"MAN OVERBOARD!" -- IMMERSION, EMBARKATION AND RELATED THEMES IN THE FICTION OF MELVILLE

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I

INTRODUCTION

The object of this thesis is to examine Melville's use of an image which recurs in his sailing stories, that of men going overboard into the sea. This image recurs with astonishing frequency; one has only to think of the numerous incidents in which men are washed overboard or deliberately leap to commit suicide, are tossed out of whaleboats or leap out to save themselves, fall out of the rigging, or desert ship. There are related motifs, which extend to include the act of going to sea, going from one vessel to another, or any embarkation or disembarkation. There is also the image of "the voyage itself", which, as Newton Arvin points out, ". . . is a metaphor of death and rebirth, of the passage from childhood and innocence to experience and adulthood; the crossing, to and fro, of a sea in the waters of which one dies to the old self and puts on a new."[1] This leads to another idea germane to the thesis -- the relationship between the sea and the sailor. James Baird says that:

> The archetypal significance of ocean as the element over which the voyager travels is that of timelessness -- eternity. The sea is primitive and timeless; the ego is subsumed by the sea; and here man returns to his first objective in his atavistic longing for origins . . . . The seaman becomes by association primitive and eternal like the sea beneath him.[2]

Melville was keenly aware of the symbolic and metaphorical possibilities of his images, as he shows, for example, in his chapter on "The Whiteness of the Whale" in Moby-Dick. I have found no explicit exposition of the image I have chosen to discuss in Melville's writing, but as a point of departure will quote passages from Mircea Eliade's Patterns in Comparative Religion,[3] which, though more formal and cautious than Melville's expository writing, approaches imagery with an imaginative eclecticism of which he would have approved.[4] In Chapter V, "The Waters and Water Symbolism", Eliade first notes that ". . . water symbolizes the whole of potentiality; it is the source of all possible existence." In the Vedic texts, he says,

> Waters are the foundations of the whole world; . . . they ensure long life and creative energy, they are the principle of all healing, and so on. "May the waters bring us well-being!" the Vedic priest used to pray. "The waters are indeed healers; the waters drive away and cure all illnesses!"[5]

It is what Eliade says after this that I find most relevant to my own argument, but even this comment can fruitfully be applied to some of Melville's water symbolism. The best example I can think of occurs in Redburn, when Jackson, the evil, diseased sailor who has tyrannized the crew of the Highlander, plummets into the sea from the main-topsail-yard. Redburn relates that after his death,

> the sailors. . . never made the slightest allusion to the departed Jackson. One and all they seemed tacitly to unite in hushing up his memory among them. Whether it was, that the severity of the bondage under which this man held every one of them, did really corrode in their secret hearts, that they sought to repress the recollection of a thing so degrading, I can not determine; but certain it was, that his death was their deliverance; which they celebrated by an elevation of spirits, unknown before. (LIX, 285-86)[6]

In this incident the sea serves as a cleansing agent, at least from the point of view of the sailors who are now rid of Jackson. "In India", says Eliade, "illnesses are cast into the water."[7] In a somewhat different way, both Redburn and Ishmael look to the sea as a cure for their spiritual ailment, misanthropy.[8] This restorative function of the sea brings us closer to a more imaginative and significant role which Melville gives to it in his writing. Again, Eliade's comments provide an explicit description of this larger role:

> In cosmogony, in myth, ritual and iconography, water fills the same function in whatever type of cultural pattern we find it; it precedes all forms and upholds all creation. Immersion in water symbolizes a return to the pre-formal, a total regeneration, a new birth, for immersion means a dissolution of forms, a reintegration into the formlessness of pre-existence; and emerging from the water is a repetition of the act of creation in which form was first expressed. Every contact with water implies regeneration: first, because dissolution is succeeded by a "new birth", and then because immersion fertilizes, increases the potential of life and of creation.[9]

He goes on to say that

> Immersion is the equivalent, at the human level, of death, and at the cosmic level, of the cataclysm (the Flood) which periodically dissolves the world into the primeval ocean. Breaking up all forms, doing away with all the past, water possesses this power of purifying, of regenerating, of giving new birth; for what is immersed in it "dies", and, rising again from the water, is like a child without any sin or any past, able to receive a new revelation and begin a new and real life.[10]

This is the symbolic use which baptism makes of immersion, and it is the use to which Melville puts it, particularly in the sailing stories up to Moby-Dick.[11] The plainest example of an immersion which promotes a "new birth" is perhaps the accidental fall of the protagonist of White Jacket, the young sailor whose distinctive white jacket has already endangered his life and made him an "outsider" aboard the frigate Neversink. Drastically abridged, this is White Jacket's account of his "baptism" and rebirth:

> . . . the ship gave a plunge in the sudden swells of the calm sea, and pitching me still further over the yard, threw the heavy skirts of my jacket right over my head, completely muffling me. Somehow I thought it was the sail that had flapped, and, under that impression, threw up my hands to drag it from my head, relying upon the sail itself to support me meanwhile. Just then the ship gave another sudden jerk, and, head foremost, I pitched from the yard. . . . I was conscious of a collected satisfaction in feeling, that I should not be dashed on the deck, but would sink into the speechless profound of the sea. . . . As I gushed into the sea. . . my soul seemed flying from my mouth. The feeling of death flooded over my with the billows. . . . Some current seemed hurrying me away; in a trance I yielded, and sank deeper down with a glide. . . . I wondered whether I was yet dead, or still dying.

> But of a sudden some fashionless form brushed my side -- some inert, soiled fish of the sea; the thrill of being alive again tingled in my nerves, and the strong shunning of death shocked me through.
>
> For one instant an agonising revulsion came over me as I found myself utterly sinking. Next moment the force of my fall was expended; and there I hung, vibrating in the mid-deep. . . . The life-and-death poise soon passed; and then I found myself slowly ascending, and caught a dim glimmering of light.
>
> Quicker and quicker I mounted; till at last I bounded up like a buoy, and my whole head was bathed in the blessed air. . . . I essayed to swim toward the ship; but instantly I was conscious of a feeling like being pinioned in a feather bed, and, moving my hands, felt my jacket puffed out above my tight girdle with water. I strove to tear it off; but it was looped together here and there, and the strings were not then to be sundered by hand. I whipped out my knife, that was tucked at my belt, and ripped my jacket straight up and down, as if I were ripping open myself. With a violent struggle I then burst out of it, and was free. Heavily soaked, it slowly sank before my eyes.
>
> Sink! sink! oh shroud! thought I; sink forever! accursed jacket that thou art!
>
> "See that white shark!" cried a horrified voice from the taffrail, "he'll have that man down his hatchway! Quick! the grains! the grains!"
>
> The next instant that barbed bunch of harpoons pierced through and through the unfortunate jacket, and swifty sped down with it out of sight.
> (XCII, 369 - 71)

In explicating this passage, Newton Arvin says that White Jacket returns to life

> . . . because he has in fact ripped open an aspect of himself, thrown it off, and allowed it to sink in the sea; the aspect of himself that is mere uniqueness and differentness, mere protective-unprotective self-assertion, easy to identify and individualize in any mob, and white, fatally white, as white as a shroud.[12]

Like the best of Melville's symbols -- others are the white whale, Moby-Dick, and the San Dominick's figurehead, the bleached skeleton of Don Alexandro Aranda, in "Benito Cereno" -- the symbol of the white jacket is rich and ambiguous in meaning, not a mere emblem or allegorical sign (white, appropriately, is the result of superimposing all the primary colours). We can safely say, though, that White Jacket's baptism and self-administered "delivery" from the jacket are an image of his metamorphosis into a seasoned sailor, or -- to pursue the metaphor implied in Melville's sub-title, The World in a Man-of-War -- a man equipped for living in the world, unhampered by innocence or inexperience.

At its simplest level, then, the sea serves as a purifying and cleansing medium, performing services which range from swabbing the decks of the Highlander or the Pequod, to swallowing up villains like Jackson. The imagery becomes more resonant and complex when the sea is no longer merely a cleaning solvent or lustrum which retains what it removes, but a womb or matrix which changes and gives back what it has received, as in the re-birth of White Jacket.

There is a variant on this motif, in which a character undergoes a change, signified by his leaving or boarding a vessel, or transferring from one boat to another, without necessarily being immersed. Changes brought about in this way are generally more social than psychological or spiritual; the transfer affects the character's mode

of life and his status among men more than the deeper areas of his personality or soul. A fine example of this variant of the motif is Billy Budd's transfer from the merchantman Rights-of-Man to the British frigate Indomitable. Melville leaves the reader in no doubt as to the meaning of Billy's enforced enlistment. As the frigate's boat pulls away from the merchant ship, ". . . the new recruit jumped up from the bow. . . and. . . bade the lads a genial good-bye. Then, making a saluation as to the ship herself, 'And good-bye to you too, old Rights-of-Man.'" (I, 296)[13] One of the ways in which Billy's social position changes is that he loses some of the pre-eminence he had had on the merchant ship. "As the handsome sailor, Billy Budd's position aboard the seventy-four was something analogous to that of a rustic beauty transplanted from the provinces and brought into competition with the highborn dames of the court." (II, 297) Tragically, Billy fails to adapt for survival in his new environment,

> . . . a world not without some man-traps and against whose subtleties simple courage, lacking experience and address and without any touch of defensive ugliness, is of little avail; and where such innocence as man is capable of does yet in a moral emergency not always sharpen the faculties or enlighten the will. (IX, 316)

When an afterguardsman, presumably at the instigation of the schemer Claggart, suggests that Billy join a mutiny, "It was an entirely new experience; the first time in his life that he had ever been personally

approached in underhand intriguing fashion (XVI, 329)." But the most important aspect of the change in Billy's environment is his subjection to a code of law which recognizes neither private conscience nor the notions of human dignity and natural rights which underly the opening sentences of the preamble to the American Declaration of Independence, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (France, 1789), and Thomas Paine's Rights of Man, after which Billy's ship had been christened. Captain Vere defines the difference between the two orders in his summation to the drumhead court which is trying Billy for knocking down Claggart.

> But your scruples. . . do they import something like this. . . . How can we adjudge to summary and shameful death a fellow creature innocent before God, and whom we feel to be so? . . . You sign sad assent. Well, I too feel that, the full force of that. It is Nature. But do these buttons that we wear attest that our allegiance is to Nature? No, to the King. . . . in receiving our commission we in the most important regards ceased to be natural free agents. . . . suppose condemnation to follow these present proceedings. Would it be so much we ourselves that would condemn as it would be martial law operating through us? For that law and the rigor of it, we are not responsible. (XXII, 354-55)

It is ironic that after this rather abstract argument, "Starry Vere" clinches the death sentence by reminding his officers of "the practical consequences to discipline, . . . should a man-of-war's man's violent killing at sea of a superior in grade be allowed to pass for aught else than a capital crime demanding prompt infliction of the penalty (XX, 357). Despite an apparent inconsistency

between the two arguments, the one deriving from principle and the other from expendiency, both really enter the tyrant's plea, an appeal to necessity. This vindicates the name of the frigate, descriptive of the impersonal force to which all who enter its sphere are absolutely subjected. As Billy awaits execution, "lying between the two guns, as nipped in the vice of fate" (XXV,363), he is visited by the chaplain, who gives the narrator an opportunity to make clear what he thinks of the code which has condemned him:

> Marvel not that having been made acquainted with the young sailor's essential innocence (an irruption of heretic thought hard to suppress) the worthy man lifted not a finger to avert the doom of such a martyr to martial discipline. . . . Bluntly put, a chaplain is the minister of the Prince of Peace serving in the host of the God of War -- Mars. As such, he is as incongruous as a musket would be on the altar. Why then is he there? Because he indirectly subserves the purpose attested by the cannon; because too he lends the sanction of the religion of the meek to that which practically is the abrogation of everything but brute Force. (XXV, 365-66)[14]

The same motif is even more significant in Benito Cereno, because in that story it is important structurally as well as thematically. As in Billy Budd, the tale begins with the protagonist, Captain Delano, leaving his own ship for another. Rather like Billy, the Captain is "of a singularly undistrustful good nature, not liable. . . to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man."[15] The acute suspense which the story generates depends on this candour, since what the

reader sees aboard the San Dominick is through the eyes of a man who is less apprehensive of his danger than we are. The San Dominick's captain, Benito Cereno, and Babo, his negro servant, explain that the ship's crew have been decimated by gales, calms and disease; the cargo of negro slaves are now free but apparently more or less under Cereno's control. As they wait for the Bachelor's boat to return with provisions, various incidents and Cereno's behaviour convey a growing sense that something is wrong. The suspense rises steadily until the moment when Delano is returning to his own ship, the Bachelor's Delight; it is then resolved when Cereno jumps into the boat after him. At first Delano thinks that Cereno has betrayed him, but when Babo attempts to stab Cereno in the boat,

> Captain Delano, now with scales dropped from his eyes, saw the negroes, not in misrule, not in tumult, not as if frantically concerned for Don Benito, but with mask torn away, flourishing hatchets and knives, in ferocious piratical revolt.[16]

The two movements from vessel to vessel change Cereno and Delano only externally -- that is, Cereno is physically rescued from Babo and the slaves, and Delano ceases to be their unwitting dupe and near-victim. On the other hand, there is no parallel change in the two men's personalities or visions of the world. Cereno is not regenerated, even though Delano rescues him; Delano, as unperceptive as ever, fails to understand why.

> "You are saved," cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; "You are saved: what has cast such a shawdow upon you?"
> "The negro"
> . . . There was no more conversation that day.[17]

In general, then, the "man overboard" motif signifies a change of some sort. Where it is accompanied by an immersion, or going to or from the sea, there is often a metamorphosis of character, or at least a change in temperament; in other cases, as with Billy Budd, Benito Cereno and Captain Delano, the change of environment does not effect a significant change in the character himself. With this formulation in mind, I began writing the chapters that follow. Having written them, I have something to add concerning Melville's use of the "man overboard" motif, but have left it for the "Conclusion".

NOTES

[1] Herman Melville. (New York: Viking, 1957), p. 106.

[2] Ishmael: A Study of the Symbolic Mode in Primitivism. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), p. 213.

[3] Trans. Rosemary Sheed, (New York and Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1963).

[4] One example of the relevance of Eliade's work to Melville is the agreement between Melville's intuition and Eliade's scholarship on the ambivalence of the sun. Compare Eliade's remarks on this subject, ibid., Ch. 3, and Melville's in Moby-Dick (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1948), Ch. 102, p. 445 and Ch. 116, p. 489.

[5] P. 188.

[6] This and all subsequent quotations from Melville's novels refer to the chapter and page number in Roman and Arabic numerals, respectively. For details of texts used please refer to the Bibliography.

[7] P. 194.

[8] See Redburn, ch. II, and the opening paragraphs of Moby-Dick.

[9] Pp. 188-89.

[10] P. 194.

[11] The Confidence-Man, "Benito Cereno" and Billy Budd show a development of the image which dispenses with the actual ducking, although, as I will note later, the purpose is similar.

[12] Herman Melville, pp. 114-15.

[13] This and subsequent references to Billy Budd cite the version printed in Melville: Selected Tales and Poems. For further details of this and other primary texts used please refer to the Bibliography.

[14]The phrase "as incongruous as a musket would be on the altar" is Elizabeth Treeman's correction, and makes much better sense that F. Barron Freeman's reading, which Chase prints. Miss Treeman's corrections are incorporated in the text printed in Lynn Altenbernd and Leslie L. Lewis, eds., Introduction to Literature: Stories (New York: MacMillan, 1963), pp. 42-92.

[15]Selected Tales and Poems, p. 3.

[16]Ibid., p. 68.

[17]Ibid., p. 90.

II

MARDI

Mardi, Melville's third novel, is in one way a continuation of Typee and Omoo, which are loosely based on about two years' experience as a sailor in the Pacific. Typee (1846) records his stay with a cannibal tribe after deserting his whaling ship at Nuku Heva in the Marquesas Islands; Omoo (1847) is a picaresque account of his travels among the islands of Tahiti prior to returning to the United States. Mardi (1849), like its predecessors, begins with its narrator deserting a whaling ship and goes on to relate his adventures among people native to the South Pacific. Yet, in its use of these materials, and in its introduction of new ones, this novel marks a radical departure from the relatively uncluttered, modest narratives that preceded it. Melville intimates as much in a brief preface to the novel:

> Not long ago, having published two narratives of voyages in the Pacific which in many quarters were received with incredulity, the thought occurred to me of indeed writing a romance of Polynesian adventure and publishing it as such to see whether the fiction might not, possibly, be received for a verity -- in some degree the reverse of my previous experience.
>
> This thought was the germ of all others, which have resulted in Mardi.

The book begins beautifully, with a confident flourish of perfectly cadenced, masculine prose:

> We are off! The courses and topsails are set; the coral-hung anchor swings from the bow; and together the three royals are given to the breeze that follows us out to sea like the baying of a hound. Out spreads the canvas -- alow, aloft -- boom-stretched on both sides with many a stun' sail, till, like a hawk, with pinions poised, we shadow the sea with our sails and reelingly cleave the brine. (I, 15)[1]

This is the kind of exuberance one might expect from a "sea-dog author" whose first two books had made him "sought after and feted" by the American public.[2] Unfortunately, examples of it are rare after about the first forty-five chapters, or the first quarter of the book. An explanation for this deterioration in style would need to take many factors into account. Although I do not intend to elaborate on my interpretation of this point, my own feeling is that the transition from the sinewy prose of the opening to the generally effete, uninspired, imitative writing of the remainder of the book, reflects the narrator's desertion of the businesslike world of the islands of Mardi, which seduce him into a tangle of symbolic and allegorical wanderings. Milton R. Stern says that Taji's "'man overboard' plunge from the historical world is the first death, the first suicide of self, and the first possible murder of that world."[3] I question whether Taji's desertion can fairly be called a suicide, but would rather defer the matter of the "man overboard" theme and its relation to suicide until later.

It is not necessary to summarize a well-known book before proceding with an interpretation of it, since one can assume that there is some unanimity about its contents and their relative significance. Mardi has received relatively little scrutiny and it therefore seems appropriate to recapitulate the story, as I see it, before any analysis of its details.

The narrator and an old sailor, Jarl, have deserted ship in a stolen whaleboat and sail eastward toward an archipelago located somewhere in the middle of the Pacific. After boarding a brigantine sailed by two natives who have survived a massacre and mutiny, the ship and the female native are lost in a storm and the two sailors and the survivor continue in the whaleboat. Eventually they meet a ceremonial canoe, from which the narrator rescues a beautiful blonde woman named Yillah, after killing the priest who was going to make a human sacrifice of her. The party of four are triumphantly received at an island called Odo, where the narrator passes himself off as Taji the sun-god, and retires on a kind of honeymoon with Yillah. It is worth pointing out that this debarkation at Odo brings, for Taji, a kind of "re-birth" and a definite enhancement of his social stature. Yillah then disappears, and at this point Melville's narrative becomes much more complicated and diffuse, registering the change of intentions that he

forewarns of in the Preface. Taji announces his intention of embarking on a quest to regain Yillah, and his previous companions, Jarl and Samoa, along with Media, King of Odo, and a selected retinue, leave in a convoy of ceremonial canoes for a circuit of the islands in the archipelago, which is named Mardi. During this voyage, which occupies almost the whole remainder of the book, Media, who also claims to be a demi-god and therefore on an equal footing with Taji, tends to become the central character. Besides Taji, who from now on has very little to say or do, his three companions are Mohi, an historian, Babbalanja, a philosopher, and Yoomy, a poet.

What ensues is a series of visits to islands which provide occasions for satire, moralizing, and philosophizing. This part of the book resembles the third book of Gulliver's Travels, except that instead of a solitary wanderer we have a travelling Platonic academy with Media acting as panel moderator and commander-in-chief. Yillah is scarcely mentioned, save for the periodic observation that she is certainly not to be found on this or that particular island (when this comment is made, it implies that there is something particularly reprehensible going on, which would be inimical to the purity and innocence that Yillah seems to represent). Another feature of this part of the romance is the periodic reappearance of the three avenging sons of Aleema, the

priest whom Taji has killed, accompained by a trio of female emissaries from the witch-queen Hautia, who has conceived an unreciprocated passion for Taji.

This routine -- visiting an island, meeting its ruler, observing its customs, having a debate or a digression into Mardian legend or history, or a philosophical disquisition, or a poem from Yoomy, with the three avengers and Hautia's flower-throwing maidens occasionally paddling in and out of the narrative -- breaks abruptly at Chapter CXC. The party has left Babbalanja behind on the island of Serenia, a colony of contemplative, "primitive" Christians, and Taji now elects to follow the sirens to Hautia's island, where he thinks Yillah is to be found. With some difficulty, Taji resists seduction by Hautia, but not before Media leaves to restore rule and justice to Odo, taking Yoomy and Mohi with him. A sample of the stilted prose in which Melville renders this crisis helps explain what Taji does at the novel's end:

> As their last echoes died away down the valley, Hautia glided near, zone unbound, the amaryllis in her hand. Her bosom ebbed and flowed; the motes danced in the beams that darted from her eyes.
> "Come! Let us sin and be merry. Ho! Wine, wine, wine! And Lapfuls of flowers. . . (CXCIV, 539)

In the next and final chapter, Taji sees -- or thinks he sees -- Yillah's drowned body circling in currents that take her out to sea; Hautia seems to claim the credit for eliminating her rival. Taji loses his self-control

here, much as Young Goodman Brown does when Faith's ribbons flutter down to him in the forest. Yoomy and Mohi return with a canoe to paddle him back to Serenia, the island of primitive Christian piety, which has already claimed Babbalanja. As they pass a gap in the reef which separates the world of Mardi from the open sea, Taji seizes the helm from Mohi:

> Of all the stars, only red Arcturus shone. But through the gloom, and on the circumvallating reef, the breakers dashed ghost white.
>
> An outlet in that outer barrier was nigh.
>
> "Ah! Yillah! Yillah! The currents sweep thee oceanward, nor will I tarry behind. Mardi, farewell! Give me the helm, old man!"
>
> "Nay, madman! Serenia is our haven. Through yonder strait, for thee, perdition lies. And from the deep beyond, no voyager e'er puts back."
>
> "And why put back? Is a life of dying worth living o'er again? Let me, then, be the unreturning wanderer. The helm! By Oro, I will steer my own fate, old man. Mardi, farewell!"
>
> "Nay, Taji; commit not the last, last crime!" cried Yoomy.
>
> "He's seized the helm! Eternity is in his eye! Yoomy, for our lives we must now swim."
>
> And plunging, they struck out for land, Yoomy buoying Mohi up and the salt waves dashing the tears from his pallid face as through the scud he turned it on me mournfully.
>
> "Now I am my own soul's emperor, and my first act is abdication! Hail, realm of shades!" And turning my prow into the racing tide, which seized me like a hand omnipotent, I darted through.
>
> Churned in foam, that outer ocean lashed the clouds, and straight in my white wake headlong dashed a shallop, three fixed specters leaning o'er its prow, three arrows poising.
>
> And thus, pursuers and pursued flew on over an endless sea. (CXCV, 543)

It is difficult to be sure what this conclusion means. Henry Popkin says that Taji is "surely seeking

death by drowning"[4]; Richard Chase speaks of "the flight of the hero to undiscovered realms."[5] Neither of these explanations is entirely satisfactory, although the second one is more attractive and more in agreement with the spirit of the book. In the first place, the "last, last crime" to which Yoomy refers might not be mere suicide, but the assumption of self-sufficiency implied in Taji's determination to "steer his own fate". His quest for Yillah has to some degree already prefigured Ahab's much more diabolical quest in Moby-Dick; Taji's sudden resumption of independence here looks forward to the colossal cosmic impudence of Ahab, who smashes his quadrant rather than navigate by the sun, which is physically, at least, above him (CXVII, 492-3). Secondly, steering for the open sea may seem like a "flight . . . to undiscovered realms" to a Mardian, but we have to remember that this outer world is Taji's home; he himself has deserted a ship (named the Arcturion) in order to avoid being carried on a voyage he had bargained for, as Yoomy and Mohi do now when they jump overboard. It might be objected here that the fact that the Arcturion was never heard of again after Jarl and Taji had deserted her, bodes ill for Taji. Possibly Melville is instead hinting that it is a mistake for those who elect to stay behind to assume the extinction of those they never see again;

they have forfeited the right to such knowledge by a decision to restrict the range of their experience. There may be confirmation of this idea in the last sentences of the book, where Melville has Taji mention that "of all the stars, only red Arcturus shone".[6] In Moby-Dick, he has Ishmael express scorn for "playing it safe" intellectually, in a metaphor which, like Taji's action, involves steering a vessel for the open sea: ". . . all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effect of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore" (XXIII, 105).

Although there is an analogy between Taji's desertion and that of Yoomy and Mohi, it must not be pressed too far. The lagoon into which the Mardians leap is cicumscribed by a ring of islands, and the life they seek on Serenia is pious and rooted. Their "baptism" is a critical event only in that it defines what they are, and dramatically separates them from Taji. Taji, on the other hand, had deserted the Arcturion for a chartless voyage on the open sea, to escape from boredom into a world which would offer new challenges. His steering for the open water beyond the reef dramatizes that restless and often ruthless individualism which is part of his heritage as an American, that incapacity to be satisfied which Melville later depicts in the Nantucket whalemen, and which is latent in the phrase, "the pursuit

of happiness".

The "abdication of the soul's emperor" is no doubt an attempt to relate Taji's flight with the concerns of the central portion of the book, which, other than the tedious allegory of Hautia and Yillah, deal mainly with the critical examination of various forms of government and religion. As a result of their experiences on the islands, and their dialogues, Taji's four Mardian companions have come to learn what they want: Media returns to Odo a better king, in contrast to Taji's "abdication", and Mohi, Babbalanja, and Yoomy retire to Serenia, in contrast to Taji's apparent readiness to forfeit his soul. Having denied himself the relief from temporal cares that Serenia would have provided, Taji is committed, even though he passes the reef, to carry with him the entanglements of guilt and punishment that have dogged his relationship with Yillah.

Yillah is the passive object of a forceful removal from one vessel to another; in this way she is more like Billy Budd than Captain Delano. Like both of them, though, she seems to undergo no radical internal change in the transfer, although she is, indeed, given hardly any character at all. After her rescue, her situation changes only superficially. Both Aleema the priest and Taji acquire her through killing, and both delude her and keep her in seclusion for their own purposes. Milton R. Stern

attempts to find significance in Yillah's story of how she owes her white skin and fair hair to immersion in "the waters of Oroolia" (XLIII, 125), the sacred island where Aleema had held her captive. Stern says that this "baptism" is "clearly . . . a removal of humanity, or, more accurately, earthliness."[7] I feel that we cannot take the tale so seriously, since it is part of the "cover story" with which Aleema has reconciled Yillah to her position. Concerning her origins, we do know that she recognizes -- though does not understand -- English (XLIII; 124-5; XLIX, 137), and that she was taken as a baby from a ship after all the other whites, including her mother, had been massacred (this is the testimony of Aleema's sons, C, 137). Taji suspects his own motives for rescuing her, and admits that they "had been covered with a gracious pretense, concealing myself from myself. But I beat down the thought" (XLIV, 177). He does not learn until after her disappearance that she was a white captive, and his reaction to this news suggests that he might otherwise have treated her less like a prize captured in a naval engagement: "Oh, Yillah! Too late, too late have I learned what thou art!" (C, 261). When Hautia finally reveals what has happened to her, in language suggestive of Ariel's song in The Tempest ("Full fathom five . . ."), she implies that Yillah has undergone a sea-change: ". . . she lies too deep to answer; stranger voices than thine she hears; bubbles are bursting

round her" (CXCV, 541).

The imagery of Yillah's death in the whirlpool is certainly rich enough for development into a pattern of rebirth of regeneration like that of White Jacket or Ishmael, but Melville simply does not bother to breathe life back into the "blonde and bloodless Yillah", as Newton Arvin calls her.[8]

One can see more clearly why Yillah is so "bloodless" if we measure her against those characters in Melville's fiction who experience some sort of growth. She undergoes none at all; Taji's Mardian companions undergo a great deal as a result of their travels, and so are more interesting. Even they, however, choose to truncate their development, at least from Taji's point of view, and that is why he must leave them behind. Ultimately, Serenia is like Swift's Houyhnhnmland with somewhat more emphasis on love and metaphysics. Serenia is anti-Romantic; it requires quiescence, as we learn from Babbalanja's dream in Chapter CLXXXVIII, and emphasizes "right reason" (CLXXXVII, 523). Taji persists in his romanticism at the end of the tale; for the Romantic there is no permanent rest,[9] and life is a series of struggles which make growth possible. At the beginning of the book, Taji explicitly articulates this doctrine when he explains why the men of the Arcturion are inadequate as companions:

> Under other and livelier auspices, the tarry knaves might have developed qualities more attractive. Had we sprung a leak, been "stove" by a whale, or been blessed with some despot of a captain, against whom to stir up some spirited revolt, these shipmates of mine might have proved limber lads and men of mettle. But as it was, there was naught to strike fire from their steel. (I, 17)

It is significant that two of these three hypothetical crises involve the danger of being overwhelmed by the sea. Hawthorne remarks that Mardi has "depths . . . that compel a man to swim for his life."[10]

I propose these possibilities without claiming that Melville has successfully resolved the tangle of plots and themes into which the romance has proliferated. The concluding chapter is still an eleventh-hour attempt to end the book honourably, and in the context of Melville's literary career, suggests a repudiation of allegorical wanderings in an imaginary world for the realism of the two books that followed, Redburn (1849) and White Jacket (1850).

NOTES

[1] It would be a shame not to remark in passing what a fine piece of prose this opening passage is. One might be inclined to identify its style as euphuistic, but it seems to me much closer, with its vigorous accentual stresses and alliterations, to a passage of Anglo-Saxon sea poetry. It also compares favourably with the opening lines of Pound's Cantos. Chapter 8, "They Push Off, Velis et Remis", is another example of exquisite prose narrative, well qualified for a place in an anthology of models for creative writing. From it I took the refrain, "Man overboard!", for a title-caption. Daggoo raises the same cry when Tashtego falls into the whale's head in Moby Dick (LXXVIII, 339).

[2] Jean Jacques Mayoux, Melville (New York and London: Evergreen Books, 1960), p. 42.

[3] The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957), p. 95.

[4] In his "Afterword" to Mardi, p. 552. Tyrus Hillway has also assumed that "abdication" meant "suicide", according to Stern, who cites Hillway's article "Taji's Abdication in Herman Melville's Mardi, AL, XVI (1944), 204-07; see The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville, p. 137 n.

[5] In his Introduction to Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1962), p. 8. In a more elaborate statement of essentially the same interpretation, James Baird sees Taji's action as the expression of a turning point in Melville's writing. In the persona of Taji, says Baird, Melville is steering a new course for symbolism. See Ishmael, p. 84.

[6] Several passages earlier in the book indicate that Melville was playing with the idea of extending the range of the voyages in Mardi to the exploration of space, perhaps in an allegorical way. In Ch. 3, for example, Taji says that after death we "give ear to the voyagers who have circumnavigated the ecliptic; who rounded the Polar Star as Cape Horn." (p. 24). Later he looks into the night sky: "From earth to heaven! . . . Wondrous worlds on worlds!" (Ch. 58, p. 158). Babbalanja's recitation from Bardianna in Ch. 175 provides further examples: "Who in Arcturus hath heard of us?" (p. 475); "We must go and obtain a glimpse of what we are from the belts of Jupiter and the moons of Saturn, ere we see ourselves

aright." (p. 477). In a rhapsodic trance in Ch. 184 he has a vision of life on other worlds, and says "Ho! Let's voyage to Aldebaran." (p. 512). Queequeg's people believed that the skies were continuous with the sea, and that their dead floated to "starry archipelagoes" in their funerary canoes. See Moby Dick, CX, 473.

[7] Fine Hammered Steel, p. 111.

[8] Herman Melville, p. 95.

[9] Cp. Byron's letter to Thomas Moore, 3 Aug 1814: "Lord, Lord, if these home-keeping minstrels had crossed your Atlantic or my Mediterranean, and tasted a little open boating in a white squall -- or a gale in "the Gut" -- or the "Bay of Biscay", with no gale at all -- how it would enliven and introduce them to a few of the sensations!"

[10] Quoted by Arvin in Herman Melville, pp. 122-23.

III

REDBURN AND WHITE JACKET

1. Redburn

Although the third of Melville's novels in order of composition, Redburn chronicles the introduction of Melville's "young man as Ishmael" to the "man-of-war world".[1] Unlike the preceding novels, Redburn's hero sees the East, the Old World, as the exotic land of promise; with the exception of Clarel, he is the only Ishmaelean hero to regard Europe in this way, and he is soon disillusioned.

Redburn's motives for going to sea are rather like those which Ishmael is to describe later, except that there is more of the boyish, romantic daydream about them. The son of an impoverished patrician family, it is plain that he knows little of the world outside his household except by way of souvenirs brought home by his father, and memories of his father's experiences abroad, which he has almost transmuted into a private mythology. The souvenirs include a French painting of a harpooned whale chased by whaleboats, and a glass ship named La Reine, whose glass figurehead falls under the bows on the day he goes to sea (I, 8)[2].

Redburn leaves American in a mood of misanthropic resentment:

> . . . there is no misanthrope like a boy disappointed; and such was I, with the warm soul flogged out of me by adversity. (II, 8-9)

From the effects of poverty on his family he has already learned that he lives in a "hard-hearted world" (II,8); but his education into the nature if its hard-heartedness really begins when he embarks on the steamer for New York. He almost hates the "stony-eyed and heartless" passengers, finds that the fare has suddenly been doubled ("owing to the other boats not running"), and finally points his fowling-piece at a passenger in his annoyance at the insolent stares he is receiving (II, 10-12). His introduction to that vicious mainstay of capitalism, the "law" of supply and demand, is supplemented in New York by the pawnbrokers, who fleece him when he pawns his fowling-piece. Redburn sees the pawnbroker's counter in terms of aquatic predation; it is "like a great seine, that caught every variety of fish." (IV, 19) Ultimately, of course, Captain Riga and the crimps of Liverpool, among others, provide even more shocking examples of human venality. Redburn is ultimately to perceive that the natural predation in the sea is less horrible than that which human beings practise on each other. In Liverpool, he realizes, "poor Jack finds more sharks than at sea" (XL, 188-89). On the return voyage, he observes the

panic among the steerage passengers when an epidemic breaks out. "Certainly," he says, "the bottomless profound of the sea, over which we were sailing, concealed nothing more frightful." (XVIII, 276)

Once at sea aboard the Highlander, Redburn has to accommodate himself to a world completely unfamiliar to him. Almost immediately, as if to confirm that he has entered a new order, the first mate jokes about baptizing him anew, and renames him "Buttons" (VI, 26). His landsman's wardrobe is worse than inappropriate at sea; the ill fit of his boots nearly costs him his life (XV, 71). His pathetic attempts to ingratiate himself with the Captain, the second mate, and some other sailors, all meet with rude rejections. The diseased and diabolic sailor Jackson gratuitously promises to toss him overboard at the first opportunity (X, 49). Redburn's attitude toward his shipmates is what it was toward his fellow passengers on the steamboat: "I loathed, detested and hated them" (X, 50).

In Redburn the sea is most frequently connected with human suffering, though more often as its antidote or shroud than as its cause. Redburn tosses his last penny into it before boarding the Highlander, an eloquent gesture signifying what he is doing with himself, and prefiguring the fate of Harry Bolton, who subsequently succumbs to

"the insanity of throwing himself away in a whaler" (LXII, 300) and ends up in an "ocean grave" (L, 243). At the start of the Highlander's voyage a sailor who has been brought aboard drunk comes to, and, in a delirium, throws himself overboard. At the beginning of the return voyage, as the book presents increasingly more appalling scenes of human depravity and suffering, it is discovered that a sailor presumed to be sleeping it off in his bunk has actually been brought aboard dead. The sailors are horrified when "two threads of greenish fire, like a forked tongue, darted out between the lips; and. . . the cadaverous face was crawled over by a swarm of wormlike flames" (XLVIII, 336). Jackson comments that he has "gone to the harbour where they never weigh anchor" (XLVIII, 237). The body is thrown into the sea without the usual refinement of a weighted canvas bag. Jackson himself provides the final horror of the voyage by coughing his life's blood onto the sail he is reefing before dropping into the sea. By this time many of the passengers have gone the same way, victims of the epidemic. In one case, a man is buried just as his child is born, so that the infant's first cry "was almost simultaneous with the splash of its father's body into the sea" (LVIII, 278).

Ashore, as afloat, the sea is mostly associated with death and suffering. Redburn deals with his experience of Liverpool in chapter upon chapter of human beings preying and being preyed upon. As a port for sailors it

is a menance:

> . . . Liverpool, perhaps, most abounds in all the variety of land-sharks, land-rats, and other vermin, which make the hapless mariners their prey. In the shape of landlords, bar-keepers, clothiers, crimps, and boarding-house loungers, the land-sharks devour him, limb by limb; while the land-rats and mice constantly nibble at his purse. (XXIX, 131)

As a home, for many of its citizens, at least, it is an earthly hell that vies with the London of Wordsworth's Prelude (Bk. VII). Redburn sees one man apparently bent on drowning himself to escape the torment of having a family and being destitute (XLI, 194); there are even people who find such calamities merchantable--those who live by recovering drowned corpses and claiming the bounty on them (XXXVI, 172-73). In passing the beggars along the dock walls, Redburn would

> . . . offer up a prayer, that some angel might descend, and turn the waters of the docks into an elixir, that would heal all their woes, and make them, man and woman, healthy and whole as their ancestors, Adam and Eve, in the garden. (XXXVIII, 182)

This imagined use of sea-water as a healer echoes the prayer of the Vedic priest quoted by Eliade: "May the waters bring us well being! . . . The waters are indeed healers; the waters drive away and cure all illnesses!"[3] One could see an ironic twist to this view of water as a healer in Redburn, in the numerous examples of those who seek to cure their troubles by drowning themselves, like

the man in Liverpool, or by throwing their lives away at sea, like Harry Bolton. On the other hand, Redburn himself experiences an effect which enables him, though briefly, to feel an alternative to the sullen misanthropy he had felt when he boarded the Highlander. An elation at the way the ship responds to the wind in her stunsails leads to a response like Wordsworth's "correspondent breeze" in The Prelude:[4]

> . . . 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 centre 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! (XIII, 64)

Though not as dramatic (or convincing) as the redemption of Ishmael's "wolfish world" in Moby Dick[5]--for one thing, it is short-lived, and for another, it has no social dimensions--this illumination of Redburn's is comparable to it. It is the first notable appearance of the sea as a creative force, fertilizing the mind, contributing to the growth of consciousness, although at the same time threatening to overwhelm it completely,

as Ishmael is to warn in "The Mast-Head" chpater of Moby Dick.

Several of Melville's sea stories end with the narrator's rescue; Ishmael is picked up by the Rachel, Tom of Typee by the Julia's whaleboat, White Jacket by a cutter from the Neversink. Redburn needs no physical rescue at the end of his novel, but there is an echo of the idea in his closing words:

> But yet, I, Wellingborough Redburn, chance to survive, after having passed through far more perilous scenes than any narrated in this, My First Voyage--which here I end. (LXII, 301)

He is not here referring specifically to the crises he has survived in Redburn, but contrasting his survival with Harry Bolton's death between a whale carcass and a ship's side in a later voyage. Although he attributes this survival to chance, we may speculate that some development in Redburn's character has also played its part in preserving him. We will touch on this idea again in White Jacket and rather fully in Moby Dick. Here, it is only necessary to note that, in a way, Redburn is meeting, in Harry Bolton, an earlier version of himself, the Redburn who first boarded the Highlander in New York. Like Harry, he had been a proud, self-pitying, aristocratic boy. Harry's surface sophistication is a superficial difference. The real difference between the boys is indicated in a remark of Redburn's during his

consideration of the way various characters responded to the threat of the epidemic: ". . . in every being's ideas of death, and in his behaviour when it suddenly menaces him, lies the best index to his life and faith" (LVIII, 280). Harry, who is too frightened to climb the rigging, is a physical coward (L, 243-49). His nature is precisely complementary to that of Queequeg in Moby Dick, who is physically fearless but lacking in cultivation, or what one of Redburn's shipmates calls "snivelization" (XXI, 96). Redburn, on the other hand, has already begun to grow in the direction of Ishmael, who, as we shall see, manages to remain physically in possession of himself, without jettisoning his intellectual and cultural interests. He learns "to hop about in the rigging like a St. Jago's monkey" (XXIV, 108), but is also developing the imaginative capacities which reach fruition in Ishmael.

2. White Jacket

In White Jacket, Melville's interest in factual detail is raised to a higher power than in any of his other books. I do not agree with Newton Arvin that

> The current of personal narrative is simply not full enough or strong enough to buoy up and float along the solid and sometimes rather lumpish blocks of straight exposition and description . . . [6]

To correct this impression we need to perceive that its documentariness places White Jacket in a genre almost by itself. It may have something of the novel, the documentary, and the voyage narrative about it, but more essentially it is a book of hours. The only other modern work I know of that belongs in this category is James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.[7] What Agee does for the tenant farmer and sharecropper in that work, Melville does for the naval seaman in this one. He gives us the feel of the daily, weekly, and yearly life of a rather specialized class of proletarians, while continually drawing our attention to the contradiction between official human rank and authentic human dignity, between the Captain Clarets and the Jack Chases of this man-of-war world.

In several ways White Jacket is an extension and elaboration of Redburn. Both organize their action around the voyage of an American ship; both are narrated by neophytes--Redburn a green hand on a merchant vessel, White Jacket a newcomer to naval life. Both narrators begin by introducing a jacket which serves to set them apart from their shipmates, though the hunting jacket given to Redburn by his brother is less important than the "grego" which gives White Jacket its title, and which the hero makes for himself. Both sailors are made to feel like pariahs. Redburn finds himself "a sort of

Ishmael in the ship" (XII, 60) and White Jacket, though less of an outcast socially, is expelled from his first mess because of his distinctive garb, and comes in for an undue amount of attention from the officers (XV, 70-71; XXIX, 123-24). Both Redburn and White Jacket express a terror of falling into the sea; for White Jacket, as we have seen, the fear becomes a reality.

Life aboard the Neversink is infinitely worse than that on the Highlander. "In truth," says White Jacket, "a man-of-war is a city afloat" (XVIII, 82), and the Neversink is more like Redburn's Liverpool, where men will drown themselves to escape. In fact, this is precisely what life on men-of-war, "familiarly known among sailors as 'Floating Hells'" (XC, 354), drives men to:

> . . . some repentant sailors have actually jumped into the sea to escape their fate, or set themselves on the wide ocean on the gratings, without compass or rudder.
> (XC, 354)

One man who attempts to take an unauthorized "liberty" in Rio de Janeiro is shot while attempting to swim from the ship, and dies after an unnecessary amputation by the Neversink's depraved surgeon Cuticle (LX, LXI, 236-41). Here the sea's role is that of liberator; even if "liberty" means death, it is, for some preferable to the tyranny of the Neversink.

White Jacket is almost driven to this extremity at one point. He is accused of neglecting a duty of which he has never been informed, and Captain Claret orders him flogged. White Jacket determines that rather than submit to a flogging he will push Claret overboard and die with him in the sea.

> I meant to drag Captain Claret from this earthly tribunal of his to that of Jehovah, and let Him decide between us. No other way could I escape the scourge. (LXVII, 269)

Luckily, the corporal of marines and Jack Chase intervene as character witnesses to prevent the flogging, thereby saving White Jacket from becoming a murderer (this incident may be compared with Moby Dick's intervention in the feud between Radney and Steelkilt in "The Town-Ho's Story", which saves Steelkilt from becoming Radney's murderer). In this incident the sea was somehow expected to dissolve the forms of earthly "justice" and re-open the case for appeal to a higher court.

There is a less dramatic illustration of this principle in the death of Bungs, the cooper, who is responsible for maintaning the lifebuoys. A sheet-anchor man warns Bungs that they are leaking, and asks:

> ". . . Suppose you yourself should fall overboard, and find yourself going down with buoys under you of your own making--what then?"
> "I never go aloft, and don't intend to fall overboard," replied Bungs. (XVII, 80)

The next morning the sea swallows Bungs and his lifebuoys

in fulfilment of the sheet-anchor man's prophecy. In terms of a symbol we will be considering in the chapter on Moby Dick, Bungs has ignored the principle inherent in the monkey-rope, that human beings are responsible for each other, and the sea has judged and punished him for it.

Finally, it is in the sea that White Jacket cuts himself out of his old identity. The visual image of the white cloth of his jacket sinking under the weight of the harpoons suggests a naval sea burial, in which a man is sewn into his hammock or a piece of canvas to make a white bundle, which is weighted to make it sink (LXXX, LXXXI). Earlier in the book one of White Jacket's messmates blames him for the three casualties that have occurred in their mess:

> ". . . Damn you, you Jonah! I don't see how you can sleep in your hammock, knowing as you do that by making an odd number in the mess you have been the death of one poor fellow, and ruined Baldy for life, and here's poor Shenly keeled up. Blast you, and your jacket, say I." (LXXVIII, 315)

At the end of this chapter the hero apostrophizes: "Jacket! jacket! thou hast much to answer for, jacket!" (LXXVIII, 317). All three casualties have involved a drop or fall. Baldy has fallen from the rigging to the deck and seriously injured himself, Shenly has been buried at sea after dying of some disease, and the other dead man is the one who has attempted to escape

the Neversink by dropping into the sea and swimming for it.

In some way, it is as though White Jacket's fear of falling--as yet unrealized--is connected with the jacket itself, and also with a burden of guilt which increases as others fall. One possible explanation for this guilt is a phenomenon exemplified in Moby Dick: the relief of the sailors when one of their shipmates is lost in a fall from the masthead after a bad omen (CXXVI, 516). The reasoning seems to be that there is a finite amount of bad luck in the world, so that other people's misfortunes increase one's own safety. I have been told that men still experience this feeling during wartime ("there's one less chance of my appearing on the casualty list"). Whatever its precise nature, we are meant to sense a connection between the jacket, the fear of falling, and these other accidents, and it is not until White Jacket himself experiences a fall that he is able to get rid of the jacket. Before this happens, he attempts to get it sold in an auction, then considers "rolling a forty-two-pound shot in it and committing it to the deep" (XLVII, 199), but gives up that idea because it makes him imagine his own death:

> If I sink my jacket, thought I, it will be sure to spread itself into a bed at the bottom of the sea, upon which I shall sooner or later recline, a dead man. So, unable to conjure it into the possession of another, and withheld from burying it out of sight forever, my jacket stuck to me like the fatal shirt on Nessus. (XLVII, 199)[8]

Newton Arvin interprets the jacket as the hero's "mere uniqueness and differentness mere protective-unprotective self-assertion."[9] This is fair enough as far as White Jacket's social existence is concerned; his jacket is both the cause and the symbol of his isolation from other men, as Redburn's jacket was for him. But the phrase about self-assertion is misleading, since the jacket is connected in several instances with self-annihilation. At one point he is almost killed by some shipmates who mistake him in his white jacket for the ghost of Bungs, the dead cooper (XIX, 84-85). Later, when he imagines himself to be dying with the sinking of the jacket, he is seeing it as a kind of shroud. Yet he goes on wearing it.

We might also regard this reverie as an indication that the jacket is the image of an obsession, or perhaps something relied upon in an infantile way, like the blanket carried by Linus in the Peanuts cartoons. In any case, it is something he needs to be rid of, if his real self is to survive. We should notice that it is White Jacket's mistaken reliance on the jacket that causes him to fall from the yardarm (XCII, 369).[10] Deep under the sea's surface, he has given in to the idea of death, and is still wearing the jacket. Something alive brushes past him, and he feels "the strong shunning of death"; then

"The life-and-death poise" passes, he ascends, and cuts himself out of the jacket.

If the jacket represents self-assertion, it is of the infantile kind that is suicide in the adult world. There is a plain enough illustration of this in White Jacket's determination to kill himself and Claret rather than be flogged. The impulse is understandable, but puerile, like a self-assertive rebellion against a father-figure. Billy Budd's response to Claggart's accusation is a comparable gesture. In the adult world, of course, the alternatives to it are social revolution and reform. White Jacket, as Melville's advocate, does have some success in the latter course, if we are to believe, as an American admiral has claimed, that this book had "more influence in abolishing corporal punishment in the Navy than anything else."[11] As White Jacket expresses it, it is as though he is ripping open himself (XCII, 371), assisting at the birth of a new self which turns away from the mainly solipsistic, personal emphasis of Melville's early narrator-heroes to the more fully developed historical and social consciousness of Ishmael and the narrators of Israel Potter, The Confidence Man and Billy Budd.[12]

NOTES

[1]The first phrase is Richard Chase's; see Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York: MacMillan, 1949), p. 3; the second is Melville's; see White Jacket, passim.

[2]The hunted whale is also mentioned in the first paragraph of Mardi (I, 15).

[3]Quoted above, p. 2.

[4]Book I, ll. 33-42 (1850 edition).

[5]Ch. X, p. 50. Ishmael's "redemption" is discussed at some length in Chapter IV below.

[6]Herman Melville, pp. 110-11.

[7]James Agee and Walker Evans, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966). Of the book Agee says--and Melville might well have said the same of White Jacket--

> Ultimately, it is intended that this record and analysis be exhaustive, with no detail, however trivial it may seem, left untouched, no relevancy avoided, which lies within the power of remembrance to maintain, of the intelligence to perceive, and of the spirit to persist in. (p. xiv)

[8]The essential connections in this simile are that the shirt killed its wearer and was associated with blood-guilt. It is not too important that Nessus was the centaur Herakles killed, and that it was Herakles for whom the shirt was fatal.

[9]Herman Melville, p. 114.

[10]This passage was quoted at some length above; see pp. 2-3.

[11]Quoted by Plomer in his introduction to the Grove Press edition, p. vii.

[12]This tendency can be traced in the gradual disappearance of the fictive "I" from Typee to Billy Budd. In White Jacket the narrator frequently refers to himself in the third person, and in Moby Dick Ishmael frequently drops out of sight--particularly when Ahab is present and in the "dramatic" chapters, which need no narrator. After Moby Dick all the longer fiction works lack a first-person narrator.

IV

MOBY DICK

1

In a writer who makes great symbolic use of the sea and of the ships that sail it as images of the world, or microcosms, it is obvious that the act of embarking or disembarking is actually more important than one's mere presence on a boat. In Moby-Dick one has only to think of Ishmael's exploration of his own motives for going to sea in Chapter I, the smuggling aboard of Fedallah and Ahab's boat crew, or the leapings and fallings overboard of Queequeg, Tashtego, Pip, Ahab, and eventually Ishmael himself. Many of the other important motifs in the book relate to this one. The monkey-rope prevents a man from slipping into the water unattended, and incidentally affirms, symbolically, the necessity for human ties. Pip's madness results from his being left to float by himself in the Pacific, which "had jeeringly kept his finite body up but drowned the infinite of his soul" in the terror of being isolated from human society, as well as seeing "God's foot on the treadle of the Loom" (XCIII, 411). The coffin upon which Ishmael floats at the end of the book, after being tossed out of Ahab's whaleboat, bears the image of Queequeg who, with his

generosity, had already begun to rehabilitate Ishmael spiritually and socially--"No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it" (X, 50).

On a larger scale, Ishmael's embarkation is the foundation of the whole book; it makes the subsequent narrative through Ishmael's memory possible, of course; but more importantly it initiates that process in Ishmael's own consciousness which is to save him from the deadly sense of alienation he expresses in the opening chapter, and from the catastrophe which overtakes everyone else at the end and leaves him with the burden of reporting what happened, like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine thoroughly what it is that Ishmael learns, and why it saves him. I would begin by asserting that it is everything that passes through his mind--the lessons on human fellowship he learns from Queequeg, the deceptiveness of appearances which he learns from the giant squid, the sense of reverence for nature and the ability to empathize which he learns from his contemplations on the whale, and so on. This study of Moby Dick will concentrate on those aspects of Ishmael's education which have to do with going to, or into, or out of the sea.

Ishmael's opening paragraph recalls the state of mind which initially prompted his going whaling, a

spiritual malaise which he describes as "a damp drizzly November in my soul", and whose symptoms include an obsession with death and an aggressiveness towards other human beings.

> . . . I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and. . . it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off. . . (I, 1)

His remedy for this state, he says, is "to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball." This strongly implies that for Ishmael, going to sea is a way of responding to the death-wish without actually committing suicide.[1]

He goes on to suggest that his own feeling for the sea is an instinct shared by "almost all men in their degree", and points to the crowds of landlubbers who are drawn to the waterside whenever they are free of being "pent up in lath and plaster". There is a desperation about this instinct, for these people "must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling in". The drive does not even need to be conscious, because a man absent-mindedly walking in the country ". . . will infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in all that region" (I, 2). At the end of this little dissertation he introduces an image which gathers up the examples he has given and establishes one of the most important themes in the book:

> . . . that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, wild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life: and this is the key to it all. (I,3)

Daniel Hoffman remarks, "That key slides surely but slowly into the lock upon the mystery of the universe".[2] This is an overstatement; the Narcissus image does not solve anything, though it does present paradigmatically a problem which is of central concern in the book. Teilhard de Chardin formulates this problem succinctly in a remark which, though specifically about scientific method, applies to epistemology generally:

> . . . when they reach the end of their analyses they cannot tell with any certainty whether the structure they have reached is the essence of the matter they are studying, or the reflection of their own thought. And. . . as the result of their discoveries, they are caught body and soul to the network of relationships they thought to cast upon things from outside: in fact they are caught in their own net. . . . . Object and subject marry and mutually transform each other in the act of knowledge; and from now on man willy-nilly finds his own image stamped on all he looks at.[3]

The problems Ishmael introduces in "Loomings", then, resolve into two main perplexities: the relation of the self to other selves, or man in society, and the relation of perceiver to the world perceived, or man in nature. In Ishmael's case, the first of these problems is overcome initially through his friendship with Queequeg, and then

in the chapter entitled "A Squeeze of the Hand", in which Ishmael suddenly feels relieved of the allegiance which Ahab had extorted from the crew in the Quarter-Deck scene. While squeezing out the lumps of congealed sperm-oil with some other sailors he ". . . felt divinely free from all ill-will, or petulance, or malice, of any sort whatsoever." The significance of the change is mainly social, as Ishmael indicates by his assessment of the experience in retrospect:

> . . . now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity, not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. (XCIV, 413)

This facet of Ishmael's growth is only indirectly linked with the sea and immersion imagery, but the connection is there. The sea is the whale's element, and ultimately supplies the sperm oil. There is also an immersion of sorts: Ishmael says, "I washed my hands and my heart . . .", recalling the "splintered heart and maddened hand" of Chapter I, but he also speaks of "bathing in that bath" as though figuratively, at least, he has been totally immersed in the oil. Thus the effect of "squeezing case" on Ishmael's social rehabilitation is clearly discernible; Queequeg's contribution, though probably more profound, is also more complicated.

Until the novel's final moments the immersions involving Queequeg are, for Ishmael, merely revelations or dramatizations of literal and symbolic truths. Unlike the squeezing of the congealed sperm oil, Ishmael absorbs lessons from Queequeg's immersions without becoming directly involved in them. With the final immersion, of course, in which Queequeg plays an important though indirect role, Ishmael is no longer merely a spectator. While deferring consideration of Ishmael's survival until later, I want to discuss here the ways in which two adventures of Queequeg's that involve immersion help us to understand his function in the novel.

When Ishmael first meets him, Queequeg is not yet ready to return to Kokovoko, where a throne awaits him, because he fears his life among the Christians has "unfitted him for ascending the pure and undefiled throne of thirty pagan Kings before him" (XII, 56). He will not return, he says, until he feels baptized again. It seems reasonable to speculate that Queequeg expects his baptism to have something to do with going to sea, since that is what he plans to do before returning to Kokovoko.[4]

In the first incident, Queequeg and Ishmael are sailing to Nantucket on the schooner Moss. Because the captain is too busy reviling Queequeg for attacking another passenger, the boom goes out of control and sweeps back and forth over the decks. Amidst the impotent panic of the

others, Queequeg secures it and leaps overboard to save the passenger who had previously provoked him.

Queequeg seems to undergo no intrinsic change as a result of this immersion, but the other people aboard the Moss now regard him differently. "All hands voted Queequeg a noble trump; the captain begged his pardon", and Ishmael says "From that hour I clove to Queequeg like a barnacle; yea, till poor Queequeg took his last long dive" (XII, 60). After this exploit Queequeg leans against the bulwarks, "mildly eyeing those around him," seeming to say to himself "'It's a mutual, joint-stock world in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians!". He has succeeded in restoring, to the little fragment of human society aboard the Moss, a sense of the importance of human brotherhood which had been grievously lacking before the incident. The crisis also dramatizes openly what has already become apparent to Ishmael privately, that Queequeg is more heroic and ethically more "Christian" than the Christians whose first impulse is to treat him with contempt.

Again to save a life, Queequeg leaps into the sea after a whale's head falls from the tackles with Tashtego, another harpooneer, inside it. As the head sinks, Queequeg cuts it open with a boarding sword and hauls Tashtego out in an explicit parody of parturition. We see no apparent change in either Queequeg or Tashtego; what we do see

plainly is the close association of the ideas of death by water and rebirth from the whale (Jonah saved by the courage of another human being), the whale as potential coffin, hearse and tomb, and the possibility that death can be pleasant ("in the very whitest and daintiest of fragrant spermaceti," LXXVIII, 342). James Baird contends that

> Melville is thinking, of course, of the sacrament of baptism, as the act of Christian initiation into the knowledge of God. For he goes on to say that Tashtego might have perished in that head just as the "many" who have fallen into "Plato's honey head, and sweetly perished there."[5]

Symbolically, says Baird, Queequeg is "freeing Tashtego from an oily death in the inscrutable mysteries of God. . . through pagan indifference to those enigmas which Melville calls at the end of the chapter "the secret inner chamber and sanctum sanctorum".[6] He suggests that it is Ahab who really needs to be delivered from this honey head. From this suggestion we may infer that, for Baird, the necessary antidotes for Ahab's troubles are those qualities which Queequeg exemplifies: selflessness, acceptance of God, acceptance of mortality. Elsewhere Baird refers to Queequeg's indifference to death and says that "What Queequeg has taught Ishmael is freedom from consciousness of self." This, he says, is what saves Ishmael from drowning with the rest. Queequeg is really Ahab's opposite number.[7] In hacking open the whale, it is as though Queequeg were dramatizing the effect which his

virtues have on intricate theological perplexities like theodicy (the one which most troubles Ahab)--they cut through them as Alexander cut through the Gordian knot.

In both these incidents, Queequeg rescues a man from the water. In another, it is Queequeg who saves the Pequod from going under when a whale chained alongside begins to sink (LXXXI, 357). In the Epilogue, Ishmael saves himself on a coffin-lifebuoy which belonged to Queequeg and bore designs transferred from the tattooing on his own body. Operationally defined, then, Queequeg is the lifeguard, he who saves people from being overwhelmed by water. In "The Monkey-Rope" chapter, Ishmael learns one of his most important lessons when he finds himself responsible for keeping Queequeg out of the shark-infested water while he is cutting into a whale. In view of the aspects of his role which I have discussed above, it is most appropriate to have Queequeg at the working end of the Monkey Rope. Physically by far the most self-reliant character in the book, even he needs another human being to look out for him.

It is appropriate that Ishmael learns from Queequeg, his close friend, lessons that are mainly social in emphasis. From the cabin boy Pip, who does not appear to have any special friendship with him, Ishmael gains insights which are ultimately more metaphysical than social in their implications.

At the social level, Pip's immersions show what can happen to an individual when the principle of reciprocal responsibility represented by Queequeg's Monkey Rope is overlooked or broken. Temporarily replacing an oarsman in Stubb's boat, Pip panics, leaps overboard, and becomes entangled in the whale line at the moment the whale to which it is attached makes a run. Tashtego reluctantly cuts the line to save Pip from getting strangled. While realizing the fragility of my logic here, I suggest that the line choking Pip is a kind of monkey-rope, and that when Tashtego cuts it he signifies that the boat's crew no longer acknowledges responsibility for his safety.

When Pip leaps again, under similar circumstances, he is simply abandoned. The boat is quickly towed out of sight by the fleeing whale, and Pip finds himself alone in the empty sea. He is finally picked up by the Pequod, but "from that hour the little negro went about the deck an idiot; such at least they said he was." Ishmael first prepares us for this change in Pip with a commonplace and perfectly acceptable explanation: ". . . the awful lonesomeness is intolerable. The intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity, my God! . . ."(XCIII, 411). We are reminded of Pascal's atheist: "le silence éternal de ces espaces infinis m'effraye."[8] But Ishmael goes on to elaborate this account in a rather mysterious way. We are told that Pip's soul, not his body, was " . . . carried down alive

to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; . . . He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; . . ."(XCII, 411). Pip has acquired "that celestial thought, which, to reason, is absurd and frantic". The burden of his wisdom is only the appearance of madness, for "man's insanity is heaven's sense" (XCIII, 411-12).

Pip's experience has taken him on an imagined descent through space to the origins of the world, to the "primal world" that Ishmael himself visits in an imagined descent through time,

> . . . by a flood, borne back to that wondrous period, ere time itself can be said to have begun; for time began with man. . . . Then the whole world was the whale's; and, king of creation, he left his wake along the present lines of the Andes and the Himmalehs. (CV, 452)

In the depths to which Pip's soul has descended once lay the Vedas, which the Hindu god Vishnu needed as an instruction manual for creating the world; he descended there to retrieve them incarnate in a whale (LXXXII, 360-61).

In myth and in Ishmael's mind, then, whales are intimately connected with the beginnings of the world. To write of them, says Ishmael, is "to have one's hands among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world" (XXXIII, 131). To travel to the bottom of the sea is to travel in time to the earth's "pre-Adamic" beginnings. Charles Olson says that "Melville had a way

of reaching back through time until he got history pushed back so far he turned time into space."[9] That is to say, Melville can treat space and time as though they were interconvertible. In "The Castaway" he is turning space into time. The loom of Pip's vision is surely the "Loom of Time", that allegorical object dealt with in "The Mat-Maker".

Christianity and various forms of idealism have encouraged the comforting belief that space and time were created by a benevolent God just so that humanity would have a theatre in which to act out history. This anthropocentrism is rudely travestied in the image of Pip turning "his crisp, curling black head to the sun, another lonely castaway." This is not Ptolemaic man enjoying a central role in a cosmic drama. It is man the castaway in the middle of silent, infinite space, which, because of its infinity,[10] is capable of any number of orientations or mappings, because it lacks fixed points of reference. Man must create his own meanings in it, if he is to have any meanings at all.[11] It is blank as the whale's forehead, polysemous as the colour white. Time, similarly, is not God's invention, but man's; it exists subjectively, not objectively. "For time", says Ishmael, "began with man". Meaning in time--human history--is therefore man's creation and man's responsibility. It is

this burdensome truth that drives Pip mad.[12] As Eliot's bird warns, "human kind/cannot bear very much reality".[13]

In "A Bower of the Arsacides", Ishmael deliberately seeks out the knowledge that overwhelms Pip. He does it by ritually re-enacting Jonah's descent into the whale or Perseus's entry into the Cretan Labyrinth. Mircea Eliade says that "One goes down into the belly of a giant or a monster in order to learn science or wisdom."[15] Naturally enough, Ishmael refers to his "descent" into the whale-chapel in an immersion metaphor: "Cutting me a green measuring rod, I once more dived within the skeleton" (CII, 446). What does Ishmael learn inside the whale? Before entering, he sees a manifestation of the image which, only a few chapters earlier, had driven Pip crazy (the image is the same, though the context and contents are different):

> . . . the industrious earth beneath was as a weaver's loom, with a gorgeous carpet on it, whereof the ground-vine tendrils formed the warp and the woof, and the living flowers the figures. All the trees, with all their laden branches, all these unceasingly were active. Through the lacings of the leaves, the great sun seemed a flying shuttle weaving the unwearied verdure. (CII, 445)

This is the world before the advent of conscious life, before the beasts, fowls, fishes and men became its tenants; this is the backdrop against which human history has been acted out. Continuing the weaving simile, Ishmael

says that.

> . . . as the ever-verdant warp and woof intermixed and hummed around him, the mighty idler seemed the cunning weaver. . . . (CII, 445).

The mighty idler, the whale, is the artificer, the weaver-god, who "hears no mortal voice". After "diving" into it, Ishmael reports that he "saw no living thing within; naught was there but bones." If the whale is an avatar of God, and has nothing to say to man, in a way that is saying a great deal: so much greater the irony of attempting to draw him out with a hook and slice his flesh into "Bible leaves" (XCV, 416 n.).

Ishmael uses "a green measuring-rod" to take the skeleton's dimensions, and transfers them to a living part of his own person--his right arm. There is a striking contrast between this image and that of Ahab taking an observation of the sun and "mutely reckoning the latitude on the smooth, medallion-shaped tablet, reserved for that daily purpose on the upper part of his ivory leg" (XXXIV, 145). Ahab is writing the position of the sun, the weaver's shuttle, on a lifeless limb in erasable characters, whereas Ishmael is indelibly recording the dimensions of the weaver himself on a living surface. Ahab's measurements are only temporarily an accurate indication of his position on the globe, rather like Redburn's guidebook to Liverpool, which becomes less and less reliable with time (Redburn, XXXI, 150).

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The superimposition of these images--Ahab and his pencil and tablet, Ishmael with his living branch and tattooed arm--is a good point of departure for a closer examination of Ishmael himself. A fruitful way to study him and the growth of his consciousness--for we must not allow ourselves to think of his character as static--is to select significant incidents and compare their effect on Ishmael with that on Ahab. Although the two domains I mentioned earlier are difficult to isolate from each other as they are dealt with in Moby Dick, that of man-in-society has been uppermost in the discussion of Queequeg, while with Pip, man-in-nature becomes more important, even though his perception of cosmic isolation began with a social isolation. In contrasting Ahab with Ishmael, the discussion will trespass into an area which is really phenomenology--an attempt to give objective accounts of subjective phenomena--and it will definitely emphasize the second category, that of man-in-nature.

After the opening chapter, the next major use of "the key to it all", the Narcissus theme, occurs in the chapter entitled "The Mast-Head". Ishmael confesses that whenever he was manning a masthead on the lookout for whales;

> . . . I kept but sorry guard. With the problem of the universe revolving in me, how could I. . .

> but lightly hold my obligations to observe all whale-ships' standing orders, "Keep your weather eye open, and sing out every time." (XXV, 155)

The problem represented here stems from the incompatibility of contemplative and practical activity. Ishmael moves from his specific case to an analysis of the absent-minded youth who takes to whaling because he is "disgusted with the carking cares of earth, and seeking sentiment in tar and blubber". Gazing into the sea from the masthead,

> . . . he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding beautiful thing that eludes him, every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some undiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it. (XXV, 156)

But this temporary separation of body and soul may become permanent if the untenanted body makes a mistake:

> . . . slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps. . . you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever. (XXV, 157)

The sea-gazing Platonist illustrates one extreme for which the third mate, Flask, represents the opposite. Melville takes care to present Flask, the man who is all body and no soul, as an undesirable alternative to the man whose soul is only too ready to assume independence of the body. It is Flask who callously torments the old whale and interprets the doubloon nailed to the masthead

merely as so many cigars (he is so far from "Descartian vortices" that he cannot perform even this simple arithmetic properly). One of Ishmael's concerns, then, is the orchestration of body and mind,[16] the practical and the contemplative. And he does succeed in doing this, later in the book, particularly at the moments when he is experiencing some of his most important perceptions. We have already noted one chapter that bears this out--"A Squeeze of the Hand"--other examples are "The Try-Works" and "The Mat-Maker" chapters. In each of these incidents, Ishmael comes to an important realization while carrying out some practical activity, squeezing case, steering the ship, or weaving a mat with Queequeg. In each of these passages, Ishmael is applying that habit of tying concepts firmaly to percepts which prompts him to accept the testimony of his whaling colleagues "Simeon Macey and Charley Coffin of Nantucket" over the opinion of Linnaeus, in the question of whether or not the whale is a fish (XXXII, 131). For Ishmael, as for Keats, "axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses".[17]

To grasp the full importance of this trait of Ishmael's, it is necessary only to compare it with the corresponding cast of mind in Ahab. One has to be cautious in making such a comparison, for much of what

Ahab says about the relation of perceiver to perceived seems to agree with Ishmael's observations. Both characters frequently gaze into the sea or some other surface, such as the doubloon or the eyes of another man, and report what they find there; both speak of the perplexity of distinguishing what is truly other, or not self, from what is merely a reflection of the perceiver. But despite the fact that both Ishmael and Ahab are frequently presented as embodiments of the myth of Narcissus, we are conscious of a radical difference between them, and it is important to identify what it is. It seems to me that this difference is best exemplified in the way the two characters interpret what they see; let us examine Ahab's epistemology, which is most fully articulated in "The Quarter-Deck". (Incidentally, this chapter is placed directly after "The Mast-Head", as if to make more pointed the contrast between the viewpoints they present.)

In this chapter Ahab reveals that the real purpose of the Pequod's voyage, as far as he is concerned, is the hunting and killing of Moby Dick, the white whale that has crippled him on the previous voyage. He makes impressive use of the tactics of demagoguery to gain the enthusiastic assent of the harpooneers and seamen--including Ishmael, as we learn in the next chapter--but Starbuck, the pious first

mate, demurs. To him, "To be enraged with a dumb thing. . . seems blasphemous" (XXXVI, 161). Ahab's response seems to be intended for Starbuck alone, and to reveal more than he had intended. Starbuck knows him, and must be bullied intellectually, unlike the rest of the crew, for whom greed, pride, or mass hysteria are adequate motive forces.

Ishmael's daydreamer had seen the ocean as an image, the "dimly-discovered" things in it as "embodiments"; Ahab too sees the "visible objects" as illusion, but the imagery he uses is significantly different. ". . . All visible objects. . . are but as pasteboard masks." Behind these masks he imagines not the "deep, blue bottomless soul pervading mankind and nature", but "some unknown but still reasoning thing" that "puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask." Ahab fails to identify what is behind the mask with himself; therefore "That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate" (XXXVI, 161). To him, Moby Dick seems the image of nature's refusal to yield to the human intellect; for that obstinacy he desires not to contemplate Moby Dick, but to kill him.

For Ishmael, knowledge is love; for Ahab it is conquest. We see the same distinction earlier, in the contrast between Ishmael's attachment to Queequeg, which gives rise to growth in his character, and the attachment

of the whaling industry in the persons of Peleg and Bildad, who see him only as a harpooneer whom they can use for profit, and who register him as "Quohog" (XVIII, passim).[18] Ahab embodies the same attitude toward the world, that of the industrialist,[19] only in him it is raised to a fanatical pitch. Proud of his machine-like inflexibility, he refuses to allow anything to change him, and sees love or discovery, identical in Ishmael, as a threat; "Thrusted light is worse than presented pistols" (CVIII, 466).

In view of this contrast between Ahab and Ishmael, one might expect Ishmael's utterances about the sea (and all of nature, by implication) to emphasize its benevolence. This is not at all the case; in fact, although I have not tabulated them, I think that the majority of Ishmael's references to the sea emphasize its malice, terror, or mystery. In "The Try-Works", for example, he calls the ocean "the dark side of the earth" (XCVI, 420), and later, in "The Gilder", he says quite unequivocally that "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" (CXIV, 484). Remarks like these are close in tenor to Ahab's view of the sea as the executioner and abattoir of a universe that is

malevolent and capricious. Ahab articulates this view while musing on the decapitated head of a sperm whale at the end of Chapter LXX:

> ". . . in her murderous hold this frigate earth is ballasted with bones of millions of the drowned; there, in that awful waterland, there was thy most familiar home. . . . Thou saw'st the murdered mate when tossed by pirates from the midnight deck; . . . his murderers still sailed on unharmed--while swift lightnings shivered the neighbouring ship that would have borne a righteous husband to outstretched, longing arms." (LXX, 309)

Ahab is capable of seeing more in the sea than that, as he shows in "The Symphony". On the day before Moby-Dick is first sighted, there is particularly fine weather, in which "The firmaments of air and sea were hardly separable in that all-pervading azure"; the sea and the sky are like a man and woman united--this is one way in which the chapter-title is appropriate--except that the "feminine air" is frequented by birds which are "gentle thoughts", while below it "rushed mighty Leviathans, sword-fish, and sharks; and these were the strong, troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea" (CXXXII, 531-2).

Into this masculine sea Ahab gazes, but sees only "how his own shadow in the water sank and sank to his gaze, the more and the more that he strove to pierce the profundity" (CXXXII, 532), which is the reappearance of the "tormenting" image, the pursuit of which, as

Ishmael points out in Chapter I, destroyed Narcissus. The enchanting air, however, seems "to dispel, for a moment, the cankerous thing in his heart"; Ahab drops a tear into the sea; and confesses to Starbuck "what a forty years' fool--fool--old fool, has old Ahab been!" (CXXXII, 533). Starbuck seizes this remorse for the past as an opportunity to change Ahab's plans for the future, and comes close to succeeding, until Ahab turns the air and the sea into precedents for his own actions:

> . . . By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike. And all the time, lo! that smiling sky, and this unsounded sea! Look! see yon Albicore! who put it into him to chase and fang that flying fish? Where do murderers go, man! Who's to doom, when the judge himself is dragged to the bar? . . . (CXXXII, 535)

The universal law that drives him after Moby-Dick, like that which drives the Albicore, is not subject to human views of right and wrong, to which even "that smiling sky" is indifferent. Without dwelling on the contradiction betweeen this view of himself as "the Fates' lieutenant" (CXXXIV, 555), as he puts it later, and his belief in his unlimited freedom and invincibility expressed elsewhere, the point I want to make here is that Ahab implicitly recognizes the distinction between opposites--hunter and hunted, good and evil--in this passage, yet assumes that Fate, or implicitly God, does not, and

submits himself to them, as he puts it, "against all natural lovings and longings, . . . to do what in my own, proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare" (CXXXII, 535). In other words, as Ahab momentarily realizes, he has sacrificed part of himself, the gentle and loving part, to play, as he thinks, a leading role in a cosmic drama. The repressed side of his personality, which emerges in this passage, also manifests itself momentarily in his dealings with Pip and his farewell to Starbuck, but in each case the ruthless isolato[20] reasserts itself more strongly than ever. In fact, Ahab's dealings with others are characterized by either ruthlessness or sentimentality, but never a balanced mixture of these qualities; as the ship's carpenter remarks, "some sort of Equator cuts yon old man. . . right in his middle" (CXXVII, 519). I have already noted that Ishmael approves of harmonizing contrary qualities; one of his most rhapsodic passages bears on this bifurcation in Ahab, and celebrates the union of strength and grace. He is speaking of the tail of the sperm whale.

> Nor does. . . its amazing strength at all tend to cripple the graceful flexion of its motions. . . . On the contrary, those motions derive their most appalling beauty from it. Real strength never impairs beauty or harmony, but it often bestows it; and in everything imposingly beautiful, strength has much to do with the magic. . . .
>
> Such is the subtle elasticity of the organ I treat of, that. . . its flexions are amazingly marked by exceeding grace. (LXXXVI, 372)

The loss of one of Ahab's "flukes" appropriately symbolizes his imbalance, his lack of grace and harmony. If it is true that a man "finds his own image stamped on all he looks at", then we could hardly expect Ahab to find much harmony in the world.

If Ahab sees any connection between the sea and sky, it is that of murderer to accomplice, whereas for Ishmael they seem united like man and wife, and ". . . it was only the sex, as it were, that distinguished them" (CXXXII, 532). It is the same failing that causes Ahab both to overlook this connection and to forsake his own matrimonial obligations--his inflexibility.[21] Ishmael, on the other hand, has the flexibility both to grow, as I have already argued, and to hold contrary or contradictory ideas simultaneously without excluding either. Appropriately enough, he speaks of his "marriage" to Queequeg, and of the monkey-rope as "a Siamese connection"; such relationships are beneficial, whereas Ahab repudiates them as threatening his ultimate purpose. More to the point, Ishmael can see the virtues he praises in the human world reflected in the ocean as well as spite and evil. This is most impressively brought out in the chapter entitled "The Grand Armada", when in the lagoon formed by concentric rings of circling whales, he sees the values which he will later advocate in "A Squeeze of the Hand".

Queequeg has harpooned a whale which tows their boat into the centre of a huge flock of whales circling in panic at the attacks of the Pequod's crews. Ishmael identifies this centre as ". . . that enchanted calm which they say lurks at the heart of every commotion". While they wait "for a breach in the living wall that hemmed us in," as Ishmael calls it, reminding us of the wall which Ahab identifies with the white whale, young whales

> came snuffling round us, right up to our gunwales, and touching them; till it almost seemed that some spell had suddenly domesticated them. Queequeg patted their foreheads; Starbuck scratched their backs with his lance; but fearful of the consequences, for the time refrained from darting it. (LXXXVII, 384)

Temporarily, at least, the lion is lying down with the lamb (or the wolf with the sheep, to use one of Ishmael's similes for the whales and their hunters), and in this lull they are permitted to see,

> . . . far beneath this wondrous world upon the surface, another and still stranger world. . . . For, suspended in those watery vaults, floated the forms of the nursing mothers of the whales, and those that. . . seemed shortly to become mothers. . . . The young whales seemed looking up towards us, but not at us, as if we were a bit of Gulfweed in their new-born sight. Floating on their sides, the mothers seemed also quietly eyeing us. . . . Some of the subtlest secrets of the seas seemed divulged to us in this enchanged pond. We saw young Leviathan amours in the deep. (LXXXVII, 384-85)

This vision is the antithesis of Ahab's conclusions about

what lies beneath the surface. It is not that Ishmael finds only this felicity in nature, for we have seen that he recognizes her malevolence as well. Unlike Ahab, though, he does not take the part for the whole, and can selectively draw moral conclusions from his observations--as he does in "A Squeeze of the Hand"--without sacrificing the integrity of his vision. To find the values of "the wife, the heart, the bed. . ." which Ishmael endorses after squeezing sperm oil, Ahab had to turn his gaze from the sea to the eyes of Starbuck (CXXXII, 534). What Ishmael sees in the lagoon, on the other hand, is an enactment by whales of the values he later itemizes in "A Squeeze of the Hand". Despite his recognition of "linked analgies" between man and nature (LXX, 309), Ahab fails to apply the principle thoroughly enough, and where Ishmael is intelligently selective about the inferences he draws from nature, Ahab is stubbornly blind. The distinction is rather like that between editing and censoring.

3

The spiralling vortex which sucks "the smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight"(CXXXV, 564) is the last of a host of images which have in common the shape of the rayed circle: the windlass of which Fate is the handspike, the circling whales, the giant squid,

"Quohog's" mark, the compass, the zodiac on the doubloon and the spiral that Moby Dick describes around Ahab's head are examples. Toward the centre of this vortex Ishmael is drawn, and as he says in the Epilogue, is saved only as he reaches it and Queequeg's coffin-lifebuoy bursts up in a bubble. In a way it is as though the lifebuoy is the only part of the Pequod capable of surviving the wreck, for Ishmael survives only by clinging to it.

Why should Ishmael and the coffin by spared? The most grossly pedantic answer is that they together displace more water than they weigh. Liberally interpreted, though, that is the right answer. The coffin is decked out with "hieroglyphic marks" presenting "a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth."[22] These marks have been transcribed from the tattooing on Queequeg's body, and "were therefore destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed" (CX, 476). In the sense of Blake's aphorism that "a cup cannot contain more than its own capaciousness",[23] the coffin, as a metaphor for the whole universe, is simply too large for a mere ocean to swallow.

To put the same idea in different terms, the diagrams on the coffin are both a divine image, in the sense that the physical world is God's body, and a human one, since they are copied from Queequeg's body. They assert an

analogy and proportion between man and creation, both of which Ahab denies, for he does not see himself as linked and subordinate to the whole of creation, nor does he recognize the scale on which he exists in relation to it, since he can infer a malevolent universe from a lost leg. His wish-fulfilling phantasy that he exists on a scale comparable to that of the sun is compounded with the delusion that the universe is committed to justice, at least of the eye-for-an-eye variety. What Ishmael has learned from his visit to the Arsacides, and what Ahab fails to learn from Moby Dick, is that the universe is under no obligation to answer man's demands for knowledge or justice. This is nothing new: God says as much to Job. But, having given recognition to what he supposes a universal law, Ahab even goes on to claim special exemption from it:

> ". . . I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. But not my master, man, is even that fair play. Who's over me? . . ."
> (XXXV, 161-62)[24]

But since man is a microcosm, he cannot wreak vengeance on the cosmos without damaging himself, as both he and Stubb demonstrate without understanding. Ahab attacks Moby Dick with a "six-inch blade" and his own leg is

cut off; Stubb threatens to kick the old man in his dream only to realize that he will injure his foot in doing so.

The punishment for failing to recognize the principle of proportion is so terrible that it is surely wrong to lay too much emphasis on Ishmael's "resurrection" at the end of the tale.[25] It is almost by a technicality that he survives; a philosophical victory, perhaps, but hardly a moral or social one, for Ishmael is again an orphan, deprived even of the Queequeg whose moral and social virtues were insufficient to save him.

4

What of the sea's role at the end of Moby Dick? For an adequate answer we need to review the role it has played as an independent agent before the sinking of the Pequod. We have considered some of the various ways the sea can seem to different characters; we are now concerned with what it actually is and does.

As on all the voyages in Melville's novels, the sea cleans the decks and accepts the dead. A body is dropped overboard from the Delight just before the Pequod meets Moby Dick. It also contributes to the danger of hunting Mody Dick; the first man to mount the mast-head to look out for him is mysteriously "swallowed up in the deep" (CXXVI, 515). A grim sequel to this drowning is the reaction of the crew: . . . in some sort, they were not grieved at this event, at least as a portent; for

they regarded it. . . as the fulfilment of an evil already presaged"(CXXVI, 516). This is a wilful and callous misinterpretation of their shipmate's death, particularly when we compare it with the reaction of the Highlander's crew to the death of Jackson, and it leaves us with less pity for these men at the end. The whaleman's death is one of many warnings to turn back from the hunt for Moby Dick. The deaths of Radney and Macey involve the whale more directly, and also remind us of its role as a moral force which swallows men like Bungs and Jackson.

Radney, the mate of the Town-Ho, like Jackson of the Highlander, is another character whose death is a deliverance. Radney has provoked Steelkilt into striking him, and administered a punitive flogging the captain dared not give. Steelkilt, a kind of "handsome sailor", a roguish version of Jack Chase of the Neversink, is about to murder Radney when someone sights Moby Dick. Boats are lowered; the first one to make fast is Radney's, with Steelkilt as the bowsman. Radney is thrown from the boat onto the whale's back, and while attempting to swim out of the whale's field of vision is seized between his jaws and taken down. We need not worry here about whether the sea or Moby Dick should be credited with removing Radney; in this incident--and I will elaborate on this

point later--the sea and the whale are almost one. As far as Ishmael's assumptions are concerned, the "Descartian vortices" of the "summer sea" in Chapter XXV and the cistern of the sperm whale's head into which Tashtego falls are equivalent in that they both threaten to engulf the "Platonist", the absent-minded man, the man who forgets himself. Though hardly a Platonist, Radney belongs to this general type: he has a habit of dozing while resting himself over the side of the ship, with the sea beneath him, and Steelkilt was about to kill him in this position when Moby Dick intervened (LIV, 254-57). Steelkilt warns Radney, before breaking his jaw, to "look to yourself" (LIV, 246).

Rather like Radney's death is that of Macey, chief mate of the Jeroboam. A crazed Shaker sailor named Gabriel has managed to terrorize the crew into obeying him. He declares that Moby Dick is "no less a being than the Shaker God incarnated" (LXXI, 313), and warns against attacking him. Eventually, when Moby Dick is sighted, Macey ignores the warning and persuades enough sailors to crew his boat and pursue the whale. Like Radney, he gets one iron fast, and while "venting his wild exclamations upon the whale", is catapaulted out of the boat and never seen again (LXXI, 314). Macey, too, has forgotten himself; Ishmael's phrase, "so full of furious life" describes him at the instant he is shot out of the boat, and implies a

kind of ecstasy or madness. We must assume that Gabriel, mad though he may be, is correct in regarding Moby Dick as sacred, taboo,[26] something to be revered; Starbuck begins to imply this in his warning to Ahab ("Blasphemy, man . . ."). Ahab follows Macey in cursing Moby Dick before he dies.[27]

When contemplating the total effect of Moby Dick in one's memory it is hard to think of the whale in isolation from the sea, or to imagine the sea without whales, so thoroughly has Melville woven the two together. The foregoing examples of the sea's role as a moral force exemplify this, as does the sinking of the Pequod. This feeling for the inseparability of sea and whale, which the reader retains long after he has forgotten the analyzable details of the story, is part of the archetypal dimension of meaning which Melville has given the sea. I use the term archetype precisely as M. H. Abrams defines it in A Glossary of Literary Terms:

> . . . a character type or plot pattern or description which recurs frequently in literature and folklore and is thought to evoke profound emotional responses in the reader because it resonates with an image already existing in his unconscious mind.[28]

We have already noticed, while considering Pip's madness, that Melville was quite conscious of what we can now call the archetypal potentialities of whales, and that he connected them with the sea and primordial time.

> To grope down into the bottom of the sea after them; to have one's hands among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world; this is a fearful thing. (XXXII, 130-31)

It is not difficult to find confirmation of Melville's feeling for the connection between the whale, the sea, and primordial time. A few facts are worth mentioning in this connection, not because they prove anything, but because they help to place Melville's symbols in a wider perspective, and to account for the resonances which they evoke in a reader.

The sea is primal water. When men speak of having it in their blood, they are hardly exaggerating, for human blood plasma has almost the same constitution as sea water. So has the amniotic fluid in which we float in the womb before birth. The dolphin, whose name is cognate with δελφ , "womb", was called the "uterine beast" by the Greeks.[29] As Ishmael points out, the dolphin (or porpoise, as he calls it) is actually "the great Sperm Whale himself in miniature" (XXXII, 140). Thales, the earliest Greek philosopher, asserts that everything came of water. Homer calls the sea the "source of all things".[30]

Melville makes much use of Biblical material in Moby Dick. Besides the Jonah story and the Book of Job, the most important Biblical motif in the novel is the

story of the earth's creation in the opening verses of Genesis, and its sequel, the earth's near-destruction by water, in the Flood story. The idea of the sea as "source of all things" is implicit in the cosmogony of Genesis I:

> And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

The "Spirit-Spout", which seems to be connected with Moby Dick--though the connection is never proved conclusively in the novel--is an evocation of the "Spirit of God", a suggestion that the Pequod, like Pip the castaway, has in its voyage through maritime space also gone back in time to the period of the Creation. In the Genesis story, God

> made the firament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament . . .

Then he gathered the waters under the heaven

> . . . unto one place, and let the dry land appear. . . . and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas . . . .

The seas on which the Pequod sails are thus the remnant of primal chaos, held at bay, as it were, by the creative energy of God. To go further, as W. H. Auden puts it:

> The sea in fact, is that state of barbaric vagueness and disorder out of which civilization has emerged and into which unless saved by the effort of gods and men, it is always liable to relapse.[31]

In the Bible, this danger is realized in the Flood, an incident closely connected to the cosmogony of the opening verses because it is an almost exact, though incomplete, reversal of the original Creation-by-separation. The connection between the Creation and the Flood is also important in Moby Dick. Ishmael raises an echo from the second myth in the opening chapter of the book, in concluding his discussion of his reasons for going to sea:

> . . . the great flood-gates of the wonder-world swung open, and in the wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into my inmost soul, endless processions of the whale, and mid most of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air. (I, 6)

The phrase "two and two" seems a deliberate reference to the Noah story:

> There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah.

It may be merely that the phrase was suggested to Melville through an unconscious association with the word "flood", but it is more likely that he intended to end the first and last chapters of his book with an allusion to the Flood. At the book's mid-point, Ishmael warns:

> The first boat we read of, floated on an ocean, that with Portuguese vengeance had whelmed a whole world without leaving so much as a widow. That same ocean rolls now; that same ocean destroyed the wrecked ships of last year. Yea, foolish mortals, Noah's flood is not yet subsided; two thirds of the fair world it yet covers. (LVIII, 272)

At the end of the book, after the vortex created by the sinking Pequod subsides, ". . . then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago" (CXXXV, 565).

The mythical approach adopted in this section yields a more satisfactory answer to the question of Ishmael's survival, which I have attempted to answer using the more cautious, analytic techniques of the previous section. If we see the wreck of the Pequod as in part a transmutation of the Creation and Flood stories of Genesis, with the Spirit-Spout as an avatar of "the Spirit of God", then Ahab's pursuit of the spout is a return to the border separating chaos from creation, the sea from dry land and its inhabitants. That the Pequod crosses the boundary to be swallowed up by the sea is poetically appropriate. Ahab's leg and Stubb's dream have already prepared us to expect that aggression is ultimately directed against its originator. The Pequod has been devoted to killing whales, extracting the parts that are useful, and discarding what is left, that is, uncreating them. Ahab has insisted that Moby Dick has a mentality, and that it is malicious, and Moby Dick finally obliges him by destroying him and his ship. But it is Ahab's own malice which stoves the Pequod.

Ironically, Ahab also insists on his own men being mere appendages to him (CXXXV, 560); they oblige

him by relinquishing their individual volitions to his. That is, with the exception of Ishmael, they have allowed themselves to become less than human before the catastrophe. Moby Dick and the sea merely complete the process of "uncreation" to which the men have already assented, while visiting Ahab's own vindictiveness on himself.

NOTES

[1]This motive is later imputed to Perth in the last two paragraphs of "The Blacksmith" (CXII, 480); there Ishmael elaborates what he has already hinted at in the book's opening paragraph.

[2]Form and Fable in American Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 252.

[3]The Phenomenon of Man, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), p. 32.

[4]Melville appears to have regarded his own "baptism" to have come around the end of his Pacific journey in October, 1844. In a letter to Hawthorne he writes "Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life." See James Baird, Ishmael, p. 92, and Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel, p. 32.

[5]Ishmael, p. 229.

[6]Loc. cit.

[7]Ishmael, pp. 244, 246, 251.

[8]Quoted in Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 14.

[9]Call Me Ishmael: A Study of Melville (New York: Grove Press, 1947), p. 14.

[10]To be more accurate, infinity has no middle. Auden quotes Marianne Moore: "It is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing; But you cannot stand in the middle of this." See The Enchafèd Flood (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 7.

11 Bartleby, who had come to the narrator's law firm from a dead letter office, is rather like Pip, though more stoical. At one point the narrator calls him "a bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic", inviting comparison with Pip, a bit of human wreckage in the mid-Pacific. See "Bartleby The Scrivener" in Selected Tales and Poems, p. 116.

[12]Milton R. Stern says that "the significance of a naturalistic universe" is what drives Pip crazy and enrages Ahab; see The Fine Hammered Steel, p. 4. To my mind, Stern is too insistent on Melville's naturalism. Melville's universe is a great deal more complicated--more primitive, animate, and even divine--than, say, Stephen Crane's or Ernest Hemingway's. Stern's "single vision" leads him to what is in my opinion a gross misreading of Billy Budd; see Chapter VI below.

[13]In Four Quartets (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), "Burnt Norton", I, p. 14.

[14]Ishmael has already demonstrated this curiosity, for example as the "Platonist" gazing into the sea from the masthead. It is prefigured as early as Redburn; at one point the narrator ". . . was all eagerness to . . . get a peep at a specimen of the bottom of the sea." See Redburn, XX, 94.

[15]Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, trans. Philip Mairet (New York and Evanston: Harper Torchbooks, 1967), p. 225.

[16]Ishmael uses the terms "mind" and "soul" interchangeably in these passages. His reference to Descartes recalls the mind-body duality which Descartes is traditionally credited (or blamed) for introducing into Western thought.

[17]Keats's aphorism occurs in a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 3 May 1818. See R. H. Fogle, ed., John Keats: Selected Poetry and Letters (New York: Rinehart, 1951), p. 315.

[18]The lawyer who narrates "Bartleby the Scrivener" regards Bartleby as "a valuable acquisition"; see Selected Tales and Poems, p. 107.

[19]Richard Chase calls Ahab a "captain of industry" and observes that the Pequod "is a beautifully efficient factory for the production of whale oil." See "Melville and Moby-Dick" in Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 54. Charles Olson made a similar point ten years earlier: see Call Me Ishamel (New York: Grove Press, 1958 [(c) 1947]), p. 12.

[20] A term which Ishmael defines at the end of Chapter XXVII; it means "loner". The reader eventually realizes that the term applies to Ishmael, Queequeg, Ahab and Moby Dick.

[21] The windlass-handspike image quoted above is a good example of the mechanical way in which Ahab thinks of and sees himself; the book abounds with others. He nags a steersman for "not steering inflexibly enough" (CVI, 458); Ishmael speaks of the "mechanical humming wheels of his vitality in him" (XXXVI, 159); Ahab speaks of the "iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run" (XXXVII, 166).

[22] I have already quoted Queequeg's belief that the skies are continuous with the sea, and that the dead may float to "starry archipelagoes" in funerary canoes; see Moby Dick (CX, 473), and the intimations of "space travel" in Mardi, mentioned above, p. 21 and pp. 26-7 n. 6. In Typee Tom describes the effigy of a chieftain "paddling his way to the realms of bliss and breadfruit --the Polynesian heaven", in a canoe a little longer than a man, or about the same dimensions, one would think, as Queequeg's coffin; see Typee (XXIII, 198-200). Baird suggests that ". . . either in the Marquesas or in Tahiti Melville saw a mortuary canoe, the prototype of Queequeg's 'coffin' to which Ishmael clings at the close of Moby-Dick"; see Ishmael, pp. 112-13.

[23] Quoted by Mark Schorer in William Blake: The Politics of Vision (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), p. 65. The complete sentence runs: "Man can have no idea of anything greater than Man, as a cup cannot contain more than its capaciousness." This is a particularly apt comment on the anthropomorphic view of creation depicted on the coffin.

[24] We may wonder if Ahab believes everything he says here, or whether there is some exaggeration calculated to disconcert Starbuck into silence (which it does). Captain Claret of the Neversink, when asked to forgive a man sentenced to flogging, retorts "I would not forgive God Almighty!" See White Jacket (XXXIII, 138).

[25] Marius Bewley makes too much of the "resurrection", although his chapter on Melville has strongly influenced the foregoing paragraphs. See "Melville and the Democratic Experience" in Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 108.

[26]See Baird's comments on tabu as an ethical system in Oceania, Ishmael, p. 106.

[27]In Redburn, Jackson also dies blaspheming (LIX, 284).

[28](New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), p. 5 I do not wish to limit the term "archetype" to literature or literary experience as Northrop Frye does in Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). Frye does this to elevate literary criticism to the status which an exact science enjoys, by reducing its field of study, literature, to an "order of words" (p. 17) comparable to the "nature" which is the subject of physics. To my mind, there are three fundamental weaknesses in this program.

First, literary works exist not on the printed page, where they are recorded, but in the minds of people reading or remembering them. Archetypes do not reside in literary works, but in the minds of people affected by them. It is not necessary to worry about whether we inherit our "resonances" or learn them, or whether archetypes exist in the collective unconscious; it is necessary to recognize that primordial images arise in dreams and everyday experience, and that to account for our intuitions about Melville's white whale, for example, we have to go beyond those shared experiences which are accessible only through literature.

Second, in his contention that a more scientific attitude in criticism would emancipate it from the "vacillations of fashionable prejudice" (p. 9), he is merely delivering criticism up to the contemporary prejudice of scientism.

Third, and most important, literature is qualitatively unlike the fields which lend themselves to scientific study, because it is the product of human creativity. Frye suggests that physics is to nature as criticism is to literature (p. 11). In the first place, such analogies are not very accurate; a more exact one would be that criticism is to literature as the philosophy of science is to the sciences. And nature feels no obligation to respond to the propitiation she receives from the scientist, whereas literature does respond to criticism. There is much commerce between the literary practitioner and the critic. "Scientific" rigour is therefore impossible in criticism (if indeed it is any longer

possible in science), since, even more dramatically than Heisenberg's electron, literature is radically affected by those who study it.

[29] C. Kerényi in C. G. Jung and C. Kerényi, Essays on a Science of Mythology, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York and Evanston: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), p. 50.

[30] C. Kerényi, op. cit., p. 46.

[31] The Enchafèd Flood, p. 6. This part of Auden's argument gave me the idea of using the passages from Genesis, although he uses them to illustrate the more general idea that, until the Romantics, the sea and sea-travel have traditionally been regarded as things to be avoided or got over as quickly as possible. Melville's attitude toward the sea is equivocal, but in the closing pages of Moby Dick he is emphasizing its chaotic, dreadful character, the traditional view taken of it by pre-Romantic writers. See Auden's development of this theme, pp. 6-13 and passim.

V

ISRAEL POTTER AND THE CONFIDENCE-MAN

I will be dealing with these two novels more briefly than with those discussed previously, because the water imagery is less pervasive, particularly in The Confidence-Man. Nevertheless, both books provide some interesting material for this study, the most obvious being the embarkations and debarkations of the central characters.

1. Israel Potter

There is an interesting development in the course of Melville's sea stories, in the relative values assigned to life aboard ship and life on land. In Typee, Omoo and Mardi, the hero-narrator is ready to take palpable risks in order to get off a whaling ship. In each case, the ship he leaves stands for boredom, manipulation and exploitation. In Typee, Tom leaves the Dolly to become the pampered guest of royalty among the Typees.[1] In Omoo, he escapes his subservience to rascals and incompetents and takes up the picaresque life of a beachcomber with Dr. Long Ghost. In Mardi, as we have seen, he risks a chartless voyage across the Pacific in order to escape the boredom of life on the Arcturion, and for a while enjoys the role of a demi-god

among the peoples of the archipelago.

Although there is a counter-movement in these books--Tom signs on aboard the Julia to escape the Typees, and aboard the Leviathan when he tires of beachcombing, and Taji steers for the open sea at the end of Mardi--the balance is clearly in favour of land, with its diversity of experience, sexual and gustatory gratifications, and relative comfort and safety.

In Redburn, White Jacket and Moby Dick, the balance shifts. Redburn and Ishmael both begin their narratives, as we have seen, by listing their reasons for wanting to go to sea. But both the Highlander and the Pequod become scenes of human hardship, exploitation and tyranny. In Redburn, with the exception of a brief excursion into the countryside, life on land is not depicted as a desirable alternative to the suffering and degradation that characterize life aboard the Highlander. Ishmael's opening chapter suggests that his assessment of life ashore is partly, at least, a function of his state of mind; he ascribes his distaste for it more to a "damp, drizzly November" in his soul than to a set of objective conditions. On the whole, the book is ambivalent in this regard; Ahab sees the values associated with the land--wife, children, domesticity, and so on--as a lure to be resisted, while Starbuck argues eloquently for the opposite viewpoint.

The point of view which Ishmael articulates on behalf of Bulkington is later contradicted by his meditation over the case-squeezing incident. In White Jacket, as we have already noted, the Neversink is a floating hell mitigated by few advantages:

> A man-of-war's man is only a man-of-war's man at sea; and the sea is the place to learn what he is. But we have seen that a man-of-war is . . . full of strange contradictions; and though boasting some fine fellows here and there, yet, upon the whole, charged to the combings of her hatchways with the spirit of Belial and all unrighteousness. (XCI, 368)

That is, although life on a man-of-war may bring out the best in a few men (or strike the fire from their steel, as Taji phrases it in Mardi), the evil it fosters far outweighs this advantage.

On the whole, Israel Potter goes farther than the other novels toward presenting life at sea as preferable to that on land. Israel spends almost his entire life in a state of imprisonment, exploitation or tyranny, and the few moments of freedom he enjoys have to do with ships and the sea.[2] After taking part in the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775, Potter volunteers for service in a small brigantine, one of several ships attempting to blockade the British troops in Boston. After three days out, the Americans are captured and conveyed in a British frigate to a marine hospital, where a third of them die of smallpox, and then to a prison hulk off Spithead, where Israel spends a month "like Jonah

in the belly of the whale" (III, 18). From this point on in the novel, the sea, and embarkations and debarkations, predominantly signify freedom, or an opportunity for it. He makes his first escape when temporarily transferred as an oarsmen to a commander's barge, but is quickly recaptured. He escapes and is recaptured several more times, but does not see the sea again until he is sent to Paris with a message for Benjamin Franklin by three English sympathizers with the American cause. The sea-crossing from Dover to Calais increases Israel's freedom, to the extent that in France he can indulge himself in "freely declaring himself an American" (VI, 49). But whatever freedom he gains by crossing the Channel, he quickly loses when he reaches his destination. Franklin, who is portrayed as a wily, worldly old precursor of Melville's Confidence-Man,[3] orders Israel to stay in his room while in Paris, "just as if you were my prisoner" (VII, 59). Although it does not apply rigidly to the subsequent events of the narrative, this alternation indicates the general pattern in Israel Potter: when Israel is on land, he is exploited, imprisoned or tyrannized over; when he goes to sea; he has an opportunity, at least, for real freedom. In Franklin's room he meets Paul Jones, the flamboyant American sea captain, whose combined sophistication and barbarism suggest a combination of Queequeg and Harry Bolton. When Jones makes his demand for a ship in which to realize his desire

for personal glory, he confirms from another angle this distinction between sea and land; for him, too, a ship means greater freedom of action.

When Israel returns to England he suffers various misfortunes, which are capped by his betrayal by a crimp and impressment onto a British frigate. When a boat is lowered to help a short-handed revenue cutter, Israel is first into it, and manages to get himself chosen to replace the crewmen the cutter has lost. As in his escape from the prison hulk, his transfer to a smaller boat spells freedom, for when he is mistreated aboard the cutter he takes advantage of the shortage of men and knocks the captain down. During the ensuing scuffle the cutter is challenged by an enemy ship, which turns out to be that of Paul Jones. Israel throws the captain overboard and disables the cutter, and is taken aboard Jones' ship where Jones makes him quartermaster. In the voyage that follows Jones harrasses British coastal shipping and fires some colliers at the town of Whitehaven, an exploit in which Israel becomes prominent as the man who supplies the fire for the conflagration.

This voyage is followed by the cruise of the Bonne Homme Richard, an old merchant ship fitted with guns, and presented to Jones by the French king through the influence of Franklin. The Richard is supposed to be the flagship

of a squadron of nine vessels, but most of the other ships desert early in the cruise. A battle develops between the Richard and a British frigate, the Serapis. Melville devotes two chapters to this fight, partly because it "stands in history as the first signal collision on the sea between the Englishman and the American," but mostly because of the ferocity with which it was fought: "For obstinacy, mutual hatred, and courage, it is without precedent or subsequent in the history of ocean. The strife long hung undetermined, but the English flag struck in the end." (XIX, 170). During most of this fight, the two ships are lashed side by side, firing into each other at point-blank range. Superior in guns and manpower, the Serapis should have the advantage, but Jones' flamboyant inventiveness and enthusiasm make up for the Richard's deficiencies as a fighting ship. When Jones sees the cartridges piling up in the Serapis' main hatchway faster than the gunners can fire them, he orders Israel to drop in a grenade and explode them. Israel does so, thereby restoring the chance of victory to the Richard. As at Whitehaven, Israel again plays the role of incendiary.

Israel's third voyage with Paul Jones would have returned him to America, but a strange accident returns him to England instead. It is almost as though the process by which Israel escapes the British frigate to end up aboard

Jones' ship has been reversed. They exchange fire with a British ship,which appears to surrender. Israel leaps aboard her, expecting to be followed by other boarders, but as he does so the British ship pulls away and escapes with Israel still on her spanker boom. Israel now finds himself in a situation like that of Redburn or White Jacket: he needs to persuade some section of the ship's company to accept him as a messmate. With him, though, it is more urgent, because he risks discovery as an enemy sailor. Surprisingly, although he does not fool the sailors into accepting him, he manages to deflect suspicion away from himself by feigning partial madness. Ultimately, he is accepted into the crew of the maintop as "Peter Perkin", although no one is able to account for his origin. The most striking thing about this adventure is that Israel finds himself more at home on a British privateer than he has in the English countryside or will in the English city. Furthermore, he is more readily accepted on this ship than when he finally returns home to America.

"His" ship returns to England just in time for Israel to witness the landing at Falmouth of Ethan Allen, the captured American guerilla, and his bold behaviour in captivity. Israel is frustrated in his intention of making himself known to Allen, when another American prisoner recognizes him and almost gives him away. Meanwhile, Israel learns that the letter-of-marque which has adopted him is as subject to impressment as any merchant vessel, and that a

man-of-war in the harbour intends to impress a third of her crew.

> His mind was soon determined. Unlike his shipmates, braving immediate and lonely hazard, rather than wait for a collective and ultimate one, he cunningly dropped himself overboard the same night, . . . doubly haunted by the thought, that whether as a Englishman, or whether as an American, he would, if caught, be now equally subject to enslavement. (XXII, 217)

In view of the degradation that Israel is to suffer in London, his eagerness to escape impressment is plainly ironic. In a way, he is behaving admirably in influencing his own future rather than passively awaiting it. On the other hand, he has failed to see that life at sea under almost any conditions is preferable to any life he can expect ashore in England.[4] Ultimately, Melville shows that during the worst periods of hardship among the poor in London, men were actually better off in the armed forces than as civilians. (In The Tin Flute, Gabrielle Roy makes a similar point about the Montreal poor: World War II was a welcome relief to those who could enlist.)

Only occasionally does the rest of the narrative touch on themes related to the topic of this thesis. A notable variation on the "death by water" motif occurs before Israel reaches London. Fearing that his seaman's clothing will arouse suspicion, he exchanges it for some rags left beside a stagnant pond, apparently "by some pauper suicide" (XXII, 217).[5] This image is more macabre

than anything we have yet considered; at least in other immersions it has been possible to think of the water in which men immerse themselves as a lustrum at its best, or a decent burial-place at its worst. What Israel has done is to foreshadow his own suicide as a sailor, the role in which he might enjoy some happiness and freedom, in order to become, in a sense, the pauper who left the rags behind. Melville suggests as much when he describes Israel's near-enslavement in a brickyard,

> . . . where cleanliness is as much out of the question as with a drowned man at the bottom of the lake in the Dismal Swamp. (XXIII, 219)

When, during his forty-five years of poverty in London, he manages to save enough for his passage back to America, he spends it instead on ". . . a rash embarkation in wedlock" (XXVI, 230), a gesture already prefigured in his symbolic suicide by the pool. Israel is never at home in London; at one point, the narrator says, he seems like a "trespassing Pequod Indian, impounded on the shores of Narraganset Bay, long ago" (XXVI, 233). The novel's crowning irony, to which this phrase points, is that when he finally returns to America, his native land has as little use for him as it had had for the Pequod Indians. No sooner is he off the ship than he is nearly run over by a "patriotic triumphal car" flying a banner inscribed to the glory of the heroes who had fought at Bunker Hill. It is the Fourth of July. "By certain caprices of the law" he

is refused a pension (XXVII, 241), and no one in his native hills remembers him. "His scars proved his only medals" (XXVII, 241). It is only during the crossing itself that Potter is really where he belongs:

> An octogenarian as he recrossed the brine, he showed locks besnowed as its foam. White-haired old Ocean seemed as a brother. (XXVI, 237)

2. The Confidence-Man

As with most of the novels we have discussed, The Confidence-Man begins with an embarkation:

> At sunrise on a first of April, there appeared . . . a man in cream-colors, at the water-side in the city of St. Louis.
>
> . . . He had neither trunk, valise, carpet-bag, nor parcel. No porter followed him. He was unaccompanied by friends. From the shrugged shoulders, titters, whispers, wonderings of the crowd, it was plain that he was, in the extremest sense of the word, a stranger.
>
> In the same moment with his advent, he stepped aboard the favourite steamer Fidèle, on the point of starting for New Orleans. . . . he held on his way along the lower deck until he chanced to come to a placard nigh the captain's office, offering a reward for the capture of a mysterious imposter, supposed to have recently arrived from the East. . . (I, 9)

For the crowd gathered to read the placard, the mute writes on his slate mottoes about charity from I Corinthians--"Charity thinketh no evil", and so on--and displays them until the other passengers drive him away with increasing hostility. The mute falls asleep on the deck and is forgotten. The narrator suggests that he must have

gone ashore: ". . . the last transient memory of the slumberer vanished, and he himself, not unlikely, waked up and landed. . ." (II, 14).

The next character on whom the narrative focusses is a crippled negro beggar who calls himself Black Guinea and allows the passengers to amuse themselves by tossing coins into his mouth. Another cripple interrupts the pitch-penny game to denounce Guinea as a white imposter. When a bystander asks him if anyone aboard can supply a character reference for him, Guinea reels off a catalogue of descriptions of people, most of whom eventually appear in the novel:

> ". . . dar is aboard here a werry nice, good ge'mman wid a weed, and a ge'mman in a gray coat and white tie, what knows all about me; and a ge'mman wid a big book too; and a yarb doctor; and a ge'mman in a yaller west; and a ge'mman wid a brass plate; and a ge'mman in a wiolet robe; and a ge'mman as is a sodjer; and ever so many good, kind, honest ge'mmen more abord what knows me and will speak for me, God bress 'em; . . . let 'em come quick, and show you all, ge'mmen, dat dis poor ole darkie is werry well wordy of all you kind ge'mmen's kind confidence." (III, 19)

Guinea disappears at the end of Chapter III; in Chapter IV a merchant is hailed as an old acquaintance by "a man in mourning clean and respectable, but none of the glossiest, a long weed in his hat" (IV, 24). The merchant does not remember having known him, but we begin to grasp what is happening when the man in mourning says,

> "Oh, the cripple. Poor fellow, I know him well. . . . I have said all I could for him . . . . And apropos, sir, . . . allow me to ask, whether the circumstance of one man, however humble, referring for a character to another man, however afflicted, does not argue more or less of worth in the latter?" (IV, 25)

The reader now suspects collusion between Guinea and the man with the weed, who manages eventually to wheedle a "loan" out of the merchant, leaving him with a tip concerning shares in the "Black Rapids Coal Company", which he can buy from an agent who happens to be aboard the Fidèle.

In the next chapter the same character scolds a young student who has been reading Tacitus, and we notice something familiar about his language:

> ". . . Without confidence himself, Tacitus destroys it in all his readers. . . .paternal confidence, of which God knows that there is in this world none to spare. For, comparatively inexperienced as you are, my dear young friend, did you never observe how little, very little confidence there is? I mean . . . particularly between stranger and stranger . . ." Then softly sliding nearer, with the softest air, quivering down and looking up, "Could you now, my dear young sir, under such circumstances, by way of experiment, simply have confidence in me?" (V, 34)

We begin to perceive now that the deaf-mute, the negro and the bereaved widower are the same person in different disguises. We learn to identify him by the fact that he never has far to go, and when he "disembarks" from the steamboat, is quickly replaced in the narrative by another

character who makes frequent use of the words "confidence", "charity" and their synonyms. Except for when he is masquerading as the deaf-mute, the word "confidence" usually peppers the page whenever the Confidence-Man is present. Another distinguishing feature is his strategy of providing testimonials for his other masquerades, employing the principle which he has blandly suggested to the merchant.

Altogether we see eight of the Confidence-Man's masquerades. Each metamorphosis is punctuated with a contrived disembarkation and embarkation which we never, of course, actually see. Thus we have the association of several themes whose combinations we have noted in other works, like "Benito Cereno" and "Billy Budd"--a metamorphosis in character or a change in social position, with an accompanying difficulty, for both reader and character, in distinguishing appearance from reality--connected with the act of boarding or leaving a boat.

Yet the general effect is radically different from anything in the works already discussed. For one thing, the novel is both more realistic and more fantastic than Melville's other fiction. We feel much more at home with the various incarnations of the Confidence-Man than we do with Ahab, mainly because the Confidence-Man uses language in a way which is much more colloquial and familiar than Ahab's archaic and hieratic speech. Yet the Confidence-Man

is obviously a supernatural figure, as the opening paragraphs of the book firmly establish, whereas Ahab, despite his aspirations, is not. In its observation of the formal unities, the book is also much "tidier" than most of Melville's fiction, limiting itself in time and space to one day (April Fool's Day) and one place (the Fidèle) respectively. Its point of view is unusually consistent, too, remaining outside but close to the protagonist, speaking in the third person, and doing relatively little editorializing. One consequence of this formality is that the action and speech feel more immediate, so that the Confidence-Man's metamorphoses and sophistries challenge the reader more than they would with a more obtrusive narrator. As Daniel Hoffman warns, "We may in fact be taken in by the confidence man."[6]

In his facility with language and his ability to tease out the weaknesses of his victims through flattery, the Confidence-Man reminds us of Satan, especially Milton's character. He is a shape-shifter, as the devil traditionally is; he expresses sympathy with the snake at one point in his conversation with the "Mystic", (XXXVI, 196) and he often brings to light the worst inclinations of his victims--the vanity of a "charitable" lady, the avarice of an old miser. On the other hand, although he brings these traits out in people, he can

hardly be blamed for putting them there in the first place. Furthermore, not all the people he meets fall victim to him, and some of those that do redeem themselves partially. The merchant may be foolish to permit "John Ringman" to cheat him, but he does so out of the same kindness he had shown to Black Guinea. This partially redeems the cupidity he manifests when he buys bogus shares in the "Black Rapids Coal Company" and has his name entered in the Confidence-Man's ominous black book. Other characters resist him, too, like the backwoodsman who punches him when disguised as a herb doctor, and denounces him as a "Profane fiddler on heart strings! Snake" (XVII, 94). Another backwoodsman named Pitch resists the Confidence-Man in two of his disguises and eventually recognizes the identity behind the third one, after he has succumbed. He shrewdly wonders "Was the man a trickster, it must be more for the love than the lucre. Two or three dirty dollars the motive to so many nice wiles?" (XXIII, 137). R. W. B. Lewis's answer is that his motive is " . . . to trick, beguile, maneuver or force each and every person he accosts to declare himself--to announce, whether consciously or not, his own fundamental moral and intellectual nature."[7] Or, to use the metaphor from Mardi, the Confidence-Man's purpose is to strike fire form his victims' steel--if they have any.

If we can accept this explanation of the Confidence-Man's motive, the book's conclusion becomes less puzzling. The first half of the book deals with seven masquerades, whose success depends partly on the Confidence-Man's seeming to disembark to be replaced by a different person who embarks at the same place. The second half concerns the adventures of the Confidence-Man in his final disguise, that of a "Cosmopolitan" in a multi-coloured costume who calls himself Frank Goodman. The final chapter, "The Cosmopolitan Increases in Seriousness", is one of the most astonishing passages in Melville. Although it is unlike anything in Mardi or Moby-Dick, we can reach at least a partial understanding of it in the light of my discussion of those novels.

The chapter is a grim allegory. Its meaning is less certain than that of, say, The Pilgrim's Progress, because it does not dramatize a set of widely-acknowledged orthodoxies, although we do recognize a parody, at least, of the Apocalypse. Melville has already taken pains to suggest that the Fidèle is an image of the human world, its passengers "an Anacharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man" (II, 15). The setting in which the Confidence-Man plays out his final deception is an image of the solar system; the solar lamp, or sun, is the only planet that remains, since the other lamps, "barren planets", have all gone out. A young

boy whose feet, the narrator suggests, are cloven hoofs (XL, 255), assists the Confidence-Man in persuading a pious old man, who has been reading the Bible under the solar lamp, that he can trust neither human goodness nor divine providence. The boy sells the old man a door-lock and a money belt; the Confidence-Man hands him something he calls a life-preserver, and having turned out the sole remaining lamp, leads him away in the dark.

An interesting element in this closing movement is the implication that the Fidèle is about to sink. The old man looks about for a life preserver before going to bed, and the Confidence-Man hands him "a brown stool with a curved tin compartment underneath". To reassure the old man that this is what he needs, he tells him "'. . . any of these stools here will float you, sir, should the boat hit a snag, and go down in the dark . . . . I think I can recommend this one; the tin part,' rapping it with his knuckles, 'seems so perfect--sounds so very hollow'" (XLV, 259).[8] A moment later he says "'. . . I never use this sort of thing, myself. Still, I think that in case of a wreck, barring sharp-pointed timbers, you could have confidence in that stool for a special providence!'" The old man asks Providence to keep them both, to which the Confidence-Man ironically replies: "'Be sure it will,' eyeing the old man with sympathy, as for the moment he stood,

money-belt in hand, and life-preserver under arm, 'be sure it will, sir, since in Providence, as in man, you and I equally put trust.'" (XLV, 260).

Like Moby-Dick, then, The Confidence-Man ends with the images of the rayed circle, the foundering ship, and the victim reaching for a lifebuoy. But this novel is both funnier and more frighteningly pessimistic than Moby-Dick; the "life-preserver" to which the old man has entrusted himself is actually a chamber pot.

All the passengers aboard the Fidèle, it seems, are about to undergo a crisis. As with Ishmael, White-Jacket and Taji, it will involve immersion in water, but, judging from their vulnerability to the Confidence-Man, we may expect that few if any of them have enough "steel" in their souls to survive it.

NOTES

[1]Milton R. Stern says that Typee opens by opposing the sterility of life at sea to the "physicality and fertility" and "primitive simplicity" of Marquesan life. See The Fine Hammered Steel, pp. 34-35.

[2]There is a similar, though more marked, contrast between life ashore and life afloat in Huckleberry Finn. It may be worth noting that there are also resemblances between characters in the two novels, especially between Israel and Huck.

[3]At one point Melville has Franklin tell Israel: "Sad usage has made you sadly suspicious, my honest friend. An indiscriminate distrust of human nature is the worst consequence of a miserable condition . . . " (VII, 55-56). Later Melville says of him that "Having carefully weighed the world, Franklin could act any part in it," (VII, 66)

[4]Auden's summary of "the distinctive new notes in the Romantic attitude" toward the relative merits of sea and land are particularly relevant to Israel's situation:

> 1) To leave the land and the city is the desire of every man of sensibility and honour.
> 2) The sea is the real situation and the voyage is the true condition of man.
>
> --The Enchafèd Flood, p. 12

The narrator has already stated his own preference, although the prospects are far from cheerful:

> A hermitage in the forest is the refuge of the narrow-minded misanthrope; a hammock on the ocean is the asylum for the generous distressed. The ocean brims with natural griefs and tragedies; and into that watery immensity of terror, man's private grief is lost like a drop.
>
> (I, 11)

[5]Newton Arvin speaks of Melville's preoccupation with clothing, in Herman Melville, p. 109; we have already seen its importance in the white jacket and Redburn's shooting-jacket.

[6]Form and Fable in American Fiction, p. 282.

[7]"Afterword" to The Confidence-Man, p. 271.

[8] This echoes Melville's mockery of Providence in Pierre: ". . . doth not Scripture intimate, that He holdeth us in the hollow of His hand?--a Hollow, truly!" See Signet Classics Edition (Toronto: New American Library of Canada, 1965), Bk. VII, pt. viii, p. 168.

VI

CONCLUSION: BILLY BUDD

1

For reasons stated earlier in a polemical footnote,[1] I think it is important to resist the temptation to view literary criticism as an exercise in aesthetics, to treat literary works as mere "hypothetical verbal structures".[2] Words, after all, are not independent variables, but symbols for communicable human experience.

It is not even a sufficient concession to this principle to relate a writer's themes to such extra-literary realities as historical change or philosophical perplexity. In this study, as in many of the commentaries cited, these dimensions of meaning have been recognized in Melville's work. But to thoroughly comprehend Melville, I think it is necessary to at least glance at another dimension, that on which he is attempting to work out a social vision in terms of the concrete realities of his own experience.

In The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville,[3] Milton Stern develops an interpretation of one of Melville's symbols, the figure of the illusory ideal, which includes the white jacket, the white whale, and other symbols characterized by whiteness. This exegetical exercise is

imaginative and intelligent, but when he applies it to Billy Budd, the result is a bizarre misreading of Melville's plain intention. It is as though one were to take an identity in x from one set of mathematical relations and substitute them in an equation whose axioms are different. This is unsound as mathematics, and disastrous as criticism.

In Stern's analysis of Billy Budd, Captain Vere is the representative of what is best in humanity, sacrificing an unattainable and therefore dangerous ideal so that his inferiors may continue to function as an integral society.[4] Billy Budd, that is, must die by the Articles of War, to prevent a mutiny among the crew of the Indomitable, which would in turn weaken the English cause against the French.

We can easily adduce arguments to show that the assumptions upon which Stern's and Vere's arguments rest, are invalid. In White Jacket, for example, the desertion of Jack Chase should, according to the Articles of War then in effect on the Neversink, have been punished by flogging or execution. Chase is forgiven, and there is no mutiny (V, passim). Must we assume that the Articles are more germane to Budd's case than to Chase's, or that Melville's contempt for them has moderated in the forty years since he wrote White Jacket? Apparently not, for he condemns the code as roundly in one book as the other, and

Budd's case is certainly more exceptional than Chase's. Or if we are to see Billy Budd as a less formidable version of the menacing white ideal incarnate in Moby Dick, must we not forego the principle we have already learned from Ishmael, that the accuracy with which we interpret experience depends upon the comprehensiveness of our vision? How can we trust the vision of a man who resorts to Vere's arguments at the drum-head court,[5] or subordinates his better judgment to the Articles of War? Ishmael does not see the white whale that Ahab sees, and we need not accept Vere's final judgment on Billy Budd.

The interpretation of Billy Budd which seems to me most adequate, and most fair to Melville's vision as presented in this and his other works, is that Billy is the new Adam, and Vere a Pilate who fails to break through the "mind-forged manacles"[6] of Caesar's world in order to accept him for what he is. For acceptance of Billy would amount to a radically transformed, and therefore revolutionary, conception of man, a conception that would make darbies, men-of-war, navies and Captain Vere himself, superfluous.

Before adducing support for this view directly from Billy Budd, it is appropriate to review other passages in Melville where there is a longing for a new dispensation, a revolutionary solution to the inadequacies of a society based on the weakness of the ruled and the ruthlessness of

the oppressors. We have already examined examples of human society in which death by water is preferable to survival--the Neversink, Liverpool, the Highlander, the England of Israel Potter--and besides the conditions directly connected to immersion imagery, there are numerous examples of human suffering and depravity. In that many of Melville's characters attempt to break out of this world, it is not far-fetched to see in his novels a dramatization of his own attempts to think out solutions for the troubles of civilization, or to phrase it more grandly, to forge a social vision. Melville's literary career begins with Tom of Typee's attempt to break out of the suffering world of civilized society and "plunge into"[7] a prelapsarian culture. But even if he could accept the cannibalism and forego intellectual companionship, his body will not permit him to stay among the Typees.[8] To become a renegade is not a sufficient means to emancipation from the civilized world. This principle is also borne out in Omoo. Again, in Mardi, the hero attempts to escape his society by jumping off a ship, but before he does so he recognizes that a change in the social conditions under which man lives requires a revolutionary overthrow of the sloth or the coward in man himself:

> Had we sprung a leak, been "stove" by a whale, or been blessed with some despot of a captain against whom to stir up some spirited revolt, these shipmates of mine might have proved limber lads and men of mettle. But as it was, there was naught to strike fire from their steel. (I, 17)

In the next two novels, Melville turns to a more detailed examination of the inhumanities which are institutionalized in portions of his own civilization. Redburn, observing the police, who represent the interests of the ruling class, breaking up a Chartist's lecture in the streets of Liverpool, discreetly confines himself to a prayer for a miracle that will alleviate the sufferings of the beggars, whose plight the police treat with indifference (XXXVII, passim; XLI, 198-99; XXXVIII, 182). White Jacket's hero, Jack Chase, deserts the Neversink in order to help the republican revolutionaries of Peru. The narrator leaves no doubt that for him, Chase is naturally superior to leaders like Captain Claret, who have to enforce loyalty by flogging (LI, passim). His only misgiving about him is over his enthusiasm for military bloodshed:

> Now, this Jack Chase had a heart in him like a mastodon's. I have seen him weep when a man has been flogged at the gangway; yet, in relating the story of the battle of Navarino, he plainly showed that he held the God of the Blessed Bible to have been the British Commodore in the Levant, . . . And thus it would seem that war almost makes blasphemers of the best of men, . . . (LXXV, 304)

In The Confidence-Man, Melville implies that the protagonist is potentially capable of revolutionizing human society:

> In short, a due conception of what is to be held for this sort of personage in fiction would make him almost as much of a prodigy there, as in real history is a new law-giver, a revolutionizing philosopher, or the founder of a new religion. (XLIV, 346)

As I have already argued, his failure in this regard lies

in the weakness of the human beings he deals with, who refuse to measure up to the challenge he presents.

I have already pointed out the important change brought about in Billy's social relations by his transfer from the Rights-of-Man to the Indomitable.[9] Having established that a strongly social and political concern runs through Melville's work, it remains for me to elaborate on the claim I have made for Billy Budd as a new Adam. An adequate defence of Captain Vere could be rested on the case, that, first, the men of the Indomitable were beyond social or political redemption, and second, that even had they been redeemable, Billy Budd would not have had the power to transform them. The first point is well expressed by Captain Vere at the drum-head court:

> Even could you explain to them. . . they, long moulded by arbitrary discipline, have not that kind of intelligent responsiveness that might qualify them to comprehend and discriminate. No, to the people the foretopman's deed. . . will be plain homicide committed in an act of mutiny. [If Budd is spared] You know what sailors are. Will they not revert to the recent outbreak at the Nore? Ay. (XXII, 81)

The fallacy in this argument is that Vere does not know what sailors are, any more than Ahab knows what Moby Dick is, although, as I have already argued, men, like Moby Dick, will behave in a way which tends to fulfil one's expectations.[10] Vere's presupposition about sailors is a favourite a priori in ruling-class casuistry. To make such categorical judgments is presumptuous, and in the case of a man in

authority it is criminal. The assumption of incompetence prevents those whom it affects from practising or learning the virtues they are assumed to lack. Treat a man like an animal, and he will probably behave like one. Or, as White Jacket pleads:

> It is to no purpose that you apologetically appeal to the general depravity of the man-of-war's man. Depravity in the oppressed is no apology for the oppressor; but rather an additional stigma to him, as being, in a large degree, the effect, and not the cause and justification of oppression. (XXIV, 143)

It is characteristic of Vere, the embodiment of "prudence and rigor" (XXII, 75), that he would argue that "With mankind, forms, measured forms are everything; and that is the import couched in the story of Orpheus with his lyre spell-binding the wild denizens of the wood" (XXVIII, 89). The appropriate reply to this is that of the Missourian to the Confidence Man in his disguise as a herb-doctor:

> "Picked and prudent sentiments. You are the moderate man, the invaluable understrapper of the wicked man. You, the moderate man, may be used for wrong, but are useless for right". (XXI, 119)

If the redeemability of the men is an open question, what kind of transformation might Billy Budd have brought about? We do not need to guess here, for Melville has Captain Graveling of the Rights-of-Man tell us quite explicitly.

> See here now. Before I shipped that young fellow, my forecastle was a rat-pit of quarrels. . . . But Billy came; and it was like a Catholic priest striking peace in an Irish shindy. Not that he preached to them or said or did anything in particular; but a virtue went out of him, sugaring the sour ones. . . . all but the buffer of the gang . . . . He indeed out of envy, perhaps, of the newcomer, . . . must needs bestir himself in trying to get up an ugly row with him. Billy forebore with him and reasoned with him in a pleasant way . . . but nothing served. So, in the second dog-watch one day the Red Whiskers . . . gave him a dig under the ribs. Quick as lightning Billy let fly his arm. I dare say he never meant to do quite as much as he did, but anyhow he gave the burly fool a terrible drubbing . . . . And. . . the Red Whiskers now really loves Billy . . . . But they all love him . . . . Anybody will do anything for Billy Budd; and its the happy family here . . . . Ay, Lieutenant, you are going to take away the jewel of 'em; you are going to take away my peacemaker! (I, 45)

With or without the interference of Claggart, Billy could not, of course, have survived for long on a man-of-war. A society which is based on exploitation requires the perpetual exercise of threats and violence, and the occasional waging of war. It cannot tolerate peacemakers for long; it will imprison them, or, if necessary, put them to death. Thoreau, Benjamin Spock, Martin Luther King, Bertrand Russell and other peacemakers illustrate this. Captain Vere is culpable, not as a naval captain, because in that capacity he correctly sees Billy as a threat to his command, but as an exceptionally sensitive and intelligent man, who, instead of using his gifts to redefine the rules under which the game was to be played, uses them instead to

cloak with persuasive rhetoric what any scoundrel in his position would have done without thinking twice about it. It is as though Prospero, having impressed Ariel into his service, were to terminate their relationship by stringing him up instead of giving him his freedom.

2

Billy Budd's story begins with the debarkation from one ship and embarkation on another. It ends with an immersion--his burial at sea. Sewn into a shotted hammock, the body is laid on a plank and all hands called to witness the burial.

> . . . when the tilted plank let slide its freight into the sea, a second strange human murmur was heard, blended now with another inarticulate sound proceeding from certain larger sea-fowl, whose attention having been attracted by the peculiar commotion in the water resulting from the heavy sloped dive of the shotted hammock into the sea, flew screaming to the spot. . . . As the ship under light airs passed on, leaving the burial-spot astern, they still kept circling it low down with the mvoing shadow of their outstretched wings and the croaked requiem of their cries. (XXVIII, 88-89)

Melville's narrator regards this phenomenon from a naturalistic point of view, at the same time noting that the men seem to see it differently:

> . . , to such mariners the action of the sea-fowl, though dictated by mere animal greed for prey, was big with no prosaic significance. (XXVIII,89)

A similar bifurcation of views is possible with the white whale, and some of the images in Moby Dick almost demand

comparison with that of Billy's burial. After a sperm whale has been "impressed", hung from a yard arm, drained of its sperm oil and stripped of its blubber, it is cast adrift as carrion for birds and sharks. In "The Funeral", there is the visual image of a white carcass falling astern, with a "peculiar commotion" around it, attended by birds:

> The vast tackles have now done their duty. The peeled white body of the beheaded whale flashes like a marble sepulchre; . . . Slowly it floats more and more away, the water round it torn and splashed by the insatiate sharks, and the air above vexed with rapacious flights of screaming fowls, . . . (LXIX, 306)

This is a naturalistic view of the whale, which sees it in an ecological perspective, as a predator in turn preyed upon by men, sharks and sea birds. The other view occurs in the epiphanic description of Moby Dick when the Pequod first sights him, "as he so divinely swam," casting off "enticings" in his swell, and attended by "hundreds of gay fowl softly feathering the sea. . ." (CXXXIII, 538). As if to ensure that our reading of this passage will not be merely naturalistic, Ishmael insists on the apotheosis. He asserts that Moby Dick surpasses "the white bull Jupiter" in majesty, speaks of the "hand-clappings" and "rapture" of the waves, and as the whale raises himself from the water to dive, he says that

> . . . the grand god revealed himself, sounded, and went out of sight. Hoveringly halting, and dipping on the wing, the white sea-fowls longingly lingered over the agitated pool that he left. (CXXXIII, 539)

This view of Moby Dick corresponds with the sailors' intuition that Billy Budd's immersion is "big with no prosaic significance". In my view, Billy embodies whatever may be divine in man as Moby Dick embodies whatever may be divine in nature.

We can therefore regard Billy's burial in two ways, which do not need to conflict with each other. From one point of view, Billy is the third Adam, rejected by men, whose death and burial are attended by significant miracles, suggesting his immortality and possibly his godhead. From the other, he is the human victim of an aggressive, militaristic civilization which forcefully extracts his labour and liquidates him when he is of no further use.

The way in which Billy's death is understood by the men on the Indomitable, "the people" as the officers call them, is the most important fact about Billy, because it is what survives of him, the trace he has left on his shipmates' sensibilities. The ballad which one of them makes about him circulates among the hands and is finally printed for wider circulation. Its closing lines gather together many of the motifs I have already considered--the "last long dive" which befalls Queequeg and Harry Bolton, the imagined experience of being dead beneath the sea, such as White Jacket has, the longing for rest, the

conception of death and immersion as liberation, and the sense of being at peace with, and involved in, the sea and its creatures, as suggested in Ishmael's sojourn on the coffin-lifebuoy. They are therefore an appropriate way to conclude this study.

> Fathoms down, fathoms down, how I'll dream fast asleep.
> I feel it stealing now. Sentry, are you there?
> Just ease this darbies at the wrist, and roll me over fair,
> I am sleepy, and the oozy weeds about me twist.

NOTES

[1]See note 28, Chapter IV, pp.84-5 above.

[2]This phrase is used by Frye in Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 79; similar expressions occur elsewhere in the book, as at p. 92 ("hypothetical creations"), p. 74 ("literary verbal structures"), and p. 350 ("a self-contained literary universe").

[3](Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957).

[4]Ibid. See for example his remark on p. 109 about ". . . Melville who had Captain Vere sacrifice a beautiful dream in order to save a common and mindless humanity," and the chapter on Billy Budd, pp. 206-239, especially pp. 225ff.

[5]See my analysis of Vere's arguments in Chapter I, p.8-9 , above.

[6]This is Blake's phrase from "London", one of the Songs of Experience. The stanza runs:

> In every cry of every Man,
> In every Infant's cry of fear,
> In every voice, in every ban,
> The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

See R. S. Hillyer, The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne and the Complete Poetry of William Blake (New York: Modern Library, 1941), p. 538.

[7]Melville's phrase in Typee (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, n.d.), Chapter V, p. 30.

[8]D. H. Lawrence points this out in Studies in Classic American Literature (New York: Viking, 1961), p. 137.

[9]See Chapter I, pp.7-9 above.

[10]See Chapter IV, pp.80-81 above.

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