

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Ghosts in the Machine:
The Black/Africanist Presence
in the Sea Novels of Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville

by
Peter F. deCataldo

**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.**

1998

UMI Number: 9908307

**Copyright 1998 by
deCataldo, Peter F.**

All rights reserved.

**UMI Microform 9908307
Copyright 1998, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.**

**This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

© 1998
Peter F. deCataldo
All Rights Reserved


Chair of Examining Committee

Joan Richard
Executive Officer Acting

William Kelly

Louis Menand

David Reynolds

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a source of wonder to me that this dissertation, which I have for so long thought of as a private journey, owes so much to so many people. The countless hours spent in solitude, writing, reading, and working in libraries, created the false impression that I had gone about this alone; but this was an impression of which I am now gladly disencumbered. Since this work is an apt reflection of so many of my own personal obsessions, however, the first persons I wish to thank are the two people who have meant the most to me since it all began many years ago. And although I realize that a few paltry words of gratitude will never begin to tell the story, I thank Laura Maxine Gradman, my great love, whose greater love has shown me a light in the darkness, one I doubted could exist; and Wendy J. Mardigian, for the many years of loving friendship, companionship, travels, and sharing.

Special thanks to David R. Reynolds, my mentor and guide in this work, whose own writings set a great example. He was often demanding but always just, and his patience and encouragement are deeply appreciated. William Kelly, a truly inspired teacher and kind man who has been a loyal supporter from the outset, will likely never know how much he has meant to me; as is the case with Luke Menand, the "Invisible Man" whose quiet generosity and graciousness have been only too visible throughout. Again, words can only fail here to express my appreciation.

Among those others I wish also to remember and thank are Marshall E. Suther, who would be proud, and who is deeply missed; Patrick Cullen, for many years now the learned patrician of warm and generous heart; Mercedes Bains, for her honesty and open conversations, as well as her unwavering support and encouragement; Gerianne Brusati, for the time, the support, and, usually, her understanding; Bill Daniels, my best reader and good friend; Robert Friedman and William Potter, for the kind words and showing the way; Diver D. Dog, my silent, steadfast companion and friend; Linda Sherwin, for her years of patience, encouragement, and helpfulness; the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library of New York University, especially the staff of the Inter-library Loan Office; the New School University, for two decades of mostly meaningful work, the vast intellectual resources, and the opportunity to meet so many gifted, talented, and interesting people; and finally, Lisa Fugard and Deborah Aaronson, my loving and loved listeners, friends, intellectual and emotional confidantes.

In Memoriam

Robert Peter Lurig, 1981–1998.

**Had babbled “Uncle” on my knee;
But that remorseless iron hour
Made cypress of her orange flower,
Despair of hope, and earth of thee.**

(Tennyson)

**With love and deep sadness, I dedicate this work to my sister,
Ellen Lurig, her husband Robert, and their surviving son, Matt.
Words will never express their grief, nor my share in it.**

Table of Contents

	<i>Introduction</i>	P. 1
PART ONE:	POE	
<i>Chapter One</i>	<i>Poe and the Sea</i>	P. 19
<i>Chapter Two</i>	<i>Poe, Pym and Slavery</i>	P. 56
<i>Chapter Three</i>	<i>Toward a Reading of Pym</i>	P. 77
PART TWO:	MELVILLE	
<i>Chapter Four</i>	<i>Loomings: Melville, the Sea, and the Universal Thump</i>	P. 115
<i>Chapter Five</i>	<i>Sailors and Slaves, Typee and Omoo</i>	P. 166
<i>Chapter Six</i>	<i>Chartless Voyage to a Voiceless End: Mardi</i>	P. 202
<i>Chapter Seven</i>	<i>Redburn and White-Jacket</i>	P. 223
<i>Chapter Eight</i>	<i>Melville's Sea of Opposites: Moby-Dick</i>	P. 301
<i>Epilogue</i>		P. 368
<i>Bibliography</i>		P. 385

There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath.

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

Introduction

Our house stood within a few rods of the Chesapeake Bay, whose broad bosom was ever white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe. Those beautiful vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eyes of freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched condition....The sight of these always affected me powerfully. My thoughts would compel utterance; and there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint, in my rude way, with an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships:--

"You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world; I am confined in bands of iron! O that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing..."

Thus I used to think, and thus I used to speak to myself; goaded almost to madness at one moment, and at the next reconciling myself to my wretched lot.

(Frederick Douglass)

As we shall see in the pages that follow, the beatific vision that Frederick Douglass imposed upon the sea and the ships that sailed upon it did not always correspond with the often harsh reality of a sailor's life at sea. With no small amount of irony, Herman Melville would often compare his own experience at sea to slavery--although, when it got down to choosing between being a sailor or a slave, he quickly admitted that the comparison itself was a false one. For there was no injustice more abhorrent to Melville than the "atheistical iniquity" of slavery.¹ From the

tragic vantage point of an enslaved black like Frederick Douglass, however, subject as he was to a life of enforced servitude, the “bloody whip,” and “confined in bands of iron,” it is easier to understand, perhaps, how the white sails of seagoing vessels might have conjured thoughts of escape from the abject darkness of his bondage. As one of the most universally accepted symbols of freedom and exploration, the sea was commonly recognized as a fitting emblem of humankind’s seemingly indefatigable quest for what Melville once called the “open independence” that could not be found on “the treacherous, slavish shore” (*Moby-Dick*, 23; 97).² And, in Douglass’ case, the *slavish shore* was a reality for which he needed no symbol to serve as a reminder of his “wretched condition.” Does it not seem both ironic and appropriate, then, that when Frederick Douglass managed, finally, to effect his escape from slavery, he did so in the guise and garb of a sailor?

One of the main concerns of the present study is to examine the ways in which the sea was used by both Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville to frame their racial discourses and representations of the African blacks who clearly commanded the political, historical, and moral attention of both writers. And, as we shall

see, their literary productions provide evidence that, like Douglass himself, Poe and Melville recognized the “mythic” association of the sea (and ships) with concepts of freedom. In their apt framing of black characters as human and symbolic embodiments of the “unfree” within this “open independence of the sea,” both writers were able to dramatize a dialectical relationship between blacks/slavery and the sea itself. And although their motives, as well as their representations, evinced radically divergent points of view about both blacks and the sea, there is no refuting the fact that their association of the two was a significant feature of their sea fictions. As will be seen, both men’s meditations on the nature and limits of freedom--their own and the American nation’s-- were figured frequently in terms of either the sea or blacks; and quite often the result of these metaphysical musings contained provocative and complex figurations in which blacks and the sea were depicted as being connected intrinsically to each other.

On a historical level, the connection between the sea and African blacks began with the incomprehensible horrors associated with the Middle Passage. As Emerson once said, “[f]or the negro, was the slaveship to begin with.”³ And both Poe and Melville express a keen awareness of this unconscionable transat-

lantic trade in human flesh. At the same time, as one maritime historian has noted, “until the Civil War black sailors were central to African Americans’ collective sense of self, economic survival, and freedom struggle--indeed central to the very creation of black America.”⁴ This is another fact that was not likely to have been lost on either Poe or Melville. For if this connection between blacks and the sea was as historically significant as it certainly seems to have been, what, then, of the implications that this conjunction must have carried for the white race who attempted to control or dominate both blacks and the sea?

This brief historical sketch of the connection between blacks and the sea is highly relevant, of course, to the broader designs and purposes of this study. And much more in the way of historical backgrounds and contexts will follow, as I attempt to trace the impact of African blacks on the sea fictions of Poe and Melville. But the attempt to situate historically the connections between blacks and the sea represents just one aspect of the more immediate effort to assess how the *presence* of blacks operated to determine the language, choices, representations, and directions of the narratives that Poe and Melville set at sea. For like this sea, it was the black slaves in America who unwillingly (and

unwittingly) provided a profound *looking-glass* in which to measure the nation's own sense of freedoms and imperfections, its possibilities and limitations. In discussing Melville, for example, more than one critic has noticed that there exists a telling "connection...between American slavery and American freedom, how heightened the one rendered the other."⁵ Moreover, this is a connection that is, arguably, one of the most significant in all of Melville. For as Toni Morrison has suggested:

There is no romance free of what Herman Melville called "the power of blackness," especially not in a country in which there was a resident population, already black, upon which the imagination could play; through which the historical, moral, metaphysical, and social fears, problems, and dichotomies could be articulated. The slave population, it could be and was assumed, offered itself up as surrogate selves for meditation on problems of human freedom, its lure and its elusiveness.⁶

Framed against the backdrop of the wild and uncontrollable sea, that ultimate and most universal symbol of freedom, this heightening effect is brought even more sharply into focus. For it may be the case that this contextualization of blacks and the sea can provide a fresh perspective from which to approach these "historical, moral, metaphysical, and social fears, problems, and dichotomies" that need, indeed, to be articulated. This is mainly what I endeavor to demonstrate in this study.

*

*

*

*I want to know what it says. The sea, Floy, what is it
that it keeps on saying?*

Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*

Following the lead of cultural critics like Toni Morrison, Paul Gilroy, Henry Louis Gates, and Kenneth Warren, I undertake in the present work to share and explore their common “assumption that the construction of black/white racial difference in the United States has been so central to our political, imaginative, and economic lives that it ought to be possible to trace the process of this construction in a variety of cultural places, many of them unexpected and not yet adequately examined.”⁷ It is my perhaps peculiar contention, however, that one of these “unexpected and not yet adequately examined” sources is found, in fact, in American literature of the sea--a suggestion which, unlikely as it may seem at first, is supported by recent comments made by both Morrison and Gilroy. As the latter critic has noted in *The Black Atlantic*, the Black/Africanist “relationship to the sea may turn out to be important for both the early politics and poetics of the black Atlantic world.”⁸

In particular, what I propose is a rethinking of American sea fiction from the unique perspective of its racial dynamics,

especially with regard to what Morrison has called the “Black/Africanist presence” in American literature. This is a *presence* that has been routinely silenced, degraded, and distorted in American criticism, in the opinion of Morrison. And it is only too inviting to enlist in her campaign to recover this Black/Africanist presence in American writings by bringing attention to the ways that two canonical figures of nineteenth-century American literature--Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville--framed their racial discourses within the fiction they wrote about the sea. For while it has been noted that Melville’s sea novels, from *Typee* through *Moby-Dick*, incorporated many of the same symbolic and mythic elements used by Poe to “universalize” his own “sea novel,” *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, it has been somewhat less generally recognized that, at the same time, like Poe, Melville also embedded within his early sea fictions a series of disquisitions and meditations upon racialized *others* --especially the African blacks who were victimized by the institution of American slavery. Of course, *Benito Cereno* has long been recognized as Melville’s quintessential (and most daringly subversive) expression on race, slavery, and the Black/Africanist presence. But, with the relatively recent exception of *Moby-Dick*, very little attention indeed has been paid to the black characters and

the black *presence* in those works written between 1846 and 1851. Yet these are the very texts, I suggest, that make up the *scaffolding* upon which Melville constructed his 1855 masterpiece of slave insurrection at sea. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, the half-dozen sea fictions that Melville wrote up to (and including) *Moby-Dick* set the stage, both literally and metaphorically, for the sea-masquerade and the dark racial-drama that *Benito* would later present. And it is these works--*Typee*, *Omoo*, *Mardi*, *Redburn*, *White-Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick*--that, together with Poe's *Pym*, represent the focus of the chapters that follow. For while *Benito* has attracted a massive critical response to its racial agendas and bold representations of blacks, there has been a grievous lack of serious attention paid to the same subjects in Melville's early novels.

That Melville should have followed Poe in framing his racial discourse within the genre or arena of sea literature might suggest a "shock of recognition" between himself and the older writer. But it is a clear indication, as well, that such a contextualization was integral to their respective experience of the race of blacks who (forcibly) inhabited their homeland. There exists no concrete, explicit evidence of which I am aware that proves

Melville had ever read *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, let alone consciously imitated Poe's racially-charged masterpiece of sea literature. But several critics have offered such convincing arguments that Melville's works, particularly *Moby-Dick*, bear such strong similarities to *Pym* that to deny Melville's "debt" to Poe sets forth the task of trying to account for "one of the most extraordinary accidents in literature."⁹ Indeed, as we shall see, there are significant differences in their respective attitudes towards (and representation of) racialized others, especially the black-Africanist presence that inhabited America as a visible reminder of the nation's willingness to support an institutionalized system of slavery. But the resemblances between the two writers' pairing of the sea with the issues of race and slavery suggest that this coupling might not have been merely fortuitous. In fact, the question whether Melville had actually read Poe's *Pym* seems to matter less than the fact that he emulated, intentionally or not, Poe's transmutation of the symbolic mode of the sea narrative; while, at the same time, he refigured many of the racial elements and discourse that Poe was originally responsible for introducing into the genre. For in doing so, he opted instead "to investigate and analyze hierarchic differ-

ence” that Poe had elected “not to confront and explore,” as one critic suggests. Moreover, as we will see, where Melville strove both to dramatize the “atheistical iniquity” of slavery and to illuminate the humanity of blacks through a recognition of the *inherent similarities* between the black and white races, Poe had sought instead “to evade and simultaneously register the cul de sac, the estrangement, the non-sequitur that is entailed in racial difference.”¹⁰

*

*

*

*They skim along the surface, the others; they have no feeling
for what the sea is.*

Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage*

By its very nature, this project, which combines the almost universally symbolic figure of the sea with the somewhat singular moral questions related to slavery and the black/Africanist presence in America, likely raises questions about the critical methods and working methodologies employed for the contextualization of my readings and interpretations. And these are not questions which should be answered in a hasty or facile manner. But I should emphasize at the outset that this dissertation is not *about* ideology or rhetorics or Afro-American literary theory.

Nor is it *about* myth, even though any topic related to the sea would seem to invite such a *universally*-oriented perspective.

Rather, since my subject involves the history, language, literature, and tradition of American sea literature, *and* the influence of the Black/Africanist presence on this tradition, it requires the freedom and versatility to move freely among the gamut of available critical theories and applications--which is to say that no single "school" or "theory" of literary criticism will suffice to chart this voyage. And it is still the text which is of paramount concern here. To paraphrase Edward Said, I claim no authority for what I say, nor do I profess a special allegiance to any particular critical doctrine; what I most strive for is the ability to produce a *powerful* discourse.¹¹ And, indeed, if there is an individual critical source that has inspired this work, and which both shapes and informs *its* discourse, it is the aforementioned criticism by Toni Morrison, particularly her essay "Un-speakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature" and her book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*.

Morrison herself never makes this association between the sea and the Black/Africanist presence of which she writes

--except, perhaps, implicitly, when she refers to the "flight from the Old World to the New [which] is generally seen to be a flight from oppression and limitation to freedom and possibility."¹² But the irony here is that this "flight...to freedom and possibility" was possible only for *whites*. For the African, conversely, a life of degradation and slavery was the unvarying reward for managing to survive the ever-unimaginable horror of the *Middle Passage*. Significantly, however, the subject of Morrison's attention at this point in her discussion is Poe's *Narrative of...Pym* --a novel that Philbrick claims to have "pointed the way to the greatest achievement of American sea fiction,"¹³ but a work that contains, at the same time, a profound expression of Poe's "resentment and racial phobia."¹⁴ And what Morrison pays particular attention to in Poe's novel, are the "closed white images" which pervade the work, "figurations of impenetrable whiteness that surface in American literature whenever an Africanist presence is engaged."¹⁵ Such is the case near the end of Poe's narrative, when Pym, Peters, and the black native, Nu-Nu, are floating together on a sea of "milky hue," under a "white ashy shower." Immediately upon the death of the black man, however, the two survivors suddenly see a "shrouded human figure" behind a

“white curtain,” a white figure whose skin seems to Pym “the perfect whiteness of the snow.” According to Morrison's argument, it is significant that these “images of blinding whiteness” occur “almost always in conjunction with representations of black or Africanist people”:

These closed white images are found frequently, but not always, at the end of the narrative. They appear so often and in such particular circumstances that they give pause. They clamor, it seems, for an attention that would yield the meaning that lies in their positioning, their repetition, and their strong suggestion of paralysis and incoherence; of impasse and non-sequitur.¹⁶

When Morrison adds here that “these images of blinding whiteness seem to function as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow that is companion to this whiteness--a dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing,” then it becomes apparent that a careful attention to these functions might help to produce a self-reflexive criticism which can reveal to the critic the ways in which one “combats and confronts received prejudices and even creates *other terms* in which to rethink one's attachment to or intolerance of the material of these works.”¹⁷ And ultimately, the success of *this* thesis will most depend, I believe, on the extent to which it can reflect or embody such criticism. For although I

make no grandiose claims for my subject's preeminence in, or *seminal* influence upon, the vast field of American literature, I do maintain, first, with Philbrick and Bender, especially, that the central importance of American sea literature has been largely unrecognized and undervalued;¹⁸ and second, with Toni Morrison and the likes of the sociologist Orlando Patterson, that, shocking and horrific as the notion may be, "[b]lack slavery enriched the country's creative possibilities":

The concept of freedom did not emerge in a vacuum. Nothing highlighted freedom--if it did not in fact create it--like slavery....For in that construction of blackness *and* enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin color, the projection of the not-me. The result was a playground for the imagination.¹⁹

Dangerous and delicate as this position may be, it is nevertheless a minefield that cannot--indeed, ought not--be skirted. To ignore the possibility, once it has brought out into the open, creates but another ideological trap, as well dismisses an important truth about the "ideological foundations of abstract categories of Otherness which depend for their effectiveness upon fictions of a fundamental and constitutive difference."²⁰

If it is true, as Morrison argues, that "the ways in which artists--and the society that bred them--transferred internal

conflicts to a 'blank darkness,' to conveniently bound and violently silenced black bodies, is a major theme in American literature,"²¹ what is the significance, then, of the fact that the sea--boundless, untameable, impossible to silence--has been similarly represented, on a consistent and insistent basis, as a "blank darkness" or "mysterious darkness" by generations of writers the world over, not just Americans? If, too, the "construction of blackness and enslavement" contains a "projection of the not-me," as Morrison has suggested, what then of the sea, that "universal" symbol of "mind and the otherness of the non-self"?²² And the similarities, of course, do not end here. For surely these are but two of the deep affinities which need to be explored between the sea and the Black/Africanist presence in American literature. Like this "dark and abiding presence," which Morrison claims to have "move[d] the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing,"²³ so, too, has the sea long evoked a powerfully ambivalent response in America and Americans who have been "chronically beset with the simultaneous lure and terror of the sea."²⁴

In these days of multicultural awareness and righteous aversion to hegemonies of every kind, any attempt to "describe"

is more likely to be viewed instead as a misguided and futile effort to “ascribe” one’s own sense of power and perception--and, therefore, of course, one’s prejudice. But with this in mind, I accept Morrison’s challenge to write about the Black/Africanist presence from the perspective of one who seeks to rectify its earlier erasure and *whitewashing*. For if Morrison is correct in her assessment that “literary analyses of canonical texts have shied away from that perspective: the informing and determining Afro-American presence in traditional American literature,”²⁵ then what is called for, in order to begin to offset such racial erasures and distortions, is, as she says, an

investigation into the ways in which a non-white, African-like (or Africanist) presence or persona was constructed in the United States, and the imaginative uses this fabricated presence served...[and]...the examination and re-interpretation of the American canon, the founding nineteenth-century works, for the “unspeakable things unspoken”; for the ways in which the presence of Afro-Americans has shaped the choices, the language, the structure--the meaning of so much American literature. A search, in other words, for the ghost in the machine.²⁶

Notes

- 1 “Supplement” to *The Battle-Pieces of Herman Melville*, ed. Hennig Cohen (New York: Thomas Yoseloff/A.S. Barnes and Company, 1963), p. 200.
- 2 All citations from *Moby-Dick* are from Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker’s edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967). With two additional exceptions, *Benito Cereno* and *The Battle-Pieces*, all other Melville texts cited here will be from the Northwestern-Newberry editions listed in the Bibliography. My working text for

Benito is taken from Egbert S. Oliver's edition of *Piazza Tales* (New York: Hendricks House, Farrar Straus, 1948); and *Battle-Pieces* is cited above (n. 1). Wherever possible, I will indicate page numbers from these editions parenthetically within text, and, in some instances, especially for *Moby-Dick*, I will include chapter and page numbers for the purpose of easier reference.

- 3 "Emancipation in the British West Indies," in *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume II ; English Traits, Representative Men, Addresses* (Boston and New York: The Jefferson Press, 1914), p. 503.
- 4 W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 2.
- 5 Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Africanist Presence in American Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 28 (Winter 1989), p. 14. At the point Morrison makes this statement, she is giving credit to Michael Paul Rogin for being among the first to locate this Black/Africanist presence which, she argues, has been generally ignored in American literature and sidelined by Americanist criticism. Morrison is not alone, of course, in her thinking, and, among others, Henry Louis Gates has leveled much the same charge: "In much of the thinking about the proper study of literature, race has been an invisible quantity, a persistent yet implicit presence." See Henry L. Gates, (ed.), *"Race," Writing, and Difference* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p.2.
- 6 *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 37.
- 7 Kenneth W. Warren, *Black and White Strangers; Race and American Literary Realism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 139.
- 8 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic; Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 12.
- 9 Patrick F. Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957), p. 214. J. Gerald Kennedy rephrases the same argument almost forty years later in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, and the Abyss of Interpretation*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), p. 10.
- 10 *Playing in the Dark*, p. 69.
- 11 Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1993), p. 192.
- 12 *Playing in the Dark*, p. 34.
- 13 Thomas Philbrick, *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 175.

- 14 Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 121.
- 15 *Playing in the Dark*, pp. 32-33.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 17 Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," p. 10.
- 18 Philbrick, *op cit.*; and Bert Bender, *Sea-Brothers: The Tradition of American Sea Fiction from Moby-Dick to the Present* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).
- 19 *Playing in the Dark*, p. 38.
- 20 Gates, "Race," *Writing, and Difference*, p. 15.
- 21 *Playing in the Dark*, p. 38.
- 22 Gloria L. Young, "The Sea As Symbol in the Work of Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad," unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Kent State University, 1971, p. 6.
- 23 *Playing in the Dark*, p. 33.
- 24 See Donald P. Wharton's "Introduction" to a collection of early American sea narratives edited by him: *In the Trough of the Sea: Selected Sea-Deliverance Narratives, 1610-1766* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1979).
- 25 "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," p. 18.
- 26 *Playing in the Dark*, p.6; "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," p. 11.

Chapter One

Poe and the Sea

"I felt the greatest desire to go to sea...."

In saying that the interest depends, *first*, upon the nature of the theme, we mean to suggest that this theme --life in the Wilderness--is one of intrinsic and universal interest, appealing to the heart of man in all phases; a theme, like that of life upon the ocean, so unfailingly omniprevalent in its power of arresting and absorbing attention, that while success or popularity is, with such a subject, expected as a matter of course, a failure might be properly regarded as conclusive evidence of imbecility on the part of the author. The two theses in question have been handled *usque ad nauseam*--and this through the instinctive perception of the universal interest which appertains to them. A writer, distrustful of his powers, can scarcely do better than discuss either one or the other. A man of genius will rarely, and should never, undertake either; first, because both are excessively hackneyed; and, secondly, because the reader never fails, in forming his opinion of a book, to make discount, either wittingly or unwittingly, for that intrinsic interest which is inseparable from the subject and independent of the manner in which it is treated.

(Edgar Allan Poe, review of James Fenimore Cooper's *Wyandotté* ; underscored emphasis mine.)

The rather protracted extract above is excerpted from a review that Poe published in the November, 1843, issue of *Graham's Magazine* , and it is quoted at such length for several reasons. In the first place, it comprises a number of opinions and ideas which are essential to locating Poe's position in and on the

history of sea literature in America during the first half of the nineteenth century. And according to several recent commentators, this sea literature was of seminal importance to the literary climate and practices of the era. More than this, if we are to believe these critics, the history of American sea literature at this time exerted a profound influence upon the course of American literature itself--if not the *shaping* of what more than one of these commentators have called "the American Spirit."¹

Secondly, Poe's review contains a curious usage of terms like "universal interest" and "the heart of man in all phases"--phrases which relate, implicitly, to Poe's own valuation of the burgeoning sea fiction genre of the 1830s. As such, they seem also to betray the beliefs of a man who held strong and fixed opinions about his supposed reader, the general reading public, and some "universal" version of "mankind" which could be designated to represent, in fact, *all people*--regardless of nationality, gender, or, more germane to the immediate purpose here, *race*. For implicit in Poe's remarks is a grossly oversimplified sense of what, exactly, "universal interest" consists--and to whom it refers. Surely, it did not include the millions of black slaves in America, most of whom were forbidden by states' laws

from even learning to read.² In fact, in the contemporary critical world, such an attitude or belief is likely to evoke the suspicion that Poe uses the term ‘universal’ in such a way that it is meant both to “transcend the particularities and contingencies of cultural specificity” and to suggest perhaps that “racial specificity is less desirable than putative universality.”³

As *gauche* or old-fashioned as it may seem to some in the present day, however, to express concern with “universals” or “archetypes,” it is apparent from Poe’s review of *Wyandotté* that he suffered no compunction about the use of such concepts to convey possible meaning or aid in describing what he took to be certain defining and salient characteristics of literature in general. It is significant, too, that he seems to use these terms with a strong measure of confidence that his audience would share his own understanding and use of them. It is not that Poe fails to equivocate in his estimation of a writer’s employing such *universal* themes. After all, he does seem to associate their *intrinsic* interest with the popular audience whose sensibilities he felt obliged to propitiate. But, clearly, he displays here also an explicit recognition of certain mythic patterns, if not *unconscious* forces in literature, which are capable of “appealing to the heart of man in all phases” and are “unfailingly

omniprevalent in [their] power of arresting and absorbing attention." Two such "themes," he says are "the Wilderness" and the sea, both of which figure prominently in the American experience and literature, and whose conjunction by Poe suggests, at the very least, a tacit apprehension of their shared and wider symbolic potentiality. To enter the wilderness or venture forth upon "dread Neptune's wild, unsocial sea" (in Freneau's pithy phrase), is not, Poe understood, to embark only upon an actual voyage. It is also to participate in a journey *inward*, an archetypal peregrination into a symbolic realm where the journey becomes emblematic of the inner, psychic, mythic dimensions of mind.

Most early critical assessments of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* called special attention to the symbolic nature of Pym's sea journey, from Marie Bonaparte's early Freudian reading of Poe's own "ardent and frenzied search--ever frustrated, ever renewed--for the lost mother" to Gaston Bachelard's description of a dreamscape where the action seems symbolic of human conflict with "the elemental world itself...a universe of monstrous forces."⁴ Later, critics like Grace Farrell Lee and Robert Lee observed more pointedly that Poe's novel-

length contribution to the hybrid genre of American sea fiction seemed to invoke the mythic-symbolic elements of the classical *Night Sea Journey* that its author was doubtless familiar with from his reading of Homer, Virgil, and the Bible.⁵ But in line with the more recent recognition of the text's indeterminacy and the unreliability of the narrator(s) in *Pym*, I would suggest that it is impossible to ascertain whether Poe was attempting to revitalize an archetype found throughout religious and classical mythologies--the *nekylia* or descent into Hell and the Underworld --or, perhaps more likely, perpetrating a literary hoax infused by "a mild type of parody" aimed at the glut of contemporary sea narratives.⁶ In either case, however, it is apparent that the sea was a powerful presence in Poe's mind at the time of *Pym's* composition. It served as a catalyst both to his self-conscious literary production in response to the public's appetite for sensationalist accounts (both real and imagined) of the sea and Poe's own (perhaps unconscious) desire to escape the sense of immurement so characteristic of his later tales, as well as the desperate personal life depicted in his letters. The sea seems to have represented all that was vast, open, uncontrollable, chaotic and *other* to Poe. And it afforded him the opportunity to voyage intellectually through literary sources and exploration accounts,

while at the same time it presented itself, no doubt, as occasion for an *inner* journey that Poe himself was likely to have been but dimly aware. In short, the sea was no *mere* trope. Rather, it was an image capable of rendering simultaneously the outer (physical) world and the inner (psychic) self, which helps to explain, at least in part, why he perceived it as “so unfailingly omniprevalent in its power of arresting and absorbing attention,” as Poe acknowledged in his review of *Wyandotté*. Even in the first half of the nineteenth century, it would seem, the power and suggestiveness of the sea might have allowed someone as prescient as Poe to sense instinctively what the critic William Tyndall would describe so meaningfully more than a century later:

The motion and the permanence of the sea, its depth and vast extent make it an image of refuge, danger, mystery, infinity, of all that is alien and welcoming. ...[It is] the great image, not altogether to be grasped, [which] embodies total reality: social, psychological, and divine....The sea is our origin and our end, and, whether in poem, dream, or myth, voyaging on it has always seemed our necessity; for life is a voyage and we embark in ships of society or self.⁷

For many of Poe's precursors, those eighteenth-century writers who seemed indeed to embark upon the voyage of life in “ships of society” as opposed to “self,” the sea represented also

an image of chaos or vacancy. It suggested a “disorder,” that is, which was antithetical to the ratiocinative constructs and ideals of their era, as Freneau’s pointed emphasis on the “wild, unsocial” elements of the sea should suggest:

“One has exchanged the Puritan Jehovah, who made the sea ultimately meaningful, for the neoclassical sublime; the wild is indeed aesthetically appealing to some, though it is...finally a threat to human society and a language for what we now call the irrational. Given these tensions, it is no wonder that we find writers of fiction using sea material with circumspection, aware both of its imaginative potential as outer scene and as inner language and of its capacity to breed disorder in their world.⁸

For Poe, especially, the sea seemed to possess a “nightmarish interiority, a warped mirror of consciousness, equally threatening in fact and in memory.”⁹ And its association with elements of the neoclassical sublime--most specifically, the ability to incite “terror”--caused the sea to be linked with his own deepest fears, the most notoriously recognizable of which was the “unconscious...racial phobia” pointed out by critics like John Carlos Rowe and Harry Levin.¹⁰ For the sea did not only provide Poe with a literary battleground in which to imitate, critique, and parody his predecessors and contemporary rivals in the sea fiction genre. I am suggesting also that the “universal” images and representations of the sea in Poe’s time--that is, the sea as primordial other, primitive, chaos, savage, wild, fearsome, unconscious--

induced Poe to sound the depths of his own psychic obsessions. And this was a sounding that inexorably led him to confront and express his obdurate aversion toward blacks, as well as his inveterate prejudices concerning the issues of race and slavery. Indeed, it is a central point of contention here that what is most unique and original about *Pym* is that it is the first text in American literature to incorporate a sustained and serious treatment of racial matters and ideology into a major work of sea fiction. Leslie Fiedler and Toni Morrison (among others) have noted previously that Poe, especially in *Pym*, offered the first significant treatment of the Black/Africanist presence by a white American literary figure in all of American literature.¹¹ But I would extend these claims even further. In my mind, through his strategic use of the sea as both the physical and metaphysical setting for Pym's adventures--and as a trope, almost an objective correlative, for the expression of his racial phobias--Poe managed to combine (perhaps unwittingly) two subjects which, it seems reasonable to assert, exerted a most persistent dominion over the minds and hearts of the American people during the 1830s. Indeed it is difficult to imagine any two realms of the American experience at the time which could have matched in impact the

intensity and pervasiveness of the sea and slavery.

Despite its headlong westward expansion, and the population explosion in its urban settings, America was still primarily a maritime nation in 1838. It sent out the world's largest fleet of ocean-going whaling vessels, and its trade ships could be found in virtually every port the sea could possibly lead them. Large portions of the population depended, to varying degrees, upon the sea for their livelihoods. And American literature of nearly every variety and genre was rife with tales and accounts of the sea--"*Usque ad nauseum*" is how Poe himself put it. If one was able to read in 1838, it seems there can be little, if any, doubt that some form of sea literature was a regular feature of one's standard reading fare.

Likewise, during this same time, another form of reading material became more readily available to the public and began to seize hold of its consciousness. And this, of course, was represented in those works which dealt directly with the simmering slavery issue, such as William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator* (1831), and the slave narratives that had begun to appear more regularly after the introduction of steam powered printing in 1827. The public showed a great appetite for these narratives, which often depicted a black slave's de-

liverance from the brutality and oppression of institutionalized slavery. But often they were met with “critical hostility and patronizing sympathy”¹²—even by those supposedly sympathetic to the slaves’ cause. For their graphic descriptions of the horrors of slavery were only slightly more subtle perhaps than the militant Garrison’s newspaper in their attempt to enlist support for emancipation of the slaves in America. And taken together, they combined to fuel an already dangerously incendiary atmosphere concerning the slavery issue. Simply stated, there was no issue more volatile than this during the 1830s:

...the bloody Nat Turner Rebellion in Virginia terrified Southerners and dramatized for them the danger of exciting slaves with the idea of freedom....But the issue of slavery remained an ongoing controversy, erupting every time a new state joined the Union. The American Antislavery Society formed in 1833 a powerful new coalition for abolition, prompting an increasing stridency and defensiveness in the South. Racial tensions ran high in the North as well, and bloody race riots erupted in 1835 in Philadelphia and Washington. Emboldened by the crusade for abolition, African-Americans manifested their hatred of slavery more openly than before, while various white groups resorted to violence to demonstrate their resistance to social change. Several Southern states indignantly outlawed the circulation of abolitionist tracts and punished agitators.¹³

It was in this “climate of hostility” that Poe would edit and publish--if not personally author--an anonymous review in the *Southern Literary Messenger* of April, 1836, which defended the

“much abused” praxis of American slavery as providing the very foundation of “all our institutions.”¹⁴ In the same year he would also publish an essay-review on South Sea exploration that is fraught with racial implications, and he would begin writing *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, which, as we will see, frames his racist beliefs within the context of an epic sea journey. It is my intention here to explore the reasons why such ostensibly diverse matters as race and slavery and the sea seemed to have been so inextricably tied together in Poe’s mind and writings.

Of course, based on the ever growing body of critical commentary which supports my belief in the crucial importance of sea literature in America, it is a plausible and informative task to delineate and assess the impact of sea literature on a selected group of writers from any particular era or region. And it is just a bit more of a critical reach to extrapolate from these findings the larger connections and consequences that sea literature has forged in its pivotal influence upon much of American literature in general. It is quite another, more problematical venture, however, to examine the latent ramifications of Poe’s definition of “universal” or modern critical assessments concerning the *shaping of the American Spirit*. One cannot help but won-

der, especially when attempting to treat the phenomena of such a pluralistic society, just *which* spirit is meant--and *whose* ? The Boston Brahmin, perhaps. Or the Southern plantation owner. Maybe the Baltimore dockworker or the Pennsylvania farmer. Why not the Northwest fur trapper or Mississippi River steamboat captain? And what about the millions of marginalized peoples residing in nineteenth-century America? (Indeed, one could make a forceful argument that some of the individuals just cited here--say, the dockworker or the farmer--were "marginalized" in a variety of socio-economic ways.) What about the nations of Native Americans whose forced diasporas were rationalized by White Americans as necessary adjuncts to the fulfillment of their own Manifest Destiny? Finally, what about the entire race of Black/African individuals who were *enslaved* by white Americans, those "conveniently bound and violently silenced black bodies" who suffered centuries of atrocities and degradation as human chattel within the institution of American slavery? What part did *they* play within the "shaping of the American spirit"? More to the point, what role did this Black/Africanist presence play in the development of an American literature of the sea which is said to have influenced so profoundly this

shaping of the American spirit ?

There are, obviously, no simple answers to such seriously vexing and grave questions. In fact, it is likely that there are no answers which will prove satisfactory to all who pursue such lines of questioning. For a *consensus* of opinion in these matters is as difficult to achieve, it seems, as finding unanimity among Poe critics on the meanings, forms, or intentions of the work which provides the nexus of this chapter, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. In a later chapter I will endeavor to contextualize my reading by examining the multifarious significances of the Black/Africanist presence in *Pym*, while seeking also to address and analyze Poe's attitudes toward slavery and the Black/Africanist race--as they are expressed both in *Pym* and in other sources, historical, literary and biographical. But first it is necessary to foreground this discussion with a detailed investigation of Poe's place in the history of American sea literature. As a direct result of her "reading" of *Pym*, Morrison has stated that "[n]o early American writer is more important to the concept of American Africanism than Poe."¹⁵ But, at the same time, however, as we have already seen above, it "seems clear that Poe designed *Pym* to have the effect, if not the content, of a symbolic narrative, and in linking the sugges-

tion of metaphysical significance to a remote and exotic maritime setting, he pointed the way to the greatest achievement of American sea fiction.”¹⁶ Before taking on the much more vexing problems involving the issues of “race” and “whiteness” in *Pym*, it is essential to my thesis that we first take to the sea, so to speak, to better understand why *Pym* “occupies a pivotal place in the development of American nautical fiction.”¹⁷

In the first place, it seems likely that “no other genre was more popular in Edgar Allan Poe’s time than the sea narrative.”¹⁸ Indeed, the sea is responsible for a literary tradition in America that has flourished to the point where recent studies can suggest, with great equanimity, that “from the renowned canonical writings of the nineteenth century, through the fiction and poetry of many of our best contemporaries, the sea has been the source, scene, and symbol for writings by the most highly regarded American authors...[and]...to understand the history of American literature one must attend to its persistent concern with the sea.”¹⁹

In the case of Edgar Allan Poe, a “persistent concern with the sea” is palpable on at least two levels, the personal and the

literary. Sailing on the *Lothair* from Norfolk, Virginia, on June 22, 1815, at the highly impressionable age of six, young Edgar made the risky transatlantic crossing from Norfolk to Liverpool, England, in the company of his foster parents, John and Frances (“Fanny”) Allan. They were accompanied by Anne Valentine, the elder sister of Fanny, who had also resided with the Allan family in Richmond and was known affectionately among them as “Aunt Nancy.” Prior to the departure, however, it seems likely that the young Edgar may have witnessed several domestic “scenes” in the Allan household, as Fanny Allan “balked at making the trip, fearful of the sea.”²⁰ And so powerful was his “stepmother’s” trepidation--“the greatest aversion to the sea” is how John Allan described it--that it could not but have made a deep impression upon her young ward, Edgar. (Years later, in writing *Pym*, Poe would have his narrator/alter-ego say “mother went into hysterics” whenever he expressed the desire to go to sea.) Nevertheless, as if to offset Fanny’s near-hysteria, the young Poe was subjected routinely to what Kenneth Silverman refers to as “John Allan’s pronouncements on manly fortitude.” Thus caught between Fanny’s conspicuous dread and John’s apparent machismo, it seems that Edgar himself made it *un point d’honneur* not to succumb to whatever his own portion of fear was in

regard to the voyage. And despite a bout of seasickness, as well as “Niggardly accommodations,” he braved the five-week crossing in good enough fashion, it would seem, that John Allan would see fit to write home (albeit, apparently, at the exultant youngster’s insistence): “Edgar says pa say something for me say I was not afraid coming across the Sea.”²¹

After five years spent mainly in England, but with frequent sojourns to Irvine, Scotland--where John Allan’s father, William, was a shipmaster amidst a town “full of sailor folk,”²²--young Edgar, or “Ned” as he was often called by the Allans, made another five-week transatlantic crossing. And this time he sailed from Liverpool to New York, where the family arrived, after a passage of thirty six days, on July 21, 1820. From there, it appears, the family returned to Virginia, where the now financially-stricken John Allan was to resume residence in Richmond. In the course of this five-year period, then, the adolescent Edgar Allan Poe had crossed the Atlantic twice, a biographical fact that frequently goes unremarked, but which, I would argue, had an enormous impact upon the maturer Poe. Indeed, we see the effects registered both in his own fictional works (“MS. Found in a Bottle,” “Descent into the Maelstrom,” “The Oblong Box,” “The

Premature Burial," "The Lighthouse," and, of course, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* --in all of which the sea is prominently figured), as well as in his publicly expressed attitudes toward the literary treatments of the sea by his predecessors and contemporaries alike. It may be easy for some, from the vantage point of a climate-controlled, three-to-five *hours* trip across the Atlantic in this jet-age, to discount the terror and hardships of *sailing* in a wooden ship across the "fast and furious ocean" in the early nineteenth century. But it is fatuous to underestimate the possible effects that *ten weeks* on the open water might have had on a young boy between the ages six and eleven--especially one so precociously sensitive as Edgar Allan Poe. Those ten weeks may seemed months or even years to him.

There is also some evidence to suggest that, later in his life, Poe made at least one other roundtrip transatlantic excursion--and even less conclusive testimony that indeed he did so twice. In the first instance, "according to the story credited to Poe's brother," Edgar worked his passage (probably in 1827) on a sailing vessel to England under the assumed name of Henri Le Rennét. Unable to find work, Poe then tried Paris, where his efforts to find employment were again unsuccessful, forcing him to use the meagre remnants of his depleted savings to return home to

the United States. Here, his desperation led him to enlist in the army under yet another pseudonym, Edgar A. Perry. And during the almost two years that Poe served in the army, he was stationed in close proximity to the sea, "first at Fort Independence on Castle Island in Boston Harbor and then at Fort Moultrie on Sullivan Island in the vicinity of Charlestown."²³ According to one recent Poe biographer, the transfer of Poe's military unit, Battery "H" of the First Regiment of the United States Artillery, from Boston to South Carolina, was accomplished by sea transport in the midst of a storm which came perilously close to taking the lives of the men in a shipwreck.²⁴ Later, in 1832, in a story "given credence by James H. Whitty and other Poe authorities,"²⁵ Poe was reputed to have shipped with a sailor and native Irishman named James Tuhey to Ireland, from whence he again made his way to Paris and, according to the "legend," called upon Alexander Dumas "with an introduction from his fellow-countryman, the famous novelist Fenimore Cooper." This information comes to us from a Dumas manuscript found in Italy nearly one hundred years after the meeting between the two was supposed to have taken place. And although there is some doubt as to its authenticity, there is equal reason to believe in the legitimacy of the

encounter. As Charles Lee Lewis has stated:

...Dumas could have been romancing, but more credence should be given to the statement (which includes many details regarding Poe's appearance at the time, his habits of writing, etc.) when one recalls the contents of Poe's letter to Superintendent [of the U.S. Military Academy] Thayer...[to whom Poe had announced his intention to go to Paris and, through through the intercession of Marquis de Lafayette, obtain an appointment in the Polish army]...It is not incredible that Poe should have secured such a letter from Cooper and have gone to Paris from Ireland at this time to seek service in the Polish army. Certainly some of his short stories indicate that their author was rather intimately acquainted with the French capital.²⁶

Unless new information is discovered, it is probable that Poe's whereabouts and activities during certain periods of his life will remain a mystery. And the question as to whether or not he actually crossed the Atlantic Ocean again subsequent to 1820 is of relatively minor importance to either his "French Tales" or sea stories. What is known about his contact with the sea, however, suggests that its lure was a puissant one. In his lifetime, he knew the awe-inspiring experience of travelling on and across an ocean in a wooden bark smaller (and more inhospitable) than most of us would ever care to imagine. He lived most of his life in cities along the eastern seacoast of the United States, and he often "commuted" on the sea when travelling between cities--even if it was the Chesapeake Bay to shuttle back and forth between Baltimore and Richmond. As for his literary response, is it

not provocative and revealing that Poe's first published short story, "MS. Found in a Bottle," as well as his only novel, *Pym*, employed the sea as its central and controlling metaphor?

"If not as boy who crossed the Atlantic, as youth who sailed seaward on the James River, or as man who spent his life in cities along the coast," observes Emilio De Grazia, "Poe felt the pull of the sea."²⁷ In all likelihood, though, this "pull" was enhanced greatly by the abundance of sea narratives that flooded the American journals, periodicals, and newspapers during Poe's formative years, especially during the 1820s. Having crossed the Atlantic first in 1815, just after the end of hostilities in the War of 1812, and having returned in 1820, when American patriotic fervor was swollen by the nation's still recent victory over England--especially, as Philbrick informs us, the "astounding naval successes"--Poe's return to America coincided with a surge in maritime interest unmatched in American history. The prevailing literary climate was such that, if we are to believe Philbrick, "it now became the *duty* of American literature to keep the flame of maritime nationalism burning brightly."²⁸ The din of such a proliferating patriotism was, no doubt, inescapable for so avid a reader as Poe. And, in addition to the proliferation of sea narra-

tives of almost every kind--novels, short stories, poems, serializations of first-person accounts of exploration--the decade of the 1820s also ushered in James Fenimore Cooper's emergence as the first great American writer of sea fiction with the publication of his early works of Byronic romanticism and literary nationalism, *The Pilot* (1824), *The Red Rover* (1827), and *The Water-Witch* (1830). Having sensed the "deep and complementary relationship between the ocean and continent in the American psyche, Cooper established the sea novel as a viable genre in American literature."²⁹ And there can be little doubt that Cooper's success had a potent impact upon the imagination of Poe, the aspiring young writer whose elitist literary inclinations did not preclude his keeping a fastidious eye on the reading tastes of the American public.

Although Poe would, as late as 1839, offer a number of benignant words for Cooper in a review of the latter's *The History of the Navy of the United States of America*, there is no explicit recognition of Cooper as the progenitor or vanguard of sea literature in America. Nor does Poe risk the possibility that these mild compliments be construed as paeans to the renowned master of the sea fiction genre:

Mr. Cooper's strength in sea narrative was well known, and justly appreciated; and in a work on Naval History, much was expected of a character very similar to that which had afforded its charm to the "Pilot," and riveted attention in the "Red Rover."...Mr. Cooper has succeeded in writing a book which cannot fail to do him lasting honor, *not more in a literary point of view*, than as affording evidence of the *final triumph of his kind-lier and more manly feelings over the promptings of Satan and the spleen*. The very preface is redolent of a returning good humor--of a recovered modesty--of a resuscitated common sense. Mr. Cooper is evidently Mr. Cooper again...and we rejoice, from the bottom of our heart, that he has arisen to the good work, from *the moral death which has so long entrapped him....*³⁰
[emphasis mine]

Amidst the wealth of disturbing ambiguities here, it is most surprising that Poe refers to the "sea narrative" in a tone that is so matter-of-fact as to seem dismissive, if not pejorative. However, if we recall his review of Cooper's *Wyandotté* (quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and about which more will be said later), where the theme of "life upon the ocean" in literature is associated with "universal interest"--and is therefore considered "hackneyed"--it becomes apparent that Poe was actually sincere in his implicit disparagement of sea narratives, relegating them to some inferior sub-order of literature. Or, perhaps, he was being duplicitous, unwilling to recognize Cooper's stature without first diluting his office. Having made his own contribution to the mass of sea narratives with the publication of *Pym*

only a year previous to his review of Cooper's *Naval History* , Poe's depreciation of the genre is not only surprising; it seems self-defeating and counterproductive to his own unfulfilled and pained ambitions for "success or popularity." It may have also been the case that Poe's aesthetic judgments overruled his own personal stake in the "ratings war" among fledgling American writers who were vying for attention. But, quite possibly, what Poe may have been trying to establish was an implicit comparison between his own sea novel, *Pym* , and those of Cooper. For even when he seems, ostensibly, to be praising them, the best he can manage to say is that one possessed "charm" and that another "rivetted attention." As a parting shot, Poe states that whatever Cooper's claim to "honor"--as opposed to "fame" or "success"--it is due him "*not more in a literary point of view* " than for his "returning good humor...recovered modesty...[and]...resuscitated common sense"--that is, what Poe perceived to be Cooper's amelioration of what today might be called "attitude."

What the "evidence" seems to suggest is that a comparison of Poe's *Pym* with any of Cooper's early trilogy of patriotic romances uncovers profound differences in their respective handlings of the "sea novel" form. Cooper was writing at the zenith

of an American romanticism which he himself helped to create, although he was heavily indebted to Scott and Byron. And his work was carefully calculated, it seems, to satisfy what he perceived to be his readers' demand for maritime nationalism. His representation and imaging of the sea was highly idealized. And his heroes all seemed to be righteous, morally conscientious individuals who were "lured to the ocean by its beauty, its freedom, its promise of achievement," as Cooper seemed intent upon constructing a "meaningful, internally consistent statement of...values"³¹ for his sea and the people with whom he populated it.

For contrast to Cooper's vision, however, we need look no further than the opening page of *Pym's* second chapter, where the narrator Pym expresses his "ardent longing for the wild adventures incident to the life of a navigator [i.e., sailor]" (57), and then insists that his friend, Augustus, "most strongly enlisted my feelings in behalf of the life of a seaman, when he depicted his more terrible moments of suffering and despair." For in the same passage, which (at least on one level) is heavy with the type of romantic agony vitiated only by death or self-destruction--but at the same time, allows for a parodic reading in which the young (and as yet uninitiated) Pym is guilty of just so much flummery and Byronic posturing--the narrator continues:

For the bright side of the painting I had limited sympathy. My visions were of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown. Such visions or desires--for they amounted to desires--are common, I have since been assured, to the whole numerous race of the melancholy among men--at the time of which I speak I regarded them only as prophetic glimpses of a destiny which I felt myself in a measure bound to fulfill.³²

Cooper's heroes might be willing to die for their country or their *cause*, perhaps. But Pym's romantically self-absorbed, melancholic disposition was anomalistic to Cooper's idealized creations--even those who were mildly "piratical" by nature. But where Cooper's heroes seem to brim with an amalgam of noble romanticism and highly rational motives, Pym experiences irrational "desires" for a "lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown." In the world according to *Pym*, "continual images of doubling, self-consumption, and polar opposition take us out of the rational world of mediation into a surreal world of categorical extremity. *Pym* is awash in a dream ocean of terror, a pre-Freudian sea of the id."³³ Moreover, as Thomas Philbrick has pointed out, the fact that Poe would even attempt to

foist such a fantastical world upon the public says, perhaps, as much about the American reading public as it does about Poe himself:

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym serves as a useful index to American attitudes toward the sea....The mere fact that a writer so versatile and so sensitive to the vagaries of public taste as Poe should choose to produce a sea novel at this time indicates the intensity of the public demand for nautical literature....And in its very confusion of aims and concerns, its attempt to combine Gothic romanticism and documentary realism, scientific discovery and mystic revelation, *Pym* reflects the multifarious values that Americans in the late 1830s attached to their image of the sea, a range of values which Cooper's early romances did not encompass.³⁴

Such were the times and literary atmosphere regarding the sea that fostered Edgar Allan Poe's attitudes and beliefs about the inherent values and possibilities of sea literature. What was certainly not lost upon him either was the fact that two of America's first--some would say the first two--"professional" creative writers, Cooper and Washington Irving, had won popular acclaim and financial success with works about the sea. As Emilio DeGrazia has pointed out, between the three decades from 1820 to 1850--or, more precisely, between the appearance of Cooper's *The Spy* (1819) and Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851)--"the sea [was an] inexhaustible source of news, adventure, and lore for American writers and readers."³⁵

It should be obvious from Poe's review of *Wyandotté* that he was keenly aware of--and sensitive to--the literary tastes and demands of the American reading public in the 1830s and 1840s. Clearly, too, he seems to insist upon a division of literature into two distinct types--one which relies upon what he twice calls "universal interest" (and which he deems "hackneyed"), and another which, later in the same review, he refers to as "a class not so popular, nor so widely diffused." That Poe's own aesthetic inclinations evince a decided preference for the latter class of writings is evident, as he later calls them "more worthy and more artistical fictions." But one can sense also, here, Poe's feelings of constraint over making too strident a derogation of his readers' implicit partiality to themes of "intrinsic and universal interest," since these represent a virtual guarantee of "success or popularity." As Harold Beaver has observed, "What an ambiguous document--especially for an aspiring aesthete who had recently and publicly failed with just such a universal theme!"³⁶

The failed work Beaver refers to is, of course, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, the "shameless bid for popular success," as Leslie Fiedler called it, and a work in which it seems

Poe could not resist the temptation to avail himself of the “intrinsic and universal interest” of the sea narratives so much in vogue at the time. Not that Poe would--or could--avoid subverting the existing forms of the sea narratives of the 1830s. Rather, he would turn to the sea narrative in order to capitalize on its popular appeal while simultaneously extending and transforming its defining characteristics. This “dual process of enthusiastic absorption and studied re-direction of the sensational,” as David Reynolds has termed it, was not unusual for Poe. And he was “[i]ntimately aware of every type of popular sensational literature.” Moreover, as Reynolds tells us:

Poe repeatedly commented on such literature in his criticism and borrowed from it liberally in his tales and poems. ...To some degree, Poe was clearly trying to tap the new market for sensational literature...[for]...[i]n the formative stage of his literary career...Poe had learned from America's pioneering penny newspaper a lesson in conscious manipulation of sensational themes through a double-sided fiction that possessed both novelty and tact, excitement and control.³⁷

Is it at all surprising, then, that Poe would, first, in referring to the “theme” of “life upon the ocean,” acknowledge its “intrinsic and universal interest”; second, attest to the theme’s “power of arresting and absorbing attention”; and, third, while allowing that lesser writers who are uncertain of their talent “can scarcely do better” than to choose such a theme as “life upon

the ocean,” then arrive, finally, at the conclusion that the great writer or “man of genius will [only] rarely,” and then mistakenly, according to Poe’s subsequent admonition (“should never undertake”), write about such a theme? Indeed, it is difficult to know here whether Poe’s censure was directed more at Cooper or himself for having written and published *Pym* five years earlier. On the surface--a place where Poe seldom resided--this depreciation of the sea narrative, or theme of “life upon the ocean,” might seem to be an avowal of Poe’s own earlier claim that *Pym* was rather “a silly book.” But it should be kept in mind that this remark was made in a letter (1839) to William Burton, publisher of *Gentleman’s Magazine* and the same reviewer who had so thoroughly trashed *Pym* a year earlier. More importantly, Burton was a prospective employer whom Poe, in his mendicity, doubtless felt obliged to placate in order to secure a much needed job.³⁸ It would seem the “double-sided fiction” Reynolds alludes to was not restricted solely to Poe’s fiction.

What I hope has been demonstrated in the foregoing discussion is that, from both a literary vantage point and a biographical perspective, Poe’s interest in the sea was deep and

complex. Although from his own time through the present day, a number of observers have found reasons to carp about Poe's relative lack of true intimacy with seamanship or technical mastery of maritime and nautical materials,--relative, that is, to his more heavily salt-encrusted contemporaries, the writers/sailors like Cooper, Dana, and, later, Melville-- we ought to remember, perhaps, that Poe's mixed-genre masterpiece *Pym* was never intended to rival *The Blue-Jacket's Manual* in its technical verisimilitude. In his "stress on documentation and vraisemblance" Poe may very well have been attempting to deride and deflate the "idealized conception of marine life established by Cooper in his early romances,"³⁹ just as he can also be said to anticipate Dana's conviction that a sobering dose of realism was required to correct the "misrepresentation and false coloring" he (Dana) believed endemic in Cooper's romantic treatments of the sea. There is little doubt, even, that Poe intentionally sought to add a touch of authenticity in order to secure credibility for his tale and, in so doing, further beguile his reading public.

But even a cursory reading of *Pym* reveals the extent to which Poe's intentions lay beyond the scope of realism. Insofar as realism attempts to contain the images of "social fragmenta-

tion...within the order of significant form," it "thereby suggests that the chaotic fragments are somehow socially viable and morally redeemable."⁴⁰ And this, as Poe apparently recognized, was not commensurate with his own subversive designs, the complexity of which is hinted at, somewhat obliquely but tantalizingly, in the remarkable "Preface" to *Pym*, where *fiction* is said to be presented as *fact* --"under the garb of fiction." Rather, in a work that has been identified, alternately, as symbolic, mythic, psychological, among "the finest adventure stories ever written," metacritical, epistemological, metaphysical, *bildungsroman*, phenomenological, social document, apolitical, and more, it seems obvious that Poe's *intentions*, to the extent they can be ascertained, were not limited to any single literary strategy or defined more precisely by any one form than another. For every argument that *Pym* exhibits determinative elements of, say, realism, gothicism, or romance, a compelling counter-argument can be (and, in all likelihood, has been) made. Where one camp finds romance (Chase, Egan), another discovers psychological realism (Philbrick, Davidson). Where one observer sees metaphysical affirmation (Fukuchi), another perceives metaphysical negation (Rosenzweig). Where one group either fails (or refuses) to recognize the importance of *Pym* as a

“social document” or to consider the relevance of Poe’s racist strategies and attitudes to any elucidation of possible “meanings” of the text (Thompson, Campbell), yet another (growing) conclave insists upon an ideological/political approach which casts both Poe and Pym as racist exploiters of the black race (Kaplan, Levin, Fiedler, Morrison, Dayan, Nelson, Rowe). Even with regard to the one supposition that most critics can agree about, that is, Poe’s primary (pecuniary) motivation for writing a sea narrative in the first place, there is still no consensus of agreement as to why Poe waited more than two years to complete *Pym* and reissue it as a novel in 1838. (An earlier variant of Chapters 1–4 had been published in two installments of the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1836). For while most literary historians seem convinced that the likeliest impetus was the attempt by Poe and his publisher (Harper and Brothers) to capitalize on the thriving market for sea stories or the launching of the Wilkes Expedition, there is still disagreement over whether Poe was attempting to appeal to a wider audience (Bezanson, Reynolds) or ridicule the public with a satiric hoax (Kennedy, Pollin).⁴¹

After nearly a half-century of such persistent and variegat-

ed critical excavations, exhumations, and examinations, a reader familiar with the vast body of critical/scholarly commentary on *Pym* can only agree, I think, with Douglas Robinson's suggestion that *what we are left with, finally, is "an interpreter's dream-text...a textual vacuum begging to be filled with a reading."*⁴² And for all the considerable insight and invaluable information that has been imparted about *Pym* within the heterogeneous presentations of modern criticism, this "dissensus" of opinions provides a persuasive testament to J. G. Kennedy's assertions that "the shifts and turns in *Pym* criticism over four decades closely mirror the transformations of modern critical thought." Moreover, it seems, we learn from these "transformations" as much about the limitations and vicissitudes of the contemporary world of literary criticism as we do about Poe and *Pym* :

In this way, Poe's novel delivers an ironic critique of our human compulsion to *make* sense, literally to manufacture meaning; intelligence abhors a cognitive vacuum and must fill a discernible void with signification....This primal gesture of explication before the abyss of interpretive anxiety, so much a part of Pym's experience, ultimately mirrors our own radical fear of uncertainty and ambiguity. It allows us to see the limits of our own knowing as an unspoken source of apprehension and suggests that we generate interpretation in some sense as a defensive reaction to the overwhelming unknowableness of so much that defines our mortal condition.⁴³

Notes

- 1 In addition to Philbrick and Bender, both of whom make persuasive arguments for the sea's importance to American life and letters, see the superb collection of essays in Patricia Carlson (ed.), *Literature and Lore of the Sea* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986). Also, in my mind, the recent publication of Haskell Springer's (ed.) impressive volume, *America and the Sea: A Literary History* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1995) is itself a testament to the enduring significance of the sea and sea literature in the American nation. Beginning with the nineteenth century, as Donald Wharton writes in his chapter ("The Revolutionary and Federal Periods") in Springer's work, a "new age in American sea literature had begun. Increasingly the sea experience became the focus of romantic iconography and symbolism, its power to excite, awe, delight, and terrify increasingly the principal object of the writer's imagination. The concept of the Sublime as a means of morally and aesthetically controlling the disordered elements of nature no longer held together. The unsocial aspects of the sea now became a crucible in which individual rather than communal experience was tested and realized. The subjectivity of experience and the multiplicity of perception fashioned a new world to be explored" (pp. 61-2).
Poe's review of *Wyandotté* is reprinted in *Edgar Allan Poe, Essays and Reviews*, ed. G.R. Thompson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), pp. 479-90.
- 2 In a rhetorical rejoinder directed at the abolitionists, Governor Hammond of South Carolina once sputtered: "Allow our slaves to read your writings, stimulating them to cut our throats! Can you believe us to be such unspeakable fools?" Such fears were not, apparently, uncommon. See Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1959; rpt. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1963), pp. 219-220.
- 3 According to Nancy Harstock, the immediate danger for many is the risk of being "marginalized by the transcendental voice of universalizing Theory." See "Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories" in *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 34.
- 4 Marie Bonaparte, *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, trans. John Rodker (London: Imago, 1949); Gaston Bachelard, "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," in *The Right to Dream*, trans. J.R. Underwood (New York: Grossman, 1971), pp. 113-26.
- 5 Grace F. Lee, "The Quest of Arthur Gordon Pym," *Southern Literary Journal*, 4, no. 2, (1972), pp. 22-33; A. Robert Lee, "'Impudent and ingenious fiction': Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*," in *Edgar Allan Poe: The Design of Order*, ed. A. Robert Lee (London: Vision Press, 1987), pp. 112-34.

- 6 Burton Pollin, "Introduction" to the *Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe, Volume 1, The Imaginary Voyages: The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, The Unparalleled Adventure of one Hans Pfaal, The Journal of Julius Rodman*, ed. Burton R. Pollin (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), p 6. Two of the leading proponents for the indeterminacy of (and in) *Pym* are John T. Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), and J. Gerald Kennedy, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, and the Abyss of Interpretation* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995). Kennedy's title practically speaks for itself, while Irwin's argument (which he applies also to Ishmael's discussion of the whiteness of the whale in *Moby-Dick*) rests upon the fact that "indeterminacy is the essential characteristic of the hieroglyph" (p. 286).
- 7 William Tindall, *The Literary Symbol* (rpt. New York: Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960), pp. 150-51.
- 8 Roger B. Stein, "Pulled Out of the Bay: American Fiction in the Eighteenth Century," *Studies in American Fiction*, 2 (1974), pp. 21-22.
- 9 Hugh Egan, "Cooper and His Contemporaries," in Springer, *America and the Sea*, p. 75.
- 10 See Levin, *Power of Blackness*, and John Carlos Rowe, "Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism" in *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*, ed. Richard Kopley (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), pp. 117-38. In the "Preface" to his *Tales* (1840), Poe wrote: "If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany but of the soul." As we will see, however, the terror he felt about blacks and slavery in America was actually much closer to home--and his soul.
- 11 Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, rev. ed. (New York: Stein and Day, 1982). It is Fiedler's opinion that "*Pym* represents the first serious attempt at introducing Negroes into our literature" (p. 398).
- 12 Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in Zinsser, William (ed.). *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 107.
- 13 Kennedy, *op cit.*, pp. 6-7.
- 14 This unsigned review appeared in the April 1836 *Southern Literary Messenger*, while Poe was the magazine's editor, and it approvingly outlined the proslavery attitudes of two works of the time: James Kirke Paulding's *Slavery in the United States* and an anonymous volume, *The South Vindicated from Treason and Fanaticism of Northern Abolition* (which was likely written by William Drayton). The traditional assumption was that Poe himself had written this review. But in 1941, when William Doyle Hull's dissertation suggested that Beverly Tucker had, in fact, authored this racist tract, it set the stage for a controversy that still lives for many of Poe's critics.

A full treatment of this controversy can be found in Bernard Rosenthal's comprehensive analysis and (convincing) speculative arguments relating to the question of the review's authorship. See his

"Poe, Slavery, and the *Southern Literary Messenger* : A Reexamination," *Poe Studies*, 7 (1974), pp. 29-38. As an example of the kind of revisionist practices that have taken place since the appearance of Hull's dissertation, I should point out that the text that I use here for many of my discussions of Poe, the *Library of America's Essays and Reviews*, does not include the "Paulding/Slavery" review among its one thousand, five hundred forty-four pages. Therefore, the text I use for this review is from *Race and the American Romanticism*, eds. Vincent Freimarck and Bernard Rosenthal (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).

- 15 *Playing in the Dark*, p. 32.
- 16 Philbrick, p. 175.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- 18 Emilio DeGrazia, "Poe's Other Beautiful Woman," in Carlson, *Literature and Lore of the Sea*, p. 176.
- 19 Haskell Springer, "Preface" to *America and the Sea*, IX.
- 20 Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe; Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance* (London: Weidenfeld, 1993), pp. 15-22.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 22 Charles Lee Lewis, "Edgar Allan Poe and the Sea," *The Southern Literary Messenger* (January, 1941), p. 6. Much of the biographical information about Poe's early years is quite sketchy. And although I have utilized several sources to piece together my account of his youthful connection to the sea, many of the details derive from this short article by Lewis, as well as Silverman's *Remembrance*.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
- 24 Silverman, p. 42.
- 25 Charles Lee Lewis, p. 7.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 DeGrazia, in Carlson, p. 176.
- 28 Philbrick, p. 2.
- 29 Egan, in Springer, p. 65.
- 30 *Essays and Reviews*, p. 474.

- 31 Philbrick, p. 173.
- 32 *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838; rpt. New York and London: Penguin, 1986), p. 57. Page numbers for subsequent citations from *Pym* are from this edition and appear within parentheses in the text.
- 33 Egan, in Springer, p. 75.
- 34 Philbrick, pp. 175–76.
- 35 DeGrazia, in Carlson, p. 176.
- 36 Harold Beaver, “Introduction” to (Penguin) *Pym*, p. 19.
- 37 David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance; The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 227; 241.
- 38 See Walter E. Bezanson, “The Troubled Sleep of Arthur Gordon Pym” in *Essays In Literary History Presented to J. Milton French*, ed. Rudolph Kirk and C.F. Main (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960), pp. 149–75. Bezanson describes Burton’s “contempt” for the “various discrepancies” and the events that “outrag[e] possibility” in *Pym*, and then wryly adds: “It seems not to have occurred to him [Burton] that if *Pym* could not be taken as fact it might be taken as fiction” (151).
- 39 Philbrick, p. 166.
- 40 Warren, *Black and White Strangers*, p. 2.
- 41 Useful summaries of these wildly diverging interpretations can be found in two places: Douglas Robinson, “Reading Poe’s Novel: A Speculative Review of *Pym* Criticism, 1950–1980,” *Poe Studies*, 15 (1982), pp. 47–54; and David Ketterer, “Tracing Shadows: *Pym* Criticism, 1980–1990,” in Kopley, pp. 233–74.
- 42 Douglas Robinson, “Reading Poe’s Novel: A Speculative Review of *Pym* Criticism,” p. 47.
- 43 J. Gerald Kennedy, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, and the Abyss of Interpretation*, pp. 72–3.

Chapter Two

Poe, *Pym* , and Slavery

"In truth, from everything I could see of these wretches, they appeared to be the most wicked, hypocritical, vindictive, bloodthirsty, and altogether fiendish race of men upon the face of the globe...."

In describing this "human compulsion" to inscribe every blankness with "meaning" and "signification," Kennedy's sage remarks serve not only to account for the mass of critical vagaries that have attempted to explicate the elusive "meanings" of *Pym* . They help to explain also, I think, one of Pym's major conundrums as both observer and narrator. For Pym, like the recent critics who have essayed to "explain" him, is repeatedly confronted with indecipherable signs, symbols, talismans, and characters (human and hieroglyphic) which seem to beg for interpretation. And although, like these critics, "Pym tries to impose his own interpretive grid on the chaotic, shifting conditions of phenomenal experience,"¹ his is a futile hermeneutic effort that works (at least in Pym's case) to disclose the extent of his self-delusion and the speciousness of his perceptions. These are

but human failings, of course. But they undermine nevertheless his authority and credibility as either recorder of events or interpreter of signs and experience.

What should also be recalled by this discussion is an earlier mention of Toni Morrison's claim that "the ways in which artists --and the society that bred them--transferred internal conflicts to a 'blank darkness,' to conveniently bound and violently silenced black bodies, is a major theme in American literature."² For a striking similarity exists between this transferral of "internal conflicts" that Morrison talks about and the human exigencies to assign meanings to the voids or blanknesses that Kennedy describes. Much like the sea itself, which is often represented as a "blank darkness" or mysterious blankness" by those who have made the daunting attempt to confront its unfathomable nature or penetrate what Melville has called its "sweet mystery," the "blank darkness" of the Black/Africanist presence in America also seems to have necessitated the psychic projections by which the white Euro-American imagination in the nineteenth century sought to comprehend, define, and identify a state of otherness that constituted a "source of apprehension." Perhaps in this very attempt to affix an identity, what was sought was a means of stabilizing the uncontrollable and, in naming the unknowable,

sublimating the fear associated with the potentially destructive elements of chaos or primitive energy.

Poe, in particular, I would suggest, seems to have experienced such a compulsion with regard to both the sea and the Black/Africanist presence in America. And as incongruous as this connection may seem, the “terror” he seems to have felt concerning both stems largely from the very same qualities of blank darkness that have just been brought into consideration here. Each a form of *tabula rasa*, the sea and the black race seem to have tapped deeply into the wellspring of Poe’s unconscious being, presenting him with blank pages in which he inscribed some of his most powerful and troubled emotions--as well as allowing his imagination its fullest possible rein. Just as in *Pym*, where the earlier, more realistic, chapters give way to the fantastic elements of the later South Sea/Tsalal episodes--a movement in the novel that corresponds to the psychological journey from the conscious to unconscious--it is the *terra incognita* aspects of the latter chapters which seem to push Pym (and Poe) to the furthest limits of psychological awareness and arousal, as well as dread, doubt and uncertainty. “At every step we took,” Pym says in Chapter 18, “the conviction forced itself upon us that

we were in a country differing essentially from any hitherto visited by civilized men. We saw nothing with which we had been formerly conversant" (193). It is here in these late chapters, as Robert Lee has suggested, that Poe's text "becomes a perfect blank to be enscribed [*sic*] for the first time entirely by his own invention--and in which all storytelling and speculative bets are in play."³ And it is here, too, in my opinion, that Poe's complex conceptions--conscious and unconscious--of both the sea and the Black/Africanist presence begin to coalesce into uneasy expression. For it is in this South Sea/Tsalal section of *Pym* that Poe steers his crafts, both *The Jane Guy* and his text, into regions previously uncharted in American sea fiction; on a course that would lead him (through the guise of his racist-landlubberly-narrator/alter-ego, Pym) out of the more traditional realms of romance and gothic-sensationalist sea literature into a dark world of social allegory characterized by what one critic has called a "presurrealistic distortion of perspective."⁴ Rightfully, but for too long single-mindedly, *Pym* has been seen as Poe's failed attempt to cash in on the contemporary public's excited interest in the government sponsored Wilkes Expedition of 1838 that sent a fleet south into previously unexplored regions (below 74°S.) of the Antarctic. As a result, what would

pass unnoticed for more than a century, is that Poe's elaborate rendition of the sensational (but metaphysical) sea journey in *Pym* contains a deliberate depiction of the American South in which Poe embeds a symbolic treatment of the nettlesome "Negro problem"--a treatment that seems to express his barely submerged antipathy toward Blacks, while simultaneously it reveals "a consciousness of guilt and a fear of retribution"⁵ over their heinous mistreatment. *Pym* may have found its literary heritage in the variety and abundance of sea narratives in existence at the time of its composition, and its pragmatic (pecuniary) impetus from the expected success of employing such a "universal theme." But this same theme--the sea, with all its previously mentioned significations of the primitive, the unknown, the savage, the wild, and the uncontrollable--seems also to have prompted Poe's connection to his own "inner conflicts" and the dark recesses of his own mind. Doubly *dark*, indeed, for as John Carlos Rowe has noticed: "Poe's own repressed fears regarding slave rebellions in the South and the deeper fear that Southern aristocratic life itself might be passing are the psychic contents that provoke the poetic narrative."⁶

To look beneath the surface of *Pym* is to see a myriad of layers and purposes, as the manifest and latent contents of the work seem to diverge wildly. It offers a world of appearances, deceptions, contradictions, paradoxes, masks, and disguises. All of which is then submerged within a text whose ostensible form, the sea narrative, was, in Poe's mind, "hackneyed" (as we saw in his review of *Wyandotté*) and "the natural exponent of the vulgar thought in the person of a vulgar thinker," as he once said about the sea narratives of Frederick Marryatt.⁷ In light of such opinions, one can only wonder, then, why Poe should have even attempted to employ such a form, one that would seem antithetical to his own, professed, literary ambitions and attitudes. Unless, of course, he had ulterior motives or hidden agendas to which he wanted to attend. And these, no doubt, he had, as he confided so revealingly in his closing remarks to the Marryatt review just mentioned. Seemingly pained at having to even consider seriously such "trash so ineffable," where, clearly, the author "finds it his interest to *push on ...[and]...incident* is the sole thing which answers," Poe continued on to suggest exactly what was missing from works of this type--and what he himself would have incorporated into a work of this kind should he ever choose to ignore his own advice not to "undertake" such

an “excessively hackneyed” theme:

Comment, in the author's own person, upon what is transacting, is left entirely out of the question. There is thus none of that *binding* power perceptible, which gives a species of unity (the unity of the writer's individual thought) to the most random narrations....The *commenting* force can never be safely disregarded. It is far better to have a dearth of incident, with skilful observation upon it, than the utmost variety of event, without....The successful novelist must, in the same manner, be careful to bring into view his *private* interest, sympathy, and opinion, in regards to his own creations.⁸

Poe's heavy use of italics in this passage suggests a special urgency or stridency in his remarks. It is as if he were attempting to explain the differences between his own sea novel, *Pym*, published with dismal results only three years earlier, and the usual fare of sea literature offered to the American reading public. The voice here is almost shrill, as Poe tries plaintively to get his reader's attention, to force this reader to see the obvious. There *must* be a message, he seems say, some *commenting* voice which expresses the author's “*private* interest, sympathy, and opinion”--or else, we are left with little more than what he calls in the end, “a pitiable production” (328).

In the case of *Pym*, as I have been suggesting, Poe's own “*private* interest, sympathy, and opinion” are expressed in the thinly disguised racial allegory which suffuses the text. Nearly

every important section of this episodic “sea-adventure” novel contains an image, event, characterization, or direct reference to the issue of slavery, the primitive savagery of the black race, or the catastrophic possibility of a slave insurrection. While it is difficult to agree with Thompson’s assessment that a “seemingly multiform and multicolored world becomes simplistically elemented into black and white”⁹--since very little ever seems *simplistic* in Poe--it is true that Pym’s journey is fraught with the frequent bifurcation of symbol and experience into a dichromatic strategy of representation. There is evidence of this from the seemingly innocent but rather highly symbolic naming of ships like the *Grampus* and the *Penguin* (both of which recall the predominantly black-white coloration of the creatures after which they were named) to the intricately wrought “quincuncial network” found in Pym/Poe’s description of the symbiotic nesting habits in a rookery shared by albatrosses and penguins.¹⁰ There is nothing “simplistic” either about the appalling implications of the complex black-white allegory of the Tsalal sections in *Pym*, where Poe’s own racial phobias led him, inevitably, it would seem, to embed a “segregationalist parable” in which the black Tsalalians embody the fortifying paradox that sustained

southern mythology of Poe's time. For not only are these blacks obtuse and puerile (in desperate need of patriarchal--*white* -- supervision and control, that is). They are also terrifying and demonic savages whose murderous impulses must be checked and vigilantly watched over. As Pym says of these Tsalalians, whose very blackness must have carried very disturbing racial connotations to Poe's American readers, they "were among the most barbarous, subtle, and bloodthirsty wretches that ever contaminated the face of the globe" (205).

That Poe felt strongly enough about the issues of race and slavery in America to make them a central locus of concern in *Pym* should not be surprising to the contemporary reader--or to any reader acquainted with Poe's literary oeuvre, his personal biography, or his social-historical milieu. But those familiar with the staggering wealth of criticism devoted to Poe and *Pym* and, more recently, Poe's racial attitudes, especially as they are reflected in *Pym*, cannot help but to realize the extent to which Poe's obsessive nature often fixated upon racial matters. And always in writing about these fixations, Poe's racism is starkly apparent. He was raised from the age of two, we must remember, in the slaveholding state of Virginia, after the deser-

tion of his father and the death of his mother. And his guardians, the Allans, “owned” several household servants, all of whom were slaves, “but at least one of these was owned by someone else and bonded to Mr. Allan.”¹¹ In fact, these same black slaves seem to have provided Poe with a perverse justification for attacking his fosterparent, John Allan, in letter written in 1827, while Edgar was busy acquiring both academic accolades and impressive gambling debts at the University of Virginia. Dismayed by what he considered Allan’s paltry allowance, the petulant Poe wrote to him: “You suffer me to be subjected to the whim & caprice, not only of your white family, but to the complete authority of the blacks.”¹²

Poe wrote these words when he was eighteen years old, and it is clear that his belief in black inferiority, cultivated no doubt by living in a slaveholding family in a notoriously pro-slavery state, was already well developed. Implicit in his remarks is an overt recognition of a racial hierarchy in which white supremacy was an *a priori* assumption. And the worst indignity possible for a member of this superior race was to be treated like a slave--or worse yet, to be subjected to black authority. In this respect, his attitudes concerning the black race exhibited, it seems, a “potpourri of every racial cliché and

of every racial nightmare that characterized the South,¹³ while, at the same time, they prefigured the kinds of racist sentiments that would characterize his later writings. “At the climax of *Gordon Pym*,” Leslie Fiedler wrote, in response to the latent racism of this same missive, “Poe dreams himself once more, though a grown man, subject to that nightmare authority; and the book projects his personal resentment and fear, as well as the guilty terror of a whole society in the face of those whom they can never quite believe they have the right to enslave.”¹⁴

Not that Poe’s fears were unfounded, of course. Rather, the racial strife and turbulence of the South during the 1830s was such that an ever discerning outside observer like Alexis de Tocqueville would note the tensions and prophesy a racially mandated apocalypse:

The more or less distant but inevitable danger of a conflict between the blacks and whites of the South of the Union is a nightmare constantly haunting the American imagination. The northerners make it a common topic of conversation, though they have nothing directly to fear from it. They seek in vain for some means of obviating the misfortunes they foresee.

In the southern states there is silence; one does not speak of the future before strangers; one avoids discussing it with one’s friends; each man, so to say, hides it from himself. There is something more frightening about the silence of the South than about the North’s noisy fears.¹⁵

More than a century and a half later, the prescience and per-

spicacity of de Tocqueville's remarks can still evoke a chilling reminder of the racially charged atmosphere in America during Poe's lifetime. The consequences of the institutionalized enslavement of the black race loomed heavily over the country, especially in the South, where the Great Silence observed by Alexis de Tocqueville suggests a collective trauma or mass lapsing into shock. In reality, however, what began to gain control in the South was a form of *siege mentality* that became known as the Great Southern Reaction of the 1830s and 1840s, a period in which much of the South "created a closed, nearly martial society intent upon preserving its slave-based civilization."¹⁶ And Tocqueville was right, of course, to be so alarmed by this grim, silent determination displayed in the South. For this nightmare that seemed to infect its collective imagination could have only one, inevitable, tragic, and cataclysmic ending--the mass hysteria known as *war*. This was a nightmare from which the South would awake only to find a worse one waiting to happen.

Although this silence frightened Tocqueville, it should not surprise those with the hindsight of a longer historical perspective. After all, this was a historically acquired silence, it seems, passed down, as it was, from the example of the Consti-

tution itself, which deliberately omitted mention of blacks and slaves, through the slaveholding practices of American presidents like Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, to the nascent literature of an emerging nation--a literature which had managed, to this point in time, to erase the presence of Black Americans from its pages. Having dealt with the black race predominantly from the perspective of masters controlling the "subhuman" slaves who were, as Jefferson once wrote, clearly "inferior to the whites,"¹⁷ blacks were treated, if at all in American literature, as stereotyped caricatures whose presence served mainly to provide comic relief or to reinforce, by contrast, the superiority of the white race.

Thus, when Poe wrote, in reviews of authors like Cooper and Robert Lee, that "[t]he Negroes are, without exception, admirably drawn,"¹⁸ he meant that the blacks in these works were harmless buffoons, "black 'rascals' or 'scamps,' named pompously 'Jupiter' or 'Pompey,' who lend a minstrel-show note to Poe's lighter tales. Woolly-pated and bow-legged, these characters play the role of mischievous, cowardly, stupid and faithful dependents, good always for a laugh when they say 'soldiers' for 'shoulders' or 'clause' for 'cause.'"¹⁹ Unless depicted in such a way as to fit this palliating stereotype that many white Amer-

icans invoked to comfort themselves--and thereby deepen their delusionary sense of superiority--it would seem that blacks had no place in American literature.

As late as the 1840s, Poe would still express disgust with those authors who dared either to represent blacks themselves as human beings, or who considered sympathetically the plight of the American slaves. For example, in a review of Longfellow's "Poems on Slavery," published in the April, 1845, issue of the *Aristidean*,²⁰ Poe opened his remarks with the smug assertion that these poems were "intended for the especial use of those negrophilic old ladies of the north, who form so large a part of Mr. LONGFELLOW'S friends." Later in this same review, a particular poem in this volume, "The Slave in the Dismal Swamp," is deemed by Poe to be "a shameless medley of the grossest misrepresentation" because, presumably, Longfellow himself had never actually *seen* a slave hunted in a swamp. "When did Professor LONGFELLOW ever *know* a slave to be hunted with bloodhounds in the DISMAL SWAMP?" Poe demanded to be informed. "Because he has heard that runaway slaves are so treated in CUBA, he has certainly no right to change the locality, and by insinuating a falsehood in lieu of a fact, charge his countrymen

with barbarity. What makes the matter worse, he is one of those who insist upon truth as one of the elements of poetry.”²¹ And finally, in his consideration of the concluding poem in this volume, “The Warning,” Poe allows that it “contains at least one stanza of absolute truth,” which is the possibility of a slave revolt due to the emasculation of what the poem calls “a poor, blind Sampson in this land,/ Shorn of his strength and bound in bonds of steel.” Nevertheless, “[o]ne thing is certain,” this grim review asseverates in conclusion, “--if this prophecy be *not* fulfilled, it will be through no lack of incendiary doggrel on the part of Professor LONGFELLOW and his friends. We dismiss this volume with no more profound feeling than that of contempt.”²²

In 1849, the year he was to die, Poe’s “contempt” had still not abated for those, like Longfellow, who offered sympathetic (and therefore “incendiary”) portraits of America’s enslaved blacks. Worse yet, however, were the abolitionist “fanatics,” like James Russell Lowell, whose relentless attacks upon the “peculiar institution” of the South seemed to be gaining in numbers, support, and momentum--a prospect that clearly would have been most distressing to Poe. In a review published in the March issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger* of this year, Poe’s defensiveness turns vituperative, if not hysterical:

Mr. Lowell is one of the most rabid of the Abolitionist fanatics; and no Southerner who does not wish to be insulted, and at the same time revolted by a bigotry the most obstinately blind and deaf, should ever touch a volume by this author. His fanaticism about slavery is a mere local outbreak of the same innate *wrong-headedness* which, if he owned slaves, would manifest itself in atrocious ill-treatment of them, with murder of any abolitionist who should endeavor to set them free. A fanatic of Mr. L's species, is simply a fanatic for the sake of fanaticism, and must be a fanatic in whatever circumstances you place him.²³

These are strong words, of course. But despite their seeming conviction, they seem to reek also of a mind stricken by fear and paranoia. Behind the verbiage is a Poe who appears to have felt that there was both a *right* way and a *wrong* way to write about "Negroes," and the choices rested between his own degraded characterization of Jupiter in "The Gold Bug" and--well, to be blunt about it, anything else was, in Poe's own neologistic phrase, *negrophilic* ("nigger-lovin"). But Poe was also not very good, as we have seen, at taking his own advice about what his *themes* should represent. He deemed the genre of sea literature "excessively hackneyed," as has been pointed out more than once. But he devoured and plundered from the existing libraries of sea fiction and nonfiction in order to write *Pym*, an ostensible sea tale. Anything other than minstrel burlesques in

writing about blacks ran the risk of being “incendiary” or “fan-
 ical”—so Poe depicted a Black/Africanist-like presence in *Pym*
 more subtle, cunning, and threatening than had ever been pre-
 sented in American literature.

If, as his reviews seem to suggest,²⁴ Poe indeed condoned
 the Great Silence of the South with regard to the institution of
 American slavery, he must have at least suspected that the in-
 corporation of such a conspicuous racial allegory into the fabric
 of his sea adventure tale could undermine the possibility of its
 popular success—especially because the blacks portrayed in the
 work are not depicted by Pym in the comically stereotyped man-
 ner usually reserved for them, but are described instead as “the
 most wicked, hypocritical, vindictive, bloodthirsty, and altoge-
 ther fiendish race of men upon the face of the globe” (233). Yet,
 somehow, it seems, Poe could not restrain himself from lacing
 his “sea tale” with added weight, as if to ballast an otherwise
 too salty a sea yarn—which, it would seem, he felt was beneath
 his talent and aesthetic scruples. Despite his having been ad-
 monished in 1836, by Harper and Brothers of New York, the fu-
 ture publisher of *Pym*, to “lower himself a little to the ordinary
 comprehension of the generality of readers,”²⁵ Poe then proceed-
 ed, instead, to complicate his sea adventure novel in such a way

as to doom it (what was likely his best opportunity for a public success) to public failure. In *Pym*, both Harper's and Poe promised the reading public a sensational account of a voyage to the South Seas; they even delayed by months its publication so as to coincide as nearly as possible with the departure of the Wilkes' Expedition, seeking profit from the public's feverish interest: "The public mind is at length thoroughly alive on the subject," said Poe at the time.²⁶ And indeed *Pym* gave the reading public all the sensationalism it could want *in extremis*.

As promised in the sixteen-line catalogue that subtitles the mock-epic title page, Pym's narrative delivered in graphic detail all that it had pledged: "ATROCIOUS BUTCHERY...SHIPWRECK...HORRIBLE SUFFERINGS FROM FAMINE...CAPTURE...MASSACRE...DISTRESSING CALAMITY" and, of course, "INCREDIBLE ADVENTURES AND DISCOVERIES." The only enormities missing, it would appear, from this roster of horrors about to be presented, were *cannibalism* (too strong for public consumption, no doubt)²⁷ and the racist obsessions that Poe could not, or would not, dismiss. But in giving in to this latter compulsion to address the Black-Africanist presence in *Pym*, Poe overloaded himself and his sea story. In a manner of speaking, he took on too much ballast--and failed to stow it properly.

Perhaps he should have heeded the advice of his own narrator, Pym, who knew the danger in this: "It is not too much to say that at least one half of the instances in which vessels have foundered in heavy gales at sea may be attributed to a shifting of cargo or of ballast" (99). In the self-referential way that *Pym* often operates, where the act of writing becomes an act of writing about the act of writing, and the different vessels that Pym sails upon signify *Pym's* overlaying texts, Poe's text/vessel sinks (fails) beneath the rising crest of American sea literature because it could not support the added and shifting ballast of Poe's own *incendiary* and *fanatical* racial allegory. This desperate attempt to transfer his own "inner conflicts," to load them into his sea story (and unload them onto the American reading public), became the *improper stowage* that caused *Pym* --and indeed causes it still--to founder.

Notes

- 1 J. Gerald Kennedy, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, and the Abyss of Interpretation*, p. 72.
- 2 *Playing in the Dark*, p. 38.
- 3 A. Robert Lee, *op cit.*, p. 127.
- 4 Reynolds, *Beneath*. See, especially, Reynolds' chapters "Poe and Popular Irrationalism" (pp. 225-48) and "Stylized Laughter in Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville" (pp. 524-33).

- 5 As Joan Dayan observed, "Poe remained haunted, as did Jefferson, by the terrible disjunction between the ideology of slavery (the abstract and rather benign parental ideology grounded in the equally abstract assumption of negro inferiority) and the concrete realities of mutilation, torture, and violation." See her chapter, "Romance and Race," in *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliot (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 89-109.
- 6 "Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism" in *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*, ed. Richard Kopley (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 127.
- 7 Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, p. 325.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 327-28.
- 9 G. R. Thompson, "The Arabesque Design of *Arthur Gordon Pym*," in Kopley, p. 199.
- 10 John T. Irwin, "The Quincuncial Network in Poe's *Pym*," in Kopley, pp. 175-87.
- 11 Joan Dayan, "Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves," *American Literature*, 66 (June, 1994), p. 264.
- 12 *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, 2 vols., ed. John Ward Ostrom (New York: Gordian Press, 1966), p. 7.
- 13 Bernard Rosenthal, "Introduction" to *Race and the American Romantics*, p. 2.
- 14 *Love and Death in the American Novel*, p. 399.
- 15 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, quoted in Harold Beaver's "Introduction" to the Penguin edition of *Pym*, p. 15.
- 16 Dayan, "Amorous Bondage," p. 264.
- 17 *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, eds. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York, 1944), pp. 256-62.
- 18 Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, p. 486.
- 19 Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, p. 399.
- 20 Reprinted in *Essays and Reviews*, pp. 759-77.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 763.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 764.
- 23 Reprinted in *Essays and Reviews*, p. 819.

- 24 Dayan, in "Romance and Race," states her belief that Poe was indeed the author of the infamous Paulding review (see note 14, Chapter 1, above). In fact, she sardonically refers to this review as "Poe's most disturbing, because most authentic, 'love poem'" (96). As evidence of his participation in The Great Silence of the South, she makes the astute observation that, although Poe does refer to "recent events in the West Indies" (presumably the two bloody slave revolts in Jamaica during 1831-32) in the review, he significantly omits mention of the Nat Turner rebellion of 1831-- "too unspeakable to mention, perhaps because it took too close to home in Southampton, Virginia" (p. 97).

- 25 Actually, this "advice" was passed on to Poe in a letter from James Kirke Paulding, whose aid Poe had solicited to help him find a publisher. See *The Letters of James Kirke Paulding*, ed. Ralph Aderman (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), pp. 173-74.

- 26 See Poe's lengthy essay-review of the "South-Sea Expedition" in *Essays and Reviews*, pp. 1227-52.

- 27 As well, of course, Poe also indulges (at least in a figurative sense) what appears to be his primal obsession with cannibalism. J. Gerald Kennedy discusses the figures of decomposition and cannibalism as suggestive of the limits of language in "*Pym* Pourri: Decomposing the Textual Body," where Kennedy says of Poe and *Pym*, "in a body of fiction pervaded by morbid themes, the narrative marks what Poe might have called the ne plus ultra of bad taste" (167). This article appears in Kopley, pp. 167-74.

Chapter Three

Toward a Reading of Pym

Right from the outset of *Pym*, a number of questions arise that will never be answered satisfactorily within the text itself. In fact, beginning with the first sentence of the “Preface”, Poe has Pym reporting but not offering to detail any particulars of the “accident” which, as he says, “threw me into the society of several gentlemen in Richmond, Virginia, who felt deep interest in all matters relating to the regions I had visited, and who were constantly urging it upon me, as a duty, to give my narrative to the public” (43). No further details are provided here by Pym as to the nature of these gentlemen’s “deep interest,” or why they should have deemed it Pym’s “duty” to report his findings. Thus, within the very first sentence of the novel, a discerning reader --or even just a curious reader--is likely to be left wondering, among other things, about the nature of Pym’s “accident.” Just who might these gentlemen be? Why do they have such a “deep interest” in Pym’s narrative? And just what makes them think it

is Pym's "duty" to relate his story to the public? Considering the spurious nature of the scientific data collected and presented by Pym--and most of this "from mere memory" (43)--it would thus seem most unlikely that the Virginia gentlemen's "deep interest" lay in this aspect of Pym's narrative. What also is improbable is that the publication of such ersatz scientific information should, for any apparent reason, be construed as anyone's "duty." Surely, something else, then, urged this sense of incumbency.

The second sentence of the novel continues this mysteriously vague and equivocal practice of partial disclosure, as Pym declares his initial reluctance to go public with his narrative. "I had several reasons, however, for declining to do so, some of which were of a nature altogether private, and concern no person but myself; others not so much so" (43). What follows, of course, is a series of disclaimers by Pym in which he enumerates those reasons he *is* willing to discuss for not wanting to publish his narrative; namely, his "fear" that he would not be able to render a credible "*appearance* of that truth it would really possess" (and thus be regarded as "merely an impudent and ingenious fiction"); the fact that the only support for his "assertions" was the "evidence of a single individual, and he a half-breed;" and, finally, as Pym so coyly states, a "distrust in my

own abilities as a writer was, nevertheless, one of the principal causes which prevented me from complying with the suggestions of my advisers”¹ (43).

When we consider the fact that the very first paragraph of this “Preface” to *Pym* is characterized by such evasiveness and “disinformation,” it should be clear--if anything *can* be clear about the forbearing ambiguity of this passage--that Pym is not about to be overly forthcoming with regard to his motives for telling his tale. Inadvertently, however, we do learn a lot about this narrator through the very dissembling he seems to employ in order to avoid being pinned down or pigeonholed. Although he is from Massachusetts,² he spends part of his time in Virginia; he has an abiding interest in the South Seas; he is deeply concerned about what the public may think of his writing; and, based upon his dismissive condescension toward the “evidence of...a half-breed,” it can be assumed that his regard for a racialized *other* is consistent with what might expected in the early nineteenth-century slaveholding state of Virginia.

Not surprisingly, in all these many respects (and numerous others, well noted³), Pym closely resembles his creator/alter-ego, Edgar Allan Poe himself. And as such we can surmise that

the similarities between *Pym's* author and narrator are not entirely coincidental. Yet, Poe's apparent ambivalence about publicly admitting his authorship is dramatized by the sudden appearance of a "fictionalized" Poe in the second paragraph of the "Preface." Presented, as he is, as one "[a]mong those gentlemen in Virginia who expressed the greatest interest" in Pym's narrative, Poe's "fictionalized" depiction of himself allows for the possibility that the actual Poe was again trying to distance himself from responsibility for writing the novel⁴--while making certain, at the same time, that (should Pym's narrative be successful, perhaps?) his name was prominently associated with it. More immediate to my concern here, however, is the fact that Pym introduces "Mr Poe" as that gentleman whose "greatest interest in my statement" was "more particularly in regard to that portion of it which related to the Antarctic Ocean" (43). For implicit in this last description of "Mr Poe's" particularized interest in the Antarctic Ocean segment of Pym's narrative is the intimation that the other Virginian gentlemen cherished more deeply certain other, unnamed, portions of Pym's statement. As Pym had made clear in his first sentence, these men felt "deep interest in *all matters* relating to the regions I had visited" (my em-

phasis) and *these* it was Pym's "duty to give...to the public."

In my reading of *Pym*, this apparent discrepancy of *interest* between "Mr Poe" and his cohorts is evidence of further dissimulation in the text--and on the part of Poe himself, who liked to represent himself publicly as an authority on matters related to the sea and sea exploration. It seems a perfectly natural guise for Poe to adopt as he persisted in his attempts to deflect a too overt attention from the potentially volatile racial allegory he had woven into *Pym*--but which, in reality, represented that aspect of the work which Poe himself felt obliged (by "duty") to "give...to the public." By the time the full-length version of the the work appeared in print (1838), the historical Poe (whose keen interest in, and literary reliance upon, exploration accounts of all kinds has been as assiduously documented as Melville's) had already gained some small measure of notice as a writer of sea tales with earlier stories like "MS. Found in a Bottle" (1833). And more recently, in 1836, as noted, he had published the aborted serial version of *Pym* itself in two installments in the January and February issues of the *Southern Literary Messenger*--after having publicly announced it as a narrative of sea adventure and exploration.

Poe would likely have been familiar to the public also for

a number of reviews and essays he had written for the same publication on works in which both the sea and sea exploration figured prominently. And in one of them, "Letter to B----*," he claims that "books, like their authors, improve by travel--their having crossed the sea is, with us, so great a distinction."⁵ In fact, during the fourteen-month period between January, 1836, and February, 1837, Poe published half a dozen pieces (including the first two installments of *Pym*) that featured the sea or sea exploration as the main focus of his attention.

In relation to *Pym* , and especially the ways in which Poe's admitted *ruse* consisted mainly of the attempt to camouflage his subversive racial text within the popular form of sea narrative, the most important of these essays was a pair of impassioned companion pieces he had again written for the *Southern Literary Messenger* . In both, his personal ardor for South Seas exploration was very much in evidence, as was his attempt at rationalizing the capitalist/colonialist tropism for territorial expansion and appropriativeness. The first of these articles was published in August, 1836, at perhaps the crest of maritime nationalism in America. And Poe was at his maudlin, jingoistic best as he appealed to his readers' "pride" and "sense of moral and

political responsibility” to help pressure the American government into financing an exploring expedition to the South Seas:

Our pride as a vigorous commercial empire, should stimulate us to become our own pioneers in that vast island-studded ocean, destined, it may be, to become, not only the chief theatre of our traffic, but the arena of our future naval conflicts.... We possess, as a people, the mental elasticity which liberal institutions inspire, and a treasury which can afford to remunerate scientific research. Ought we not, therefore, to be foremost in the race of philanthropic discovery, in every department embraced by this comprehensive term? ...We have followed in the rear of discovery, when a sense of our moral and political responsibility should have impelled us in its van....The commercial nations of the earth have done much, and much remains to be accomplished. We stand a solitary instance among those who are considered commercial, as never having put forth a particle of strength or expended a dollar of our money, to add to the accumulated stock of commercial and geographical knowledge, except in partially exploring our own territory.⁶

This is indeed a provocative document. Beneath its polished veneer of interest in “philanthropic discovery,” it provides a startling glimpse into the minds and motives of the racist/imperialist colonizers, the Captain Guys and Arthur Gordon Pym of the world, whose self-righteous sense of racial superiority and manifest destiny overwhelms any doubts they might possibly have felt concerning the moral rectitude of their actions or intended enterprise. *Pride*, the first and deadliest of the cardinal sins, as Poe well knew, is here called upon to be the force

that stimulates American exploration efforts to become again the pioneers who would vanquish any obstacles--human or natural--that stood in the way of the glorious and "vigorous commercial enterprise." Let us get there *first*, Poe seems to be saying, so that we can gather up the riches and then establish a stronghold. This way, when the inevitable naval conflicts arise over possession and control of the "chief theatre of our traffic," we shall have entrenched and fortified ourselves already, and thus be able to defend better what we have appropriated. Of course, Poe said all the "right" things regarding "scientific research," "geographical knowledge," and "discovery," but, at least for this observer, based on both the historical evidences and the actions of Pym and Captain Guy, these remarks smack of mere lipservice to obscure the truer motives which Poe ascribed (through Pym) to the captain of the *Jane Guy*: "Captain Guy... wish[ed] for a thorough investigation of the country, *in the hope of making a profitable speculation in his discovery*" (192; my emphasis). Later, even Pym will get caught up in the frenzy for gain when he includes himself in the party of crewmen who pay a visit to the hut of the Tsalalian chief, Too-wit. For after the men decline the chief's offer to share his meal of "palpitating entrails of a species of unknown animal," Pym admits that he

shares an ulterior, capitalistic motive for paying the visit in the first place. "When the monarch had made an end to his meal, we commenced a series of cross-questioning in every ingenious manner we could devise, with a view of discovering what were the chief productions of the country, and whether any of them might be turned to profit" (199). So much for "philanthropic discovery" and "scientific research" it would seem.

Perhaps even more pertinent to the matter at hand, however, is the second of the two "South-Sea Expedition" articles that Poe published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, this one in January, 1837. For if the first of these pieces (August, 1836) offers insight into the motives and methods of the *Jane Guy* and ships involved in similar "trade"/exploration ventures, then the later essay makes clear the preferred means and methods of dealing with the *barbarous hordes of murderous savages* who would inevitably interfere with, perhaps even resist, the nobly philanthropic quest "to add to the accumulated stock of commercial and geographical knowledge."⁷ Noting the "great national advantages derivable from an exploring expedition to the South Seas and the Pacific" (1235), Poe insisted that the explorers not be deterred by the "savages in these regions [who] have

frequently evinced a murderous hostility" in their hopelessly vain attempt to defend what is theirs. Rather, in an imperative that, although milder, anticipates the final judgment of Conrad's Kurtz ("Exterminate the brutes"), Poe said flatly, "they should be conciliated or intimidated" (1236). There was no question in Poe's mind, it seems, that these "savages" might possess an inherent right to the lands they occupy, or that they should have had any voice in determining whether or not they might have been willing to relinquish these rights to the white "traders" who happened to land, often forcibly and uninvited, upon their shores. Consistent with the prevailing attitudes of most white explorers and colonizers of his time, Poe seems to have made little, if any, distinction between "trade" or "commerce" and *conquest*: "Various other sources of commerce will be met with, and may be almost exclusively appropriated" (1235), as he said later in this same review. Moreover, he says,--and here Poe seems to take his cue from Reynolds himself,⁸--as long as "we" provide the expedition with "extended protection" in the way of ships, men, and armament, there could be no doubt that our "imposing appearance will avail more to overawe the savages, and impress upon them a just idea of our power" (1240).

What seems most apparent about Poe's attitudes concern-

ing these “savages” is that he did not deem them sufficiently “civilized” to be considered human. Like the Black/Africanist slave population in the American South, who were Poe’s models for the Tsalalians, they were to be exploited, subjugated, and controlled. More revealingly, the savage blacks clearly were viewed by Poe as a subhuman species whose chief value was derived from their *conquerability* into economic units of production and labor. As such, having been made tractable, they became what he would define (in the infamous Paulding/Slavery review of April, 1836) as the “property” which was “the basis of all our institutions.”⁹ And in the same place, Poe would begin to comment on the “peculiar character...of the negro”--only then to correct himself with a parenthetical emendation, “(I may say the peculiar *nature*) of the negro” (my emphasis); as if to deny the possibility of so human a trait as *character* in the black race. Unwilling to allow such an attribution, Poe then considered the possibility that “they [blacks] are, like ourselves, the sons of Adam, and must therefore, have like passions and wants and feelings and tempers in all respects.” Perhaps predictably, however, his appraisal was as terse as it was categorical: “This, we deny, and appeal to the knowledge of all who know.”¹⁰

To read words like those just quoted, and to take into account all that has been said to this point about Poe's beliefs and attitudes concerning the Black/Africanist presence, seems to reinforce the prevailing critical estimate of *Pym* as a racist text. And indeed there seems little, if any, evidence to suggest that Poe expressed sympathy, compassion, or even polite tolerance toward blacks in either his life or literary productions. When, for example, he was trying to drum up public support for J.N. Reynolds' proposed expedition to the South Seas, Poe would include a *patriotic* plea for the "crews, or at least some portions of the crews, of many of our vessels known to be wrecked in this vicinity"--giving as his reason the hope that they "may be rescued from a life of slavery and despair" (1236). How ironic this entreaty is, though, when we realize that there were more than half a million despairing black slaves living *in Virginia alone* at the time Poe wrote these words. But, then again, as Poe had declared, these blacks were but "savages" and not "the sons of Adam" who felt, like whites, "passions and wants and feelings." Thus, while *slavery* itself was clearly synonymous with despair in Poe's mind, this same analogy was voided, it seems, when the enslaved were black.

We can only wonder ruefully at the mental and emotional gymnastics involved in such hypocrisies. Surely, such prejudice could only have been instilled by a profound mistrust and fear of an Other who is perceived to be so threatening as to imperil one's very existence. And in Poe's case, perhaps, the fear of a slave insurrection posed just such a threat. On another level, however, it is clear that Poe simply did not know what to feel or think about the Black/Africanist presence that inhabited *his* country and haunted his imagination. Blacks represented an aspect of that blank darkness which both horrified yet fascinated him, this man who seemed to require "circumscribed settings" to act as stays for his perversely overripe imaginative faculties. Thus, for example, in a work like *Pym*, which opens on the vast, open expanse of the sea, Poe was compelled almost immediately to move his narrator into the confined space of the hold of the *Grampus*. In fact, throughout *Pym* there is a constant tendency to move from the open setting of the sea into smaller, restricted interior spaces like ships' holds, caves or caverns. Indeed, even the interior recesses of an *island*, itself an archetypal symbol of isolation and confinement, suggests such a symbolic movement. Significantly, when Pym proclaims early on that "[f]or the bright side of the painting I had a limited sympathy" (57), the key word

is limited. The bright (and broad) panorama of life at sea seems inconceivable to him. It is almost overwhelming. Instead, his visions, like Poe's, when confronted with openness or blankness, veer toward "captivity" and a life of isolation "upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown."¹¹

According to this line of thought, the racial jeremiad that Poe elected to include in his sea novel can be said to result from his (probably unconscious and definitely paradoxical) attempt to delimit his scope through expansion of themes; that is, the tropical capaciousness of the sea presented such a vast, blank page to fill that Poe narrowed his focus simply by adding another one --in this case, the racial allegory so often referred to here. This is not to suggest that the choice was accidental or coincidental. Rather, as the previously mentioned essays and reviews would seem to indicate, the issues of slavery and the Black/Africanist presence in America seethed just behind the the wall of silence which Poe (for the most part) honored but obviously chafed against. And *Pym* was his vehicle for ventilating this deep internal conflict. The additional point of contention here is that, having set Pym (and *Pym*) afloat in the two early serializations in the *Southern Literary Messenger* , Poe found himself in a posi-

tion remarkably similar to that of Pym who was “filled...with an indescribable feeling of dread” (49) upon finding himself adrift in the open ocean. For when Pym says, “I knew that I was altogether incapable of managing the boat” (50), he might also be said to speak for Poe in his first extended voyage on the literary seas. Having written only poems, short stories, reviews, and essays to this point in his career, Poe was very much like an inexperienced sailor who suddenly finds himself both captain and navigator of an oceangoing vessel—with only his book knowledge to guide him.

From his own reading, Poe would have known that the sea seemed boundless but was limited; it was puissant but strangely vulnerable; it separated even as it connected. The sea could be gentle one moment but rage with an almost unimaginable fury in the next. It was male and female; life and death; it inspired hope only to wreak despair. As surely as it offered peace, it often substituted terror. And quite naturally, since similar emotions and desires appear to lurk deep within all hearts and minds (except those of racial Others, in Poe’s opinion), the sea was likely to carry an added significance whenever or however it was engaged in writing. This, I believe, is what Poe meant when he re-

ferred to the “universal” nature of sea themes, however limited by his racially determined understanding of this term his usage was. What seems clear is that his insistence upon the universal meanings and significances of the sea suggests a recognition of its awesome magnitude, both real and symbolic. Poe could rant all he wanted about the sea narrative being a “hackneyed” form. But the fact remains that his only prolonged attempt to redirect it caused him to lose control of his material in ways that are completely uncharacteristic of his tightly controlled shorter fictions.¹² In his mistaken belief that the sea narrative was an exhausted form, Poe seems to have laid a dangerous trap for himself. Having steeped himself in the exploration accounts of Benjamin Morrell, J.N. Reynolds, W.F. Owen, William Scoresby, *et. al.* , as well as innumerable volumes of fiction, poetry and deliverance narratives, Poe must have thought his own sea novel would practically write itself. He would lift entire passages from some of these works,¹³ imitate certain others, and, mixed with his own style and *comment* , it seems he must have thought that he could produce an almost effortless work that could both capture a public audience and gain him a handsome remuneration.

What he may not have realized, however, was the actual

and powerful sway of the sea itself. Perhaps he underestimated even the extent to which his own inner conflicts and ambivalences could be evoked by the kind of sustained meditation and concentration upon the sea necessitated by the writing of *Pym*. On a conscious level, Poe may have seen himself as performing hack work in a hackneyed form. But the pull of the sea, with all its contradictory connotations, suggestiveness, and, at the same time, mesmerizing blankness, seems to have insinuated itself deeply into the interior recesses of his mind. The end result was a text that purported to depict the externals of an exciting (and sensationalistic) sea voyage, but instead details a voyage of mind. It pretended to present a journey of discovery but ends in an amorphous cloud of uncertainty and ambiguity. It claimed to portray a race of primitive barbarians in a distant land, when, in fact, these “savages” represent none other than the Black/Africanist presence whose domicile was America. But most surprisingly, perhaps, in its likely attempt to exacerbate white America’s fear of slave revolt and its hostility towards the black race, *Pym* “implicitly questions the legitimacy of colonial exploitation; it may even be said to question, in its depiction of savage behavior by both American and British sailors, the racial

superiority assumed by Pym in his representation of the Tsalal-ian natives.”¹⁴ And ironically, in *Pym*, this assumed racial superiority is mainly responsible for the crew’s demise.

Indeed, on the surface *Pym* gives every appearance of being an indelibly racist tract in which black characters are associated consistently with evil by Pym. And the occasional lampooning of the black race seems to reveal Poe’s own racist beliefs, even as it heightens the dramatic effect of the black Tsalalians subsequent treachery. But this is a representation that allows for an alternate interpretation. Such is the case when the crew of the *Jane Guy* first encounters the black inhabitants of Tsalal. The crew members are possessed of a misguided sense of their own right, might and intellectual superiority, of course, and this causes them to misinterpret the words and actions of the black Tsalalians, who *seem* to evince, as Pym says, “a degree of ignorance for which we were not prepared” (191). The first description given by Pym of chief Too-wit is taken straight out of the minstrel stereotype of the times, it seems, with the imbecilic-seeming chief having “evinced symptoms of extreme surprise and delight, clapping his hands, slapping his thighs and breast, and laughing obstreperously” (190). Later, as if to reinforce this

stereotype, Pym describes the blacks' fondness for eating "tame fowls" (196), their "thick and clumsy" lips (197), and the concupiscence of the black "women [who] especially were most obliging in every respect" (204). The irony here, of course, is that it was their susceptibility to belief in such stereotypical vulgarizations that created the false sense of security and complacency in the crew. For it was this smug racism that prevented them from entertaining the possibility that the natives could be less than ingenuous--or more than simpleminded. As Pym ruefully admits, "we should have been the most suspicious of human beings had we entertained a single thought of perfidy on the part of a people who treated us so well" (205).

What a careful and unbiased reader might have noticed, however, was the degree of duplicity and dissimulation evinced by the the crew of the *Jane Guy* , whose primary motive was, as noted earlier, "profit." Not only do they exhibit an embarrassingly arrogant condescension towards the Tslalalians (who are clearly considered racial inferiors). But the crew attempts also to cheat and deceive the "savages," as they are referred to by Pym and as, no doubt, they were perceived by the crew. In return for water, food, numerous other staple provisions, including a veritable industry of *biche de mer* collection and processing,

the natives receive in return “blue beads, brass trinkets, nails, knives, and pieces of red cloth” (201). But having opened an exchange market, significantly situated “just under the guns of the schooner,” Pym tells us that the crew carried out its barterings not in good faith—but rather “with every *appearance* of good faith” (201; my emphasis). And despite Pym’s repeated claims that there seemed to be not the “slightest suspicion” (204, 205) concerning the “good faith of the savages,” he adds that, nevertheless, “no proper precaution was neglected” (205)—which meant, as he informs us a short while later, “[w]e were armed to the teeth” (205). Age, apparently, had not diminished Pym’s ability to “accomplish wonders in the way of deception” (56); in fact, his earlier willingness to resort to “intense hypocrisy for the furtherance of [his] project—an hypocrisy pervading every word and action of [his] life for so a period of time—” (58) seems to have expanded beyond the point of a schoolboy’s innocuous cozening. “His deception might also be taken as a symbol of his own rhetorical strategy in his narrative and, at a larger level, of a culturally sanctioned policy of colonially sanctioned subterfuge.”¹⁵

Such a reading depends, of course, on the critical perspec-

tive of the reader, and it begs questions about that most tenuous field of critical assessment, intentionality. How did Poe *intend* his text to be read? Based on the existing “evidence” culled from his life, literary productions, and social milieu, the answer might seem painfully obvious. But, in the end, Pym himself supplies the only answer possible when he says “[t]his is a matter that cannot be determined” (140). What has become increasingly apparent is that Poe’s text is capable of supporting many diammetrically opposed interpretations. And unlike many of the recent poststructuralist theorists, however, who would deconstruct the text into an olio of polarized meanings that necessarily cancel each other out, it seems more sensible simply to allow the contrarities to exist, holding them in abeyance in order to see them more clearly and thus recognize them as integral components of the complete work. For all his hyperconscious awareness (and manipulation) of the tradition in which he was working, Poe’s *Pym* represents a profound expression of his unconscious mind as it confronts that most universally recognized trope of itself, the sea--a sea that, historically, *means* duality, contradiction, opposition: “*Odi et amo* [I hate and I love] may well be the confession of those who consciously or

blindly have surrendered their existence to the fascination of the sea.” The words may be Conrad’s, but they describe a condition that may have afflicted Poe when he brought his psychic obsession with the Black/Africanist presence to bear on his sea novel.

*

*

*

As we have seen, the literary, historical, and biographical evidence of Poe’s attitudes towards slavery and the Black/Africanist presence might seem to preclude the likelihood of his intentionally offering, even implicitly, an indictment of the white colonialists’ hegemonic usurpation of territories and individual rights. However, there is at least one extended section within *Pym* that appears to undermine the notion that Poe’s racist tendencies were as singleminded and absolute as they might appear. Perhaps, as was suggested earlier, however, this possible duality should not be surprising in a work that relied so heavily upon the sea for its inspiration and setting. For if ever a universal or archetypal figuration has found a consensus of agreement about its connotative signification, it exists in the relation between the sea and the unconscious. “In twentieth-

century psychoanalytic terms, sea journeys often represent a quest for selfhood, with the sea as an archetype of the unconscious and analogue of the womb. In this view, the sea threatens drowning and extinction, but it also provides the opportunity for ritual immersion and rebirth.”¹⁶

Thus, although there is little doubt that Poe’s description of Pym’s entombment in the hold of the *Grampus* invites the numerous mythic-symbolic interpretations that have been attached to it over the years,¹⁷ there exists also another possible signification that has not been noticed—one that inverts the meaning customarily assigned to the episode, while pointing again to the centrality of Poe’s concern in *Pym* with slavery and the Black/Africanist presence. What is most unusual and important in this instance, however, is that such a reading suggests an unexpected (and probably unconscious) sympathy for the experience of the Black/Africanist presence on Poe’s part.

As always in Poe, the landscape is a mirror for the psyche. And what else could Pym’s tortured meanderings through the hold of the ship resemble more closely and harrowingly than the mental and emotional travails of the black slave in transport during the Middle Passage. Pym is terrified, confused,

hungry, thirsty, unable to understand what is happening to him --or why. He feels betrayed, mistreated, abandoned. He has been consigned to an "ironbound box...nearly four feet high, and full six long, but very narrow" (61), for an indeterminate time, and he experiences "[e]very species of calamity and horror" (65). When we compare this experience of Pym's with that of the (also "ironbound") black slave crossing the Atlantic, stacked on bare wooden racks like books on a crowded shelf ("every man was allowed a space six feet long by sixteen inches wide and usually about two feet, seven inches high),"¹⁸ the similarities are both striking and undeniable. In fact, to illustrate this point, notice how, when read in tandem, the discreteness of the ensuing passages is blurred by their similitude --so much so, in fact, that one might seem but a continuation of the other:

My sensations were those of extreme horror and dismay. In vain I attempted to reason on the probable cause of my being thus entombed. I could summon up no connected chain of reflection, and sinking on the floor, gave way, unresistingly, to the most gloomy imaginings, in which the dreadful deaths of thirst, famine, suffocation, and premature interment, crowded upon me as the prominent disasters to be encountered....In a few moments [I] became alarmed at the insufferable stench and closeness of the atmosphere. [I] could not think it possible that I had survived my confinement for so long a period breathing so oppressive an air.

I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I never had experienced in my life; so that with the loathsomeness of the stench...I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything. I now wished for the last friend, Death, to relieve me..... The stench of the hold...was so intolerably loathsome that it was dangerous to remain there for any time...it became absolutely pestilential...the whole scene of horror almost inconceivable.

The first passage is, of course, spoken by Pym.¹⁹ And much like second citation, it is characterized by thoughts of death, feelings of horror, the physical experience of suffocation, and an attack upon the olfactory sense so pernicious as to poison the viscera or render one senseless. And it would not be surprising, although it cannot be proved, in fact, that this passage is actually based on the second--which was written nearly fifty years earlier by Olaudah Equiano in his own *Narrative*.²⁰

From both a literary and historical perspective, it might be interesting to note the unexpected irony of the fact that Equiano's work was the much greater "popular" success. But it is even more important to notice how remarkably like Equiano's account of his own Middle Passage is Poe's rendition of Pym's. And it is difficult to imagine that the resemblances were purely accidental or unintentional. Even if it was not specifically Equiano's *Narrative* that inspired Poe's depiction

of Pym's "detested place of confinement" (97) within the bowels of a ship, then, in all likelihood, it could have been any one or more of an increasingly available number of similar slave narratives that provided Poe with the graphic details for his "incarceration" (80) episode. Keeping in mind Poe's attempt to appeal to a popular audience with *Pym*, and recognizing the public's zeal for slave narratives, some of which included (not unintentionally sensationalistic) accounts of the horrors of the Middle Passage, the possibility increases that Poe relied upon such narratives in order to strike a familiar chord in his readers' minds. Too many telling details coincide for the comparison to be dismissed as coincidence.

In fact, to extrapolate from these details is to see that Pym's entire voyage parallels a Middle Passage as much as, if not more than, it resembles the traditional sea voyage of the mythic hero. After all, Pym experiences no spiritual rejuvenation. His initiation, rather than an educative introduction into the mysteries of the world, consists of a series of atrocities (murder, cannibalism), racism, hypocrisies, and deceptions. Nor does he return to the phenomenal world with any particular boon to share with his community. Instead, the horrors of

many a Middle Passage are detailed in the series of ghastly calamities that beset the narrator: betrayal, butchery, cannibalism, inhumation, loss of loved ones, dislocation, relocation to strange and threatening new lands. Using Equiano's *Narrative* alone as a point of comparison, we see that just as Africans (including Equiano himself) often were sold into slavery by their own people, so Pym is betrayed by the mutineers aboard the *Grampus*. In the second chapter of his *Narrative*, Equiano tells of both his fear of being eaten and his heart-wrenching abduction and separations, first from his family, and then from the sister who was seized along with him. Pym, of course, partakes in cannibal acts, and survives the loss of every person (except one, Dirk Peters) that he sailed with on two ships. He suffers the demise of his dearest friend, Augustus, with whom he had formed an attachment so close that, at one point, Pym said: "It is probable, indeed, that our intimate communion had resulted in a partial interchange of character" (57). Both Pym and Equiano witness (and sometimes endure) savage acts of violence, brutality and murder. And after being forced to brook the indescribable anguish of captivity within the hold of a ship, each lands in his respective nightmare world, Equiano in White-America and Pym in Black-Tsalal.

Within his strategy of what has been called Poe's overall racist project of literary productions, there exists the keenly ironic possibility he unwittingly made representations that, in their verisimilitude, imitated the slave narratives, like Equiano's, which were being used by Abolitionists in their campaign to elicit sympathy (and outrage) over the plight of the black slaves in America. Or perhaps somewhere deep, deep within the labyrinths of his own mind and heart, Poe felt the tug of his own conscience and humanity--an undertow of compassion for the wretched conditions and treatment of Black American slaves that could only find expression in the tortured voyage of one Arthur Gordon Pym, Poe's own *doppelganger*. It is possible that, almost in spite of himself, Poe sought release from the obsessive fears and racial fanaticism that seemed to consume him. For in this release was also the possibility of redemption. It is possible also that, given these circumstances, Poe was imitating Pym, who, "actuated by one of those fits of perverseness which might be supposed to influence a spoiled child," drained the last drop of his only remaining provision and then dashed the vessel "furiously upon the floor" (79)--only to have this act serve as his salvation when Augustus hears the

crash and comes to his rescue. Perhaps something in Poe, in his own undeniable perverseness, was smashing his own vessel (racial agenda) in the hope it would transform his *brig* into a more humane *craft*. This may even help to explain the meaning of perhaps the most enigmatical line spoken by someone other than Pym in the entire *Narrative*; that is, when the nefarious black cook throws the bound and handcuffed Augustus “into a lower berth...with the assurance that he [Augustus] should never put his foot on deck again ‘until the brig was no longer a brig.’” In response to which Pym opines: “it is hardly possible to say what precise meaning was intended by the phrase. The whole affair, however, proved the ultimate means of my relief...”(88). Could it be that Poe, in the midst of his great racist tract, was offering a testament to the inhuman conditions of slavery? Or maybe, in some unconsciously desperate manner, he was attempting to store, like the narrator of “Bartleby”, some sweet morsel for his conscience. For one like Poe, stricken though he was by a deep-seated racial phobia, he *must* have sensed--somewhere, somehow--the pure evil of slavery. And these realizations must have warred within him somewhere, and sought perhaps to find in the release of expression some “ultimate means of...relief.”

Whatever creditability or plausibility that can be assigned to the foregoing reading of Pym's Middle Passage, it is clear that any sympathy Poe may have expressed for the Black/Africanist presence in *Pym* was an aberration from his public postures and from the racist strategies of the overall text. With the possible exception of Nu-Nu, all of the Black characters in *Pym* are depicted as evil, bloodthirsty savages. And Nu-Nu had to be *bound and silenced* in order to fulfill his function within the novel. For it is his silence (and ultimate death) that authorizes Pym's version of the tale: "Nu-Nu cannot (and must not) tell his story to the white world. His silence and death provide another proof for racialism as it confirms 'white' identity."²¹ Indeed, what Richard Drinnon has observed about the colonial "civilizer's" predilection for the dispossession of many native peoples is equally true for the proslavery advocates like Poe. It was the experience that became the "defining and enabling experience" and the means by which they "conquered an identity for themselves."²² Just before Nu-Nu is shot and captured by Pym (and Peters), the escaping duo kill several "savages" --with the effect, Pym tells us, of "leaving us completely masters of the field" (231). Which is a role, an *identity*, that suits

Pym as much as it would a slaveholder in America (or a pro-slavery partisan like Poe). Having achieved this comforting self-definition, Pym can now deign to spare (temporarily) Nu-Nu's life. Thus, he takes Nu-Nu hostage, and deceives himself into thinking he has obtained important information from the now "perfectly submissive...prisoner" (231, 235)--even though Nu-Nu is said to have communicated exclusively through "idiotic gesticulations" (238). Until finally, however, Pym reveals his moral (and human) obtuseness when he remains steadfast in his refusal (or inability) to understand the black's "terror" over what is so clearly a totemic whiteness. Apparently clueless as to the racial allegory that is being enacted, Pym says, simply, Nu-Nu "appeared to be too utterly overcome by terror to afford us any rational reply" (238).

The fact is, however, Nu-Nu's seeming torpor is not really so different from Pym's own state of mind. Which should not be surprising considering what each of them has been through. Earlier, upon first being rescued by the *Jane Guy*, Pym had said of his harrowing adventures aboard the *Grampus* --his Middle Passage--the "incidents are remembered, but not the feelings which the incidents elicited at the time of their occurrence" (163). Now, less than two pages from the end of his narrative,

Pym says, “it would seem reasonable that we should experience some alarm at the turn events were taking--but we felt none....I felt *numbness* of body and mind--a dreaminess of sensation--but this was all” (237). This is the portrait of a mind traumatized, in shock. It is a mind capable of a blood-chilling rationalization like the one invoked by Pym to deflect responsibility for the Tsalalian genocide. In his (perhaps vain) belief that the *Jane Guy's* “constant tendency to the southward” (188) was effected by his prodding of Captain Guy, Pym says, with the cool distance and aplomb of the Nazi geneticist:

While, therefore, I cannot but lament the most unfortunate and bloody events which immediately arose from my advice, I must still be allowed to feel some degree of gratification at having been instrumental, however remotely, in opening to the eye of science one of the most intensely exciting secrets which has ever engrossed its attention. (186-7)

The “unfortunate...events” that Pym “cannot but lament” consisted of the loss of fifty to sixty crew members from the *Jane Guy*, in addition to the death of “[p]erhaps a thousand” of the black Tsalalians, “while at least an equal number were desperately mangled. The whole surface of the bay was literally strewn with the struggling and drowning wretches, and on the

shore matters were even worse" (218). By the end of his narrative, as Pym floats seemingly directionless upon a sea of "milky hue" amidst a "falling white powder" (237), in the company of a black and a "half-breed", Pym appears to be as benumbed and insentient as his captive. This is not the "partial interchange of character" that Pym claimed to have experienced with Augustus. But it does represent an identification foregrounded by the earlier, shared experience of the two. As Pym had said: "this species of partial oblivion is usually brought about by a sudden transition, whether from joy to sorrow or from sorrow to joy" (163). And now, as the "sullen darkness" hovers suddenly above them (238) and "materially increase[s]," it is apparent that another such transition is taking place. Nu-Nu stirs momentarily but, significantly, Pym says that "upon touching him, we found his spirit departed" (239).

Is there actually a note of tenderness here, implausible as it may seem? Is it possible that Pym, too, like Poe, was expressing an unconscious remorse for his actions and bigotries? Perhaps it is important to notice that at the very moment after Nu-Nu's death, in the last sentences of his narrative, Pym says:

**And now we rushed into the embraces of the cata-
ract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us.**

But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow.
(239)

Pym does not say that he is *drawn* into the “cataract” or “chasm,” as we might expect. Rather, he uses the active voice --as if to express his volition. His own journey has led him, it would seem, to the brink of extinction. And, at nearly the precise moment that Nu-Nu expires--yet another racially motivated death caused by the narrator--Pym, guilt-stricken and overcome by what he has seen and done, *rushes* to the embrace his own demise. What “saves” him, however, is not *God* or any other of the many versions of a transcendent reality which have been proposed.²³ Instead, it is Poe himself who fashions his hero’s escape into an anthropomorphized vision of the *whiteness* that had been his lifelong sanctuary against the menacing chimera of the Black/Africanist presence. The sea had taken Pym and Poe through a Middle Passage as far as Poe’s blanched sensibilities would allow, it seems. In the end, his sea engulfs him as much as it does Pym. Literally, at the end, the sea in *Pym* is “usually smooth, never so rough as to endanger the canoe.” But it is subject, at times, to fits of “violent agitation” (237). And it is in this respect that it em-

blematizes the dark spectre of the Black/Africanist presence, whose bitter resentment was correctly presumed by Poe to be smoldering beneath the surface of America. The blank sea, like the black body, had seduced Poe with terror and promises of gain. But the problem lay in trying to gain control over one or the *other*.

When Poe turned to the sea as the meta/physical setting for his tale, he could not possibly have known just how inept a “thought-diver” he was in this regard. Melville, whose years at sea make Poe’s experience seem relatively vicarious, would understand more nobly the powerful influence of the “masterless” ocean²⁴--especially the unconscious leverage it could exert upon the writer. And where Poe’s racial phobias forced him and his narrator to escape into a vision of “perfect whiteness” (239)--the result of both his terrifying encounter with blank/blackness and his inability to make the disparate elements of his novel cohere--Melville would pursue “the shadow” that plagued America with full awareness of the “remorseless fang” that lurked beneath the “velvet paw.” *Pym* represents, on a number of levels, Poe’s attempt to grapple with the demons of *the deep*--his own and those of the sea. But his effort ends in a form of retreat from the seemingly endless and irreconcila-

ble dualities that confronted him. It is possible that Poe's encounter with the sea--in all its alluring terror--helped to occasion the mysterious grafting of elements from the slave narrative onto a sea tale whose racist, ulterior motives seem to stand in contradistinction to such abolitionist "propaganda." But it is difficult to say anything with certainty about a work that so often concerns itself with the impossibility of *knowing*. And for once, then, it is easy to agree with Pym himself, that ever-didactic but unreliable narrator, when he says: "In no affairs of mere prejudice, pro or con, do we deduce inferences with entire certainty even from the most simple data" (57).

Notes

- 1 Here we should recall the review of *Wyandotté*, where Poe insists that only a writer who is "distrustful of his powers" should stoop to the level of writing sea fiction, due to the "excessively hackneyed" nature and history of the genre.
- 2 Strictly speaking, this fact is not divulged until the opening page of the Pym's actual narrative, which follows the "Preface."
- 3 So many critics and scholars have detailed the biographical similarities between Pym and Poe that it seems quite superfluous to do so here. Bonaparte's early Freudian reading of the text set the precedent and, with the exception of some postmodernists, deconstructionists, and those theorists who analyze the metatextual suggestiveness of the narrative, nearly every commentator on *Pym* has, to a certain extent, followed suit.
- 4 We should remember here that *Pym* was published without Poe's name included as its author.

- 5 *Southern Literary Messenger*, July, 1836; reprinted in *Essays and Reviews*, pp. 5-12.
- 6 *Essays and Reviews*, pp. 1231-32.
- 7 Originally published in *Graham's Magazine*, September, 1843; reprinted in *Essays and Reviews*, pp. 1235-52. Subsequent citations appear within parentheses in the text and refer to the pagination in *Essays and Reviews*.
- 8 Reynolds is quoted in the review as follows: "Reflecting on the pictures we have sketched of our *interests* in that immense region, all must admit, that the armament of the expedition should be sufficient to protect our flag; to succor the unfortunate of every nation, who may be found on desolate islands, or among hordes of savages; a power that would be sufficient by the majesty of its appearance, to awe into respect and obedience the fierce and turbulent, and to give facilities to all engaged in the great purposes of the voyage...the calculations of the wise are generally secured by the strength of their measure" (pp. 1245-46).
- 9 "Paulding/Slavery" review, p. 29.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 11 Similarly, in two of Poe's shorter sea fictions, "Manuscript Found in a Bottle" (1833) and "A Descent into the Maelstrom" (1841), the narrative moves (literally and symbolically) from the open space of the ocean to the inner recesses or vortices of supernatural whirlpools. The earlier story ends with the narrator disappearing into the vortex of one of these abysmal eddies: "we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool--and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering ocean and of tempest, the ship is quivering, oh God! and going down." In the later work, the narrator describes a "funnel vast in circumference, prodigious in depth" into which he, too, is about to be swallowed, "along the black walls, and far away down into the inmost recesses of the abyss." See *Edgar Allan Poe, The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings* (London and New York: Penguin, 1986), pp. 109 and 238.
- 12 See Burton Pollin's "Introduction" to the *Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, pp. 1-16.
- 13 See Joan Tyler Mead, "Poe's 'Manual of Seamanship,'" in Kopley, pp. 20-32.
- 14 J. Gerald Kennedy, "Decomposing the Textual Body," in Kopley, p. 174.
- 15 Dana Nelson, "Ethnocentrism Decentered: Colonialist Motives in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*," in her excellent collection of essays, *The Word in Black and White: Reading "Race" in American*

- Literature 1638-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 94.
- 16 Joseph DeFalco, "Modernist Prose and Its Antecedents," in Springer, *America and the Sea*, p. 289.
 - 17 As Douglas Robinson points out in "Reading Poe's Novel: A Speculative Review of *Pym* Criticism, 1950-1980," *Poe Studies*, 15 (1982), pp. 47-54, these mythic readings began, of course, with Marie Bonaparte's landmark Freudian reading. And indeed the works of Bachelard, Fiedler, Grace Farrell Lee and others seem to have taken their cues from Bachelard's pioneering effort.
 - 18 Daniel P. Mannix and Malcolm Cowley, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518-1865* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 107.
 - 19 Two points need to be explained or clarified here. Firstly, the passage from *Pym* is actually a merging of two passages from pages 70 and 94. And secondly, for the sake of consistency in the narrative voice and person, I have taken the liberty of exchanging the first-person "I" for the third-person "he." In the second portion of the quotation in question, Pym is actually describing Augustus' reaction to the squalor of his friend's entombment.
 - 20 Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative* (1789; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1995), pp. 56 and 58. Apropos my subsequent remarks in the text, it should be pointed out that Equiano's *Narrative* was published in thirty-six editions between 1789 and 1850.
 - 21 Nelson, p. 105.
 - 22 Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-hating and Empire-building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), p. 461.
 - 23 As David Ketterer notes in "Tracing Shadows: *Pym* Criticism, 1980-1990" (in Kopley, p. 265): "Hints at baptism, communion, and the white figure as Christ have been noted, more or less incidentally, by *Pym* critics over the years." Levin, for example, in *The Power of Blackness*, proposes that the "whiteness of the snow is suggestively that of the raiment of the angel, who announces that the sepulcher is empty in the gospel of St. Mark" (p. 117). But the best "sustained Christian reading of *Pym*" is Richard Kopley's own essay, "The 'Very Profound Under-current' of Arthur Gordon Pym," in *Studies in the American Renaissance 1987*, ed. Joel Myerson (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987), pp. 143-75.
 - 24 *Moby-Dick*, 58; 235.

Chapter Four

Loomings :

Melville, the Sea, and the *Universal Thump*

Looming (*lu* min). vbl. sb¹ [f. Loom v.² + -ing]
A coming indistinctly into view.

(*OED*)

I love an indefinite, infinite background--
a vast, heaving, rolling, mysterious rear!
(Melville, *White-Jacket*)

You must have plenty of sea-room to tell the
Truth in, especially, when it seems to have an
aspect of newness, as America did in 1492,
though it was then just as old, and perhaps
older than Asia, only those sagacious philoso-
phers, the common sailors, had never seen it
before; swearing it was all water and moon-
shine there.

(Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses")

Nay, be a Columbus to whole new continents
and worlds *within* you, opening new channels,
not of trade, but of thought.

(Thoreau, *Walden*)

When Melville said, in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," that he
"must have plenty of *sea-room* to tell the Truth in" (my italics),
he seemed to be acknowledging the fact that his own idea of
Truth was best expressed by his apprehension and experience
of the sea itself: expansive, deep, mutable, and, of course, heavi-

ly laden with contradictions. As Alfred Kazin once wrote, Melville “constantly shifted and transformed himself; the motion of the sea became his image of truth.”¹ It is a still deeper *truth*, however, that it was not simply the eternal movement of the sea that opened “the great flood-gates of the wonderworld” to Melville. For beyond its ceaseless motion, it was the “blankness” of the sea,² its inscrutability, that made it the ideal image of the “ungraspable phantom of life” and, therefore, as Ishmael tells us in *Moby-Dick*, “the key to it all” (1; 14). As became increasingly evident in his writings as he matured, Melville grew more and more distrustful of people, ideologies, and literature whose univocal opinions did not reflect the ambiguity and complexity that he himself had come, in time, to insist upon as inherent to life.³ And for Melville, there was no image better capable of expressing this ambiguity and paradox than the sea itself, just as there was no *truth* to be found anywhere that these oxymoronic qualities were absent.

Perhaps this helps to explain why the sea and his shipboard experiences proved to be so meaningful to Melville in his life and writings; and why the sea became for him so crucial a trope and setting for his meta/physical explorations of yet another enig-

matic aspect or figuration of “blankness”—the Black/Africanist peoples who challenged both his moral/social constitution and his artistic imagination whenever and wherever he encountered them: at sea, in foreign lands, and, most tragically, in his homeland. For like the blank sea itself, replete with its myriad capabilities to connote ambiguity, the black-Africanist presence in many of Melville’s writings is represented as a blank darkness and the metaphorical embodiment of contradictory elements and attitudes that Melville perceived as simultaneously alluring and threatening. In addition to this, just as the sea, in all its “unshored, harborless immensities” surpasses all other images in Melville as the quintessential figuration of uncertainty, a blank slate upon which he inscribed his (and his nation’s) deepest fears and most cherished romantic longings, so also did Melville seem to recognize the black-Africanist presence as a blank darkness upon which Americans (including, at times, himself) could transfer inner conflicts of fear and loathing, desire and love.⁴ Like the formless and “portentous...black mass of something hovering in the centre” of a painting described in the “Spouter-Inn” chapter of *Moby-Dick* (3; 20), so the black-Africanist presence seems to hover in the center of Melville’s sea canvasses as a touchstone to his own racial fears and confusions; more-

over, it is a looming and “indefinite” figure of “[s]uch unaccountable masses of shades and shadows,” as Ishmael says, that any attempt to classify or explain away its complexity is as pointless and misguided as the effort “to delineate chaos bewitched.” Instead, what we see in Melville’s depiction of this black-Africanist presence is similar to what Ishmael sees in the painting, 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...” (3; 20).

In his sea fiction, Melville’s representations of blacks reveal a similar picture. They are at times murky and ambiguous, but, in the end, they testify to his heroic effort to force a recognition of the humanity--indeed, the “sublimity”--of the black race. By the time he wrote *Benito Cereno* in 1855, his figuration of the black-Africanist presence would still be cloaked within his now familiar narrative masks and deceptions, just as his own attitudes and sympathies would remain mostly hidden to all but the “lynx-eyed reader” of his works. But, in *Benito*--a work that can be read as Melville’s dirge to the once flourishing tradition of sea narratives, as well as his most pessimistic incanta-

tion about the virulence of racism in both the New and Old World Americas--it is the black characters who, through the force of their intelligence, courage, and guile, have seized control (however briefly) of the ship-of-state previously governed by Old World racisms and New World racists. Gone are the early, stereotyped figures of literary convention, "the jolly little Negro," Billy Loon, and the "poor old black cook" Baltimore, the latter of whom was depicted as the pitiable and "altogether too good-natured" representative of an "easy tempered people" (*Omoo*, 41). They have been replaced by powerful, dynamic, highly individualized characters such as the "noble" and "imperial" Dagoo, the "royal" Atufal, and the master dramaturge himself, the "hive of subtlety" who masterminds a shipboard revolt, Babo. As we shall see, these transformations represent a stunning and radical departure from the literary conventions of the time, a boldly subversive attempt by Melville to reconfigure the implicit limits of an already well-established genre, sea literature, in order to dramatize and highlight the "atheistical inequity" of slavery and the people who helped to perpetuate this "peculiar institution."

To focus attention upon the black-Africanist presence in

what I call Melville's *sea of opposites* is to see a profound connection between the way each is confronted and represented, and how each establishes a dialectical corollary for understanding the metaphysical relationship between the two. Indeed, an examination of Melville's sea literature from *Typee* through *Moby-Dick* reveals a consistent concern on his part with the ways in which his own attitudes toward race, slavery, and the black-Africanist presence were shaped by his experiences at sea, as well as his experiences *of* the sea. Not only did the sea provide the impressionable young Melville with a trove of worldly experiences as a common sailor, including uncommonly close and prolonged contact with blacks (who were not then generally supposed to be the equals of whites). But it also served as his training ground for contemplating "ontological heroics" and the "problems of the universe," as he would later describe his "meditations on the unanswerable" in a letter to his often reluctant friend, Nathaniel Hawthorne.⁵ At sea, the young Melville's culture-bound preconceptions about race and alien cultures were quickly (and keenly) tested, as his contact with cultural and racial *others* forcibly shocked his sensibilities and aroused a humanitarian sympathy.⁶

Created, almost incrementally as he progressed through his works, was an awareness of the need for something more than mere tolerance of these racialized others, especially and most urgently the black-Africanist race whose presence in the United States was rending the nation, besetting his family allegiances, and infiltrating the tenor and thrust of his own literary productions. What becomes evident in Melville's sea literature during the 1846-1851 period, I would argue, is a pattern of literary and personal development in which ignorance, innocence, and genial tolerance of blacks were replaced by more enlightened attitudes (which Melville himself had gained from his experience working with blacks at sea) and righteous indignation over their heinous mistreatment. And while some continue to maintain that Melville's own ambivalence about blacks and their plight is discernible throughout his life and works,⁷ I would argue that the cumulative effect of Melville's representation of the black-Africanist presence in his sea narratives makes it clear that he saw slavery as a great evil and blight upon his country's moral and political constitution. As we will see, not even the literary ambiguity which frequently characterizes his narratives can occlude Melville's liberal-minded efforts to champion the recognition of a "common continent of men," where understanding and accept-

ance are not only possible but desirable among all races of “fellow beings.” Although Ishmael’s command to “squeeze hands all around...squeeze ourselves into each other...squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness” (94; 349) may seem an intoxicated plea for an impossible fraternity among humanity, it reveals, I think, at least on a figurative level, one of Melville’s devoutest wishes. “[I]f we reject this brotherhood now,” he had written in a review of “Mr. Parkman’s Tour” in 1849, “we shall be forced to join hands hereafter.”⁸

Certainly among the most incendiary “problems of the universe” for Melville and America in the period between 1846 and 1851, when Melville wrote the bulk of his fiction, were the highly volatile issues of race, slavery and the black-Africanist presence in a nation whose founding principles were supposed to be based upon the inalienable equality of all men. At the same time, these issues were the most likely to evoke exactly the grossest (and most dangerous) kinds of platitudes, stereotyping, and skewed moral certainty to which Melville’s life and writings stand in sharp repudiation. Melville well knew the difficulty of challenging his audience’s settled convictions, but he was also

aware that the slavery issue represented “one of the most obvious...of America’s failures to live up to the promises inscribed in the Declaration of Independence to offer liberty to all of its people.”⁹ In the overt antislavery and anti-racist sentiments that he expressed in virtually all of his writings, and especially in the increasing complexity of motivation and personality that he accorded the black characters in his works, Melville provided dramatic counterpoints to the dominant images of the black race at the time, the racist images that were rooted in witless generalities whose basis (the concept of stereotype) precluded consideration of blacks as human beings, and instead reduced them to formulas or relegated them to subhuman status.¹⁰ At a time when blacks were often perceived in terms of contrasting stereotypes of the “hard” and “soft” varieties--bestial, savage, or dangerously oversexed versus docile, childlike, and religious--Melville knew that the effect of such distorted generalizations would help to perpetuate the lie of his nation’s promise of liberty and justice for all. Because the basic thrust of such stereotypes was to deny the very humanity of the black race, Melville knew also that public acceptance of these stereotypes helped to sanction continued oppression of blacks and to deprive them of any claim to equality by law:

In fact, the growing popularity of racialist thinking, with its emphasis on contrasting stereotypes, seems to have led to a change in the character of the debate over Negro personality and prospects. The discussion of the 1830s had been largely a dialogue between environmentalist defenders of a single human nature and proponents of deep-seated racial differences; the dialogue of the 1840s and 1850s tended increasingly to start from a common assumption that the races differed fundamentally. The biological school saw the Negro as a pathetically inept creature who was a slave to his emotions, incapable of progressive development and self-government because he lacked the white man's enterprise and intellect. But those who ascribed to the priority of feeling over intellect sanctioned both by romanticism and evangelical religion could come up with a strikingly different concept of Negro "differences." Whereas scientists and other "practical" men saw only weakness, others discovered redeeming virtues and even evidences of black superiority.¹¹

That Melville was one of this latter group of "others [who] discovered virtues and even evidences of black superiority" will become increasingly evident as the discussion here examines the the development of the Black/Africanist presence in his works.

What I propose to do in the following chapters is to examine how, from *Typee* through *Moby-Dick*, Melville's revision of certain conventions and stereotypes that related to matters of race, slavery, and the Black/Africanist presence, especially those that prevailed in the vast sea literature of his era, represented a subversive reform effort on his part. These works reflect, I suggest, his desire to create a new and heightened aware-

ness of the platitudes and arrogances indulged by most Americans to camouflage the contradictions which are inherent in the very idea of a slaveholding nation such as America. At the same time, I attempt to subsume this argument within a wider endeavor to explore the interaction, or relationship, between these two subjects that are repeatedly figured by Melville in his writings: the sea and race--but more specifically, the sea and the race of African blacks. For to examine this conjunction is to see, first, how inextricably bound together these themes were in Melville's mind and art. And secondly, it becomes apparent how his depiction of the Black/Africanist presence in his sea fictions came to represent a significant advance in the serious treatment of the black race in American literature. As mentioned in a previous chapter, a number of reputable critics (Fiedler, Dayan, Morrison) believe that Poe was the first major American author to invest his work with something more than the predictable stereotyping of black figures, even though all acknowledge readily the fact that Poe resorted, more often than not, to just such traditional representations. But, as both the grotesque horror of the Tsalalian episode in *Pym* and Pym's escape into the refuge of *whiteness* at the end of his sea narrative would seem to attest, Poe's fear and mistrust of the black race signalled, finally, an evasion of *seri-*

ous consideration of the problem of racialized *otherness* , specifically the Black/Africanist presence in an agitated, racially-torn America.

Melville, on the other hand, while not exempt from an occasional use of stereotyped figures of black humor or negro buffoonery, especially in his early writings, also made it a point to imbue these stock black characters with a modicum of dignity. And in his later works he endowed ostensibly stereotyped figures such as Fleece and Pip with an unprecedented complexity and with fully delineated human qualities that enabled them to transcend their conventionally expected roles. As we shall see, it was no accident that this transformation was effected in the sea literature of the era. For as Melville recognized, the sea made possible a form of literary license that provided a venue in which otherwise tabooed subjects, like mass murder, cannibalism, racial genocide, and the Black/Africanist presence could be presented with less fear of the moral and literary restrictions usually imposed upon land-based domestic fictions.¹² By removing his racially-charged meditations from the land and shifting them to the high seas of romantic adventure and conquest--where exoticism, primitivism, and barbarism were per-

missible, if not expected--Melville was not only making use of a natural setting that was most familiar and compelling to himself as a result of his experience at sea. He was recognizing, at the same time, the profound connection that had been created in his own mind between the sea and the black race by the frequent historical and literary representations of each, as well the metaphysical and mythical import that such representations seemed to suggest to him. Indeed, the very *otherness* of both the sea and the black race situated them jointly as literal and metaphorical emblems of the Known-as-Unknown, the Wild-yet-Conquered, and the Feared-but-Loved. All these paradoxical figurations pervade Melville's writings and demonstrate the extent to which Blacks and the sea were connected, dramatically in his mind, and probably unconsciously in the public's, by their shared oppositions. As symbiotic manifestations of the "everlasting *terra incognita*" (58; 235), both the blank sea and the black race were represented as fathomless composites of unknown intimates and beloved enemies. Together, they represented the inscrutable blanks upon which Melville inscribed his nation's deepest fears and most desperate longings, its venerable myths and its revered (if reconstructed) histories.

Historical and Literary Backgrounds

The historical associations between the sea and African-Americans were rooted in the tragic, almost imponderable sea diaspora that has come to be known as the Middle Passage, the forced transport of Africans to the New World that was likely the “most traumatizing mass human migration in modern history.”¹³ It has been estimated that between 1619, when the first Africans were brought to American soil, and the end of the Civil War in 1865, between fifteen and sixty *million* blacks were made to suffer the unspeakable horrors associated with the slave trade.¹⁴ And although the enormity of such an unrelentingly pernicious “event” might seem to defy description or produce severe psychological numbing and detachment,¹⁵ “the wickedness of this odious business”¹⁶ seems instead to have produced quite the opposite effect upon a legion of eyewitnesses and commentators on the trade. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, newspapers and periodicals were rife with reports of an ongoing slave trade right up to the years immediately preceding the Civil War, despite the fact that the trade had been legally abolished in America in 1808. And the American press, in

particular, would firm the public's impression of the African blacks' historical connection to the sea and the slave trade with its assiduous coverage of two slave revolts that occurred at sea between 1839 and 1841. The news of these insurrections dominated headlines nationwide for months immediately following their respective occurrences aboard the *Amistad* and *Creole*, and the various legal and moral ramifications of each resurfaced with great regularity until the late 1850s, when the darkening specter of an impending civil war made old news of all other news.¹⁷

In addition to the widespread publicity generated by the contemporary press was a long roster of individuals on both sides of the Atlantic who had written about the barbarism of the slave trade and the Middle Passage since the first half of the eighteenth century.¹⁸ Many of these narratives were published in England, of course; but, given the original colonies' political ties to that country, as well as the later America's continued reliance upon English literary publications well into the nineteenth century, it was not at all uncommon for Americans to have easy access to books printed overseas, especially London. And this motley collection included writers who were both black and

white, as well as an extensive array of observers and witnesses, some of whom in the former group had never seen a slave ship, but the majority of whom in the latter were active participants in this nefarious enterprise. Among them were representatives of nearly every social level: common sailors, ships' captains, doctors, lawyers, ministers, legislators, abolitionists, novelists, and even the black victims of the the trade themselves. In a uniquely perverse instance, the same writer, one John Newton, was both a slave ship captain *and* a minister.¹⁹

So great was the volume and availability of these accounts of the slave trade between the Revolution and the Civil War that the American reading public could hardly have avoided coming into contact with at least some of the writings related to the subject. The horrific magnitude of the slave trade itself and the sensationalistic aspects of the Middle Passage, in particular, were so widely disseminated among the general population that even the illiterate portions of society would have had a fair acquaintance with some of the facts and legends culled from the diverse accounts that were in print at the time. These, it seems, would have been conveyed to them either in everyday social conversation or, as was certainly the case for many, in their churches, where the slavery question in general was widely discussed

and hotly debated. As the writer for a Boston workingmen's paper, *The New Era*, said in 1848, "You cannot touch a single question of general policy in which slavery does not get some moral thrust. It cannot be avoided."²⁰

For the reading public, in particular, however, details of the slave trade in black flesh would likely have proven inescapable, as Emerson implied in his address on "Emancipation in the British West Indies," which was delivered in the courthouse at Concord, Massachusetts, in 1844 (scarcely two months before Melville returned from almost four years at sea). "I am sick at heart," Emerson said, "when I *read* how they [the black Africans] came there, and how they are kept there....Language must be raked, the secrets of slaughter-houses and infamous holds that cannot front the day, must be ransacked, to tell what negro slavery has been" (my emphasis).²¹ And although he does not enumerate his sources, what follows makes it quite clear that Emerson had not only gleaned a passel of grisly details from his readings. In fact, more significant to the present study is the explicit awareness he avows in the opening words of this passage about the profound historical association between African blacks and the Middle Passage itself:

For the negro, was the slaveship to begin with, in whose filthy hold he sat in irons, unable to lie down; bad food, and insufficiency of that; disfranchisement; no property in the rags that covered him; no marriage, no right in the poor black woman that cherished him in her bosom,—no right to the children of his body; no security from the humors, none from the crimes, none from the appetites of his master: toil, famine, insult, and flogging; and when he sunk in the furrow, no wind of good fame blew over him, no priest of salvation visited him with glad tidings: but he went to death, with dusky dreams of African shadow-catchers and Obeahs hunting him.²²

The syntax here is awkward, but the power of Emerson's opening words resonates with historical meaning: "*For the negro, was the slaveship to begin with*" As must have been true for many Americans at the time, the figure of the African-American was inextricably bound to the slave ship in Emerson's mind. And how could it not be, at a time when reminders seemed everywhere of a slave trade that had carried millions of black people into a life of degradation and enslavement by whites, after they had first been violently wrenched from their homelands? Like many Americans, Emerson had *read* about the base and deplorable activities inherent to the Middle Passage and the slave trade, and it had made him "sick at heart" to realize the depths of their evil. His "Emancipation Address," the ostensible purpose of which was to celebrate England's abolition of slavery in all its territories and possessions, was both a lament for America's failure to abol-

ish slavery in its own territories and a reproach to all who ignored or condoned the continuing horrors of the slave trade.

Melville, too, made it a dramatic point in several of his works to remind his readers of the atrocities that took place on slave ships. In *Redburn*, for example, he features a sadistic, depraved character named Jackson, who “had served in Portuguese slavers on the coast of Africa.” This “foul lees and dregs of a man,” as the narrator/Redburn describes him, seems to enjoy regaling his shipmates with baleful accounts of the inordinate suffering of the blacks aboard these slave vessels. It is “with a diabolical relish” that he delights in recounting for the crew the grisly details of how, during “the *middle passage* ...the slaves were stowed, heel and point, like logs, and the suffocated and dead were unmanacled, and weeded out from the living every morning, before washing down the decks” (57). That Jackson was intended as a chilling example of natural depravity seems obvious; to the impressionable young Redburn, he was nothing less than “a fiend” (62). What is most revealing, however, in terms of this study, is the way in which Melville uses the *Middle Passage* to sound the depths of this character’s evil nature; for it is the inhumanity of Jackson’s cold-blooded, racist

response to blacks and the deplorable conditions of the Middle Passage that, above all, marks this Claggart-like figure as the novel's most despicable villain and, at the same time, a moral challenge both to Redburn and to Melville's audience. To remain indifferent to suffering such as that wrought by the Middle Passage is to be like Jackson, whose mirthful disregard of the blacks' torment exemplifies the base and dehumanizing conditions that the slave trade had wrought upon both those who conducted it and their unfortunate victims.

The provocative example of the horrors of the Middle Passage provided in *Redburn* represents but a single voice among many in the extensive recorded history and literature that pertained to the slave trade. And although it may be impossible to determine with which of these works Melville himself was acquainted, it is reasonable to surmise that, given his lifelong attachment to the sea and his voracious reading of every kind of sea narrative, he would surely have come across more than a few of the works that were spawned in the proliferation of writings on the various aspects of this hideous traffic in black humanity. Indeed, to whatever the extent he was consciously drawing upon the extensive literature generated by the trade, it would

seem that Melville's contributions to the subject, however original and progressive they seem, can best be viewed perhaps as capstones to an already well-established tradition. His depiction in *Redburn*, for example, of the detrimental effects that slavery and the slave trade had exerted upon both master and slave was actually but a recent figuration of a concern that was familiar to antislavery writers since 1700, when Judge Samuel Sewall published a pamphlet, "The Selling of Joseph," which many consider the first truly significant example of the Puritans' moral and religious contribution to the antislavery movement in America.

Sewall had "long intended to write something against the slave-trade,"²³ and his abolitionist pamphlet, which became so "significant in the history of anti-slave literature,"²⁴ anticipated the writings of later eighteenth-century writers like John Woolman, Anthony Benezet, and even Benjamin Franklin, all of whom denounced the trade and shared Sewall's belief in the demoralizing effect it had upon everyone involved in it, black or white. Then, in the nineteenth century, the crusade for abolition in America was taken up by the likes of William Garrison, James Russell Lowell, and Theodore Parker, to mention but a few of those who also recognized and rued the deleterious implications of the slave trade upon both its perpetrators and its victims. But Mel-

ville was neither reading nor writing, of course, from a zealously abolitionist perspective. In fact, even though his antislavery sentiments and his belief in the abolitionist cause were increasingly evident both in his fiction and his (infrequent but often racially-sensitive) prose pieces,²⁵ his refusal to enlist publicly in the abolitionist movement was typical of his reluctance to affiliate himself with any organized group or institutionalized congregation of any sort. In my opinion, Melville viewed "causes" in much the same way he perceived stereotypes, as containing perhaps an aspect of truth which was exactly that: an *aspect* of truth --a monochromatic belief lacking the required "sea-room" because of the insularity of the visions it embodies. What he may have sensed also was the fact that, although the intentions of the Abolitionists may have been decidedly more benign than the racists who promoted the "hard" stereotype of blacks in order to inspire fear and mistrust, their own adoption of the "soft" stereotype represented a form of paternalism and condescension that was actually a racist construction in disguise, no matter how mild or well-intentioned it seemed. For when they promoted these "soft" stereotypes instead of representing blacks as human beings capable of manifesting the same spectrum of virtues and

vices as whites, these “benevolent reformers” of the abolitionist movement only compounded the problem of perception that Melville sought to rectify. Their misguided embrace of such grossly racialized generalizations indicated the extent to which they all too often tended to view blacks more as *symbols* than as human beings, and more as vehicles for their social criticism than as individuals whose complexity of character was, especially for someone like Melville, what most urgently needed to be acknowledged and dramatized.²⁶

The most prominent of the white race’s stereotypes for the African-American black was likely the Sambo-Newfoundland dog-cotton-picking-slave that was depicted so regularly in the pro-slavery plantation romances of the 1820s and 1830s. In the years following the War of 1812, when many had expected that slavery would inevitably fade from the American scene, the introduction of the cotton gin changed quite suddenly and dramatically the course of the nation. Most tragically for the black slaves of the South, they became significant economic pawns for the white plantation owners who quickly recognized the huge profits that were available to them if they could use unpaid labor to process the vast amounts of cotton that could then be rendered as a re-

sult of the technological advancements offered by the cotton gin and the power loom.²⁷

As might be expected, a further result of this industrial revolution was that it necessitated also a moral reevaluation of the white slaveowners' relation to their human chattel, as well as a refiguring of their position on the institution of slavery itself. And in their morally bankrupt greed, as Tremaine McDowell has noted, "[m]any Americans now actively defended slavery where they had once merely excused it."²⁸ Foremost among these proslavery apologists, and a powerful agency by which to transmit this defense, was a group of writers that included George Tucker, William Gilmore Simms, James Kirk Paulding, and Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, whose romantic fictions idealized both the plantation blacks and the relations that supposedly existed between slaves and slaveowners. Generally, these writers presented sentimentalized portraits of blacks as infantilized creatures whose primary attributes were their loyalty and their amiability. And, in many cases, such as Hector in Simms' *The Yemassee* (1835) and a whole cast of devoted slaves in Paulding's *Westward Ho!* (1832), the blacks are depicted as being so content in their lot that they refuse offers of manumission in order to remain with their kindly masters. In an 1836 novel by Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, *George Balcombe*, there

appears a sentimental vignette that epitomizes the way in which these plantation writers promulgated the idealized relations between the honorable Southern gentry and the helpless black race whose very lives and welfare depended upon the benevolence and magnanimity of their white masters. The hero/title character of the work says of his loyal black servant:

As he spoke thus in a tone of reverential affection, I held out my hand to him. He took it, and drawing it strongly downward to accommodate the lowness of his prostration, bowed himself upon it, and pressed it to his lips. I felt a tear upon it, and if an answering tear had not sprung to my eyes, I should not have deserved to be the object of such emotion, as ardent and devoted as it was hopeless."²⁹

Such maudlin episodes abound in the plantation romances of the era, and often they are accompanied by more dialectical discourses in which the Southern slaveowner attempts to polemicize against those who question the morality of America's peculiar institution or "indulge in idle declamation about the injurious consequences of domestic slavery," as the protagonist of George Tucker's 1824 novel *The Valley of Shenandoah* argued.³⁰ Furthermore, according to this same character, Edward Grayson, any argument against the condition or continuance of slavery represents little more than a "very ingenious piece of sophistry" (60) since, given the "choice of difficulties" involved in the only possible alterna-

tive, recolonization, the best to be hoped for is honor among the slaveowners who must “endeavour to *mitigate* a disease which admits of *no cure*” (62). The possibility of emancipation is never considered, of course, as it is, however cursorily, in Paulding’s *Westward Ho!* (after the slaveowning Dangerfield family has lost its estate and forced to relocate in Kentucky), and Tucker’s conservative mouthpiece, Grayson, expostulates for the benefit of a doubting Northern visitor to his plantation:

Yet after giving the subject the most serious and attentive consideration, and finding it admitted of no other safe remedy but what time may bring some centuries hence....And while we set task-masters over our slaves--give them coarse food and clothing--and occasionally subject them to punishment--...yet neither is their situation so bad, nor ours so enviable, as you might at first suppose. They are perhaps better supplied with the necessaries of life than the labouring class of any country out of America. They have their pleasures and enjoyments according to their station and capacity, and probably enjoy as much happiness, with as few drawbacks, as any other class of our population. (63)

In one sense, this type of proslavery literature was intended to assuage the fears of white Americans who were terrified by the possibility of a slave rebellion such as the bloody uprising in Santo Domingo in 1799, a rebellion which, at the time, had excited great worry that France might marshal black troops from that newly emancipated island in order to liberate the black slaves in the United States.³¹ Closer to home in America, the Gabriel Plot of

1800, the planned insurrection led by Denmark Vesey in 1822, and most notoriously, the Nat Turner rebellion of 1831, had made most Americans keenly aware that blacks were not so genial, content, nor tractable as the sentimentalized plantation fictions had pretended. Perhaps there was also an element of trying to hide from the blacks themselves the realization of just how potent or formidable a force they might have been had they been able to band together. As the Quaker abolitionist Anthony Benezet had once written, "I know it is the general opinion, that nothing ought to be published whereby the Negroes may be made acquainted with their own strength & the apprehension of danger the whites are in from them..."³²

In the end, however, as the elements of literary realism that came to characterize the sea literature of the 1830s began to infiltrate even the plantation romance, writers like William Gilmore Simms allowed another, darker--and more fully human--side of blacks to be introduced into their erstwhile sanitized versions of proslavery cant.³³ And although tame by comparison, Simms' willingness to acknowledge the baser and more profligate aspects of black character also contained the seeds of the more odious representations of blacks as a race savage by nature and able to be

controlled or “semi-civilized” only by the constraints imposed by slavery³⁴ which are found in works like Poe’s *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. In the aforementioned *The Yemassee*, for example, upon being offered his freedom (and a house and money) by his grateful master, Gabriel Harrison, whose life he has saved, the black slave Hector refuses, predictably enough for the plantation romance, the white man’s offer of liberty:

I d--n to h--l, maussa, ef i guine to be free! ...I can't loss you company. ...'Tis onpossible, maussa, and dere's no use for talk 'bout it. De ting ain't right: and enty I know wha' kind of thing freedom is wid black man? Ha! you make Hector free, he turn wuss more nor poor buckrah--he tief our of de shop--he git drunk and lie in de ditch--den, if sick come, he roll, he toss in de wet grass of de stable. No, maussa--you and Dugdale berry good company for Hector. I tank God he so good--I no want any better.³⁵

Though it strains the credulity of the reader to accept the strange logic of Hector’s complaisant oration, the dark potentiality of self invoked in the black’s speech provides a dramatic contrast to the obsequiousness that characterized the majority of representations of the black race in the plantation romance. Here, at least, the black envisions for a moment the concept and possibility of freedom. And although his infantilized self cannot comprehend the desirability of an unmastered (and therefore uncared-for) existence, his adult self, stunted by a lifetime of servitude, recognizes its temptations. Interestingly, this concept of the duality or

“instability” of black character possessed the inchoate makings of the more complete picture that Melville seemed to strive for in his own representations of blacks. But where Melville would combine many of these character traits in one figure like Babo, or perhaps in two, like the “Siameses twins” in *Redburn* (83), the old cook Thompson and the dandified steward Lavender, most proslavery writers saw these same qualities as mutually exclusive attributes which could not be embodied in any single black individual. Writers like Simms would begin, however condescendingly, to render the subtleties and complexities of the Black/Africanist presence. But it would remain within the realm of the writers of the sea (and, of course, the slave narratives) to depict the true horror of the blacks’ ghastly experience. Finally, it would take until Melville himself began to write, that the “soft-stereotype” of the plantation romance--and, ironically, the abolitionists--was challenged by representations of blacks that were not contaminated by partisan agendas. This is not to say that Melville’s works lacked an ideological perspective; for as we will see, his portraits of blacks evince a clear and profound empathy for their inhuman suffering and an equally apparent repugnance for their inhumane treatment. But, as always in Melville, there

must be “plenty of sea-room to tell the Truth in;” which means, in this case, that the myths indigenous to the plantation romance needed to be revised accordingly.

By the time Melville had begun to write in the 1840s, however, the popularity of the sea narrative had come to rival, if not surpass, that of the plantation romance. In many of these sea-related writings, such as Poe’s *Pym*, Cooper’s *The Spy*, and J. R. Browne’s *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*,³⁶ the stereotyped images of blacks found in the earlier plantation-based fictions and propaganda pieces were simply repeated. But there were also numerous accounts of the Middle Passage and the slave trade by writers like Alexander Falconbridge, Anthony Benezet, Olaudah Equiano, and Hawthorne’s friend, Horatio Bridge, which helped both to puncture the credibility of the prevailing stereotypes and to command sympathy among some for the cruel indignities inflicted upon blacks—at sea and on American slave plantations.³⁷ In itself, of course, the impact of such works could not erase the deeply ingrained beliefs that fostered the plantation-type stereotypes. But it is reasonable to assume, I believe, given the popular appeal of the sea narrative at the time, that many of the earlier romantic generalizations about the docility and imbecility

of blacks were now being tested against the revelatory context of the sea itself. From the first Atlantic crossings and the earliest colonial settlements, the sea had come to symbolize the perils of nature to Americans,³⁸ and by the time of the Revolution, it provided an arena where blacks worked, in many cases, as virtual equals to whites. Aboard ship, a black sailor was but one of "the people" (both black and white), a distinction he shared with other common seamen under the command of the officers. But the black seaman was also subject to the same harsh conditions and omnipresent dangers as the white seamen, whom he often showed himself equal to (or better than) for having the courage and skill to withstand the rigors and hazards of life at sea--a fact which doubtless had much to do with the creation of a new stereotype in which the physical prowess and acute intelligence of blacks worked to demolish the degraded misrepresentations that had preceded it. In addition to this, sailors had authored the first six autobiographies of blacks that were published in English prior to 1800,³⁹ which perhaps makes it easier to understand how, for most of those who read them, the deconstruction of the plantation stereotypes was surely hastened.

This is not to say that the sea replaced the plantation as

the primary setting in which to figure the American black. At the very least, however, the prominence of blacks as both victims and heroes in the sea literature of the era combined with certain historical circumstances of the time to dramatize the powerful association between the sea and African blacks that has been insisted upon here. In the first place, the American reliance upon interstate slave transport by ship would have strengthened the connection between blacks and the sea, especially in the coastal states from Louisiana to New England, where blacks were seemingly ubiquitous among ships' crews and dockside workers, some of them free blacks and some enslaved⁴⁰ but working for wages that their owners would appropriate. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, it was common knowledge that the slave trade itself had not ended, and that it was still taking place during the 1840s and 1850s, in defiance of its "legal" abolition. Moreover, it was conducted on a regular basis not only in the South, as might be expected, but also, quite notoriously, in places like New York City, where Melville was born and lived the majority of his life. Even into the late 1850s, according to the New York *Leader*, a Democratic press organ, "an average of two vessels each week cleared out of our [New York's] harbor, bound for Africa and a human cargo"; while the New York *World* charged that, during the same

period, as many as “thirty to sixty thousand [black slaves] a year are taken from Africa to Cuba by vessels of the single port of New York.”⁴¹

So widespread was this knowledge, it would seem, that beginning in 1846, when Melville published *Typee* , and as late as 1856, shortly after the publication of *Benito Cereno* , a certain author would write a series of articles for the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* , the New York *Herald* , and *Life Illustrated* in which he publicized the fact that “crime-stained” slave ships were still being fitted out in, and disembarking upon their “hellish traffic” from New York City; and that they were doing so with an impunity made possible only by the laxity of enforcement of the existing laws against the slave trade. The writer estimated that the average profit margin for the owner of a slaver was close to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars per expedition, that the odds of a successful voyage were ten to one in favor, and that, in light of these facts, “it is not strange that while scoundrels live, and such profits are so sure, the slave trade continues.”⁴²

The writer, of course, was Walt Whitman; and his “reportage” did more than recount facts or challenge the integrity of those “officials” who were supposed to interdict the slave

trade. Like Melville, Whitman bore witness to the inhumanity of slavery and tried to keep its evil in the eye of public attention; though his early support of the South's right to hold slaves and his idolatry of Calhoun certainly test the morality of his claim, in *Leaves of Grass*, that contradictions are the mark of a "large" man.⁴³ Perhaps Melville felt more fundamentally than Whitman the close historical/metaphysical connections between the sea and the Black-Africanist presence, as might be expected from one whose literal and literary voyaging in the sea were both so intensive and extensive. But Whitman's apprehension of these same associations was unmistakable, and his attention to the slave trade, in particular, indicates his recognition of just how forcefully the conjunction of blacks and the sea provided both a historical and literary vehicle for reminding the American people of its complicity in the blacks' desperate predicament. By framing his "horrid vision" of slavery mainly within the "hot pestilential atmosphere" of the slaveships "during the passage across the Atlantic," Whitman echoes not only Melville's perception of the powerful ligature between blacks and the sea, but he also seconds Melville's metonymical figuration of the (slave) ship as the image which, together with the sea, most aptly embodies

the dichotomous nature of the black experience in America. For if it is true, as Melville well knew, that seafaring vessels “have long represented the union of opposites to all human beings-- slavery and freedom, exploitation and exhilaration, separation and reunion--” then it is equally true that, as W. Jeffrey Bolster has suggested, “these antipodes have been amplified for black Americans.”⁴⁴

Of all the historical and literary circumstances that forged a connection between the sea and the black race, however, it is likely that none would prove more significant to Melville and the American nation than the two slave insurrections that took place aboard the *Amistad* and *Creole* in 1839 and 1841, respectively. As previously mentioned, the legal ramifications of these revolts would last for almost two decades, a fact which not only kept the public's attention focused upon the complex legal issues involved, but which helped also both to transmute these issues into a moral struggle that became a visible symbol of America's vexing slavery problem and to sway public sympathies towards the slaves who had fought so desperately for their freedom.⁴⁵ Indeed, apart from the Nat Turner rebellion, it seems quite certain that the insurrections aboard the *Amistad* and the *Creole*

brought more public attention and debate in the antebellum era to the black African slaves' desperation and willingness to fight for their freedom than any other historical events of the time.⁴⁶ For most Americans, the profusion of sympathetic publicity and the subsequent agitation generated by each of these cases helped to create one of the most massive shifts ever witnessed in popular opinion about slavery; one in which, after a period of Delano-like paralysis and miscomprehension, the public sentiment (at least in the North) shifted dramatically in the favor of the black insurgents, even as it turned against the piratical white traders who sought restitution of their "cargoes." Typical of not only the abolitionist press but more generally the northern newspapers and periodicals as well, the *Boston Courier* expressed aptly the emerging mood of many concerning the black insurgents as early as September, 1839: "In the language of humanity they have committed no crime at all. They have attempted to regain the liberty, in which they were born, and which has been wrested from them by robbers, pirates, and murderers."⁴⁷

These insurrections, especially the *Amistad* revolt, appear also to have had a quite profound effect upon Melville's life and

and writings. As many have noticed, Melville's rendering of a similar slave ship revolt in *Benito Cereno* owes much to his awareness of the *Amistad* affair.⁴⁸ At times, it is difficult to determine, even, whether the source for certain details of his 1855 fictional tale derived more from his knowledge of the 1839 revolt off the American coast than it did from his ostensible source, *Delano's Voyages*, which describes a slave insurrection off the coast of South America in 1804. Melville had arrived home from his inaugural sea voyage to and from Liverpool aboard the *St. Lawrence* on 1 October 1839, scarcely one month after the first reports of the revolt at sea aboard the *Amistad* began to appear in the American press near the end of August. Within months, the captured African slaves would begin to elicit an "extraordinary outpouring of popular fervor," and the young Melville, fresh from the first of his sea experiences that would later be compared repeatedly to slavery,⁴⁹ was undoubtedly responsive both to the vast publicity surrounding the event and to the immense suffering of the enslaved blacks whose fates were subject to the unreliable control of a primarily white, slaveholding nation. Melville never acknowledged publicly that several of his own ancestors had been slave owners, or that at least one of his (not too) distant relations was a notorious slave-trader.⁵⁰ But it would

seem certain, given his literary treatment of blacks and slavery, that this knowledge was troubling to him. The controversies involved in the *Amistad* and *Creole* revolts must have proved to be lingering and painful reminders of a legacy he surely wished he could disavow.

The numerous written accounts of these slave ship revolts and their resultant trials were recorded both in the era's high and low forms of narrative. And increasingly, both forms grew passionately sympathetic toward the unfortunate blacks. In fact, the ongoing mass publicity surrounding the *Amistad* and *Creole* seemed to startle the nation's conscience, even as it galvanized the public's association of the black race's historical destiny with the sea. As was the case with Melville himself, this association would prove crucial to shaping a more pervasive awareness of the hegemonic injustices perpetrated upon one race (the blacks) by another (the whites). Consequently, it would lead also to a spate of writings that offered revisionist interpretations of American concepts of freedom and equality, not only by whites like Melville, Whitman, Thoreau, and others, but also by blacks like Frederick Douglass, whose short novel, *The Heroic Slave* (1853), was based on the *Creole* uprising and which, in some ways, can

be said to exceed even Melville's practice of using the sea as the setting for racial polemics. For not only was it apparent that Douglass saw in the sea a setting which afforded him (and his people) the greatest latitude for expressing the "unspeakable truths unspoken" about African blacks and the slavery question; and not only did he satirize the example and promises of the "Founding Fathers." But the black writer also gave voice to black characters in ways that the sympathetic but comparatively timorous Melville had not dared to do. Where the African blacks in Melville's works are frequently seen but seldom heard (except, of course, for the false, scripted, and equivocal voices they employed during the masquerade in *Benito*), Douglass afforded his black characters the opportunity to speak passionately and often eloquently. And when they did speak, as Madison Washington did in *The Heroic Slave* , the significance of the sea figured prominently in their words as their ultimate symbol of freedom and redemption, despite the inevitable fact that the sea must have been linked in their minds with the horrible recollection of the Middle Passage. As the leader of the slave revolt, Madison Washington, says to the white mate of the seized vessel:

Sir...your life is in my hands...I could have killed you a

dozen times over...and could kill you now. You call me a *black murderer*. I am not a murderer. God is my witness that LIBERTY, not *malice*, is the motive for this night's work. I have done no more to those dead men yonder, than they would have done to me in like circumstances. We have struck for our freedom, and if a true man's heart be in you, you will honor us for the deed. We have done that which you applaud your fathers for doing, and if we are murderers, *so were they* Mr. Mate, you cannot write the bloody laws of slavery on those restless billows. The ocean, if not the land, is free.⁵¹

As in Melville, the opposition between the land and the sea is a crucial one. But, unlike Melville, Douglass does not insist upon the antithetical qualities of each. Instead, he equates the sea, almost allegorically, with freedom, courage, and possibility. At the outset of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael turns his back on the “treacherous, *slavish* shore” (23.97; my emphasis) in order to seek “the open independence of [the] sea.” But, in the end, he vacillates and longs for the “safety, comfort, hearthstone, supper, warm blankets, [and] friends” that await him on land. For the African black, however, Douglass makes it clear that such choices are not so readily available. Nor is the land as appealing or promising as it for whites. Interestingly, in *The Heroic Slave*, it is a white man (the mate, Grant) who expresses most plainly and suggestively the blacks' connection to the sea, as well as the reasons for their devoted attachment to it:

It is quite easy to talk of flogging niggers here on land, where you have the sympathy of the community, and the whole physical force of the government, State and national, at your command; and where, if a negro shall lift his hand against a white man, the whole community, with one accord, are ready to unite in shooting him down. I say, in such circumstances, it's easy to talk of flogging negroes and of negro cowardice; but, sir, I deny that the negro is, naturally, a coward, or that your theory of managing slaves will stand the test of *salt* water. It may do very well for an overseer, a contemptible hireling, to take advantage of fears already in existence, and which his presence has no power to inspire; to swagger about whip in hand, and discourse on the timidity and cowardice of negroes; for they have a smooth sea and a fair wind. It is one thing to manage a company of slaves on a Virginia plantation, and quite another thing to quell an insurrection on the lonely billows of the Atlantic, where every breeze speaks of courage and liberty.
(70-71)

Melville, given to indirection and ambiguity, would rarely speak so directly about matters such as these. Nevertheless, he had already established the precedent of immersing *his* sea with diatribes about race and freedom. Thus, if Douglass was not consciously imitating Melville here, then perhaps his unconscious emulation is all the more telling for its evocation of a number of the very same patterns and connections that Melville had employed in all his sea narratives to that time, from *Typee* through *Moby-Dick*. Possibly, these were patterns and connections similar to those that had begun to infiltrate the thoughts and emotions of the American reading public the more it was exposed to the persistent press coverage and the various narratives relating to the slave trade, the Middle Passage, and the violent slave

insurrections at sea. For however much the ship was an emblem of the world, and however much the sea represented freedom and passage to the New World for white Euro-Americans, each had become increasingly populated with African blacks whose forced passage across the Atlantic in slave ships was a stern reminder of the liberty that was trampled and forsaken in order for the white population to achieve its own sham version of it.

In the end, perhaps, both Melville and Douglass sought the same elusive dream, the cherished but receding possibility of a true equality among races. As we have just begun to see, Melville's writings often rival even Douglass' in their racial rancor and their bitter disappointment at the inability of the nation to live up to its stated ideals. Melville, the white man of patrician background, would not have condoned Douglass' militancy or his eventual conversion from Garrisonian pacifism to the countenancing of violent slave rebellion. At any rate, he would never have been willing to risk saying so in published works. But Melville almost certainly would have approved of the black writer's literary strategies in *The Heroic Slave*, where, framed against the "lonely billows," he (Douglass) played ever so ironically upon the name of the revolt's leader, Madison Washington; first, in

order to satirize the wide hypocrisy and existing inequality among races; but also, as Eric Sundquist has noted, “to highlight the shadowed vision of the founding fathers.”⁵² After all, is this not similar to what Melville himself did just three years earlier when he had Ishmael proclaim that “Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed”? And is this not similar to what Melville would do in *Israel Potter* (published one year after *The Heroic Slave*) when he dedicated the work to “His Highness the Bunker Hill Monument” and then proceeded to invoke two Revolution-era heroes, Benjamin Franklin and John Paul Jones, only to question the benevolence (and integrity) of their intentions? Franklin (a former slave owner/seller turned abolitionist)⁵³ is described as a “labyrinth-minded” thespian who is “sly, sly, sly” and, therefore, “the type and genius of his land” --while Jones is a vainglorious, “unprincipled,” and “predatory” usurper who, like the later Delano, is ironically cast as a “representative” American.

These are not the glib portraits of famous men that the nation was accustomed to seeing. But for Melville and Douglass, it seems the time had arrived to debunk the myths of the land-- by taking them out to sea, so to speak. Viewed from the land,

through a lens incapable separating “myth” from “history,” the historical figures of Madison, Washington, Franklin, and Jones had captured the imagination of those many Americans who deemed it necessary and patriotic to preserve the (mythic) reputation of their Founding Fathers. But Melville and Douglass were not seeing through this same protective lens when they juxtaposed their historical/fictional characters against the blankness of the sea and the darkness of slavery in America. Given both the popular appeal and the unlimited metaphorical possibilities of sea literature in America at the time, both Douglass and Melville elected to utilize the sea as the primary agent in their respective attempts to rewrite American myth and history--not in glorified shades of red, white, and blue; but rather, against the ever shifting background of the sea, in sharply contrasted images of black and white.

Notes

- 1 Alfred Kazin, *An American Procession* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), p. 349.
- 2 In *Redburn*, for example, Melville's narrator says that the sea made him feel “very dreamy...I...did not exactly know where, or what I was; everything was so strange and new” (65). In *Benito Cereno*, the sea is figured as “the blank ocean” (59). And in *Moby-Dick*, Melville uses other figurations to express this same sense of blankness, as when Ishmael says, “we know the sea to be an everlasting terra incognita ” (58; 235). According to Houston Baker, many African

blacks in America during the nineteenth century, especially Southern field slaves, were also moved to identify themselves by the "blankness" that enveloped them. It seems that, since these blacks "had scarcely any *a priori* assumptions to act as stays in their quest for self-definition, so they were moved to introspection by the apparent 'blankness' that surrounded them." See *The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 30.

- 3 See Lucy Maddox, *Removals: Nineteenth Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.56.
- 4 See my discussion of Toni Morrison in the "Introduction" above; see also Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death*, especially p. 397, for his discussion of "the white man's perverse lust for the Negro."
- 5 Lynn Horth (ed.), *Correspondence* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1993), p.196. Subsequent references to this volume will be footnoted as *Letters* and include the dates of Melville's letters. The "ontological heroics" that Melville wanted to discuss with Hawthorne (over "a bottle of brandy") are mentioned in a letter dated June 29, 1851.
- 6 Many critics and scholars have discussed the importance of Melville's contact with racialized others, of course. Among the best full-length studies, I think, are: Carolyn Karcher, *Shadow Over the Promised Land* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Laurie Robertson-Lorant, *Melville: A Biography* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1996); and Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983). Also worthy of mention here is Robertson-Lorant's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Herman Melville and Race: Themes and Imagery" (New York University, 1972), which she wrote as Laurie Lorant. In a private conversation with Ms. Robertson-Lorant, I expressed my surprise--and she, her "regret"--that this work, a very fine, early example of New Historical criticism, was never published. I gratefully acknowledge my debt to both of her works cited here.
- 7 See, for example: Sidney Kaplan, "Herman Melville and the American National Sin," *Journal of Negro History*, 41 (1956), pp. 311-38, and 42 (1957), pp. 11-37; Eleanor Simpson, "Melville and the Negro: from *Typee* to 'Benito Cereno,'" *American Literature*, XLI, No. 1 (March, 1969), pp. 19-38; and Priscilla Zirker, "Evidence of the Slavery Dilemma in *White-Jacket*," *American Quarterly*, XVII (Fall, 1966), pp. 477-92.
- 8 "Mr Parkman's Tour" was originally published in *The Literary World* (March 31, 1849). It is reprinted in Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, Alma MacDougall, and G. Thomas Tanselle (eds.), *The Writings of Herman Melville, Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces 1839-1860* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1987), pp. 230-34. Years later, in 1866, Melville

would write about his joy over the demise of the institution of slavery in the "Supplement" to *Battle-Pieces*: "Those of us who always abhorred slavery as an atheistical iniquity, gladly we join in the exulting chorus of humanity over its downfall." See Hennig Cohen, (ed.), *The Battle-Pieces of Herman Melville* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff/A.S. Barnes and Company, 1963), p. 200.

- 9 Brook Thomas, *Cross-examinations of Law and Literature: Cooper, Hawthorne, Stowe, and Melville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 151.
- 10 See Seymour L. Gross, "Stereotype to Archetype: The Negro in American Literary Criticism," in Seymour L. Gross and John Edward Hardy (eds.), *Images of the Negro in American Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 1-26.
- 11 George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind; The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), p. 101.
- 12 See Ann Douglas, "Herman Melville and the Revolt Against the Reader" in *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 289-326. Another recent writer who is careful to mention the subversive significance of the sea, nautical matters, and sea literature to Melville is Reynolds in *Beneath*. See, especially, his analysis of what he calls "nautical humor" as an example of "a hitherto unnoticed type of popular American humor," pp. 540-49.
- 13 Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Black Odyssey; The Afro-American Ordeal in Slavery* (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1990), p. 25.
- 14 Despite the efforts of many to determine the number of blacks who were either transported and/or died as a result of the Middle Passage and the slave trade, it is impossible, I think, to determine even an approximate number--let alone an exact figure. The most recent and authoritative study on the subject of the trade is Hugh Thomas' *The Slave Trade; The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997). Thomas estimates the number of blacks ("Total Leaving African Ports") at what I believe is a very conservative 13,000,000. Toni Morrison, on the other hand, suggests that "Sixty Million and more" reflects more accurately the number of blacks involved, as she indicates in the dedication of her novel *Beloved*. What should be kept in mind here, however, is that Thomas' estimate represents only the number of blacks who were forcibly removed from their homelands. It does not include, as Morrison's figure almost certainly does, the number of blacks who died en route to the coast in the barbaric slave coffles or caravans from Africa's interior regions, those who died in the slave holding-pens while waiting to be sold into slavery, and the thousands upon thousands of blacks who surely died in the internal wars to secure slaves in the first place. To give some evidence of how these events might affect the number of blacks involved here, and how a consideration of these events would undoubtedly raise the number of blacks who died as a direct (but

frequently overlooked) result of the slave trade, I refer the reader to Anthony Benezet's *Some Historical Account of Guinea...With an Inquiry into the Rise and Progress of the Slave Trade* (1788; rpt. London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968). Benezet, a Quaker abolitionist, quotes from "the original manuscript Journal of a person of credit, who went surgeon in the same trade, in a vessel from New York"--an eyewitness, that is, to the inconceivable atrocities perpetrated upon blacks (by blacks) in order to satisfy the whites' demand for slaves (I have taken the liberty of modernizing the spelling):

Being on the coast, the Commander of the vessel, according to custom, sent a person on shore with a present to the King, acquainting him with his arrival, and letting him know, they wanted a cargo of slaves. The King promised to furnish them with the slaves; and, in order to do it, set out to go to war against his enemies; designing to surprise some town, and take all the people prisoners. Some time after, the King sent them word, he had not yet met with desired success; having been twice repulsed, in attempting to break up two towns, but that he still hoped to procure a number of slaves for them; and in this design he persisted, till he met his enemies in the field, where a battle was fought, which lasted three days, during which time the engagement was so bloody, that four thousand five hundred men were slain on the spot. (100-101)

Four thousand, five hundred men were slain on the spot. The tragic proportions of this reported fact are difficult to comprehend. Four thousand, five hundred human beings slaughtered...in order to procure, at most, several hundred slaves for transport! Of course, many more of those who did manage to "survive" these wars would die during the Middle Passage, and more still during the harsh "seasoning" of these slaves in the West Indian islands. In light of this appalling fact, Morrison's estimate of the inutterably tragic slave trade does not seem as farfetched as many might, originally, have believed. It is both a chilling and terrifying realization.

- 15 Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (New York: Universal Library, 1963), p. 102.
- 16 James Russell Lowell, "Fanaticism in the Navy," in Freimarck and Rosenthal (eds.), *Race and the American Romantics*, p. 269.
- 17 The histories and profound repercussions of both the *Creole* and *Amistad* revolts have been brought increasingly to bear in recent Melville studies, especially for their striking relevance to the slave insurrection at sea that Melville presents in *Benito Cereno*. In particular, see Chapter 2 ("Melville, Delany, and New World Slavery") of Eric Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 135-221; and Carolyn Karcher, "The Riddle of the Sphinx: Melville's 'Benito Cereno' and the *Amistad* Case," in Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker (eds.), *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Moby-Dick* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co./Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), pp. 196-230.

- 18 Among the earliest: Francis Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* (London, 1734); John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil and the West Indies...* (London, 1737); and Captain William Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea, and the Slave-Trade* (London, 1734).
- 19 As was the case with Benezet's *Historical Account of Guinea...* (see note 14, above), many of these accounts of the slave trade were made available to the public through intermediaries. The most important and available of these were Churchill's collection of voyages, which first appeared in London in 1732, and Thomas Clarkson's *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Africa Trade*, 2 vols. (1808; rpt. London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1968). As for those volumes to which Melville (and his contemporaries) would have had easiest access, due to their wide and enduring distribution, these include: John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader: 1750-1754* (rpt. London: The Epworth Press, 1962); Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (1788; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1973); and Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799; rpt. New York: Arno Press and *The New York Times*, 1971). The title of Park's volume, a work with which we know Melville was acquainted, is somewhat misleading here. Although, ostensibly, an account of Park's journey into the interior sections of Africa, the author describes both his accompanying of a slave coffle to the coast and the first leg of his homeward journey aboard an American slaver.
- Two more first-person accounts of the slave trade were published in New York City in the early 1850s, and one of them was written by a friend of Nathaniel Hawthorne. In fact, Hawthorne himself was the editor of this uninspired work by Horatio Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser* (New York: George P. Putnam & Co., 1853; rpt. Detroit, Michigan: Negro History Press, [n.d.]). The other text, also still in print today, was authored by a former slave trader, Théophile Conneau (ed. by Brantz Mayer), *Captain Canot; or Twenty Years of an African Slaver* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1854; rpt. New York: Arno Press and *The New York Times*, 1968).
- 20 July 27, 1848; cited in Sidney Kaplan, "Towards Pip and Dagoo: Footnote on Melville's Youth," in Sidney Kaplan, *American Studies in Black and White, Selected Essays*, ed. by Allan D. Austin (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), p. 145.
- 21 *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, p. 503.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 Lorenzo Dow Turner, *Anti-Slavery Sentiment in American Literature Prior to 1865* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1929; rpt. 1966), p. 5.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- 25 I discuss several of these reviews in subsequent chapters here.

- 26 See George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, p. 109. Frederickson points out the unconscious racism of those like William Emory Channing and Charles Stuart, for example, who seized upon the infantilized images of blacks that were common to the plantation fiction of the 1820s and 1830s. They did so for the apparent purpose of trying to subvert the romantic racist conceptions of blacks which originally (and mainly) had been put forth to allay Southern fears of insurrection. Despite their apparent good intentions, though, their depictions of blacks as "affectionate, imitative, and docile" or "almost impossible to excite...to revenge" since they are content in "making the best of their miserable lot" is as distasteful and marked by as much distortion of the black character as the works these antislavery writers intended to exploit. Rather than introducing or establishing the complex fullness of blacks' human potential--for good and evil, love and hate, modesty and bellicosity--the idealized portraits provided by Stuart and Channing only served to reinforce the racial illusions of their readers. It is an ironic commentary upon the abolitionists' mindset of the time, that some among them deemed it appropriate to employ to their own ends the same racialized deceptions as those proslavery apologists who sought to dehumanize or emasculate a race of people they simultaneously feared and patronized.
- 27 According to Hugh Thomas in *The Slave Trade*, p. 571, the United States "exported a mere 138,328 pounds of cotton" in 1792, one year before Whitney's invention--"which placed her on the same level as a producer as Demerara (Guiana)." By 1820, however, the American nation would export more than 35 million pounds.
- 28 Tremaine McDowell, "The Negro in the Southern Novel Prior to 1850," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 25 (1926), p. 56.
- 29 Quoted in McDowell, p. 56.
- 30 George Tucker, *The Valley of Shenandoah; or Memoirs of the Graysons* (1824; rpt. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1970), p. 62. Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work appear within parentheses in the text.
- 31 Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 43.
- 32 Benezet to Robert Pleasants, Philadelphia, April 8, 1773, in George S. Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet*, p. 292; and Aptheker, p. 40.
- 33 According to one critic, McDowell, *op cit.*, p. 67, Simms ought "to be credited with introducing or establishing in fiction the black man's pomposity, his overbearing nature, his untruthfulness, his insolence, his ungovernable temper, his liking for drink, and his lust."
- 34 Frederickson, pp. 51-55.
- 35 William Gilmore Simms, *The Yemassee, A Romance of Carolina* (1835; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), pp. 437-38.

- 36 For a discussion of Poe, see Chapters 1-3, above. Cooper's *The Spy* is discussed in Chapter 7, below. J. Ross Browne's racial attitudes are graphically conveyed by the disgust he experiences over having to work and live aboard ships with blacks. See his *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1846), p. 108.
- 37 Benezet, earlier in this chapter, and Equiano, in Chapter 3, have been discussed above. Falconbridge, cited above, makes his feelings about the moral and physical horrors of the slave trade more than apparent right from the outset of his work. "Leaving to abler pens to expatiate more at large on the injustice and inhumanity of the *Slave Trade*," he avers in his "Preface," "I shall content myself with giving some account of the hardships which the unhappy objects of it undergo, and the cruelties they suffer, from the period of their being reduced to a state of slavery, to their being disposed of in the West India islands; where, I fear, their grievances find little alleviations" (p. 2). Hawthorne's friend, Horatio Bridge, on the other hand, was correct in terming his *Journal* "a collection of desultory sketches" (vi). But his apparent lack of *human* concern for blacks is somewhat mitigated by his dispassionate and determined pursuit of possible slavers.
- 38 William Bradford established early this pattern of associating the the sea with nature's malignity. See his awestruck account of the "fast and furious ocean" that led him (with the protection of Providence) to the "hideous and desolate wilderness" of America in *Of Plimouth Plantation: 1620-1647*, ed. by Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: Knopf, 1952). For a brief critical mention of this idea, unrelated to Bradford, see Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy*, p. 146.
- 39 Bolster, *Black Jacks*, p. 4. The list includes Britt Hammond, James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Olaudah Equiano, John Marrant, Venture Smith, and Boston King. See Bolster, p. 248, n. 56.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 41 Quoted in Walt Whitman's *New York Dissected* (New York: R.R. Wilson, 1936), p. 219; and attributed to Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America* (Boston, 1874), p. 619.
- 42 Walt Whitman, "Slavery in New York," in *New York Dissected*, p. 110. Whitman's ensuing paragraph warrants quotation in full, I believe, both for its historical insight and bitter ironies:
- The market for slaves is in Cuba, upon the sugar plantations. Upon these death-mills, as they might well be called, it is coolly computed that an able-bodied slave will last five years, just about the average life of a Broadway stage horse. And, upon further ciphering, it is discovered to be cheaper to buy full-grown Africans, and work them right through, replacing the force of the plantation once in five years, than it would be to breed them, as our wasteful Virginians do, with the costly drawbacks of wife, family and youthful uselessness. (110-111)

- 43 See David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America, A Cultural Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995), pp. 50-51. As Reynolds points out, however, Whitman's early praise of Calhoun was later reversed by "an instinctive double take" over the Southern statesman's position in the nullification crisis.
- 44 Bolster, *Black Jacks*, p. 3.
- 45 Karcher, in "The Riddle of the Sphinx," p. 206, suggests that these revolts and the long-running publicity that followed them "marked a dramatic turning point in the struggle against slavery and a major advance in the American public's racial attitudes."
- 46 Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, p. 114.
- 47 Reprinted in the *Liberator*, 13 September 1839.
- 48 In addition to Sundquist and Karcher (see note 17, above), see Jean Fagan Yellin, *The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature, 1776-1863* (New York: New York University Press, 1972), pp. 216-217; Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy*, pp. 211-213; Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the "Amistad": The Saga of a Slave Revolt and Its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); and Brook Thomas, "The Legal Fictions of Herman Melville and Lemuel Shaw," *op cit.*, pp. 29-30.
- 49 See, especially, Chapter 2 of Karcher's *Shadow Over the Promised Land*.
- 50 Except, of course, for the dark implications in *Pierre*. For a fuller account of the slaveholding Gansevoorts and the prosperous slave-trading D'Wolfs, see Kaplan, "Toward Pip and Dagoo," *op cit.*
- 51 Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, March, 1853; rpt. in Ronald T. Takaki (ed.), *Violence in the Black Imagination; Essays and Documents* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), pp. 75-76.
- 52 Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, p. 115.
- 53 Franklin was, in fact, a slaveholder for more than thirty years. He also bought and sold slaves, a practice which, in his younger days, led him to publish slave advertisements in his newspaper. In fairness to him, however, it should be pointed out that he eventually became President of the Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society and, in 1790, he presented to Congress a petition on behalf of the Quakers which called for an immediate end to slavery in the nation.

Chapter Five

Earliest Encounters and First Representations: Sailors and Slaves, *Typee* and *Omoo*

*Miserable dog's life is this of the sea! command-
ed like a slave , and set to work like an ass! vulgar
and brutal men lording it over me, as if I were an
African in Alabama . Yes, yes, blow on, ye breezes,
and make a speedy end to this abominable voyage."*

(Wellingborough Redburn, *Redburn*)

Who aint a slave? Tell me that.

*And what is it, thought I, after all! It's only
his outside; a man can be honest in any sort
of skin. But...[i]gnorance is the parent of fear....*

(Ishmael, "Loomings"/ "The Spouter-Inn")

Sailors and Slaves

When Melville returned to Boston in October, 1844, aboard the USS *United States* , he was twenty-five years old, and he had just spent most of the previous four years at sea. It seems superfluous to say that Melville had been profoundly affected by his experiences at sea and in the foreign lands he visited. But at the risk of repeating (in order to extend) what most of his critics and biographers have long claimed to be true, I would

argue that, in all likelihood, no other experience in Melville's life would ever come close to matching the depth and range of the emotional and psychological transformation that he experienced at sea. "Melville did have one great experience," as D.H. Lawrence once observed, "the experience of the sea."¹ And although the narrator of *Redburn* might well have been speaking for Melville himself when he said, prior to his first sea voyage, "I was then but a boy" (3), the same could not be said of the twenty-five year old young man and aspiring author who, after several grueling and transforming years at sea, disembarked from the *United States* in the Fall of 1844.

Repeatedly, during his time at sea, Melville had "found himself experiencing situations that presented him with a profound disjunction between what he felt and what he was supposed to feel," as a recent biographer has noticed.² And despite the fact that several of his family relations had served aboard seafaring vessels, it is apparent that their experiences offered little to deter Melville's own ambition to go to sea. Worse yet, perhaps, as his most recent biographer, Hershel Parker, has noted about the abominable conditions of Melville's sea experience, "nothing he had learned about...[them]...from his cousins or their families

had prepared him for the reality.”³ Undoubtedly, Melville must have been very quick to learn about the constant hardships and cruelties that often characterized a sailor’s lot, however. And the “strange, romantic charm” (3) that had initially drawn both Redburn and Melville to the sea was replaced by an appalling awareness not only of a “pitiless sea” but also the slave-like conditions to which the common seaman was often subjected during the nineteenth century. Whaling ships, in particular, were notorious for resembling slaveships in the harsh treatment that their captains and officers exerted upon the crews. But it seems that merchant ships and navy vessels did not offer appreciably better conditions or treatment. In *White-Jacket*, Melville would refer to the navy as an “asylum for the perverse, the home of the unfortunate” and as a place where “the sons of adversity meet the children of calamity” (74). But he would also reserve his severest criticism for the “modern sea-commanders” who exercised “powers which exceed the due limits of reason and necessity” and thereby created an environment aboard their ships that mirrored America’s “peculiar institution”:

...Nor is this the only instance where right and salutary principles, in themselves almost self-evident and infallible, have been advanced in justification of things, which in themselves are just as self-evidently wrong

and pernicious.

Be it here, once and for all, understood, that no sentimental and theoretic love for the common sailor; no romantic belief in that peculiar nobleheartedness and exaggerated generosity of disposition fictitiously imputed to him in novels; and no prevailing desire to gain the reputation of being his friend, have actuated me in any thing I have said, in any part of this work, touching the gross oppression under which I know that the sailor suffers. Indifferent as to who may be the parties concerned, I but desire to see wrong things righted, and equal justice administered to all.

Nor, as has been elsewhere hinted, is the general ignorance and depravity of any race of men to be alleged as an apology for tyranny over them. On the contrary, it can not admit of a reasonable doubt, in any unbiased mind conversant with the interior life of a man-of-war, that most of the sailor iniquities practiced therein are indirectly to be ascribed to the morally debasing effects of the unjust, despotic, and degrading laws under which the man-of-war's-man lives. (304; my emphasis)

Like Redburn, who compared his life as a sailor to that of an "African in Alabama," White-Jacket's philippic underscores the similarity between the slave and the seaman, especially the "pernicious" subjection to tyranny and the loss of personal liberty. It echoes, at the same time, the testimony of Melville's predecessors and contemporaries, men like Olaudah Equiano and Richard Dana, Jr., whose own experiences and writings certainly support the veracity of such comparisons. Indeed, so atrocious were these conditions at times that, according to Equiano, the white sailors were often treated worse than the black slaves themselves:

But still I feared I should be put to death, the white people looked and acted, as I thought, in so savage a manner; for I had never seen among any people

such instances of brutal cruelty; and this not only shewn towards us blacks, but also to some of the whites themselves.⁴

On board a slaveship, in particular, the slaves actually had more monetary value than a white sailor, and the latter was often allotted lesser portions of food and water in order to ensure that the more valuable “cargo” arrived in good enough condition to fetch full price. According to testimony delivered to the English Parliament in 1790–1791, white sailors were often subjected to frequent and severe floggings. And, astoundingly, according to some of the figures presented in this testimony, evidence exists that “the rate of mortality among seamen on the Guinea voyage was higher, on the average, than the rate among slaves packed in the hold.”⁵

At age twenty-five, then, Melville had returned home with the tempered enthusiasm and contentment, perhaps, of an initiate who had passed or endured (not, as was Dana’s case, barely survived) a terrible but enlightening ordeal. At the same time, Melville’s sea novels also reveal his recently awakened distress at the frequent squalor, both moral and physical, and the constant (often abject) subservience of sea life. “Oppressed by illiberal laws, and partly oppressed by themselves,” he would

write, near the end of *White-Jacket* , “many of our people are wicked, unhappy, inefficient” (399). For Melville, this was a painful revelation, but one that was intrinsic to his experience of the sea. It also helps to dramatize yet another reason why blacks and the slavery issue were the centers of so much attention in Melville’s literary efforts to describe his experience at sea, even though he was not the first to have noticed the connections between black slavery and sailors. Indeed, by the time Melville began writing, it was likely that many Americans had already heard or read the shocking comparisons made between black slavery and the deplorable conditions suffered by the common sailor. The recent turn in sea literature from the romantic to the realistic had opened the way for verisimilitude in the presentation of many of the graphic details of the sailor’s life at sea. And, as a result, the comparison between slavery and sailors had become much more common and explicit. For example, in the most famous and widely read of these accounts (and one that Melville certainly had read), Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast* , the sinister captain of the brig *Pilgrim* , Frank Thompson, leaves no doubt in his crew’s collective mind as to how it can expect to be treated. Just as he is about to flog a man for

a trivial offense, the sailor turned to the captain, "and asked him what he was to be flogged for":

"Have I ever refused my duty, sir? Have you ever known me to hang back, or to be insolent, or not to know my work?"

"No," said the captain, "it is not that that I flog you for; I flog you for interference--for asking questions."

"Can't a man ask a question here without being flogged?"

"No," shouted the captain; "nobody shall open his mouth aboard this vessel, but myself;" and began laying the blows upon his back, swinging half round between each blow, to give it full effect. As he went on, his passion increased, and he danced about the deck, calling out as he swung the rope, --"If you want to know what I flog you for, I'll tell you. It's because I like to do it!--because I like to do it!--It suits me! That's what I do it for!"

..."You see your condition! You see where I've got you all, and you know what to expect! You've been mistaken in me --and you didn't know what I was! Now you know what I am!--I'll make you toe the mark, every soul of you, or I'll flog you all, fore and aft, from the boy up!-- You've got a driver over you! Yes, a *slave-driver--a nigger-driver!* I'll see who'll tell me he isn't a *NIGGER* slave!⁶

Even if Melville himself never experienced conditions as extreme and terrifying as both Equiano and Dana described, it is reasonable to assume that the frequent analogies he made between black slavery and a sailor's life were inspired by his firsthand experiences at sea. More than this, what becomes increasingly clear in his writings about the sea and life aboard merchant, whaling, and naval vessels, is that these experiences caused him to reassess what he thought he knew and felt about race, slavery, and African-blacks. Not surprisingly, it was a re-assessment that also taught him to question the familial and

cultural inculcations that had helped to shape his own racial assumptions prior to his going to sea. After so many years at sea --a time in which he had been schooled by the fundamental contradictions of what I have been calling the *sea of opposites* -- the “profound disjunction” between what he had *expected* to feel and what he actually *did* feel certainly heightened his awareness of the paradoxical nature of his own experience. It provoked, at the same time, an especially profound awareness of the ways in which stereotypes tended to limit human contact and understanding because of the way they encouraged a predisposition, however illusory, in the judgment of others--instead of allowing for the possibility of a fresh and uncontaminated perception. And when it came to race, in particular, what Melville came to realize is that such generalizations were usually the exaggerated and sometimes dangerous psychological projections sown by ignorance and superstitions, most of which were parented, as Ishmael warns, by fear. Together, as Melville came to see, these hackneyed misconceptions had contributed to the creation of many of his own expectations. And, in time, he realized how they were also responsible, to an alarming degree, for determining his own opinions and prejudices-- “social prejudices,” as Redburn would call them, “social prejudices, *that are*

the marring of most men , and from which, for the mass, there seems no possible escape” (202).

Melville did manage to escape many of his prejudices, however, as has been suggested here already. And the fact that his experience at sea played such a pivotal role in the reshaping and molding of his racial attitudes points up the facetiousness of an oddly self-deprecating remark he made to Hawthorne in 1851: “Until I was twenty-five,” he wrote, seemingly referring to a time between his separation from the *United States* and his beginning to write *Typee* , “I had no development at all...[and]... [f]rom my twenty-fifth year I date my life.”⁷ For however much Melville valued the great “world of mind” that he entered sometime subsequent to his quitting his sailing life at sea, this rude dismissal of his earlier years blatantly belies the obvious fact that much of what he wrote about during his meteoric decade of literary output, 1846–1855, issued directly from, and was deeply indebted to, his *lived* experience at sea between the ages nineteen to twenty-five. When he stepped ashore in Boston during that autumn of 1844, he was but a few months from commencing his writing career with *Typee* . But there can be little doubt that had he not gone to sea the course of American literature

itself would have been irrevocably altered. And the first truly original, nonsentimentalized portraits of African blacks in the literature of white American writers would have had to wait decades to be recorded. Numerous of Melville's contemporaries, men like Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman, Bryant, and Whittier, all "may have spoken and editorialized against the evils of slavery and the wickedness of Daniel Webster and Judge Shaw." But, with the likely exception of Whitman, seldom did blacks appear as individualized characters in the works they wrote.⁸ In Melville, on the other hand, black characters are not only figured in almost every major work. With increasing regularity, as we shall see, these black characters are given voices to speak for themselves and as representatives for their race.

In fact, though, the actual roles of the few black characters in Melville's first two novels, *Typee* and *Omoo*, are somewhat slight in themselves. And perhaps they are even lightly tinged with stereotypical representations of blacks as both Sambo and Noble Savage--an oxymoronic coupling that allows us to see an early example of what David Reynolds aptly describes as "Melvillian ambiguities emerging from their popular shells."⁹ More importantly, however, the Black-Africanist presence is indirect--

ly but undeniably located in both of these works as a deeply felt moral and symbolic referent to the “savages” in the South Sea Islands whose fates have also been corrupted by whites. Such is the case, for example, when the narrator of *Typee* describes an unsuccessful assault upon the Typees by “a considerable detachment of sailors and marines from the frigate *Essex*” [*sic*]. During “their march back to the sea,” the narrator continues, after these “invaders” had been “obliged...to retreat and abandon their design of conquest,” these white men “consoled themselves for their repulse by setting fire to every house and temple in their route.” Already, here, the narrator’s irony is much in evidence; but what follows surpasses mere irony, as the narrator’s outrage and contempt towards the whites is made explicit:

...a long line of smoking ruins defaced the once-smiling bosom of the valley, and proclaimed to its pagan inhabitants the spirit that reigned in the breasts of Christian soldiers. Who can wonder at the deadly hatred of the Typees to all foreigners after such unprovoked atrocities?

Thus it is that they whom we denominate “savages” are made to deserve the title. When the inhabitants of some sequestered island first descry the “big canoe” of the European rolling through the blue waters towards their shores, they rush down to the beach in crowds, and with open arms stand ready to embrace the strangers. Fatal embrace! They fold to their bosoms the vipers whose sting is destined to poison all their joys; and the instinctive feeling of love within their breasts is soon converted into the bitterest hate. (26)

This passage recalls, in a quite inverted (and perhaps uncon-

scious) manner, certain details of accounts of the African slave trade which took place along the shores of the Guinea Coast. As Equiano wrote, after being torn from his home and marched in a slave coffle to trading coast, "The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast, was the sea, and a slave ship. ...These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board."¹⁰ In both cases, the fateful encounter between white Europeans and a race they deem "savage" takes place at the edge of an ocean that the whites seem, magically, to have control over. But, in each instance, the meeting ends with the subjugation and oppression of those indigenous to the land adjoining the sea. The Polynesians are eventually forced into a virtual enslavement, while the Africans must submit to a more insidiously institutionalized form of servitude. Of course, the Typees that Melville writes about arrive most willingly to the shore, astonished at the whites' "big canoe" and "ready to embrace the strangers." But their friendliness and curiosity represent the most significant inversions of the slave-trade encounters in which the abject terror of the kidnapped blacks surpasses all other emotions in their first encounter with whites. And for both the Polynesian "bar-

barians” and the African “savages,” their fateful seaside rendezvous with white men’s ships would open the way to repeated future incursions.

This is not to say, of course, that Melville presented this scene with the intention of making a direct comparison between the Typees’ portentous encounter with the white race and the treacherous removal of blacks from their African homeland. Instead, what happens is that, immediately following the passage quoted above, the narrator’s sudden shift of attention from the Typees to thoughts of “home” suggests a comparison between the two. Melville would have realized the tragic nature and the doomed future of both encounters, of course. And he well knew that, like the enslaved black population in America, the Polynesian natives were suffering horrible oppression at the hands of white colonizers who were, “as a class, ignorant, and, in many cases, deplorably bigoted” (*Omoo*, 185). What he seems intent upon doing here, however, is to make sure that a similar comparison is established in his readers’ minds as well. And without naming, explicitly, the African blacks in America, Melville surely invokes them when, immediately after he has the narrator of *Typee* insist that the “enormities perpetrated in the South Seas upon some of the inoffensive islanders wellnigh pass belief,” he

abruptly shifts his readers' attention to America: "[t]hese things are seldom proclaimed at home; they happen at the very ends of the earth; they are done in a corner, and there are none to reveal them."

"Until here and now," Melville might have added.

Typee* and *Omoo

In the earliest of his sea novels, *Typee* and *Omoo*, Melville was obviously trying to capitalize on the popular market for sea narratives that also offered travel accounts of remote or distant lands, as well as romanticized encounters with exotic, usually primitive *others*. From the very beginning, however, in his first novel, *Typee* (1846), Melville would prove that his authorial self was far less likely to be bound by (literary) convention than his personal self--which he often allowed to be conscripted by his stiff sense of social decorum and gentility. Rather than write "the *other* way" (as he would later describe his notion of what the reading public wanted), Melville insisted repeatedly upon stretching the limits of the sea narrative (and, eventually, the patience of his audience) by filling his works with in-

flammatory politics, seemingly abstruse and metaphysical ruminations, and, as became increasingly apparent in each of his successive works, a persistent and sympathetic interest in the plight of the African-blacks who *colored* America, both on the ships he had sailed upon and in the land he called his home. Slowly but progressively, as he wrote his earliest "sea novels," Melville began to incorporate his views on the raging racial controversies of the time--until, as he moved into the post-1850 period, these same issues came to represent a central motif in his works. In fact, although *Typee* gained much attention for its sympathetic depiction the South Sea "barbarians" (as well as vilification for its overt satire of the "European Civilisers"/Christian missionaries), it is clear that Melville was already preparing himself (and his anticipated audience) for the radicalizing and iconoclastic views on slavery and the racialized *other* that would become a defining characteristic of his later sea narratives. Moreover, Melville's preoccupation with questions about authority and power, tyrants and slaves, and his blurred distinction between oppressors and the oppressed in *Typee*, all combined to foreground his ever deepening concern with black-white relations, the slavery issue, and the ambiguous character

of African-blacks.

To some, this insistent coupling of the sea and race might still seem an odd, possibly arbitrary, union. As well it might, except for the fact that the sea was Melville's *looking-glass* into matters of race. By this I mean it was the sea that brought Melville face-to-face with himself *and* his intrepid regard for the racialized other he encountered; first aboard ship as a common sailor, and then in the persons native to the South Sea islands that he visited as a seaman. Aboard ship, as previously mentioned, Melville was subjected to some of the most oppressive working conditions imaginable, from the often filthy, back-breaking labor to the frequent tyranny of officers to the rogue cast of characters with whom he worked before the mast. The sea was often the "refuge of scoundrels," and Melville was undoubtedly shocked at first, like Dana, by his enforced cohabitation and dealings with all kinds of renegades and misfits. The ranks of common seamen were swollen with convicts and ex-convicts of every kind. And racial tensions could be high amongst such an unusually diverse, multi-racial cast of largely uneducated men. Under such conditions, any one of these servilities could have been enough to break a man down. But together they created an evil

environment, the depravity of which Melville could only equate to the institutional slavery of his home country, as the epigraph from *Redburn* that heads this chapter seems to suggest: “Miserable dog’s life is this of the sea! commanded like a slave, and set to work like an ass! vulgar and brutal men lording it over me, as if I were an African in Alabama” (119). What Melville would learn upon his arrival in the South Seas, however, was that this kind of heinous mistreatment was but another aspect of the *universal thump* later described by Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*. For “however the old sea-captains may order me about--” Ishmael says, “however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right; that everybody else is one way or other served in much the same way-- either in a physical or metaphysical point of view” (15).

It is doubtful that Melville himself ever experienced very much “satisfaction” over the realization that persecution and suffering seemed to be universally distributed evils. Instead, he was clearly shocked and horrified when he first witnessed the effects of the Christian white man’s decimation of the native, non-white cultures in the South Sea islands. For it was here that Melville witnessed the corruption of the Marquesan warriors (“Nature’s noblemen” is how Tommo, the narrator of Mel-

ville's first novel, *Typee*, refers to them) by the white Christian colonialists whom the narrator describes with pained irony as those "rapacious hordes of enlightened individuals" (195-96). Shorn of their dignity and pagan religious expression ("heathenish rites"), riddled with a host of debilitating and deadly infectious (usually venereal) diseases, the once Edenic-like denizens of the Happy Valley are literally "civilized into draught horses, and evangelized into beasts of burden":

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 never been brought into contaminating contact with the white man. (15)

In the *looking-glass* of his sea experiences, the time he spent in the Marquesas taught Melville important lessons about the powerfully determinative forces of cultural control and conscription, "how culture imposes limitations on self-knowledge and self-expression by rigidly defining and determining gender, race, and class."¹¹ And at first, it would seem, the young Melville assigned the responsibility for these cultural chauvinisms exclusively to the "European civilizers" in the South Seas. But forced by his

experiences, as surely he was, to examine more acutely his own preconceptions and responses to matters of cultural difference and diversity, and compelled by the dark specter of slavery and racial inequities in his own country, the young American sailor's inward glance turned its rueful focus upon the source and setting of his own cultural conditioning, the racially torn (dis)United States of America. His sojourn in the Marquesas seemed to convince Melville that the "white civilized man [was] the most ferocious animal on the face of the earth" (*Typee* , 125), and this realization had such a life-changing impact upon him that he would never again presume to think that the color of one's skin or the denomination of one's religion offered any assurance of moral superiority or right. On the contrary, Melville had learned that there was much to be learned by viewing his own culture from the *other* end of the racial spectrum, through the eyes of the "savages" themselves, so to speak. In doing so, however, he could not have liked very much what he saw: an America less than a century removed from the age of Revolution, but a deeply conflicted society whose "revolutionary mind [was] at odds with itself, energized by the ideals of fatherly humanitarianism but, confounded by racialism, blind to the recriminating violence they h[e]ld tenuously in check."¹²

Omoo (1847) continues the litany, begun in *Typee*, of the “enormities perpetrated” by the white man upon the natives of the South Sea Islands. But the venue has shifted from the Marquesas Islands to Tahiti, and the *presence* of African blacks begins to emerge from the shadows of indirection and symbolic implication that characterized Melville’s treatment of this subject in *Typee*. For although both works present rather “standard reform” stances (mainly against the corruptive influences of Christian “civilization”) as a “cover for quite subversive commentary on the norms and values of white civilization,”¹³ *Omoo* marks the appearance of the first significant black character in Melville’s works, as well as a more pointed authorial attempt to invoke the experience of African blacks in America through comparison with various forms of white oppression in the South Sea Islands. Apropos of the latter, and possibly for the first time in the now exhaustive history of Melville criticism, a then contemporary reviewer of *Omoo* actually noticed the connection between the persecuted South Sea native and the black slaves in America. And thus, the race of African blacks in America was drawn into the complex issues of a moral division between the civilized and the primitive that had been hotly debated about

Melville since the publication of *Typee* .

At the time, many reviewers generally approved of *Omoo* for exhibiting the same qualities of entertainment that they had praised in *Typee* --it was "vivid" and "graceful" and "full of excitement."¹⁴ At the same time, the pro-missionary journals that had excoriated Melville's first novel only increased the intensity and biliousness of their attacks upon his second. Beyond these rather standard reactions to the book, however, other contemporary reviewers of *Omoo* focused on the ideological perspectives involved in Melville's exposé of the Christian missionaries, his apparent glorification of the primitive, and the related questions of "verity"--the last of which was, for many of the reviewers, "an inevitable corollary to their concern for the implications of primitivism."¹⁵ Indeed, there yet remained a lingering concern and skepticism over the "truth," or *vraisemblance* , of both *Typee* and *Omoo* , just as there were serious doubts as to who this Herman Melville really was, this bold new writer whose obvious literacy seemed irreconcilable with his claim to be a common seaman.

Among those who offered a testimonial to the veracity of details in Melville's depiction of the state of affairs in the South

Sea Islands, and who shared as well his empathy for the hapless natives who suffered the “civilized” whites’ oppressive contact, was the reviewer of *Omoo* in the 11 May 1847 issue of the *New York Gazette and Times*. Most importantly, this reviewer was noteworthy also for his willingness to discuss the dark implications that the work held for his own country. In fact, his attention to the ways in which both *Omoo* and *Typee* reflected “melancholy” aspects of the American racial scene, and his insinuation of white Americans’ denial of responsibility, came closer to mirroring Melville’s *looking-glass* than most of his literary brethren would have dared attempt:

The statements which are made in relation to the missionary establishments, and the labors of those religious emissaries must inevitably attract great attention. Evils, barely hinted at in *Typee*, are openly detailed in the present work, and as the testimony of an unbiassed intelligent witness, the facts and the results which the writer adduces, must make a deep impression. As with the Indian of our own continent, contact with the white man, has only served to entail upon the primitive, simple and happy people of the South Sea Islands, the worst vices, and to introduce diseases, from the ravages of which the race is becoming gradually but surely extinct. This is a melancholy subject of reflection, but it is one nevertheless, which can neither be denied nor extenuated.¹⁶

There can be no doubt that Melville was also distressed at the egregious persecution and possible genocide of the Native American. Like the black population in America, the American Indian had come to represent yet another “beautiful blank,” as George

Catlin had theorized in 1841, “a beautiful blank on which anything can be written if the proper means be taken.”¹⁷ And thus, like the African black, the American Indian had been violently reduced to a status of “silent other” that was actually, in Melville’s mind, a *silenced* other. Up to this point in time, however, few seemed as willing as Melville to acknowledge the hypocrisy involved in America’s presentation of itself as a haven for egalitarian ideals while, at the same time, it was a nation that tacitly sanctioned the murder and enslavement of its non-white inhabitants. The very fact that the *Gazette and Times* reviewer would even direct his readers’ attention homeward was an indication of both his own moral courage and his seeming comprehension of Melville’s darker reform impulses to expose the lies and erasures that Euro-American whites had perpetrated for centuries. As Lucy Maddox has suggested, “Melville knew that the lie of the ‘beautiful blank’ had been perpetuated since 1492, when the sailors who arrived on a populated continent that was in fact ‘just as old, and perhaps older than Asia’ returned home ‘swearing it was all water and moonshine there.’”¹⁸

Of course, if there was one group of Americans who seemed to feel little or no compunction about reminding both the

government and the white populace of their complicity in the horrors of American racism, especially with regard to slavery and the depraved consideration of blacks in general, it was the abolitionists. It is not surprising, then, that the first mention of a connection between Melville's writings and the black/slavery issue appeared (scarcely two weeks after the *Gazette and Times* piece) in a review of *Omoo* published by an abolitionist paper, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* of 27 May 1847. What is surprising, however, are the rather mordant prefigurations of Melville's allegorical characters in the Uivenza chapters of *Mardi* and the similarities to Father Mapple's sermon in *Moby-Dick*, where the earthly justice of "Senators and Judges" is also inveighed against:

The Typee munches the muscles and tendons of his dead enemy between his molars, but inflicts no pain upon him; but with us the Calhoons, Clays, and Polks, feed daily upon the sweat, the tears, the groans, the despairing hearts, of living men and women; they do not eat the insensible flesh of their dead slaves, but they lacerate it when alive with whips and cauterize it with hot branding irons. We would advise our readers who are sick at heart, from reading of the daily reports of the murders committed by our army in Mexico; or of the inhuman cruelties of our slaveholders in the South; or the daily outrages upon the rights of humanity practiced by Christian judges, and lawyers in the Halls of Justice, to turn for relief to the amiable savages of Typee, whose greatest cruelty consists in devouring the body of an enemy who has been killed in a hand to hand scuffle.

The irony here is overwhelming. The true cannibals, it seems,

are those in America who would “feed daily upon the the sweat, the tears, the groans, the despairing hearts, of living men and women.” In contrast, the sort of cannibalism practiced by the “amiable” Typee consists of painless “munches.” In relation to Melville, however, this irony is not misplaced if we consider the connection he made between cannibalism and racism in *Typee*, where there were elements of predation and voracity attached to both. (Surely, too, it lends an ironic meaning to Melville’s sardonic description of himself, while living in America, as “a man who lived among the cannibals.”) Clearly, the reviewer is using Melville’s texts here as pretexts to voice his abolitionist sympathies. And the text of *Omoo* itself seems eclipsed by the sensationalist elements of the propaganda. In fact, the writer’s sly recommendation to read Melville as a kind of palliative to the miseries of real life might seem to indicate that the writer of this review had actually missed the point of Melville’s dark reform attitudes about racialized others, particularly the enslaved African blacks in America. But such is not the case, I think, especially given the reviewer’s ironic tone and propensity toward Swiftian exaggeration. Indeed, the very inclusion of such macabre satire recalls the dark humor of *Omoo* itself, however faint-

ly or imperfectly. Rather than missing the point, the reviewer seems instead to have intuited from *Typee* and *Omoo* the direction in which Melville's writings would veer with regard to the Black/Africanist presence in America. *Typee* had laid the foundation by calling attention to the white civilizers' cannibalistic relation to racialized others, but *Omoo* had shifted that attention home to America. It was no accident that the linking of Melville's work with slavery occurred in a review of *Omoo*, for this was the book in which Melville simultaneously introduced his first important black character (who happened to be a runaway slave) and also presented a satiric segregation-allegory that left little doubt as to the tenor of its ridicule.¹⁹

"Baltimore" is the black cook aboard the *Julia* in *Omoo*. But, perhaps because his appearances in the narrative are so infrequent, he has attracted very little critical attention. And on those rare occasions when he is discussed at all, the subtle figure of Baltimore has, for the most part, had the effect of misleading certain critics into blithe dismissals of his significance. Eleanor Simpson, for example, sees Baltimore as evidence of Melville's adherence to "established, romantic conventions" in which the "stereotyped figure of...the old cook... probably ha[d] little relevance to Melville's actual attitudes toward Negroes,

except as perhaps demonstrating that at this early period he evidently had no deep convictions on the subject and accepted ready-made stereotypes without really examining them."²⁰ Such commentary falsely diminishes both Baltimore's key role in the dramatic events that took place aboard the *Julia* and the partiality showed to him by the narrator of *Omoo*. It demeans also the integrity of Melville's efforts to examine and revise those convictions about race and slavery, in particular, which his experience at sea had forced him to reconsider and question, as we have already seen.

Baltimore is introduced by the narrator of *Omoo* in Chapter Eleven, where the "capers" and "pranks" of Doctor Long Ghost are recounted as often ghastly "jokes" which, despite their violent nature, were "duly appreciated" by the fun-loving sailors. In fact, Baltimore, who "was so called from the place of his birth, being a runaway Maryland slave", as the narrator makes it a point to inform the reader in an editorial note, was apparently the pitiable victim of a good many of these cruel jests:

The poor old black cook! Unlashing his hammock for the night, and finding a wet log fast asleep in it; and then waking in the morning with his wooly head tarred. Opening his coppers, and finding an old boot boiling away as saucy as could be, and sometimes cakes of pitch candying in his oven. (41)

Read within the context and overall harshness of seafaring life at the time, these pranks might seem relatively harmless to some. But it does not appear as though the narrator would agree with this estimation. From his sailor's perspective, the reality of having to sleep in a dank hammock at sea was surely a most discomfiting experience. Just as the reality of a tarred pate would almost certainly enrage even the meekest or genial of victims. And what cook could tolerate such foul tampering with his or her kitchen as Baltimore was subjected to, especially when one is answerable to a crew as coarse and rough-hewn as the sailors whom the narrator had described earlier in *Omoo* as "reckless, and impatient of the restraints of civilization" (28). Melville's narrator, even though he is on friendlier terms with Doctor Long Ghost than he is with any other member of the crew, is clearly sympathetic with Baltimore and strongly implies that the black cook would have been justified in seeking vengeance for Long Ghost's incessant harassment:

Baltimore's tribulations were indeed sore; there was no peace for him day nor night. Poor fellow! he was altogether too good-natured. Say what they will about easy-tempered people, it is far better, on some accounts, to have the temper of a wolf. Who ever thought of taking liberties with gruff Black Dan! (41)

Although “gruff Black Dan” is a figure of marginal importance in *Omoo*, he appears to anticipate later Melvillean figures of black power and resistance to white authority such as Dagoo and Atufal. In the passage just quoted, he represents also the antithesis of Baltimore’s “altogether too good-natured” acquiescence to white oppression in the form of Doctor Long Ghost, whose very name, with its suggestion of whiteness, encourages this interpretation. What the narrator also makes clear is that he is not simply invoking stereotypes to represent either of these black characters, as his humane compassion for the one (Baltimore) and deferential respect for the other (Black Dan) reflect personalized responses to highly individualized characters. Indeed, the only stereotypes apparent in his account refer not to supposed racial attributes but to the more generalized human qualities of passivity and amiability versus aggressiveness and truculence. If anything, what this passage reveals about the narrator’s (and, likely, Melville’s) opinion of blacks is the subversive belief that, given the often dire circumstances and frequent persecution of the race, it might indeed be “far better” for a black “to have the temper of a wolf.”

That Melville’s narrator should express such a belligerent attitude on behalf of his black shipmates is explained, at least in

part, by his awareness of the physical, emotional and psychological debasements to which they were often subjected. Like the “naked heathens” that the white crews encountered in many of the South Sea Islands, African-blacks were considered inferior specimens who were hardly deserving of inclusion among the ranks of humankind. “Indeed,” as the narrator said in an earlier chapter, “it is almost incredible, the light in which many sailors regard [them]. They hardly consider them human. But it is a curious fact,” the astonished observer continued, “that the more ignorant and degraded men are, the more contemptuously they look upon those whom they deem their inferiors” (25). Not that education and learning proved any guarantee against depravity, however, as the narrator’s shipboard experiences had made him aware. In fact, the captain of the *Julia* is described as “a man of education...[who]...bore himself with becoming meekness.” Yet he harbored also a “timid cunning,” the narrator avers, a dangerous trait “which no one would have suspected, and which, for that very reason, was all the more active” (10).

The narrator does suspect this dark quality about the captain, however, a recognition that seems to set him apart from the rest of the crew, despite the fact that “the men made no

secret of the derision in which they held him [the captain].” For while the crew seems to despise “The Cabin Boy” and “Paper Jack,” as they called him--primarily for his incompetency and the “obnoxious measures” which he inflicted upon them at times--the narrator’s complaints are not limited to his own personal comfort or welfare. Beyond this, he deplores also what he considers the base attitudes and “wanton cruelties” that he sees the captain direct toward the racial others he encounters, a notable example of which is provided in his actions against the natives of La Dominica, or Hivarrhoo. From the head of his boat, where he was standing, and with no more provocation than the natives *on the land* shaking their spears, “he [the captain] fired a pistol among them [the natives]” and badly wounded at least one of the retreating band--much to the consternation of the narrator who has witnessed the entire episode. “Wanton acts of cruelty like this are not unusual on the part of sea captains landing at islands comparatively unknown” (25), the narrator states with obvious disdain and pained incredulity. For like the cruelties committed in the name of “fun” against Baltimore, such acts were performed as “a mere amusement on the part of ruffians,” a fact that arouses both the narrator’s ire against the perpetrators and his compassion for the unwitting victims. Indeed, he is

so outraged that he seems, for a moment, to adopt the “temper of a wolf” temperament he would later propose as a likely remedy to Baltimore’s tribulations. He had watched in horror, the narrator tells us, as the captain fired his weapon into the crowd of natives on the shore. But when he noticed “one poor little fellow, dropping his spear and clapping his hand behind him” as a result of his being shot, the narrator’s own thoughts turned murderous. The injured native “limped away in such a manner,” he bristles, that it “almost made me itch to get a shot at his assailant” (24).

What we should see in episodes such as these, and especially in the narrator’s highly emotional and opinionated responses to both Baltimore’s and the natives’ mistreatment, is the overt seriousness of Melville’s concern for all oppressed individuals and groups, despite the salient comic vein that characterizes *Omoo* throughout. Contrary to the rather standard critical perception of Baltimore as comic stereotype, for example, I would suggest that the figure of the black cook is presented in ways that are more consistent with the pathos of slavery as depicted in the abolitionist and dark reform literature of the time, such as the review of *Omoo* cited above. For no matter

how parodic-comic this review might seem on the surface, the underlying meaning is deadly serious--just as Melville's depiction of Baltimore is fringed with comic elements that all but disappear beneath the gravity of the narrator's tone and the realization that the comedy is actually sadistic. There is not a single instance in all of *Omoo* when Melville's narrator condescends to the black; neither is there an occasion in which the black suffers abuse of any kind without the narrator's explicit commiseration, such as the scene in which Baltimore's victimization by Doctor Long Ghost is so sympathetically described. In fact, the narrator singles out Baltimore for a role of major symbolic and political import within the drama of *Omoo*, a role that signifies also one of Melville's subtlest critiques of American racism and perhaps his most bitterly ironic comment to that time on what he may have deemed a basic fallacy of the Declaration of Independence. For it is at the recommendation of the narrator that Baltimore is selected to deliver the "Round Robin," the list of grievances that the mutinous crew of the *Julia* wished to convey to the English Consul at Tahiti--"I proposed that a 'Round Robin' should be prepared and sent to shore to the consul, by Baltimore, the cook" (74), he tells us--an endorsement whose symbolic implication is as ironic as it is poignant. For what is this Round Robin if not the

sailors' version of the Declaration of Independence? Significantly, it is a document, like the original, to be delivered to the ruling English head-of-state by an oppressed and liberty-starved conglomeration of multinational (and now multiracial) individuals who demand their freedom. And who better to deliver such demands than a representative of perhaps the most oppressed race of people in all the world at that time? Indeed, the narrator's choice of the black cook, Baltimore, is fraught with a deep significance, I think. As perhaps he was trying to tell us when, upon the black's return from his mission, the narrator states "we learned a good deal from old Baltimore" (75).

Notes

- 1 *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), p. 140. In the same chapter ("Herman Melville's 'Typee' and 'Omoo'"), Lawrence writes that the "greatest seer and poet of the sea for me, is Melville."
- 2 Robertson-Lorant, *Melville*, p. 125.
- 3 Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville, A Biography, Volume 1, 1819-1851* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 206.
- 4 *The Interesting Narrative*, pp. 56-57. Falconbridge makes a similar point when he describes "a young man on board one of the ships [who] was frequently beaten in a very severe manner, for very trifling faults." One day, again having been "cruelly beaten," the young man jumped overboard:
 He, however, providentially escaped being devoured by the sharks, and was taken up by a canoe belonging to one of the black traders then lying along-side the vessel. As soon as he was brought on board, he was dragged to the quarter-deck,

and his head forced into a tub of water, which had been left there for the negroe women to wash their hands in. In this situation he was kept till he was nearly suffocated; the person who held him, exclaiming, with the malignity of a demon, "If you want drowning, I will drown you myself." Upon my inquiring of the young man, if he knew the danger to which he exposed himself by jumping overboard, he replied, "that he expected to be devoured by sharks, but he preferred even that, to be being treated daily to so much cruelty." (40-41)

- 5 Mannix, *Black Cargoes*, xi. Edward Reynolds disputes the notion that the death rate of crew members aboard slavers exceeded that of the slaves. However, he does recognize a "correlation, which suggests that they were similarly affected by conditions of disease, faulty provisions and length of voyage." See his "Human Cargoes: Enslavement and the Middle Passage" in Anthony Tibbles (ed.), *Transatlantic Slavery, Against Human Dignity* (London: HMSO, 1994), p. 34. According to Falconbridge, conditions were so cruel and degrading for crews of the slavers that, although most ships set out with "between forty and fifty men, scarcely three-fourths, and sometimes not one-third of the complement, ever return to the port from whence they sailed, through mortality and desertion" (p. 11).
- 6 *Two Years Before the Mast, A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea* (1840; rpt. New York: Random House, 1936), pp. 106-7. It is both curious and troubling that the *Penguin Classic* edition of Dana's text (New York: Penguin Books, 1986; pp. 156-57) substitutes "Negro" for "Nigger" in two places here. A check of the first edition of Dana's work (New York: Harpers Brothers, 1840) shows that Dana did, in fact, use "Nigger." "Political Correctness" aside, Uiking Penguin's editorial decisions here are equivalent to censorship.
- 7 *Letters*, June 1?, 1851.
- 8 Eleanor Simpson, "Melville and the Negro: from *Typee* to 'Benito Cereno,'" *op cit.*, p. 19.
- 9 Reynolds, *Beneath*, p. 139.
- 10 *Narrative*, p. 55.
- 11 Robertson-Lorant, *Melville*, p. 111.
- 12 Sundquist, *To Wake the Nation*, p. 102.
- 13 Reynolds, *Beneath*, p. 137.
- 14 A generous sampling of the contemporary reactions to *Typee* can be found in Milton R. Stern, *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Typee* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982).
- 15 See Stern's "Introduction" to the historical currents of *Typee* criticism in *Critical Essays*, pp. 1-16.

- 16 Quoted in Parker, *Herman Melville*, p. 514.
- 17 George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians* (New York: Dover, 1973), 1: 184. Maddox, in *Removals*, discusses Catlin in a most informative and provocative chapter called "Writing and Silence: Melville" (pp. 51-87). Her last sentence of this chapter bears repeating, both for its profound insight and the resemblance to my own thesis here. In response to Charlie Noble's "motto" for "all the talkers" aboard the *Fidèle* in *The Confidence-Man*--"If truth don't speak through the people, it never speaks at all; so I heard one say" (142)--Maddox writes: "In this microcosm of midcentury democratic America, only the language of confidence and geniality, the homogenizing, recirculating discourse that feeds on itself ('so I heard one say'), can contribute to the Truth; the alternative truth, tangibly embodied in the silent blacks and Indians, 'never speaks at all' (p. 87)."
- 18 Maddox, p. 52.
- 19 The racial allegory to which I refer occurs near the end of Chapter 48, where Melville's narrator describes the practice of segregating at school the native children from the offspring of the white missionaries. Both in Tahiti and Hawaii, it seems, "the two races are kept as far as possible from associating; the avowed reason being, to preserve the young whites from moral contamination. The better to insure this end, every effort is made to prevent them from acquiring the native language." Like blacks in America, who were, in many states, both segregated from whites and forbidden to learn to read, the native children that Melville writes about here are considered "wicked" and need to be "exclude[d]" from white society. Melville's comment upon this, especially its sexual pun, is wonderfully ironic: "And yet, strange as it may seem, the depravity among the Polynesians, which renders precautions like these necessary, was in a measure unknown before their intercourse with the whites" (188).
- 20 Simpson, p. 21. Without comment, I note that Simpson also dismisses both *Typee* and *Omoo* as "the fledgling efforts of a young writer" (p. 20).

Chapter Six

Mardi: Chartless Voyage to a Voiceless End

'O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea.
 Our thoughts as boundless, and our souls as free,
 Far as the breeze can bear, the billows foam,
 Survey our empire, and behold our home!
 These are our realms, no limits to their sway--
 Our flag the sceptre all who meet obey.
 Ours the wild life in tumult still to range
 From toil to rest, and joy in every change.
Oh, who can tell? not thou, luxurious slave!
Whose soul would sicken o'er the heaving wave...

Oh, who can tell, save he whose heart hath tried,
 And danced in triumph o'er the waters wide,
 The exulting sense--the pulse's maddening play,
 That thrills the wanderer of that trackless way.

(Byron, "The Corsair"; Canto the First, I; my emphasis)

From time immemorial many fine things have been said and sung of the sea. The days have been, when sailors were considered veritable mermen; and the ocean itself as the peculiar theatre of the romantic and wonderful. But of late years there have been revealed so many plain, matter-of-fact details connected with nautical life, that, at the present day, the poetry of salt water is very much on the wane. The perusal of Dana's "Two Years before the Mast," for instance, somewhat impairs the relish with which we read Byron's spiritual "Address to the Ocean." And when the noble poet raves about laying his hands upon the ocean's mane (in other words manipulating the crest of a wave), the most vivid image suggested is, that of a valetudinarian bather at Rockaway, spluttering and choking in the surf, with his mouth full of brine.

(Melville; review of J. Ross Browne's
Etchings of a Whaling Cruise)

The lines quoted above from "The Corsair" are not the lines Melville refers to in his review of J. Ross Browne's *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* . But like Byron's "Address to the Ocean," these

verses are certainly representative of the Romantic sea that, in Melville's mind at least, had been polluted and eviscerated in most mid-nineteenth century sea narratives, largely as the result of a literary acquiescence to the perceived public demand for more pragmatic, day-to-day details of life-at-sea. There is a mild irony in Melville's position here, of course, as his own sea fiction would evince an inordinate preoccupation with the "science" of everyday shipboard activities, perhaps increasingly as he wrote *Redburn*, *White-Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick*, respectively, in the three to four years subsequent to the Browne review. But Melville would seldom neglect the "poetry" of ocean voyaging, as he himself liked to call it (and to invoke a distinction between "science" and "poetry" that is similar to the one he ascribes to Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*). In *Mardi*, for example, which he began to write within two months after the appearance of the Browne review, Melville's emphasis on *romance* and the *poetical* aspects of sea literature indicates the extent to which this review can be said to identify a significant phase in his aesthetic development.¹ As he wrote to his English publisher, John Murray, with regard to *Mardi*:

The truth is, Sir, that the reiterated imputation of being a romancer in disguise has at last pricked me into a resolution to show those who may take any interest in the matter, that a real romance of mine is no *Typee* or *Omoo*, & is made of different stuff altogether. This I confess has been the main inducement in altering my plans--but others have operated. I have long thought that Polynisia [*sic*] furnished a great deal of rich poetical material that has never been employed hitherto in works of fancy; and which to bring out suitably, required only that play of freedom & invention accorded only to the Romancer & poet.... [*Mardi*] opens like a true narrative--like *Omoo* for example, on ship board--& the romance & poetry of the thing thence grow continuously, till it becomes a story wild enough I assure you & with a meaning too.²

Like Byron, whom Hershel Parker called the “hero of [Melville’s] brooding adolescence,”³ Melville would consistently accent the romance and *poetry* of the sea in each of his sea narratives from *Typee* to *Moby-Dick*. And contrary to the narrator’s “anxious desire” and stated intention in the Preface of *Typee* “to speak the unvarnished truth,”⁴ it is clear, as we have already seen, that Melville’s perception of truth transcended anything that could be conveyed by realism alone. As another of his letters to Murray suggests, Melville worried that, “after producing two books on the South Seas, the subject must necessarily become somewhat barren of novelty.”⁵ Thus it was, beginning with *Mardi*, that Melville made an attempt to write “different stuff altogether” while making certain that whatever he wrote also contained, as he put it, “a meaning too.” If nothing else, he

believed it was “possible for [him] to write such a romance that it shall afford the strongest presumptive evidence of the truth of *Typee* & *Omoo* by the sheer force of contrast.”⁶

In fact, however, there is a distinct possibility that Melville revealed more in his review of Browne than a personal or literary chagrin over the presentation of “so many plain, matter-of-fact details connected with nautical life.” For despite the fact that “the poetry of salt water [was] very much on the wane” as a result of writings like those of Browne (and Captain Ringbolt/John Codman, whose *Sailors’ Life and Sailors’ Yarns* was reviewed in the same place), Melville’s invocation of Byron suggests perhaps a more complex concern with deeper possibilities of sea literature. Indeed, he may have gleaned from Byron more than poetic inspiration or a particular affinity for the Romantic sea, as his figuration of the sea (especially in *Typee* and *Omoo*) as an arena of conquest and empire-building seems to suggest. Like Britain, who had long “ruled the waves,” America took great pride in its maritime exploits.⁷ But like Byron’s ironic suggestion of the sea as a highway to colonial imperialism and jingoistic pride in the opening lines of “The Corsair” (“Survey our empire, and behold our home!/These are our realms, no limits to their sway--/Our flag the sceptre all who meet obey”), Melville’s accounts of the Ameri-

can nation's sea exploits are often satiric and openly critical of the "civilizing" effects they achieved.

What is most significant about Byron's lines in "The Corsair" as they relate to this study, though, is the meaningful conjunction established by Byron's speaker between the sea and slavery ("Oh, who can tell? not thou, luxurious slave!"). This is not the incidental or condescending representation of blacks that was common to the sea literature of his time. Byron's linking of the two, in a work that so well exemplifies the Romantic sea that Melville seems to wax wistfully over in the Browne review, is both anachronistic and radical in its apparent attempt to comment upon the silencing of black slaves. The speaker's "Who can tell?" appears quite rhetorical even, in relation to the slaves' historically subjugated position. It is an ironic interrogative that anticipates Melville's own profound concern with questions of slavery and the ability to empower through voice. Not only does Byron's provocative recognition of the slave's inarticulate predicament precede by more than forty years the "voiceless end" to which Melville commits the black slave Babo in *Benito Cereno*. It prefigures also a scene in *Mardi* where an enslaved member of the tribe of Hamo responds to Babbalanja's demand to "speak, then,

for thyself; say, whether thou beliest thy maker." The slave replies:

Speak not of my Maker to me. Under the lash, I believe my masters, and account myself a brute; but in my dreams, be-
think myself an angel. But I am bond; and my little ones;
--their mother's milk is gall. (532)

In Byron's poem, the "luxurious slave" cannot "tell" the "exulting sense--the pulse's maddening play,/ That thrills the wanderer of that trackless way" because he has never "danced in triumph o'er the waters wide." The slave has been deprived of his own voice, that is, precisely because he has also been denied the opportunity to experience himself as a free individual whose worth is self-determined rather than imposed. Insofar as the sea is figured here as a kind of litmus test of freedom, the slave cannot express what he has been prevented from knowing, whether the sea or the sense of freedom it frequently inspires. Significantly, the first words spoken by the serf in *Mardi* are "Speak not"; and he must "account [him]self a brute," he says, because this is how the masters who enslave him "under the lash" insist that he define himself. It does not matter, the serf realizes, that he sees himself as an "angel" in his dreams. He is "bond," the milk of the mother of his children is "gall," and his dreams rival only his voice as unarticulated expressions of his misery and longing.

Curiously, these are the only words spoken by a slave in the *Uivenza* sections of *Mardi*. Like Byron, Melville either refuses or is unwilling at this point to presume to speak too freely *for* the slave, although he makes certain to acknowledge the enforced silencing that characterized the majority of the whites' treatment of blacks/slaves. Moreover, he would seem to have championed the cause of these silenced victims when he had Babbalanja ruefully aver, "truth is in things, and not in words: truth is voiceless." In the half-dozen chapters he devotes to an allegorized American nation here, Melville clearly makes the slavery issue his central concern, and he has much to say about it through the passionate but often contradictory voices of several (white) characters. Yet, the voice of the Black/Africanist presence is muted in comparison to the pained voices of these other characters who appear to express Melville's own outrage and anguished torment over a seemingly insoluble problem. On the one hand, Yoomy likely speaks for the author when he exclaims, "oh, beings as ourselves, how my stiff arm shivers to avenge you! 'Twere absolution for the matricide, to strike one rivet from your chains. My heart outswells its home!" And the same is also true of his later insistence that "all honest hearts must cheer this tribe of Hamo on; though they cut their chains with blades thrice-edged, and gory to the haft! 'Tis

right to fight for freedom, whoever be the thrall....Oro will van the right" (533). On the other hand, Babbalaja's response to these exhortations takes the form of cautionary warnings about both the disinterestedness or indifference of the god Oro and the use of violence to emancipate the serfs. Very likely, it is a rejoinder that may also reflect Melville's own apprehensions at the time:

"Not always has it proved so," said Babbalanja. "Ofttimes, the right fights single-handed against the world; and Oro champions none. In all things, man's own battles, man himself must fight. Yoomy: so far as feeling goes, your sympathies are not more hot than mine; but for these serfs you would cross spears; yet I would not. Better present woes for some, than future woes for all." (533-34)

Whether or not Melville shared Babbalanja's reservations on the subject of condoning violence in order to bring an end to slavery, it is certain that he understood the moral dilemma posed by a repugnance for evil that seems overridden by the practical necessity of tolerating "present woes for some." This was, after all, a predicament that operated upon the minds and hearts of many in America who *knew* the moral evil of slavery but bought into a political and historical rationalization which had begun with the willful omission of mention of slavery and blacks in the Constitution. Of course, this kind of racist temporizing persisted until the Civil War, and its impact was not exclusive to the South. It ex-

emplified the *laissez-faire* attitude of politicians like Thomas Jefferson and writers as different in age, temperament, and talent as George Tucker and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

In *Mardi*, Babbalanja clearly recognizes the evil of slavery, and he somewhat savagely asks the slave-driver Nulli (Calhoun), “How can ye abide to sway this curs’d dominion?” Nulli, who had earlier expressed suspicion that the narrator’s band of wanderers had come as “firebrands, to light the flame of revolt,” responds with equal savagery and incendiary threats of his own:

Peace, fanatic! Who else may till unwholesome fields,
but these? And as these beings are, so shall they remain;
'tis right and righteous! Maramma champions it!
--/ swear it! The first blow struck for them, dissolves
the union of Uivenza'a uales. The northern tribes well
know it; and know me.

What becomes apparent from these exchanges is that Babbalanja's worry over “future woes for all” expresses both the inveterate fear of slave insurrection and the familiar belief, noted by Taji, that “intermeddlings” by “northern tribes” would “dissolve the common alliance” and thereby goad the South to “establish a distinct confederacy among themselves” (531). In the mid-1770s, Jefferson authored his famous proclamation that “all men are created equal”—but he did not truly mean *all* men. For although he

frequently proclaimed his strong disapproval of slavery, he exercised neither his considerable political power to end it nor his personal conscience to emancipate his personal slaves. In his "Notes on Virginia" (1784), Jefferson openly acknowledged the evil of slavery. But, at the same time, he believed (with many others) that any attempt to emancipate that did not include re-colonization would destroy the union--or worse yet, lead inevitably to violent and fatal confrontation. It would be impossible to "incorporate [*sic*] the blacks into the state," he wrote, as a result of both the whites' "deep-rooted prejudices" and the "ten thousand recollections by the blacks of the injuries they have sustained...[which]...will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions, which will never end but in the extermination of one or the other race."⁸ In the same place, he advanced his "suspicion... that the blacks...are inferior to whites both in body and mind," a judgment which appears to have encouraged similar racist tracts in a number of other American writers well into the nineteenth century. George Tucker, for example, in *The Valley of Shenandoah* (1824), writes as though he had just finished reading Jefferson:

We, of the present generation, find domestic slavery established among us, and the evil, for I freely admit it to be an evil, both moral and political, admits of no remedy that is not worse than the disease. No thinking man supposes that we could emancipate them, and safely let them

remain in the country; and no good or prudent man would run the risk of renewing the scenes which have made St. Domingo one general scene of waste and butchery.
(1.61-2)

There is no question here, as elsewhere in *The Valley of Shenandoah*, that Tucker recognizes the blatant immorality of slavery. Through his alter ego/plantation owner, Edward Grayson, he also acknowledges the humanity of “the negro” who “feels the bitterness of his lot, and his utter insignificance as a member of civilized society” (II .207). In the end, however, Tucker’s representation of blacks and slaves reminds one of Jefferson, who thought the “mental and moral characteristics of Negroes” provided the “most obvious proof of their inferiority.” And Tucker’s fear of a slave insurrection, which fails to share Jefferson’s cognizance of white guilt and responsibility for the profound antipathy that the blacks must have felt for their enslavers, clearly prevents him from acknowledging either the full humanity of the the black race or the (not so) benign racism of his own opinions. To have allowed such a recognition would have mandated the immediate manumission of the slaves, an untenable prospect that, for both Jefferson and Tucker, conjured visions of a bloody slave rebellion such as that which took place in Santo Domingo in 1804. Instead, Tucker justifies his tyrannical position of slaveholder by resorting to the

common Southern rationalization that the slaves it held as human chattel were actually content as the result of their being well-kept and kindly cared for within the “patriarchal family” of the American South’s “peculiar institution”:

The weight of his fetters, the negro, who has been born and bred on a well regulated estate, hardly feels. His simple wants are abundantly supplied, and whatsoever of coercion there is on his will, it is so moderate and reasonable in itself, and, above all, he has been so habituated to it, that it appears to be all right, or rather, he does not feel it to be wrong. He is, in fact, a member of a sort of patriarchal family. (11.206)

Finally, even Hawthorne, it seems, could not resist the lure of such rationalizations. And in a campaign biography he wrote for Franklin Pierce, just after Melville had published *Moby-Dick*, he dismissed the abolitionist call for immediate emancipation as a dangerously abstract idealism whose theoretical or philanthropic basis undermined the “practical sagacity” of those who, like Pierce and Hawthorne himself, saw the preservation of the Union (and their own lives, perhaps) as the paramount good of the nation.⁹ Indeed, his remarks in *The Life of Pierce* demonstrate the consistency of this line of thinking in America from the time of Jefferson to the nineteenth-century proslavery apologists like Tucker to the irresolute antislavery sentiments expressed by Melville’s Babbalanja. It was an argument against change that made

Babbalanja's "Better present woes for some, than future woes for all" sound like a rally cry or campaign slogan for inactivity. It was a testimonial to the kind of moral reprobation that led Emerson to expunge Hawthorne's dedication to him in his copy of *The Life of Pierce*. It inspired Thoreau's cryptic remark in "Civil Disobedience" that the "children of Washington and Franklin say they know not what to do and do nothing" about the slavery problem. It was also a position, as R. C. Robey wrote, which insisted upon the old belief that "the present dimensions of evil are certain and limited, but that any future good is unclear and undefined."¹⁰ Any change, according to Hawthorne, would only ensure "the aggravated injury of those whose condition it aimed to ameliorate, and terminating, in its possible triumph--if such a possibility there were--with the ruin of two races which now dwelt together in greater peace and affection, it is not too much to say, than had ever elsewhere existed between the taskmaster and the serf."¹¹

He then continued:

"And if the work of anti-slavery agitation, which, it is undeniable, leaves most men who earnestly engage in it with only half a country in their affections--if this work must be done, let others do it....Those northern men, therefore, who deem the great cause of human welfare all represented and involved in this great hostility against southern institutions, and who conceive that the world stands still except so far as that goes forward--these, it may be allowed, can scarcely

give their sympathy or their confidence to the subject of this memoir. But there is still another view, and probably as wise a one. It looks upon slavery as one of those evils which divine Providence does not leave to be remedied by human contrivances, but which, in its own good time, by some means impossible to be anticipated, but of the simplest and easiest operation, when all its uses shall have been fulfilled, it causes to vanish like a dream. There is no instance in all history, of the human will and intellect having perfected any great moral reform by methods which it adapted to that end; but the progress of the world, at every step, leaves some evil or wrong on the path behind it, which the wisest of mankind, of their own set purpose, could never have found the way to rectify. Whatever contributes to the great cause of good, contributes to all its subdivisions and varieties; and, on this score, the lover of his race, the enthusiast, the philanthropist of whatever theory, might lend his aid to put a man, like the one before us [Pierce], into the leadership of the world's affairs. (113-114)

The partisan nature of Hawthorne's political tract stands in sharp contradistinction to the writings that prompted Melville to say that his then new friend was a man "in whom humor and love, like mountain peaks, soar to such a rapt height,...in whom humor and love are developed in that high form called genius."¹² And the bald insensitivity of Hawthorne's racialized rationalizations here can also be said to cast an ironic light upon Melville's remark, in the same place, that "it is not the brain that can test such a man; it is only the heart."¹³ Emerson was only one of many Northerners and abolitionists distressed by what was generally considered to be Hawthorne's pandering for the "Copperhead" Pierce, and in his journal Emerson lamented Hawthorne's "perverse politics and and unfortunate friendship for that paltry Franklin Pierce."¹⁴ What

is most surprising in relation to *Mardi* , however, is Hawthorne's rabidly univocal reaction to a moral dilemma that Melville's sea romance seemed determined not to (over)determine just a few years earlier, a reaction that belies the "great beauty" and "honest heart" that Melville once perceived in his friend.¹⁵

Hawthorne had read *Mardi* , of course. In fact, he praised Melville's third novel in a letter to Evert Duyckinck by saying that it contained "depths here and there that compel a man to swim for his life."¹⁶ But where *Mardi* seems to reveal Melville's confusion and ambivalence about the political aspects of the slavery question, or perhaps a resigned willingness on his part to "swim for his life" over such a painfully vexing problem, Hawthorne's propaganda piece forsakes the very humanity of blacks in favor of a stale and dogmatic Unionist defense of the racist status-quo. In the romance that is *Mardi* , where the author freed himself to pursue "bootless deep diving...in oceans unknown" (651), Melville was not afraid to allow Babbalanja to voice the rudiments of the position that Hawthorne's *Pierce* would later elaborate upon. But he more than balances this perspective with baleful images of slaves laboring "under a burning sun, hundreds of collared [read also: *colored*] men...toiling in trenches....Standing grimly over these, were men unlike them; armed with long thongs, which de-

scended upon the toilers, and made wounds. Blood and sweat mixed; and in great drops, fell" (531-20). And although Hawthorne's quietist belief in Providence as the only remedy which could cause slavery to "vanish like a dream" is also prefigured in *Mardi* by a passive willingness to await the inevitable intervention of "all-healing Time," there are quite significant differences in both the tone and sensitivity of the two works:

The future is all hieroglyphics. Who may read? But, methinks the great laggard Time must now march up apace, and somehow befriend these thralls. It cannot be, that misery is perpetually entailed; though, in a land proscribing primogeniture, the first-born and last of Hamo's tribe must still succeed to all their sire's wrongs. Yes: Time--all-healing Time--Time, great Philanthropist!--Time must befriend these thralls! (535)

If we compare Melville's exclamatory tone and obvious compassion for the serfs/slaves to Hawthorne's politicized inanities, it becomes apparent that however much Melville's political feelings and thoughts might have persuaded him of the necessity of preserving the union, he saw unflinchingly the monstrous inhumanity of the blacks' enslavement: "Humanity cries out against this vast enormity" is how he states it in *Mardi* (534). And even though, in the same place, Melville acknowledges the fact that "no one man knows a prudent remedy," he does seem to make it

clear that the Providential “remedy” that much of the nation had been waiting for, at least since Jefferson’s time, represented but a well-rehearsed evasion of responsibility. Just as it was also an indication of one race’s deluded sense of presumed superiority over another. How ironic it must have seemed to Melville that the black slaves in his country were yet denied the freedom promised by the Declaration of Independence and the protection supposedly guaranteed by the Constitution is expressed poignantly near the end of Chapter 157 in *Mardi*. As the narrator (Taji) and his entourage near the coast of Divenza (America), the travellers notice an inscription that, upon closer inspection, Mohi is able to decipher: “In-this-re-publi-can-land-all-men-are-born-free-and-equal.” In a literal sense, Mohi’s staccato-paced reading of these words might seem more the result of his difficulty in seeing or translating the “immense hieroglyphics” that confront the party. But the effect of these disjointed words suggests also the insincerity often associated with political propaganda or words spoken in connivance rather than words that are delivered from the heart. Perhaps this is why Media and Babbalanja react with such abrupt cynicism upon hearing Mohi’s recitation: “False!” exclaims Media. “And for how long stay they so?” asks the skeptical Babbalanja.

As it turns out, the pessimism expressed by Media and Babbalanja is indeed well-founded. For upon even closer investigation of the hieroglyphics, the group discovers a racial disclaimer appended to Uivenza's supposed declaration of universal equality: "Except-the-tribe-of-Hamo." And again it is the terse Media who speaks first and accusingly: "That nullifies the other," cried Media. "Ah, ye republicans!" Babbalanja's initial response is to suggest that "some wag must have done it" (513). But, as he and the remainder of Taji's covey are about to discover, there is absolutely nothing waggish about the ugly disclaimer they have chanced upon at the coast of Uivenza. Like the silent exclusion of blacks from the American Constitution, the implications of such blatant prejudice presaged greater evils than mere exclusion or separatism among tribes and races. It tacitly sanctioned the violent and hegemonic usurpation of one race's freedom to the point where, as Yoomy sadly notes, "fettered sons of fettered mothers [are] conceived and born in manacles" (533). In *Mardi*, Melville's own feelings about blacks and the institution of slavery are probably distributed amongst several of the characters who have been cited here, which might be an indication of the awkward hesitation he must have experienced about making bold pronouncements on the virtually inseparable subjects. Yet, compared to many who

wrote before and after him (with the obvious exception of committed abolitionists), the powerful anti-slavery sentiments expressed in *Mardi* reveal a mind and a heart in the midst of tumultuous change and reappraisal of erstwhile uncertainties or rationalizations. As for the Black/Africanist presence itself, there is a passage at the beginning of Chapter Nine which offers a clue, perhaps, how Melville's own feelings about blacks and slavery had come to develop in the course of writing *Mardi*. Significantly, it is also a passage that demonstrates yet another connection made by him between blacks/slaves and the sea. Here, Melville's alter ego, Taji, has escaped from the *Arcturion* and begins to experience an "awful loneliness" in the vast expanse of open sea that surrounds him. "Ere this," he says, "*I had regarded the ocean as a slave* , the steed that bore me whither I listed, and whose various propensities, mighty though they were, often proved harmless, when opposed to the genius of man. But now, how changed!" (29).

Melville, too, had changed. And not only did he change in his attitudes about himself and his writing, as so many commentators have observed about his journey into "the world of mind" that is *Mardi*. One of the most important features of Melville's seeming-

ly “chartless voyage” is his urgent representation of the unspeakable horrors associated with slavery in America, as well as his attempt to keep the *human* elements of the Black/Africanist people in the forefront of his nation’s consciousness. Melville certainly experienced his own constraints about being too overtly political (and public) about the slavery question. But beginning with *Mardi* he began to insist that his readers see blacks more as people than simply as problems or subhuman vassals. He proposed no solution to the problem, but there is no doubting the intensity of the moral reprobation he felt towards the institution itself and those who defended it:

But sin it is, no less;--a blot, foul as the crater-pool of hell; it puts out the sun at noon; it parches all fertility; and, conscience or no conscience--ere he die--let every master who wrenches bond-babe from mother, that the nipple tear; unwreathes the arms of sisters; or cuts the holy unity in twain; till apart fall man and wife, like one bleeding body cleft:--let that master thrice shrive his soul; take every sacrament; on his bended knees give up the ghost;--yet shall he die despairing; and live again, to die forever damned. (535)

Notes

- 1 See Parker, *Herman Melville*, p. 490; and Robertson-Lorant, *Melville*, p. 154.
- 2 *Letters*, March 25, 1848.
- 3 *Herman Melville*, p. 700. It was a lasting infatuation, it seems, if the frequency of Melville’s references to Byron in his works is any indication.

- 4 *Typee*, xiv. There has been much speculation about the source and meanings of Melville's stated (but misleading) desire "to speak the unvarnished truth." One possible source that does not seem to have been noticed, however, is Mungo Park, who says in his own Preface to *Travels* (vii): "As a composition, it has nothing to recommend it, but truth. It is a plain, unvarnished tale."
- 5 *Letters*, January 1, 1848.
- 6 *Letters*, March 25, 1848.
- 7 Philbrick quotes an unnamed "popular magazine in 1813" that celebrated "the glorious achievements of our navy [which had] kindled a new and holy spirit of nationality, and enabled the humblest citizen among us boldly to say to the world that he too has a country" (pp. 1-2).
- 8 *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*; ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York, 1944), p. 256.
- 9 See Richard C. Robey's "Foreword," ix, to Hawthorne's *The Life of Franklin Pierce* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1852; rpt. New York: Garrett Press, 1970).
- 10 *Ibid.*, vii.
- 11 *Life of Franklin Pierce*, p. 112. Subsequent citations from this edition appear parenthetically in the text.
- 12 "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (eds.), *Moby-Dick* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967), p. 539.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 541.
- 14 Quoted in Robey, v.
- 15 "Hawthorne and His Mosses," p. 539 and p. 543.
- 16 Nathaniel Hawthorne to Evert Duyckinck, August 29, 1850; quoted in Jay Leyda, *The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville* 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), I. 391.

Chapter Seven

Redburn and White-Jacket

It is too often the case, that civilized beings sojourning among savages soon come to regard them with disdain and contempt. But though in many cases this feeling is almost natural, it is not defensible; and it is wholly wrong. Why should we condemn them?--Because we are better than they? Assuredly not; for herein we are rebuked by the story of the Publican and the Pharisee.--Because, then, that in many things we are happier?--But this should be ground for commiseration, not disdain. Xavier and Eliot despised not the savages; and had Newton or Milton dwelt among them, they would not have done so.--When we affect to condemn savages, we should remember that by so doing we asperse our own progenitors; for they were savages also. Who can swear that among the naked British barbarians sent to Rome to be stared at more than 1500 years ago, the ancestor of Bacon might not have been found?--Why, among the very Thugs of India, or the bloody Dyaks of Borneo, exists the germ of all that is intellectually elevated and grand. We are all of us--Anglo-Saxons, Dyaks and Indians--sprung from one head and made in one image. And if we reject this brotherhood now, we shall be forced to join hands hereafter.--A misfortune is not a fault; and good luck is not meritorious. The savage is born a savage; and the civilized being but inherits his civilization, nothing more. Let us not disdain then, but pity. And wherever we recognize the image of God let us reverence it; though it swing from the gallows.

(Melville, "Mr Parkman's Tour")

The excerpt from "Mr Parkman's Tour" that is quoted above was published in *The Literary World* in March, 1849. It registers and records a voice seldom heard of Herman Melville, one that is (seemingly) undisguised, straightforward, and openly political in its expression of a liberal, humane sentiment for the racialized

other whose presence in America was the source of widespread controversy. And although this review specifically identifies the “Indian” as the “savage” other who merits “commiseration” and “pity,” Melville makes it quite clear that his censure of Mr. Parkman’s racist attitude toward these Indians is meant to extend beyond the specific realm of Indian-hating alone. In fact, Melville makes a point of universalizing his criticism of racist sentiments when he says that a belief such as Parkman’s, while “almost natural...is not defensible” and as “wholly wrong” as any similar prejudice against the so-called barbarism of the “Thugs of India,” the “Dyaks of Borneo,” or--can there be any doubt?--the African-American Negro. Like the few other reviews that Melville wrote, this review of Francis Parkman’s *The California and Oregon Trail* was unsigned, and the suspicion here is that this anonymity could only have served to encourage the author’s frankness of opinion and, possibly, the candid expression of a heartfelt conviction--qualities of directness, that is, which are increasingly difficult to discern in Melville’s later writings, as he came to rely more heavily upon ironized, fallible narrators and shifting, multiple points of view to “tell” his stories. What we learn about the post-1850s Melville is that what he once said

about the intentions of Hawthorne's story titles turns out to be as much a projection of Melville's own fictional techniques and methods as it is an accurate description of his friend's: "But with whatever motive, playful or profound, Nathaniel Hawthorne has chosen to entitle his pieces in the manner he has, it is certain, that some of them are directly calculated to deceive, egregiously deceive, the superficial skimmer of pages."¹

In this sense, the review of "Parkman's Tour" provides one of the scant clues available to the critic who essays to discover Melville's own attitudes and beliefs about the racialized other whose numbers in America were increasing rapidly, and whose impact upon the collective psyche of white America was growing ever more urgent. While many observers remain confident in their assessments of Melville's racial attitudes, it should be remembered that these appraisals are primarily interpretations culled from the author's fictions, and that, as a result of this, depending upon the individual critic's "reading" of a fictional text, Melville has been described as either a staunch abolitionist or one of the "classic figures" whose reputed antislavery sentiments "may be a construction of generous wish rather than hard fact."² The Parkman review is thus invaluable for its seem-

ingly ingenuous presentation of the historical Melville's personal opinions on racial matters. And written as it was, just prior to his writing of *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*, it foregrounds the predominantly sympathetic depictions and increasingly original representations of racial others in these works, especially the black race whose enslaved presence seemed to torment the equalitarian Melville even as it exacerbated his fears about the threat that this black presence posed to the unity of the American nation.

In the extraordinarily prolific year of 1849, when he would finally complete *Mardi*, compose the Parkman review, and then write both *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*, Melville was doubtless aware of the tempestuous Congressional debate over the grave race issues that would lead to the infamous Compromise of 1850 (which included the nefarious and enormously divisive Fugitive Slave Law.) And how could he not have been aware of other inflammatory, racially-charged legislation like the Roberts' school segregation case? After all, it was a ruling by his father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw, that sanctioned the "separate- but-equal" policy of Boston's segregated school system--a doctrine that established a nationwide precedent of racial segregation in the American school systems which would last for more than a century.³ (Of

course, Shaw was soon to be embroiled in even more tumultuous crises related to the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, but discussion of these episodes will be deferred to a later chapter.)

As these racially-fraught social and political events came to a head near the midpoint of the century, Melville surely recognized the urgency of the nation's crisis. And although it was not compatible with his temperament to make public shows of whatever abolitionist sentiments he may have felt, the climate of the times was such that he could not watch silently or "dumb at [his] desk," as Emerson had accused certain senators and representatives whose "tameness and silence" on the slavery question he deplored.⁴ Somewhere inside himself, Melville may also have experienced a twinge of guilt over what Lowell termed the "admitted fact...that African slavery presses with a nearly equal degrading influence upon the nonslaveholding whites as upon the slave."⁵ Perhaps in response to these external and internal pressures, and in the angry aftermath of *Mardi's* failure to earn him neither money nor the fame he felt his due, Melville's characterizations of the Black/Africanist presence in both *Redburn* (1849) and *White-Jacket* (1850) took on a much more dramatic, human dimension. His depictions of the Black/Africanist *presence* in

these two works essay to describe black people as *individuals* with faces, features, feelings, emotions, intellects, and voices of their own. There is less reliance upon literary conventions and the stereotyped black discussed in previous chapters here, and now, more than ever, when a stereotype is invoked, as with the cook (Mr. Thompson) in *Redburn* or the wryly named “Tawney” in *White-Jacket*, the purpose of the stereotype is to subvert both the expectation and the prejudice of the “common reader.” It is as if Melville now presents the stereotype only to force his reader’s recognition and then deflate it through careful manipulation of roles and expectations that had been previously (albeit tacitly) agreed upon.

Most of Melville’s readers would have recognized immediately the black cook, Mr. Thompson, for example, especially if they were familiar with sea narratives. Or at least they would have thought so with some measure of confidence, for he is described initially by the author as “the only man taking his ease” (81) on a “drizzling, foggy, clammy...most miserable Sunday” (80). He moves about his cramped, greasy, suffocatingly small kitchen with an air of propriety, answers to the ironic cognomen “*the doctor*” and is given to using “some bad language occasionally” (82). However, just when the majority of mid-nineteenth-

century readers would have been expecting a burlesque in the form of a jolly minstrel or lazy illiterate, Melville turns both conventions around by presenting instead a figure of scholarly bent and true religious aspect.

Now, our doctor was a serious old fellow, much given to metaphysics, and used to talk about original sin. All that Sunday morning, he sat over his boiling pots, reading out of a book which was very much soiled and covered with grease spots....I could hardly believe my eyes when I found this book was the Bible.

...Fronting the stove, and very close to it, was a sort of narrow shelf, where he used to sit with his legs spread out very wide, to keep them from scorching; and there, with his book in one hand, and a pewter spoon in the other, he sat all that Sunday morning, stirring up his pots, and studying away at the same time; seldom taking his eye off the page. (81)

“I loved to peep in upon him, when he was thus absorbed,” the narrator confides, and there is hardly a trace of condescension discernible in his otherwise often haughty voice when he observes of the cook that “[r]eading must have been very hard work for him; for he muttered to himself quite aloud as he read” (81). In fact, the passage just cited suggests the narrator’s respect and admiration for Mr. Thompson in ways that surpass his literal representation of the scene he describes. Even though it is frequently impossible to differentiate the narrative voices in *Redburn* --among the naive young seaman who is the ostensible narrator of the tale, the elder writer who authors Redburn’s sea

voyage in retrospect, and Melville himself--it seems certain that the scene is intended as a tableau in which the cook is portrayed as a venerable person rather than a venal one. First, the narrow shelf upon which he sits reading his Bible recalls the "narrow" path to salvation alluded to in that same book, and it is only by sticking to that narrow shelf that he avoids the "scorching" that Christian iconography associates with the eternal fires of hell. Second, the narrator's startling evocation of the emblematic figure of the black man with a book in one hand and a pewter spoon in the other carries symbolic implications beyond the ken of most literature extant at the time, suggesting as it does the black's duality--or his ability to embody more than one realm of personality and potentiality at a time--which is a notion that allows him to transcend the usual one-dimensionality of black stereotypes. Since the cook is black, his spoon, which can be said to represent a source or means of nourishment, must be a dull alloy like pewter rather than the silver or golden spoons associated with rank and privilege. Literally and metaphorically, there is a consonance to this fact. However, the book in Mr. Thompson's other hand suggests the possibility of something more, indeed much more: the world of mind, the world of thought, a world of "religious studies and meditations" which could lead him to puz-

zle over “a mysterious passage in the Book of Chronicles” and demand “an explanation” from Redburn--whom he singles out, as the narrator says, because he was “aware that I knew how to read” (82).

The very fact that Mr. Thompson notices Redburn's ability to read represents a somewhat subversive transformation of conventional expectations. Since it was still illegal in the southern states to teach slaves to read or write, and since illiteracy among free northern blacks was so widespread, Melville's depiction of the cook as such a sober, pious, and devotedly literate individual suggests his own interest in introducing a revised figure of black characters in his writings.⁶ Mr. Thompson does not simply read; he notices others who read, he reads *to* them, he encourages them to meditate, and he cajoles them for explication. There is nothing of the burlesque elements common to preachy, poorly-spoken black preachers of dubious piety who populated the popular press,⁷ nor is there even a trace of the Sambo stereotype common to plantation romances and much sea literature alike. Even Melville's own earlier blacks were not regarded with such deference as Mr. Thompson is accorded (with the possible exception of Baltimore, who, in *Omoo*, is the beleaguered recip-

ient of the narrator's sympathetic attention). Throughout the entire chapter devoted to the cook and the steward, Lavender, Redburn's tone seems to verge upon bemusement without ever achieving it. He fails to "satisfy" the cook's demand for an exegesis of the "mysterious passage" in *Chronicles*, and following a brief account of an apparent prayer-meeting in the cook's box of a kitchen among the cook and "a committee of three reverend looking old darkies,"⁸ he refers to the cook's occasional propensity for "bad language" and then attempts to excuse it by stating that the cook was guilty of such mild transgressions only under circumstances that would have exasperated Job himself:

...particularly of cold, wet, stormy mornings, when he had to get up before daylight and make his fire; with the sea breaking over the bows, and now and then dashing into his stove.

So, under the circumstances, you could not blame him much, if he did rip a little, for it would have tried old Job's temper, to be set to work making a fire in the water. (82)

The sea still provides the all-important physical and metaphysical setting for Melville's treatment of black characters in his fiction, and in this passage the plight of the black race in America is figured in the black cook's sea-induced predicament. In a literal sense, Mr. Thompson must try to light a fire with which to cook, but Melville's synecdochic use of *the water* to represent the sea has the effect of inflating the metaphoric possibili-

ties of the image. The cook seeks not only fire with which to cook (and, therefore, serve), that is; but, as should be evident in his earnest endeavors to penetrate the mysteries of scripture, his quest for fire is also a quest for enlightenment. And just as the passage under consideration moves from a concrete description of the cook trying to make fire “with the sea breaking over the bows...into his stove” to the quasi-mythical figure of a persecuted Job/Mr. Thompson attempting to make “a fire in the water,” so the symbolic implications of the passage shifts the literal meaning to a metaphysical plane in which the fate of the black race is evoked in all its Sisyphean absurdity.

In his efforts to refigure the prevailing stereotypes of his era, particularly those related to race in the popular sea literature of the time, Melville was faced with the demanding task of trying to transform images that had been accepted and that had continued to thrive in more than one genre of writing. Some of these stereotypes, like those of the black cooks and stewards at sea, were so common that their acceptance as norms is found in works that might otherwise seem quite disparate. Indeed, it was not only in the abundant sea narratives that the impact of these stereotypes was registered upon the reading public. Per-

haps unwittingly, as suggested earlier, these same racist representations frequently found their way into the abolitionist press and even antislavery tracts such as Emerson's "Emancipation Address." Obviously, the motives behind the use of these stereotypical representations varied greatly among the authors who employed them, from the factual or fictional purposes of those who wrote sea narratives to the antislavery designs of the abolitionists, to the high-minded rhetorical strategies of Emerson. But, interestingly enough, certain figures like those of the black cook and steward were so prevalent--and had so much in common--as to become standardized, almost *expected* representations of the African black in American life and lore.

In an 1841 sea narrative, for example, Henry James Mercier's description of a black cook is characteristic of the *type* of black the public was accustomed to seeing. First, he is demeaned by his lack of proper name; he is known to the crew (and the reader) only as "Swampseed." And although most of Melville's black mariners are also known by nicknames such as Lavender, Rosewater, or Sunshine, these sobriquets seem milder or less offensive than the clearly pejorative "Swampseed." More significantly, Melville's cook in *Redburn* is allowed to make certain

that everyone does in fact know his name: "In fair weather, he spread the skirt of an old jacket before the door, by way of a mat; and screwed a small ring-bolt into the door for a knocker; and wrote his name, 'Mr. Thompson,' over it, with a bit of red chalk" (82).

Second, in the scant physical description afforded the cook in Mercier's work, the most prominent of his features is "the grease oozing from his ebony countenance and running down his cheeks in streams,"⁹ an observation which focuses attention on the black's sloven appearance rather than the hard fact that the cook's occupation permits nothing else. And here again, a comparison with Melville's Mr. Thompson is revealing, for although it was the black hue of the cook's skin that "kept us from seeing his dirty face," as the narrator blandly states, the incipient stereotype is redirected by the subsequent disclosure of the cook's piety, literary bent, evangelism, and evident fastidiousness over the condition of his workplace. Of these "premises," the narrator acknowledged, "this old cook was very particular about them; he had a warm love and affection for his cookhouse" (82).

While Mercier's characterization of his black cook was typical of the representations found in the sea narratives of the era, a more ironic note is registered by the unexpected reprise of

this minstrel figure in works whose ostensible aim was the promotion of antislavery sentiments. In Emerson's impassioned "Emancipation Address," we see also an evidence of just how deeply the stereotypes of forlorn blacks at sea had penetrated into virtually every level of American thought and rhetoric. At the same time, we gain profound measure of how pervasive and commonplace were these stereotypes that Melville attempted to refigure. The figures of pathetic black cooks and stewards evoked by Emerson in his "Emancipation Address," for instance, are clearly reminiscent of the numerous representations of the cooks and stewards in the sea literature of the time, where the blacks were forced to accept meekly their relegation to subordinate or degraded positions. But equally obvious is the fact that Emerson invoked the familiar images of these subjugated blacks in order to elicit sympathy and perhaps to excite outrage over their depraved condition. We should notice how he purposefully juxtaposed his images against "the great vision of the patriots and senators who have adopted the slave's cause" so that the dramatic contradiction between the American nation's ideals and practices was not lost upon many of his "fellow citizens":

I have found myself oppressed by other thoughts. As I

have walked in the pastures and along the edge of the woods, I could not keep my imagination upon those agreeable figures, for other images that intruded on me. I could not see the great vision of the patriots and senators who have adopted the slave's cause:--they turned their backs on me. No: I see other pictures--of mean men: I see very poor, very ill-clothed, very ignorant men, not surrounded by happy friends,--to be plain--poor black men of obscure employment as mariners, cooks, or stewards, in ships..."¹⁰

Emerson's vision of destitute black men serving as cooks and stewards on ships at sea derives from a long tradition of sea literature and actual custom. Commonly, these menial occupations were almost regularly filled by blacks, some of them free men and some who, still legally enslaved, earned wages which were then forfeited to their owners. And just as routinely, sea narratives noted this fact with great accuracy.¹¹ In 1842, then Senator Calhoun evidently became so accustomed to seeing African blacks cast into occupational roles of such fitting servitude and degradation that he attempted to make it unlawful for them to serve in any other capacity aboard a vessel of the United States Navy; and his reasoning was that whites should not be relegated to performing tasks clearly meant for "inferiors." His introduction of legislation to this effect managed somehow to get out of the Senate but failed to win Congressional approval,¹² and what Calhoun failed to establish in law remained nevertheless as a common practice that was well-recognized by many. When Em-

erson summoned up the image of the black cook and steward who suffered stoically, and mostly silently, the squalid circumstances imposed upon them by a racist society, he was surely aware that this representation would be immediately recognizable to most of his audience. What made his figuration different from many others at the time, however, was also what made it similar to Melville's a few years later in *Redburn*. It was meant to show empathy for blacks and remorse for his and his nation's recalcitrance to the "moral revolution" required to liberate America's blacks. "I was a slave," Emerson quotes an English counsel as having said on behalf of a client; "I was a slave, for I was in America: I am now in a country, where the common rights of mankind are known and regarded" (526). Five years later in *Redburn*, Melville would write a truly remarkable passage about a black American steward in Liverpool, and he would also make comparisons between "the rights of mankind" enjoyed by this black in England and the racially-motivated denigration and violence he was forced to suffer in his own country. As if in reply to Emerson's citation, or perhaps to elaborate upon it, Melville's narrator would admit "that, in some things, we Americans leave to other countries the carrying out of the principle that stands at the head of our Declaration of Independence" (202).

It is impossible to gauge the degree of deliberate dissimulation that went into Melville's depiction of the black steward "Lavender" in *Redburn*. But based upon the seeming nonchalance of the narrator's opening description of the "handsome, dandy mulatto," it seems likely that the representation of this steward comprises a most egregiously deceptive and subversive example of Melvillean irony at work. After all, everything the narrator chooses to relate to his reader about this black seems calculated, at least at the outset, to portray him as an innocuous, perhaps feminized type of black whose dandified manner exceeded even the soft plantation stereotype in its non-threatening aspect. Even his name, Lavender, which the narrator associates with the black's former occupation as a barber in New York City, carries both feminine and servile connotations. He was "a sentimental sort of darky," the narrator explains, and he was given to reading popular fiction like *Charlotte Temple* and *Three Spaniards*. Other than his exaggerated vanity, which the narrator presents in a humorous vein, the most satiric jibe directed at Lavender is that his sartorial tastes veered more toward a costume-like array of "claret...and snuff-colored suits, and red vel-

vet vests, and buff and brimstone pantaloons.” On those occasions when he did bedeck himself in a black suit, the narrator offers the opinion that, “with his dark-colored face, [it] made him look quite clerical; like a serious young colored gentleman of Barbadoes, about to take orders” (83).

Of course, the effect of such a representation is almost to emasculate the black. And Melville’s narrator seems intent upon de-masculinizing the steward well beyond what is necessary for one who toiled in a service-oriented position which many whites of the time already perceived as an inherently “feminized” occupation.¹³ What else can be made of the fact that Lavender wears an oddly “large pussy ring on his fore-finger” and is said to have “carried a lock of frizzled hair in his vest pocket, which he frequently volunteered to show people, with his handkerchief to his eyes”? Moreover, in addition to these decidedly feminine traits, Lavender is the “Siamese twin” of the pious cook, Mr. Thompson, and, rather than waste his free hours cavorting with the “cruel and black-hearted” crew (52), the steward spends “[e]very fine evening” with his “great crony,” apparently trying to resist the older black’s evangelical efforts to curb his “blameless” tendency to be a “sad profligate and gay deceiver ashore; addicted to every youthful indiscretion” (83). Together, they would sit on

the cook's narrow shelf, the narrator informs us, "leaning up against each other...to keep from falling off," an unmatched set of paired opposites who seemed to balance each other in a pose that, like the earlier image of the cook holding a book and pew-ter spoon, transcends its literal signification.

What we learn next about the steward Lavender, however, is all the more shocking for its unexpectedness--and the extent to which Melville was willing to risk offending the proprieties of his often sententious reviewers and his racially sensitive (white) audience, especially in a work that he had referred to as a "little nursery tale of mine"¹⁴ and which, with *White-Jacket*, he considered one of "two *jobs*, which I have done for money--being forced to it, as other men are to sawing wood."¹⁵ For what happens next is nothing short of extraordinary, I believe, as Melville transforms his erstwhile popinjay of a steward into a bold figure of black sexuality, a truly subversive character who represented a defiant challenge to a significant portion of the white American public's deepest racial fears and taboos about black sexuality and the effects of miscegenation. As George M. Fredrickson has observed, "[t]here is little reason to doubt the conventional notion that a fear of oversexed 'brute' Negroes has

been a constant and deeply rooted feature of the white racist imagination.”¹⁶ And as such, then, Melville’s representation of Lavender as a black Lothario whose conquests include white women strikes potently at one of white America’s most primal, if irrational, sources of dread and anxiety.

Speaking of Negroes, recalls the looks of interest with which negro-sailors are regarded when they walk the Liverpool streets. In Liverpool indeed the negro steps with a prouder pace, and lifts his head like a man; for here, no such exaggerated feeling exists in respect to him, as in America. Three or four times, I encountered our black steward, dressed very handsomely, and walking arm in arm with a good-looking English woman. In New York, such a couple would have been mobbed in three minutes; and the steward would have been lucky to escape with whole limbs....Being so young and inexperienced then, and unconsciously swayed in some degree by those local and social prejudices, that are the marring of most men, and from which, for the mass, there seems no possible escape; at first I was surprised that a colored man should be treated as he is in this town; but a little reflection showed that, after all, it was but recognizing his claims to humanity and normal equality; so that, in some things, we Americans leave to other countries the carrying out of the principle that stands at the head of our Declaration of Independence. (202)

When we consider that most of the lynchings of blacks in the South at the time are thought to have been related to the alleged raping of white women by blacks and the imagined need to keep in check the “uncontrollable sexual passions” of the “Negro beast,”¹⁷ it should be apparent that Melville’s patently sympathetic view of Lavender’s conduct represented a dangerously subversive (and perhaps self-destructive) stance to assume for

a white author seeking popular recognition. So widespread, apparently, was the fear of miscenegation in white American society, that the image of a sexually threatening, predatory black fiend was cultivated even among certain “religious” spheres: “The baleful fire of unchaste amour rages through the negro’s blood, more fiercely than in the blood of any other people,” insisted the Reverend Josiah Priest, a proslavery advocate who invoked a spurious Biblical defense of the heinous practice just a few years before *Redburn* appeared, “inflaming their imaginations with corresponding ideas and images.”¹⁸

Melville apparently recognized, however, the appalling possibility that such misrepresentations of blacks were in part responsible for the violence of American society--too often racial in nature--and was unable to resist the opportunity to counter such detrimental and malevolent images with a (courageous) refiguration of his own. He seems also to have been unwilling to ignore the damning repercussions such violence incurred upon the heirs to the supposedly egalitarian ideals of the so-called Founding Fathers of the nation. “He remembered how proud he had been of his patriot grandfathers,” says Laurie Robertson-Lorant, “and how disillusioned he had been when he found out

that the Founding Fathers were slaveholding hypocrites and humbugs as well as great architects of liberty.”¹⁹In this passage about the black steward, Melville catalogues his list of grievances through a series of emotionally-charged moments; first, through the graphic evocation of the kind of racially motivated violence that characterized his homeland (not only, as one might expect, in the Deep South, but in Melville’s own birthplace, New York City); second, in a homiletic account of his own epiphanic transformation from the dark prejudice of his youth to enlightened colorblindness, where the young hero’s ability to transcend the moral and temporal limitations of his society possibly infuses him with mythic dimension; and, finally, in an ironic polemic against the mid-nineteenth-century Americans’ unwillingness or incapability to live up to the promise of their own Declaration of Independence; where the most sensational and subversive of Melville’s implications and imprecations are disclosed in his willingness to support the steward’s apparent miscegenational proclivities as a right supposedly guaranteed by the seminal proclamation of the American nation.

While mindful of the possible interpretive fallacy involved in ascribing Redburn’s sentiments to Melville’s own beliefs, it is clear that this passage reveals several traits which are charac-

teristic of Melville's life and writings; namely, his growing repugnance for slavery and instances of racism, his growing disquietude with the legacy of his revolutionary forebears, and his inveterate repugnance for mob persuasion or coercive cultural proscriptions ("local and social prejudices"), which he associated with a lack of individual courage, conviction, and integrity--and which he deemed "the marring of most men."²⁰ Yet, as Melville well knew, it was neither seemly nor safe to speak too openly or candidly about certain aspects or policies of American society, a lesson he learned from the censorial troubles he encountered in publishing *Typee* and *Omoo*. This was especially true with regard to the former, his first published work, where his attack upon the Christian missionaries deeply offended many of his religious readers and reviewers and forced him to make significant revisions for its second American edition: "I have rejected every thing, in revising the book, which refers to the missionaries," he wrote in a letter to John Murray,²¹ including all "passages" that might "offend the tastes, or offer violence [*sic*] to the feelings of any large class of readers." And although, in the same place, Melville acknowledged the fact that his audience's taste for "popular reading" seemed to preclude the inclusion of

anything so “objectionable” as the irreverences many saw in the first edition of *Typee*, the numerous subversive elements in *Redburn* indicate his unwillingness to completely give himself over to writings which mollified the public taste for pabulum. As he would write to Hawthorne exactly two years after his writing of *Redburn*: “What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,--it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches.”²²

Redburn is not nearly the “botch” of a book that Melville described it as in this moment of unwarranted self-deprecation. And it is clearly more than the “dull...nursery-tale” that he once had the shrewd audacity to proclaim it in a letter to his conservative father-in-law.²³ Rather, it is a work in which the narrator’s early likening of himself as a sailor at sea to a “slave,...an African in Alabama” seems to have set the stage for his (and Melville’s) rite of passage into a state of mind and belief in which a growing sense of restiveness and moral responsibility regarding the slavery question compelled him to offer a defiant rejection of the racist enterprise that was being acted out in the slave-holding American nation at the time. From the outset, it becomes apparent in *Redburn* that the narrator/Melville’s mind was much

immersed in thoughts about slavery, initially as a result of the indignities he *was forced to suffer as a sailor*, and then, more abstractly and universally, as he composed his observations of the black men with whom he lived and worked. It is a work in which images of slavery and racism permeate the recollections, the daily routines, and the creative process of the narrator/sailor/author who combine to tell the tale.

And finally, before moving on to a discussion of Melville's further elaboration of these concerns in his next "job"--*White-Jacket*-- it is instructive perhaps to close this section with a brief examination of two episodes in *Redburn* that frame Melville's subversive depiction of the Black/Africanist presence in this work, even as they anticipate his continuing reform efforts of his next. Thus far, I have tried to show how Melville rendered his revisionist views of blacks and slavery primarily through his reformist representations of the black characters, representations that challenged the racist perceptions that had previously worked to define, identify, and therefore control white America's perceptions and beliefs about the black race. In closing here with the narrator's own direct address to his readers, however, the weight of interpreting Melville's opinions through his

figurations of blacks and slavery is shifted to a recognition and affirmation of these views as expressed in the words of his narrative alter ego, the young Redburn.

In a scene that indicates the extent to which this preoccupation with slavery and the Africanist presence exists, and how, as in the novel itself, the focus of attention constantly returns to these subjects, Redburn gazes at a statue “representing Lord Nelson expiring in the arms of Victory” and notices that, “[a]t uniform intervals round the base of the pedestal, four naked figures in chains, somewhat larger than life, are seated in various attitudes of humiliation and despair.” The narrator knows, of course, that “[t]hese woe-begone figures of captives are emblematic of Nelson’s victories”; but he then confesses that he “never could look at their swarthy limbs and manacles, without being involuntarily reminded of four African slaves in the market-place” (155). Moreover, and quite revealingly, the narrator informs us also, a short time later, that he was unable to resist visiting this statue again and again: “How this group of statuary affected me, may be inferred from the fact, that I never went through Chapel-street without going through the little arch to look at it again” (156).

Like the younger boy who had listened in on conversations

among his father's friends about the slave trade in Africans, the older narrator can hide neither his morbid curiosity nor his ultimate disgust for the almost unspeakable horrors he clearly associated with it:

And my thoughts would revert to Virginia and Carolina; and also to the historical fact, that the African slave-trade once constituted the principal commerce of Liverpool; and that the prosperity of the town was once... indissolubly linked to its prosecution. And I remembered that my father had spoken to gentlemen visiting our house in New York, of the unhappiness that the discussion of this trade had occasioned in Liverpool; that the struggle between sordid interest and humanity had made sad havoc at the fire-sides of the merchants; estranged sons from sires; and even separated husband from wife.
(155-56)

In the end, I would argue, the voices of both the narrators and Melville coalesce into one and yet another voice, that of the famous British abolitionist William Roscoe, in announcing their mutual abhorrence of the slave trade and the institution of slavery itself. This "great Roscoe," as the narrator admiringly refers to him, was "the intrepid enemy of the trade; who in every way exerted his fine talents toward its suppression; writing a poem (*"the Wrongs of Africa"*) several pamphlets; and in his place in Parliament, he delivered a speech against it, which, as coming from a member for Liverpool, was supposed to have turned many votes" (156) in favor of the slave trade's abolition. And as

a result of these efforts, the narrator concludes, Roscoe “had no small share *in the triumph of sound policy and humanity that ensued* ” (my emphasis). That the historical Melville’s father, Allan Melvill, was indeed acquainted with “the good and great Roscoe” is a matter of record. That Melville himself wished to share in the “triumph” and “humanity” of Roscoe’s antislavery propensities and efforts is made clear in his attempts in *Redburn* to refigure the prevailing racialized stereotypes of the Black/Africanist presence and, in so doing, to ameliorate perhaps what he saw as the “local and social prejudices, that are the marring of most men” (202).

*

*

*

Thank God! I am white.

(White-Jacket)

Had Melville read William Gilmore Simms’ review of *White-Jacket* in the *Southern Quarterly Review*,²⁴ he would have had good reason to wonder whether Simms was intentionally turning the language and moral import of *Redburn* against its author’s political “history” and “argument” in his subsequent work. For in this review, where he praises Melville as a “shrewd, sensible,

well-informed man, thoughtful and practical,” Simms also uses the notion of “local prejudices” and “stereotyped prejudices of [one’s] own region” to attack Melville’s stated position in *White-Jacket* on slavery and the Southern slaveholder. According to Simms, Melville was right, of course, to observe that “the lieutenants from the Southern States, the descendants of the old Virginians, [were] much less severe, and much more gentle and gentlemanly in command, than the Northern officers, as a class” (*W-J* ;141). But “shrewd” sentiments such as these were contaminated, in Simms’ mind, by Melville’s unfortunate infatuation with “his own local prejudices”:

It is somewhat strange that a writer who can think so shrewdly and observe so well should still be so infatuated with his own local prejudices, as to forget subsequently what he has just said, and reflect upon the Southern slaveholder, as one necessarily more tyrannical than any other class of persons. At page 447 he tells us that a manly freedom of carriage on board a man-of-war is as offensive to most sea officers “as an erect, lofty-minded African would be to some slave-driving planter.” He forgets wholly his own social reflection, above-quoted, in order to give a most unjust and wanton fling at the South, in compliance with the stereotyped prejudices of his own region.²⁵

If we compare this passage to Melville’s remark in *Redburn* about “local and social prejudices” (quoted above), it seems that both Melville and Simms would have agreed that such prejudices represented the “marring of most men”—as well as the literary

productions of those who chose to express these “stereotyped prejudices” in public. The difference in their opinions, however, is as obvious as it is significant. For Melville, who admitted to having been “unconsciously swayed” by “local and social prejudices” when he was “young and inexperienced” (*Redburn* , 202), the ability to rise above these racial distortions represents an important achievement. Unlike “the mass” of bigots, for whom “there seems no possible escape” from racial prejudice and stereotyping, *Redburn*/Melville’s willingness to indulge openminded “reflection” leads to a recognition of a black’s “claims to humanity and normal equality”; a claim which is implicitly but obstinately refuted by Simms, whose proslavery sentiments reflect the widespread Southern belief in black inferiority and, even, subhumanity. Predictably, Simms does not even seem to recognize the inherent tyranny of the slaveholders’ position, and, instead, he angrily accuses Melville of “a most unjust and wanton fling at the South, in compliance with the stereotyped prejudices of his own region.” How ironic is it, then, that the prejudices which Melville believed himself to have “escaped” were almost certainly acquired, of course, in the North (New York) where he was raised? Locked into his own racial myopia as he was, Simms

failed to see that Melville's juxtaposition of slavery and tyranny, as well as his respect for the blacks' claim to equality, was actually a consequence of his determination to transcend the racist attitudes that prevailed in both the North and South alike. A decade earlier, Alexis de Tocqueville had already noticed the rise of racial prejudice in the "free" North; in fact, he perceived it as a greater evil, even, than the paternalistic racism of the South. Like Melville here in *Redburn*, Tocqueville recognized that racist attitudes were confined neither to borders nor regions, and that even the so-called "free blacks" of the North were "condemned by the laws and public opinion to a hereditary state of misery and degradation."²⁶

It was not only in his appraisal of (what he believed to be) Melville's regionally-inculcated racial assumptions or attitudes that Simms was misguided in his critique of *White-Jacket*. Like many commentators on Melville's fifth novel, from the then contemporary reviewers to present-day critics of the work,²⁷ Simms viewed *White-Jacket* as "a history, and an argument, and not a story." And consistent with this line of reading, he thought the main thrust of the novel was to present an exposition of Melville's reformist stance against the cruelties and abuses that ex-

isted in the United States Navy at the time. As in *Redburn* , however, Melville was once again mixing fact with fiction, art with politics, reform protest with satire, and autobiography with subversive propagandizing. And again the nexus for many of these concerns was the African black whose presence looms hauntingly at the heart of *White-Jacket* . For no matter how “explicit [a] call for reform”²⁸ in the navy *White-Jacket* was (and often continues to be) read as, the Black/Africanist presence and the issue of African slavery in America are the *ghosts in the machine* that provide the darkest undertones in a work much noted for the tenebrous dimensions of its exposé of naval tyranny and brutishness at sea. The blacks in *White-Jacket* represent both a heightened symbolic analogue for class oppression, in general, and a concrete referent for the cruel victimization involved in flogging, in particular. Implicitly, at times, and quite explicitly at others, the questions that Melville asks repeatedly here have to do with the nature and degree of suffering and indignity that *the people* on board a navy vessel must be made to suffer. (Officers, like aristocrats, of course, were exempted from corporal punishment. As Melville informs us in *White-Jacket* , “the laws involving flogging in the Navy do *not* render to every man his due, since in some cases they indirectly exclude the officers

from any punishment whatever, and in all cases protect them from the scourge, which is inflicted upon the sailor"; 145.) But, beyond this, almost as if *behind* the impassioned rhetoric of his protests, Melville invokes the Black/Africanist presence at sea and at home in America as the measuring stick for the inequalities, indignities, and oppressions forcibly endured by sailors. He does not simply revive again the familiar comparisons made between sailors and slaves in order to elicit sympathy for the sailors (and himself). And although he repeatedly invokes slavery, of course, in order to dramatize the tyranny and deplorable conditions to which sailors were subjected, the vehicle of the comparison is now as important as the tenor itself. In *White-Jacket*, Melville's insistence upon this analogy is characterized by the added weight he attaches to slaves' miserable plight, as well as the narrator's recognition that racial oppression exceeds even class oppression in its wilfull, deluded ("fancied") assumption of superiority:

"Poor mulatto! thought I, one of an oppressed race, they degrade you like a hound. *Thank God! I am white*. Yet I had seen whites also scourged; for, black or white, all my shipmates were liable to that. Still, there is something in us, somehow, that, in the most degraded condition, we snatch at a chance to deceive ourselves into a fancied superiority to others, whom we suppose lower in scale than ourselves." (277)

Thank God! I am white . These words resound with moral meaning and fervid emotional relief, even as the last sentence of the passage seems to announce *White-Jacket*/Melville's guilty awareness of his own "degraded" potentialities and latent racist tendencies. It may have been insufferably slave-like and demeaning to have been a sailor, the message here suggests, but it was clearly preferable to actually being a black slave. As *White-Jacket* ominously declares, "I was not born a serf, and will not live a slave" (295). In fact, this is a recurrent theme in *White-Jacket* where, out upon the "holy element" of the sea, that "place [for man] to learn what he is" (389, 390), the narrator and at least some of his white shipmates become both witness and subject to the same atrocities and inhuman treatment that blacks were forced to suffer rather routinely on land.²⁹ And as in *Redburn* , where the Declaration of Independence is invoked in order to demonstrate the racial limitations of its definition of "humanity and normal equality" (202), so in *White-Jacket* is the Declaration cited again, more for its exclusions and marginalizations than for its ostensible proclamation of equality for all. The sailor, like the slave, according to Melville, "shares none of our civil immunities....For him our Revolution was in vain; to him

our Declaration of Independence is a lie" (144).

The most obvious source for the *Neversink* of *White-Jacket* was the *United States*, the navy ship that brought Melville home to Boston some five years prior to its use as a model in the book. But so much had occurred in the United States during that five-year period, especially with regard to race and slavery-related issues, that Melville could not resist, apparently, the opportunity to "attack slavery on board ship, in the middle of the crisis over slavery."³⁰ He was still deeply troubled, it seems, by the possibility of violent uprising, as he tells us through the narrator/*White-Jacket* near the end of the novel: "whatever befall us, let us never train our murderous guns inboard; let us not mutiny with bloody pikes in our hands" (400). But so outraged was he about the abominations perpetrated upon sailors--and slaves--that he wrote a work whose subversive racial strategies surpass those of *Redburn*, even as they anticipate the increasingly sophisticated racial masquerades in *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*. For *White-Jacket* is really all about slavery; and although Melville declines to point murderous *guns* inboard, he is not unwilling to *take aim* at those individuals, institutions, and Declarations which prove themselves "opposed to the essential dignity

of man, which no legislator has a right to violate" (146). The events and crew of the *United States* may have provided the models for the *Neversink* and *White-Jacket*, but, on broader levels, it was the United States that was Melville's real target --and slavery the bull's-eye.

As if to prove this point, Melville provides a strong clue in the final chapter of *White-Jacket* that it is once again misleading to trust surface appearances. Explicitly, he warns the reader not to be content with the mere physical details of that which is "outwardly seen." For any "craft," whether a naval vessel like the *Neversink* or, especially, a text like *White-Jacket*, can submerge its most important features in order to keep them from too public a view:

Outwardly regarded, our craft is a lie; for all that is outwardly seen of it is the clean-swept deck, and oft-painted planks comprised above the waterline; whereas, the vast mass of our fabric, with all its store-rooms of secrets, forever slides along far under the surface.

(399)

In these lines that bear a striking resemblance to his description of ships, like the *San Dominick* in *Benito*, that "hoard from view their interiors till the last moment,"³¹ Melville encourages us to suspect what the attentive reader has likely known all along; that the fictional *Neversink* is intended to signify the American

ship-of-state at a time when the urgency of the slavery crisis had reached feverish proportions; and that the pressing reform focus of *White-Jacket* is as much concerned with slavery in the United States as it is with the “barbarous feudal aristocracy” that countenanced flogging in the navy. In fact, a metaphorical deepening of Melville’s anti-flogging campaign is achieved by mere virtue of the fact that flogging was still such a commonplace practice on many Southern plantations, and the added fact that the whip was easily the most recognizable (and dread) symbol of slavery. Based upon the ample evidence that exists, it is clear that the American public perceived a powerful connection between the flogging and slavery issues during the 1840s; and Melville’s expressed abhorrence for the former could not have failed to draw attention also to the repellent but accepted practice of slave-whipping on many Southern plantations. This association was persistently and “openly made,”³² it seems, and it served to divide the country along similar lines on both issues. The practice of flogging in the navy may have been the asserted objective of Melville’s reformist position in *White-Jacket*, but it was the slavery dilemma--as symbolized by the scourge--that raised the aim (and the stakes) of the author’s attack upon his

country's "oppressive" and "repugnant" policies in both of these regards. "You see a human being, stripped like a slave;" Melville wrote, careful to make overt the connection between the sailor and the slave, "scourged like a hound. And for what? For things not essentially criminal, but only made so by arbitrary laws." And "not to feel scarified to the quick at these scenes," he adds, with a pungent twist of the belief in black bestiality, "would argue a man but a beast" (138). The *Neversink* is no longer just a ship, and the ideologies it embodies can no longer be contained within the structure of the splendidly realistic ship that it is. "As a Man-of-War that sails through the sea, so this earth that sails through the air....Oh, shipmates and world-mates, all around!" Melville exclaims, "we the people suffer many abuses" (398-99). And no one suffers more, he makes it very clear, than the black slaves aboard the *Neversink*, that emblematic microcosm of America itself.

In Melville's self-conscious handling of the ship-as-state metaphor, he is able to retain many of the archetypal elements that had been handed down through antiquity, from the biblical story of Noah's ark to the Middle Age and Renaissance motif of the ship-of-fools.³³ But throughout *White-Jacket*, Melville was

primarily concerned, it seems, with developing a contemporary and more particularized version of the ship-as-state, or ship of state, metaphor that was becoming an increasingly popular figure to represent the Union.³⁴ Longfellow's poem, "Building of the Ship," written in the same year as *White-Jacket*, enjoyed an immense popularity at the time; and Melville certainly aligned himself with the poem's "message" that the Union must be preserved in order to fulfill its great and divine destiny to promote *higher laws* (a notion he would return to treat in earnest in *Moby-Dick*). But, perhaps typical of his subversive propensities, Melville also chose to invest his ship-of-state metaphor with the kind of strident antislavery sentiments that posed, in all likelihood, the gravest threat to the preservation of the Union. As a microcosm of American society at the midpoint of the nineteenth century, when the nation's near hysteria over the slavery question threatened to erupt into violence and disunion, Melville's *White-Jacket* made it a point to recall attention to the injustice and oppression of the nation's black slaves. And in doing so, he was reopening the oldest and most pernicious of the country's failures to live up to its principles. In 1848, the Mexican War had "momentarily distracted attention of the country," as James Russell Lowell remarked at the Buffalo Convention. But Lowell's

dire prophecy that “the country will at once revert to the old issue” proved correct. Exactly one year later, as Melville was writing *White-Jacket*, the “old issue” had resurfaced with a vengeance, and the the most volatile “question [had] again become one between Slavery and Freedom. The struggle between these two must be one of life and death.”³⁵

This life and death struggle in his homeland is what Melville seemed most to dread, of course; the possibility that the slavery question might lead to violent conflict, even war. And traditionally, the final paragraph of *White-Jacket* has been read as an expression of his unwillingness to advocate violent insurrection, even to rectify the “sin” of slavery, as he called it in *Mardi* --“a sin, it is, no less;--a blot, foul as the crater-pool of hell”-- (535). But it should also be recalled that Melville, having first cited Blackstone and Justinian’s belief in the pre-eminence of the “Law of Nature” and the right of every man to be “rendered his due,” has *White-Jacket* insist that “every man-of-war’s-man would be morally justified in resisting the scourge to the uttermost; and, in so resisting, would be religiously justified in what would be judicially styled ‘the act of mutiny’ itself” (145). It is significant here, I believe, that *White-Jacket*/Melville does not

stipulate “every *white* man.” In fact, the omission of the racial adjective seems a loud reminder that the sea should not provide an arena in which natural rights are abdicated *such as they are on land* for enslaved blacks. To consider all the evidence presented to this point is to see that even Melville’s final words in *White-Jacket* (“Life is a voyage that’s homeward-bound”) contain a possible irony beyond their customary reading as an expression of his nationalism or fear of disunity. If *White-Jacket* embodies, through its radical attack on flogging and institutionalized tyranny, the racial allegory that has been suggested here, then the ultimate word of the text can be said also to express Melville’s disdain for the status-quo. In a work where Melville has his alter-ego narrator proclaim the repugnance of the American attempt to “convert into slaves some of the citizens of a nation of freemen” (144), the phrase “homeward-bound” surely accommodates satiric and subversive possibilities of meaning in which “homeward-bound” suggests also a “bound homeland” or a home of bondage. For however much *White-Jacket* refers to sailors who, while at sea, were treated as vassals or bonds, it is also a poignant expression of Melville’s recognition that the most tragic, miserably “bound” of the American homeland were its black slaves--black slaves and the American nation itself, that

is; a nation founded upon the ideals of equality and freedom but “bound” by its moral capacity to abide the immoral scourge that was slavery.

Among the “homeward-bound” bondsmen of *White-Jacket* is a cast of diversified black characters who, in their very diversity and range of representation, indicate the extent to which Melville's vision of the Black/Africanist presence had developed and even matured. In fact, there is an appreciable difference between these black characters and those of *Redburn*, which was written only months before. In *Redburn*, as we saw, Melville seemed intent upon presenting easily recognizable stereotypes of blacks in order, mainly, it seems, to explode the racist generalizations upon which they were based. In *White-Jacket*, however, where blacks and slavery are figured so significantly in the overall design of the work as analogues and symbols of those who are victimized by despotism and oppression, Melville seems to have discovered that he could rely less heavily upon those stereotypes and still manage to convey his subversive racial messages. Instead, he developed a unique strategy of representing his blacks through a meta/physical coupling, so

to speak, with various white characters aboard the *Neversink*. This process of paralleling or juxtaposing of the black and white characters in *White-Jacket* is indeed a primary *modus operandi* of the entire work, where the tyrannical conditions under which sailors labored are repeatedly compared and contrasted to the black slaves on plantations in the American South. And it is of particular interest here to notice the ways in which the narrator/Melville uses these black-and-white-couplings to help establish his own sense of self-definition, as well as the limitations and contradictions of freedom that are inherent in a slaveholding nation like America.

What we discover, then, when we examine the imaginative process through which Melville represents the Black/Africanist presence in *White-Jacket*, is that almost a century and a half before the contemporary black writer Toni Morrison proposed it as one of the "topics that need critical investigation," Melville had begun already to explore "the African character as surrogate and enabler."³⁶ And quite uncharacteristic for any American writer outside the abolitionist milieu of the time, the results of his efforts reveal a considerable and demonstrable appreciation, if not favoritism, for the character and honesty of the blacks who peopled the *Neversink* --even, frequently, at the expense of the

white characters who provided the frame of reference by which the comparisons were made.

Among the African sons on board Melville's fictional vessel, there are (one is tempted to say "of course") a black cook and a black steward, Old Coffee and Guinea; the cook's three "assistants, negroes also [who] went by the poetical appellations of 'Sunshine,' 'Rose-water,' and 'May-day'" (58); and "an old negro, who went by the name of Tawney, a sheet-anchor-man, whom we often invited into our top of tranquil nights, to hear him discourse" (311). And what becomes evident when we examine Melville's representations of these characters is that many of them are counterpoised against representations of white characters in such a way as to blur or distort the usual boundaries of the racial formulations that were common in the literature of the era (much of which attempted, of course, to stereotype and debase the African race/s). In a peculiarly Melvillean twist, for example, the black characters who, in the majority of this literature, worked typically to reinforce the smug condescension of many white Americans were revised by Melville in such a way in *White-Jacket* that it is sometimes difficult to tell the slaves from the masters or the free from the un-free. And as for the

racial condescension itself, Melville makes it quite clear what he felt: "Of all insults, the...condescension of a master to a slave is the most outrageous and galling. That potentate who most condescends, mark him well; for that potentate, if occasion come, will prove your uttermost tyrant" (276).

Although Melville's narrator provides relatively few details about the black cook, Old Coffee, he does make sport of him with a comical reference to his being "a high and mighty functionary" among the ship's crew. Almost immediately, however, the narrator states, with apparent sincerity, that Old Coffee is "a dignified colored gentleman," and the earlier persiflage seems but an instance of good-natured ribbing among shipmates. In turn, Old Coffee himself appears quite adept at the arts of sailor-humor and yarn-spinning, as White-Jacket suggests when he observes: "Coffee often assured us that he had graduated at the New York Astor House, under the immediate eye of the celebrated Coleman and Stetson" (58). Unlike the cook in *Redburn*, though, who received so much respectful attention from the narrator/Melville, Old Coffee remains a minor figure in *White-Jacket*, and the most significant representations are reserved for his cohorts, Rose-water, Sunshine, and May-day. Collectively and individually, this

trio, especially Rose-water and Sunshine, serve to illustrate how Melville figured his black characters in such a way as to evoke explicit comparisons with white characters, and how he did so in the hope, perhaps, that he might instigate the kind of reflection which marked Redburn's "escape" from the racial prejudices of his untutored adolescence. *White-Jacket* is, after all, a reform work; and by now it should be clear that naval reform was but a single aspect of the greater changes Melville sought to effect. If Morrison is correct when she insists that Africanism "serves as a vehicle for regulating love and the imagination as defenses against the psychic costs of guilt and despair,"³⁷ then it becomes increasingly apparent, I think, that in his representation of black characters like Rose-water, Sunshine, Tawney, and Guinea, Melville sought to create vehicles that helped him to examine the ways in which the Black/Africanist presence operated to *enable* him to think about himself; and how, in so doing, it provided him (and his audience) with a vehicle to measure and define the nature of the "freedom" which Americans claimed to prize more highly than anything else.

Sunshine, for example, is considered "the bard of the trio; and while all three would be busily employed clattering their

soap-stones against the metal, he would exhilarate them with some remarkable St. Domingo melodies" (58). The mention of St. Domingo is significant, of course, as Melville invokes the single most fearsome slave insurrection known to the American public. More than forty years after the event, the mere mention of this bloody revolt by the black slaves of Haiti still seemed to terrorize the racial imaginations of Americans, perhaps as much as it did the French against whom it was perpetrated. Aside from the Nat Turner rebellion of 1831, which took place on American soil, the Santo Domingo revolution became for many whites the most threatening reminder of the smoldering rage of blacks and the potentially catastrophic risks of slavery. And in some ways, because of its success in overthrowing white domination and control, the Santo Domingo insurrection may have surpassed even the Nat Turner rebellion in its capacity for exciting racial fears and guilt. It is only after quoting a sestet from one of the Santo Domingo melodies sung by Sunshine that White-Jacket/Melville discloses the true source of his own irritation, however. And if he lets the Santo Domingo reference pass without comment, the same cannot be said of the blacks' penchant for song as a palliative for enforced labor or servitude:

When I listened to the jolly Africans thus making gleeful their toil by cheering songs, I could not help murmuring against that immemorial rule of men-of-war, which forbids the sailors to sing out...when pulling ropes, or occupied at any other ship's duty...you must pull the ropes, like convicts, in profound silence; or else endeavor to impart unity to the exertions of all hands, by singing out mechanically, *one, two, three*, and then pulling altogether.
(58)

What is most notable about this passage is White-Jacket's remarkable assertion that he feels like a "convict" in comparison to the three blacks who are made "gleeful [in] their toil by their cheering songs...." For, here, it is the white man, even more than the black, who is humbled and humiliated by arbitrary command. He is deprived of his "song" and forced into such a "profound silence" that it resembles the racial usurpation of "voice" in *Mardi* --only now, ironically, it is the white who has been silenced. White-Jacket would later exclaim, as mentioned above, "Thank god! I am white." But in this instance, and again later with regard to Guinea, the narrator/Melville learns to recognize the limitations of his own freedom by comparing his oppressed estate with those of certain blacks who seem to enjoy greater liberties than himself. Melville allows himself a delicious irony when he describes how Sunshine and his companions literally "threw themselves into a violent perspiration, and put a fine polish upon the interiors of the coppers." And the symbolic implication of the crew's eating out of coppers cleaned and polish-

ed by the blacks' perspiration is an unpalatable reminder of how whites continued to profit from the labor and (in this case, literally) the sweat of blacks. But such a cleverly disguised symbolic joke pales in significance when it is submerged within the passage in which the silenced, voiceless White-Jacket is permitted only to recite, "mechanically, *one, two, three* ," as if a drone.

Melville was never shy about "borrowing" from various sources to help him in the composition of his own works, and *White-Jacket* was certainly no exception to this practice. Indeed, he lifted more liberally from others in writing this work, perhaps, than ever before.³⁸ Foremost among these plundered texts were a number of sea narratives such as Nathaniel Ames' *A Mariner's Sketches* (1830), William McNally's *Evils and Abuses in the Naval and Merchant Service* (1839), Henry J. Mercier's *Life in a Man-of-War* (1841), and Samuel Leech's *Thirty Years from Home* (1843). And from these, among others, Melville seems to have derived details for at least some of the black characters, as well as the incidents in which they are involved aboard the *Neversink*. Of course, Melville's appropriation of these details would necessarily be infused with his own artistry and political perspectives, especially his more enlightened racial attitudes;

but the importance of these source works cannot be ignored.³⁹

Rose-water and Tawney, in particular, are two of the black characters in *White-Jacket* whose descriptions owe much to the works of Leech and Mercier. In fact, Rose-water's peculiar reading habits, as described by Melville's narrator, are so similar to those of "one of [black] galley cooks" in Mercier's *Life in a Man-of-War* that Melville could be (rightly) accused of literary pilferage.⁴⁰ Compare the following passages on reading, or what *White-Jacket*/Melville refers to as "[o]ne of my principal antidotes against *ennui* " while aboard ship. First, *White-Jacket* :

I diversified this reading of mine, by borrowing Moore's "*Loves of the Angels* " from Rose-water, who recommended it as "*de charmingest of wolumes* ;" and a Negro Song-book, containing *Sittin' on a Rail* , *Gumbo Squash* , and *Jim along Josey* , from Broadbit, a sheet-anchor man. The sad taste of this old tar, in admiring such vulgar stuff, was much denounced by Rose-water, whose own predilections were of a more elegant nature, as evinced by his exalted opinions of the literary merits of the "*Loves of the Angels* ." (168-68)

Next, Mercier:

One of the galley cooks now popped his curly head amongst the assemblage, and asked in quite a polite style for Moore's "*Love of the Angels* ." "Never mind," cried Flukes, the main-top wag-- "I've got *Sittin on a Rail* and *Gumbo Squash* in my *ditty-bag* I can let you have, they will answer you just the same; you will be more at *home* with them at all events." "I'd have you to understand," replied the "coloured gemman" --his lips thickening and his nose dilating with anger, "that I don't read such foolish stupid stuff as you have just mentioned--nothing less than Moore or Byron in the shape of poetry do I think palatable; and when I read prose, always give

me a philosophical treatise; I always like something *heavy* to digest.

(108)

One of the most obvious differences between these otherwise strikingly similar passages is the contrast in the tone of the respective narrators with regard to the black characters described by each. Melville certainly spoofs a bit on Rose-water's vernacular pronunciation ("wolumes" for "volumes"), and there is even an implication that the narrator does not share fully the black's "exalted opinions" on Thomas Moore's allegorical poem (1823) which tells the tales of three (fallen) angels' love for human women. But compared to the (presumably) white Broadbit's "sad taste" for "vulgar stuff," Rose-water's "predilections" are said to be "of a more elegant nature," and the black is clearly the more respected of the two figures portrayed by the narrator. Broadbit, the white, is not even allowed a say in the matter, as his sad and vulgar tastes are simply recorded, it seems, in order to elevate, by comparison with the black's, the narrator's apparent esteem for the latter. And once again it is the white who is "silenced" rather than the black.

An even more significant difference between the two passages is made evident by a different kind of *silencing*, however; that is, by what Melville's narrator does *not* say in his rendering

of Mercier's scene. For example, while Mercier's narrator actually allows the black cook to speak with a modicum of grammatical correctness, the black's pomposity is also accentuated. And when the narrator refers to this black in order to distinguish his words from the white's within the interstices of dialogue in the passage, he does so by placing quotation marks around the phrase "coloured gemman"--for no apparent reason. After all, this is not how the black himself speaks, if we can judge from his words of protest that follow immediately. Rather, it seems a gratuitous attempt to mock the black, just as the white wag's remarks to the black are intended to do when he refuses the cook's "polite" request for Moore's *Loves of the Angels*: "Never mind," he retorts, "I've got Sittin on a Rail and Gumbo Squash in my *ditty-bag* I can let you have, they will answer you just the same; you will be more at *home* with them at all events."

It is in response to this racist rejoinder that the black gets angry--and the narrator gets ugly. In fact, Mercier's fatuous invocation of the stereotypes commonly used to describe negroid features sounds more like someone like William Leggett, whose sea fictions of the 1830s "described minor Negro characters in pejorative terms seldom equalled in any literature."⁴¹ Granted,

Mercier's facile reference to the black's "curly head" is quite mild compared to Leggett's abominable description of the same anatomical feature in a black as "a large wooly excrescence, not unlike the same member in a monkey." But the former's allusion to the black's "lips thickening and his nose dilating with anger" is surely meant to evoke an automatic response or recognition in the reader similar to that which Leggett must have known he could achieve with his vile description of a black's "lips" which, "though abundantly large enough to cover them, curled in blubbered volumes, as if unwilling to hide the lustre of the obtrusive masticators."⁴² More important to the concern here, however, is the fact that none of this racist stereotyping finds its way into *White-Jacket*, a fact which, considering how copiously Melville drew upon Mercier's passage, offers a dependable indication of just how conscientious Melville was about revising these appalling conventions.

Rose-water is figured prominently again in another scene that Melville obviously adapted from Mercier's crudely titled "The Nigger Pugilists" chapter of *Life in a Man-of-War*.⁴³ And although Melville calls his chapter "Fun in a Man-of-war," the narrator's expressed horror at the malicious "fun" involved in wit-

nessing “two negroes (*whites will not answer*) butting at each other like rams” (275; my emphasis) makes it certain that the title of Chapter Sixty-Six is clearly meant to be ironic. “*Head-bumping*,” as this brutal spectacle was called by the men, was “patronized by Captain Claret,” the narrator informs us. Indeed, this “pastime was an especial favorite with the Captain” and the two blacks involved, Rose-water and May-day, “were repeatedly summoned into the lee waist to tilt at each other,” the narrator opines mordantly, “for the benefit of the Captain’s health” (275).

May-day was a full-blooded “*bull-negro*,” so the sailors called him, with a skull like an iron tea-kettle, wherefore May-day much fancied the sport. But Rose-water, he was a slender and rather handsome mulatto, and abhorred the pastime. Nevertheless, the Captain must be obeyed; so at the word poor Rose-water was fain to put himself in a posture of defence, else May-day would incontinently have bumped him out of a port-hole into the sea. *I used to pity poor Rose-water from the bottom of my heart. But my pity was almost aroused into indignation at a sad sequel to one of these gladiatorial scenes.*
(275; my emphasis)

The “sad sequel” that nearly arouses the narrator’s indignation comes as a result of a personal feud between the same two blacks, after they engage in an unstaged fight. In the tense aftermath of yet another of the enforced *head-butting* contests, “May-day confidentially told Rose-water that he considered him a “*nigger*,” which, among some blacks, is held a great term of

reproach.” Rose-water returns the sally with the “innocent disclosure” that “his mother, a black slave, had been one of the mistresses of a Virginia planter belonging to one of the oldest families in that state.” And before anyone could prevent it from happening, an “insulting remark followed...; retort followed retort; in a word, at last they came together in mortal combat.”

And the negroes were flogged...

With these words, Melville’s narrator informs the reader of the malevolent spirit of self-righteousness and condescension with which Captain Claret ruled over the men of the *Neversink*. “I’ll teach you two men that, though I now and then permit you to *play*, I will have no *fighting*” (276). White-Jacket himself is so aghast at the turn of events that he seems at haste to bring the chapter to an end. But he cannot resist the opportunity to ridicule again the hypocrisy and condescension of the tyrannical Claret. Indeed, this is exactly the association he makes only two paragraphs later, in a passage considered here earlier, but which demands repeating here in abbreviated form. What is “most outrageous and galling,” the narrator explains, is the “temporary condescension of a master to a slave.” For this “*shipping of the quarter-deck face* after wearing a merry and

good-natured one” is the duplicitous act that proves a man a despot. “That potentate who most condescends, mark him well”; Melville’s narrator concludes the chapter, “for that potentate, if occasion come, will prove your uttermost tyrant.”

That the powerful and heart-rending effects of the scenes just related could not be contained neatly within a single chapter is made quickly apparent by the opening words of the next. *White-Jacket* begins with the recollection that, together “with five hundred others I made one of the compelled spectators at the scourging of poor Rose-water” (277). And it is at this point, exactly, that Melville/*White-Jacket* utters the startling exclamations: “Poor mulatto!...one of an oppressed race, they degrade you like a hound. Thank god! I am white.” There is nothing like this in Melville’s source, of course; in fact, the black combatants of Mercier’s tale, Chuffy and Grubbings, battle each other much to the delight of the mostly white crew, and the blacks barely escape before their ship’s officers can discover the identities of those involved. They are, in any event, fighting over a woman, and the main point of Mercier’s extended account of “The Nigger Pugilists” can be located in the author’s apparent desire to burlesque what he took to be the two blacks’ stupidity and concupiscence.

In Melville's terse refiguring of this episode, there is never room for the strained comic effect that Mercier seemed to reach for in his chapter. Instead, the horror and indignation expressed by White-Jacket at Rose-water's cruel mistreatment so dominate his account of "Fun in a Man-of-war" that the narrator's outrage itself becomes, in some ways, the focal point of the entire chapter. At the very moment when White-Jacket is on the verge of telling us about the extreme trauma of his own near-flogging--"Captain Claret was about to degrade me, and I had taken an oath with my soul that he should not"--he foregrounds his own unwillingness to be *degraded* with an impassioned plea on the black Rose-water's behalf. "Poor mulatto!...one of an oppressed race, they degrade you like a hound....Poor Rose-water! thought I; poor mulatto! Heaven send you a release from your humiliation!" (277). However much he may have borrowed from Mercier's narrative for details and storylines, Melville would always "make it new" and make it his own. And despite some unfathomable comments by modern critics who see "Fun in a Man-of-war" as an "inconsequential chapter" and "a breathing space between the brilliance of the Cuticle satire and the intense drama of Chapter 67, 'White-Jacket arraigned at the mast,'"⁴⁴ it is

obvious, on the contrary, that Chapter 66 signifies Melville's insistence upon a new, more tolerant and compassionate, way of viewing and depicting black characters in sea literature. More than this, in a novel whose subtitle, "The World in a Man-of-War," betrays the emblematic/allegorical purposes at work in the text, "Fun in a Man-of-war" represents Melville's strongest indictment of slavery, tyranny, and racism prior to *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*. To call this "inconsequential" is worse than the *shipping of the quarter-deck face*, as Melville termed the hypocrisy of the tyrant. It is a willful denial and silencing of the *black-face* that Melville is trying on in *White-Jacket*; and as such, it represents a distortion of Melville's egalitarian spirit in a work where the unadulterated love of that spirit--and resistance to tyranny--is everything. Melville never seemed to see himself as an abolitionist, *per se*; nor have his critics tried to portray him as such. For although the cause was righteous, and Melville's sympathies were clearly in favor of emancipation and equality for all, dogma and absolutism of any kind were anathema to his temperament. And yet, as *White-Jacket* surely demonstrates, Melville was not above adapting abolitionist rhetoric to his own reform impulses. For someone not considered an abolitionist, Melville certainly could sound like one at times

--especially if we keep fresh in our minds the aforementioned historical connection between flogging in the navy and flogging on the Southern plantation:

We plant the question, then, on the topmost argument of all. Irrespective of incidental considerations, we assert that flogging in the navy is opposed to the essential dignity of man, which no legislator has the right to violate; that it is oppressive, and glaringly unequal in its operations; that it is utterly repugnant to the spirit of our democratic institutions; indeed that it involves a lingering trait of the worst times of a barbarous feudal aristocracy; in a word, we denounce it as religiously, morally, and immutably *wrong*.

(146)

*

*

*

Tawney and Guinea

Before proceeding to our final chapter on *Moby-Dick*, it is important to make at least brief mention of the two remaining black characters who figure significantly in *White-Jacket*, Tawney and Guinea. Interestingly, these two blacks seem to present antithetically opposed personalities in their respective relations to the narrator/White-Jacket, whose esteem for the former seems matched by his disdain for latter. But, as will soon be made evident again, it is usually misleading to accept appearances at face value in Melville, where surfaces reveal only a very small part of the story, or deceive altogether: "the vast

mass of our fabric, with all its store-rooms of secrets, forever slides along far under the surface" (399). The narrator's respect and affection for Tawney may appear quite genuine, and it will remain so throughout *White-Jacket* (just as Melville's unabashed admiration for Jack Chase would endure the forty years' hiatus between *White-Jacket* and *Billy Budd*). But, in the case of Guinea, Melville actually deploys his narrator/White-Jacket in such a way that the *truth* of the black slave's representation is made elusive, submerged as it is in layers of indirection and implication that resist easy interpretation. As we shall see, if the reader simply accepts White-Jacket's "envy" of the black slave Guinea's (apparent) life of "light and easy duties," then it is likely that that reader has not been paying careful attention--from either a literary or moral perspective.

Tawney

In the case of Tawney, it should be pointed out that the association of him with Jack Chase in the preceding paragraph was not a gratuitous one. In fact, the black man and the white seem so deliberately paired by Melville in *White-Jacket* that together they provide the best example yet of the black and white coupling strategy described earlier in this chapter. Like Chase, who

“was universally regarded as an oracle” (13), Tawney assumes a quasi-mythic mantle when the narrator refers to him with great affection as a “Triton” (311). And like Chase, who “was loved by the seamen and admired by the officers,” the black was “a staid and sober seaman, very intelligent, with a fine, frank bearing, one of the best men in the ship, and held in high estimation by everyone.” And where Chase’s love of languages, poetry, and “storytelling” endeared him mightily to White-Jacket and the crew, Tawney achieves the ultimate pledge of acceptance when the usually closed society of the main-top (of which White-Jacket was a member) extend to him an invitation to hang out (literally and metaphorically) with them. “[W]e often invited” him, White-Jacket says fondly, “into our top of tranquil nights, to hear him discourse” (311).

To consider seriously the implications of the association being made here between Jack Chase and the black man, Tawney, is to realize, perhaps, the distance Melville had come in his attempt to refigure the black image in his readers’ minds. Three-fourths of the way through *White-Jacket*, the narrator/Melville has already pressed beyond the limits of representation he apparently imposed upon himself in his earlier accounts of blacks

like Old Coffee, Rose-water, and Sunshine. And now, in Tawney, there emerges a black *hero* of sorts, a man so admirable and so honest--Tawney "was a truth-telling man"--that he could rival even Jack Chase; the same Jack Chase who, in *White-Jacket*/Melville's mind, was considered "better than a hundred common mortals; Jack was a whole phalanx, an entire army; Jack was a thousand strong; Jack would have done honor to the Queen of England's drawing-room" (14).

Melville's depiction of Tawney seems to have been drawn, as more than one scholar has noticed,⁴⁵ from a black character named Nugent who appeared briefly in Samuel Leech's sea narrative, *Thirty Years from Home*. In fact, Melville's description of Tawney is so close to Leech's account of Nugent that the two might be mistaken for each other. "We had on board a colored man whose name was Nugent," Leech relates, "who possessed a remarkably fine person, was very intelligent, exceedingly polite in his manners, and easy in his address."⁴⁶ What is truly remarkable, however, is the extent to which this description of Nugent also matches one of Melville's homages to Chase. "Jack was a gentleman. What though his hand was hard, so was not his heart....His manners were easy and free; none of the boisterousness, so common to tars; and he had a polite, courteous way

of saluting you" (14). In what must then be considered an earnest attempt by Melville to create a Janus-like representation of the ideal man, or the true hero who contains and embodies both black and white, he seems to have refigured one black (Tawney) from another (Nugent), in order to couple his black (Tawney) with a white (Chase), whose character owes much to the original black figure (Nugent).

And the connections do not end here. For in Leech's narrative, Nugent "soon grew weary of the caprices of our officers, and ran away"--much as Jack Chase, a "stickler for the Rights of Man, and the liberties of the world," also deserted ship to champion "what he deemed the cause of the Right" (17). Nugent's cause is his own, of course; he seeks freedom from oppression and tyranny. But even though Chase's motives are related in language that makes them seem more intrinsically altruistic, he is really seeking the same experience of freedom that activates Nugent's escape. Ironically, but not coincidentally, both are captured and returned to the vessels they deserted, after each was descried through a "spy-glass" by an officer in those vessels; which seems a pre-Kafka-like symbol of oppressed (and guilty) man's inability to escape the "eyes" of

those in power; and which expresses Melville's pessimism, perhaps, over the seeming impossibility of ever escaping oppression or securing true "justice for all."

In the end, what we are left with is still another enigmatic Melvillean paradox, one in which whiteness both completes but can only be completed by its opposites, darkness and blackness. And in *White-Jacket*, Melville's figuration of black and white in Tawney and Jack Chase seems a deliberate attempt on his part to mix the two. In one sense, a literary one, Tawney is born of the same blood as Chase. And that, of course, is Leech's Nugent. But on quite another level of meaning, Tawney and Chase are the offspring of Melville's subversive attempt to confuse the lines of their heritage, so that the distinctions are blurred, if not completely erased. For, as Melville was coming ever closer to *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*, the truths that he sought could only be found in the same "troubled gray vapors" that rendered invisible the differences between black and white.

Guinea

Of all the black characters in *White-Jacket*, none has received closer critical attention than Guinea, a black slave who was *owned* by the ship's Purser and "employed by him as his

body servant.”⁴⁷ This Guinea is based, of course, on Melville’s shipmate aboard the *United States*, one Robert Lucas. And the story of Lucas’ emancipation, as the result of a ruling by Judge Lemuel Shaw (Melville’s then future father-in-law), has been so much rehearsed in recent years as to be familiar to most readers of Melville scholarship and criticism. It is the wary contention here, however, that Melville’s main point in the Guinea episode seems to have been missed by those who focus attention on the narrator’s ostensibly sympathetic attitude toward the genial white who “owns” Guinea, or how this apparent attitude represents an oblique criticism of Shaw’s ruling.⁴⁸ Instead, as intimated earlier, it is my belief that the narrative strategy devised by Melville in this chapter is somewhat deviously calculated to test the moral capacity of his audience in a way that anticipates what one critic has called the “mutinous narrative structure”⁴⁹ of *Benito Cereno*. The narrator/White-Jacket seems as much at odds with himself in treating of Guinea, and is seemingly so confused by the “gray vapors” of moral uncertainties surrounding the slave’s situation, that, at times, he more closely resembles Amasa Delano than the Melville who had, up to this point in the narrative, seemed one with the narrator/White-

Jacket in his consistent and clamorous vituperations against the institution of chattel slavery in America. And the reader or critic who fails to see the irony of the crew's (and White-Jacket's) apparent envy of Guinea also fails (much like Delano) to recognize the abject depravity and desperation of the slave's predicament.

What I am suggesting here is that, in this chapter in which he describes both the circumstances of the black slave Guinea, and, especially, the crew's jaundiced reaction to his perceived liberties, the Melville who wrote *White-Jacket* in 1849 was perhaps distancing himself from his narrator/White-Jacket, more than he would do at any other juncture in the work. The narrator who can say of the slave Guinea, that "[t]here were times when I almost envied him myself" (379), this narrator seems to bear very little resemblance to the one whose earlier declamations on the horror and degradation of slavery left no room for mitigation or uncertainty about its iniquities. And for the sake of those who can find comic relief in Guinea's steadfast refusal to witness the frequent shipboard floggings that all hands were commanded to attend (" 'Scuse me, massa!" said the slave, with a low salutation; "I can't 'tand it; I can't, indeed, massa!"), the obvious must be stated in the form of a reminder that, aside

from the manacles and chains of the Middle Passage, no object but the scourge and no action beyond whipping could possibly have struck more fear and outrage in a black slave. "You can shoot me but you can't whip me," Frederick Douglass recalled a defiant slave saying to his master. Indeed, being shot was "less deplorable than the living and lingering death to which cowardly and slavish souls are subjected."⁵⁰ For Lemsford to say to the black slave, "Ah, Guinea!...you have peaceful times; you never opened the book I read in" (379), betrays a most pernicious and galling incomprehension on his part. It reflects a moral defect, in fact. And herein lies the submerged meaning of the chapter, in the form of a morality test meant to separate those who do indeed deplore slavery as a *living death*⁵¹ from those who either accepted tacitly the institution or paid lip service to its being a "necessary evil."

On the surface, Chapter Ninety of *White-Jacket*, "The Manning of Navies," seems mainly devoted to the narrator/Melville's catalogue of the types of men who served aboard the *Neversink* and other naval vessels. And despite the fair number of "noble" sailors--men like Jack Chase, Tawney, and Ushant--the narrator laments the scarcity of Americans on board; which, in turn, caus-

es him to be “repeatedly struck,” as he says, “by the lack of patriotism in many of my shipmates” (380):

Now it may be easily imagined who are the men, and of what moral character they are , who, even at the present day, are willing to enlist as full-grown adults in a service so galling to all shore-manhood as the Navy. Hence it comes that the skulkers and scoundrels of all sorts in a man-of-war are chiefly composed not of regular seamen, but of those “dock-lopers” of land-men, men who enter the Navy to draw their grog and murder their time in the notorious idleness of a frigate. (382; emphasis mine).

That Melville was concerned with the “moral character” of these men should not be surprising; after all, the reform elements that inform *White-Jacket* are based primarily on what the author perceived as the *immorality* of oppression, tyranny, and slavery. Indeed, in the opening two paragraphs of this chapter, Melville had already informed the reader that *morality* , aptly symbolized by the ambiguous emblem of the sea, was the true focus of this seemingly nomenclatorial section. “The gallows and the sea refuse nothing,” the chapter begins, in a line that Melville appropriated directly from McNally,⁵²

[f]or the sea is the true Tophet and bottomless pit of many workers of iniquity....And as the sea...is the stable of brute monsters, gliding hither and thither in unspeakable swarms, even so it is the home of many moral monsters, who fitly divide its empire with the snake, the shark, and the worm. (377)

The “moral monsters” to which Melville alludes do not need to be enumerated here. The reader of *White-Jacket* has already seen them in tyrants like Claret and the officers who “ship their quarter-deck faces” according to the dictates of their own, often cruel, caprices. The suspicion here, however, is that Melville must also have had a different kind of “moral monster” in mind when he wrote this chapter. Specifically, he might have meant men like William Gilmore Simms, Thomas Dew, and other proslavery apologists who insisted that black slaves were better cared for and provided for than their racial and economic (“free”) brethren in the North.⁵³ For, in the end, is it not men like these, and attitudes such as theirs, that Melville seems to satirize in Chapter Ninety, including, it might seem, his own narrator (and perhaps even his younger self)?

Never did I feel my condition as a man-of-war's man so keenly as when seeing this Guinea freely circulating about the decks in citizen's clothes, and, through the influence of his master, almost entirely exempted from the disciplinary degradation of the Caucasian crew. Faring sumptuously in the ward-room; sleek and round, his ebon face fairly polished with content; ever gay and hilarious; ever ready to laugh and joke, that African slave was actually envied by many of the seamen. There were times when I almost envied him myself. (379)

Perhaps, though, *White-Jacket* should be excused from the moral idiocy that would allow a free white to envy an enslaved

black. He does draw back, after all, with the simple adverb “almost.” His situation may seem desperate to him at the moment, but, as we saw earlier, there is no doubt that even these seemingly insufferable circumstances are preferable to those of the hapless slave--the slave whose miserable bondage is inherited and lifelong. It is a bitter Melvillean irony, indeed, that there are “many” among the “skulkers and scoundrels” aboard ship who seem not to realize this, however. And it is toward them, I believe, that Melville directs his derision. If the reader has been paying attention at all to what Melville has been saying about the baseness and abominations of slavery in *White-Jacket*, then it is ludicrous to think that any white would ever dare to think about exchanging places with a black slave. The reader errs who accepts blithely the crew’s apparent jealousy of Guinea’s “light and easy duties” or White-Jacket’s ambiguous remark that “Guinea, in India-rubber manacles, enjoyed the liberties of the world” (379). For manacles are still manacles, regardless from what they are fashioned. And Guinea is but a slave, no matter how gentle his master.

Although some have suggested that White-Jacket’s “friendliness” toward the Purser is an indication of Melville’s “ambiva-

lence on the Negro question,"⁵⁴ there are at least two explicit reasons in the text (among many others elsewhere) why this is not necessarily the case. In the first place, the narrator states that his "friendliness" is "involuntary" (379), which may suggest that it was an affection not easy to come by, or that an instinctive aversion (to slavery and slaveowners) had to be overridden in order for White-Jacket to discover his new "estimation of the Purser's good heart." And secondly, it was, in fact, precisely *because* of the Purser's "pleasant, kind, indulgent manner toward his slave," the narrator avows, that "I always imputed to him a generous heart, and cherished an involuntary friendliness toward him" (379).

As Melville seemed increasingly to comprehend, Good and Evil could exist in one vessel, whether that vessel be a ship or a human being. And White-Jacket/Melville's amiable feelings for Guinea's owner neither diminish his abhorrence of slavery nor signal a moral relativity. They are indicative, instead, of a person who has grown accustomed to paradox or duality. When the *United States* arrived in Boston in the Fall of 1844, Robert Lucas left the ship and sought legal manumission; a fact that in *White-Jacket* is only obliquely implied by the narrator's recollection that the Purser's "treatment of Guinea, under circumstances pe-

culiarly calculated to stir up the resentment of a slave-owner, still more augmented my estimation of [his] good heart" (379). But the fact of the matter is that *White-Jacket*/Melville is not upholding slavery or slaveholding. Rather, he is defending an individual whom he believes to have acted honorably under the "circumstances." Not everyone would have done so, he knows. As if to illustrate this point in a powerful simile near the end of Chapter 90, the narrator figures the types of individuals who, in the deep depravity of their nature, could not behave so magnanimously. These are the individuals who, like certain officers at sea, cannot abide any display of "dignity" or "manhood" in those whom they consider their inferiors:

Whereas, a seaman who exhibits traits of moral sensitivity, whose demeanor shows some dignity; this is the man they, in many cases, instinctively dislike. The reason is, they feel such a man to be a continual reproach to them, as being mentally superior to their power. He has no business in a man-of-war; they do not want such men. To them there is an insolence in his manly freedom, contempt in his very carriage. *He is unendurable, as an erect, lofty-minded African would be to some slave-driving planter.*

(384-85; my emphasis)

Just as the "erect, lofty-minded African" here foreshadows the nobility of both Dagoo and Atufal in *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*, respectively, so *White-Jacket* anticipates the loftiness

of Melville's efforts in these same works to confront the slavery/race issues that threatened his nation's union and augured civil insurrection. And just as he found in *White-Jacket* , that slavery provided the only meaningful analogue for the assault upon the "essential dignity of man" that flogging in the Navy represented; so, in the works that he would write in the 1850s would it become evident that Melville's search for an experience whose *depravity* could even remotely approximate the oppression of *the people* could only be satisfied by a darker and darker vision of African slavery in America. From the late Spring of 1849 through the following Autumn, in *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* , Melville sowed the seeds of this dark vision in two works that he once called "jobs." And in these works, as we have seen, his subversive temperament began to develop the strategies, narrative and personal, that would allow him to write his masterpieces, *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno* . That the issues of race and slavery should figure so significantly in these works should not surprise. This is, after all, what Melville was leading up to in *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* . And thus, while I cannot agree with Brook Thomas' contention that "Melville never treated slavery as an isolated issue," there is no doubt that this critic is right when he acknowledges that, for Melville, the issue

of slavery “is inseparable from his entire vision of America.”⁵⁵

As a parting glance at what that vision had become by the time he wrote *White-Jacket*, it may be instructive to look at a brief scene which fashions yet another graphic and subversive emblem in a book that, as we have seen, seems to abound in such symbols. The scene occurs in Chapter Sixteen, when White-Jacket informs us that he was the “rammer-and-sponger” of “Black Bet.” Melville tries to camouflage the image as a joke, of course, but the narrator’s jocularly cannot hide the fact that he is also making an extraordinarily subversive comment on the state of affairs in American race relations. “Black Bet” is a gun, of course, that was so named “by the captain of the gun—a fine negro—in honor of his sweet-heart, a colored lady of Philadelphia.” But when the narrator/White-Jacket exclaims, “Of Black Bet I was rammer-and-sponger; and ram and sponge I did, like a good fellow” (66), the already risky sexual implications expand to the social level. For not only is the sexual joke fraught with the tabooed subject of miscegenation, but the startling image of the white man (in the ever-symbolic white jacket) “sticking it” to the black figure is as subversive as it seems accurate.

Notes

- 1 **"Hawthorne and His Mosses," p. 549.**

- 2 **Sidney Kaplan, "Herman Melville and the American National Sin: The Meaning of 'Benito Cereno,'" in Robert E. Burkholder (ed.), *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno"* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 37. Much of the criticism that views Melville as less than sympathetic towards blacks derives from (what I take to be) misreadings of *Benito Cereno*, such as Kaplan's. Despite his astute attention to the historical contexts and framework of *Benito*, Kaplan maintains that the tale represents "a plummet-like drop from the unconditionally democratic peaks of *White-Jacket* and *Moby-Dick*" and is, therefore, a reversal of his earlier racial equalitarianism. More and more, however, ever since Karcher's landmark study, *Shadow Over the Promised Land* (1980), which demonstrated how *Benito* could be read as "an exploration of the white racist mind and how it reacts in the face of a slave insurrection" (p. 128), there has been a progressive tendency to explore the "historical and contextual analysis" that marked Karcher's treatment. It is this same methodology, of course, that I attempt to bring to the present study in order to help to compensate for the glaring disparity between the critical attention that has been brought upon race matters in *Benito* and that which has been extended to those works that preceded his "racial masterpiece."**

- 3 **See James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York/Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1969), pp. 65-66.**

- 4 **"Emancipation Address," p. 524.**

- 5 **James Russell Lowell, "Pro-Slavery Logic," in Freimarck and Rosenthal, p. 271.**

- 6 **A possible source for Melville here was Coopers's *The Spy*, where a black servant named Caesar is favorably portrayed throughout. Besides his loyalty and often keen perceptiveness, Caesar is also notable for his seeming to be as well-read as any white character in Cooper's 1821 novel; in fact the black "identified himself with the welfare of those whom it was his lot to serve." See Tremaine McDowell's "The Negro in the Southern Novel Prior to 1850" in Gross and Hardy, pp. 55-56.**

- 7 **See Reynolds, *Beneath*, p. 547, for a discussion of where these stereotypes could be located in urban humor and popular culture.**

- 8 **That Melville's usage of the then common term "darky" was not intended to be pejorative is indicated by his almost polite reference to these same men as "these colored gentlemen" later in the same sentence.**

- 9 Henry James Mercier (and William Gallop), *Life in a Man-of-War; or Scenes in "Old Ironsides"...By a Foretopman* (Philadelphia: Lydia R. Bailey, 1841).
- 10 "Emancipation Address," p. 522.
- 11 As did Melville himself in *White-Jacket*, p. 378.
- 12 Martha Putney, *Black Sailors: Afro-American Merchant Seamen and Whalemen Prior to the Civil War* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1987), p. 76.
- 13 See Bolster, *Black Jacks*, p. 167, for a discussion of the genderizing of shipboard occupations by both the public and the sailors themselves.
- 14 *Letters*, Melville to Richard Henry Dana, Jr., October 6, 1849.
- 15 *Letters*, Melville to Lemuel Shaw, October 6, 1849.
- 16 Frederickson, *Black Image in the White Mind*, p. 276.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 275-82. Frederickson examines in these pages the prevalence of this "Negro as beast" stereotype in relation to the turn of the (twentieth) century efforts to "explain" or "justify" lynching. That the stereotype had relevance to mid-nineteenth century ideology is made apparent in the citation from the Reverend Josiah Priest that follows immediately in the text.
- 18 [The Reverend] Josiah Priest, *Slavery, As It Relates to the Negro or African Race...*(Albany, New York, 1843), pp. 150-53.
- 19 Robertson-Lorant, *Melville*, p. 293.
- 20 Compare Thoreau, in "Civil Disobedience": "There is but little virtue in the actions in masses of men."
- 21 *Letters*, Melville to John Murray, July 15, 1846.
- 22 *Letters*, Melville to Nathaniel Hawthorne, June 1, 1851.
- 23 *Letters*, Melville to Lemuel Shaw, October 6, 1849.
- 24 Vol. 17; July, 1850, pp. 514-20.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 520.
- 26 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vol. (New York: The Colonial Press, 1899), vol. 1, pp. 299; 273.
- 27 Two noteworthy exceptions among the reviews that appeared at the time *White-Jacket* was published were those in *The Athenæum* (February 2, 1850) and the *March Bentley's Miscellany*. In the first

of these, the reviewer said "Mr. Melville stands...far apart from any past or present marine painter" for his ability to capture the "poetry" of "the Ship--her voyages and her crew"; while, in *Bentley's*, the effusive reviewer also praises Melville's "poetry" and "prodigal genius": "Mr. Melville...is everywhere original, suggestive, and individual. We follow him as if we were passing through an exciting dream."

- 28 Brook Thomas, *Cross-examinations...*, p. 149.
- 29 Years later, in *Clarel*, Melville would figure this experience as being "schooled by the inhuman sea"; *IV*, xiii, 7.
- 30 Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy*, p. 86.
- 31 *Benito Cereno*, p. 59.
- 32 Priscilla Zirker, "Evidence of the Slavery Dilemma in *White-Jacket*," *American Quarterly*, XVII (Fall, 1966), p. 480.
- 33 Howard P. Vincent, *The Tailoring of Melville's White-Jacket* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 72ff.
- 34 Thomas, *Cross-examinations...*, pp. 151-54.
- 35 Lowell, "The Buffalo Convention," in Freimarck and Rosenberg, p. 264.
- 36 *Playing in the Dark*, p. 51.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- 38 In the "Historical Note" to the Northwestern-Newberry edition of *White-Jacket*, Willard Thorp states that "the number of his extensive pillages for *White-Jacket* is exceeded only by those in *Moby-Dick*" (p. 417).
- 39 Melville scholars are deeply indebted to Charles Roberts Anderson and Howard Vincent for providing much of the information pertaining to Melville's sources for *White-Jacket*. But relatively little new information has come to light since their pioneering efforts. As for examining the historical/social influences and contexts of the novel, a more recent essay by Brook Thomas, "Exploitation at Home and at Sea," is included as a chapter in his *Cross-examinations*, and it offers, I think, a very insightful historical analysis of Melville's novel, pp. 138-63.
- 40 Vincent, in the *The Tailoring of White-Jacket*, was the first to notice these resemblances, but he makes no reference to race.
- 41 Zirker, *op cit.*, discusses Leggett's works in connection to the flogging issue (p. 487), but she makes no connection between Melville and Leggett.

- 42 "Brought to the Gangway," *New York Mirror*, XI (April 19, 1834), p. 330.
- 43 Pp. 193-200.
- 44 Vincent, for all his helpfulness with the sources, is guilty of saying this (pp.148-49). And while Zirker finds Melville's attitude toward blacks in *White-Jacket* "ambiguous" (p. 43), Kaplan, in "Herman Melville and the American National Sin," makes what I consider an unjust accusation that Melville's "sketches of the *Neversink's* [black] galley hands...adulterated sympathy with condescension" (p. 45).
- 45 Vincent and Zirker.
- 46 *Thirty Years from Home...*, p. 75.
- 47 A selected list of those already mentioned in this chapter includes Rogin, Kaplan, Robertson-Lorant, Parker, and Zirker. Additionally, I would refer the interested reader to Levy, 59-84; Anderson, 431-33; and Keith Huntress, " 'Guinea' of *White-Jacket* and Chief Justice Shaw," *American Literature*, XLII, pp. 639-41.
- 48 See, especially, Kaplan and Rogin.
49. John Haegert, "Voicing Slavery Through Silence: Narrative Mutiny in Melville's *Benito Cereno*," *Mosaic, A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 26:1 (Winter, 1993), pp. 21-38.
- 50 Frederick Douglass, "Treatment of Slaves on Lloyd's Plantation," rpt. in Sterling A. Brown, Arthur P. Davis, and Ulysses Lee (eds.), *The Negro Caravan* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1943).
- 51 As Douglass said in his *Narrative*, "a happy slave is an extinct man" (p. 39).
- 52 William McNally, *Evils and Abuses in the Naval and Merchant Service Exposed: With Proposals for Their Remedy and Redress* (Boston: Cas-sady, 1839), p. 57.
- 53 Representative essays include the Poe/Paulding review discussed in Chapter One, above; also see William Gilmore Simms, "The Morals of Slavery," *Southern Literary Messenger*, III (November, 1837), pp. 641-57.
- 54 Zirker, pp. 482-83.
- 55 Thomas, *Cross-examinations...*, p. 160.

Chapter Eight

Melville's *Sea of Opposites* : *Moby-Dick*

Nothing is but what is not.
(Shakespeare, *Macbeth*)

And that's true, too.
(Shakespeare, *King Lear*)

Man's desire is that the dark waters of death become waters of life, that death and its cold grip be the maternal bosom, just as the sea, though she swallows the sun, gives birth to it again in her depths....

From a consideration of the claims of the inner and outer worlds, or rather, from the conflict between them, the possible and the necessary follows. Unfortunately our western mind, lacking all culture in this respect, has never yet devised a concept, nor even a name, for the union of opposites through the middle path, that most fundamental item of inward experience....

(C.G. Jung; *The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious/ "Metamorphoses and Symbols of the Libido"*)

Such a funny, sporty, gamy, jesty, joky, hoky-poky lad/ is the Ocean, oh!
(Stubb; in "The Candles")

Can there really be any doubt that Ishmael's proclamation, "for a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard," speaks clearly for Melville also? As we have already seen in the preceding chapters here, the sea and shipboard life afforded Melville the kind of education that would have been impossible to

find at nineteenth-century Harvard or Yale--where the exclusively white, Brahmin faculty and student body were likely responsible for the creation of the original, fuller meaning of *Ivory Tower* academics. As a direct result of his time spent aboard the several vessels he shipped on, that is, Melville experienced his severest, if not his first, cultural shock;¹ the concussive effect of which seemed to forge in his mind a vital connection between the racialized others with whom he lived and the sea itself. It was while working, eating, and sleeping in suffocatingly close quarters with the racially mixed crews of nineteenth-century whalers and merchant ships --"at the present day not one in two of the many thousand men before the mast employed in the American whale fishery, are American born" (27; 108)--that Melville's close encounter with racialized others began in earnest, well before he ever disembarked in the South Pacific. And based upon the evidence of his first five novels, it is difficult to exaggerate the profound and transforming impact that this experience as a *minority* white American made on his personal and imaginative (literary) life. "Now, at sea, and in the fellowship of sailors," Melville had said in *Mardi*, "all men appear as they are. No school like a ship for studying nature. The contact of one man

with another is too near and constant to favor deceit" (3; 14).

At the same time, it was while he was at sea, working and living amongst this multiracial society of sailors, I believe, that Melville became especially attuned to an overwhelming sense of duality and contradiction that was both denoted and connoted to him by the paradoxical qualities of this sea--an experience that would affect deeply his response to the racial others whose presence became such a significant element of his later writings. In fact, this *sea of opposites* was so linked in Melville's mind with the racial others he encountered, especially African blacks, that it came to represent a primary symbolic vehicle for his literary figurations of these dark personages. Nearly a decade after the publication of *Moby-Dick*, Emerson would say "[w]e are incompetent to solve the times. Our geometry cannot span the huge orbits of the prevailing ideas, behold their return and reconcile their opposition. We can only obey our own polarity."² But Melville already knew this, as the decidedly polarized vision of his writings clearly indicate. Especially in his representations of the sea and the Black/Africanist presence, indissolubly paired in his mind and *Moby-Dick*, we see important evidence of what has been called "those binary opposites...that Melville's works seem always at pain to put into question."³ And though David Reynolds

was surely right when he wrote that “antebellum popular culture was full of contradictions and paradoxes that became textually inscribed in Melville’s most capacious novel [*Moby-Dick*],”⁴ none of these could match the sea, I believe, for the sheer force and power of impact on Melville’s mind and writings on blacks and the slavery controversy in America. When we look, in particular, at his subversive representations of the major black characters in *Moby-Dick* --Fleece, Dagoo, and Pip--it becomes apparent that the paradoxical and seeming contradictoriness of Melville’s portraits of these blacks owes much to his own experience of the sea itself. By analogy, Melville informs us that the color of a person’s skin tells us as much--or as little--about this person’s *humanity* as the surface of the ocean reveals about the true nature of what lies beneath its often blank aspect.

It was the sea (the *looking-glass* of the sea, as I referred to it earlier) that transformed the young Melville into the maturer man and enigmatic writer “who ha[d] also by the stillness and seclusion of many long night-watches in the remote waters... been led to think untraditionally and independently” (16; 71). It was also the sea that exposed the neophyte “thought-diver” to the *other* side of so many aspects of life: people (individually

and collectively), races, cultures, ideas, emotions--and most of all, the sea itself. After his initial excitement in the "wilderness of waters" (18; 330), Melville would discover a "mortally intolerable truth" (23; 97) about the "the all-contributed and all-receptive ocean" (112; 402), a "truth" about the abundant contradictions of "the pitiless sea" (132; 443) that changed forever the vision of the man and his writings. The boyish enthusiasm expressed by the narrator of a work like *Redburn*⁵ would be tempered by years upon the "appalling ocean" and the "sea [that is] such a foe to man who is an alien to it" (58; 235-6), as Ishmael knows. And this awareness is heightened to terror, at times, by the realization that "the most terrific of all mortal disasters have immemorially and indiscriminately befallen tens and hundreds of thousands of those who have gone upon the waters..." (58; 235). The sea could be, at once, an "only friend" and a "bit-terest foe" (23; 97), as Ishmael reveals. And both he and Melville would spend their lives, it seems, vacillating between a worship for "the open independence of [the] sea" and the "safety, comfort, hearthstone, supper, warm blankets, [and] friends" that are associated with the land. Contradictions such as these would come to characterize Melville's treatment of the sea, as well as his own response to it. And it was in the impossibly enigmatic

duality of the sea, as we shall see, that Melville discovered both an analogue and emblem for the dilemma posed by the slavery and race issues that figure so prominently in *Moby-Dick* .

It is in his dualistic figuration of the sea that we discover a touchstone to Melville's often paradoxical representations both of the black characters in *Moby-Dick* and the historical context of their racial oppression on the "treacherous, slavish shore" (23; 97) of an American slaveholding nation. For it was the ever-changing sea, in its infinite capacity to contain the sublime elements of beauty and terror, that provided him with an image commensurate to his troubled vision of a nation divided by its inability to resolve its slavery crisis. In my mind, there is more than an oblique correspondence between the lessons Melville learned from his experience within the *sea of opposites* and the insight he gained about racialized others who increasingly drew his attention as a man and as a writer. It was the sea, it seems, that taught Melville to look beneath the surface, both of things and people. And it was the sea that seems to have imparted a form of wisdom which allowed him to recognize the duality and paradox inherent to all things--and people. In *Moby-Dick* , the sea comes to represent both life and death to Ishmael/Melville.

It is both male and female; it preserves and murders; and it both terrifies and delights. But, in this very duality, the sea also promotes a lesson whose meaning hinges upon one's ability to see the unity beneath the surface (appearance) of oppositions. Ishmael warns the reader not to be seduced into an unwary state 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" (114; 405). And then, significantly, he also extends to both a racial and moral level the insight gained from this awareness, when he describes his own ability to overcome an early, irrational fear of the dark-skinned harpooner, Queequeg. "Ignorance is the parent of fear," Ishmael realizes, once he has looked beyond the surface of the darker man's skin: "And what is it, thought I, after all! It's only his outside; a man can be honest in any sort of skin" (3; 29). Indeed, if there is one constant feature in Melville's representations of the sea, it is that, throughout his writings, the sea embodies the dualities of existence and the essential paradox of the human condition. It seems likely, even, that the sea was a major source or inspiration for the perception of those contradictions that Melville came to insist so vehemently upon in his

depiction of the world around--and within--him. Through Ishmael, in *Moby-Dick*, for example, Melville would figure the sea as the source of life, the "highest truth," and "that howling infinite" (23; 97). But later he would associate the sea with death by suggesting that it "is but the first salutation to the possibilities of the immense Remote, the Wild, the Watery, the Unshored" (112; 402). In one place, Ishmael refers to the feminine, maternal attributes of the sea which "suckled" Ahab (116; 410). But then, a short while later, the sea is said to be a "man-like sea," and it is referred to as a "groom." Even the "mighty leviathans, the sword-fish, and sharks" are described as "the strong, troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea" (132; 442). Repeatedly in *Moby-Dick*, as we shall see, it is the sea, or more precisely the *image* of the sea, that furnishes a trope of sufficient magnitude to render adequately or truthfully the contradictory spectrum of human existence, from the "great flood-gates of the wonderworld swung open" (1.16) to the "intangible malignity that has been from the beginning" (41.160).

Even in his private journals Melville registers the contradictions of the sea and his own responsiveness to its vicissitudes. Just days apart during the same voyage across the At-

lantic, two entries indicate the disparity between emotions and the range of psychological extremes that can be experienced as a result of exposure to the open seas. In the first, amidst some excitement aboard the vessel, Melville comments that, “mad feelings found something congenial in the riot of the raging sea.” Then, just a few days later, the lethargic traveller writes, “[t]he sea has produced a temporary effect upon me which makes me for the time incapable of anything but vegetating.”⁶

Of course, the sea was not solely responsible for Melville’s recognition of the duality of life or his related belief that “there is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself” (11; 55). But the correspondence between the antithetical nature of the sea and Melville’s own *burgeoning awareness of paradox and duality* should not be discounted, especially in view of the impact this awareness would have on his own sense of identity. For it helped also to determine how this sense of identity was both shaped and reflected, in turn, by his deeply troubled and dichotomized perception of the Black/Africanist presence in America. Indeed, it is a point central to my analysis of the Black/Africanist presence in Mel-

ville's sea literature that this consciously bifurcated perception of the sea and race be recognized not as mutually exclusive or separately arrived at modes of apprehension but as interconnected realizations that are characteristic of Melville's attitudes towards each. Moreover, if it is true, as I have suggested, that it was the "friend" and "foe" of the sea which opened Melville's eyes (and heart and mind) to the fundamental oppositions and contradictions of worldly experience in general, and the love-hate relationship between the black and white races in America, in particular, then it was also the sea that forced another recognition. It taught him how such a divided consciousness might afflict him to the extent that identity itself can become another form of slavery--unless, of course, one is able to recognize, accept, and even reconcile the "darkness" within the light, as Ishmael attempts to do.

Ishmael, however, having registered "the whole striking contrast of the scene" (115; 408), admits that he has his own peculiar way of dealing with the problem: "I have a way of always keeping my eyes shut," he maintains, "[b]ecause no man can ever feel his own identity aright except his eyes be closed; *as if darkness were indeed the proper element of our essences* ,

though light be more congenial to our clayey part" (11; 55; emphasis added). Clearly, this is not intended to be understood on a literal level, and meaning emerges here in a buried symbolic suggestion that links darkness and light with the prevailing racial ideologies of the time--which held that darkness had no essence. Ishmael, like Melville, is aware of the onerous racism of such beliefs, and he must close his eyes to these prejudices, as he says, in order to experience what he *knows* to be the truth about the power of darkness. Ishmael knows, on a human level, that to deny the reality of darkness, within or without, is a dangerous prevarication which, on the individual (identity) and collective levels, denies the very "essences" required to be whole or integrated. This is, in part, what his experience at sea and his contact with various forms of enlightened *darkness* have taught him.

*

*

*

As we have seen in the chapters above, Melville's construction of "images of the non-white"⁷ in his works prior to *Moby-Dick* veered progressively away from representations of South Sea Islanders in order to focus ever more centrally upon the Black/Africanist presence and the slavery controversy in Ameri-

ca. But this was not a matter of Melville's having lost interest in the *Isolatoos* and "primitives" of his earlier works--historically or symbolically, as the significance of Queequeg's role in *Moby-Dick* should remind us. Rather, the desperate urgency of the slavery question in America at the time could not have failed but to command his attention. At the same time, as I have just suggested, Melville's experience of the sea itself was inextricably joined in his mind with his several years' close encounter with representatives of the African races. For other than what he had read or heard, Melville doubtless knew very little about the sea or blacks when he first worked his way across the Atlantic as a cabin boy (and green deckhand) aboard the *St. Lawrence* in 1839. They were both *blanks* that he met for the first time with many preconceptions, it is certain. As he began to fill in these blanks, and personalize his canvas, however, he began to broaden his seascape to include, in heavier and bolder strokes than ever before, an extended treatment of the Black/Africanist presence that is under consideration here. This is not to say that Melville had excluded blacks from his earlier works, as the previous chapters here have attempted to demonstrate. But his canvas prior to the "whale-book" more closely resembles some of Gauguin's paintings in their bold depictions of South Sea Island-

ders and Polynesians than it does the works of Winslow Homer, which reveal a consistent preoccupation and affinity for the blacks of America and the West Indies.

By the time he came to write *Moby-Dick*, then, between 1850-1851, both Melville's personal life and the American nation's historical quandary over the slavery crisis merged to create a set of circumstances which seemed to compel him to face the Black/Africanist presence and the slavery issue with an increased sense of exigency. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law was part of the great Compromise of 1850 that was meant to preserve the Union. But, in fact, many Northerners and Southerners alike felt only compromised by the new legislation, and the race-related tensions in the country were dangerously high as a result of its enactment into law. And as the son-in-law of the man who would be the first judge to return a fugitive black into slavery, Melville's interest in the slavery issues was necessarily complicated. As will be seen in my discussion of Pip, later in this chapter, Melville's reliance upon allegory and narrative indirection to filter his expressions on these matters was likely the result of his familial attachment to Lemuel Shaw. But ignore these issues, he could not.

In the very early stages of *Moby-Dick*, while Ishmael is searching for a place to sleep in New Bedford, before going on to Nantucket, he happens upon a Negro church which, after stumbling over an “ash-box in the porch” and almost choking on flying ash particles, he peeps in upon:

It seemed the great Black Parliament sitting in a Tophet. A hundred black faces turned round in their rows to peer; and beyond, a black Angel of Doom was beating a book in his pulpit. It was a negro church; and the preacher's text was about the blackness of darkness, and the weeping and wailing and teeth-gnashing there. Ha, Ishmael, muttered I, backing out, Wretched entertainment at the sign of “The Trap!”
(2; 18)

On a symbolic level, this scene seems to recreate Melville's own, early hesitation to enter the world of the blacks in America. Perhaps he felt unprepared for the darkness of blackness, to invert Ishmael's phrase. Or maybe he simply felt out of place, like an intruder. But, having just completed a book-length allegory of slavery in the American ship of state with *White-Jacket*, Melville would use the decks of the *Pequod* and the pages of *Moby-Dick* to reinvent the African presence in America. Like his narrative alter ego, Ishmael, Melville too had initially backed out of the “The Trap” of the negro world. But, by the end of *Moby-Dick*, it becomes obvious—at least to the “lynx-eyed reader”—that

Melville and Ishmael are united in their efforts not only to enter this dark world but to show its brilliance. And the careful (and morally sensitive) reader would discern also the significance of Ishmael/Melville's use of the term "The Trap" to identify the Negro church that Ishmael stumbles upon. For a *trap* indeed it is meant to signify.

As we have seen here with regard to the Guinea episode in *White-Jacket*, and as is increasingly apparent in his fictions of the 1850s, especially *Benito Cereno*, Melville's sea narratives seem deliberately constructed to "deceive the superficial skimmer of pages" (to repeat a description of Hawthorne offered by Melville). And this appears to be especially true of his representations of the Black/Africanist presence in these sea writings, where the seascape is fraught with "traps" that are actually more like moral snares for the unwary and morally delinquent reader. Melville narrates and describes events, and characters' reactions to these events, in such a way that the surface meanings suggest, at times, the exact opposite of the hidden, deeper meanings that he has secreted away for those only who would dare penetrate this illusory surface. Such is the case in his representations of the triad of major black figures in *Moby-Dick* --Fleece, Dagoo, and Pip--where Melville makes a specific point,

it seems, to create characters who are not what they seem. Instead, they become signifiers whose buried significations indicate the moral failure of those who insist upon univocal or stereotyped readings of Conventional import. As we shall see, the seemingly fearsome black brute, Dagoo, is actually a brave and noble black who, in his most poignant and symbolic moment, suggests the (seemingly impossible) possibility of unity and equality between blacks and whites; and Fleece, the ostensibly shambling “darky” who represents (to many) the servile, tractable black, is actually an angry malcontent whose irony and cynicism marks him for a revolt waiting to erupt. And, finally, there is Pip, the half-insane, submissive black whose gentleness and innocence seem attachments to emphasize the feminized qualities of his personality--but who turns out to be a seer, a prophet, and a visionary relativist who knows that there are only too many ways to perceive the world (“I look, you look, he looks...”), all qualities, that is, which would endear him both to Ishmael and, it seems certain, to Melville himself.

In constructing his images of blacks as multidimensional characters whose *humanity* is defined by their ability to contain oppositions or contradictions, Melville was, of course, attempt-

ing to revise the gross generalizations and oversimplifications that too many Americans had subscribed to for generations. We have seen ample evidence of this in the chapters that precede this one. As we focus attention now on the black characters in *Moby-Dick*, we see the capstones to Melville's efforts to illuminate the darkness that such stereotypes apparently brought upon the American nation's vision of its dark brothers and sisters. Melville had worked and lived with numerous blacks during his time at sea. And he *knew* the truth to be otherwise than had been generally represented. His own experience told him so. And his apprehension of the sea both fostered and deepened the veracity of his beliefs. In order to reveal the truly "correspondent *coloring*" of his times, and reflect accurately his countrymen's attitudes about black people, Melville would infuse Ishmael's narrative with depictions of stereotyped black characters who seem to flatter white expectations. But he offered, at the same time, alternative and subversive readings of these figures to those precious few "thought-divers" who were willing to penetrate the surface of the *sea of opposites*. As should be obvious from the earlier chapters here, Melville had experimented with this process before. But in his representations of Fleece, Dagoo,

and Pip, within the slavery allegory that often defines *Moby-Dick*, we find profound examples of Melville's final "trying-out" at sea of the narrative and moral ambiguity that would characterize *Benito Cereno*, the work thought by many to contain his ultimate expression on the racial hegemony that had darkened the New World for centuries--and that was about to precipitate the bloodiest, most costly civil insurrection the American nation would ever know. But Melville's figuration of the Black/Africanist presence in *Moby-Dick* demonstrates the extent to which he had made a similar expression almost five years earlier, in his "wicked book" about the *white* whale (perhaps slavery itself⁸) that destroyed "all but one" in a ship clearly intended to represent the American ship of state itself.

*

*

*

Fleece

Your voraciousness, fellow-critters, I don't blame ye so much for; dat is natur, and can't be helped; but to govern dat wicked natur, dat is de pint. You is sharks, sartin; but if you govern de shark in you, why den you be angel; for all angel is not'ing more dan de shark well governed.... And, by Gor, none on you has de right to dat whale; dat whale belong to some one else. I know some o' you has berry brig mout, bigger dan oders; but den de brig mouts sometimes has de small bellies; so dat de brigness ob de mout is not to swallar wid, but to bite off de blubber for de small fry ob sharks, dat can't get into de scrouge to help demselves. (64.251)

Fleece's speech to his "fellow-critters," the sharks, which takes up approximately one-half of the "Stubb's Supper" chapter in *Moby-Dick*, is a remarkable passage for many reasons. It is filled with a dark, gallows-type humor, and it is seemingly parodic in intent, although it is not immediately clear whom or what is the object of Melville's lampooning here. The traditional interpretation of the passage has Melville writing a caricature of the stereotypically lazy, ill-spoken negro, or perhaps recalling "the style and content of burlesque sermons by [William H.] Levi-son's *Julius Caesar Hannibal*, the pedantic...black preacher who regaled antebellum humor readers with his darkly humorous discourses (called 'black diamonds') on countless topics."⁹ But it seems clear also that Melville's more subversive purpose is discovered in his droll use of Fleece's "message" to camouflage the more irreverent one imparted by Stubb's indelicate rejoinder to the black cook's words: "that's Christianity; go on" (64; 251).

Most often, however, critical attention has been directed toward the "comic relief" or "humor"¹⁰ of this passage, rather than the subtly important fact that, within the overall context of the chapter, the much-abused Fleece is several times referred to as either "sullen" or "sulky" in response to Stubb's clearly

racist mistreatment. But Melville's narrator does not want to dismiss the significance of Fleece's torment, it seems, a fact that is supported both by his repetition of these adjectives and the further fact that he allows Fleece the last words, and final *say*, of the chapter¹¹--a narrative strategy which seems to shift the object of ridicule in the scene:

"Wish, by gor! whale eat him [Stubb], 'stead of him eat whale. I'm bressed if he ain't more of shark dan Massa Shark hisself," muttered the old man, limping away; with which *sage ejaculation* he went to his hammock.
(254; emphasis added)

Ishmael's feelings of disapprobation for Stubb are disclosed in his reference to the *sagacity* of Fleece's derisive judgment of the second mate. The narrator's language is careful here, and the tone, while not devoid of irony, seems purposefully controlled and subdued. Whatever irony does exist is clearly directed at Stubb, as Ishmael is now choosing sides in this shark-baiting contest. Earlier it was Fleece who was associated with the villainous sharks, partly the result of his repeated use of the appellation "fellow-critters" in addressing them. Now, however, it is Stubb who is "more of shark dan Massa Shark hisself," and the onus of the analogy is shifted from the black cook to the white mate. Very subtly also, in making such a transfer, Melville has

attempted to revise what Albert Boime has termed “the almost legendary association of blacks and sharks in the literature on slavery”:

...the gruesome bite of the shark had long been associated with the system of slavery. Indeed, the expression “to be thrown to the sharks” grew out of its grisly practices. Blacks who died en route were thrown overboard, and those who saw their fate as hopeless often jumped overboard, thus serving as “shark bait.” Occasionally a dead black was deliberately used as bait to lure sharks when food was scarce, ironically feeding the sharks to enable the crews to survive. In this cannibalistic cycle, the slavers literally devoured their own slaves like greedy sharks.¹²

Actually, this was an association Melville had sought to reverse in the paragraphs immediately preceding Fleece’s enjoined oratory. In fact, the passage in question, which contains an explicit but previously neglected reference to the Middle Passage, can be said to establish the context in which Melville intended the discerning reader to view the ensuing *pas de deux* between Fleece and Stubb.¹³ It is a passage that evokes such horrific historical associations between sharks and African blacks aboard slaveships (more gruesome even than the Boime citation above can begin to convey) that it casts a deep pall over the remainder of the chapter. Clearly, the comic perspective of the scene is available, especially in view of the literary models, like Julius Caesar Hannibal, upon which the character of Fleece seems to

have been based. But it is important to notice, I think, that this “comic relief” can only be achieved at the *expense* of the black cook (by a reader whose laughter represents, at best, a form of racial condescension and, at worst, is a sign of complicity in the more overtly racist behavior exhibited throughout *Moby-Dick* by Stubb). The more we see of Stubb, the more we realize the possibility that he could have served aboard a slaver. For here it should be recalled also that, in addition to his calloused, racially-inspired abandonment of Pip at sea (“Stick to the boat, Pip, or by the Lord, I wont pick you up if you jump; mind that. We can’t afford to lose whales by the likes of you; a whale would sell for thirty times what you would, Pip, in Alabama”), it is Stubb who, often abuses the black seamen aboard the *Pequod*. An example of this occurs when, “flushed with conquest,” he arrogantly orders yet another black, the “imperial” Dagoo, to climb upon the dead whale and cut for him a whale-steak, even while “thousands on thousands of sharks, swarming round the dead Leviathan, smackingly feasted on its fatness” (248-9). Of course, too, there is no small irony in the fact that it is this very whale-steak that provokes Stubb, ostensibly unhappy with the way it has been cooked, into commencing his badgering of Fleece.

Ishmael begins the passage to which I have been referring with a lurid account of how, “amid all the smoking horror and diabolism of a sea-fight, sharks will be seen longingly gazing up to the ship’s decks, like hungry dogs round a table where red meat is being carved, ready to bolt down every killed man that is tossed to them” (249). He then continues it with an ironic commentary on the futility of any attempt to truly contrast such sharkish behavior with the human, “valiant butchers over the deck-table” (aboard ship, that is), who “cannibally caru[e] each other’s live meat with carving knives all gilded and tasselled.” For it seems that in Ishmael’s mind, such a comparison is based upon the fallacious supposition that there exists, in fact, what might be considered a truly opposed set of *oppositions*. Instead, it appears Ishmael locates the similarities in such (seemingly) disparate experiences with the wry, and perhaps grim, explanation that, “were you to turn the whole affair upside down, it would still be pretty much the same thing, that is to say, a shocking sharkish business enough for all parties” (249).

The irony is much more palpable here, as Ishmael equates cannibalistic human behavior with the vicious predation of the sharks. But the culmination of his meaning is yet withheld until the penultimate of four subordinate clauses that make up this

long sentence of more than two hundred words. With a startling suddenness of impact, however, especially for those sensitive to matters of race and the ghastly history of the Atlantic slave trade, Ishmael relates the somber fact that “sharks also are the invariable outriders of all slave ships crossing the Atlantic; systematically trotting alongside, to be handy in case a parcel is to be carried anywhere, *or a dead slave to be decently buried*” (249-50; my emphasis). To comprehend what is being related here, is to see the horror of the scene described emerge with ghoulish power from latent to blatant. With stunning celerity, Ishmael has moved from comparing human and sharkish behavior to the bloodcurdling image of flesh-craving sharks that followed slave ships during the Middle Passage in pursuit of the slaves’ bodies--dead and alive--that inevitably came their way. The conflated image, then, is of sharkish humans transporting human slaves who are (more than occasionally) fed to the actual sharks who follow unfailingly the *chum-line* of slaves’ bodies. And the tragic reality is that, almost inconceivably, this image was based upon historical evidence. As an eighteenth-century slaveship captain, John Barbot, wrote:

The bar-canoes, however well manned, were frequently overset with loss of goods and also lives, for the waters swarm with monstrous sharks, sometimes thirty feet long, that soon make way with any man who happens to fall near them. These sharks usually swim in company and when a dead slave was thrown overboard, one shark would bite off a leg, another an arm, while others would sink down with the body; and all this happened in much less time than it takes to describe the gruesome feast. Great numbers of sharks always followed the course of slave ships, as if they knew that one or more bodies would be thrown, *daily*, to their ravenous jaws.¹⁴

Barbot's account of the shark/slaveship connection is but one among many narratives that establish the historical authenticity of this ghastly experience. Witness another slavehip captain, Thomas Phillips, whose narrative suggests that such macabre episodes had become so commonplace as to have become predictable:

The negroes are so wilful and loth to leave their own country, that they have often leap'd out of the canoes, boat and ship, into the sea, and kept under water till they were drowned, to avoid being taken up and saved by our boats, which pursued them; they having a more dreadful apprehension of Barbadoes than we can have of hell, tho' in reality they live much better there than in their own country; but home is home. &c. We have likewise seen divers of them eaten by the sharks, of which a prodigious number kept about the ships in this place ["Whidaw" or "Quedaw" as Phillips refers to the slave harbor in Guinea where he conducted his odious "business"], and I have been told will follow her hence to Barbadoes, for the dead negroes that are thrown over-board in the passage.¹⁵

What is important to remember here, then, is that while it was Ishmael/Melville's imagination that juxtaposed the ideas, the fact of this hideous connection among slaves, slaveships and

sharks, was exactly that, a historical *fact* --one that had been so widely reported by eyewitnesses to the trade that there is no reason to doubt its authenticity. And although it remains uncertain where, exactly, Melville came by his harrowing knowledge of sharks as the “invariable outriders of all slave ships,” it is likely that, in addition to whatever reading he may have done to discover such horrors, he had heard also the firsthand stories and accounts of the sailors with whom he worked. Melville indeed suggests as much when he describes the nefarious Jackson of *Redburn*, who was based upon a historical personage (one Robert Jackson of New York), and who had worked aboard the slavers.

Among those narratives that Melville was most likely to have read, however, was an account by a slaveship surgeon, Alexander Falconbridge, whose *Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* was published in 1788 and widely circulated both in England and America.¹⁶ And what Melville would have gained from this first-hand reportage (had he in fact read Falconbridge) was confirmation of seemingly sensationalistic details relating to what Boime called the “legendary association of blacks and sharks in the literature on slavery.” He would have learned of the regularity with which slaves were dispatched into the sea,

and of the appallingly primal fate that awaited them there, what with the mammoth sharks (as Ishmael says) “ready to bolt down every killed man that is tossed to them”:

The river of Bonny abounds with sharks of a very large size, which are often seen in almost incredible numbers about the slave ships, devouring with great dispatch the dead bodies of the negroes as they are thrown over-board. (52)

Indeed, he would have learned that many blacks leapt willingly into the shark-infested waters, as Phillips and others reported, rather than accept their enslavement:

During the time we were there [anchored in the Bonny River], fifteen negroes belonging to a vessel from Liverpool (*sic*), found means to throw themselves into the river; very few were saved; and the residue fell sacrifice to the sharks. A similar instance took place in a French ship while we lay there....Circumstances of this kind are very frequent. (30)

Considering the fact that many of Melville's readers might also have possessed (or at least had access to) a similar store of information, it is possible that Ishmael's graphic and overpowering evocation of the shark-slaveship image was meant to test his readers' willingness to dwell upon the moral implications of such a historically shameful and morally decadent an enterprise as the slave trade. Would the reader simply gloss over the un-

speakable horrors associated with this nefarious transatlantic trade in human flesh? Or would such evidence as Ishmael reports serve as a catalyst to a dark reflection and moral repugnance that prevent the reader from laughing too openly at the black cook's misfortunes? It seems possible, even, that Melville was laying another of the moral traps for *his* reader, much as he had done sporadically in his earlier representations of certain blacks in *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*, but which he would feature most significantly in *Benito* a few years later. There, Amasa Delano's (moral) failure to read "signs" consigns him to a deeper moral delinquency, deeper than his "singularly undistrustful nature" might seem, at the outset, to suggest. Similarly, readers of *Moby-Dick* who read with condescending amusement only the scene where Fleece is forced to endure the wanton scurrility of a brutishly insensitive Stubb have also failed to discern the important "signs" that Melville frequently provides. Fleece's speech to the voracious sharks presents no "comic relief" or "fun" to the reader who has just swum with sharks in Melville's *sea of opposites* --not without an overwhelming sense of tragedy to accompany and dilute the laughter. Rather, like the "jeering...passengers" mentioned by Ishmael in "Wheelbar-

row,” the “lubber-like assembly, who marvelled that two fellow beings should be so companionable” as the white-skinned Ishmael and the dark-skinned Queequeg, the reader who chuckles at Fleece instead of sneering at Stubb is subject to Ishmael’s (and Melville’s) scorn, fittingly proclaimed when the narrator sardonically exclaims, “as though a white man were anything more dignified than a whitewashed negro” (13.60).

If Fleece’s representation in *Moby-Dick* allowed the majority of Melville’s readers to plug him into the stereotyped notion of blacks as an indolent race of “dim-witted...subservient... [and] stupid” individuals that some later critics also came to see as an accurate description of Melville’s earlier black cooks at sea (Baltimore, Mr. Thompson, and Old Coffee),¹⁷ then it needs to be made clear that Ishmael/Melville sought to undermine such a reading within the context established by the hauntingly tragic image of sharks and slaveships that immediately precedes the cook’s one appearance in the novel. It is even possible that the sharks which so much annoy Stubb were intended, because of their subversive identification with the rapacity of whites and the institution of slavery, to symbolize the clamor of the mate’s conscience regarding the inhuman practices of black enslave-

ment. Indeed, this identification of Stubb with the sharks is reinforced by the mate's likening of his own taste for whale-flesh to theirs, as both he and "they prefer it tough and rare" (250). Thus, in a perverse twist of atonement, Stubb summons a "tractable" black, Fleece, to "preach" to the sharks in an effort to quiet the demons that disturb his supper. What does seem most apparent, however, is that such a representation, together with Stubb's callous brutality and his racist abuse of the unfortunate black cook, complicates and deepens the overall effect of the chapter, while it challenges also the reader's moral purview in response to the events that take place--a challenge which, as I suggested earlier, seems to anticipate Melville's narrative style and strategy in *Benito*. The reader here can submit to the temporization that characterizes Amasa Delano in his steadfast refusal to "see" the truth behind the appearances. Or, sensitive to utter inhumanity to which the black (and Blacks) were subjected, historically and in "Stubb's Supper", the reader can look beneath the surface to *see* indeed the extent to which Stubb, and those like him, can be "more of shark dan Massa Shark hisself."

Dagoo

Dagoo represents Melville's most important attempt, prior to *Benito Cereno*, to present a black character whose presence worked to subvert the "soft" stereotype of Negro docility and willingness to be governed by whites. Indeed, Dagoo's most obvious relation to *Benito* is that he seems a veritable harbinger of Atufal, the "brave prisoner" of the later work who was, like many of the black slaves in America at the time, *seemingly* restrained by an "iron collar" attached to padlocked chains (73). Both Dagoo and Atufal are imposing physical specimens who can strike a simultaneous sense of fear, awe, "corporeal humility" (as Ishmael calls it), and "a mixture of admiration" in the whites who encounter them.¹⁸ And the physical resemblances alone between them are striking, as Dagoo is twice referred to as "gigantic" (27,107; 48,191) while Atufal is described as both "gigantic" (73) and "colossal" (74). Beyond the mere surface resemblance, however, even their manner and demeanor appear to link them, with the former's taciturnity matched by the latter's "unquailing muteness" (73). Where Atufal is said to exhibit a "royal spirit" and to have been a king in his African homeland (73-4), so too is Dagoo assigned regal attributes by Ishmael's references to him as "noble," "imperial," and (twice) "an Asahuerus to behold"

(107; 108). Perhaps more importantly, though, just as Afton's awesome physicality is thought to balance or counterpoint Babo's intellectual "hive of subtlety," so, also, is Dagoo, as the "Squire of little Flask," said to be responsible for "supplying the muscle" for the "native American [who] liberally provides the brains" (108)--a description which, considering the *brains* provided by the "liberal hero" of *Benito*, Amasa Delano, encourages the reader of both works to reconsider just how disingenuous Melville's distinction between the "brains" of the white and the "muscle" of the black was intended to be.

Like all the blacks aboard the *San Dominick*, Dagoo is also figured frequently in terms of animal imagery. He is "erect as a giraffe," and he walks with a "lion-like tread" (27;107). His is also a walk, Ishmael says, which reverberates throughout the cabin "as when an African elephant goes passenger in a ship." Unlike the bestial imagery associated with the black cast of *Benito*, however, the metaphorical qualities associated with Dagoo are not transformed as the result of his actions--or the prejudices of the narrator, as they are in *Benito*. In the early stages of the later work, Amasa Delano's paternalistic racism encourages his condescending assignation of docile traits to the blacks he

sees. Thus, he perceives them as “Newfoundland dogs” (100), “a doe,” and “doves” (87). Later, however, after the slave insurrection has been revealed, and the “scales dropped from his eyes” (119), the imagery shifts to menacing images of Babo’s “snakishly writhing” (118) and the “red tongues” of the blacks which “loll[ed], wolf-like, from their black mouths” (122). Dagoo, on the other hand, is allowed, in a deftly oxymoronic phrase, to retain “all his barbaric virtues” (107), which include, according to Ishmael, his quality of being “wonderfully abstemious,” as well as his appearing “baronial,” “lordly,” and even “majestic” (191). Most revealingly, perhaps, Dagoo is such an awesome specimen of black grandeur and vitality, and one who had never felt (presumably) the sting of the white man’s lash nor the shackles of enslavement, that his implacable figure seems to threaten the dominion of the white race who can hold no power over him. In what clearly seems an attempt by Melville to play upon the fears of slaveholding Americans, Ishmael says of Dagoo: “There was a corporeal humility in looking up at him; and a white man standing before him seemed a white flag come to beg truce of a fortress” (108).

Unlike Fleece, the “old Ebony [who] floundered along...in obedience to the word of command” (250), Dagoo, the harpooner

to the third-mate, Flask, is a magisterial black presence. He is “a gigantic, coal-black negro-savage” who exudes such a sense of power and self-actualization that his mien would have been, in all likelihood, menacingly unfamiliar to those whites who put too much faith in the “soft” stereotypes of blacks discussed in previous chapters here. With the rare exception of characters like “Black Sampson,” who appeared in a pair of George Lippard’s best-sellers, *Blanche of Brandywine* (1846) and *Washington and His Generals* (1847),¹⁹ the preferred image of the negro for white Americans was generally culled from the more familiar portraits of abject subservience presented by the sanitizing Conventional and sentimental literature of nineteenth-century America. In fact, in his depiction of this “noble negro” who sustained himself with “a cool, indifferent, easy, *unthought of*, barbaric majesty” (191; my emphasis), Melville seems intent upon creating an image of the Negro that would subvert the prevailing belief among American whites about the supposed docility and amiability of the race. Figured in Dagoo were many of the very qualities and characteristics that, in their insistence upon the black’s inherent “nobility” and “majesty,” could demolish the self-serving platitudes that afforded comfort to the white race, from its belief in

the “tractability” and inferiority of the negro to the presumption of the blacks’ innate tendencies toward the witless indulgence in music, dance, and song.

As late as 1855, for example, during the same winter in which Melville was composing *Benito*, *Putnam’s Magazine* (the same publication in which *Benito* would appear) printed a piece entitled “Negro Minstrelsy” in which the author remarked upon “the character and habits of the colored race.” Foremost among these traits, the anonymous author suggested, is the fact that, for negroes, “[n]o hardships or troubles can destroy, or even check their happiness and levity.” To support his observations, then, the author of this article (which Melville himself was very likely to have read) points to “the lightness and prevailing good humor of...negro songs”²⁰ as corroboration. All of which makes it seem fitting, of course, that, in “Midnight, Forecastle,” it is Pip who is expected to lead the “jig” called for by the French sailor. Significantly, it is an American (the second Nantucket sailor) who summons Pip to the assembly with the racially charged epithet, “Pip! thou blackling!” (150). But Pip is described parenthetically as “*Sulky and sleepy*,” and his response to the call for his tambourine (and participation in the musical festivities) is tersely resistant: “Don’t know where it is” (150). This sets the stage

(literally and figuratively) for Tashtego's cryptic rebuttal of the notion that blacks and other darker, "primitive" races derive a singular and inordinate pleasure from such mindless forms of entertainment: "That's a white man; he calls that fun: humph! I save my sweat" (151). Dagoo, meanwhile, with no indication given that he has participated in the gaiety, seems also, like Pip and Tashtego, to have been somewhat agitated by the proceedings. In fact, he appears so sufficiently annoyed that when the Old Manx Sailor describes the sky as "pitch black," the massive black harpooner takes (what appears to be unreasonable) offence: "What of that? Who's afraid of black's afraid of me! I'm quarried out of it!" (153)--a powerfully poetic image that, in the unexpected usage of the verb *quarry*, collapses the dual figurations of the negro as prey and laborer into one loaded trope.

At this point in the poetic drama of "Midnight, Forecastle," however, Melville introduces a Spanish sailor who does indeed take offence at Dagoo's remark. And there is a clear intimation that racial differences and animosities are at the root of his vexation. In an aside, he says of Dagoo: "He wants to bully, ah!--the old grudge makes me touchy." And then, advancing, he attempts to bait Dagoo into an altercation with the incendiary de-

claration: "Aye, harpooner, thy race is the undeniable dark side of mankind--devilish dark at that. No offence" (153). Dagoo's response is registered in a "grimly" uttered single word: "None." But this answer seems more a retort than an acknowledgment of the Spaniard's insincere disclaimer. From the black's point of view, and probably Melville's as well, "the old grudge" belongs rightfully to him. The Spaniard, as a member of the nation responsible for introducing slavery into the New World, is considered by Dagoo to be so base and depraved as to render his comments worthless or beneath Dagoo's dignity to respond to.

In the fight that inevitably ensues, as a direct result of the Spaniard's continued provocation of Dagoo, Melville foregrounds the hostilities between blacks and the Spanish aboard the *San Dominick* in *Benito*. It is an antagonism that has deep historical roots, of course.²¹ And Dagoo's acid reference to the Spanish sailor as a "mannikin" (154) anticipates the characterization of the Spanish captain, Benito Cereno, who, in the later tale, is described as an "undemonstrative invalid" (63) whose appearance suggests a "skeleton" (62). Significantly, it is an English sailor who attempts to even the circumstances of the row by insisting that the Spaniard's knife be snatched from him (a reminder, perhaps of the English efforts to thwart the Spanish slave trade in

the earlier years of the nineteenth century). But the scene ends somewhat abruptly with a “mate’s voice from the quarter deck” that orders the crew to the halyards in preparation for the onset of an approaching squall. Whereupon, as if to summarize (or accentuate) the racial import of the drama, Pip, “shrinking under the windlass,” closes the chapter with a meditation upon squalls and *whiteness*, Ahab (“that anaconda of an old man”), and the crew itself “[T]hose chaps there are the worse yet--they are your white squalls, they” (154).

In the confrontation he has just witnessed between his fellow black (Dagoo) and the Spanish sailor, Pip has seen the Past enacted again. In miniature, Melville has recreated the New World struggle between the white oppressor and the black who would resist becoming the white’s slave or subordinate. Pip can be said too to have glimpsed a page from a Future that would reenact this tragic struggle yet again, on a much larger scale, and with much more catastrophic results, aboard the *San Dominick*. But Dagoo will not cower as Pip does. Dagoo seems an incarnation of some eternal Present that allows him to exist *vitality* and *humanly*, powerfully and inexorably, in a world that experiences a “corporeal humility” in his presence. And this is precisely the

reason that Dagoo's representation in *Moby-Dick* is so essential to Melville's depiction of the Black/Africanist presence in this work of so many levels of meaning and signification. Ishmael's vision, much like Melville's, it seems certain, is characterized by an ability, a willingness, and indeed a determination to represent his black characters' nobility, as well as their possible cowardice. For the "eternal oppositions" which characterize Melville's *sea of opposites* could not possibly exclude this same potentiality for duality in blacks; else the representation reverts back to the distorting one-dimensionality of stereotypes. Which is exactly what Melville was trying not only to avoid but also to subvert and rectify. The diverse portraits of Fleece, Dagoo, and Pip, derived as all of them appear to be from earlier literary models, nevertheless contain individual touches by which Melville shows his own hand. And together they make for a very full canvas indeed.

In the case of Dagoo, as we have just seen, his prodigious physicality is what sets him apart from other men--black and white, it would seem. And it is this awesome robustness that would seem to have posed such a threat to the whites who, in their racial guilt over slavery, had reason to fear this power. But as if to illustrate the point being insisted upon here about

Melville's refusal to settle for generalizations or stereotypical characterizations of his black figures, one needs only to look at his depiction of Dagoo in a scene in "The First Lowering" to discern the originality and subversiveness of the representation. For in this scene the fearsome-seeming Dagoo is figured as a symbol of the kind of brotherhood between blacks and whites that few, it would seem, except perhaps sailors, had ever dared to envision. And at the risk of making grandiloquent claims for Melville (or the present argument), I would suggest that this individual scene represents one of the most truly exceptional and, within its context, subversive visions expressed in American literature to that point about the relations that could possibly exist someday between blacks and whites. Melville, presumably, had already experienced this possibility as a reality during his years at sea. But he well knew that the *laws* of the sea were often inapplicable on land.

In the scene in question, Flask's view of the whales he is pursuing is blocked by a high and heaving sea. "I can't see three seas off;" he says, "tip us an oar there, and let me on to that." But before any of the crew can respond to the mate's command,

...Dagoo, with either hand upon the gunwhale to steady his

way, swiftly slid aft, and then erecting himself volunteered his lofty shoulders for a pedestal.
 "Good a mast-head as any, sir. Will you mount, sir?"
 "That I will, and thank ye very much, my fine fellow...."

Flask then mounts the black's shoulders and steadies himself against the sea's turbulence by grasping the "one lifted arm" offered to him by Dagoo.

But the sight of little Flask mounted upon gigantic Dagoo was yet more curious; for sustaining himself with a cool, indifferent, easy, unthought of, barbaric majesty, the noble negro to every roll of the sea harmoniously rolled his fine form. On his broad back, flaxen-haired Flask seemed a snow-flake. *The bearer looked nobler than the rider.* Though, truly, vivacious, tumultuous, ostentatious little Flask would now and then stamp with impatience; but not one added little heave did he thereby give to the negro's lordly chest. So have I seen Passion and Vanity stamping the living magnanimous earth, but the earth did not alter her tides and her seasons for that.

(48; 191; my emphasis)

Melville's invocation of the allegorical figures of Passion and Vanity makes it quite clear that the passage is intended to be read symbolically and viewed as an emblem. And the image of the white man pursuing his profit while perched upon the shoulders of a black man lends itself readily to the darker implication of the white Americans' moral and economic dependence upon black slaves to support themselves--and their economic system.

But the significance does not end here. For aside from Ishmael's unprecedented admiration for Dagoo, which is both con-

siderable and subversive in the degree of its unvarnished adulation ("The bearer looked nobler than the rider" and the association of the black with the "living magnanimous earth"), Melville seems to have indulged in a vision that would have been almost unimaginable in his day. Even the abolitionists themselves (or at least a sizable portion of them), irregardless of their "higher moral purpose," were known to have been made uncomfortable by the notion of true equality. Although they knew that slavery was an egregious moral evil, it seems many of them would have been appalled at the idea of having to work, sleep, and eat with blacks, as Melville had done at sea.²² Melville, on the other hand, in his meta/physical account of the black Dagoo and the white Flask working together in harmony, with the black's *offering* of his services and the white's gracious, respectful acceptance of that unbidden offer, has envisioned a nobler world. It is a place where blacks and whites might exist in a state of mutual dependence and support, rather than in enmity and hegemonical persecution.

Is it not just like Melville, swimming boldly within his *sea of opposites*, to depict such a troubling and yet redemptive black presence as Dagoo? Based upon most of the available historical evidence, Dagoo would have terrified a majority of white Ameri-

cans in the mid-nineteenth century. Had they looked beneath the surface, however, as Melville kept insisting they do (to little avail, judging from the dismal sales of *Moby-Dick*), they just might have understood the lessons that the *teaming* of Dagoo and Flask was meant to represent. "Who ain't a slave?" Ishmael asks. It is rather a rhetorical question on his part. It represents Ishmael/Melville's belief that *we are all in this together*, "federated along one keel." Dagoo is a living symbol, within the fictional world of *Moby-Dick*, both of his people's oppression and their magnanimity. To see him *freely sharing* the burden of the white Flask--rather than, subjugated, being forced into *shouldering* it--is to appreciate Melville's forbidden fantasy.

Pip

Critical recognition of Pip's significance in *Moby-Dick* has been slow in arriving. And, oddly enough, even when the black cabin boy first began to excite critical notice, there was almost nothing said about his being black. What makes this omission so unusual is that it is Pip's *blackness* --and the *darkness* of the

vision he embodies--that Melville seems to emphasize throughout the novel. Consistent with his own polarized vision, Melville would also recognize the black's "brilliance" and comedic possibilities. But it is the "*black tragedy* of the melancholy ship," as Ishmael informs us, that black Pip's "strange mummeries are not unmeaningly blended with" (113; 405; my emphasis). Several decades ago, when critics F.O. Matthiessen and then Charles Olsen first observed how the "lovely association of Ahab and Pip is not unlike the relations of Lear to both the Fool and Edgar,"²³ it was indeed a signal observation that brought long-delayed attention to Pip, "the loftiest and the brightest" (93.347) of the *Pequod's* crew. At the same time, however, the influence of this insight worked to deflect serious consideration of Melville's vested interest in Pip as a key symbolic agent in the profound antislavery message of *Moby-Dick*.

Among those few who did see fit to mention Pip, in any capacity other than his Fool-like relation to Ahab, most continued to dismiss Pip in the early manner of E.L. Watson, who said "Pip went to sea by mistake, and...became more and more of a coward, until frightened beyond all endurance, he lost his wits."²⁴ But finally, concurrent with the then nascent awareness of the

political dimensions of Melville's texts, critics like Willie T. Weathers, Charles Foster, and Alan Heimert²⁵ began to correct these earlier assessments that either ignored, limited, or, as with Watson, distorted Pip's true significance to *Moby-Dick* and Melville. And what has become apparent by now is that Pip's role in *Moby-Dick* is crucial both to an understanding of Melville's historicized racial contexts and to the narrative techniques of indirection or obliquity that Ishmael/Melville uses to camouflage the subversive themes expressed in his representations of Pip and other black characters in the work. In 1848, John Hale could say, "If this Union, with all its advantages, has no other cement than the blood of slavery, [then] let it perish."²⁶ But for Melville, the issues seemed vastly more complex. Despite his determination to confront the slavery controversy, and its attendant perversions of the Black/African presence in American life and literature, Melville's representation of Pip in *Moby-Dick* reflects also his unwillingness to speak too plainly about the crisis that threatened to rend the nation--and possibly his own family relations. But to look beneath the surface of this representation is to see that Melville was, nevertheless, not to be denied expression of his dissent.

Although the Compromise of 1850 sought to find a middle ground in dealing with the expansion of slavery within the nation's territories, the poison pill of the new legislation for many Northerners was the notorious Fugitive Slave Law. Throughout the New England region, but especially in Boston and New York, it seems, the mandate to return fugitive slaves to their owners represented an onerous incursion upon the people's widespread antislavery beliefs and practices. And it particularly outraged abolitionists and those like Melville's friend Richard Dana, Jr., who, as the first president of the Boston Vigilance Committee, denounced the Fugitive Slave Law as "a tyrannical statute" that rendered "[o]ur temple of justice...a slave pen!"²⁷--a sentiment that was shared by James Russell Lowell and Emerson. Lowell remarked that the "return of fugitives is clearly an immoral act by the showing of that very Gospel [the Constitution] which Mr. Webster admits to being an authority when he intimates that it nowhere condemns Slavery."²⁸ And Emerson went even further, invoking as he did the vile contradiction between the abolition of the slave trade and the recent injunction to remand fugitive slaves:

By law of Congress March 2, 1807, it is piracy and murder, punishable with death, to enslave a man on the coast of Africa. By law of Congress September, 1850, it is a high crime and misdemeanor, punishable with fine and imprisonment, to resist the re-enslaving a man on the coast of America. Off soundings, it is piracy and murder to enslave him. On soundings, it is fine and prison not to re-enslave. What kind of legislation is this? What kind of constitution which covers it? And yet the crime which the second law ordains is greater than the crime which the first law forbids under penalty of the gibbet. For it is a greater crime to re-enslave a man who has shown himself fit for freedom, than to enslave him at first, when it might be pretended to be a mitigation of his lot as a captive in war.²⁹

Melville, of course, was ensconced at Arrowhead, close to Boston, whence this ugly racial uproar began to emanate. He was writing *Moby-Dick*, in fact, when the Compromise was ratified in September of 1850, and he was still working on it in April, 1851, when his father-in-law, Judge Lemuel Shaw, became the first judicial officer in the nation to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. But the vilification of Shaw in the wake of his decision to remand Simms to his Virginia "owner" must have pained Melville deeply, regardless of how profound his conviction that slavery was "man's foulest crime."³⁰ Likely, it also raised the problem for the young author of trying to figure out how to present his opinions without subjecting his own father-in-law to open ridicule. Unwilling to run this risk of offending Shaw in public, as several scholars have speculated, Melville nonetheless invented ways to express his vision of an American nation "all over dent-

ed with the marks of slavish heels and hoofs" (13; 60).³¹ And father-in-law or not, Shaw was linked with the *bad guys* . In the profoundly enigmatic symbolism of *Moby-Dick* , its "hideous and intolerable allegory" (45; 147), and its unrelenting reliance upon a *sea of opposites* to cloak the meanings of his "wicked book," there are clear evidences of Melville's antislavery sentiments, as well as his disapproval of Shaw's failure to obey the "higher laws" of moral right and "equal justice for *all* ," including blacks. And these are evidences that go beyond mere stylistic or rhetorical inventiveness. They were devised by Melville to express his outrage over the slavery controversy itself, as well as the prevailing racist ideologies that encouraged the belief in white supremacy over blacks. In his enigmatic (but wilfully subversive and compassionate) representation of Pip, we see perhaps the best example of these Melvillean strategies at work in *Moby-Dick* .

One of the most important clues to understanding the importance of Pip to both Melville and *Moby-Dick* is located in the esteem with which Ishmael regards the black. It is an appreciation that Melville obscures at first, by making it *seem* as though Ishmael shares the crew's (and too many Americans') contempt

for a seemingly worthless black like “base little Pip” (110; 398). But Ishmael’s apparent condescension only exemplifies the narrative strategy used by Melville to camouflage the subversive implications of his text. And only the reader who is prepared to examine more closely what is actually being said will be able to understand the extent to which Ishmael’s affection for Pip, “the most insignificant of the Pequod’s crew,” comes to rival his love for Queequeg, the dark-skinned harpooner who provoked Ishmael’s early recognition of the fact that racial difference meant little or nothing in terms of one’s *humanity* -- “thought I to myself--the man’s a human being just as I am” (11; 55). It is precisely this recognition, however, that is so crucial to comprehending Pip’s significance in the novel. For it is in his representation of Ishmael’s *wedding* with the dark essence of that “most loving and affectionate” cannibal, Queequeg, that Melville foregrounds the more tantalizing twinning of Ishmael and Pip; more tantalizing, that is, because Melville’s readers were not likely to have been surprised by his narrator/protagonist’s union with a South Sea “savage.” They had seen this before, to some extent, in his early novels. But a Black! At a time when the slavery question so dominated the nation’s politics, while the “anthro-

pological” debates over blacks’ presumed inferiority still raged, Melville must have known that he would be thrusting close, dangerously close, to *home* .

At the beginning of *Moby-Dick* Ishmael tells us that he set off to sea to stave off his splenetic impulses toward suicide and homicide. He sought to rediscover in the sea a “simplicity” that he had been lacking of late, he informs us, “a Socratic wisdom” that he still considers “sublime” (10; 52). As it turns out, however, Ishmael’s quest begins to be realized even before he sets foot upon the *Pequod* or casts his eyes upon the ocean. It begins in the company of a dark primitive, Queequeg, who sets the stage for the narrator’s eventual encounter with a deeper darkness, the “brilliant” blackness that is Pip:

I began to be sensible of strange feelings. I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it. There he sat, his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceptions. Wild he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those same things that would have repelled most others, they were the very same magnets that thus drew me. I’ll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy.
(10; 52)

Ishmael’s “melting” reflects--“either in a physical or meta-

physical point of view"--an extraordinary departure in American literature from the traditional, sentimental, platitudinous representations of the white man's encounter with the racialized other. Here the "soothing savage" redeems a white "wolfish world" that is defined by its "civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits." And Ishmael's (Melville's) apostasy is figured, appropriately enough, in terms of the polarized fields of magnetic opposition. What repels most people attracts him, Ishmael says. His voyage upon the *sea of opposites* has led him, it seems, to a profound conviction about the unity and love that is possible within the "common continent of men" (27; 108). If only "most others" could grasp this lesson, Ishmael suggests, they might "yet see how elastic our stiff prejudices grow when love once comes to bend them" (11; 55).

Pip, it seems, does grasp this lesson, as his attachment to Ahab in the later chapters of *Moby-Dick* would suggest. For although Pip sees Ahab as an "anaconda of an old man" (40; 155) whose velvety skin covers the shark within (125; 428), yet he seeks to cleave unto the megalomaniacal captain of the *Pequod*. But first, of course, Pip must be "carried down alive into wondrous depths" of the sea that "drowned the infinite of his soul" (93; 347), a mythic *descent* that links him with Ishmael, who

narrates from the perspective of one who has experienced a similar immersion. And it is this shared experience that helps Ishmael to understand Pip's mad wisdom.

Melville, however, does not make this connection between Ishmael and Pip readily apparent. In fact, he seems initially (and deliberately) to cloak the affinity between his narrator and the black in such a way that it raises the possibility of his having posed another of his moral tests or traps for his readers. Would these readers perceive Pip solely with racial condescension as the darkly humorous embodiment of William Levison's "black diamonds"?³² Or would they penetrate the surface appearance of Ishmael's early narrative ambiguity to overcome the prejudice that Pip's character seems to invite? Indeed, Ishmael's earliest representation of Pip offers one (surface) view of him which allows (if not encourages) the general reader's perception of Pip's genial idiocy and insignificance. But, at the same time, if we do look beneath the surface, it becomes apparent that the narrator endeavors repeatedly to disassociate himself from this viewpoint, even if it seems he must equivocate or contradict himself.

In the opening paragraph of "The Castaway," for example, when Ishmael describes Pip as "the most insignificant of the Pe-

quod's crew," it is not yet made clear in the text that this estimation of the diminutive black belongs more generally to the majority of the crew--but not to Ishmael himself. (Based upon the ample evidence of the text, Melville himself did not consider Pip to be a minor character. Pip makes at least ten appearances in the novel, and his several extended soliloquies assure him a position of prominence among the echelon of characters just below Ahab and Ishmael himself.) And though Ishmael's initial presentation of Pip (in "Knights and Squires") seems to presage a looming significance for the "Poor Alabama boy," the narrator's own feelings towards him remain shrouded ambiguously within a dichotomized account of earthly-versus-"eternal" evaluations of Pip's worth. If anything, Ishmael's closing words of this same passage seem to suggest that he himself is caught between these perspectives. At the same time, his words betoken the young black's tragic fate and premature doom:

Black little Pip--he never did [return]! Poor Alabama boy! On the grim Pequod's forecastle, ye shall ere long see him, beating his tambourine; prelude of the eternal time, when sent for, to the great quarter-deck on high, he was bid strike in with angels, and beat his tambourine in glory; called a coward here, hailed a hero there! (108)

For Ishmael to say "called a coward here," might seem to

suggest that he shares the view of “the Pequod’s grim forecas-
tle,” best expressed by Tashtego who “hated Pip for a poltroon”
(93.347). But instead, what becomes evident is that the further
Moby-Dick develops as a narrative, the more overtly does the
narrator seem to strive to establish a distance between his own
regard for Pip and the apparent consensus among the crew that
the black is indeed an insignificant “crazy loon” and “coward.”
According to Ishmael, Pip is both “tender-hearted and “at bot-
tom very bright” (93.345)--even though, in the same place, he
(Ishmael) does seem to lapse into the racially stereotypical be-
lief that Pip’s “genial, jolly brightness” was a trait “peculiar to
his tribe; a tribe, which ever enjoy all holidays and festivities
with finer, freer relish than any other race.” (Or perhaps this
is Melville’s parody of a notion that had prevailed in American
letters at least since Jefferson’s eighteenth-century character-
ization of blacks as jovial merry-makers in perpetual search of
holiday or festival amusements in *Notes on Virginia* .)

The heart of this passage is revealed, however, when Ish-
mael admonishes his potentially skeptical readers, “Nor smile so,
while I write that this little black was brilliant, for even black-
ness has its brilliancy.” For here is heard an echo of Melville him-
self in his essay on Hawthorne, when he offers the opinion that

“it is the blackness in Hawthorne...that so fixes and fascinates me...this blackness...that furnishes the infinite obscure in his background.”³³ More importantly, perhaps, it is crucial to notice how Ishmael seems here to anticipate his readers’ reluctance or inability to accept his depiction of the black’s brilliancy. And his direct address of these readers is tantamount to an overt challenge to their racist penchant for oversimplifying the differences (human and symbolic) between black and white, a tendency which historically associated blackness with moral depravity and intellectual inferiority. Implicitly, what Ishmael seems also to have recognized here is the extent to which *blackness* “served as an easily grasped symbol of the Negro’s baseness and wickedness.”³⁴ And his attempt to rectify this racist miscomprehension is reminiscent of his more copious efforts in “*The Whiteness of the Whale*” to undercut such simpleminded (and ultimately nefarious) significations. In this earlier chapter Ishmael had emphasized the “royal” and “imperial” (42; 163) connotations of *whiteness*. However, he added immediately a cryptic reminder that the very “pre-eminence in it applies to the human race itself, giving the white man ideal mastership over every dusky tribe.” Of course, Ishmael’s use of the word

“ideal” is ironic here. He *means* the word, I think, to connote immanence--or something that exists only in the mind--rather, of course, than the alternative possibility which suggests the notion of white superiority as justification for racial hegemony. In a world fraught with duality and complexity, Ishmael knows “there is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself” (11; 55). Thus, although he exhaustively catalogues how, “in other mortal sympathies and symbolizings, this same hue [whiteness] is made the emblem of many touching, noble things,” Ishmael knows the truth of Shakespeare’s ultimate paradox, “Nothing is but what is not”:

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. Witness the white bear of the poles, and the white shark of the tropics; what but their smooth, flaky whiteness makes them the transcendent horrors they are? That ghastly whiteness it is which imparts such an abhorrent mildness, even more loathsome than terrific, to the dumb gloating of their aspect. So that not the fierce-fanged tiger in his heraldic coat can so stagger courage as the white-shrouded bear or shark. (42.164)

It is difficult to determine Ishmael’s tone here; there is an “elusive quality” to it that resembles the very *whiteness* he at-

tempts to “explain.” But even though he knows that “To analyze it, would seem impossible” (42; 165), Ishmael feels compelled to try, “else all these chapters might be naught” (42; 163). At times preachy or exhortatory, the passage gushes forth in a dizzying stream of analogies and postulations which seek to convince the reader by dint of sheer force and volume. But this is not enough, as Ishmael knows, for “in a matter like this,” he says, “subtlety appeals to subtlety, and without imagination no man can follow another into these halls.” In fact, though, it is more than imagination alone that is required by Ishmael/Melville. What is needed is an openness to duality, one that allows sympathy for both both black and white, for lightness and darkness. And in this case, Ishmael makes it plain, for once, that he has a certain kind of individual in mind who must be instructed and enlightened. He refers to the “man of untutored ideality” or, more precisely, “the unread, unsophisticated Protestant of the Middle Atlantic States” (167), whose smug smile at Ishmael’s recognition of the *brilliancy of blackness* signifies not only a lack of imagination but a moral depravity, as well.

Perhaps, after all, Ishmael is lecturing as much as he seems to be preaching. In his attempts to effect a separation between himself and his crewmates--and a good many of his readers--

he is proclaiming his difference from them while insisting also upon the necessity of an imagination capable of surviving, like Pip, the metaphysical estrangement caused by an immersion in the “wondrous depths” (93.347) of the *sea of opposites* . In Ishmael’s mind, it becomes increasingly clear, Pip should be a paragon rather than the object of ridicule he tends to become to too many observers. The young black’s abandonment in the sea has transformed him, Ishmael says, from the “Pip [who] loved life, and all life’s peaceable securities” (93; 345) into “another lonely castaway, though the loftiest and the brightest” (347). Like Ishmael himself, Pip has also experienced “the awful lonesomeness [that] is intolerable.” He has experienced the “intense concentration of self” known only to those few who have floated alone “in the middle of such a heartless immensity” as the open ocean (347)--and lived to tell about it. Like Ishmael, and like Job, too, who “escaped alone to tell”, Pip returns to the *Pequod* just long enough to reveal, at least to Ishmael, the divine madness obtained in his *nekyia* :

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 miserman, 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 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. (93.347)

Ishmael, of course, should *know* . He has been there. Within the chronological structure of *Moby-Dick* , he has yet to tell, as he says, “what like abandonment befell myself” (347). But he is narrating *after the fact* of his own epiphanic immersion, of course. And his responsiveness to Pip's experience reflects his profound appreciation of Pip's words and actions, a sympathy not available to most of the crew. From the time of Pip's rescue, Ishmael informs us, “the little negro went about the deck an idiot”; or so it might seem. For what the careful reader is likely to be struck by here is that Ishmael adds a most revealing qualification to this sentence; one that applies as well to the earlier judgment that Pip was “the most insignificant of the Pequod's crew” -- “such, at least,” Ishmael opines, “*they* said he was” (347; my emphasis). Twinned as they have been by their respective submersions in Melville's *sea of opposites* , Ishmael and Pip together stand apart from their shipmates as outcasts and castaways, and Ishmael alone among the crew

comprehends the divine madness in Pip. Ahab would affect to comfort Pip with both physical shelter in his own cabin and the spiritual balm of his words ("Thou touchest my inmost centre, boy; thou art tied to me by cords woven of my heartstrings" 125.428). But, in the end, he threatens to murder Pip because the humanizing influence exerted by the pitiable black threatens Ahab's mad resolve: "If thou speakest thus to me much more, Ahab's purpose keels up in him. I tell thee no; it cannot be" (129.436). Only Ishmael can be said to have remained true to Pip, a true "sea-brother" to the end. For his narrative is, in the end, a moving testament indeed to his efforts to reveal the *brilliance of blackness* .

*

*

*

Following his sea-induced transfiguration, as the narrative of *Moby-Dick* nears its fateful climax, Pip is made to appear at several crucial moments where he then offers seemingly insane commentaries on various people and events aboard (and beyond) the *Pequod* . But just as his first speech at the end of "Midnight, Forecastle" is characterized by an undercurrent of profound lucidity, so are Pip's later appearances noteworthy for the mysterious, multiple-edged meanings of his words and actions. "Oh, Pip! thy wretched laugh, thy idle but unresting eye," Ishmael ex-

claims, noting the stark contradictions of the black's demeanor, "all thy strange mummeries not unmeaningly blended with the black tragedy of the melancholy ship, and mocked it!" (113.405).

Ishmael's use of the term "black tragedy" to describe his unfolding drama seems significant here; and the fact that Pip is said to mock this "black tragedy" of the *Pequod* seems also to carry a racial freight that is revealed with increasing intensity as the relationship between Pip and Ahab develops. Thus, in "The Log and Line," Ahab refers to Pip as a "holiness" (427) who has been "abandoned" by the "creative libertines" of the north ("There can be no hearts above the snow-line")--a phrase which recalls, as many have now pointed out, Shaw's decision to return Thomas Simms to slavery. However, Pip, in turn, having taken hold of Ahab's hand, utters a monody remarkable not only for its deceptively eloquent humanity but also for its emblematic appeal to Ahab's (and our) *humanities* :

"What's this? here's velvet shark-skin," intently gazing at Ahab's hand, and feeling it. "Ah, now, had poor Pip but felt so kind a thing as this, perhaps he had ne'er been lost! This seems to me, sir, as a man-rope; something that weak souls may hold by. Oh, sir, let old Perth now come and rivet these two hands together; the black one with the white, for I will not let this go." (125; 428)

The shark imagery here recalls the horrific association of

black slaves with sharks and slaveships during the Middle Passage, an association that was established in the episode that segues into Fleece's tragicomic appearance in "Stubb's Supper." At the same time, it prefigures also Pip's last words in the novel, "The sharks! the sharks!...O master, my master, come back!" (135.463), when the anguish of abandonment seems to compel Pip's desperate exclamation. Of course, what Pip seems to realize, in the above passage, is that sharkskin covers but sharks; and that Ahab's recent softness is only a velvety cover for the cannibalizing predator within him. But Pip's "awful lonesomeness is intolerable," and Ahab's offer to bind himself to Pip by his very own "heart-strings" is more than the "luckless child" Pip can withstand. The black's awareness of Ahab's latent ferocity is overcome by a staggering vision, the possibility of a racial unity that is emblemized by the black hand (his own) joined as "one with the white." And Pip swears that he "will not let this go" despite his dark doubts. Much earlier in the novel, Pip had called upon "the big white God aloft there somewhere in yon *darkness*" to "have mercy on this small black boy down here; preserve him from all men that have no bowels to fear!" (40; 155, my emphasis). It is a plea that reveals the depth of his

alienation and estrangement from the whites' world, even as it discloses his tacit comprehension of the black-white paradox discussed above. In a wonderful example of Melvillean irony at work, Pip is still prone (conditioned) to call upon the God of the whites for protection from these whites. Ahab's sudden tenderness must have seemed like an answer to this prayer. Yet, if Pip could not help but to clutch for this "man-rope" in the hope that to cleave so might provide that missing "something that weak souls may hold by," it is also apparent that his suspicions have not disappeared completely, as his request that Perth be allowed to "rivet these two hands together" would seem to indicate. Lacking that rivet, Pip realizes, the bond between himself (or any black) and the white is as illusory as the benevolence of those whites who have attempted to author his existence and determine his worth. No, there was no forgetting for Pip what Stubb had told him: "Stick to the boat, Pip, or by the Lord, I won't pick you up if you jump; mind that. We can't afford to lose whales by the likes of you; a whale would sell for thirty times what you would, Pip, in Alabama. Bear that in mind, and don't jump any more" (93.346). Like Ishmael, Pip has survived (albeit temporarily) his trial-by-water. And his initiation has imparted both a need for the "man-rope" of love and some very

hard, cruel lessons. Among the most harrowing, he learns that the land-sharks of humanity are as ruthless, as predatory, and as voracious as their counterparts in the sea--perhaps worse. For the ravenous monsters of the deep have no choice; they consume their prey merely to survive, implacably and dispassionately. Humans, however, do have a choice as to what or whose existence they annihilate in order to persevere. But the avariciousness of their choices is often unconscionable. For "though man loves his fellow," Ishmael warns, in response to Stubb's appallingly racist lecture to Pip, "yet man is a money-making animal, which propensity too often interferes with his benevolence."

Notes

- 1 See Chapter 5, above. As mentioned several times here, with regard to Melville's "cultural shock," I am much indebted to Carolyn Karcher's *Shadow Over the Promised Land* and Robertson-Lorant's recent biography, *Melville*, for their illuminating discussions of the time Melville spent at sea.
- 2 See his "Fate" essay in Larzer Ziff (ed.), *Ralph Waldo Emerson, Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 362.
- 3 Dennis Pahl, "The Gaze of History in 'Benito Cereno,'" *Studies in Short Fiction*, 32 (1995), p. 173.
- 4 Reynolds, *Beneath*, p. 524.

- 5 One memorable passage from *Redburn*, in particular, best expresses the young Melville/Redburn's wonder and excitement at going to sea:

...Every mast and timber seemed to have a pulse in it that was beating with life and joy; and I felt a wild exulting in my own heart, and felt as if I would be glad to bound along so round the world.

Then was I conscious of a wonderful thing in me, that responded to all the wild commotion of the outer world; and went reeling on and on with the planets in their orbits, and was lost in one delirious throb at the center of the All. A wild bubbling and bursting was at my heart, as if a hidden spring had just gushed out there; and my blood ran tingling along my frame, like mountain brooks in spring freshets.

Yes! yes! give me this glorious ocean life, this salt-sea life, this briny, foamy life, when the sea neighs and snorts, and you breathe the very breath that the great whales respire! Let me roll around the globe, let me rock upon the sea; let me race and pant out my life, with an eternal breeze astern, and an endless sea before! (66)

Of course, consistent with the polarities and contradictions that characterize Melville's *Sea of Opposites*, it is not surprising that the effusiveness of this passage is separated by merely one sentence from the narrator's lamentation over the slave-like conditions of a sailor's life: "Miserable dog's life is this of the sea! commanded like a slave, and set to work like an ass! vulgar and brutal men lording it over me, as is I were an African in Alabama. Yes, yes, blow on, ye breezes, and make a speedy end to this abominable voyage!"

- 6 Howard Horsford and Lynn Horth (eds.), *Journals* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1989), pp. 6 (October 14) and 7 (October 16, 1849).
- 7 This term is used by Edward S. Grejda in *The Common Continent of Man: Racial Equality in the Writings of Herman Melville* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1974).
- 8 This is, in fact, what the white whale symbolizes to Willie T. Weathers, "Moby-Dick and the Nineteenth-Century Scene," *University of Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 1 (Winter, 1960), pp. 477-501. Weathers sees Melville's characterization of Ahab as "indebted not only to Promethean rebels and reformers of myth and literature, but more immediately to the radical abolitionist and moral perfectionist, William Lloyd Garrison" (p. 477). Therefore, of course, the white whale he maniacally pursues is meant to figure the institution of American slavery itself.
- 9 Reynolds, *Beneath*, p. 547.

- 10 F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Experience in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 432; and Warner Berthoff, *The Example of Melville* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 105.
- 11 In fairness to Berthoff, whose *Example* remains one of the most erudite studies to date on Melville, he does allow that Fleece's comment that Stubb is "more of shark dan Massa Shark hisself" is actually "just and, in the circumstances of the book, an honorific tribute" (p. 106).
- 12 Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), p. 44.
- 13 Because so little attention has been paid to the passage about to be discussed, and perhaps because this passage is the focus of so much of my attention, it was quite a shock to discover that Hugh Thomas, in his exhaustive new study, *The Slave Trade*, has actually entitled one of his book's chapters "Sharks Are the Invariable Outriders of All Slave Ships" (Chapter 33, p.709). Of course, Thomas discusses at length the "vile conditions" of the trade throughout this chapter, but he mentions neither sharks nor Melville, except for the chapter title and brief epigraph taken from "Stubb's Supper."
- 14 Reprinted in George Francis Dow, *Slave Ships and Slaving* (1927; rpt. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1969), p. 10.
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.
- 16 Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, cites Falconbridge's narrative as one of the most influential and available among the "innumerable memoirs" published in the eighteenth century (p. 798).
- 17 Grejda, p. 105; and Simpson, *passim*.
- 18 *Moby-Dick* (27; 108) and *Benito Cereno* (p. 74).
- 19 Reynolds, *Beneath*, pp. 541-42, discusses these characters, but he compares Black Sampson to Queequeg rather than, as I do, Dagoo.
- 20 "Negro Minstrelsy--Ancient and Modern," *Putnam's Magazine*, 5 (January, 1855), p. 74.
- 21 Among the best recent studies is Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations*.
- 22 See Stephen Small, "Racist Ideologies," in Tibbles, pp. 111-15. As Small suggests, "many abolitionists refused to let black children into their schools, or to employ blacks except as menials. Some claimed this was dictated by the pressures of the times, but for many it revealed clear antipathies" (p. 114). Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, p. 37, quotes Lydia Mara Child on the same

subject: "On the subject of equality, the principles of the abolitionists have been misrepresented. They have not the slightest wish to do violence to the distinctions of society by forcing the rude and illiterate into the presence of the learned and the refined." Rather, they sought to provide blacks with "rights and opportunities" that were owned only by "the lowest and most ignorant white man in America."

- 23 Charles Olson, "Lear and Moby-Dick," in Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker (eds.), *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Moby-Dick* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co./Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), p. 278.
- 24 E.L. Watson, "Moby-Dick," in Higgins and Parker, pp. 157-58.
- 25 Willie T. Weathers, *op cit.* (n.8); Charles H. Foster, "Something in Emblems: A Reinterpretation of *Moby-Dick*," *The New England Quarterly*, 34 (March, 1961), pp. 3-35; Alan Heimert, "Moby-Dick and American Political Symbolism," *American Quarterly*, 15 (Winter, 1963), pp. 498-534.
- 26 Quoted in Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy*, 135.
- 27 *The Journal of Richard Henry Dana, Jr.*, ed. Robert F. Lucid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).
- 28 Lowell, "Mr. Webster's Speech," in Freimarck and Rosenthal, p. 279.
- 29 Emerson, "Address on the Fugitive Slave Act," *Ibid.*, p. 186.
- 30 See Melville's poem, "Misgivings," in *Battle-Pieces*.
- 31 Interestingly, Thoreau employs similar imagery in his remarks on the Fugitive Slave Law in "Slavery in Massachusetts" (reprinted in Freimarck and Rosenthal, pp. 162-76):

I hear a good deal said about trampling this law underfoot. Why, one need not go out of his way to do that. This law rises not to the level of the head or the reason; its natural habitat is in the dirt. It was born and bred, and has it life, only in the dust and mire, on a level with the feet; and he who walks with freedom, and does not with Hindoo mercy avoid treading on every venomous reptile, will inevitably tread on it, and so trample it underfoot--and Webster, its maker, with it, like the dirt-bug and its ball. (167)
- 32 Reynolds, *Beneath*, pp. 547-48.
- 33 "Hawthorne and His Mosses," p. 541.
- 34 Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (New York and London: Norton, 1977); see pp. 257-58 and p. 275.

Epilogue

Like Negroes, these powers own man sullenly; mindful of their higher master; while serving, plot revenge.

(Melville's epigraph to "The Bell-Tower")

"...what Babo has done was but duty."

(Babo; in *Benito Cereno*)

"...truth is in things, and not in words: truth is voiceless."

(Babbalanja; in *Mardi*)

Some months after, dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black met his voiceless end.

(referring to Babo; in *Benito Cereno*)

The savage is born a savage; and the civilized being but inherits his civilization, nothing more. Let us not disdain then, but pity. And wherever we recognize the image of God let us reverence it; though it swing from the gallows.

(Melville, "Mr Parkman's Tour")

In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville would prophesy the American nation's naval and commercial dominance of the sea. In fact, he foresaw the day that Americans might "become the foremost maritime power of the globe" because, in his estimable opinion, "they are born to rule the seas, as the Romans were to conquer the world."¹ As it turns out, however, the Frenchman was more accurate in another of his predictions--that the slavery controversy in America would end in civil war--than he was about America's future as the world leader of maritime affairs. But, significantly, it is likely that it *was* the slavery issue in America that sank the nation's hopes for extending its power upon the sea at the midpoint of the nineteenth-century. For as the nation

moved into the 1850s, as Thomas Philbrick has noted, it was the “increasing seriousness of the controversy over slavery [that] turned the attention of Americans from commercial and naval competition with Great Britain to the tensions and rivalries within their own national boundaries.”²

As we have seen in the previous chapters of the present study, however, Melville’s expansive but intense interest in the sea was not precluded by his burgeoning concern over slavery, racial matters, and the Black/Africanist in America. On the contrary, as I have attempted to demonstrate, the six novels that Melville wrote between 1846 and 1851 frequently figure the sea in terms of its racial dynamics, and these works establish a connection between blacks and the sea that remains unparalleled in American literature. Clearly, Melville understood the profound historical connections between blacks/slavery and the sea, and often he used this recognition as a springboard to launch his meta/physical couplings in which the sea and blacks were made to share both historical and symbolical affinities. My chapters on *Redburn*, *White-Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick*, in particular, I believe, offer abundant testimony to this fact.

Undoubtedly, by 1850, Melville was aware of the “abrupt

decline of American nautical activity and interest;"³ just as he surely recognized a decline of power in the sea literature that so had captured American interest in the previous two decades. In fact, this was a "waning" that Melville had noticed as early as 1847, when, in his review of J. Ross Browne's *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*, he expressed his earnest belief that, "at the present day, the poetry of salt water is very much on the wane." Such a recognition did not prevent Melville's own vigorous efforts to revitalize the genre in works like *Redburn*, *White-Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick*, of course. But much to Melville's chagrin, these works failed to rekindle public interest to any appreciable degree. In fact, when *Moby-Dick* "was not generally appreciated, Melville became understandably cynical and vindictive toward the Conventional culture that misunderstood him," as one observer has argued. And in the works that followed, "Melville utilized the sensational images of radical democracy in a far more vitriolic, rhetorical way than he had in his earlier fiction."⁴ Also, rather than speaking to his readers from the "lowly" vantage point of a rover, a foretopmen, or an Ishmael, Melville began to employ narrators like the "eminently safe" lawyer of "Bartleby" and Amasa Delano, the representative American of a "singularly undistrustful nature" whose inability to see blacks as fully devel-

oped human beings constitutes the very reason the masquerading blacks aboard the *San Dominick* can deceive him in the first place. "Instead of addressing his affluent readers from below," as F. Bruce Franklin has observed, "Melville creates narrators who assume their point of view."⁵

By 1855, then, when he would publish his subversive tale of a black slave insurrection at sea in *Benito Cereno*, Melville's disgust with both the prevailing sea literature of the era *and* the course of American race relations seems to have cast a deep shadow over his thinking--to such an extent, I believe, that this dual-layered contempt became perhaps the signal feature of his bold retelling of the historical event recorded by Amasa Delano in 1817. In his representations of the sea and the Black/Africanist presence within the dark vision expressed in *Benito*, Melville would again insist upon the historical and metaphysical connection between blacks and the sea. But, as the capstone to those sea novels which have been the focus of attention in this study, the "final vision" of *Benito* is "that of a despairing (even sinister) collapse of history into timeless, repeated and unavoidable oppression."⁶ As Dana Nelson has suggested, "Melville demonstrates a desire to tell a different kind of history" in *Benito Cer-*

eno. "It is one that, in revealing history's imposing gaps, its eloquent silences, and its counter-discourses, finally makes it possible for the Other (otherwise kept silent) to speak and for the *otherness of history* finally to emerge from its shadowy depths."⁷ Moreover, where Melville's earlier sea works seemed content, at times, to refigure the Black/Africanist presence in a comparatively limited and camouflaged fashion, *Benito* can be said to represent his attempt to reveal the "elaborate ideology by means of which Americans denied the historical implications" of their commercialism and colonialism--and, most pernicious of all, their willingness to abide human slavery. Far beyond the ordinary dimensions and traditions of the sea tale--even his own, with the exception, perhaps, of *White-Jacket* and *Moby-Dick*--*Benito* is where Melville "presents slavery and the rationalizations that justified it not simply as discrete phenomena but as powerful synecdoches for economic activities and cultural disjunctions that threatened the country's stability at every level."⁸ It is a work in which he seems to author a threnody for what he once thought of as the "open independence" of the sea, even as he seems to foretell a murderous climax to the racial enmities on America's "treacherous, slavish shore." And as in several of the works I have considered here, Melville constructs

his narrative in such a way that it poses a moral examination for the reader who is able and willing to “test her or his own standard of justice.” As Joyce Sparer Adler asks: “Will the atrocities inflicted on Babo (and on the shackled blacks by the white sailors) horrify the reader as much as the atrocities inflicted on Don Alexandro and the other whites, killed during and after the revolt against enslavement?”⁹

* * *

In attempting to bring this study to whatever degree of closure it can achieve, it is expressly *not* my intention to offer anything resembling a reading or in-depth analysis of so “open” a text as *Benito Cereno*. Such an effort, given even the narrow, contextualized parameters of my own topic here, could easily fill the pages of a dissertation equal in length to this one. My search has been for what Toni Morrison called the *ghosts in the machine* in the half-dozen sea novels that Melville wrote prior to *Benito Cereno*. For where *Benito* “continues to receive the most attention among Melville’s shorter works,”¹⁰ and where much of this attention is devoted to detecting and inspecting these ghosts that are everywhere in this later work, the same could not be said of the earlier novels which contain the seeds

of the moral, historical, and narrative insurrection that flourished, finally, in *Benito*. Nevertheless, two final thoughts must be noted; first on the sea itself, which represents *Benito Cereno*'s greatest symbol (along with Delano) of the "pervasive aura of paralysis"¹¹ that characterizes the tale; and second, on the ambiguous narrative "voices" that have complicated or misled, for many, their understanding of the text's possible "meanings" or significations. To my mind, the significance of the sea in *Benito* warrants more than the anecdotal notice it has received, and it remains to be seen how it compares to Melville's earlier *sea of opposites*. But, finally, in summarizing the often contentious debate over the elusive narrator/s of *Benito*, perhaps a tentative conclusion can be drawn about the text's relation both to the man who created it and the audience for whom it was--and still is--intended.

Benito Cereno is not a work that has received much attention as an example of American literature of the sea. There is no voyage in *Benito*, as there is in other of Melville's "sea-books." The sea itself, which in previous works had been described as a "holy" force that "*will* have its way," and whose enigmatic power contained "tranquil beauty" within a "tiger heart," seems, at

first glance, to have been tamed or tranquilized. Gone is the vital and animalistic imagery of *Moby-Dick*, where the “velvet paw” of the sea hides its “remorseless fang.” In its place, we learn that it is “those velvets of the Spaniard [Cerenio]” which are “but the silky paw to his fangs.” And we also discover a sea which “seemed fixed, and was sleek at the surface like waved lead that has cooled and set in the smelter’s mould” (55).

This is not the sea one is accustomed to seeing in Melville; it is not the sea into which Ahab pours his “hot tears.” Rather, this sea is lifeless, static, sterile, and contained. It has “cooled and set” as if it were so base an element as lead; and it has become so impotent and devitalized as to be malleable to mere man’s mechanical apparatus, “the smelter’s mould.” We learn that the *gray* sea in *Benito* is “fixed” and “blank” (55; 59), significations which can be said to correspond to the characters themselves, white and black, respectively. The whites seem *fixed* in a cast of racist beliefs and stereotypes that paralyze their psychological, moral, and political attitudes toward black human beings; while the blacks, in the blankness of their alien inscrutability, are cast into the roles of objects in the whites’ efforts--American and European, New and Old Worlds--to fill the blank slate of African otherness with ambivalent projections of fear and de-

sire.¹² Eric Sundquist was certainly right when he offered the opinion that Delano “is emblematic of the paralyzed American revolution, at once idealistic and paternalistic, impassioned for freedom but fearful of continuing revolution.”¹³ But, as we see here, it is Melville’s representation of the sea itself in *Benito* that both symbolizes this paralysis and frames it within the dynamic trope of entropy within the (dis)order of the natural world.

In *Benito Cereno*, it is the black slaves’ inability to navigate the *San Dominick* that prevents them effecting their escape to Senegal. As might be expected of a subjugated race, most of whom were likely to have been born--or whose ancestors surely were born--in the interior regions of Africa, the first experience of the sea for the majority of these blacks would have occurred aboard a slaveship during a Middle Passage. Of navigational and other marine skills, they must surely have been lacking. Thus it is that the slaves in Melville’s story re-enact the historically accurate predicament suffered by many slaveship insurgents; that is, like the slave revolts aboard the *Tryal* and the *Armistad*, for example, the blacks’ heroic and desperate attempt to escape their enslavement is thwarted by their lack of maritime know-

ledge and the ability to sail a ship. Read within the larger context of Melville's tale, however--and read within the still larger context of his first six sea novels--this inability to sail the ships they have seized can also be perceived as a metaphor for the blacks' inability to survive in ships (worlds) constructed by white men--except, of course, as oppressed chattel subject to white rule and domination.

Conversely, it is also possible that Melville's refusal to allow Babo to speak (except when the black plays his Sambo/Newfoundland dog/Byronic-barber role in order to perpetrate a cunning masquerade) suggests a recognition on his part that, just as blacks were rendered powerless to gain freedom within the white-man's ship-of-state, so too, then, were a white man's words impotent to express the true feelings and thoughts of a race of people whose subjection to the inhuman horrors of slavery might be imagined by a sympathetic white---but whose unutterable plight it would be presumptuous to even attempt to voice. Perhaps Melville realized that, like the sea, which in common seamen's parlance, "hath no voice" and "tells no tales," the blacks aboard the *San Dominick* were *blanks* that ought not, indeed could not be spoken for. Or perhaps Melville anticipated

the righteous claims of blacks like Toni Morrison who insist that “it is no longer acceptable merely to imagine us and imagine for us. We have always been imagining ourselves.”¹⁴

* * *

If Babo’s apparent voicelessness has given cause for concern among certain readers, it is the *narrative* “voice” (or perhaps “voices”) in *Benito Cereno* that has caused more confusion and consternation for its readers than any other aspect of the work. What has become increasingly apparent, however, in the wake of some early, egregiously mistaken readings in which the racist narrative voice of *Benito* was imputed to Melville himself, is the fact that *Benito* almost certainly represents Melville’s “greatest treatment of slavery”¹⁵ and, arguably, as yet another critic has suggested, “one of the 19th-century’s most searching explorations of America’s ‘peculiar institution.’”¹⁶ Historically, questions about the narrative point(s) of view in *Benito Cereno* have been at the center of a persistent critical debate over just whose “voice” the narrator, particularly in the long first section of the tale, is meant to represent. However, much of this debate is rendered superfluous by the mistaken identification of Melville himself with the narrator of the tale, an identification that is as misguided and erroneous as any attempt to view the

narrator of "Bartleby" or "The 'Gees" or *Billy-Budd* as a reliable spokesperson for Melville's personal opinions. And the interpretive fallacy that guides these attempts to impute to the personal Melville the same odious and obnoxious racial prejudice that afflicts the representative American of the tale, Captain Amasa Delano, is clearly without basis.

For what now seems certain, as I suggested earlier, is that *Benito* represents Melville's most powerful indictment of slavery and his fellow white's (mis)treatment of African blacks, despite the ambiguity of narrative technique that has distorted or obscured, for many, both the probity and the complexity of the moral vision it contains. Through the use of a "mutinous text" and subversive narration, as several critics have noticed, both Melville and *Benito* are intent upon *exposing* the racist minds of the American protagonist of the tale (Captain Amasa Delano) *and* the reader who identifies with the American's "benign racism."¹⁷ Indeed, as many of these same critics have suggested, Melville seems to make a point of implicitly directing the willing reader's attention to the black slaves' point of view.¹⁸ Based upon all the evidence we have seen here (and elsewhere), it is simply not true, as was once said, that the "melodrama" of *Ben-*

ito Cereno “insists on the deep fears and hatreds in Melville’s white consciousness.”¹⁹ Rather, as a much more discerning observer has opined, *Benito* “can be read as a discourse about discourse, about how the mind of a certain social subject [like Delano, not Melville] *talks to itself*, giving itself the evidence with which to feel and live its own ruthlessness as ‘innocence’ and ‘moral simplicity.’”²⁰

There is little doubt that Melville intentionally obfuscated whatever “message” or lessons his text was (and is) meant to reveal. And he did so by presenting to his reader a palimpsest of a text in which the multilayered possibilities of ironic meanings and satiric significances emerge only upon the reader’s abandonment of conventional expectations concerning the way in which meaning is conveyed in literature *and* through an assiduous re-reading of the work itself.²¹ And Melville’s reasons for constructing such a subversive text were probably several and complicated. These range from his previously mentioned personal reluctance to make bald pronouncements on just about any issue (let alone one so volatile as the slavery/race issues raging throughout the nation at the time) to a perhaps disingenuous literary ploy on his part to ensure that his tale would be accepted for

publication (and five dollars per page) by *Putnam's Magazine*.²² But this only begins to tell the story. Clearly, there is also a strong possibility that, in turning the popular (and usually accessible) genre of sea fiction into an intricately wrought, metaphysically challenging text whose narrative "deceptions" were intended to subvert his readers' expectations, Melville was expressing his anger and disapprobation toward a complacent audience that preferred to skim the surface reality of both life and literature. Not only did Melville defy the tastes and demands of his reading public "by altering the historical record to attribute even more violence to the slaves and less intelligence or understanding to his fictional Captain Delano."²³ But he did so in such a way that only a certain few of his readers, those who could or would dive beneath the surface of the work, might begin to comprehend the Gordian knot of its manifold complexities. *Benito* represents Melville's sternest challenge to his readers on the subjects of slavery and racism, a cleverly disguised moral and literary "trap" intended to gauge his contemporaries' moral and humanitarian sympathies and provide a sort of litmus test of their social and political ideologies. If, as Melville was likely to have anticipated, the majority of his reading audience identified with the "good Captain Delano"--the *representative* Ameri-

can of his tale--then these readers had indeed been caught by the snare of a narrative text in which the most puissant (and revealing) ironies were reserved only for those few "lynx-eyed" readers who also possessed an unbiased, humanitarian belief in the "common continent of man, federated along one keel." In his own mind, I suggest, for those who saw in Delano a reflection of themselves, or perhaps the embodiment of American rectitude and virtue, Melville was holding up the mirror of Narcissus for them to flatter themselves. Perhaps he was half-wishing that, in their blind self-absorption, triggered by their racial arrogance and condescension, they would drown in the ocean of their witless self-love, their false and evil notions of white supremacy.

Notes

- 1 *Democracy in America*, 1, 429.
- 2 *Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction*, p. 261. Philbrick is owed a great debt of gratitude here. His work has exerted a deep influence on many of the directions and attitudes expressed in my own study.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 261.
- 4 Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, p. 292.
- 5 H. Bruce Franklin, "Past, Present, and Future Seemed One," in *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno,"* ed. by Robert E. Burkholder (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 239.

- 6 **"'For the Gaze of Whites': The Crisis of the Subject in 'Benito Cereno,'" in *The Word in Black and White*, *loc cit.*, p. 127.**
- 7 ***Ibid.*, p. 182.**
- 8 **Sandra Zagrell, "Reenvisioning America: Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, 30 (1984), p. 245.**
- 9 **"*Benito Cereno*: Slavery and Violence in the Americas," in Burkholder, p. 89. Earlier in her essay, Adler pointed out several of the many racialized disjunctions that exist in *Benito*: "Babo's actions are considered atrocities by the whites, but the manner of *his* death, dragged alive to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, constitutes justice to them. Don Alexandro's skeleton on the prow proves the slaves barbaric, but Babo's head on a pole in the Plaza is civilized. The enslavement of Don Benito is evil; the enslavement of the blacks is taken for granted" (88).**
- 10 **John Samson, "Melville," *American Literary Scholarship, An Annual, 1996*, ed. by David Nordloh (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 62.**
- 11 **Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, p. 143.**
- 12 **C.L. Miller, *Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 248.**
- 13 **Eric Sundquist, "*Benito Cereno* and New World Slavery," in *Reconstructing American Literary History*, ed. by Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge and London, 1986), p. 103.**
- 14 **"Unspeakable Things Unspoken," pp. 8-9.**
- 15 **Robert E. Levine, "Fiction and Reform 1," in *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, p. 150.**
- 16 **John Haegert, "Voicing Slavery Through Silence: Narrative Muting in Melville's *Benito Cereno*," *loc cit.*, p. 21.**
- 17 **Karcher, of course, was the first to make this point in *Shadow Over the Promised Land*, which she followed up with "The Riddle of the Sphinx: Melville's 'Benito Cereno' and the *Amistad* Case," in Burkholder's volume, cited above (pp. 196-229). See also, especially, the essays by Adler and Nelson, cited above.**
- 18 **Karcher, "The Riddle of the Sphinx," p. 197.**
- 19 **Kingsley Widmer, *The Ways of Nihilism: A Study of Herman Melville's Short Novels* (Los Angeles: The California State Colleges, 1970), p. 73.**
- 20 **J.H. Kavanaugh, "That Hive of Subtlety: 'Benito Cereno' and the Liberal Hero," in *Ideology and Classic American literature*, p. 357.**

- 21 While I am drawing upon Adler's essay here, it has become apparent to many that a rereading of *Benito* is essential to an apprehension of *Benito's* many daunting complexities. According to Adler herself, it is only upon rereading the text that the reader can recognize the "triangular form in which the Spaniard, the North American, and the black slave are seen in historical interrelationship, each representing a point of view, not inborn, but the result of his experience in the Americas in his time" (84). Kavanaugh, in "'Benito Cereno' and the Liberal Hero," suggests that because "the reader is usually 'deceived' along with Delano on first reading, this extrication requires a second reading that is not so much a rereading of the text 'itself' as a reading of one's first spontaneous *relation* to the text" (358).
- 22 *Putnam's* was actually conspicuous for its "liberal philosophy" and its links to the antislavery movement. But the true subversiveness of *Benito*, I think, needed to be copiously disguised even from the the generally sophisticated and supportive (of Melville) editorial board at the time. For a contrary opinion, see Sheila Post-Lauria, "Editorial Politics in Herman Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" *American Periodicals*, Vol. 5 (1995), pp. 1-13. "Beyond an affinity with editorial politics," in Post-Lauria's estimation, "'Benito Cereno' reflects the magazines concern with method" (8). In my mind, however, despite its persistent concern with matters relating to race, blacks, and slavery, a perusal of *Putnam's* non-fiction pieces in 1855, such as "Are All Men Descended from Adam?" and "Negro Minstrelsy--Ancient and Modern" (both printed in the January, 1855, issue), as well as the partially ironic "About Niggers" (December, 1855), reveals a much tamer and ambivalently condescending attitude toward blacks than any of Melville's fictional pieces that appeared in the same year, including "The Bell Tower" (August, 1855) and "Benito Cereno" itself, which was presented in three consecutive issues in October, November, and December, 1855.
- 23 Charles Berryman, "'Benito Cereno' and the Black Friars," *Studies in American Fiction*, 18: 2 (Fall, 1990), p. 159.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

-----*New Melville. American Literature*, 66 (March, 1994), 1.

Adams, K.H. "Black Images in Nineteenth-Century American Painting and Literature: An Iconological Study of Mount, Melville, Homer, and Mark Twain." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Emory University, 1977.

Altschuler, Glen C. "Whose Foot on Whose Throat? A Re-examination of 'Benito Cereno.'" *College Language Association Journal*, 18, no.3 (March 1975), 383-92.

Ames, Nathaniel. *A Mariner's Sketches*. Providence, R.I.: Cory, Marshall, and Hammond, 1830.

Anderson, Charles Roberts. *Melville in the South Seas*. Rpt. New York: Dover Publications, 1966.

Andrews, William L. "The Novelization of Voice in Early African American Narrative." *PMLA*, 105 (January, 1990), 23-34.

Aptheker, Herbert. *American Negro Slave Revolts*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1943.

Arvin, Newton. *Herman Melville*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1950; rpt. 1976.

Auden, W.H. *The Enchafed Flood: The Romantic Iconography of the Sea*. New York: Random House, 1950.

Bachelard, Gaston. *L'eau et les Reves*. Paris: Librairie Jose Corti, 1942.

-----*The Right to Dream*. Trans. J.R. Underwood. New York: Grossman, 1971.

Baker, Houston. *The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Bender, Bert. *Sea-Brothers: The Tradition of American Sea Fiction from Moby-Dick to the Present*. Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.

Benezet, Anthony. *Some Historical Account of Guinea...With an Inquiry into the Rise and Progress of the Slave Trade*. Rpt. London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968.

Bercovitch, Sacvan and Myra Jehlen, eds. *Ideology and Classic American Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

- Berryman, Charles. "Benito Cereno' and the Black Friars." *Studies in American Fiction*, 18: 2 (Fall, 1990), 159-170.
- Berthoff, Warner. *The Example of Melville*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.
- Berthold, Michael C. "Moby-Dick and American Slave Narratives." *Massachusetts Review*, 35: 1 (Spring, 1994).
- Bezanson, Walter E. "The Troubled Sleep of Arthur Gordon Pym." In *Essays in Literary History Presented to J. Milton French*. Eds. Rudolph Kirk and C.F. Main. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960, 149-75.
- Bledsoe, Albert. *An Essay on Liberty and Slavery*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott & Co., 1856.
- Boime, Albert. *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990.
- Bolster, W. Jeffrey. *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Bonaparte, Maria. *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. Trans. John Rodker. London: Imago, 1949.
- Bonner, Willard H. *Harp on the Shore: Thoreau and the Sea*. Ed. George R. Levine. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985.
- Bourke, John. *Sea as Symbol in English Poetry*. Eton: Alden and Blackwell, 1954.
- Bradford, William. *Of Plimouth Plantation: 1620-1647*. Ed. Samuel Eliot Morison. New York: Knopf, 1952.
- Bridge, Horatio. *Journal of an African Cruiser*. Ed. Nathaniel Hawthorne. New York: George P. Putnam & Co., 1853; rpt. Detroit, Michigan: Negro History Press, [n.d.].
- Brodhead, Richard H. *Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976.
- Brown, David. *The Planter, or Thirteen Years in the South, by a Northern Man*. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1970.
- Brown, Sterling. *The Negro in American Fiction*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Negro Folk Education, 1937; rpt. New York: Argosy-Antiquarian, Ltd., 1969.
- and Arthur P. Davis, and Ulysses Lee, eds. *The Negro Caravan*. New York: The Dryden Press, 1943.
- Browne, J. Ross. *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1846.

- Bryant, John, ed. *A Companion to Melville Studies*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Burkholder, Robert E., ed. *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno."* New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992.
- Cable, Mary. *Black Odyssey: The Case of the Slave Ship Amistad*. New York: Viking Press, 1971.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- Campbell, Killis. "Poe's Treatment of the Negro and the Negro Dialect." *Studies in English*, 16 (1936), 106-114.
- Canright, Stephen. "The Black Man and the Sea." *South Street Reporter*, Vol. VII, No. 4 (Winter, 1973-74), 5-10.
- Carey, H.C. *The Slave Trade, Domestic and Foreign: Why It Exists, and How It May Be Extinguished*. Philadelphia: Henry Carey Baird, 1853; rpt. 1862.
- Carlisle, E.F. "Captain Amasa Delano: Melville's American Fool." *Criticism*, 7, no.4 (Fall 1965), 349-62.
- Carlson, Patricia, ed. *Literature and Lore of the Sea*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986.
- Carson, Rachel. *The Sea Around Us*. Rpt. New York: The New American Library, 1961.
- Catlin, George. *Letter and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians*. New York: Dover, 1973.
- Chase, Richard. *The American Novel and Its Tradition*. Rpt. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1962.
- Clark, Robert. *History Ideology and Myth in American Fiction, 1823-52*. London: Macmillan, 1984.
- Clark, Rev. Rufus W. *The African Slave Trade*. Boston: American Tract Society, 1860; rpt. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970.
- Cohn, Michael, and Michael K. Platzner. *Black Men of the Sea*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1978.
- Coker, R.E. *This Great and Wide Sea*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
- Conneau, Théophile. *Captain Canot; or Twenty Years of an African Slaver*. Ed. Brantz Mayer. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1854; rpt. New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968.

- Corbin, Alain. *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World 1750-1840*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994.
- Cover, Robert M. *Justice Accused: Antislavery and the Judicial Process*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975.
- Dana, Richard Henry, Jr., *The Journal of Richard Henry Dana, Jr.* Ed. Robert F. Lucid. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.
- Two Years Before the Mast, A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea*. Rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.
- Davis, Clark. *After the Whale: Melville in the Wake of Moby-Dick*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1995.
- Davis, Merrell R. *Melville's Mardi: a Chartless Voyage*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952.
- Davis, Thadious M. "Race and Region." In *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliot. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, 407-36.
- Dayan, Joan. "Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves." *American Literature*, 66 (June, 1994) 2, 239-73.
- "Romance and Race." In *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliot. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, 89-109.
- Delaney, Martin R. *Blake or The Huts of America*. Rpt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.
- Delano, Amasa. *Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres*. Boston: E.G. House, 1817.
- Dillingham, William B. *Melville's Short Fiction 1853-1856*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977.
- Douglas, Ann. "Herman Melville and the Revolt Against the Reader." In *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1977, 289-326.
- Douglass, Frederick. *The Heroic Slave*. Rpt. in Ronald T. Takaki, ed. *Violence in the Black Imagination; Essays and Documents*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972.
- The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Boston: 1845; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.
- Dow, George Francis. *Slave Ships and Slaving*. Rpt. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1969.
- Drinnon, Richard. *Facing West: the Metaphysics of Indian-hating and Empire-building*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980.

- Duignan, Peter, and Clarence Clendenen. *The United States and the African Slave Trade 1619-1862*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963.
- Eliade, Mircea. "The Waters and Water Symbolism." In *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Trans. Rosemary Sheed. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958.
- Elkins, Stanley M. *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*. New York: Universal Library, 1963.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume II ; English Traits, Representative Men, Addresses*. Boston and New York: The Jefferson Press, 1914.
- Selected Essays*, ed. Larzer Ziff. New York: Penguin Books, 1985.
- Emory, Allan Moore. "The Topicality of Depravity in 'Benito Cereno.'" *American Literature*, 55 (October, 1983), 316-331.
- Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative*. Rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.
- Falconbridge, Alexander. *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa*. London: J. Phillips & George Yard, 1788; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1973.
- Farr, James Barker. *Black Odyssey; The Seafaring Traditions of Afro-Americans*. New York: Peter Lang, 1991.
- Feder, Lillian. *Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.
- Feldman, Burton and Robert D. Richardson. *The Rise of Modern Mythology: 1680-1860*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972.
- Fiedler, Leslie. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Rev. ed. New York: Stein and Day, 1982.
- Fisher, Marvin. *Going Under: Melville's Short Fiction and the American 1850s*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977.
- Fisher, Philip. "Introduction" to *The New American Studies*. Ed. Philip Fisher. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991.
- Fogle, Richard Harter. *Melville's Shorter Tales*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960.
- Franklin, H. Bruce. *The Victim as Criminal and Artist: Literature from the American Prison*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Frederickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind; The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1971.

- Freimarck, Vincent and Bernard Rosenthal, eds. *Race and the American Romantics*. New York: Schocken Books, 1971.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. and trans. A.A. Brill, New York: Random House, 1938.
- Gates, Henry L., ed. *"Race," Writing, and Difference*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- ed. *The Classic Slave Narratives*. New York: New American Library, 1987.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic; Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*. London and New York: Serpent's Tail, 1993.
- Gossett, Thomas F. *Race; The History of an Idea in America*. New York: Schocken Books, 1963.
- Graff, Gerald. *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Green, Jesse D. "Diabolism, Pessimism, and Democracy: Notes on Melville and Conrad." *Modern Fiction Studies*, 8 (1962), 287-305.
- Grejda, Edward S. *The Common Continent of Man: Racial Equality in the Writings of Herman Melville*. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1974.
- Gross, Seymour L. and John Edward Hardy, eds. *Images of the Negro in American Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Haegert, John. "Voicing Slavery Through Silence: Narrative Muting in Melville's *Benito Cereno*." *Mosaic, A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 26: 1 (Winter, 1993), 21-38.
- Hamer, Philip M. "Great Britain, the United States and the Negro Seaman's Acts 1822-1848." *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1935.
- Hamilton, William. "Melville and the Sea." *Soundings: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 62 (1979), 417-29.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Life of Franklin Pierce*. Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1852; rpt. New York: Garrett Press, 1970.
- Hayford, Harrison. "Hawthorne, Melville, and the Sea." *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 6 (December, 1946), 435-452.
- Herbert, T. Walter. *Marquesan Encounters*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Hetherington, Hugh W., ed. *Melville's Reviewers, British and American 1846-1891*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961.

- Higgins, Brian and Hershel Parker, eds. *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Moby-Dick*. New York: G.K. Hall & Co./Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992.
- Hildreth, Richard. *Despotism in America: An Inquiry into the Nature, Results, and Legal Basis of the Slave-holding System in the United States*. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968.
- Hollister, Michael. "Melville's Gam with Poe in *Moby-Dick*: Bulkington and Pym." *Studies in the Novel*, 21 (1989), 279-91.
- Horsley-Meacham, Gloria. "Bull of the Nile: Symbol, History, and Racial Myth in 'Benito Cereno.'" *New England Quarterly*, 64: 2 (June, 1991), 225-242.
- "The Monastic Slaver: Images and Meaning in 'Benito Cereno.'" *New England Quarterly*, 56 (June, 1983), 261-266.
- Hovey, Kenneth Alan. "Critical Provincialism: Poe's Poetic Principle in Antebellum Context." *American Quarterly*, 4 (1987), 341-54.
- Howard, Leon. *Herman Melville: A Biography*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951.
- Huggins, Nathan Irvin. *Black Odyssey; The Afro-American Ordeal in Slavery*. New York: Vintage Random House, 1990.
- Irwin, John T. *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.
- JanMohamed, Abdul, and David Lloyd. *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Koch, Adrienne and William Peden, eds. *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*. New York: Random House, 1944.
- Jentsch-Grooms, Lynda. *Exile and the Process of Individuation: A Jungian Analysis of Marine Symbolism in the Poetry of Rafael Alberti, Pablo Neruda, and Cecilia Meireles*. Valencia: Albatros Hispanofila, 1986.
- Johnson, Charles. *Middle Passage*. New York: Atheneum, 1990.
- Jones, Gavin. "Dusky Comments of Silence: Language, Race, and Herman Melville's 'Benito Cereno.'" *Studies in Short Fiction*, 32 (1995), 39-50.
- Jones, Howard. *Mutiny on the "Amistad": The Saga of a Slave Revolt and Its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- "The Peculiar Institution and National Honor: The Case of the Creole Slave Revolt." *Civil War History*, 21 (1975), 28-50.

- Jordan, Winthrop D. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. New York and London: Norton, 1977.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Basic Writings of C.G. Jung*. Ed. Violet deLaszlo. New York: Random House, 1959.
- Kaplan, Amy. *The Social Construction of American Realism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Kaplan, Sidney. *American Studies in Black and White, Selected Essays*. Ed. Allan D. Austin. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1991.
- "An Introduction to Pym." In *Poe: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Robert Regan. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967.
- "Herman Melville and the American National Sin." *Journal of Negro History*, 41 (1956), 311-38; 42 (1957), 11-37.
- Karcher, Carolyn. *Shadow Over the Promised Land*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980.
- Kavanaugh, James H. "That Hive of Subtlety: 'Benito Cereno' and the Liberal Hero." In *Ideology and Classic American Literature*. Eds. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen. New York: Cambridge, 1986, 352-383.
- Kazin, Alfred. *An American Procession*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.
- On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature*. Rpt. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, & Jovanovich, 1982.
- Kennedy, J. Gerald. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, and the Abyss of Interpretation*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.
- Kopley, Richard. *Poe's Pym : Critical Explorations*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Lawrence, David Herbert. *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Rpt. New York: Viking, 1972.
- Lee, R. Robert. "'Impudent and ingenious fiction': Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*." In *Edgar Allan Poe: The Design of Order*. Ed. Robert A. Lee. London: Vision Press, 1987.
- Lee, Grace F. "The Quest of Arthur Gordon Pym." *Southern Literary Journal*, 4, no. 2, (1972), 22-33.
- Levy, Leonard. *The Law of the Commonwealth and Chief Justice Shaw*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957.
- Leech, Samuel. *Thirty Years from Home, or A Voice from the Main Deck, being the Experience of Samuel Leech, who was for Six Years in the British and American Navies: Was Captured in The British Frigate Macedonian: Afterwards Entered the American Navy, and Was Taken in the United States Brig Syren, by the British Ship Medway*. Boston: Charles Tappan, 1843.

- Leslie, Joshua, and Sterling Stuckey. "The Death of Benito Cereno: A Reading of Herman Melville on Slavery." *Journal of Negro History*, 67 (December, 1982), 287-301.
- Levin, Harry. *The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville*. New York: Knopf, 1976.
- "Some Meanings of Myth." In *Myth and Mythmaking*. Ed. Henry A. Murray. Boston: Beacon Press, 1960.
- Levine, Robert. "Fiction and Reform I." In *The Columbia History of the American Novel*. Ed. Emory Elliot. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, 130-54.
- Lewis, Charles Lee. "Edgar Allan Poe and the Sea." *The Southern Literary Messenger* (January, 1941), 5-10.
- Lewis, R.W.B. *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.
- Leyda, Jay. *The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville*. 2 vols. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951.
- Locke, Alain, ed. *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. New York: A. and C. Boni, 1925.
- Lorant, Laurie. "Herman Melville and Race: Themes and Imagery." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. New York University, 1972.
- Maddox, Lucy. *Removals: Nineteenth Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Mannix, Daniel P. and Cowley, Malcolm. *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518-1865*. New York: Viking Press, 1972.
- Marchand, Ernest. "Poe as Social Critic." *American Literature*, 6 (1934), 28-43.
- Martin, Robert K. *Hero, Captain, and Stranger: Male Friendships, Social Critique, and Literary Form in the Sea Novels of Herman Melville*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986.
- Martin, Terry J. "The Idea of Nature in *Benito Cereno*." *Studies in Short Fiction*, 30 (1993), 161-168.
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Matlack, Jack. "Attica and Melville's 'Benito Cereno.'" *American Transcendental Quarterly*, 26 (supplement; Spring 1975), 18-23.

Matthiessen, F.O. *American Renaissance: Art and Experience in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. Rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Mattison, H. *The Impending Crisis; or The Present Connection of The Methodist Episcopal Church with Slavery, and Our Duty in Regard to It*. New York: Mason Brothers, 1858; rpt. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971.

Mayoux, Jean-Jacques. *Melville*. Trans. John Ashbery. London: Evergreen Books, 1960.

McDowell, Deborah E. and Arnold Rampersad, eds. *Slavery and the Literary Imagination*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

McDowell, Tremaine. "The Negro in the Southern Novel Prior to 1850." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 25 (1926), 455-73.

McNally, William. *Evils and Abuses in the Naval and Merchant Service Exposed: With Proposals for Their Remedy and Redress*. Boston, 1839.

Melville, Herman. *The Battle-Pieces of Herman Melville*. Ed. Hennig Cohen. New York: Thomas Yoseloff/R.S. Barnes and Company, 1963.

-----*Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative): Reading Text and Genetic Text*. Eds. Harrison Hayford and Merton Sealts, Jr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

-----*The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*. Eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1984.

-----*Correspondence*. Ed. Lynn Horth. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1993.

-----*Israel Potter: His Fifty Years in Exile*. Eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1982.

-----*Journals*. Eds. Howard Horsford and Lynn Horth. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1989.

-----*Mardi and the Voyage Thither*. Eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1970.

-----*Moby-Dick*. Eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967.

- Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas*. Eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1968.
- Piazza Tales*. Ed. Egbert S. Oliver. New York: Hendricks House, Farrar Straus, 1948.
- Pierre, or the Ambiguities*. Eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1971.
- Redburn: His First Voyage, Being the Sailor-boy Confessions and Reminiscences of the Son-of-a-Gentleman, in the Merchant Service*. Eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1969.
- Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*. Eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1968.
- White-Jacket, or The World in a Man-of-War*. Eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1970.
- The Writings of Herman Melville: Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces 1839-1860*. Eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, Alma MacDougall, and G. Thomas Tanselle. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1987.
- Mercier, Henry James and William Gallop. *Life in a Man-of-War, or, Scenes in "Old Ironsides" During Her Cruise in the Pacific, By a Fore-Top-Man*. Philadelphia: Lydia R. Bailey, 1841.
- Michaels, Walter Benn and Donald E. Pease, eds. *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985.
- Michelet, Jules. *La Mer*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, Editeurs, n.d.
- Milder, Robert. *Critical Essays on Melville's Billy Budd, Sailor*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1989.
- Miller, C.L. *Africanist Discourse in French*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Miller, John C. "Did Edgar Allan Poe Really Sell a Slave?" *Poe Studies*, 9 (1976), 52-53.
- Miller, Perry. *The Raven and the Whale; The War of Words and Wits in the Era of Poe and Melville*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956.

- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- "The Site of Memory." In William Zinsser, ed. *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987, 103-123.
- "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Africanist Presence in American Literature." *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 28 (Winter 1989), 1-34.
- Nelson, Dana D. *The Word in Black and White: Reading "Race" in American Literature 1638-1867*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Newton, John. *The Journal of a Slave Trader: 1750-1754*. Rpt. London: The Epworth Press, 1962.
- Nishigushi, Masahiro. "On Poe's Sea Stories." *Journal of Otsuki Junior College*, 16 (1985), 81-101.
- Olson, Charles. *Call Me Ishmael*. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947.
- Ostendorf, Berndt. *Black Literature in White America*. Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982.
- Pahl, Dennis. "The Gaze of History in 'Benito Cereno.'" *Studies in Short Fiction*, 32 (1995), 171-183.
- Park, Mungo. *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*. London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1799; rpt. New York: Arno Press and *The New York Times*, 1971.
- Parker, Hershel. *Herman Melville, A Biography, Volume 1, 1819-1851*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- and Harrison Hayford, eds. *Moby-Dick as Doubloon: Essays and Abstracts*. New York: Norton, 1970.
- Pease, Donald. *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.
- Peirce, Carol and Alexander G. Rose, III. "Poe's Reading of Myth: The White Vision of Arthur Gordon Pym." In *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*, ed. Richard Kopley. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992, 57-74.
- Perry, Lewis and Michael Fellman, eds. *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979.
- Philbrick, Thomas. *James Fennimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. *Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe, Volume 1, The Imaginary Voyages: The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, The Unparalleled Adventure of one Hans Pfaal, The Journal of Julius Rodman*. Ed. Burton R. Pollin. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981.

- Essays and Reviews*. Ed. G.R. Thompson. New York: The Library of America, 1984.
- The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*. London and New York: Penguin, 1986.
- The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*. 2 vols. Ed. John Ward Ostrom. New York: Gordian Press, 1966.
- The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. Rpt. London and New York: Peguin, 1986.

Post-Lauria, Sheila. "Editorial Politics in Herman Melville's 'Benito Cereno.'" *American Periodicals*, Vol. 5, 1995, 1-13.

Putney, Martha S. *Black Sailors: Afro-American Merchant Seamen and Whalemens Prior to the Civil War*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1987.

Quinn, Patrick F. *The French Face of Edgar Poe*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957.

Raban, Jonathan, ed. *The Oxford Book of the Sea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Rank, Otto. *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, and Other Writings*. Ed. Philip Freund. New York: Vintage, 1959.

Rawley, James A. *Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War*. New York/Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1969.

Reynolds, David S. *Beneath the American Renaissance; The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*. London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

-----*Walt Whitman's America, A Cultural Biography*. New York: Knopf, 1995.

Richardson, William D. *Melville's "Benito Cereno" An Interpretation with Annotated Text and Concordance*. Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 1987.

Riddle, Mary-Madeleine Gina. *Herman Melville's Piazza Tales: A Prophetic Vision*. Goteborg, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1985.

Robertson-Lorant, Laurie. *Melville: A Biography*. New York: Clarkson Potter, 1996.

Robinson, Douglas. "Reading Poe's Novel: A Speculative Review of *Pym* Criticism, 1950-1980." *Poe Studies*, 15 (1982), 47-54.

Rogin, Michael Paul. *Subversive Genealogy; The Politics and Art of Herman Melville*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983.

Rosenthal, Bernard. "Poe, Slavery, and the *Southern Literary Messenger* : A Reexamination." *Poe Studies*, 7 (1974), 29-38.

- Rowe, John Carlos. *Through the Custom-House: Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Modern Theory*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.
- "Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism." In *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*, ed. Richard Kopley. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992, 117-38.
- "Writing and Truth in Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym." *Glyph*, 2 (1977), 102-21.
- Sadler, Lynn Deach. "The Sea in Selected American Novels of Slave Unrest." *Journal of American Culture*, 10:2 (1987), 43-48.
- Sanchez-Eppler, Karen. "Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition." *Representations*, 24 (1988), 28-59.
- Sands, Kathleen. "The Mythic Initiation of Arthur Gordon Pym." *Poe Studies*, 7 (1974), 14-16.
- Santraud, Jeanne-Marie. *La mer et le roman americain dans la premiere moitie du dix-neuvieme siecle*. Paris: Didier, 1972.
- Selden, Raman and Peter Widdowson. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1993.
- Schiffman, Joseph. "Critical Problems in 'Benito Cereno.'" *Modern Language Quarterly*, 11, no. 3 (September 1950), 317-24.
- Shulman, Robert. *Social Criticism & Nineteenth-Century American Fictions*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987.
- Silverman, Kenneth. *Edgar A. Poe; Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance*. London: Weidenfeld, 1993.
- Simms, William Gilmore. *The Yemassee, A Romance of Carolina*. Rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961.
- Simpson, Eleanor. "Melville and the Negro: from *Typee* to 'Benito Cereno.'" *American Literature*, 81, No. 1 (March, 1969), 19-38.
- Slochow, Harry. *Mythopoesis: Mythic Patterns in the Literary Classics*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970.
- Smith, Barbara Herrnstein. *On the Margins of Discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Smith, Myron Jr. and Robert C. Weller, eds. *Sea Fiction Guide*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1976.
- Smith, William Andrew. *Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery, as Exhibited in the Institution of Domestic Slavery in the United States; with the Duties of Masters to Slaves*. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969.

- Smyth, William D. "Water: A Recurring Image in Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*." *CLA Journal*, 34 (1990), 174-187.
- Springer, Haskell, ed. *America and the Sea: A Literary History*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1995.
- Stanton, William. *The Great United States Exploring Expedition of 1838-1842*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975.
- The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America 1815-59*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Stein, Roger B. "Seascape and the American Imagination: The Puritan Seventeenth Century." *Early American Literature*, 7 (1972), 21-25.
- "Pulled Out of the Bay: American Fiction in the Eighteenth Century." *Studies in American Fiction*, 2 (1974), 22-26.
- Stern Milton R. *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Typee*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982.
- ed. *Discussions of Moby-Dick*. Boston: Heath, 1960.
- The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville; with a Checklist of Melville Studies*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957.
- Stepto, Robert B. *From behind the Veil*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979.
- Stroupe, John H. "Poe's Imaginary Voyage: Pym As Hero." *Studies in Short Fiction*, 4 (1967), 315-21.
- Stuckey, Leslie. "Avoiding the Tragedy of Benito Cereno: The Official Response to Babo's Revolt." *Criminal Justice History*, 3 (1982).
- Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Sundquist, Eric J. *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Takaki, Ronald T., ed. *Violence in the Black Imagination; Essays and Documents*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972.
- Thomas, Brook. *Cross-examinations of Law and Literature: Cooper, Hawthorne, Stowe, and Melville*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- "The Legal Fictions of Herman Melville and Lemuel Shaw." *Critical Inquiry*, 11 (September, 1984), 29-30.
- Thomas, Hugh. *The Slave Trade; The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
- Thompson, Lawrance. *Melville's Quarrel with God*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952.
- Tibbles, Anthony, ed. *Transatlantic Slavery, Against Human Dignity*. London: HMSO/Merrell Holberton Publishers, 1994.

- Tindall, William. *The Literary Symbol*. Rpt. New York: Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. 2 vols. New York: The Colonial Press, 1899.
- Tolchin, Neal. *Mourning, Gender, and Creativity in the Art of Herman Melville*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Tucker, George. *The Valley of Shenandoah; or Memoirs of the Graysons*. Rpt. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1970.
- Turner, Lorenzo Dow. *Anti-Slavery Sentiment in American Literature Prior to 1865*. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1929; rpt. 1966.
- Ujházy, Maria. *Herman Melville's World of Whaling*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982.
- Vanderbilt, Kermit. "'Benito Cereno': Melville's Fable of Black Complicity." *Southern Review*, 12 (1976), 311-322.
- Vickery, John B., ed. *Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.
- Vincent, Howard P. *The Tailoring of Melville's White-Jacket*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970.
- Warren, Kenneth W. *Black and White Strangers; Race and American Literary Realism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Weathers, Willie T. "Moby-Dick and the Nineteenth-Century Scene." *University of Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 1 (Winter, 1960), 477-501.
- Weiner, Susan. "'Benito Cereno' and the Failure of Law." *Arizona Quarterly*, 47: 2 (Summer, 1991), 1-28.
- Welsh, Howard. "The Politics of Race in 'Benito Cereno.'" *American Literature*, 46 (1975), 556-566.
- Wharton, Donald P., ed. *In the Trough of the Sea: Selected Sea Deliverance Narratives, 1610-1766*. Westport, Ct.: Greenwood, 1979.
- Whitman, Walt. *New York Dissected*. New York: R.R. Wilson, 1936.
- Widmer, Kingsley. *The Ways of Nihilism: A Study of Herman Melville's Short Novels*. Los Angeles: The California State Colleges, 1970.
- Wood, P.H. "Waiting in Limbo: A Reconsideration of Winslow Homer's

The Gulf Stream. In W.J. Fraser, Jr. and W.B. Moore, Jr., eds.
The Southern Enigma: Essays in Race, Class, and Folk Culture.
 Westport, Conn., 1983.

Yellin, Jean Fagin. "Black Masks: Melville's 'Benito Cereno.'" *American Quarterly*, 22, no. 3 (Fall 1970), 678-89.

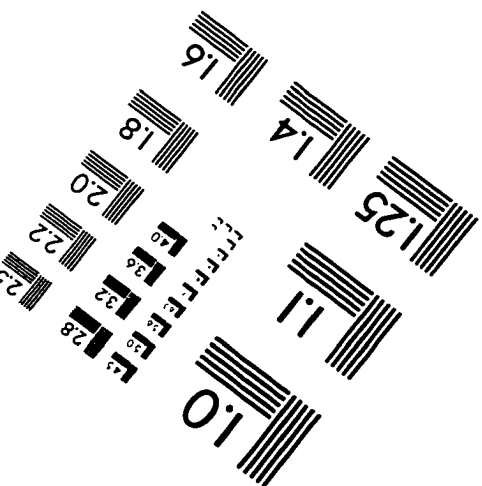
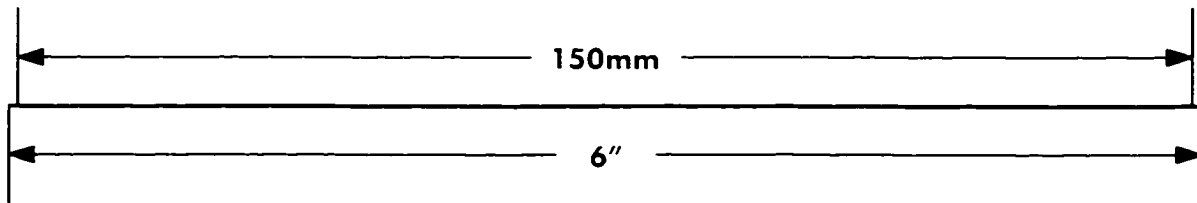
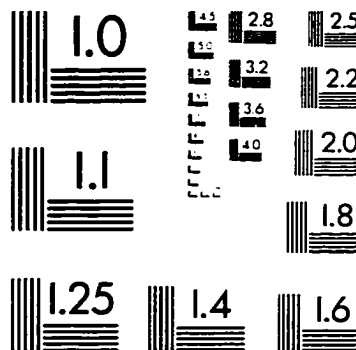
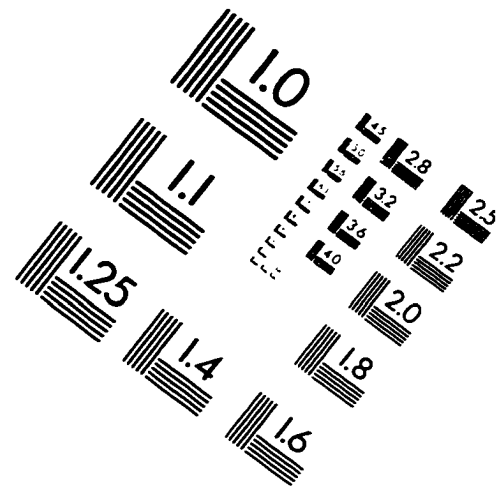
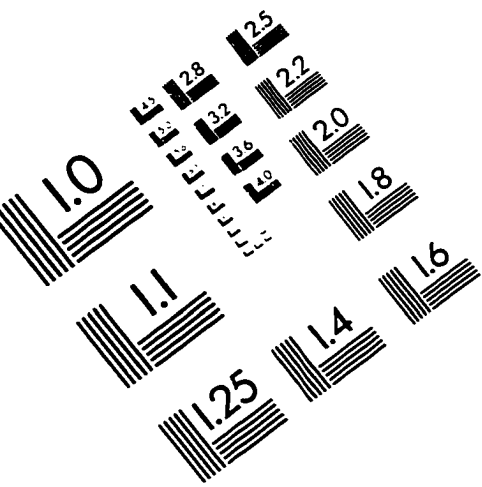
-----***The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature, 1776-1863.*** New York: New York University Press, 1972.

Young, Gloria L. "The Sea As Symbol in the Work of Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad." Unpublished Ph.D dissertation. Kent State University, 1971.

Young, Philip. ***The Private Melville.*** University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993.

Zirker, Priscilla. "Evidence of the Slavery Dilemma in *White-Jacket*." *American Quarterly*, XVII (Fall, 1966), 477-92.

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1993, Applied Image, Inc., All Rights Reserved

