywhere you catch glimpses of stately aisles, intersecting each other at all points. A strange silence, too, reigns far and near; the air,

flushed with the mellow stillness of a sunset.

But after the long morning calms, the sea-breeze comes in; and creeping over the tops of these thousand trees, they nod their plumes. Soon the breeze freshens; and you hear the branches brushing against each other; and the flexible trunks begin to sway. Toward evening, the whole grove is rocking to and fro; and the traveler on the Broom Road is startled by the frequent falling of the nuts, snapped from their brittle stems. They come flying through the air, ringing like jugglers' balls; and often bound along the ground for many rods. (593)

While at Loohooloo another incident occurs, a spearfishing party which shows Melville at his best, the narrator involved and sensing the wild harmony of the scene:

I shall never forget the night, that old Marharvai and the rest of us, paddling off to the reef, leaped at midnight upon the coral ledges with waving torches and spears. We were more than a mile from the land; the sullen ocean, thundering upon the outside of the rocks, dashed the spray in our faces, almost extinguishing the flambeaux; and, far as the eye could reach, the darkness of sky and water was streaked with a long, misty line of foam, marking the course of the coral barrier. The wild fishermen, flourishing their weapons, and yelling like so many demons to scare their

prey, sprang from ledge to ledge, and sometimes darted their spears in the very midst of the breakers. (595)

Once at Partoowye, the site of the Queen's residence, the two try to enter into the queen's services. They do eventually infiltrate her palace--she is now sickly and averse to meeting foreigners--but their attempt to have "an audience" with her is stifled by the startled and displeased queen. The option of working in some capacity for the Queen gone, the two decide to try signing on with a whaler that has touched in Taloo harbor. While the narrator is successful, something about Doctor Long Ghost disturbs the captain, and he refuses to sign Long Ghost on. Long Ghost, taking it rather amusedly, insists that his friend ship out, and that he will look after himself. Omoo ends with the narrator giving his farewell to Long Ghost and then sailing off into "the wide Pacific" (646).

The problem with Omoo is that there is no particular imaginative linkage of events: the two possibilities that appear in the novel (the mutiny of the sailors or the camaraderie of Long Ghost and the narrator) are lost because Melville feels obligated to maintain the literal truth. So the mutiny fades once the Julia sails again, and any close relationship with Long Ghost is prevented because Long Ghost was, no doubt, "a man of humorous desperation, throwing his life ironically away" (Lawrence 208). Willard B. Dillingham sees a unity to Omoo in its "trial by pleasure" (79),

comparing Long Ghost and the narrator to Prince Hal and Falstaff in Henry IV part I. But to compare Prince Hal's acceptance of his role as future King to Melville's signing on with another ship is unconvincing. There is an "impish, rebellious vitality" (Butterfield, 26) in the first half of Omoo, as the beleaguered sailors outwit their superiors, but in the second half that liveliness congeals for the most part.

One of the most evident ways of seeing the failure of Omoo is through the landscapes in the novel. In summation, they are little more than a series of pictures that lead nowhere. Even the best scenes--the hunting scene and the spearfishing incident--fail to carry the impact of many of the scenes in Typee. The lesser landscapes of Omoo lack even the temporary involvement that the two scenes mentioned have: they serve only as a flimsy lead-in to the next incident. Omoo clearly lacks the depth and elasticity of memorable fiction: "Rather than a novel it is a series of stereopticon scenes skilfully interlarded with a gallery of grotesque portraits, the slender line of continuity being furnished by the off-hand reminiscent chat of a graceful raconteur" (Anderson, 309).

But even with all these qualifications, it is important to recognize that in writing Omoo, Melville was writing out an essential part of his life. Omoo was a project which would open the way for his other novels. Alfred Kazin writes

about Melville's "grand initiation," the almost four years of voyaging "that never left him and became his imaginative life. To read Melville is to go round and round the earth in magnified and mythified versions of that voyage" (American Procession, 138). Omoo is perhaps the least "magnified and mythified" of Melville's novels, but it is an intriguing part of Melville's literary voyage, and that voyage, in its completeness, is the only way to understand the turns and lulls of Melville's extraordinary output.

The Allegorical Excess of Mardi

Melville's third attempt at fiction, Mardi, is a peculiar and disorienting work. After the autobiographical immediacy of Typee and Omoo, the allegorical correspondences of Mardi seem forced and wooden. Certainly the loss of the autobiographical texture was a conscious decision: Melville wrote in the preface, "Not long ago, having published two narratives of voyages in the Pacific, which, in many quarters, were received with incredulity, the thought occurred to me, of indeed writing a romance of Polynesian adventure...the thought was the germ of others, which have resulted in Mardi" (661). Part of Mardi does have a Gothic romance touch, namely, the Byronesque search of the main character for his kidnapped lover, the blonde Yillah. But though this imaginative casting of an obsessed character has potential, the energy is lost in the fifty-three chapters before the young sailor takes on the demi-god role of Taji, and the ponderous allegory which follows his transformation. In the latter part of the novel Mardi becomes a Swiftian look at some of the major nations and customs of the Western world. But without the crisp pacing of Gulliver's Travels--for instance, Swift takes three pages to get Gulliver to Lilliput; Melville takes one hundred and sixty to bring the sailor to the archipelago of Mardi--Mardi never gains the focused energy of Swift's masterpiece.

What the one hundred and ninety five chapters of Mardi amount to, then, are three narratives, the last two concurrent: a long and fragmented voyage to Mardi that reminds one of Arthur Gordon Pym; the tracing of Taji's search for Yillah; and a series of visits to the various island countries of Mardi, ostensibly to find Yillah but actually serving as the vehicle for Melville's satire.

When the novel first appeared, critical opinion was predominantly negative.¹ Twentieth Century criticism continues to incline toward the negative,² with most critics agreeing with Harold Beaver that Mardi is "largely unreadable" (29). While most of the negative criticism is justified, Mardi is a fundamental novel in pursuing any study of Melville's growth because it is a testing ground for a number of themes that will continue in Melville (the obsessed character, the relentless voyage, the turbulence of nature). Without the working through of Mardi, Moby-Dick--and other works--might not have achieved such a balanced form, a perfect mixture of stabilizing fact and furious fancy. Newton Arvin puts it best when he says of Mardi, "Melville was feeling his way forward, rather timidly and fumblingly, to a genuine mytho-poetic form by investing his narrative with something of the quality of Polynesian legend and myth. The attempt was on the whole an abortive one, but the important thing is that he made it" (93).

In terms of landscape, Mardi is a qualified disaster.

Since allegory is necessarily inimical to close description--any buildup of realistic detail would cause undue pressure on the alignment of the two worlds--Melville throughout Mardi gives us little interesting detail. There are several notable exceptions which will be discussed, but the total effect of Mardi is of an author struggling against his representational instincts to maintain a cumbersome and deadening allegorical mechanism. Undeniably, some lively passages appear about the natives of several of the island countries visited, but the compelling curiosity shown by the narrator of Typee has receded, replaced by the manufactured obsessiveness of Taji.

The natural landscape has very little impact in the beginning of Mardi as we are first introduced to the young sailor and his shipmate Jarl. Aboard a luckless whaler searching for sperm whales in the southern Pacific, the young man chooses to escape the Arcturion after the captain decides to head north to hunt right whales in the "chill and dismal fogs" (666) of the Alaskan waters. Having made his decision to try to reach one of the "numerous groups of islands, loosely laid down upon the charts, and invested with all the charms of dreamland" (668), the sailor goes aloft one afternoon:

In the distance what visions were spread! The entire western horizon high piled with gold and crimson clouds; airy arches, domes, and minarets; as if the

yellow, Moorish sun were setting behind some vast Alhambra. Vistas seemed leading to worlds beyond. To and fro, and all over the towers of this Nineveh in the sky, flew troops of birds. Watching them long, one crossed my sight, flew through a low arch, and was lost to view. My spirit must have sailed in with it; for directly, as in a trance, came upon me the cadence of mild billows laving a beach of shells, the waving of boughs, and the voices of maidens, and the lulled beatings of my own dissolved heart, all blended together. (668)

The Irvingesque opening is mildly effective, but of real import is the ending. The assonant mixture of "mild billows laving," "waving of boughs," "voices of maidens," and "lulled beatings" shows that poetry was never far from Melville's prose. And the trance-like blending of self and nature hints at the Ishmael/nature relationship in Moby-Dick. If fifty-one chapters hadn't taken place between it and sighting land, this vision might have lead to a far more hospitable environment than the allegorical machinery of Mardi.

Instead, after the narrator and Jarl escape in one of the Arcturions's whaleboats, the tale becomes a series of rather pointless incidents. For four days they are becalmed; then they encounter a small brigantine "in a state of unaccountable disarray" (717). Hidden on the Parki are a native couple, Samoa and Annatoo. For fifteen-odd chapters,

the action aboard remains of little significance. Finally, "The Parki gives up the Ghost," during a storm that Fenimore Cooper would have enjoyed:

The storm seemed about to overtake us; but we felt no breeze. The noiseless cloud stole on; its advancing shadow lowering over a distinct and prominent milk-white crest upon the surface of the ocean. But now this line of surging foam came rolling down upon us like a white charge of cavalry: mad Hotspur and plumed Murat at its head; pouring right forward in a continuous frothy cascade, which curled over, and fell upon the glassy sea before it.

Still, no breath of air. But of a sudden, like a blow from a man's hand, and before our canvas could be secured, the stunned craft, giving one lurch to port, was stricken down on her beam-ends; the roaring tide dashed high against her windward side, and drops of brine fell upon the deck, heavy as drops of gore.

It was all a din and a mist; a crashing of spars and of ropes; a horrible blending of sights and sounds; as for an instant we seemed in the hot heart of the gale; our cordage, like harp-strings, shrieking above the fury of the blast. The masts rose, and swayed, and dipped their trucks in the sea. And like unto some stricken buffalo brought low to the plain, the brigantine's black hull, shaggy with sea-weed, lay

panting on its flank in the foam. (778)

The final simile pushes too hard, but the whole passage shows Melville's increasing ability to capture natural turbulence in an active metaphorical manner. Here the storm is an isolated incident, simply a way to get rid of the Parki. Later, the great storm of "The Candles" in Moby-Dick will serve as a culmination of Ahab's savage defiance.

The Parki's sinking (with the loss of Annatoo) throws the three men back into the whaleboat, and soon enough they find, perched on the peak of their sail at dawn, a noddy, a sure sign of land nearby. But Melville isn't ready to land his besieged travelers yet. Instead, the men now spot a large double canoe, and the central plot of Mardi unfolds.

Aboard the canoe is an old priest, Aleema, who is taking the young Yillah to be sacrificed to the gods of Tedaidee. Led by the narrator, the three decide to rescue the maiden, and in doing so, the narrator kills Aleema. This action initiates the Yillah/narrator relationship. Not surprisingly, the pair become lovers--the seduction scene is hilarious--and in a few days, the voyagers gain their first sight of Mardi:

It was innumerable islands; lifting themselves bluely through the azure air, and looking upon the distant sea, like haycocks in a hazy field. Towering above all, and midmost, rose a mighty peak; one fleecy cloud sloping against its summit; a column wreathed.

Beyond, like purple steeps in heaven at set of sun,
 stretched far away, what seemed lands on lands, in
 infinite perspective.

Gliding on, the islands grew more distinct; rising
 up from the billows to greet us; revealing hills,
 vales, and peaks, grouped within a milk-white zone of
 reef, so vast, that in the distance all was dim. The
 jeweled vapors, erewhile hovering over these violet
 shores, now seemed to be shedding their gems; and as
 the almost level rays of the sun, shooting through the
 air like a variegated prism, touched the verdant land,
 it trembled all over with dewy sparkles. (822)

The "mighty peak" with "one fleecy cloud sloping against its
 summit" would have appealed to Frederick Church, particularly
 because this peak is the symbol of Oro, the supreme god of
 Mardi. But the overall impression is too saccharine, just a
 bit too "dewy."

Having been mistaken by the natives as a "white Taji"
 (826), a sort of half-man, half-deity, the young sailor fully
 takes on the role when he meets Media, the king of Odo, the
 island he has landed on. Taji soon finds out that "to the
 people of the archipelago, the map of Mardi was the map of
 the world" (838). With the allegorical structure now in
 place, the only thing needed is a reason to start exploring
 the map. That comes a few days later, when the momentary joy
 of Taji is broken by Yillah's disappearance. Taji must "hie

from Odo, and move throughout all Mardi; for Yillah might yet be found" (857).

When Taji announces his decision to leave Odo, Media offers graciously to accompany him. Also along for the journey will be three of Media's companions, all serving as different interpretive perspectives. First is Mohi the historian, a gray haired "teller of stories and legends." Next is Babbalanja the philosopher, "a man of mystical aspect" concerned mainly with the "Ponderings of Old Bardianna." Third is Yoomy the poet, called "the Warbler" (858). Harold Beaver, in arguing that "despite many local allegories [Mardi] can hardly be called allegorical or epic," finds that this "splintering of consciousness....is a symbolic mode" (36). But one has only to look at the great symbol of Moby Dick--and the twinned personalities of Ishmael and Ahab--to see how far Mardi is from an effective symbolic mode.

The morning to depart arrives: "How glorious a morning! The new-born clouds all dappled with gold, and streaked with violet; the sun in high spirits; and the pleasant air cooled every night by the blending circumambient fountains, forever playing all round the reef; the lagoon within, the coral-rimmed basin, into which they poured, subsiding, hereabouts, into green tranquility" (861). One has only to look at the opening chapters of Typee, Redburn, and Moby-Dick to see how the natural setting adds considerably to the initial atmosphere of each novel. But this description--and

much of what follows in Mardi--is patently inappropriate for the start of an obsessive search for a kidnapped lover. As one critic puts it, Mardi "frequently resembles a leisurely pleasure tour more than a monomaniac's wild striving to find what he has lost" (Dillingham, 117). One never feels that Taji's loss is the real reason for the voyage around Mardi: the two narrative threads are never woven into a unified fabric.

The first stopping point is Valapee, or the Isle of Yams: "Two long parallel elevations, rising some three arrow-flights into the air, double ridge the island's entire length, lapping between, a widening vale, so level withal, that at either extremity, the green of its groves blends with the green of the lagoon; and the isle seems divided by a strait" (863). This description is the first of many in Mardi that add nothing to the narrative, serving only as a bridge to the satiric core. Now, if Melville were a great satirist, this skeletal structure might somehow suffice. But he isn't; he is overwhelmingly an autobiographical writer trying to present his own life in a mythically expansive mode, and Mardi, though in many ways "an exploration of the meaning of myth" (Franklin, ix), never comes close to the mythic texture of Typee or Moby-Dick. So at Valapee, despite some humorous lines about the whimsical injustices of King Peepi, the 10-year-old ruler of Valpee, the writing is too abstracted, the situation too artificially manipulated.

Much of Mardi consists of tiresome conversations between the five travelers, conversations which are often directed by Melville to expose various metaphysical arguments. But occasionally a character will contribute something more significant. For instance, Babbalanja's answer to Media's question of how best to perpetuate the king's name is representative of a seminal leitmotiv in Melville, that of the depth of the sea as aporia: "'Carve it, my lord, deep into a ponderous stone, and sink it, face downward, into the sea; for the unseen foundations of the deep are more enduring than the palpable tops of the mountains'" (873).

The next place the voyagers visit is Juam, and the landscape here is much more specific and tied in to the island's king:

Sailing nearer, we perceived an extraordinary rolling of the sea, which bursting into the lagoon through an adjoining breach in the reef, surged toward Juam in enormous billows....Here, we wended our way down a narrow defile, almost cleaving this quarter of the island to its base. Black crags frowned overhead....Thus cut in twain by masses of day and night, it seemed as if some Last Judgement had been enacted in the glen. But all over the lowermost hill-sides, and sloping into the glen, stood grand old groves; still and stately, as if no insolent waves were throbbing in the mountain's heart. (879)

What is worth noting about this scene is that Donjalolo, the young monarch of Juam, is literally split into two. Under the odd restrictions of his succession to the crown, Donjalolo, in order to remain king, has to live the rest of his life in the one valley of Willamilla. In the morning he stays in the shade of the eastern village; in the afternoon he must move to the western village to remain in the shade, thus increasing the sense that Donjalolo is indeed "cut in twain."

Trapped in Willamilla, Donjalolo leads a debauched life, but of more concern is his fixation on the outside world. Through Donjalolo's intense desire to find out the reality of the world outside, Melville reveals his own continuing concern with "the inconclusive nature of reality, man forever driven back on himself as he seeks a fixed point" (Kazin, 142). Up to now, Donjalolo has had reports from visitors about Mardi, reports he distrusts because they "must have been inclined to partiality or uncandidness in their statements" (909). Recently he had sent out agents of his own to each island nearby. Two, Zuma and Varnopi, have just returned from the same island, and Donjalolo queries them about their observations. Zuma starts but Donjalolo keeps interrupting him, since Zuma's account is different from all the earlier ones Donjalolo has heard. Then Varnopi begins and Donjalolo stops him also because his account disagrees with Zuma's. Finally Donjalolo asks them to show him their

samples of the reef at Rafona: Zuma's is bright red; Varnopi's bleached white. Donjalolo takes Varnopi's piece and smashes it to the ground, shouting: "'Oh mighty Oro! Truth dwells in her fountains; where every one must drink for himself. For me, vain all hope of ever knowing Mardi! Away! Better know nothing, than be deceived. Break up!'" (911). There is a heightened tone here, a fierce dissatisfaction with the limits of human understanding that will build throughout Melville's fiction. In his writings and in his life, outward appearances were never satisfactory for Melville's restless mind.

In sketching the next island the travelers reach, Ohonoo, or the Island of Rogues, Melville again tries to create a landscape which will lead into his satire about the inhabitants. After an initial glimpse of the island-- "Approached from the northward, Ohonoo, midway cloven down to the sea, one half a level plain; the other, three mountain terraces--Ohonoo looks like the first steps of a gigantic way to the sun" (933)--Mohi rehearses a legend about its creation:

Ere Mardi was made...Vivo, one of the genii, built a ladder of mountains whereby to go up and down. And of this ladder, the island of Ohonoo was the base. But wandering here and there, incognito in a vapor, so much wickedness did Vivo spy out, that in high dudgeon he hurried up his ladder, knocking the mountains from

under him as he went. These here and there fell into the lagoon, forming many isles, now green and luxuriant; which, with those sprouting from seeds dropped by a bird from the moon, comprise all the groups in the reef. (933)

There is an interesting correspondence between the actual origin of the inhabitants ("all the bucaniers, flibustiers, thieves, and malefactors of the neighboring islands" (930) had been sent there) and Mohi's myth. After Mohi's story the coast is sketched more closely, the correspondence magnified:

Where eastward the ocean rolls surging against the outer reef of Mardi, there, facing a flood-gate in the barrier, stands cloven Ohonoo; her plains sloping outward to the sea, her mountains a bulwark behind. As at Juam, where the wild billows from seaward roll in upon its cliffs; much more at Ohonoo, in billowy battalions charge they hotly into the lagoon, and fall in the isle like an army from the deep. But charge they never so boldly, and charge they forever, old Ohonoo gallantly throws them back till all before her is one scud and rack. So charged the bright billows of cuirassiers at Waterloo: so hurled them off the long line of living walls, whose base was as the sea-beach, wreck-strown, in a gale.

Without the break in the reef, wide banks of coral shelve off, creating the bar, where the waves muster

for the onset, thundering in water-bolts, that shake the whole reef, till its very spray trembles. And then is it, that the swimmers of Ohonoo most delight to gambol in the surf. (934)

This is very fine description, probably the best in Mardi, and the correctness of a band of rogues cavorting in the thunderous waves is undeniable.

Mardi has now settled down to its main focus: the various island countries the travelers will visit. It would have been just as well if Melville had dropped the Yillah story, but he has kept it going with an occasional sentence or two, and with the sporadic appearance of two ominous trios: three "specter-like" strangers, the remaining sons of Aleema, and three maidens bearing flower messages from the mysterious Queen Hautia--the dark opposition to Yillah--whom Taji disdains and refuses to visit. It is also clear by this point that Jarl and Samoa are superfluous (this is chapter 102) so Melville shortly has them both murdered, apparently by the sons of Aleema.

Volume Two of Mardi starts the major political satire of the novel, first with a visit to Maramma. Ruled by a surly and tyrannical "High Pontiff" (980), Maramma apparently represents the Catholic church in all its worst aspects. The writing and conversations throughout the visit to Maramma are strained and contrived, the landscapes producing no notable effect, beckoning toward another tale of Melville's where

landscape falls and dialogue takes over, The Confidence Man.

What happens next in Mardi is unexpected and of marked interest. Sailing on, the travelers drift off to sleep and presently Mardi is put aside for "Dreams":

Dreams! Dreams! golden dreams: endless, and golden, as the flowery prairies that stretch away from the Rio Sacramento, in whose waters Danae's shower was woven;--prairies like rounded eternities: jonquil leaves beaten out; and my dreams herd like buffaloes, browsing on to the horizon, and browsing on round the world; and among them, I dash with my lance, to spear one, ere they all flee.

Dreams! dreams! passing and repassing, like oriental empires in history; and scepters wave thick, as Bruce's pikes at Bannockburn; and crowns are plenty as marigolds in June. And far in the background, hazy and blue, their steeps let down from the sky, loom Andes on Andes, rooted on Alps; and all round me, long rushing oceans, roll Amazons and Oronocos; waves, mounted Parthians; and, to and fro, toss the wide woodlands: all the world an elk, and the forests its antlers.

But far to the South, past my Sicily suns and my vineyards, stretches the Antarctic barrier of ice: a China wall, built up from the sea, and nodding its frosted towers in the dun, clouded sky. Do Tartary and Siberia lie beyond? Deathful, desolate dominions

those; bleak and wild the ocean, beating at that barrier's base, hovering 'twixt freezing and foaming; and freighted with navies of ice-bergs,--warring worlds crossing orbits; their long icicles, projecting like spears to the charge. Wide away stream the floes of drift ice, frozen cemeteries of skeletons and bones. White bears howl as they drift from their cubs; and the grinding islands crush the skulls of the peering seals.

(1021)

The kaleidescopic natural imagery of these first three paragraphs is electric: the language is excited and visionary, the rhythms compelling. Suddenly Melville has leaped away from the allegory into a fantastical expansion. Almost like an Olympian god examining his kingdom, Melville dances from mountain range to mountain range, blending and building in a vital surge of imagery. With this release from logic and from the leaden narrative, the vision builds:

But beneath me, at the Equator, the earth pulses and beats like a warrior's heart; till I know not, whether it be not myself. And my soul sinks down to the depths, and soars to the skies; and comet-like reels on through such boundless expanses, that methinks all the worlds are my kin, and I invoke them to stay in their course. Yet, like a mighty three-decker, towing argosies by scores, I tremble, gasp, and strain in my flight, and fain would cast off the cables that hamper.

And like a frigate, I am full with a thousand souls;
and as on, on, on, I scud before the wind, many
mariners rush up from the orlop below, like miners from
caves; running shouting across my decks; opposite
braces are pulled; and this way and that, the great
yards swing round on their axes; and boisterous
speaking-trumpets are heard; and contending orders, to
save the good ship from the shoals. Shoals, like
nebulous vapors, shoreing the white reef of the Milky
Way, against which the wrecked worlds are dashed;
strowing all the strand, with their Himmaleh keels and
ribs.

Ay: many, many souls are in me. In my tropical
calms, when my ship lies tranced on Eternity's main,
speaking one at a time, then all with one voice: an
orchestra of many French bugles and horns, rising, and
falling, and swaying, in golden calls and responses.

Sometimes, when these Atlantics and Pacifics thus
undulate round me, I lie stretched out in their midst:
a land-locked Mediterranean, knowing no ebb, nor flow.
Then again, I am dashed in the spray of these sounds:
an eagle at the world's end, tossed skyward, on the
horns of the tempest. (1022)

Whitmanesque is probably the best overall word for this
expansive writing, but in its stateliness it goes beyond the
embracing familiarity of Song of Myself. And the

thousand-manned frigate is on the edge of the epical, an apt preliminary to Ahab's massive defiance.

"Like a grand, ground swell," the prose poem begins again, bringing in Homer and Shakespeare and Milton and Petrarch. It moves further, now invoking--"in me, many worthies recline, and converse"--Plato and Virgil, Montaigne and Sydney, and many more. Then the natural imagery returns: "And as the great Mississippi musters his watery nations: Ohio, with all his leagued streams; Missouri, bringing down in torrents the clans from the highlands; Arkansas, his Tartar rivers from the plain;--so, with all the past and present pouring in me, I roll down my billow from afar" (1023).

To find this writing in the middle of a hamstrung allegory is provocative enough, but the devotional tenor, so rare in Melville, of the next paragraph is even more unexpected: "Yet not I, but another: God is my Lord; and though many satellites revolve around me, I and all mine revolve round the great central Truth, sun-like, fixed and luminous forever in the foundationless firmament" (1023).

With this acceptance, "Dreams" continues for another paragraph, and then dramatically concludes in a Promethean burst:

My cheek blanches white while I write; I start at the scratch of my pen; my own mad brood of eagles devours me; fain would I unsay this audacity; but an

iron-mailed hand clenches mine in a vice, and prints down every letter in my spite. Fain would I hurl off this Dionysius that rides me; my thoughts crush me down till I groan; in far fields I hear the song of the reaper, while I slave and faint in this cell. The fever runs through me like lava; my hot brain burns like a coal; and like many a monarch, I am less to be envied, than the veriest hind in the land. (1023)

Despite the overly clustered naming, this entire chapter is of surprising power. Nowhere in Mardi is there such a passionate mixture of the natural and the literary, Melville's two great sources. It reminds one of Melville famous conclusion in "Hawthorne and his Mosses," another place where Melville, in recognizing other masters, justifiably joins in: "For genius, all over the world, stands hand in hand, and one shock of recognition runs the whole circle round" (2065).

As Mardi progresses, more and more time is given to the various conversations among the five main characters. These dialogues between Taji, Media, Babbalanja, Mohi, and Yoomy are either direct reactions to the islands visited or philosophical commentaries which grow out of each island experience. In either case, as mentioned earlier, they are often long-winded and forced, and generally serve to slow down an already endless narrative. Landscape, which was used to advantage earlier, becomes less and less important and, at

points, absent.

For instance, when the entourage reach Diranda, their next stopping point, there is no description at all of the landing site. Immediately we are introduced to the rulers Hello and Piko, whose brutal penchant is for continual gladiator-type games. The irony of the sylvan description of where the next games are to be held can't be contested, but it is so obvious that the effectiveness evaporates:

The spot set apart for the festival, was a spacious down, mantled with white asters; which, waving in windrows, lay upon the land, like the cream-surf surging the milk of young heifers. But that whiteness, here and there, was spotted with strawberries; tracking the plain, as if wounded creatures had been dragging themselves bleeding from some deadly encounter. All round the down, waved scarlet thickets of sumach, moaning in the wind, like the gory ghosts environing Pharsalia the night after the battle; scaring away the peasants, who with bushel-baskets came to the jewel-harvest of the rings of Pompey's knights. (1101)

Underneath this field are the bodies of thousands of "anonymous heroes," and, to complete the pointed irony, the place is called "'The Field of Glory.'"

Taji and his companions visit next the island of Dominora, the model for which is Great Britain. King Bello of the Hump is "a testy, quarrelsome, rapacious old monarch;

the indefatigable breeder of contentions and wars; the elder brother of this household of nations, perpetually essaying to lord it over the juveniles" (1122). As the travelers walk through Dominora searching for Yillah, they see a Mardian version of an English landscape:

Fair fields; the whole island a garden; green hedges all around; neat lodges, thick as white mice in the landscape; old oak woods, hale and hearty as ever; old temples buried in ivy; old shrines of old heroes, deep buried in broad groves of bay trees; old rivers laden down with heavy-freighted canoes; humped hills, like droves of camels, piled up with harvests; every sign and token of a glorious abundance, every sign and token of generations of renown. (1134)

The reader soon finds out that most of the land is owned by the nobility and that the peasants live in squalor and near starvation. But such knowledge, drily reported and insipidly contrasted with the pleasant landscape, lacks almost all the power of the short pastoral section of Redburn where, for a few hours, Redburn breaks the spell of his miserable state as a penniless "boy" fresh from aboard the St. Lawrence, and finds himself in the company of three delightful young ladies in the English countryside.

After failing to find a landing point in Caleedoni, the travelers head off to Porpheero, ruled by King Franko, where a volcanic eruption--"Down the valley now poured Rhines and

Rhones of lava, a fire-freshet, flooding the forests from their fastnesses, and leaping with them into the seething sea" (1155)--keeps them from landing.

With such conflagration going on in Porpheero, the voyagers decide to head to "the new Mardi, Vivenza." This is the United States. And here, taking direct aim at his native land, Melville makes it clear that all the other islands visited hold nothing over the hypocrisy of Vivenza. The first indication of this is when they approach the shore and find, inscribed in a natural arch near "the helmeted female, the tutelar deity of Vivenza" (1169), this oft-quoted line: "In-this-re-publi-can-land-all-men-are-born-free-and-equal." Unfortunately, beneath this, written in tiny letters, is one qualification: "Except-the-tribe-of-Hamo" (1169). Having returned home, Melville is consumed by the injustices he wants to attack, and the polemical indictment overwhelms any sense of natural landscape.

After seeing the madness at Vivenza's "Great Temple of Freedom," Taji and his friends sail on to the northern part of Vivenza, where the people are feverishly celebrating the turmoil in Porpheero (where "the kings were to and fro hunted like malefactors by blood-hounds" 1179). Much of the irony here foreshadows the internal intensity of The Confidence Man, but once Mardi becomes almost pure dialogue with minimal setting, there is a significant loss of vitality. As Bruce H. Franklin writes: "the allegory succeeds best when Melville

is able to make the realistic voyage, the romantic voyage, the intellectual voyage, and the allegorical voyage become one and thus become a voyage into the very axis of reality" (preface, v).

Southward the travelers go, but the overemphasis on dialogue to illustrate the wrongs done to the blacks mars the effect: there is no real sympathy created like there is in the Launcelott's Hey section of Redburn.

The wanderers go on, to the gulf coast, past "a cluster of islets (the caribbean), and then on to Kolombo (South America). No significant natural settings are presented until they round the Cape of Capes (Cape Horn) where this storm is described:

The sky grew overcast. Each a night, black storm-clouds swept the wintry sea; and like Sahara caravans, which leave their sandy wakes--so, thick and fleet, slanted the scud behind. Through all this rack and mist, then thousand foam-flaked domedary-humps uprose...And now, the air grew nipping cold. The clouds shed off their fleeces....

Far and near, in towering ridges, stretched the glassy Andes; with their own frost, shuddering through all their domes and pinnacles. Ice-splinters rattled down the cliffs, and seethed into the sea.

Broad away, in amphitheatres undermined by currents, whole cities of ice-towers, in crashes, toward one

center, fell.--In their earthquakes, Lisbon and Lima never saw the like. Churned and broken in the boiling tide, they swept off amain;--over and over rolling; like porpoises to vessels tranced in calms, bring down the gale.

At last, rounding an antlered headland, that seemed a moose at bay--ere long, we launched upon blue lake-like waters, serene as Windermere, or Horicon. Thus, from the boisterous storms of youth, we glide upon senility.

(1200)

There is considerable power in this description, and save for the last line, ample evidence of Melville's development as a writer employing natural violence.

Taji and friends sail past other islands, the satire unconvincing, until, like "Dreams," the narrative stops and the authorial presence of Melville bursts in. The chapter is "Sailing On," a quintessential Melvillean title:

Oh, reader, list! I've chartless voyaged. With compass and the lead, we have not found these Mardian Isles. Those who boldly launch, cast off all cables; and turning from the common breeze, that's fair for all, with their own breath, fill their own sails. Hug the shore, naught new is seen; and "Land ho!" at last was sung, when a new world was sought.

The voyager steered his bark through seas, untracked before; ploughed his own path mid jeers; though with a

heart that oft was heavy with the thought, that he might only be too bold, and grope where land was none.

So I.

And though essaying but a sportive sail, I was driven from my course, by a blast resistless; and ill-provided, young, and bowed to the brunt of things before my prime, still fly before the gale;--hard have I striven to keep stout heart.

And if it harder be, than e're before, to find new climes, when now our seas have oft been circled by ten thousand prows,--much more the glory!

But this new world here sought, is stranger far than his, who stretched his vans from Palos. It is the world of mind; wherein the wanderer may gaze round, with more of wonder than Balboa's band roving through the golden Aztec glades.

But fiery yearnings their own phantom-future make, and deem it present. So, if after all these fearful, fainting trances, the verdict be, the golden haven was not gained;--yet, in bold quest thereof, better to sink in boundless deeps, than float on vulgar shoals; and give me, ye gods, an utter wreck, if wreck I do. (1214)

The end of this passage is thematically like "The Lee Shore" in Moby-Dick, where Melville, in writing of Bulkington, concludes with "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" (906). Here we have the essential posture of the Melvillean mind: a character in opposition to any of the "pitiful" (906) comforts of the port, ruled by a "demon of restlessness" that Newton Arvin attributes to Melville himself (43).

The next place where landscape has any importance is Hooloomooloo, or the Isle of Cripples. Though only one sentence, the description captures the deformity of the inhabitants: "Heaped up, and jacked with rocks; and, here and there, covered with dwarfed, twisted thickets, it seemed a fit place for its denizens" (1227).

Leaving Hooloomooloo, the travelers reach Bonovona, where King Abrazza rules. While the landscape is minimal here, there is long conversation about the legendary Lombardo's great work, the Koztanza, that is worth looking at for the insight it gives into Melville's own view of Mardi, since he had called the novel "my own Koztanza" (Leyda, 287). Although the discussion goes on far too long, in King Abrazza's contention that the Koztanza is "wild, unconnected, all episode" (1258), Melville can be seen as predicting much of the criticism of Mardi. Also, Babbalanja's comment on the speed Lombardo worked--"In ten days, Lombardo had written full fifty folios" (1255)-- is significant when Melville's own speed and productivity are recalled. The last relevant

thing is Babbalanja's discussing Lombardo's method of composition:

He did not build himself in with plans; he wrote right on; and so doing, got deeper and deeper into himself; and like a resolute traveler, plunging through baffling woods, at last was rewarded for his toils. "In good time," saith he, in his autobiography, "I came out into a serene, sunny, ravishing region; full of sweet scents, singing birds, wild plaints, roughish laughs, prophetic voices. Here we are at last, then," he cried; "I have created the creative." And now the whole boundless landscape stretched away. Lombardo panted; the sweat was on his brow; he off mantle; braced himself; sat within view of the ocean; his face to a cool rushing breeze; placed flowers before him; and gave himself plenty of room.

The first part creates a revealing picture of Melville's own feverish technique, but with the pressures of a growing family and a lessening readership Melville was never rarely able to "off mantle," to sit by the ocean with "a cool rushing breeze" in his face, and with the luxury of enough psychic "room" to allow him to enjoy creating the creative.

The island of Serenia marks the end of the quest for Media, Yoomy, Mohi and Babalanja. All four characters had supposedly been with Taji only to accompany him, but it is evident through the ongoing dialogues that all four are

seekers also. In Serenia, the "Land of Love" where the teachings of Alma have been "restored" to their "divine origin" (1284), they end their personal journeys. After listening to the prophet of Serenia tell them of life on the island, all four are overcome and kneel down around him: "There, as they kneeled, and as the old man blessed them, the setting sun burst forth from mists, gilded the island round about, shed rays upon their heads, and went down in a glory--all the East radiant with red burnings, like an altar-fire" (1293). It is not particularly convincing but it is necessary to set up a situation where Taji can regain his central status.

Still attached to Taji and still hoping to eventually persuade him to return to Serenia with them, Media, Yoomy, and Mohi journey on with him, visiting several more unnamed and undescribed islands. At last, after one more attempt by them to convince Taji that Yillah will never be found, Taji declares himself eternally fated: "I am the hunter, that never rests! the hunter without a home! She I seek, still flies before; and I will follow, though she lead me beyond the reef; through sunless seas; and into night and death. Her, will I seek, through all the isles and stars; and find her, whate'er betide!" (1301).

With this declaration, Taji is ready to encounter the ominous Queen Hautia, and to her island the voyagers head. Landscape regains prominence, this time with the sense of

danger lurking behind an enticing appearance:

A jeweled Tiara, nodding in spray, looks flowery
 Flozella, approached from the sea. For, lo you! the
 glittering foam all round its white marge; where,
 forcing themselves underneath the coral ledge, and up
 through the crevices, in fountains, the blue billows
 gush. While, within, zone above zone, thrice zoned in
 belts of bloom, all the isle, as a hanging garden
 soars; its tapering cone blending aloft, with heaven's
 own blue....

Anon we came nearer; sails idly flapping, and paddles
 suspended; sleek currents our coursers. And round
 about the isle, like winged rainbows, shoals of
 dolphins were leaping over floating fragments of
 wrecks:--dark-green, long-haired ribs, and keels of
 canoes. For many shallops, inveigled by the eddies,
 were oft dashed to pieces against that flowery strand.
 But what cared the dolphins? Mardian wrecks were their
 homes. Over and over they sprang: from east to west:
 rising and setting: many suns in a moment; while all
 the sea, like a harvest plain, was stacked with their
 glittering sheaves of spray.

And far down, fathoms on fathoms, flitted rainbow
 hues:--as seines-full of mermaids; half screening the
 bones of the drowned. (1306)

Once on land, the voyagers enter the "Bower of Hautia,"

reminiscent of Spenser's Bower of Bliss. But because Mardi has just two short chapters left, the action becomes almost frantic as Melville tries to pull everything together. After Hautia fails in a number of unconvincing attempts to seduce Taji, the Queen rejects him scornfully.

Momentarily broken, Taji histrionically declares that "Taji Lives no more. So dead, he has no ghost. I am his spirit's phantom's phantom" (1315). His friends carry him away, off to Odo, where Media is to transplant the "flowers" of Alma's teachings to his subjects. Once there, however, an uprising causes Media to send Taji, Yoomy and Mohi back to Serenia. On the way back Taji revives into his role of obsessed defiance. As the suicidal Taji grabs the helm and heads out to "the deep beyond" where "no voyager e'er puts back" (1316), Mohi and Yoomy jump out, and Mardi ends:

Now, I am my own soul's emperor; and my first act is abdication! Hail! realm of shades!"--and turning my prow into the racing tide, which seized me like a hand omnipotent, I darted through.

Churned in foam, that outer ocean lashed the clouds; and straight in my white wake, headlong dashed a shallop, three fixed specters leaning o'er its prow: three arrows poisoning.

And thus, pursuers and pursued flew on, over an endless sea. (1316)

After reading and rereading Mardi, one can only conclude

that despite its ambitions the novel is seriously flawed. Melville admitted as much when he wrote to Richard Bentley, "But some of us scribblers, MY Dear Sir, always have a certain something unmanageable in us, that bids us do this or that, and be done it must--hit or miss" (Davis, 193). Mardi misses. The narrative initially moves in fits and starts, and Melville's introduction of Taji does little to help the allegorical satire. What Mardi remains is a book divided, a work not able to stand up under any examination as a complete and unified fiction. But that does not detract from the light it sheds on Melville's growth as a writer, particularly his vigorous concern with obsessive questing and his growing use of landscape to serve as an opposition or counterpoint to this questing. Bruce H. Franklin is not terribly off the mark when he writes that "Mardi, although fragmentary, wildly overwritten, often puerile, and sometimes tedious, is an extraordinary book" (preface, v).

Notes

¹ One critic found Mardi, "an outrageous fiction; a transcendental Gulliver, or Robinson Crusoe run mad" (The Examiner, Leyda, 295). Another reviewer wrote, "If this book is meant as a pleasantry, the mirth has been oddly left out--if as an allegory, the key of the casket is 'buried in ocean deep'--if as a romance, it fails from tediousness--if as a prose-poem, it is chargeable with puerility" (The Athenaeum, Leyda, 293). But some early writers did not agree. The reviewer for The-Critic called it "a production of extraordinary talent (Leyda, 295), and Evert Duyckinck, Melville's influential literary friend, concluded in his review in The Literary World that Mardi "is not only a very happy, genial production, in the best mood of luxurious

invention, but a book of thought, curious thought and reflection" (Leyda, 298).

² Others in the Twentieth century have faulted Mardi for existing in "the realm of rather heavily facetious fancy" (Chase, 42), or for being "a confusing roundhouse of mirrors, in which the narrator seeks substance and meaning but finds only empty reflections" (Dillingham, 105). However, one supporter, Raymond Weaver, found that in "his amazing novel Mardi--which won him acclaim in France as 'un Rableais Americain'--wine flows in ruddy and golden rivers" (105).

Growing up on the Atlantic

After the mediocre reception of Mardi, Melville knew his status as a marketable author was at a critical junction. In order to reestablish himself, he turned his pen to recounting the tale of his first voyage, a trip aboard the St. Lawrence, a small merchant vessel plying the ocean between Liverpool and New York. Writing Redburn was a reasonable decision, for the book was a success and eased his pressing financial concerns. But the book, while not the "beggarly" work Melville called it, does not achieve the overall depth of Typee. What finally strikes one about Redburn is that it is the bildungsroman of Ishmael. In some ways it aligns itself with novels like Great Expectations or The Red and the Black: a provincial boy goes to the city and the city changes and corrupts him. But in Redburn, while both New York and Liverpool have a significant effect on Wellingborough Redburn, the main character and narrator, it is during the voyage to Liverpool and back to New York that a more substantial change comes about: a naive and somewhat pretentious youth turns into an experienced young sailor, a prototypical Ishmael.

The land- and seascapes of Redburn are much more integrated into the narrative sequence than in Mardi, and they contribute largely to the reader's sense of Wellingborough's painful education. But the autobiographical

realism is so strong in Redburn that the natural settings never move into the realm of the romance, the genre to which Melville was most creatively inclined. "Being less committed to the immediate rendition of reality than the novel," writes Richard Chase, "the romance will more freely veer toward mythic, allegorical, and symbolistic forms" (13). No one wrote works that fit into Chase's definition as well as Melville. He was a romancer at core, but, as Redburn shows, he could also write a novel where a piercing realism overrides any romance intentions. Perhaps the authenticity of Redburn was a reaction to the reception Mardi met, perhaps it was simply a concern with different material. Regardless, Redburn, rushed through in ten weeks, never quite leaves the world of Wellingborough Redburn's slow awakening, despite two characters, the effeminate Harry Bolton and the demonic Jackson, who might well inhabit a romance.

The reader first finds Wellingborough Redburn as a genteel youth of "naturally roving disposition" who found in advertisements of shipping notices, "a strange, romantic charm" (7). Because of his family's financial collapse, Wellingborough decides to seek his fortune at sea. Despite the protestations of his mother and sisters, off he goes, having "a vague prophetic thought, that I was fated, one day or other, to be a great voyager" (11). That voyage will of course be Moby Dick, but here, besides the tangible irony--Wellingborough's voyage will turn out to be anything

but "great"--there is a developing complexity of narrative technique that goes far beyond Melville's earlier novels. Laurance Thompson writes, "But the reader who recognizes the difference between Wellingborough the actor and Redburn the narrator and Melville the artistic manipulator, begins to suspect, pretty soon, that while Redburn the narrator is laughing at Wellingborough the actor Melville is laughing at them both" (11). This splitting of narrative perspective comes eventually to undermine the unity of the book even while making for a scathing irony.

Wellingborough tells of a family heirloom, a glass ship, which had had this Poesque effect on him: "And often I used to feel a sort of insane desire to be the death of the glass ship, case and all, in order to come at the plunder; and one day, throwing out some hint of the kind to my sisters, they ran to my mother in a great clamor; and after that, the ship was placed on the mantle-piece for a time, beyond my reach, and until I should recover my reason" (12). This seems to be simply a humorous recollection, but when it is revealed shortly thereafter that on the very day of Wellingborough's departure a tiny glass sailor fell from the ship's prow, then the glass model takes on a somewhat deeper quality. Its role as prophetic object becomes even more imposing as the tale unfolds and two members of the crew fall to their deaths in the ocean.

Wellingborough's departure is on "a raw, cold, damp

morning" (16) and his trip down the Hudson is a masterful evocation of a penniless youth trying to maintain a semblance of dignity in front of the "stony eyed and heartless" (15) passengers. To avoid them Wellingborough decides to stay on deck but a "storm of sleet" (16) sends him below, where their "evil eyes" and "cold suspicious glances" (17) heighten the "desperation and recklessness" (17) of his poverty.

Once in New York, after a series of minor misfortunes, the ill-equipped and half-starved Wellingborough finally begins his first sea voyage on the trading packet Highlander. As the ship heads out to sea, the disoriented and weakened youth loses all his enthusiasm for seafaring, declaring instead, "then I would have given any thing if instead of sailing out of the bay, we were only coming into it" (41). But though his first reaction to the "great Atlantic Ocean" (41) is to find it "lonely and desolate" (42), Wellingborough also finds it "too strange, and wonderful, and altogether incredible, that there could really be cities and towns and villages and green fields and hedges and farm-yards and orchards, away over that wide blank of sea, and away beyond the place where the sky came down to the water" (42).

As the Highlander passes through the Narrows, Wellingborough recalls a visit to the "great castle or fort, all in ruins" (43) on the Staten Island side:

It was a beautiful place, as I remembered it, and very wonderful and romantic....On the side away from the

water was a green grove of trees, very thick and shady; and through this grove, in a sort of twilight you came to an arch in the wall of the fort, dark as night; and going in, you groped about in long vaults, twisting and turning on every side, till at last you caught a peep of green grass and sunlight, and all at once came out in an open space in the middle of the castle. And there you would see cows quietly grazing, or ruminating under the shade of young trees; and perhaps a calf frisking about, and trying to catch its own tail; and sheep clambering among the mossy ruins, and cropping the little tufts of grass sprouting out of the sides of the embrasures for cannon....Yes, the fort was a beautiful, quiet, charming spot. I should like to build a little cottage in the middle of it, and live there all my life. It was noon-day when I was there, in the month of June, and there was little wind to stir the trees, and every thing looked as if it was waiting for something, and the sky overhead was blue as my mother's eye, and I was glad and happy then. 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. (43)

Besides the authenticity of Melville's feelings here--his own father did indeed die a bankrupt--there is a simplicity and

comfort about the description which is particularly apt for the young and unhappy Wellingborough.

The next major incident in Redburn is the suicide of a sailor during a fit of delirium tremens. The shrieking man's leap into the sea recalls the fall of the glass sailor, and leads Wellingborough to conclude that he is on "an ill-omened voyage" (59).

At this point, the devilish character of Jackson is introduced, from whom "Satan himself would have run" (57). Jackson, with his "most deep, subtle, infernal eye" (67), comes to dominate the crew through his brutal menacing. The malicious Jackson shows an especial dislike for the ingenuous Wellingborough. Having gained the "bitter enmity" (73) of Jackson, Wellingborough soon finds himself ostracized by the rest of the crew. Finding no solace for his isolation, Wellingborough admits that "at last I found myself a sort of Ishmael in the ship, without a single friend or companion" (73). Besides the name, more telling is Wellingborough's simple declaration after recovering from his seasickness: "I could now look around me, and make observations" (115). While the naive Wellingborough will continue until the Highlander begins its voyage back across the Atlantic, here the character of Redburn, the Ishmael-like young man who is able to look back at the trials of his younger self, is being born. With this detachment, one senses the emergence of the speculative mode so essential to Moby-Dick. And shortly

thereafter we find Wellingborough musing on the "great ocean itself" (74):

All round us, on both sides of the ship, ahead and astern, nothing was to be seen but water--water--water; not a single glimpse of green shore, not the smallest island, or speck of moss any where. Never did I realize till now what the ocean was: how grand and majestic, how solitary, and boundless, and beautiful and blue; for that day it gave no tokens of squalls or hurricanes, such as I had heard my father tell of; nor could I imagine, how anything that seemed so playful and placid, could be lashed into rage, and troubled into rolling avalanches of foam, and greater cascades of waves, such as I saw in the end.

As I looked at it so mild and sunny, I could not help calling to mind my little brother's face, when he was sleeping an infant in the cradle. It had just such a happy, careless, innocent look; and every happy little wave seemed gamboling about like a thoughtless little kid in a pasture; and seemed to look up in your face as it passed, as if it wanted to be patted and caressed. They seemed all live things with hearts in them, that could feel; and I almost felt grieved, as we sailed in among them, scattering them under our broad bows in sun-flakes, and riding over them like a great elephant among lambs. (74)

Again, there is a correctness in Wellingborough's recollection of his "little brother's face," exactly where the musings of a homesick boy would drift. But what follows in Redburn is a revery which recalls portion of "Dreams" in Mardi and pushes toward Ishmael's reveries in Moby-Dick:

But what seemed perhaps the most strange to me of all, was a certain wonderful rising and falling of the sea; I do not mean the waves themselves, but a sort of wide heaving and swelling and sinking all over the ocean. It was something I can not very well describe; but I know very well what it was, and how it affected me. It made me almost dizzy to look at it; and yet I could not keep my eyes off it, it seemed so passing strange and wonderful. (116)

As the voyage of Wellingborough continues, the prospect of falling again enters, this time as the young sailor is ordered to loose the uppermost sail:

For a few moments I stood awe-stricken and mute. I could not see far out upon the ocean, owing to the darkness of the night; and from my lofty perch, the sea looked like a great, black gulf, hemmed in, all round, by beetling black cliffs. I seemed all alone; treading the midnight clouds; and every second, expected to find myself falling--falling-- falling, as I have felt when the nightmare has been on me.

I could but just perceive the ship below me, like a

long narrow plank in the water; and it did not seem to belong at all to the yard, over which I was hanging. A gull, or some sort of sea-fowl, was flying round the truck over my head, within a few yards of my face; and it almost frightened me to hear it; it seemed so much like a spirit, at such a lofty and solitary height.

(91)

This is a powerful scene, but to place it next to White Jacket's superbly handled fall, shows how much, even between Redburn and White-Jacket, Melville would grow in using the natural setting to explore his vision of the perilous position of man.

Not surprisingly the Highlander encounters a storm, and though briefly sketched, it has a commendable vitality:

The tornado came rushing along at last, like a troop of wild horse before the flaming rush of a burning prairie. But after bowing and cringing to it awhile, the good Highlander was put off before it; and with her nose in the water, went wallowing on, ploughing milk-white waves, and leaving a streak of illuminated foam in her wake. (115)

While the storm itself is too quickly presented--as almost every setting in Redburn is--immediately after the tempest, the Highlander passes by a "dismantled, water-logged schooner" (115) which gets more attention:

The bulwarks were pretty much gone; and here and there

the bare stanchions, or posts, were left standing, splitting in two the waves which broke clear over the deck, lying almost even with the sea. The foremast was snapt off less than four feet from its base; and the shattered and splintered remnant looked like the stump of a pine tree thrown over in the woods. Every time she rolled in the trough of the sea, her open main-hatchway yawned into view; but was as quickly filled, and submerged again, with a rushing, gurgling sound, as the water ran into it with the lee-roll....

Lashed, and leaning over sideways against the taffrail, were three dark, green, grassy objects, that slowly swayed eith every roll, but otherwise were motionless. I saw the captain's glass directed toward them, and heard him say at last, "They must have been dead a long time." (116)

Wellingborough is "amazed and shocked" (116) that Captain Riga doesn't send a boat off to bury the bodies, but the laws of the sea are quite different from the laws of the land.

Having gained his sea legs, Wellingborough now finds a "pleasant sort of vitality" (128) in the pitching and rolling of the vessel. With this acclimation the young sailor realizes a "great delight in furling the top-gallant sails and royals in a hard blow" (128):

There was a wild delirium about it; a fine rushing of the blood about the heart; and a glad thrilling and

throbbing of the whole system, to find yourself tossed up at every pitch into the clouds of a storm sky, and hovering like a judgment angel between heaven and earth; both hands free, with one foot in the rigging, and one somewhere behind you in the air. The sail would fill out like a balloon, with a report like a small cannon, and then collapse and sink away into a handful. And the feeling of mastering the rebellious canvas, and tying it down like a slave to the spar, and binding it over and over with the gasket, had a touch of pride and power in it, such as young King Richard must have felt, when he trampled down the insurgents of Wat Tyler. (128)

Words like "rebellious" and "pride and power" will have much more resonance in Ahab, but here Wellingborough's sparring with the tumultuous sea is exactly the kind of tension which will have an increasing interest for Melville, and will eventually allow him to conceive the epic encounter of Moby Dick.

In some ways it is fruitful to look at Melville's six novels as two voyages. After Melville completed his Polynesian trilogy (Typee, Omoo, and Mardi), he turned to his homeland. Irving Howe has written of this process:

Novels are composed by individual writers, but in some sense they also derive from the cultures in which these writers live. Collective sentiments, collective

stories, enter the most individual of fictions. Imagining a world, the writer must draw on the substance of his culture, and thereby, so to say, the culture speaks through and past him. All great writers are in part ventriloquists of myth--some inferior writers, nothing else. (xviii)

Melville, perhaps our greatest writer, was no doubt inflamed by the almost incredible expansiveness of the America he lived in. Redburn can be seen as the first novel in this second grouping of three, with White-Jacket and Moby-Dick to follow.

As his first voyage nears an end, Wellingborough gets a distant glimpse of his first foreign country: "Ireland in sight!....I peered hard, but could see nothing but a bluish, cloud-like spot to the northeast" (137). His first look at Wales is just as hazily disappointing: "It was high noon, and a long line of purple mountains lay like banks of clouds against the east....But, after all, the general effect of these mountains was mortifyingly like the general effect of the Kaatskill Mountains on the Hudson River" (138). Then, with his greatest dissatisfaction, Wellingborough sees the famed city of Liverpool:

Looking shoreward, I beheld lofty ranges of dingy warehouses, which seemed very deficient in the elements of the marvelous; and bore a most unexpected resemblance to the ware-houses along South-street in

New York. There was nothing strange; nothing extraordinary about them. There they stood; a row of calm and collected ware-houses; very good and substantial edifices, doubtless, and admirably adapted to the ends had in view by the builders; but plain, matter-of-fact ware-houses, nevertheless, and that was all that could be said of them.

To be sure, I did not expect that every house in Liverpool must be a Leaning Tower of Pisa, or a Strasbourg Cathedral; but yet, these edifices I must confess, were a sad and bitter disappointment to me.

(140)

Though Liverpool is not the city he expected, Wellingborough does admire the famed docks. After denigrating "the miserable wooden wharves, and slip-shod, shambling piers of New York" (176), Wellingborough turns to the scene before him:

I beheld long China walls of masonry; vast piers of stone; and a succession of granite-rimmed docks, completely inclosed, and many of them communicating, which almost recalled to mind the great American chain of lakes: Ontario, Erie, St Clair, Huron, Michigan, and Superior. The extent and solidity of these structures, seemed equal to what I had read of the old Pyramids of Egypt. (176)

When Melville visited the Pyramids in 1856, just before his

complete withdrawal from publishing fiction, how differently he would feel: "I shudder at the idea of the ancient Egyptians. It was in these pyramids that was conceived the idea of Jehovah. Terrible mixture of the cunning and awful" (Leyda 542).

Fired by the presence of so many nationalities at the docks, Melville enters the tale in a passage praising the diversity of America: "Settled by the people of all nations, all nations may claim her for their own. You can not spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world" (185). His praise for America builds--"Our blood is as the flood of the Amazon" (185)--until he reaches this grand conclusion, a summary myth of American destiny:

The other world beyond this, which was longed for by the devout before Columbus' time, was found in the New; and the deep-sea-lead, that first struck these soundings, brought up the soil of Earth's Paradise. Not a Paradise then, or now; but to be made so, at God's good pleasure, and in the fullness and mellowness of time. The seed is sown, and the harvest must come; and our children's children, on the world's jubilee morning, shall all go with their sickles to the reaping. Then shall the curse of Babel be revoked, a new Pentacost come, and the language they shall speak shall be the language of Britain. Frenchman, and Danes, and Scots; and the dwellers on the shores of the

Mediterranean, and in the regions round about;
Italians, and Indians, and Moors; there shall appear
unto them cloven tongues as of fire. (186)

Redburn's next major discovery is that his late father's guide to Liverpool, a text he had cherished as a child and had read and reread on the voyage across, turns out to be unusable. As he walks the streets in a melancholy attempt to retrace the visit his father made thirty years before, item after item listed in the guide turns out to be no longer extant. Once again, as in the Typee valley or in Taji's final confrontation with Hautia, a Melvillean character is forced to dispel his illusions and admit the reality placed before him. Wellingborough's tears are evidence enough that, at least in this novel, the past breaks hard against the solidity of the present.

The use of natural setting ceases once Wellingborough enters the heart of Liverpool. But a picture of destitute suffering occurs that literally stops the book. Wellingborough tells of walking through a narrow thoroughfare named Launcelott's-Hey, "lined with dingy, prison-like cotton warehouses" (199). One day after hearing a "feeble wail, which seemed to come out of the earth" (199), Wellingborough locates the source:

At last I advanced to an opening which communicated downward with deep tiers of cellars beneath a crumbling old warehouse; and there, some fifteen feet below the

walk, crouching in nameless squalor, with her head bowed over, was the figure of what had been a woman. Her blue arms folded to her livid bosom two shrunken things like children, that leaned toward her, one on each side. At first, I knew not whether they were alive or dead. They made no sign; they did not move or stir; but from the vault came that soul-sickening wail.

(199)

Wellingborough struggles fruitlessly to get help for them. No one will come, not even the police, and the young man finally takes them some food and water, an act, considering that it probably would only extend their misery, he "almost repented" (203). The whole incident shows Melville's ability to penetrate into the heartless core of a city, much like Charles Dickens or Elizabeth Gaskell. But even here, the social realism is of the intersection of two isolatoes, a friendless mother and a lonesome youth. Unlike many of the English and French novelists, in Melville there is never any sense of social hunger--of characters seduced by the attractiveness of the social world--even in stories that concern the city like "Bartleby the Scrivener" or "The Paradise of Bachelors."

The next few chapters are among the bleakest in Melville, as Wellingborough surveys the misery around him, finally concluding: "Poverty, poverty, poverty, in almost endless vistas: and want and woe staggered arm in arm along these

miserable streets" (221).

To descend deeper into hardship would be impossible, and that Wellingborough wants to escape this horror, at least temporarily, is understandable. So on a Sunday Wellingborough starts for a day in the country: "It was a beautiful day in July; the air was sweet with the breath of buds and flowers, and there was a green splendor in the landscape that ravished me. Soon I gained an elevation commanding a wide sweep of view; and meadow and mead, and woodland and hedge, were all around me" (230).

As Wellingborough wanders through the idyllic countryside, he has a series of disconcerting happenings until he arrives at a small cottage:

So sweet a place I had never seen: no palace in Persia could be pleasanter; there were flowers in the garden; and six red cheeks, like six moss-roses, hanging from the casement. At the embowered door-way, sat an old man, confidentially communing with his pipe: while a little child, sprawling on the ground, was playing with his shoe-strings. A hale matron, but with rather a prim expression, was reading a journal by his side: and three charmers, three Peris, three Houris! were leaning out of the window close by. (234)

To his surprise, Wellingborough is welcomed here and eventually invited in for a meal, totally captivated by the three young girls. But all too quickly the afternoon grows

long and he must return to his bunk on the Highlander, where he falls asleep "dreaming of red cheeks and roses" (236).

While the pastoral interlude can be seen as an isolated incident, with Wellingborough's return to the city, a serious plotting question arises. According to Irving Howe, Redburn is "like a Melville anthology, ill-constructed but with very interesting parts."¹ And this fragmented action continues as the reader is introduced to Harry Bolton, an effete young man who overwhelms the last quarter of the novel. Harry's role, at least while in England, is clear--to tempt the naive Wellingborough with the indulgent excess of the city. His initial description confirms his seductive character:

He was one of those small, but perfectly formed beings, with curling hair, and silken muscles, who seem to have been born in cocoons. His complexion was a mantling brunette, feminine as a girls; his feet were small; his hands were white; and his eyes were large, black, and womanly; and poetry aside, his voice was as the sound of a harp. (237)

After wandering about Liverpool with his new friend for some days, Wellingborough is whisked off by Harry to London, a place of Wellingborough's dreams. But instead of an introduction to the myriad sights of the legendary city, Wellingborough finds himself entering a vaguely disreputable "place of opulent entertainment" (249), captured in all its garish excess and a touch of falsified nature: "The walls

were painted so as to deceive the eye with interminable colonnades; and groups of columns of the finest Scagliola work of variegated marbles--emerald-green and gold, St. Pons veined with silver, Sienna with porphyry--supported a resplendent fresco ceiling, arched like a bower, and thickly clustering with mimic grapes" (249). Harry, obviously a regular at the place, leads Wellingborough to an inner room, as ostentatious as the first: "Long lounges lay carelessly disposed, whose fine damask was interwoven, like the Gobelin tapestry, with pictorial tales of tilt and tourney. And oriental ottomans, whose cunning warp and woof were wrought into plaited serpents, undulating beneath beds of leaves, from which, here and there, they flashed out sudden splendors of green scales and gold" (252). The serpent imagery, besides its Biblical implications, is another instance of a counterfeit naturalism.

Pure indulgence, probably because of his mother's Calvinist teachings, always bothered Melville (his feelings about the idolent Typees are the best earlier example). So even while being awed by the change to such "princely quarters" (253), Wellingborough has other feelings: "But all the time, I felt ill at heart; and was filled with an under current of dismal forebodings" (253).

Wellingborough's discomfort increases when Harry makes him swear to remain in the room all night, alone, while he goes off on some mysterious excursion. Harry returns during

the night, pale and delirious, and when morning comes, the pair flee back by railroad to Prince's Dock and the safety of the Highlander.

Back aboard ship with Harry now signed on as a member of the crew, the character of Redburn fully emerges. Freed from the misery and corruption of Liverpool and London, the young man casts off the character of Wellingborough and becomes the more mature Redburn, an active and experienced part of the crew who is now able to further observe and comment on the happenings aboard the Highlander.

The first event of note in the return home is the horrible discovery that a newly shipped seaman, Miguel Saveda, is dead in his bunk, and probably had been brought aboard ship in that state:

the yellow flame wavered for a moment at the seaman's motionless mouth. But hardly had the words escaped, when, to the silent horror of all, two threads of greenish fire, like a forked tongue, darted out between the lips; and in a moment, the cadaverous face was crawled over by a swarm of worm-like flames....The eyes were open and fixed; the mouth was curled like a scroll, and every lean feature firm as in life; while the whole face, now wound in curls of soft blue flame, wore an aspect of grim defiance, and eternal death.

Prometheus, blasted by fire on the rock. 268

This scene of "animal combustion" (269) is compelling in its

own right, but one cannot, considering Saveda's extremely minor role in the novel, justify the Promethean ending.

Harry, having lied about his experience, is found out to be incapable of performing the essential duty of a sailor, that of working the sails. After being physically forced to ascend to the royal yard to unreeve the signal halyards, Harry returns to the deck "pale as death, with bloodshot eyes, and every limb quivering" (282). Harry's inability to climb the rigging is a vivid counterpoint to Redburn's agility and confidence aloft, and to his growing maturity. James Justus writes, "Melville's invention of Bolton for presumably structural reasons---to replace Redburn's social difficulties on the voyage out with a parallel figure on the return--is also a brilliant device for coalescing the protagonist's character" (50). The counterpoint of Harry and Redburn does help solidify Redburn's character, but at a significant loss of Harry's vitality. Harry's world is the city, and once removed from its exotic pleasures, he becomes much less enticing to Redburn. This shift dead ends a moral exploration which, had it been handled differently, might have exposed Redburn's character more effectively.

Aboard the Highlander are five hundred emigrants, crowded and cowed by the Captain and most of the crew and, according to the now adept Redburn, "the simplest people I have ever seen" (284). Redburn gives as evidence their belief that the "dark purple headland" (284) they spot after

only three days at sea is America. Redburn's hard earned experience allows correct perceptions and actions, but since the story of the ill treatment of emigrants is hardly the stuff of epic, there is little metaphysical expansiveness as will come as Ishmael watches in Moby-Dick.

The emigrants' plight becomes increasingly severe as the Highlander continues on. Because of limited cooking space, many of them are forced to eat uncooked food, and when that runs out, they are reduced to one sea biscuit and two potatoes a day, given begrudgingly by Captain Riga. To compound their troubles, bad weather forces them below, where a fever breaks out in the "noisome confinement" of "so close, unventilated, and crowded a den" (311). Over twenty die, and the hysteria of the cabin passengers--who try to isolate themselves from the emigrants--is a bitter indictment of the selfishness of man.

Jackson has remained a tyrannical misanthrope throughout the novel, and as he slowly decays into death, Redburn gives us this picture of the horrid seaman as he waits below deck:

Brooding there, in his infernal gloom, though nothing but a castaway sailor in canvas trowsers, this man was still a picture, worthy to be painted by the dark, moody hand of Salvator. In any of that master's lowering sea-pieces, representing the desolate crags of Calabria, with a midnight shipwreck in the distance, this Jackson's would have been the face to paint for

the doomed vessel's figure-head seamed and blasted by lightning. (300)

Finally, as the ship nears Cape Cod, Jackson's demise seems imminent: "His aspect was damp and death-like; the blue hollows of his eyes were like vaults full of snakes" (321). Despite his condition, Jackson climbs to the extreme end of the main-topsail-yard--the "post of honor" (321)--and attempts to reef the sail as the Highlander, "rearing and plunging...like a runaway steed" (321), heads closer to port:

"Haul out to windward!" coughed Jackson, with a blasphemous cry, and he threw himself back with a violent strain upon the bridle in his hand. But the wild words were hardly out of his mouth, when his hands dropped to his side, and the bellying sail was splattered with a torrent of blood from his lungs.

As the man next him stretched out his arm to save, Jackson fell headlong from the yard, and with a long seethe, plunged like a diver into the sea. (321)

The "long seethe" is brilliant, and now the final prophesy of the glass sailor concerning the voyage of the Highlander has come true.

The winds hold up and the Highlander quickly comes to port, where Captain Riga tricks Redburn out of his pay. It is here also that the friendship of Harry and Redburn comes to an end. Having receiving a letter from home which required his immediate departure, Redburn bids Harry

farewell, after putting him in the hands of a friend who promises to try to secure Harry a job. But Harry, depressed and desperate, signs on to a whaling vessel, and the the glass sailor's intimations come true once more. Years later Redburn hears that on that voyage Harry had fallen overboard between the ship and a captured whale and was crushed to death.

It seems apparent that if Melville had had time to rewrite Redburn, it would have been a more ambitious volume. As it stands, the novel shows several developments that hint towards the magnificence of Moby-Dick. First, there is an increasing focus on the sea voyage itself. In Melville's three earlier novels most of the action took place on land. As Newton Arvin writes about Melville: "The voyage or quest was not simply a subject or an occasion for him; it was an archetypal pattern of experience to which his whole nature instinctively turned, and he was to lose half his strength not when he lost contact with the earth but when he stood still upon it" (79). Second, the narrative complexity, with Wellingborough, Redburn and Melville all taking part, indicates a growing concern on Melville's part for separating the narrator's perspective from the action itself. The detachment of Ishmael is the culmination of this development, one which is essential to the philosophical loosening Melville continually worked toward. Third, the falling glass sailor, although a bit fragile as a symbolic center, is an

efficient means of giving an ominous tone to the tale. Redburn can be finally seen as an effective, if peculiarly American, novel of education, and one which contains a number of preliminaries to Moby-Dick.

However, even with these developments, Redburn finally strikes one as much too disjointed. Too many elements and themes are not well integrated, particularly Wellingborough's contact with Harry Bolton in England. That relationship, even though it comes so late in the novel, seems to signal a substantial change in direction, one that might allow the exploration of a great moral dilemma in Wellingborough. Yet nothing really comes of the contact. In Redburn Melville juggles too much, too quickly, and though parts are impressive, the entire performance doesn't cohere.

Notes

¹in a letter of July 25, 1986.

The Whiteness of the Jacket

White-Jacket, particularly through the controlling symbol of the tale--the white jacket of the main character--seems a more unified and psychologically complete book than Redburn. In many ways it is. The earlier novel moves from New York, across the Atlantic, through Liverpool and its outskirts, to London, back across the Atlantic, and then returns to New York. In addition, throughout Redburn the narrative technique of having three vying perspectives--the naive Wellingborough, the savvy Redburn, and the overseeing Melville--lends itself to an even more unstable effect. White-Jacket appears to achieve what Melville was consciously trying to do after Redburn: that is, create a single voyage with a single symbolic nexus. But upon closer examination, the intimacy of character and symbol and the natural world breaks down, and White-Jacket is left a considerable but somewhat fragmented effort.

That the voyage aboard the Neversink is the main concern is verified when the sailor White Jacket, the narrator and main character, refuses to tell of his adventures during a stopover in Rio: "But, though not a few good chapters might be written on this head, I must again forbear; for in this book I have nothing to do with the shore further than to glance at it, now and then, from the water; my man-of-war world alone must supply me with the staple of my matter; I have taken an oath to keep afloat to the last letter of my

narrative" (585).

The white jacket, however, is not so easily contained. In its ostracizing capacity and its confining and dangerous nature as an article of weather gear, it serves as a coherent opposition to the sailor White Jacket. But because Melville wants to work in the theme of the brotherhood of the main-top men, the potency of the ill-starred white jacket weakens, causing a decided split in the narrator's outlook. In Moby-Dick, Melville's next novel, the perspective will be more controlled through the increasing distance of Ishmael from the rest of the crew, and the tale will no longer remain so limitedly self-reflexive: White-Jacket the novel about White Jacket the sailor about the white jacket. With Ahab to watch and the grand sea of the White Whale to encounter and describe, Ishmael has much more freedom to consider and comment than the relationally buffeted White Jacket. In fact, by gradually stripping Ishmael of almost every contact with Queequeg and his shipmates, Melville creates the consummate observer, a visionary who can study Ahab--and the magnificent ambiguities of the White Whale--without too many constraints of personal involvement.

Through Melville's fiction there is a decided growth in the use of symbols (the descent into the Typee valley, although striking, is too experiential to function as a pure symbol), from the clumsy hodgepodge of arrows, flowers, Hautias and Yillahs in Mardi, to the grand evocation of the White Whale in Moby-Dick. The white jacket is an inter-

mediate device in this symbolic maneuvering. Even though its overall efficacy is much less than the White Whale, the white jacket does gain in complexity throughout the novel (unlike the glass ship in Redburn), and finally in the great fall from the mast becomes the most powerful symbol in Melville's fiction up to this point.

There are two types of land- and seascapes in White-Jacket, and they suffer for the most part from the same rushed feeling that marred the natural scenery in Redburn. First, there are the natural descriptions which offer a respite from the harsh discipline of the frigate; second, there are the scenes (mainly in storms and wintry weather) which serve, especially through White Jacket's unpreparedness due to his improvised jacket, as a threatening element. But throughout the novel--and these are the most impressive passages of natural setting--the classifications break down and in the midst of intense danger an almost transcendental calm takes over. The highlight of this intermingling comes in the remarkable passage where White Jacket, encumbered by his jacket, falls from the mast "when the ship gave a plunge in the sudden swells of the calm sea." To have White Jacket fall during a calm is a brilliant stroke on Melville's part, because it amplifies the insidious unpredictability of the sea, a quality that would have been lost if the fall had occurred during a storm. What the entire episode leads to, of course, is the great conclusion of "The Mast-Head," where Ishmael warns against exactly this type of dreamy

complacence.

The first line of White-Jacket makes it clear that the events will be told in a symbolic mode: "It was not a very white jacket, but white enough, in all conscience, as the sequel will show" (351). After the construction of the jacket out of a "white duck frock" has been described, there are several comparisons made to this "outlandish garment" (351), all of which serve to heighten the negative implications of wearing the "well-patched, padded, and porous" (352) coat. It is compared to a shroud, said to look "like a white albatross' wing" (354), and in its "gleaming white" color, to resemble the ghostly "White Lady of Avenel" (352). Later the jacket will be compared to the shirt of Nessus, which caused the death of Hercules. Immediately the "Whiteness of the Whale" comes to mind, and "The Jacket" is no doubt a preliminary sketch for that marvelous chapter. But though White Jacket does describe, as the story progresses, some of the "positive virtues of the jacket" (Dillingham, 66), the overall sense of the jacket is of a harmful element, with little of the sublime ambiguity of the White Whale.

A series of heavily factual chapters concerning life aboard the Neversink follows next in White-Jacket, chapters which prefigure many of the similarly informative chapters on whaling in Moby-Dick. These early chapters also introduce the major theme of brotherhood, a theme, however, which comes to hamper the symbolic unity of the book. What happens is

that while the white jacket isolates the sailor from the rest of the crew, White Jacket himself becomes involved with the men of the main-top, particularly Jack Chase, the captain of the main-top: "We main-top-men were brothers, one and all; and we loaned ourselves to each other with all the freedom in the world" (362). Thus White Jacket is always stuck in the somewhat contradictory position of being an isolate and also a part of a brotherhood. His intelligence and experience allow him to gain the friendship of several members of the crew, while the white jacket constantly threatens these relationships. This opposition could have been a rich source of ambiguity; instead, the split creates almost two White Jackets, both observers of their position but both in decidedly different ways. Add to this the somewhat leaden social criticism throughout--Newton Arvin says the tale "suffers...from the humanitarian note that dominates it as it dominates no other work of Melville's" (111)--and it is not hard to see why the jacket fails to gain a real ascendancy.

The initial description of the jacket sets up the first narrative role, that of a sailor marked off from mankind. After failing to make a competent duff, a kind of pudding, White Jacket tells of his mess's continued "prejudice against my white jacket" (411). A number of other instances occur to affirm the jacket's isolating nature, a situation which led Richard Chase to comment of the young sailor that "the white jacket became the mark of his alienation" (24).

The second viewpoint appears in this celebration of the

advantages of being a member of the main-top:

And I feel persuaded in my inmost soul, that it is to the fact of my having been a main-top-man, and especially my particular post being on the loftiest yard of the frigate, the main-royal-yard; that I am now enabled to give such a free, broad, off-hand, bird's-eye, and, more than all, impartial account of our man-of-war world; withholding nothing; inventing nothing; nor flattering, nor scandalizing any; but meting out to all--commodore and messenger-boy alike--their precise descriptions and deserts. (397)

To create a character who could speak in "such a free, broad, off-hand, bird's eye" way was something Melville was constantly striving for, something that he achieves with Ishmael. But the double limitation of the white jacket and the man-of-war's world, the latter something Newton Arvin calls a "sterile" technique of "macrocosmic symbolism" (112), undercuts the freedom of this observer.

During the early chapters on the hierarchy and responsibilities aboard the frigate, the white jacket plays a relatively minor negative role. But in Chapter Nineteen, "The Jacket Aloft," the jacket almost causes White Jacket's death. Being of a "meditative humor" White Jacket was inclined to spend some time aloft "to study the stars upon the wide boundless sea":

And it is a very fine feeling, and one that fuses us into the universe of things, and makes us a part of the

All, to think that, wherever we ocean-wanderers rove, we have still the same glorious old stars to keep us company; that they still shine onward and on, forever beautiful and bright, and luring us, by every ray, to die and be glorified with them. (427)

The Emersonianism of the above line is considerable, and as the masterfully crafted reverie continues, it hints at the lovely chapter "The Squeeze of the Hand":

Ay, ay! we sailors sail not in vain. We expatriate ourselves to nationalize with the universe; and in all our voyages round the world, we are still accompanied by those old circumnavigators, the stars, who are shipmates and fellow-sailors of ours--sailing in heaven's blue, as we on the azure main. Let genteel generations scoff at our hardened hands, and fingernails tipped with tar--did they ever clasp truer palms than ours? Let them feel of our sturdy hearts, beating like sledge-hammers in those hot smithies, our bosoms; with their amber-headed canes, let them feel of our generous pulses, and swear that they go off like thirty-two-pounders. (427)

What continues is another segment which prefigures "The Masthead," but here it is the event and not the consciousness of the event that is more important:

I lay entranced; now dozing, now dreaming; now thinking of things past, and anon of the life to come. Well-timed was the latter thought, for the life to come

was much nearer to overtaking me than I then could imagine. Perhaps I was half conscious at last of a tremulous voice hailing the main-royal-yard from the top. But if so, the consciousness glided away from me, and left me in Lethe. But when, like lightning, the yard dropped under me, and instinctively I clung with both hands to the "tie," then I came to myself with a rush, and felt something like a choking hand on my throat. For an instant I thought the Gulf Stream in my head was whirling me away to eternity; but the next moment I found myself standing; the yard had descended to the cap; and shaking myself in my jacket, I felt that I was unharmed and alive.

The sailors had mistaken White Jacket for the ghost of Shenley, a recently deceased sailor, and in fear had loosed the yard on which White Jacket had been perched. Of interest in the above passage is that landscape becomes an internalized metaphor, a stylistic development which brings us closer to Moby-Dick.

More detail is given about the life of the sailors aboard the Neversink, and then comes a major seascape during the passage around the "squally" Cape Horn, where White Jacket asks, "Was the descent of Orpheus, Ulysses, or Dante into Hell, one whit more hardy and sublime than the first navigator's weathering of that terrible Cape?" (449). White Jacket cautions those Captains who might "rashly conclude that the Cape, after all, is but a bugbear...and foundering

and sinkings hereabouts are all cock-and-bull stories" (450). If they do, the following consequences are inevitable: "For ere the ropes' ends can be cast off from the pins, the tornado is blowing down to the bottom of their throats. The masts are willows, the sails ribbons, the cordage wool; the whole ship is brewed into the yeast of the gale" (450). Here we have another instance where the seeming calm of a natural setting hides a terrible power, much like the indifference of *Moby Dick*.

In Melville's earlier novels the storm would have come and gone quickly, but in White-Jacket the treacherous weather around Cape Horn is given almost four chapters. It is almost as if Melville senses the desirability of using nature as a central counter-force in the novel. Initially the icy cold is brought into play, and then the storm breaks out completely:

The ship's bows were now butting, battering, ramming, and thundering over and upon the head seas, and with a horrible wallowing sound our whole hull was rolling in the trough of the foam. The gale came athwart the deck, and every sail seemed bursting with its wild breath.

It is at this crucial moment, as destruction threatens the Neversink, that Mad Jack, a hard-drinking, courageous Lieutenant, overrules Captain Claret's directions and ultimately saves the ship.

As the storm increases, Mad Jack sends the main-yard men

up into the icy yards and rigging to try to furl the main sail, a dangerous and difficult task. In the ferocious wind, they are unable to accomplish it. The scene is captured with skill, but the more important thing is White Jacket's reaction while aloft, once again a mixing of the calm and the turbulent:

Strange as it may appear, I do not suppose that, at this moment, the slightest sensation of fear was felt by one man on that yard. We clung to it with might and main; but this was instinct. The truth is, that, in circumstances like these, the sense of fear is annihilated in the unutterable sights that fill all the eye, and the sounds that fill all the ear. You become identified with the tempest; your insignificance is lost in the riot of the stormy universe around. (462)

As the narrative moves forward, more and more information is given about life aboard the Neversink, with several instances of White Jacket's inability to rid himself of his jacket or alter it to another color. Then in the aptly numbered Chapter 33, "A Flogging" occurs. The brutality of the scene, particularly Captain Claret's arbitrary sentencing, is powerfully drawn, with Melville adding a final flourish of natural empathy which looks toward the hanging in Billy Budd:

As if in sympathy with the scene to be enacted, the sun, which the day previous had merrily flashed upon the tin pan of the disconsolate Down Easter, was now

setting over the dreary waters, veiling itself in vapors. The wind blew hoarsely in the cordage; the seas broke heavingly against the bows; and the frigate, staggering under whole top-sails, strained as in agony on her way. (489)

The flogging here readies us for one of the most striking scenes in the book, White Jacket's own arraignment at the mast later on in the tale. But it is really the picture of Captain Claret--as an insensitive and peremptory bully, the last in a series of such petty tyrants in Melville--that is of interest. In the rest of Melville's sea fiction--Moby-Dick, "The Encantadas," "Benito Cereno," Billy Budd--the simple confrontation of captain and crew will be altered or abandoned. In White-Jacket one senses Melville's growing awareness that for a symbol to achieve full potency it must serve as the main opposition in the tale. The symbol of the White Jacket is diluted for a number of reasons, some of which were mentioned earlier, but the conflict between White Jacket and Captain Claret is another decisive reason why the symbol isn't particularly effective.

The Neversink soon enters the harbor of Rio de Janeiro, and though described as "one of the most magnificent bays in the world," the scene initially painted amounts to little more than a listing of its attributes. It is upon entering the harbor that White Jacket (with Melville right behind him) admits that his interest lies elsewhere, and that he wishes to "adhere to my one proper object, the world in a man of

war" (515).

As with much of Melville's work, one often asks if a particular passage is not there simply as padding. After insisting so adamantly that no description of Rio is forthcoming--which is justified since the tale does not really involve the city--White Jacket nonetheless gives a long passage describing "the Bay of all Beauties":

More than one hundred and fifty miles' circuit of loving green hills imbosoms a translucent expanse, so gemmed in by sierras of grass, that among the Indian tribes the place was known as "The Hidden Water." On all sides, in the distance, rise high conical peaks, which at sunrise and sunset burn like vast tapers; and down from the interior, through vineyards and forests, flow radiating streams, all emptying into the harbor.

(568)

The description continues on in this vein for a number of lines, never becoming anything more than a set piece, clearly extraneous to the main flow of the tale. Moreover, the entire Rio de Janeiro section is guilty of the same fault. Though the reader learns of smuggling aboard ship and is introduced to the surgical incompetence of Cadwallader Cuticle, the Surgeon of the Fleet, this part of White-Jacket is best summed up under one of the chapter headings, "Killing Time in the Harbor."

The energy of the book returns as the Neversink leaves the harbor as part of a man-of-war race:

Slowly we dropped and dropped down the bay, glided like a stately swan through the outlet, and were gradually rolled by the smooth, sliding billows broad out upon the deep. Straight in our wake came the tall main-mast of the English fighting-frigate, terminating, like a steepled cathedral, in the bannered cross of the religion of peace; and straight after her came the rainbow banner of France, sporting God's token that no more would he make war on earth. (632)

In the light wind, the "old Neversink" soon falls behind, forming part of this picturesque setting, a technique Melville will almost entirely abandon in Moby Dick:

At one time, all three frigates were irregularly abreast, forming a diagonal line; and so near were all three, that the stately officers on the poops stiffly saluted by touching their caps, though refraining from any further civilities. At this juncture, it was a noble sight to behold those fine frigates, with dripping breast-hooks, all rearing and nodding in concert, and to look through their tall spars and wilderness of rigging, that seemed like inextricably-entangled, gigantic cobwebs against the sky. (633)

Then, as the breeze picks up, the Neversink gathers its momentum: "we dashed along through a cream-colored ocean of illuminated foam. White-Jacket was then in the top; and it was glorious to look down and see our black hull butting the

white sea with its broad bows like a ram."

Soon after the race comes the first climax in the novel, an event which tends to weaken the resonance of the white jacket in the tale. Having been accused unjustly of dereliction of duty, the astonished White Jacket is sentenced by Captain Claret to a flogging. Since this would be, in his own eyes, the ultimate humiliation, the desperate sailor prepares to save his honor:

There are times when wild thoughts enter a man's heart, when he seems almost irresponsible for his act and his deed. The Captain stood on the weather-side of the deck. Sideways, on an unobstructed line with him, was the opening of the lee-gangway, where the side-ladders are suspended in port. Nothing but a slight bit of sinate-stuff served to rail in this opening, which was cut right down to the level of the Captain's feet, showing the far sea beyond. I stood a little to windward of him, and, though he was a large, powerful man, it was certain that a sudden rush against him, along the slanting deck, would infallibly pitch him headforemost into the ocean, though he who so rushed must needs go over with him. My blood seemed clotting in my veins; I felt icy cold at the tips of my fingers, and a dimness was before my eyes. But through that dimness the boatswain's mate, scourge in hand, loomed like a giant, and Captain Claret, and the blue sea seen through the opening at the gangway, showed

with an awful vividness. I can not analyze my heart, though it then stood still within me. But the thing that swayed me to my purpose was not altogether the thought that Captain Claret was about to degrade me, and that I had taken an oath with my soul that he should not. No, I felt my man's manhood so bottomless within me, that no word, no blow, no scourge of Captain Claret could cut me deep enough for that. I but swung to an instinct in me--the instinct diffused through all animated nature, the same that prompts even a worm to turn under the heel. Locking souls with him, I meant to drag Captain Claret from this earthly tribunal of his to that of Jehovah, and let Him decide between us. No other way could I escape the scourge. (644)

But just at the moment White Jacket's "eye was measuring the distance between him and the sea" (645), Colbrook, the corporal of the marines, and Jack Chase, the captain of the main-top, intervene in White Jacket's favor. The entire scene is a compelling indictment of naval injustice, but it adds little to the symbolic crescendo of the novel, the fall from the mast and the eventual destruction of the white jacket.

Following more information about the severity of the sailor's lives, White Jacket breaks the purely factual strain with "The Main-Top at Night." While Jack Chase, "an enthusiastic admirer of sea-scenery" (676), recites "fine snatches from his catalogue of poets" (676), White Jacket

tells of the sight below:

From our lofty perch, of a moonlight night, the frigate itself was a glorious sight. She was going large before the wind, her stun'-sails set on both sides, so that the canvass on the main-mast and fore-mast presented the appearance of two majestic, tapering pyramids, more than a hundred feet broad at the base, and terminating in the clouds with the light copestone of the royals. That immense area of snow-white canvass sliding along the sea was indeed a magnificent spectacle. The three shrouded masts looked like the apparitions of three gigantic Turkish Emirs striding over the ocean.

Throughout the novel White Jacket has been trying to rid himself of his jacket because of its uselessness and the bad luck it allegedly brings. This effort builds when one Priming, a gunner's mate, accuses White Jacket of being the cause of one death, one near-fatal accident, and one present severe illness: "This comes of having thirteen in the mess" (700). White Jacket responds by placing the blame on the jacket itself: "Blast my jacket you may, and I'll join you in that" (700). Since great emphasis has been placed on the ill fortune around the jacket, one wants to believe in its effects. However, in the encounter with Priming, there is really no tangible evidence of the jacket's power.

After a striking section about some of the veteran tars refusing to have their beards cut--another instance of the

brotherhood theme taking over the tale--the end of the white jacket occurs. "The Last of the Jacket" is the most memorable chapter in the book. It is based on a passage from Nathaniel Ames' A Mariner's Sketches, but what Melville does with that raw material is stunning. As Newton Arvin puts it:

keeping the facts and the narrative order and even some of the details of feeling, but imparting rhythmicity, and a wonderfully connotative tone, to what had had no rhythm at all; working small miracles of linguistic expressiveness...and intensifying the whole emotional value of the incident through the accompaniment of powerful images. (116)

Here, in another natural setting of deceptive calm, the white jacket achieves its greatest force, becoming an almost deadly adversary to the young sailor.

White Jacket has been sent aloft to reeve the main-top-gallant-stun'-sail halyards, a task he likens to "threading a fine cambric needle with rather coarse thread," and this "upward of a hundred feet aloft in the air" (761). Then, as the ship plunges suddenly, the "heavy skirts" (762) of the white jacket fall over White Jacket's head, and the disoriented sailor is "pitched from the yard" (762):

I knew where I was, from the rush of the air by my ears, but all else was a nightmare. A bloody film was before my eyes, through which, ghost-like, passed and repassed my father, mother, and sisters. An unutterable nausea oppressed me; I was conscious of

gasping; there seemed no breath in my body. It was over one hundred feet that I fell--down, down, with lungs collapsed as in death. Ten thousand pounds of shot seemed tied to my head, as the irresistible law of gravitation dragged me, head foremost and straight as a die, toward the infallible center of this terraqueous globe. All I had seen, and read, and heard, and all I had thought and felt in my life, seemed intensified in one fixed idea in my soul. But dense as this idea was, it was made up of atoms. Having fallen from the projected yard-arm end, I was conscious of a collected satisfaction in feeling, that I should not be dashed on the deck, but would sink into the speechless profound of the sea.

With the bloody, blind film before my eyes, there was a still stranger hum in my head, as if a hornet were there; and I thought to myself, Great God! This is Death! Yet these thoughts were unmixed with alarm. Like frost-work that flashes and shifts its scared hues in the sun, all my braided, blended emotions were in themselves icy cold and calm.

So protracted did my fall seem, that I can even now recall the feeling of wondering how much longer it would be, ere all was over and I struck. Time seemed to stand still, and all the worlds seemed poised on their poles, as I fell, soul-becalmed, through the eddying whirl and swirl of the Maelstrom air.

Particularly in the last lines, "the still point of the turning world" (Eliot, 177) has once again been reached in White-Jacket. This moment of balance allows Melville to express his greatest dramatic concern: man always in a perilous position, always within the reach of death, but when closest to annihilation, suddenly achieving the deepest serenity available to him. With this established, the fall of White Jacket continues, this time bringing in the mysterious attraction of the sea:

As I gushed into the sea, a thunder-boom sounded in my ear; my soul seemed flying from my mouth. The feeling of death flooded over me with the billows. The blow from the sea must have turned me, so that I sank almost feet foremost through a soft, seething, foamy lull. Some current seemed hurrying me away; in a trance I yielded, and sank deeper down with a glide. Purple and pathless was the deep calm now around me, flecked by summer lightnings in an azure afar. The horrible nausea was gone; the bloody, blind film turned a pale green; I wondered whether I was yet dead, or still dying. But of a sudden some fashionless form brushed my side--some inert, coiled fish of the sea; the thrill of being alive tingled in my nerves, and the strong shunning of death shocked me through.

For one instant an angonizing revulsion came over me as I found myself utterly sinking. Next moment the force of my fall was expended; and there I hung,

vibrating in the mid-deep. What wild sounds then ranged in my ear! One was a soft moaning, as of low waves on the beach, the other wild and heartlessly jubilant, as of the sea in the height of a tempest. Oh soul! thou then heardest life and death: as he who stands upon the Corinthian shore hears both the Ionian and the Aegean waves. The life-and-death poise soon passed; and then I found myself slowly ascending, and caught a dim glimmering of light.

Quicker and quicker I mounted; till at last I bounded up like a buoy, and my whole head was bathed in the blessed air.

This passage has correctly been seen as a powerful rebirth, particularly when White Jacket finally frees himself from his nearly fatal jacket. Finding himself "pinioned" by the sodden jacket, White Jacket takes his knife out and cuts himself free, thinking thus: "Sink! sink oh shroud!...sink forever! accursed jacket that thou art" (764).

What follows next in White-Jacket is the last instance of brotherhood in the novel, a passage that some critics see as the result of his rebirth through the fall. However, it would be better to see this final instance of fraternity simply as a culmination of the general theme of brotherhood:

We main-top-men are all aloft in the top; and round our mast we circle, a brother-band, hand in hand, all spliced together....Hand in hand we top-mates stand, rocked in our Pisgah top. And over the starry waves,

and broad out into the blandly blue and boundless night, spiced with strange sweets from the long-sought land--the whole long cruise predestinated ours, though often in tempest-time we almost refused to believe in that far-distant shore--straight out into that fragrant night, ever-noble Jack Chase, matchless and unmatched Jack Chase stretches forth his bannered hand, and pointing shoreward, cries: "For the last time, hear Camoens, boys!

'How calm the waves, how mild the balmy gale!
The Halcyons call, ye Lusians spread the sail!
Appeased, old Ocean now shall rage no more;
Haste, point our bowsprit for yon shadowy shore.
Soon shall the transports of your natal soil
O'erwhelm in bounding joy the thoughts of every
toil.' (767)

Despite many passages of substantial merit and occasional genius, the overall effect of White-Jacket is limited by the restrictions Melville himself places on the tale. The white jacket does indeed come to represent an effective opposition to White Jacket, particularly in the "Last of the Jacket," where the mixture of entrapping jacket and soothing but suffocating seas marks the limits of the white jacket's symbolic heft and the natural settings' greatest power. Nonetheless, in White-Jacket one never feels the tremendous continuity of Ahab's obsession with the White Whale, even though White Jacket claims to be haunted by his

jacket. Written to focus more consistently on the jacket--and The Scarlet Letter shows that this is certainly possible--White-Jacket might have had a stronger overall impact. But as the tale stands, the sometimes deadening concentration on life aboard ship, along with the relative insignificance of the major characters, leaves White-Jacket a rewarding but clearly faulted work. It does have a "more complex truth" (Arvin, 119) than Redburn, but in reading it one struggles against one's own constraining jacket, the knowledge that soon Melville will be writing Moby-Dick. Still, while White-Jacket may not be "as alive as a book can be" (Kazin, preface, xv), Richard Chase is quite wrong when he writes that "the abyss which lies between White-Jacket and Moby-Dick is one of the most enormous in the history of letters" (Chase, 42). White-Jacket, with its heightened symbolic momentum and its experimental landscapes (where calm can exist in the midst of natural turbulence), moves toward Moby-Dick, and as such is an impressive prelude to perhaps our finest American novel.

The Ultimate Ambiguity: Moby-Dick

When Herman Melville began Moby-Dick, it is apparent that he had in mind another roughly autobiographical novel, one that centered on the character most like himself in the book, the restless and inquiring Ishmael. This is not to say that Melville was simply trying to push out another tale based on one of his own adventures, this time using his eighteen months aboard the whaler Acushnet. No, even in the opening chapter--especially in the great opening line--the reader senses that the isolation of Ishmael will lead to something more profound than in any of Melville's earlier novels. The narrators in Mardi, Redburn and White-Jacket do, within certain limits, separate themselves, but in none of the novels do they declare themselves so quickly or so ambitiously. In Moby-Dick, one is immediately immersed in the world of the outcast Ishmael, a man who has a psychic need for the freedom of the sea that goes far beyond the boyhood curiosity of a Redburn or the matter-of-fact acceptance of a White Jacket:

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; and especially whenever my hypos get
such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong

moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off:--then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. (795)

Ishmael speaks disdainfully of the multitude of landsmen who, though "fixed in ocean reveries" (795), will never venture offshore. Then, in praising the sacred element of water, Ishmael makes it clear that to enter upon the water is to become alive to a culminating possibility of existence: "Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever" (796). Ishmael is already in a somewhat prophetic mode in the opening of Moby-Dick, and out of his meditational musings on water, he also comes to reveal his main reason for taking part in the whaling voyage to follow: "Chief among these motives was the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself" (799). Having now shown why a "whaling voyage was welcome" (800), Ishmael concludes with an ebullient summation of his proposed undertaking: "the great flood-gates of the wonder-world swung open, and in the wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into my inmost soul, endless processions of the whale, and, midmost of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air" (800). Every element that will make Moby-Dick an epic adventure--the marriage of water and meditation, the great symbol of the whale, the mature and experienced and observing sailor--is already in place in chapter one--except the most

important, the mad Ahab.

Charles Olson makes a stimulating argument that Moby-Dick is really two novels--one before and one after the entrance of Ahab. But even in chapter one there is evidence that the tale is to contain a Shakespearean figure of tragic consummation. Ishmael tells us that he "cannot tell why it was exactly that those stage managers, the Fates, put me down for this shabby part of a whaling voyage, when others were set down for magnificent parts in high tragedies" (799). Ishmael's statement can hardly be taken as anything but evidence that Ahab--or at least the decision to create such a figure--was in the workings from the beginning of the novel. Ishmael does come to have a "shabby part" in the action of Moby-Dick--in fact, he eventually disappears from most of the proceedings. Yet in the opening chapter, Ishmael is already present as "the rich expanding consciousness...as it seeks an unsigned accord with the world in which consciousness must exist" (Howe, American Newness, 49), a role he retains throughout the book. Melville understood, after the problems he had with the symbol of the white jacket and its effect on White Jacket, that with the White Whale already starting to move toward the Pequod, a lowly sailor would never serve to meet it. However, since this is a book which "dramatizes ...the split between democratic fraternity and aggrandizing individualism" (Howe, American Newness, 48), a common sailor was the perfect choice to record the confrontation.

Even without the White Whale, the land- and seascapes in Moby-Dick would be of notable impact. Especially at the end, when Ahab challenges nature to do its worst to him, the ocean has a vitality never before expressed in Melville. When the White Whale is added to the seascape--and it is a creature which epitomizes the ocean's tremendous power and indifference--the natural settings in Moby-Dick are the greatest expression of the opposition between nature and man that American literature contains.

Ambiguity has been an essential concern of Melville throughout his novels, whether it be a descent into an unknown valley or the actual nature of a Yillah or a Hautia. In Moby-Dick, ambiguity is the key signature of the entire work. "The Whiteness of the Whale" is, of course, the most memorable example, but even as Ishmael enters Peter Coffin's Spouter Inn, a seascape he finds is already proving as elusive as a work of Albert Pinkham Ryder's:

But what most puzzled and confounded you was a long, limber, portentous, 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

marvellous painting meant. Ever and anon a bright, but, alas, deceptive idea would dart you through.--It's the Black Sea in a midnight gale.--It's the unnatural combat of the four primal elements.--It's a blasted heath.--It's a Hyperborean winter scene.--It's the breaking-up of the ice-bound stream of Time. But at last all these fancies yielded to that one portentous something in the picture's midst. That once found out, and all the rest were plain. But stop; does it not bear a faint resemblance to a gigantic fish? even the great leviathan himself?

In fact, the artist's design seemed this: a final theory of my own, partly based upon the aggregated opinions of many aged persons with whom I conversed upon the subject. The picture represents a Cape-Horner in a great hurricane; the half- foundered ship weltering there with its three dismantled masts alone visible; and an exasperated whale, purposing to spring clean over the craft, is in the enormous act of impaling himself upon the three mast-heads. (805)

This probing beneath the surface for meaning, after offering, as in the extracts which precede the novel, a number of possibilities, confirms the speculative nature of Melville's undertaking. And the natural possibilities announced--combat with the primal elements and the Lear-like blasted heath--echo throughout the tale.

The introduction of Queequeg continues the ambiguity. Ishmael, teased by Peter Coffin's tongue-in-cheek description of Queequeg, is unable to determine whether a man who is out on a Sunday morning attempting to "sell his head" would be a suitable bedfellow. Having no other alternative, he takes his share of Queequeg's bed and awaits his arrival. Already alarmed that Queequeg was a "heathen," Ishmael is literally stunned into silence as he watches the tattooed Queequeg undress, make an offering to his little idol, and then jump into bed, unsuspecting of Ishmael's presence. That action panics Ishmael into shouting for Peter Coffin, and it even upsets the usually imperturbable Queequeg. The comic misunderstanding concludes with Coffin's entrance, but the whole incident is another instance of the elusiveness which pervades Moby-Dick.

The entrance of Queequeg also serves to open the theme of friendship in Moby-Dick, the counterforce to Ahab's ceaseless vengeance. In Melville's earlier novels the narrator would eventually become attached to someone, always white and usually a fellow sailor (Toby Greene, Dr. Long Ghost, Jarl, Harry Bolton, Jack Chase). In creating Queequeg, and Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook are the literary predecessors, Melville is descending, consciously or unconsciously, into a primitive realm of social relationship where he is able to explore, at least in the beginning of the story, two thematic concerns--the

practice of religion and the brotherhood of man--through the internal dynamics of an intimate friendship. Previously, as in his scathing criticism of naval discipline in White-Jacket or in his sharp attack on the missionaries in Typee and Omoo, Melville relied mainly on external incidents or references as illustrating moments. Rarely did his comments derive directly from the narrator's personal acquaintance. But Ishmael's cleansing through his growing fellowship with Queequeg--"no more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world"--readies him for his role as consummate observer of the natural world, a counterbalance to Ahab's more directly oppositional presence.

With the Ishmael/Queequeg relationship established, Melville is ready to bring the inimitable Father Mapple on stage. His great enigmatic sermon is the central document in interpreting Ahab, and comes to represent, in the natural settings it employs, a microcosm of the entire tale. Mapple tells us that the book of Jonah is a "two-stranded lesson" (838), the first strand summed up best in these words: "And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists" (838). Mapple goes on to retell the story of Jonah in his own salt-edged style, the major incident being the storm that God sends to punish Jonah into submission: "And ever, as the white moon shows her affrighted face from the steep gullies in the blackness overhead, aghast Jonah sees

the rearing bowsprit pointing high upward, but soon beat downward again towards the tormented deep" (842). This storm sends "terrors upon terrors ... shouting through [Jonah's] soul" (842), and finally concludes in the Mapple's announcement that "God came upon [Jonah] in the whale" (844). This linking of the deity with the whale begins the process which will lead to the full supernatural implications of Moby Dick, implications which are crucial to the philosophic texture of the work.

Nonetheless, there is another side to Mapple's speech, and that is "to preach the Truth to the face of Falsehood" (845). This assertiveness seems a correct balance to the first part of Mapple's sermon, but as the preacher goes on, that balance seems to disappear, leading to more insight into the forthcoming nature of Ahab:

Delight is to him--a far, far upward, and inward delight--who against the proud gods and commodores of this earth, ever stands forth his own inexorable self. Delight is to him whose strong arms yet support him, when the ship of this base treacherous world has gone down beneath him. Delight is to him, who gives no quarter in the truth, and kills, burns, and destroys all sin though he pluck it out from under the robes of Senators and Judges. Delight,--top-gallant delight is to him, who acknowledges no law or lord, but the Lord his God, and is only a patriot to heaven. Delight is

to him, whom all the waves of the billows of the seas of the boisterous mob can never shake from this sure Keel of the Ages. And eternal delight and deliciousness will be his, who coming to lay him down, can say with his final breath--O Father!--chiefly known to me by Thy rod--mortal or immortal, here I die. I have striven to be Thine, more than to be this world's, or mine own. Yet this is nothing; I leave eternity to Thee; for what is man that he should live out the lifetime of his God?" (845)

This is an intriguing passage for while it seems to offer God his due, phrases like "inexorable self," "mortal or immortal," or "leave Eternity to Thee" are filled with a subtle audacity. To stake out the earth as one's own and to dismiss the question of immortality are exactly in keeping with a character who will later claim that "I'd strike the sun if it insulted me" (967). They are the words of an Ahab.

Another point concerns the exact nature of the White Whale. A whale has already been shown in the first part of Mapple's sermon to be an agent of God. So Ahab's Miltonic rebelliousness later in the book--"be the whale agent, or be the whale principal, I will wreck my hate upon him" (967)--seems undeniable. But Ahab, in keeping in line with the ambiguity Melville wanted to create, also comes to identify the white whale with the "infernal forces," so that his attack on it can be seen as an attack on the "face of

Falsehood." Remembering also the first section of Mapple's speech where a storm reduces a man into submission, and then looking toward Ahab's arrogant challenge of the natural world in "The Candles," one can only conclude that the major adversaries in Moby-Dick are not intended to have a fixed and immutable purpose.

Following Mapple's sermon is a return to the friendship theme in "A Bosom Friend." If Ahab is seen throughout Moby-Dick to battle with the "inscrutable thing" (967), the relationship of Ishmael and Queequeg is in direct and tangible opposition:

You cannot hide the soul. Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart; and in his large, deep eyes, fiery black and bold, there seemed tokens of a spirit that would dare a thousand devils. And besides all this, there was a certain lofty bearing about the Pagan, which even his uncouthness could not altogether maim. He looked like a man who had never cringed and never had had a creditor. (846)

Ahab and Queequeg are both fearless, but Queequeg has an "almost sublime" calmness that marks him as a different man: "and yet he seemed entirely at his ease; preserving the utmost serenity; content with his own companionship; always equal to himself" (847). It is this serenity which eventually, during a "storm booming without in solemn

swells," soothes Ishmael's "splintered heart and maddened hand" (847-8). Ishmael's joining of Queequeg in worshipping Yojo, his "innocent little idol," splendidly counterpoints the frantic obsession of Ahab for the white whale. It is this moment of simple and true faith that further prepares Ishmael for his natural meditations.

Their friendship completely established, Ishmael and Queequeg head off to Nantucket to hire themselves out on a whaling ship. Once there, Ishmael launches into a long celebration of the Nantucketers, who have "declared everlasting war with the mightiest animated mass that has survived the flood; most monstrous and most mountainous! That Himmalehan, salt-sea Mastodon, clothed with such portentousness of unconscious power, that his very panics are more to be dreaded than his most fearless and malicious assaults" (861). The war-like Nantucketers seem born out of the second part of Father Mapple's speech, and it is fitting that an Ahabian figure will come from such stock.

Yojo has ordered Ishmael to choose the ship, and the next morning Ishmael, after passing the Devil-Dam and the Tid-Bit, settles on the Pequod. Ishmael's darkly picturesque description of the fated vessel tells of her "venerable bows," and then explains how Captain Peleg has embellished the Pequod with "the chased bones of her enemies" (867). Nothing could be more fitting for a ship about to be engaged in a death struggle with the great leviathan.

Ishmael is a little staggered by Peleg's introduction of Ahab and his lost leg: "It was devoured, chewed up, crunched by the monstrousest parmacetty that ever chipped a boat!" (870). But since he must "go a-whaling" (871), Ishmael signs on. This irrevocable action leads Ishmael to muse on the Nantucket Quakers and how both their ancient scriptural names and their continued use of "the stately dramatic thee and thou of the Quaker idiom" help flavor their characters:

still, from the audacious, daring, and boundless adventure of their subsequent lives, strangely blend with these unoutgrown peculiarities, a thousand bold dashes of character, not unworthy a Scandanavian sea-king, or a poetical Pagan Roman. And when these things unite in a man of greatly superior natural force, with a globular brain and a ponderous heart; who has also by the stillness and seclusion of many long night-watches in the remotest waters, and beneath constellations never seen here at the north, been led to think untraditionally and independently; receiving all nature's sweet or savage impressions fresh from her own virgin, voluntary, and confiding breast, and thereby chiefly, but with some help from accidental advantages, to learn a bold and nervous lofty language--that man makes one in a whole nation's census--a mighty pageant creature, formed for noble tragedies. Nor will it at all detract from him,

dramatically regarded, if either by birth or other circumstances, he have what seems a half wilful over-ruling morbidness at the bottom of his nature. For all men tragically great are made so through a certain morbidness.

The man in question is, of course, Ahab, and the "bold and nervous lofty language" (something Herbert Leibowitz calls Melville's "billowing waves of rhetoric")¹ is Melville's most dramatic if sometimes histrionic voice. Moreover, even though Captain Ahab hasn't entered yet--and this is a brilliant suspense-maintaining device--his presence is beginning to take over the story.

Like the White Whale, where exactly Ahab lies in the realm of good and evil remains fluidly indeterminate throughout Moby-Dick. In the passage above, Melville has already hinted that Ahab will be susceptible to both the "sweet and savage impressions" of nature, some of which is verified in "The Gilder" and "The Symphony." As Ishmael leaves the Pequod, this problematic position is verified by Captain Peleg's declaration that Ahab is "a grand, ungodly, god-like man" (878).

While the dramatic intensity of Ahab comes out of Melville's reading of Shakespeare and Hawthorne, Ahab's creation also owes much to Melville's saturation in the Bible. This is particularly evident in the names of the central characters (Ahab and Ishmael) and in the plethora of

Biblical allusions. As Queequeg and Ishmael leave the Pequod following Queequeg's signing on, they encounter Elijah, the enigmatical seer who speaks to them in an "ambiguous, half-hinting, half-revealing, shrouded sort of talk" (892). When right after this, in the "gray imperfect misty dawn," Ishmael spots some shadowy sailors (who turn out to be Fedallah and his men) running to the Pequod, the sense of foreshadowing is complete: the voyage is ready to begin, with both the opposition to and contemplation of nature already invoked.

Ahab has still to make his appearance, but under the guidance of Captain Bildad, who also serves as a harbor pilot, the Pequod moves toward open sea on Christmas day: "as the short northern day merged into night, we found ourselves almost broad upon the wintry ocean, whose freezing spray cased us in ice, as in polished armor. The long rows of teeth on the bulwarks glistened in the moonlight; and like the white ivory tusks of some huge elephant, vast curving icicles depended from the bows" (903). Shortly, the pilot boat and the Pequod separate: "the cold, damp night breeze blew between; a screaming gull flew overhead; the two hulls wildly rolled; we gave three heavy-hearted cheers, and blindly plunged like fate into the lone Atlantic" (905).

It is now, as the Pequod "thrusts her vindictive bows into the cold malicious waves," that Bulkington appears for the second and last time in the book. As Ishmael watches

Bulkington, a man to whose feet "the land seemed scorching" (906), the precarious position of the Melvillean protagonist (like Taji at the end of Mardi or White Jacket just before his fall) comes to light:

The port would fain give succor; the port is pitiful;
 in the port is safety, comfort, hearthstone, supper,
 warm blankets, friends, all that's kind to our
 mortalities. But in that gale, the port, the land, is
 that ship's direst jeopardy; she must fly all
 hospitality; one touch of land, though it but graze the
 keel, would make her shudder through and through. With
 all her might she crowds all sail off shore; in so
 doing, fights 'gainst the very winds that fain would
 blow her homeward; seeks all the lashed sea's
 landlessness again; for refuge's sake forlornly rushing
 into peril; her only friend her bitterest foe!

Ishmael's silent questioning of Bulkington continues the examination of this restless sensibility:

"Know ye now, Bulkington? Glimpses do ye seem to 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?"

But as in landlessness alone resides the highest
 truth, shoreless, indefinite as God--so, better is it

to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety." (906)

The disappearance of Bulkington is somewhat awkward, but not especially surprising after the ambiguities of the whale and of Ahab have been so carefully embedded. Bulkington, like Jack Chase, is a thoroughly straightforward character. And Melville's dismissal of him, the one character who might be an effective opposition to Ahab, is decidedly the correct decision for this particular voyage. Nonetheless, Ishmael's understanding of the "open independence" of the sea and of the "highest truth" available there increases the necessity of the elemental battle to follow.

As the reclusive Ahab continues below deck, Ishmael's "first vague disquietude" now turns into "almost a perturbation." Then one morning, the suspense breaks: Ahab stands upon the quarterdeck. The introduction of Ahab is crucial to maintaining the dramatic pitch of the tale, and Melville is masterful in the first description:

There seemed no sign of common bodily illness about him, nor of the recovery from any. 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. Threading its way out from 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 off into the soil, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded. (924)

The origin of the "rod-like" scar is unclear, one crew member hinting that it was a birthmark, another holding that it had occurred later in Ahab's life, in an "elemental strife at sea" (924). The land- and seascapes of Moby-Dick have been slowly gathering depth and force, and this picturing of Ahab as a "great tree" struck by lightning is a compelling instance of Melville using the natural setting to literally electrify the physical presence of the captain.

Ishmael's continued description of Ahab serves to heighten his character even further:

Captain Ahab stood erect, looking straight out beyond the ship's ever-pitching prow. There was an infinity of firmest fortitude, a determinate, unsunderable wilfulness, in the fixed and fearless, forward dedication of that glance. Not a word he spoke; nor

did his officers say aught to him; though by all their minutest gestures and expressions, they plainly showed the uneasy, if not painful, consciousness of being under a troubled master-eye. And not only that, but moody stricken Ahab stood before them with a crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some mighty woe. (925)

The initial picture of Ahab is almost complete, yet as the Pequod moves south, another side is revealed: he "began to grow a little genial, he became still less and less a recluse; as if, when the ship had sailed from home, nothing but the dead wintry bleakness of the sea had then kept him so secluded" (926). While there is at present nothing to "chase away, for that one interval, the clouds that layer upon layer were piled upon his brow, as ever all clouds choose the loftiest peaks to pile themselves upon," still the warming weather has a slight but profound effect on Ahab:

Nevertheless, ere long, the warm, warbling persuasiveness of the pleasant, holiday weather we came to, seemed gradually to charm him from his mood. For, as when the red-cheeked, dancing girls, April and May, trip home to the wintry, misanthropic woods; even the barest, ruggedest, most thunder-cloven old oak will at least send forth some few green sprouts, to welcome such glad-hearted visitants; so Ahab did, in the end, a little respond to the playful allurings of that girlish

air. More than once did he put forth the faint blossom of a look, which, in any other man, would have soon flowered in a smile. (926)

This responsiveness to the solace of nature, albeit minimal, and the continuing comparison of Ahab to the "thunder-cloven oak" enrich the character of Ahab, making him more primitively potent, more humanly alive. This deepening is also crucial in creating a tragic sense about Ahab, for a man without these feelings would never be able to recognize his own downfall.

After some description of the hierarchy aboard the Pequod, reigned over by the king-like Ahab, now it is time for a closer look at Ishmael, this time in "The Mast-head." This chapter works like much of Melville's better writing, welding a variety of sources and images into, paradoxically, a transcendent vision of the inscrutable. After a brief history, Ishmael introduces "the one proper mast-head, that of a whale-ship at sea":

In the serene weather of the tropics it is exceedingly pleasant--the mast-head; nay, to a dreamy meditative man it is delightful....There you stand, lost in the infinite series of the sea, with nothing ruffled but the waves. The tranced ship indolently rolls; the drowsy trade winds blow; everything resolves you into langour. For the most part, in this tropic whaling life, a sublime uneventfulness invests you. (958)

This seductiveness leads Ishmael into confessing that he himself "kept but a sorry guard" with "the problem of the universe revolving in me." Ishmael then cautions the shipowners of Nantucket:

Beware of enlisting in your vigilant fisheries any lad with lean brow and hollow eye; given to unseasonable meditateness; and who offers to ship with the Phaedon instead of Bowditch in his head. Beware of such an one, I say: your whales must be seen before they can be killed; and this sunken-eyed young Platonist will tow you ten wakes round the world, and never make you one pint of sperm the richer. (961)

Though the above warning would seem to apply to the negligent Ishmael, what follows clearly does not. Despite the attractiveness of letting go completely in his reveries, the experienced Ishmael never really enters the Emersonian depths of what amounts to a mariner's version of the "transparent eyeball." One of the harpooners is speaking about the scarcity of whales when one of these "absent-minded young men" is on duty:

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 with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for

the visible image of the 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 undiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it. In this enchanted mood, thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space; like Wickliff's sprinkled Pantheistic ashes, forming at last a part of every shore the round globe over.

There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life imparted by a gently rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tide of God. But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch, slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists!

Since the entrance of Ahab, Melville has shown the captain to be rather the tyrant, kicking Stubb, the second mate, and intimidating everyone else. This is certainly in keeping with Melville's earlier captains, none of whom

appeared in a favorable light. But we have already seen some of Ahab's "humanities," and in "The Quarter Deck," a solidarity is established that will last till the Pequod is destroyed.

As the men become increasingly excited by his ritualistic questions about whaling, Ahab grows "more strangely and fiercely glad and approving" (964). Then he offers a gold doubloon to the first man who "raises me a white-headed whale with a wrinkled brow and a crooked jaw" (965). All three harpooners know of this whale--it is Moby Dick, the whale which Ahab admits to Starbuck had "dismasted" (966) him:

"...Aye, aye," he shouted with a terrific, loud, animal sob, like that of a heart-stricken moose; "Aye, aye! it was that accursed white whale that razed me; made a poor pegging lubber of me for ever and a day!" Then tossing both arms, with measureless imprecations he shouted out: "Aye, aye! and I'll chase him round Good Hope, and round the Horn, and round the Norway Maelstrom, and round perdition's flames before I give him up. And this is what ye have shipped for, men! to chase that white whale on both sides of land, and over all sides of earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out. What say ye, men, will ye splice hands on it, now? I think ye do look brave." (966)

With such a dramatic appeal from such an extraordinary captain, the crew, "running close to the excited old man"

(966), join with him, shouting, "a sharp eye for the White Whale; a sharp lance for Moby Dick" (966).

Starbuck tries to halt the growing hysteria by arguing against Ahab's insane quest: "'Vengeance on a dumb brute!' cried Starbuck, 'that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous'" (967). But Ahab is ready for Starbuck (and Melville is just below the surface here):

"Hark ye yet again,--the little lower layer. All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event--in the living act, the undoubted deed--there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent or principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man! I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. But not my master, man, is even

that fair play. Who's over me? Truth hath no confines.

The implication of this passage is that while there may be some higher "reasoning thing" behind the face of nature--and directing Moby Dick--there is the awful possibility that there is "naught beyond." Since either possibility is equally incendiary to the vengeance-seeking Ahab, the natural world--particularly through its greatest representative, Moby Dick--becomes the place of confrontation.

To Ahab's speech, Starbuck can only respond, "God keep me!--keep us all!" (968) as Ahab continues his dark mass with the communion of the "brimming pewter" (968):

"Now, three to three, ye stand. Commend the murderous chalices! Bestow them, ye who are now made parties to this indissoluble league. Ha! Starbuck! but the deed is done! Yon ratifying sun now waits to sit upon it. Drink, ye harpooneers! drink and swear, ye men that man the deathful whaleboats's bow--Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death!" The long, barbed steel goblets were lifted; and to cries and maledictions against the white whale, the spirits were simultaneously quaffed down with a hiss. Starbuck paled, and turned, and shivered. Once more, and finally, the replenished pewter went the rounds among the frantic crew; then, waving his free hand to them, they all dispersed; and

Ahab retired within his cabin. (970)

Sitting alone by his window at "Sunset," Ahab finds himself "damned in the midst of Paradise!" (971), and prophesies that "I will dismember my dismemberer" (971). His stormy thoughts concludes in this superb landscape image of his relentless intent: "The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. Over unsounded gorges, through the rifled hearts of mountains, under torrents' beds, unerringly I rush! Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way!" (972).

Besides the resonant ambiguities developing around Ahab and the White Whale--a situation which allows us to see Ahab with much more empathy--the other thing which holds the action of Moby-Dick together is the momentous compact between Ahab and the rest of the crew. True, Ahab intimidates; true, Ahab has hidden motives; but the men, to the final scene, join with him, often fervently. Even Ishmael tells of his temporary absorption in the pact: "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. A wild, mystical, sympathetic feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine" (983). Without the men rallying to Ahab's quest, Ahab would have lost the core of his humanity. Instead, now Ahab becomes, to a significant degree, their representative against "the inscrutable thing."

Melville has give us two main parts of the psychic landscape, Ahab, whose purpose and description are rooted in the natural landscape, and Ishmael, who views from the masthead an ocean which will bring Ahab finally in contact with his great adversary. Now it is time to intoduce the third part of the triangle, Moby Dick.

After summarizing the numerous "calamities" which have been "accumulating and piling their terrors upon Moby Dick" (984), Ishmael goes on to tell that many sailors believe the White Whale to be both "ubiquitous" and "immortal" (986-87). These god-like attributes are a perfect balance to that "god-like, godless man," Ahab. Looking closer--"But even stripped of these supernatural surmisings, there was enough in the earthly make and incontestable character of the monster to strike the imagination with unwonted power" (987)--Ishmael now gives us the first description of Moby Dick:

The rest of his body was so streaked, and spotted, and marbled with the same shrouded hue, that, in the end, he had gained his distinctive appellation of the White Whale; a name, indeed, literally justified by his vivid aspect, when seen gliding at high noon through a dark blue sea, leaving a milky-way wake of creamy foam, all spangled with golden gleamings. (988)

Add to the above the creature's "unexampled, intelligent malignity" (988), and the White Whale has already been

invested with a terrifying potency.

Ishmael then turns to Ahab's relation with Moby Dick. Since the day when the White Whale "had reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field" (988), Ahab "had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale" (989):

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 world; 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 multilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to the crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it. (989)

The word "crazy" seems to make it clear that Ahab's sense of

evil is skewed, but the entire passage has a biting irony which undercuts, even denies the word. In battling the White Whale, Ahab seems to be fighting "the general rage and hate," the evil of the world. But under closer examination, the Promethean Ahab can also be seen as fighting against the tyrannical God who has cursed us since Adam. It is an intended and essential ambiguity.

After giving Ahab's view of the whale, Ishmael now turns to his own perception of the creature, summed up in one of the opening lines of "The Whiteness of the Whale": "It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me" (993). Though Ishmael claims to "almost despair" of trying to put "in comprehensible form" the "mystical and well nigh ineffable" quality of Moby Dick, this chapter in its accumulated resonance is a dazzling show of imaginative melding. After giving a number of examples which show how whiteness "refiningly enchances beauty" (993) or represents a sacredness, Ishmael now turns to his main concern with the color:

yet for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood.

This elusive quality it is, which causes the thought of whiteness, when divorced from more kindly

associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds. (994)

Ishmael examines a number of instances of the above, and then moves on to study "the common apprehension" that "this phenomenon of whiteness is not confessed to be the prime agent in exaggerating the terror of objects otherwise terrible; nor to the unimaginative mind is there aught of terror in those appearances whose awfulness to another mind almost solely consists in this one phenomenon, especially when exhibited under any form at all approaching to muteness or universality" (999). He illustrates this with two compelling landscapes, one of the "silent, superstitious dread" a mariner would feel sailing through "a midnight sea of milky whiteness--as if from encircling headlands shoals of combed white bears were swimming around him...the shrouded phantom of the whitened waters...horrible to him as a real ghost" (999). This is followed by the sailor who encounters the scenery of the Antarctic:

at times, by some infernal trick of legerdemain in the powers of frost and air, he, shivering and half shipwrecked, instead of rainbows speaking hope and solace to his misery, views what seems a boundless church-yard grinning upon him with its lean ice monuments and splintered crosses" (1000).

Image after image have magnified the power of whiteness, and

Ishmael now moves toward a conclusion of his fugue on whiteness. He asks why a young colt, "foaled in some peaceful valley of Vermont, far removed from all beasts of prey," will "start, snort, and with bursting eyes paw the ground in phrensies of affright" if you "shake a fresh buffalo robe behind him" (1000). According to Ishmael this shows that "even in a dumb brute," there is "the instinct of the knowledge of the demonism in the world," an instinct which leads to this result:

Thus, then, the muffled rollings of a milky sea; the bleak rustling of the festooned frosts of mountains; the desolate shiftings of the windrowed snows of prairies; all these, to Ishmael, are as the shaking of that buffalo robe to the frightened colt!

Though neither knows where lie the nameless things of which the mystic sign gives forth such hints; yet with me, as with the colt, somewhere those things must exist. Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright. (1000)

The above passage is a central document for understanding Melville. For it is here that whiteness, in all its elusive shadings, becomes the central color in Melville's palette. Ishmael's consciousness that evil pervades even the whitest of examples--something which so greatly divides Melville from the early Emerson--allows him to understand Ahab's actions,

even while seeing their madness.

But even now, one more movement in this theme and variations on whiteness remains, as Ishmael turns to his last point, why the color which is "the very veil of the Christian's deity" can also be "the intensifying agent in things most appalling to mankind" (1001). He starts with two further questions, both quite piercing as they build to a final landscape image:

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows--a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink? (1001)

What is happening here is that whiteness, in its "indefiniteness" and "absence," is being presented in terms which are contrary to a loving, personal God. But Ishmael proceeds further, this time asking the reader to consider the possibility that "all deified Nature"--an Emersonian term, if ever there was one--"absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel-house within."

This is a devastating possibility, yet quite real to the skeptical Melville, and to Ishmael and Ahab both. "The Whiteness of the Whale" is almost complete, but Ishmael wants us to consider one more chilling point:

consider that the mystical cosmetic which produces every one of her hues, the great principle of light, for ever remains white or colorless in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge--pondering all this, the palsied universe lies before us a leper; and like willful 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. And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt? (1001)

As "The Whiteness of the Whale" illustrates, so much of the metaphysical expansiveness of Moby Dick depends on allusions to land- and seascapes. This continues throughout the book, and is the central grounding agent for all three of the major figures. In "The Chart," one of the finest examples occurs as Ahab sits looking at his maps just after the "wild ratification of his purpose" by his crew:

While thus employed, the heavy pewter lamp suspended in chains over his head, continually rocked with the

motion of the ship, and for ever threw shifting gleams and shadows of lines upon his wrinkled brow, till it almost seemed that while he himself was marking out lines and courses on the wrinkled charts, some invisible pencil was also tracing lines and courses upon the deeply marked chart of his forehead. (1003)

Knowing that the fiery abandon of the men will quickly subside if only the possibility of an encounter with Moby Dick were ahead, Ahab wisely decides to hunt for other whales along the way. It is in "The First Lowering" that one of Melville's most poignant sea images occurs. As a squall approaches, the boat in which Ishmael and Queequeg are pursuing a whale swamps:

The wind increased to a howl; the waves dashed their bucklers together; the whole squall roared, forked, and crackled around us like a white fire upon the prairie, in which, unconsumed, we were burning; immortal in these jaws of death! In vain we hailed the other boats; as well roar to the live coals down the chimney of a flaming furnace as hail those boats in that storm. Meanwhile the driving scud, rack, and mist, grew darker with the shadows of night; no sign of the ship could be seen. The rising sea forbade all attempts to bale out the boat. The oars were useless as propellers, performing now the office of life-preservers. So, cutting the lashing of the waterproof match keg, after

many failures Starbuck contrived to ignite the lamp in the lantern; then stretching it on a waif pole, handed it to Queequeg as the standard-bearer of forlorn hope. There, then, he sat, holding up that imbecile candle in the heart of that almighty forlornness. There, then, he sat, the sign and symbol of a man without faith, hopelessly holding up hope in the midst of despair.

(1033)

In "The Spirit-Spout" another layer of supernatural implication occurs as a mysterious phenomenon attracts Ishmael: "one serene and moonlight night, when all the waves rolled by like scrolls of silver; and, by their soft, suffusing seethings, made what seemed a silvery silence, not a solitude: on such a silent night a silvery jet was seen in advance of the white bubbles at the bow. Lit up by the moon, it looked celestial; seemed some plumed and glittering god uprising from the sea" (1041). Some of the more superstitious sailors attribute the Spirit-Spout to "one self-same whale; and that whale, Moby Dick" (1042). With this connection made, Ishmael continues on in a brilliant counterpoint:

These temporary apprehensions, so vague but so awful, derived a wondrous potency from the contrasting serenity of the weather, in which, beneath all its blue blandness, some thought there lurked a devilish charm, as for days and days we voyaged along, through seas so

wearily, lonesomely mild, that all space, in repugnance to our vengeful errand, seemed vacating itself of life before our urn-like prow.

But, at last, when turning to the eastward, the Cape winds began howling around us, and we rose and fell upon the long, troubled seas that are there; when the ivory-tusked Pequod sharply bowed to the blast, and gored the dark waves in her madness, till, like showers of silver chips, the foamflakes flew over her bulwarks; then all this desolate vacuity of life went away, but gave place to sights more dismal than before.

The final image of the Pequod as a maddened animal hints toward the last encounter of the ship and the White Whale.

With the relationship between Ahab and the White Whale well established, Melville now slows down the book to heighten the tension of their eventual encounter. One of the ways is by the various meetings with other ships. After coming upon the Albatross, the Pequod meets the Town-Ho. It is during a "gam" between the two ships that Ishmael and the rest of the crew hear a story which "wildly heightened" interest in the White Whale (1052). The story of Steelkilt and Radney unequivocally shows Moby Dick as a force for righteousness. When the White Whale seizes and destroys the malicious Radney, thus saving Steelkilt from murdering him, justice seems complete. Yet this story is simply one more intriguing perspective on the great whale, for in the later

encounter with the Jeroboam, Moby Dick, in destroying the chief mate Macey and leaving alone the mad Shaker Gabriel, seems to directly aid the forces of evil. Again and again, as with Ahab, Melville rejects a simple view of the White Whale, working instead toward a composite view where all of nature, in fact, comes to be charged with myriad possibilities.

In "The Line" Ishmael spoke of how "the calm is but the wrapper and envelop of the storm" (1094). To illustrate this, Ishmael now describes the events around Stubb killing a whale. The ship is becalmed in the Indian Ocean, and it is Ishmael's turn at the foremast-head: "with my shoulders leaning against the slackened royal shrouds, to and fro I idly swayed in what seemed an enchanted air. No resolution could withstand it; in that dreamy mood losing all consciousness, at last my soul went out of my body" (1095). The same drowsiness has taken over the rest of the crew until "not forty fathoms off, a gigantic Sperm Whale" appears "like the capsized hull of a frigate" (1095). The action begins, with the chase captured in all its enthusiasm. Closing in on the whale, Tastergo hurls the fated harpoon, then "the magical line" goes "hot and hissing" along the wrists of the boat's crew (1097). The line forces on the reader how close to death the whalers are, how transient their reveries can be. The whale is soon dispatched, its heart "burst" as "gush after gush of clotted red gore, as if it had been the purple

lees of red wine, shot into the frightened air; and falling back again, ran dripping down his motionless flanks into the sea" (1099). This second battle with a whale is a success; more is to come.

While Melville had many criticisms of Emerson's inability to fathom the depths of evil, he also praised him on a number of occasions. (It would be hard for Melville not to, when Emerson was capable of writing that "Self-trust is the essence of heroism. It is the state of the soul at war, and its ultimate objects are the last defiance of falsehood and wrong, and the power to bear all that can be inflicted by evil agents," 325). In perhaps his most laudatory moment, Melville wrote in a letter that "Emerson is more than a brilliant fellow...he is an uncommon man...for the sake of the argument, let us call him a fool;--then had I rather be a fool than a wise man.--I love all men who dive. Any fish can swim near the surface, but it takes a great whale to go down stairs five miles or more" (Melville Log, 292). In "The Sphynx," when Ahab addresses the decapitated head of Stubb's whale, the same quality is being praised: "Of all divers, thou hast dived the deepest" (1126). Ahab's praises the ability to penetrate to these depths, for he realizes, despite all his hate, that the great whale is an equal adversary to him: "'O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies! not the smallest atom stirs or lives in matter, but has its cunning

duplicate in mind'" (1127). Ahab sees his own relentless search as having a "cunning duplicate" in the brutal irresistibility of the White Whale.

After spending several chapters comparing the head of the Sperm whale to the head of the Right whale, Ishmael returns to the Sperm Whale's head in "The Battering Ram." Here the head is called "a dead, blind wall" (1153), recalling the wall that Ahab wants to smash through in "The Quarterdeck." Mentioning again this "dead, impregnable, uninjurable wall," Ishmael now ties it in with Ahab's singular drive: "there swims behind it all a mass of tremendous life, only to be adequately estimated as piled wood is--by the cord; and all obedient to one volition, as the smallest instinct" (1154).

With the "one volition" in place Melville now continues to infuse the White Whale with supernatural potency. In "The Prairie," after calling the full front view of the Sperm Whale's head "sublime," Ishmael goes on to link it with a Jehovah-like God: "in the great Sperm Whale, this high and mighty god-like dignity inherent in the brow is so immensely amplified, that gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature" (1164).

The next seascape of consequence occurs as the Pequod passes through the straits of Sunda on the way to Moby Dick's favorite cruising grounds. The ship finds hundreds of Sperm

whales and hurries in pursuit. But someone is watching the whalers, and in a section which recalls the escapes of Cooper's John Paul Jones and the Red Rover, the Pequod must now contend with pursuing Malays:

As with glass under arm, Ahab to-and-fro paced the deck; in his forward turn beholding the monsters he chased, and in the after on the bloodthirsty pirates chasing him; some such fancy as the above seemed his. And when he glanced upon the green walls of the watery defile in which the ship was then sailing, and bethought him that through that gate lay the route to his vengeance, and beheld, how that through that same gate he was now both chasing and being chased to his deadly end; and not only that, but a herd of remorseless wild pirates and inhuman atheistical devils were infernally cheering him on with their curses;--when all these conceits had passed through his brain, Ahab's brow was left gaunt and ribbed, like the black sand beach after some stormy tide has been gnawing it, without being able to drag the firm thing from its place. (1203)

A Cooper character would have been much more immersed in the chase itself. In the last line, Ahab's face literally becomes a landscape, the psychic merging with the physical as Cooper would never have conceived. The Pequod finally evades its pursuers and gains on the whales, and soon Ishmael's boat

is on to one:

Queequeg's harpoon was flung; the stricken fish darted blinding spray in our faces, and then running away with us like light, steered straight for the heart of the herd. Though such a movement on the part of the whale struck under such circumstances, is in no wise unprecedented; and indeed is almost always more or less anticipated; yet does it present one of the more perilous vicissitudes of the fishery. For as the swift monster drags you deeper and deeper into the frantic shoal, you bid adieu to circumspect life and only exist in a delirious throb. (1205)

Ishmael is, of course, the reflective balance to the megalomania of Ahab, and as he sits in the whaleboat in the "innermost fold" of the herd, the place where the cows and calves act with "a wondrous fearlessness and confidence," he is calmed by the scene before him:

And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternations and affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the centre freely and fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concernments; yea, serenely revelled in dalliance and delight. But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness

of joy. (1209)

As I hope I have established, the natural settings through Moby-Dick have been used to expand the personalities of Ahab and Ishmael, while at the same time furthering the main theme of the book, the relation of man to nature and God. Pip, though a minor character, has an important bearing on Melville's exploration, especially after he jumps for the second time from Stubb's whale boat: "The awful lonesomeness is intolerable. The intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity, my God! who can tell it?" (1236). Ahab, forever fired with this same "intense concentration of self," tries to use this intensity to break through the pasteboard mask, to destroy the White Whale. Pip, after being seared by such "heartless immensity," loses his mind, thereby gaining easy entrance to the depths Ahab so desperately strove to fathom:

The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though. Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; and the miser-man, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps; and among the joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities, Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God's foot upon the

treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man's insanity is heaven's sense; and wandering from all mortal reason, man comes at last to that celestial thought, which, to reason, is absurd and frantic; and weal or woe, feels then uncompromised, indifferent as his God. (1237)

Now that Pip has been transformed into a communicant with the higher world, the camaraderie of the crew comes back into play. In one of the most splendid instances of fraternal openness in American literature--a scene Irving Howe calls a "strange, delicious ceremony of renewal" (Howe, American Newness, 69)--the crew, after cutting up Stubb's whale, squeeze the lumps of sperm "back into fluid." Ishmael tells of this experience in what is a vivid counterpoint to both Ahab's and Pip's "intense concentration of self":

Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say,--Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social

acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy!
Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all
squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze
ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of
kindness. (1239)

Skillfully shifting back to the crew's involvement with Ahab, Melville now gives us another dark vision in "The Try-works." As the crew boils down the chunks of blubber the night after capturing the first whale, this image occurs, of ship and crew once again joining with the fiery Ahab: "the rushing Pequod, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the natural counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul" (1246). Even Ishmael is taken over as he steers the devilish ship, watching other members of the crew at the try-works: "the fiend shapes before me, capering half in smoke and half in fire...at last beget kindred visions in my soul, so soon that as I began to yield to that unaccountable drowsiness which ever would come over me at a midnight helm" (1246). In this drowsiness--much like the dangerous reverie he cautions against in "The Mast-head"--Ishmael misdirects the tiller, but recovers an instant before he would have destroyed the ship. Having greeted death, Ishmael (with Melville close at hand) now offers his great apostrophe against an undue concentration on the demonic:

Look not too long in the face of the fire, O man! Never

dream with thy hand on the helm! Turn not thy back to the compass; accept the first hint of the hitching tiller; believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly. To-morrow, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright; those who glared like devils in the forking flames, the morn will show in far other, at least gentler relief; the glorious, golden, glad sun, the only true lamp--all others but liars! (1247).

The above is directed toward Ahab, and Ishmael has the depth-probing captain still in mind as he concludes with this memorable natural image:

There is wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is till higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar.

(1248)

The next instance of landscape yielding up an interpretive treasure comes in "The Doubloon." Once again the myriad levels of Moby-Dick are brought into play. Since being nailed to the masthead, the doubloon has remained "revered" by the crew "as the white whale's talisman" (1254).

On its face is the following natural setting: "the likeness of three Andes' summits; from one a flame; a tower on another; on the third a crowing cock; while arching over all was a segment of the partitioned zodiac, the signs all marked with their usual cabalistics, and the keystone sun entering the equinoctial point at Libra" (1254). The picture is enticingly equivocal in itself, but Melville's brilliant stroke is to have several members of the crew interpret it.

First Ahab comes to view it: "There's something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; look here,--three peaks as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; and this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his mysterious self" (1254). Starbuck, having watched Ahab, now moves to the coin and finds a much more Christian meaning: "A dark valley between three mighty, heaven-abiding peaks, that almost seem the Trinity, in some faint earthly symbol. So in this vale of Death, God girds us round; and over all our gloom, the sun of Righteousness still shines a beacon and a hope" (1254). It is Stubb's turn next, and in character he sees nothing significant in the coin, instead tossing off a humorous epithet for each of the zodiac figures. Flask is equally funny as his only insight is to calculate that the sixteen

dollars would bring him nine hundred and sixty cigars. Queequeg and Fedallah both briefly stop to look, and then finally Pip, whose incoherent mutterings complete the interpretive spectrum.

Up to this point in the novel, the land- and seascapes have been displaying a rich interactiveness not seen in the preceding work of Melville's. In "The Pacific," as the Pequod passes the Bashee isles, the setting takes on a Whitmanesque expansion, recalling parts of Mardi. But here, instead of the digressive quality of Mardi, this imagery resonates even more strongly because of the land- and seascapes which have preceded it. After invoking the "millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all that we call lives and souls" which "lie dreaming, dreaming, still; tossing like slumberers in their beds; the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness" (1308), Ishmael moves further:

To any meditative Magian rover, this serene Pacific, once beheld, must ever after be the sea of his adoption. It rolls the midmost waters of the world, the Indian ocean and Atlantic being but its arms. The same waves wash the moles of the new-built Californian towns, but yesterday planted by the recentest race of men, and lave the faded but still gorgeous skirts of Asiatic lands, older than Abraham; while all between float milky-ways of coral isles, and low-lying,

endless, unknown Archipelagoes, and impenetrable
Japans. Thus this mysterious, divine Pacific zones the
world's whole bulk about; makes all coasts one bay to
it; seems the tide-beating heart of the earth. Lifted
by those eternal swells, you needs must own the
seductive god, bowing your head to Pan.

While the above is Ishmael's reaction to the tremendous interconnectedness of the natural world, Ahab has a different view:

But few thoughts of Pan stirred Ahab's brain, as standing like an iron statue at his accustomed place beside the mizen rigging, with one nostril he unthinkingly snuffed the sugary musk from the Bashee isles (in whose sweet woods mild lovers must be walking), and with the other consciously inhaled the salt breath of the new found sea; that sea in which the hated White Whale must even then be swimming. Launched at length upon these almost fatal waters, and gliding towards the Japanese cruising-ground, the old man's purpose intensified itself. His firm lips met like the lips of a vice; the Delta of his forehead's veins swelled like overladen brooks; in his very sleep, his ringing cry ran through the vaulted hull, "Stern all! the White Whale spouts thick blood!" (1309).

Another perspective on the ocean comes in the chapter following "The Pacific," where the blacksmith, a man ruined

by drink, waits only for death:

but Death is only a launching into the region of the strange Untried; it is but the first salutation to the possibilities of the immense Remote, the Wild, the Watery, the Unshored; therefore, to the death-longing eyes of such men, who still have left in them some interior compunctions against suicide, does the all-contributed and all-receptive ocean alluringly spread forth his whole plain of unimaginable, taking [sic] terrors, and wonderful, new-life adventures; and from the hearts of infinite Pacifics, the thousand mermaids sing to them--"Come hither, broken-hearted; here is another life without the guilt of intermediate death; here are wonders supernatural, without dying for them. Come hither! bury thyself in a life which, to your now equally abhorred and abhorring, landed world, is more oblivious than death. Come hither! put up thy grave-stone, too, within the churchyard, and come hither, till we marry thee!" (1312)

The Prufrockian mermaids give the ocean another dimension, a fated attractiveness, much like it had in the earlier section on Bulkington.

As Moby-Dick moves toward conclusion, Melville presents a ritualistic preparation involving Ahab and Perth, and later the harpooners. These preparations, first involving Ahab's new leg and then the creation and christening of Ahab's

harpoon, slow the action down and increase the vividness of the confrontation to come. More importantly, the harpoon incident functions as one more instance of fraternity among the crew. Richard Chase writes that Ahab is "a primitive magician who tries to coerce man and the universe by compulsive ritual" (44). This is somewhat true, but there is no doubt that the harpooners, and the rest of the crew, are behind Ahab, and remain behind him right to the end. For Ahab to be reduced to a simple tyrant would undercut the power of the christening scene, and of "The Symphony." One can't help but believe, as the harpooners temper Ahab's harpoon with some of their blood, that their own harpoons willingly await their captain's command.

The sea, having gained a death-like immensity in the section on Perth, returns to its role as a soothing agent in "The Gilder." Ishmael and the rest of the crew are in their boats off Japan in "mild, pleasant weather" where the waves "like hearth-stone cats...purr against the gunwale." It is during these moments "of dreamy quietude, when beholding the tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the ocean's skin, one forgets the tiger heart that pants beneath it; and would not willingly remember, that this velvet paw but conceals a remorseless fang" (1317). What follows is a decidedly lyric account of the "filial, confident, land-like feeling toward the sea" that a sailor knows at this time:

he regards it as so much flowery earth; and the distant

ship revealing only the tops of her masts, seems struggling forward, not through high rolling waves, but through the tall grass of a rolling prairie: as when the western emigrants' horses only show their erected ears, while their hidden bodies widely wade through the amazing verdure.

The long-drawn virgin vales; the mild blue hill-sides; as over these there steals the hush, the hum; you almost swear that play-wearied children lie sleeping in these solitudes, in some glad May-time, when the flowers of the woods are plucked. And all this mixes with your most mystic mood; so that fact and fancy, half-way meeting, interpenetrate, and form one seamless whole. (1317)

Even Ahab is touched by such an hypnotic setting, but "if these secret golden keys did seem to open in him his own secret golden treasures, yet did his breath upon them prove but tarnishing" (1318). He can only address the scene with troubled emotion:

"Oh, grassy glades! oh, ever vernal endless landscapes in the soul; in ye--though long parched by the dead drought of the earthly life,--in ye, men may yet roll, like young horses in new morning clover; and for some few fleeting moments, feel the cool dew of the life immortal on them. Would to God these blessed calms would last. But the mingled, mingling threads of life

are woven by warp and woof: calms crossed by storms, a storm for every calm. There is no steady unretracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause:--through infancy's unconscious spell, boyhood's thoughtless faith, adolescence' doubt (the common doom), then skepticism, then disbelief, resting at last in manhood's pondering repose of If. But once gone through, we trace the round again; and are infants, boys, and men, and Ifs eternally. Where lies the final harbor, whence we unmoor no more? In what rapt ether sails the world, of which the weariest will never weary? Where is the foundling's father hidden? Our souls are like the orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it. (1318)

Sailing through the Japanese sea in the opening of "The Quadrant," Ishmael gives us this picture of a God-ravished setting:

...the days in summer are as freshets of effulgences. That unblinkingly vivid Japanese sun seems the blazing focus of the glassy ocean's immeasurable burning-glass. The sky looks lacquered; clouds there are none; the horizon floats; and this nakedness of unrelieved radiance is as the insufferable splendors of God's throne. (1326)

This "insufferable" seascape leads Ahab to murmur to himself as he looks at the sun through his quadrant, "'Thou seemark! thou high and mighty Pilot! thou tellest me truly where I am--but canst thou cast the least hint where I shall be? Or canst thou tell where some other thing besides me is this moment living? Where is Moby Dick?'" (1326). Incensed by the futility of any of man's inventions which look toward the heavens, Ahab finishes his renunciation:

"Science! Curse thee, thou vain toy; and cursed be all the things that cast man's eyes aloft to that heaven, whose live vividness but scorches him, as these old eyes are even now scorched with thy light, O sun! Level by nature to this earth's horizon are the glances of man's eyes; not shot from the crown of his head, as if God had meant him to gaze on his firmament. Curse thee, thou quadrant!" dashing it to the deck, "no longer will I guide my earthy way by thee; the level ship's compass, and the level dead-reckoning, by log and by line; these shall conduct me, and show me my place on the sea." (1327)

Such a denial of the higher realm is bound to bring a direct response, and it comes in "The Candles," the supreme seascape in Moby-Dick. Here the natural setting assumes a magnificence equal to Ahab's, as the Pequod encounters "the direst of all storms, the Typhoon" (1329). Ahab, having cast off his connection to any heavenly guidance in "The

Quadrant," now stands ready for anything the natural world has to offer:

Towards evening of that day, the Pequod was torn of her canvas, and bare-poled was left to fight a Typhoon which had struck her directly ahead. When darkness came on, sky and sea roared and split with the thunder, and blazed with the lightning, that showed the disabled masts fluttering here and there with the rags which the first fury of the tempest had left for its sport.

(1329)

Starbuck, in speaking to Stubb, attributes the storm to Moby Dick: "markest thou not that the gale comes from the eastward, the very course Ahab is to run for Moby Dick" (1330). As a lightning flash illuminates the captain, Starbuck calls for the lightning rod chains to be dropped overboard. But Ahab forbids it, preferring to battle the elements without any assistance. It is at this moment that Starbuck sees the corposants: "All the yard-arms were tipped with a pallid fire; and touched at each tri-pointed lightning-rod-end with three tapering white flames, each of the three tall masts was silently burning in that sulphurous air, like three gigantic wax tapers before an altar" (1331).

As in "The Doubloon" such a sight is subject to interpretation, the simple Stubb finding that the mast-head flames portend good fortune. But Ahab has a different mind on this, his view once again magnifying his determined

separation:

"Look up at it; mark it well; the white flame but lights the way to the White Whale! Hand me those main-mast links there; I would fain feel this pulse, and let mine beat against it; blood against fire!"...."Oh! Thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on these seas I as Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee, that to this hour I bear the scar; I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know know that thy right worship is defiance. To neither love nor reverence wilt thou be kind; and e'en for hate thou canst but kill; and all are killed. No fearless fool now fronts thee. I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here....But thou art but my fiery father; my sweet mother, I know not....defyingly I worship thee." (1333)

At that instant Ahab's harpoon is touched by the Saint Elmo's fire, and Starbuck, with this final dreadful image before him, grasps Ahab by the arm and warns him: "'God, God is against thee, old man; forbear! t' is an ill voyage!'" (1335). The crew, overhearing Starbuck's admonition, start to panic and raise "a half mutinous cry." But Ahab, taking the burning harpoon in his hand, threatens to "transfix with

it the first sailor that but cast loose a rope's end" (1335). In this moment of exquisite tension, Ahab reminds the crew of their irrevocable pledge: "All your oaths to hunt the White Whale are as binding as mine; and heart, soul, and body, lungs and life, old Ahab is bound." Then, to complete his conquest, "with one blast of his breath" (1335) Ahab blows out the harpoon's flames, and the dark mass of "The Candles" is over.

After the storm of "The Candles" subsides, another chapter occurs which shows Ahab as a pseudo-sorcerer. In "The Needle," the Pequod's compasses have been turned by the lightning, and though Ahab is still able to sail with them, he realizes that the superstitious men would find such an action full of "shudderings and evil portents" (1346). Accordingly, he improvises a new compass needle by hammering a sail maker's needle into temporary magnetism and, adding "some small strange motions" (1346), awes the men back into line: "In his fiery eyes of scorn and triumph, you saw Ahab in all his fatal pride" (1347).

Having replaced the defective log and line, Ahab is now full in pursuit of the White Whale. As the weather remains calm, nothing more of an ominous nature occurs until a man falls overboard and is drowned when the life buoy proves useless. It is then that Queequeg suggests using his unneeded coffin as a life buoy, a decision which will eventually save Ishmael.

After hearing from the Rachel of its disastrous encounter with the White Whale, Ahab becomes infuriated even further when he realizes that all Moby Dick's previous meetings with other ships "contrastingly concurred to show the demonic indifference with which the white whale tore his hunters" (1365). With his purpose even further fixed, Ahab so dominates the intimidated crew that "all their bodings, doubts, misgivings, fears, were fain to hide beneath their souls, and not sprout forth a single spear or leaf" (1365). However, understanding the possibility of subversion even while maintaining an iron-fisted discipline, Ahab decides that to guarantee success it is to be his right to gain first view of the whale, and rigs himself a post aloft. It is while aloft that a "red-billed savage seahawk" steals his hat and, in a continuance of the many ill omens that pile up toward the end of Moby-Dick, drops it far from the ship, "a minute black spot...dimly discerned, falling from that vast height into the sea" (1369).

After "The Candles" and the many ominous signals of the following chapters, Melville realized that to have the encounter happen immediately would lessen the drama. He also sensed that Ahab was becoming too far removed from his men so in a softly erotic description, he brings us one more moment of Ahab's humanity in "The Symphony":

It was a clear steel-blue day. The firmaments of air and sea were hardly separable in that all-pervading

azure; only, the pensive air was transparently pure and soft, with a woman's look, and the robust and man-like sea heaved with long, strong, lingering swells, as Samson's chest in his sleep.

Hither, and thither, on high, glided the snow-white wings of small, unspckled birds; these were the gentle thoughts of the feminine air; but to and fro in the deeps, far down in the bottomless blue, rushed mighty leviathans, sword-fish, and sharks; and these were the strong, troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea. (1372)

Despite his overflowing need for vengeance, even Ahab is affected by the "gentle thoughts of the feminine air":

Slowly crossing the deck from the scuttle, Ahab leaned over the side, and watched how his shadow in the water sank and sank to his gaze, the more and the more that he strove to pierce the profundity. But the lovely aromas in that enchanted air did at last seem to dispel, for a moment, the cankerous thing in his soul. That glad, happy air, that winsome sky, did at last stroke and caress him; the step-mother world, so long cruel--forbidding--now threw affectionate arms round his stubborn neck, and did seem to joyously sob over him, as if over one, that however wilful and erring, she could yet find it in her heart to save and to bless. From beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a

tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop. (1373)

In the conversation that follows, Ahab reveals to Starbuck that his past relationships are a deep current in his sympathies, but not enough to free him from the spectre of the White Whale. Starbuck, sensing Ahab's wavering, talks on, but now "Ahab's glance was averted; like a blighted fruit tree he shook, and cast his last, cindered apple to the soil" (1375).

With Ahab's distancing from all human relationships complete, Moby Dick now is ready to appear. Ahab spots the great whale first and soon all the boats but Starbuck's are lowered and in pursuit: "Like noiseless nautilus shells, their light prows sped through the sea; but only slowly they neared the foe. As they neared him, the ocean grew still more smooth; seemed drawing a carpet over the waves; seemed a noon-meadow, so serenely it spread" (1379). Describing the "musical rippling" and the "bright bubbles [that] arose and danced," the passage concludes in this contrapuntal moment:

And thus, through the serene tranquilities of the tropical sea, among waves whose hand-clappings were still suspended by exceeding rapture, Moby Dick moved on, still withholding from sight the full terrors of his submerged trunk, entirely hiding the wrenched hideousness of his jaw. (1380)

But it is not to be an instant contact, for Moby Dick

breaches and dives, to return in one hour. Surfacing suddenly, the great whale takes Ahab's whaleboat in his mouth, and shakes "the slight cedar as a mildly cruel cat her mouse" (1381). Ahab makes a "frenzied" attempt to free it, but Moby Dick is finished toying and tears the boat in two. Spotting the floating Ahab, Moby Dick begins circling the captain, "churning the water in his vengeful wake." But it is not Ahab's time yet, and yelling to Starbuck, Ahab effectively directs the Pequod's assistance: "The Pequod's prow was pointed; and breaking the charmed circle, she effectually parted the white whale from his victim" (1383). The first battle over, Ahab, "dragged into Stubb's boat with blood-shot, blinded eyes, the white brine caking in his wrinkles," collapses in the bottom of the boat.

After following the White Whale all night, the next morning it is sighted again, with Ahab's renewed enthusiasm bringing the crew back under his spell:

The frenzies of the chase had by this time worked them bubblingly up, like old wine worked anew. Whatever pale fears and forebodings some of them might have felt before; these were not only now kept out of sight through the growing awe of Ahab, but they were broken up, and on all sides routed, as timid prairie hares that scatter before the bounding bison. The hand of Fate had snatched all their souls; and by the stirring perils of the previous day; the rack of the past

night's suspense; the fixed, unfearing, blind, reckless way in which their wild craft went plunging towards its flying mark; by all these things, their hearts were bowled along. The wind that made great bellies of their sails, and rushed the vessel on by arms invisible as irresistible; this seemed the symbol of that unseen agency which so enslaved them to the race.

But Melville wants more than simple fear directing the men. As the passage continues, the entire crew, in all their courage and trepidation, are seen as inextricably joined:

They were one man, not thirty...all the individualities of the crew, this man's valor, that man's fear; guilt and guiltlessness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to. (1388)

The united crew continue to watch until, in an "act of defiance," Moby Dick breaches not one mile off and the second lowering begins. This time all the boats make fast to the whale, but Moby Dick, unbothered even by three harpoons, entangles the lines. After Ahab frees his boat, Moby Dick takes over:

That instant, the White Whale made a sudden rush among the remaining tangles of the other lines; by so doing, irresistibly dragged the more involved boats of Stubb and Flask towards his flukes; dashed them together like

two rolling husks on a surf-beaten beach, and then, diving down into the sea, disappeared in a boiling maelstrom, in which, for a space, the odorous cedar chips of the wrecks danced round and round, like the grated nutmeg in a swiftly stirred bowl of punch.

(1391)

Ahab's line parts and then as he tries to aid the other men, his boat "seemed drawn up towards Heaven by invisible wires,--as, arrow-like, shooting perpendicularly from the sea, the White Whale dashed his broad forehead against its bottom, and sent it, turning over and over, into the air; till it fell again--gunwale downwards--and Ahab and his men struggled out from under it, like seals from a sea-side cave" (1392). Starbuck rescues the foundering men again, and now it is found that the Parsee has disappeared, the first direct casualty of the White Whale.

Further angered, Ahab vows to "ten times girdle the unmeasured globe" to avenge the Parsee's death. Here Starbuck pleads with Ahab to give up the hunt because it is "impiety and blasphemy to hunt him more." But the steeled Ahab is immovable: "But in this matter of the whale, be the front of thy face to me as the palm of this hand--a lipless, unfeatured blank. Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders" (1394).

Despite the peaceful and alluring quality of the third morning, Ahab no longer has "time to think" of such beauty: "he only feels, feels, feels; that's tingling enough for mortal man! to think's audacity. God only has that right and privilege." (1396) Maintaining his fierce defiance toward any higher being, Ahab moves towards his inescapable demise.

Moving away from the Peguod, Ahab bids farewell to the masthead, the place of Ishmael's most profound contemplations and of Ahab's sightings of the White Whale: "Good by, mast-head--keep a good eye upon the whale, the while I'm gone. We'll talk to-morrow, nay, tonight, when the white whale lies down there, tied by head and tail" (1398). As the boats approach Moby Dick once more, the whale breaches, again recalling the picture in the Spouter Inn:

Suddenly the waters around them slowly swelled in broad circles; then quickly upheaved, as if sideways sliding from a submerged berg of ice, swiftly rising to the surface. A low rumbling sound was heard; a subterranean hum; and then all held their breaths; as bedraggled with trailing ropes, and harpoons, and lances, a vast form shot lengthwise, but obliquely from the sea. Shrouded in a thin drooping veil of mist, it hovered for a moment in the rainbowed air; and then fell swamping back into the deep. Crushed thirty feet upwards, the waters flashed for an instant like heaps of fountains, then brokenly sank in a shower of flakes,

leaving the circling surface creamed like new milk round the marble trunk of the whale. (1401)

The "maddened" Moby Dick, in one more facet of his amorphous character, "seemed combinedly possessed by all the angels that fell from heaven" (1401). He quickly destroys the two boats accompanying Ahab's and then "the half torn body of the Parsee was seen; his sable raiment frayed to shreds; his distended eyes turned full upon old Ahab" (1401). Ahab now realizes that the first prophecy has come true; now he desperately tries to prevent the second, that his own hearse will be of American wood. Ahab harpoons the whale again and "with a mighty volition of ungraduated, instantaneous swiftness," the White Whale speeds through "the weltering sea" (1404). Such a strain parts the line and Moby Dick is once again free.

As the whale bears down on the Pequod, the men on board are "enchanted" by his approach:

Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled. Some fell flat upon their faces. Like dislodged trucks, the heads of the harpooners aloft shook on their bull-like necks. Through the breach, they heard the waters pour, as mountain torrents down a flume. (1405)

The sinking of the Pequod is the second hearse. Ahab realizes that he has lost and makes his final address: "I turn my body from the sun. What ho, Tasego! let me hear thy hammer. Oh! ye three unsundered spires of mine; thou uncracked keel; and only god-bullied hull; thou firm deck, and haughty helm, and Pole-pointed prow,--death-glorious ship! must ye then perish, and without me?" (1406). With no hope of success but with no other action left, Ahab darts another harpoon, and disappears: "the stricken whale flew forward; with igniting velocity the line ran through the groove;--ran foul. Ahab stooped to clear it; he did clear it; but the flying turn caught him round the neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone" (1406).

With Ahab dead, the Pequod, the final symbol of his mad quest, now completes her voyage to the bottom of the sea:

And now, concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight. (1406)

But even here, in one last act of solidarity with the dead Ahab, Tashtego pins the sky-hawk to a spar, "so the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship, which, like Satan, would

not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it" (1407).

The Pequod has gone under, yet the unceasing sea remains, and Melville gives us one last extraordinary image: "Now small fowls flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago" (1407). It is only left for the Rachel to pick up Ishmael, and Moby-Dick is complete.

Looking at Moby-Dick in terms of its land- and seascape usage is a provocative way of embracing the novel. Through the rich and resonant natural settings, Melville embeds his philosophical inquiries in a vitally alive descriptive fabric. The characters of Ishmael and Ahab and Moby Dick--the great triangle at whose center Melville remains throughout the tale--emerge most powerfully through "man's brooding interrogation of nature" (Kazin, intro. to Moby-Dick, 42). Ishmael's perceptions and commentaries, Ahab's physical description and his awesome defiance, Moby Dick's brute power and supreme indifference--all are magnified through the myriad natural images which are woven through the tale. These settings constitute the central sensual rhythm of the novel.

When the sea finally settles over the Pequod, we realize that Ahab's quest to "strike through the pasteboard mask" has drawn us in, that we have, willingly or unwillingly, been

made members of the crew. Alfred Kazin intimates this when he writes that "Moby-Dick is not so much a book about Captain Ahab's quest for the whale as it is an experience of that quest" (intro. to Moby-Dick, 40). We do experience Ahab's madness, for his "warped, awesome grandeur" (Howe, American Newness, 48) is part of our birthright as Americans. It is the Ahabian in us which tore into the wilderness, which built the industrial empire which now races toward a holocaust. Ahab illustrates what happens when we lose Emerson's gift-- that mankind can be powerful without being brutally tyrannic. Ahab goes too far in his encounter with the natural world, dives too deep in seeking "to penetrate the nature of nature" (Howe, American Newness, 49), and thereby misses the mystical. Ishmael absorbs much more, but his inability to affect anything is the other half of the American nightmare. In Moby-Dick, consciousness and confrontation, ultimately, are separate modes. Nature is the final destination for both, but the natural world in Moby-Dick is not a place of integration. Ishmael and Ahab, though they need one another--Ahab to act, Ishmael to observe--remain apart. It is this isolation which makes Moby-Dick so terrifyingly poignant, and it is this separation--of action and understanding--that threatens us still.

Notes

¹ in a conversation of May 23, 1986.

Conclusion

When Moby-Dick ends, it is not simply the final pages of a novel--it is the conclusion of Melville's great psychic and literary voyage. In the six years of recreating and reimagining his four years at sea, Melville worked steadily, sometimes with incredible rapidity, toward the remarkable voyage of the Pequod, and the inspired seascapes through which Ishmael and Ahab and Moby Dick interact. These six years were increasingly full of both inner and outer turmoil as the enthusiasm of a young man discovering his literary gifts turned into increasing discontent at the ignorance of the reading public and the constraints of family life. Not surprisingly, Melville's novels reflect this increasing turbulence, both in the hardening of character and the magnified opposition of nature. However, it is only after Moby-Dick that a decisive break takes place in Melville's fiction. What occurred is that Melville moved away from the personal voyage--and the accompanying natural settings--as his major structuring device. With this change, the possibility for transcendence fades, and the fiction which follows, though often masterful, enters a realm of unrelieved isolation and stifling inertia.

In these works following Moby-Dick, though Melville continues to pursue his explorations into the difficulties of apprehending reality, the characters and natural settings

involved are decidedly constricted. An enervated natural world echoes psychologically impotent characters.

Pierre, Melville's next novel, is entirely land-based, a bitter, ironical tale where the landscape (except for the dazzling Enceladus passage) has little connection to the main character, Pierre Glendinning. Perry Miller's point, mentioned earlier, that Pierre perverts the traditional romance is seen in the perfunctory handling of the natural environment, an element central to romance structuring and tone. But Pierre is not simply a distortion of the Romance. What happens is that after the sinking of the Pequod, Melville could no longer summon the peculiar vitality of the voyage. Instead, the "dead, impregnable, uninjurable wall" of the White Whale became the barrier that was to influence the rest of Melville's fiction. Never again would Melville attempt a character of Ahab's audacity or Ishmael's metaphysical luminescence; never again would the voyage serve as a vehicle of transcendent action or contemplation, the twin spheres of Moby-Dick.

In Pierre, the nightmare that the young Glendinning has about the Titan Enceladus strikingly testifies to the presence of "the wall." The disowned Pierre has been struggling to finish his first novel despite the "Imbecility, Ignorance, Blockheadedness, Self-Complacency, and the universal Blearedness and Besottedness around him" (393). His effort to capture "the everlasting elusiveness of Truth"

has finally affected his eyes and, unable to continue, he sits "suspended, motionless, blank" (396). Despite his tortured condition, Pierre returns once more to work, but his growing ill health betrays him and his mind wanders. A dream begins, with Pierre remembering the Mount of Titans, "a singular height standing quite detached in a wide solitude nor far from the grand range of dark blue hills encircling his ancestral manor" (397). The descriptions of the mountain are exceptional, particularly how "the recumbent sphinx-like shapes thrown off from the rocky steeps" are transformed by Melville's associative magic into a "repulsed group of heaven-assaulters." These Titans surround one "form defiant," a tremendous thrusting boulder that Pierre imagines to be the Titan Enceladus, now "shamefully recumbent" at the base of the mountain's peak. This is Melville at his best: a character deeply involved with the natural setting and the authorial presence amplifying the effect by a flowing allusiveness. Of greater interest is the conclusion of the nightmare:

such was the wild scenery, which now to Pierre, in his strange vision, displaced the four walls, the desk, the camp-bed, and domineered upon his trance. But no longer petrified in all their ignominious attitudes, the herded Titans now sprung to their feet; flung themselves up the slope; and anew battered at the precipice's unresounding wall. Foremost among them

all, he saw a moss-turbaned, armless giant, who despairing of any other mode of wreaking his immitigable hate, turned his vast trunk into a battering-ram, and hurled his own arched-out ribs again and yet again against the invulnerable steep.

"Enceladus! it is Enceladus!"--Pierre cried out in his sleep. That moment the phantom faced him; and Pierre saw Enceladus no more; but on the Titan's armless trunk, his own duplicate face and features magnifiedly gleamed upon him with prophetic discomfiture and woe. With trembling frame he started from his chair, and woke from that ideal horror to all his actual grief. (401-2)

Melville's change to the third-person narrative in Pierre also affects the presentation of landscape. In all his earlier work the first-person is employed. Though the tone varies significantly, in the novels up to Pierre there are moments of extraordinary connection between Melville as author, the loosely autobiographical narrator and the natural setting. With Pierre, however, the narrative technique splits Melville as author from the characters involved. And without an effective character to remain in contact with the natural world (excepting, again, the Enceladus section), Pierre falters badly in the area Melville had proven so strong in his earlier work: the creation of natural surroundings where a character's actions and reflections have

a heightened, almost archetypal appeal. In the most substantial land- and seascapes in the earlier novels, there is often the shadowy presence of Melville just behind the characters involved--and sometimes indiscernible from them. In Pierre, Melville intrudes as an overly ironic commentator. Even though Melville may have had many of the feelings of despair that he gives to the young Glendinning--Melville, just as he was finishing Moby-Dick, had written to Hawthorne, "Tho' I wrote the Gospels in this century, I should die in the gutter" (Leyda, 411)--it is the unlikely action of the novel that defeats the author's intentions. For a perfectly contented youth to suddenly sacrifice his wealth and happiness in an absurd attempt to expiate the unverified sin of his father simply doesn't convince.

The next major work after Pierre is "Bartleby the Scrivener." The physical and psychological walls that are the "landscape" of the story brilliantly encapsulate Bartleby, with Melville avoiding the third person narrative problems of Pierre by telling the tale from the point of view of the sympathetic lawyer. Moreover, with Bartleby's motivations as ambiguous as the nature of the White Whale, the scrivener becomes a plausible and provocative character, and the tale a marvelous study of self-enclosure.

Having worked through the intricacies of "Bartleby," Melville returns to the sea in "The Encantadas." Here the increased isolation and confinement guarantee that "The

Encantadas" is a radically different voyage than any of Melville's earlier ones. The compelling opening landscape sets the tone for the entire tale:

Take five-and-twenty heaps of cinders dumped here and there in an outside city lot; imagine some of them magnified into mountains, and the vacant lot the sea; and you will have a fit idea of the general aspect of the Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles. A group rather of extinct volcanoes than of isles; looking much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration.

(764)

This is not the world of top-gallant revery, nor is it the world of Ahabian revenge. It is a place where fire has burned away the curiosity and compulsion of the voyage. Here, "no voice, no low, no howl is heard; the chief sound of life here is a hiss" (765). Melville further increases the pressures of entrapment by dividing the story into ten sketches, the plots generally dealing with outcasts or victims marooned on the desolate isles. None of the embracing joy of the mastheads of White-Jacket or Moby-Dick remains; none of the youthful enthusiasm of Typee or Omoo.

The last important seascape that reflects on Melville's direction after Moby-Dick is in "Benito Cereno." The initial setting, once again, controls the psychological and physical rhythms of the tale:

The morning was one peculiar to that coast. Everything

was mute and calm; everything gray. The sea, though undulated into long roods of swells, seemed fixed, and was sleeked at the surface like waved lead that has cooled and set in the smelter's mould. The sky seemed a gray surtout. Flights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin with flights of troubled gray vapors among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms. Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come.

(673)

For one overwhelming reason, the third-person narrative voice is much more convincing here than in Pierre. Melville uses the superbly handled plot line of a hidden conspiracy to hold the reader's attention, even while, as a limitedly omniscient author, examining Captain Delano's naive reactions to the mystery before him. Unlike Pierre, who abruptly shifts into an almost suicidal idealism, Delano never quite grasps the situation before him, and this incapacity is further increased as the ship itself echoes the decaying stillness of the natural environs.

The best instance of this comes almost mid-way through the story, as Captain Delano moves to the side of the ship to watch for the approach of one of his boats:

stepping over into the mizzen chains he clambered his way into the starboard quarter-gallery; one of those abandoned Venetian-looking water-balconies previously

mentioned; retreats cut off from the deck. As his foot pressed the half-damp, half-dry sea mosses matting the place, and a chance cats-paw--an islet of breeze, unheralded, unfollowed--as this ghostly cats-paw came fanning his cheek, as his glance fell upon the row of small, round dead-lights, all closed like coppered eyes of the confined, and the state-cabin door, once connecting with the gallery, even as the dead-lights had once looked out upon it, but now calked fast like a sarcophagus lid, to a purple-black, tarred-over panel, threshold, and post; and he bethought him of the time, when that state-cabin and this state-balcony had heard the voices of the Spanish king's officers, and the forms of the Lima viceroy's daughters had perhaps leaned where he stood. (705)

Despite the funereal view, Captain Delano's looking to an earlier, happier time is perfectly in keeping with his unsuspecting nature, but even the good Captain comes to find himself uneasy: "as these and other images flitted through his mind, as the cats-paw through the calm, gradually he felt rising a dreamy inquietude, like that of one who alone on the prairie feels unrest from the repose of the moon" (705).

As Captain Delano continues to look out, there is a remarkable effect of the natural world imperceptibly advancing the decay of the San Dominick:

his eye falling upon the ribbon grass, trailing along

the ship's water-line, straight as a border of green box; and parterres of sea weed, broad ovals and crescents, floating nigh and far, with what seemed long formal alleys between, crossing the terraces of swells, and sweeping round as if leading to the grottoes below. And overhanging all was the balustrade by his arm, which, partly stained with pitch and partly embossed with moss, seemed the charred ruin of some summer-house in a grand garden long running to waste.

Trying to break one charm, he was but becharmed anew. Though upon the wide sea, he seemed in some far inland country; prisoner in some deserted chateau, left to stare at empty grounds, and peer out at vague roads, where never wagon or wayfarer passed. (705)

This blending is vital to maintaining Delano's fluctuating perceptions, his inability to see into the infernal machinations around him. Moreover, while this intermingling of ship and nature is intriguing in itself, it also serves as a perfect adjunct to the psychic deterioration of Benito Cereno.

What one learns from examining Melville's altered use of the natural setting in the years after Moby-Dick is just how important the voyage and the autobiographical narrator had been in coloring and amplifying the land- and seascapes of the earlier work. Those two elements were crucial to Melville's movement toward natural settings with increasingly

metaphysical implication. And though there are variations and divergences, the general thrust in Melville is to use the natural world as a focus for a number of ongoing rhetorical and dramatic considerations. Melville's writing in the first six novels is a voyage in itself, involving a growing allusiveness, a deepening psychology of the wanderer, a heightened dialogue, a diversity of physical adventure. In the best passages the natural settings saturate the action of the tales, allowing a richness of treatment which shifts the work from the personal to the mythical. When a setting or sequence of settings works, as in the descent into the Typee Valley, "Dreams" in Mardi, the fall of White Jacket or the "The Candles" in Moby-Dick, everything coheres into an archetypal American experience, where an individual's contact and conflict with nature becomes emblematic of the experience of the American nation.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Charles Roberts. Melville in the South Seas. New York: Columbia University Press, 1939.
- Arvin, Newton. Herman Melville. New York: Sloan, 1951.
- Auden, W.H. The Enchaféd Flood. New York: Random House, 1950.
- Beaver, Harold. "'Mardi': A Sum of Inconsistencies." Lee 28-39.
- Butterfield, Herbie. "'New World All Over': Melville's Typee and Omoo." Lee 14-27.
- Chase, Richard. Herman Melville. New York: Macmillan, 1949.
- . The American Novel and its Tradition. New York: Doubleday, 1957.
- Davis, Merrell. Melville's Mardi: A Chartless Voyage. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952.
- Dillingham, Willard B. An Artist in the Rigging: The Early Works of Herman Melville. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1972.
- Eliot, T.S. The Four Quartets. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1943.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Selected Writings. edited by Stephen Whicher. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957.
- Franklin, Howard Bruce. preface to Mardi. New York: Capricorn, 1964.
- Howe, Irving. The American Newness. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- . introduction to Oliver Twist. New York: Bantam Books, 1981
- Justus, James H. "Redburn and White-Jacket: Society and Sexuality in the narrators of 1849." Lee 50-58.
- Kazin, Alfred. An American Procession. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.
- . introduction to White-Jacket. Signet Classic edition. New York: New American Library, 1979.
- . introduction to Moby-Dick. Riverside edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956.
- Lawrence, D.H. Studies in Classic American Literature. New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1923.

- Lee, A. Robert, ed. Herman Melville: Reassessments. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1984.
- Levin, Harry. The Power of Blackness. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958.
- Leyda, Jay. The Melville Log. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1951.
- Melville, Herman. Typee, Omoo, Mardi. Ed. G. Thomas Tanselle. New York: Library of America, 1982.
- . Redburn, White-Jacket, Moby-Dick. Ed. G. Thomas Tanselle. New York: Library of America, 1983.
- . Pierre, Israel Potter, The Piazza Tales, The Confidence Man, Uncollected Prose, Billy Budd. Ed. Harrison Hayford. New York: Library of America, 1984.
- Miller, Perry. Nature's Nation. Intro. Kenneth B. Murdock. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- Nevius, Blake. Cooper's Landscapes. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
- Olson, Charles. Call Me Ishmael. San Francisco: City Lights, 1966.
- Philbrick, Thomas. James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961.
- Thompson, Laurance. Melville's Quarrel with God. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967.
- Van Doren, Carl. The American Novel. New York: MacMillan Company, 1922.
- Weaver, Raymond. Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic. New York: George H. Duran Company, 1921.