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THE MAKING OF AN AMERICAN AUTHOR: MELVILLE AND THE IDEA OF A NATIONAL LITERATURE

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THE MAKING OF AN AMERICAN AUTHOR: MELVILLE AND
THE IDEA OF A NATIONAL LITERATURE

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DISSERTATION

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the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
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December, 1984

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c 1984

Daniel W. Reagan

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ABSTRACT

THE MAKING OF AN AMERICAN AUTHOR: MELVILLE AND
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by

DANIEL W. REAGAN

University of New Hampshire, December, 1984

In this study I examine the ways in which the idea of a national literature affected the development of both Herman Melville's career and of his reputation through 1930. Melville, as a member of the New York literary group Young America, participated in an effort to define and create a national literature. His apprenticeship was served under the influence of Young America, and the group's ideas about the act of writing, the defining qualities of a national work, and the relationship of writer and reader influenced the shape of his career. Although Melville's exploration into the implications of Young America's theories pushed him into profound religious and social questions that were, according to the group, better left unprobed, he could not escape the contradictions inherent in Young America's theories--contradictions that made professional authorship and the development of a national literature mutually exclusive enterprises.

The first chapter of the dissertation examines Melville's relationship with Young America and the arguments of both Melville's group and the more conservative Whig reviewers over the necessity of a national literature, the defining characteristics of that literature, and the role of professional authorship in America. The next six chapters trace the development of Melville's career in light of his relationship with Young America.

In the appendix, I examine the dramatic reevaluation of Melville's place in American literature during the 1920s. Just as Melville's career becomes representative of the difficulties that many American writers encountered in trying to resolve the paradoxes inherent in the profession of authorship during the 1840s and 1850s, his Revival is representative of the broader reevaluation of the American literary canon that occurred during the 1920s. Melville's career and the history of his reputation help illuminate the central issues in America's peculiarly self-conscious attempt to create and define a truly "national literature."

INTRODUCTION

In this study I examine the ways in which the idea of a national literature affected the development of both Herman Melville's career and of his reputation through 1930. Melville, as a member of the New York literary group Young America, participated in an effort to define and create a national literature. His apprenticeship was served under the influence of Young America, and the group's ideas about the act of writing, the defining qualities of a national work, and the relationship of writer and reader influenced the shape of his career. Although Melville's exploration into the implications of Young America's theories pushed him into profound religious and social questions that were, according to the group, better left unprobed, he could not escape the contradictions inherent in Young America's theories--contradictions that made professional authorship and the development of a national literature mutually exclusive enterprises.

The first chapter of the dissertation examines Melville's relationship with Young America and the arguments of both Melville's group and the more conservative Whig reviewers over the necessity of a national literature, the defining characteristics of that literature, and the role of professional authorship in America. The next six chapters trace the development of Melville's career in light of his

relationship with Young America.

Melville's participation in Young America has been demonstrated, but very little has been written about the importance of this connection for the shape of his career. Perry Miller, in The Raven and the Whale, has written a lively account of the literary war that was raging in New York when Melville became a professional writer, and has discussed Melville's participation with Young America in the fracas, but his concern is with Melville's impact on the war rather than with its impact on him. Miller's book, then, has been an invaluable source for this study, but its angle of interest is different than mine. Two articles have discussed Melville's relationship with Young America and with one of the group's leaders, Evert Duyckinck, but neither article examines the complex ways in which Melville's professional career was affected by his involvement with Young America.¹

To study the influence of Young America on Melville's development I have looked at three areas of information. I examined the available biographical information about Melville to determine how particular events in Melville's life affected the course of his career and why he wrote the books he did in the order that he did. I am not only interested in Melville's personal relationships with Young America members but also with the effect that key issues in the debate over a national literature--the necessity of an international copyright law, the appropriate audience and form for a national literature--had on Melville's concept of the

profession of authorship. Here Jay Leyda's Melville Log, and Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman's edition of The Letters of Herman Melville have been invaluable.²

I also examined the reviews and sales figures of Melville's books. An examination of the reviews is useful to this study for three reasons. First, although favorable and unfavorable reviews do not fall into explicit partisan categories, the implicit assumptions about the nature of a national literature that underpinned most critics' responses to Melville's works illuminate the ways in which the theoretical issues of the debate over nationality affected responses to specific works. For example, two issues that drew repeated comments from Melville's reviewers were Melville's heretical observations on Christianity, and his disregard for existing genres and forms. The issue of Melville's attitude toward religion had one of its roots in the debate over why a national literature was necessary. The discussion of genre developed in part from the controversy over the relative independence of American writers from their English lineage. The reviews, then, can illustrate the application of both the liberal and conservative theories of a national literature.

The reviews are also important in helping to explain the development of Melville's career. Melville read and reacted to the American and British reviews of his books, commenting on them in letters and responding to them in his books. The reviews did not cast an accurate reflection of

popular sales or taste, but they were the most accessible mirrors from which Melville could view public opinion. During the course of his career, Melville grew increasingly dissatisfied with the critics' responses. This dissatisfaction became a theme in Mardi with elaborations in White-Jacket, Moby-Dick, and Pierre. At the heart of his argument with the critics was Melville's sense of the tension between having to write books designed for popularity to make his profession viable and wanting to write those books "said to fail," which embodied Young America's definition of a national literature.³ In opposition to the type of reader that Melville considered most critics to be, he defined in his 1850 essay, "Hawthorne and His Mosses" (published in Duyckinck's Literary World), the ideal reader of American literature.

And finally, in the reviews of his books written by Young America members Melville found a group of sympathetic readers who supported his development as a national writer. Duyckinck's reviews in the Literary World provided unflagging support for Melville's first five books, Jedediah Auld wrote a long and spirited defense of Omoo in response to a scurrilous review by George Washington Peck (a self-proclaimed conservative in literature), and William Alfred Jones wrote a perceptive, sympathetic review of Melville's first flight into romance, Mardi. Melville's developing sense of the proper relationship between the writer and reader in America and his theory of the method and form of romancing were informed and encouraged by the public and

private support that he received from Young America. He accepted Young America's program for a national literature, eloquently defined it in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," and brilliantly realized it in Moby-Dick. But Duyckinck's less than enthusiastic review of Moby-Dick confirmed for Melville something that he was beginning to suspect even as he was composing the book, that it was impossible simultaneously to achieve fame and fortune, and to create a national literature in the context that Young America had established.

Finally, I looked at Melville's own books and magazine pieces to determine his developing ideas about the profession of writing. Beginning in Mardi and extending through Pierre, Melville analyzed the profession of authorship in America. In Mardi, Redburn, and White-Jacket he explored three important themes: the relationship between writing for bread and writing for self-exploration; the meaning and method of romancing; and the role of American literature in the development of the nation. These themes, which reflected Young America's program for a national literature, were brought together in "Hawthorne and His Mosses." In Moby-Dick the act of creating a literature that fulfilled Young America's program became both method and theme. And in Pierre, Melville examined the irreconcilable contradictions inherent in Young America's program and announced his rejection of it. In his later writing Melville never again tried to fuse the components of the program. Melville's persistent irony makes an examination of his ideas as represented

in his writings a difficult task. But Melville repeatedly explored important issues in his writing, developing and enlarging his ideas from book to book. Where Melville has been repeatedly insistent and consistent, I have taken him to be sincere.

In the appendix, I examine the dramatic reevaluation of Melville's place in American literature during the 1920s. Just as Melville's career becomes representative of the difficulties that many American writers encountered in trying to resolve the paradoxes inherent in the profession of authorship during the 1840s and 1850s, his *Revival* is representative of the broader reevaluation of the American literary canon that occurred during the 1920s. Melville's career and the history of his reputation help illuminate the central issues in America's peculiarly self-conscious attempt to create and define a truly "national literature."

Notes

Introduction

¹Perry Miller, The Raven and the Whale (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1956); Leonard Engel, "Melville and the Young America Movement," Connecticut Review, 4 (1971), 91-101; Donald Kay, "Herman Melville's Literary Relationship with Evert Duyckinck," College Language Association Journal, 18 (1975), 393-403. See also John Stafford, The Literary Criticism of "Young America" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952) for a discussion of Young America's predilections in literature.

²Jay Leyda, The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819-1891 (New York: Gordian Press, 1969); Merrell R. Davis, William H. Gilman, eds., The Letters of Herman Melville (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

³Davis, Gilman, p. 92.

CHAPTER I

MELVILLE, YOUNG AMERICA, AND A NATIONAL LITERATURE

A literary war was raging in New York City when Herman Melville began his professional career with the publication in 1846 of Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life. The questions at issue concerned the creation of a national literature: who should write it, for whom should it be written, what themes and forms should characterize it. The two factions in the debate were Young America, a liberal, democratic group, and the Whig press, who were more conservative and autocratic in their critical tenets. Melville was drawn by Evert Duyckinck, his first American editor and a key member of Young America, into the liberal group's camp. He developed a strong friendship with Duyckinck and met with the group at Duyckinck's house in New York City. He participated in the group's projects, writing reviews and articles for its magazines, the Literary World and Yankee Doodle. He borrowed reading material from Duyckinck's impressive library. He received unstinting support for his first five books in the reviews written by Duyckinck and Young Americans Jedediah Auld and William Alfred Jones. And most important for this study, Melville attempted to shape his career as a professional author in large part as a response to Young America's formula for the creation of a national literature.

Young America grew out of the Tetractys Club, a group formed in 1836 by Evert Duyckinck, William Alfred Jones, Jedediah Auld, and Russell Trevett. Cornelius Mathews soon joined them and it was he who urged the group to take up the cause of the development of a national literature. Duyckinck, Mathews, Auld, and Jones, joined by William Gilmore Simms and for a brief time Edgar Allan Poe, contributed articles to a variety of journals expounding Young America's ideology. The group found three principal magazines in which to air their opinions--Arcturus, a short-lived magazine begun by the group in 1840, the United States Magazine and Democratic Review, the Democratic Party organ edited by John L. O'Sullivan, and the Literary World.

The leaders of Young America were Duyckinck and Mathews. In addition to his editorial positions on Arcturus, the Democratic Review, and the Literary World, Duyckinck edited Wiley and Putnam's Library of American Books, in which Typee was published, and their Library of Choice Reading. Through these editorial positions Duyckinck was able to sponsor American literature and advocate Young America's argument for its development. He wrote articles and reviews, occasionally scathing when dealing with opponents like Rufus Griswold, but usually good natured and generous, that were published in a variety of journals including the rival American Whig Review. He and Mathews were among the original founders and officers of the American Copyright Club, a group that, from 1843 to 1846, advocated the passage of an international copyright law. He was well respected

and often acknowledged, even by those who disagreed with him, as a man of honor. Thomas P. Kettell, who had taken over the Democratic Review in 1847 and was no friend of Young America, nonetheless could grant that the name of Duyckinck was "ample guarantee for the spirit, fidelity, and honor with which. . .[the Literary World, under Duyckinck's editorship, would] be conducted."¹

Mathews was as effective at earning his contemporaries' disapprobation as was Duyckinck at gaining their respect. He was a person, Perry Miller says, "who excited among his contemporaries a frenzy of loathing beyond the limits of rationality."² But he inspired in Duyckinck a devotion just as passionate and irrational, and the relative merits of Mathews' writings and personality were frequent topics of debate in the New York journals. He wrote novels, plays, poetry, and essays that advocated or were ostensible models of the Young America program for a national literature; he was the literary example most often referred to by the group when explaining that program; he was America's most vociferous spokesman for international copyright, to the chagrin of such conservative supporters of the cause as Griswold, Lewis Gaylord Clark, and Charles F. Briggs; and, consequently, he was the whipping boy of the Whig press. In this spat, where personalities were abused more often than issues were discussed, Mathews was the most frequently and nastily attacked.

Melville came late to Young America, and he was rarely

linked publicly to the group. But he did participate in their activities. He wrote in 1847 a series of satires, "Authentic Anecdotes of Old Zack," for Yankee Doodle, an ill-fated humor magazine edited by Mathews, and he contributed reviews to the Literary World. He frequently visited Duyckinck's New York house and there, it is safe to assume, he met frequently with other Young America members. As Duyckinck noted at least once in his diary, the conversation frequently revolved around literary issues of the day. After the failure of Yankee Doodle, Duyckinck noted: "with Mathews and Melville, in the evening discussed a possible weekly newspaper which should combine the various projects of the kind which [Mathews] had entertained for the last few years."³ It is difficult to determine the extent to which discussions of various Young America projects filled Melville's evening visits (if only there had been a Boswell to record the details), but Melville probably was involved with other of the group's unrealized schemes.

What is clear from the spotty evidence is that Melville found companionship and literary tutelage at Duyckinck's. In an 1851 letter to Duyckinck, written after Melville had moved to the Berkshires, he wistfully reminisced about those days: "I suppose the Knights of the Round Table still assemble over their cigars & punch," he wrote, "& I know that once every week the 'Literary World' revolves upon its axis. I should like to hear again the old tinkle of glasses in your basement." Whoever the specific Knights were (they certainly included Mathews and probably Jones), Melville

clearly enjoyed his evenings with them. But more important than his relations with the Knights was his friendship with Duyckinck. Melville did not meet Duyckinck until after the publication of Typee, but a scant six months later he was able to ask in a letter his editor's opinion of Omoo "not as being in any way connected with Messrs. W[iley] & P[utnam] but . . . confidentially and as a friend."⁴ This letter indicates much about their blossoming friendship. Duyckinck acted as a literary guide and intellectual mentor for Melville and, at least through the writing of Moby-Dick, Melville listened. He borrowed frequently from Duyckinck's large library. Evert and his brother George read the advance sheets of Mardi, Redburn, White-Jacket, and Moby-Dick, and advance notices and selections from Melville's books appeared in the Literary World. Evert wrote George that Melville was a "right pleasant man to spend an evening with," and Melville clearly felt the same about him, since he invited Duyckinck to accompany him to Europe in 1849.⁵

But Melville shared more than companionship with Duyckinck and his circle. He also shared their Democratic ideology and their concern for the profession of authorship in America. Politically, Young America was loco-foco Democrat. The Democratic party, in the 1840s, was concerned, according to contemporary commentator Orestes Brownson, with attempting to realize a social equality which would mirror the political equality that men (though not women) had achieved in America.⁶ Young America argued that literature,

as a tool of public education, could help promote social equality. The development of a national literature was, for them, as much a political and social issue as it was an artistic one.

Melville was not politically active--he failed to gain political posts in 1847 and 1853 because he had not participated in the presidential campaigns of those years--but he believed in the party's goal of achieving social equality. He came from a family that long had been associated with the Democratic Party. His brother Gansevoort, after stumping for loco-foco candidate James K. Polk, was rewarded with the post of Secretary of the Legation in London. Though Melville took no part in Polk's campaign, he was certainly aware of its ideology, and he agreed with it. In an 1851 letter to Hawthorne, Melville professed his democratic temperament:

when you see or hear of my ruthless democracy on all sides, you may possibly feel a touch of a shrink, or something of that sort. It is but nature to be shy of a mortal who boldly declares that a thief in jail is as honorable a personage as Gen. George Washington. This is ludicrous. But the Truth is the silliest thing under the sun.

Melville's democratic sentiments gave him the fresh vision that allowed him to see that the Typees "surrounded by all the luxurious provisions of nature, enjoyed an infinitely happier, though certainly a less intellectual existence than the self-complacent European." In his Literary World review of The Oregon Trail, it allowed him to chide Francis Parkman for his attitude of superiority toward the Indians. And it allowed him to develop the arch-Jacksonian narrator of

White-Jacket who defended "the people" against the authoritarianism of military law.⁸ Melville shared with the members of Young America the democratic spirit that was an essential ingredient of their recipe for a national literature.

Melville also shared Young America's concern about the status of professional writers in America. All those who wrote for the group were professional literary men. In addition to Duyckinck and Mathews, William Alfred Jones made a tenuous living as a magazine writer and William Gilmore Simms wrote voluminously and edited a variety of magazines in an effort to support himself. The profession of writing in the 1840s was a difficult one at best. The lack of an international copyright made the pirating of British works the most profitable publishing activity in America. Because domestic romances and sentimental novels outsold the kinds of "serious" fiction that Young America advocated, authors were forced to choose between more profitable "popular" forms and the less profitable "serious" enterprises. The resultant difficulties in selling books drove many writers to the magazines in an effort to find a medium that paid.⁹ Melville faced all of these difficulties. He complained in a letter to his father-in-law Lemuel Shaw about the necessity of writing books for money instead of the kinds he wished to write, and, as "Hawthorne and His Mosses" illustrates, he embraced Young America's program as a solution to these difficulties.¹⁰ What, then, was Young America's program,

and who was the opposition?

Young America argued that the profession of authorship in America needed to be protected and fostered, in fact needed to be made economically feasible, because a professional authorship was necessary for the development of a national literature, and a national literature was an essential ingredient in the fulfillment of America's destiny. The Whig press countered that in fact America already had a flourishing literature, that the American public, not American writers, needed protection from the influx of foreign literature, that the role of literature in the development of the nation was more humble than Young America suggested.

The two main Whig challengers of Young America's program were Rufus Griswold and Lewis Gaylord Clark. Griswold was a literary jack-of-all-trades. In addition to writing, he was editor of a variety of periodicals, an anthologist, the American Copyright Club's paid agent in Washington, and literary agent for "at least thirteen book publishers, twelve magazines, eight newspapers, and seven authors" between 1839 and 1856.¹¹ In two anthologies, The Poets and Poetry of America, published in 1842, and The Prose Writers of America, published in 1847, he produced a definition of literary nationalism that was an alternative to Young America's.

Lewis Gaylord Clark was the editor of the Knickerbocker, which, by 1840, was "the most influential literary organ in America." He published mostly material written expressly for the magazine by American writers, and he frequently

advocated the passage of an international copyright law. He was interested in the development of a national literature, but he had no use for Young America and its programs. He attacked Jones (whose work was "contemptible both in a moral and literary sense"), Simms ("a very voluminous author, now in the decadence of a limited sectional reputation"), and Poe (he was no poet, having only an aptitude for rhythm, and no critic, only a villifier), but he saved his heaviest weaponry for Mathews, who, Clark insisted repeatedly, had no originality, couldn't write, and didn't sell.¹²

One way of protecting and fostering an American literature, Young America argued, was to adopt an international copyright law in America. The law was essential, the group felt, to insure that literary production would be considered the property of the author rather than of the publisher. This issue had been raised in America as early as 1838, when fifty-six British authors presented to Congress an address requesting American passage of the law.¹³ The petition occasioned a discussion in an anonymous 1838 Democratic Review article about the relationship of property to copyright. The writer opposed passage of a copyright law under the terms that the address suggested because American laws did not yet recognize "the sacred principle of property--the original, inherent, and inviolable right of ownership in the productions of intellectual labor." Copyright did not guarantee ownership; it was "simply a sort of monopoly privilege or bonus, granted for a mere term of years, by legislative

grace, for the encouragement of authors."¹⁴ Copyright was similar to tariffs, and no self-respecting Democratic journal could support protectionism. Sacred principles and inviolable rights, on the other hand, formed the very basis of the democratic system, and nothing short of those rights was acceptable.

But given the state of the publishing business in the 1840s and 1850s, Young America was not interested in splitting abstract hairs over the difference between copyright and property. In an 1843 pamphlet written for the Copyright Club, Cornelius Mathews explained the economic situation in which authors found themselves. Mathews acknowledged at the outset that books should be considered the property of authors, and that property was indeed a sacred right. The difficulty with the American publishing system in the 1840s, he contended, was that publishers were usurping, unethically if not illegally, the author's sacred and natural right. "The authors themselves," he observed,

have no rights whatever in the products of their brains; yet somehow or other it happens that their agents, factors, and underlings, acquire through them and their labors some sort of rights about which all of this pother of usage and courtesy and publisher's privileges is kept up.¹⁵

Because authors did not control book production, Mathews observed in an earlier article, the field of letters in America was "in a state of desperate anarchy--without order, without system, without certainty."¹⁶

The Whigs agreed with Young America that the passage of an international copyright law was necessary, but they did

not agree on the reasons. Mathews and Young America were concerned with the impact that this anarchic situation had on authors; the Whigs were more concerned with the impact on the American public.

Mathews contended that it was the fault of the republishers of English books, which American publishers were blatantly pirating, that America did not have a national literature. Because republishers did not have to pay royalties to English writers, they could produce inexpensive editions of English works, in larger numbers, and with better distribution, than they could those by Americans. Initially, as William Charvat has observed, this practice of piracy was not completely deleterious to the development of American literature. "Before Byron and Scott," he states, "there were no professional American authors who could suffer from the competition; indeed there were no professional authors until the success of the British writers proved that there was a kind of literature that everybody wanted to read."¹⁷ But by 1846 there was a nascent professional American authorship, and it was facing, according to Mathews, unfair competition from pirated English books.

The lack of an international copyright law, which allowed publishers to set the terms of the book trade and made the publication of native books unprofitable, stifled native voices. Mathews, commenting on the distribution of English and American books, was probably literally as well as metaphorically accurate when he observed that foreign literature "is propelled through the country by steam, the other, the

native, halts after on foot or in such conveyances as a very narrow purse may bargain for." The only Americans earning a living from their books were the writers of sentimental novels in imitation of either Richardson's Pamela or the gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe and "Monk" Lewis.¹⁸ Writers concerned with the creation of an "independent" national literature were not making money, and, because "an unpaid literature cannot contend with a paid one," they were forced to retreat from the book field to those magazines that published native materials and paid contributors. Mathews was careful to distinguish those geniuses who thrived despite the odds (notably Cooper and Irving) from "another and lower race . . . the common body of American authors," but he insisted that it is this lower race that makes a viable body of national literature.¹⁹

For a time the lack of an international copyright law was not as damaging to American writers in England as it was to English writers in America. Though England had no copyright law protecting American works, English publishers respected one another's rights of ownership if the work was published in England before its publication elsewhere. Consequently, Cooper, Irving, Prescott, and Melville, among others, were able to substantially supplement their American earnings by selling their books in England. But when, in June of 1849, the British Court of Exchequer ruled that a foreigner from a country without a reciprocal copyright agreement could not hold a copyright in Great Britain, the

financial difficulties of American writers were exacerbated.

Young America, then, argued that without protection from unfair competition, American authors could not earn a living. The Whigs did agree with Young America that the lack of such a law hindered the cultivation of letters, but they did not agree with Mathews' contention that America had no national literature because of the lack of an international copyright law. After all, Rufus Griswold was able to compile two large anthologies of American writing that exhibited clearly the existence of a national literature. The connection of copyright with a national literature merely clouded both causes, the Whigs contended, and Clark quoted the Dublin University Magazine to illustrate the point: "let the question [of international copyright] be put forward manfully and intelligibly," the article declared, "let it not be a piece of Indian jugglery performed by Cornelius Mathews, but the plain and simple acknowledgement that literary property is property, and as such has its rights, sacred and inviolable." The Whigs, Clark maintained, supported the passage of the law. What they objected to was Mathews' connection with the issue. His "pertinacity in obtruding his name in connexion with . . . [international copyright] has done it infinite harm," Clark argued, "by preventing influential men from giving it their countenance, as they naturally felt unwilling in a cause like this, to play 'second fiddle' to the author of 'Puffer Hopkins.'"²⁰ The Whigs did not like Mathews or his reasons for supporting an international copyright, but they had their own reasons

for supporting the cause.

The problem with the pirating of English books, Clark and Griswold contended, was that it had a deleterious effect on the American public. They agreed with Young America that many badly written books were being published but they considered even more dangerous the opinions that any pirated author was likely to express. Griswold argued that because American publishers refused to recognize the rights of the foreign author, that author "is driven into inveterate enmity to our institutions and interests, and at the same time such advantage is given him in addressing the popular mind as to make opinion here in a large degree dependent on his will." The effect of reading foreign works, according to an unattributed Knickerbocker article, was to "upheave our morals, habits, and institutions." We need a copyright, they argued, to free ourselves from foreign opinions. In a clever satirical article, Charles F. Briggs, who frequently contributed to the Knickerbocker, argued that this foreign rule of the national mind granted Americans the ultimate freedom--"independence of ourselves"--and that it was pernicious to encourage a law that would result in American self-reliance. Clark satirically commended the article in his "Editor's Table" as "one of the most tenable positions yet taken by the opponents of copyright."²¹

Young America rested their case for international copyright on the needs of the American author; the Whigs were concerned with the protection of public stability and moral-

ity. Both felt that passage of the law would benefit a national literature, but Young America felt the possibility of financial gain would spur writers into attempting books rather than writing solely for magazines, while the Whigs argued that writers would be less dependent on imitations of more popular but more immoral foreign books and would find a readership less affected by foreign opinion. If a copyright law was passed, American books would be no more expensive than English books, and Americans, Mathews hoped, would be more likely to buy the home product. But the question remained: why should they? Why was a home product necessary?

Since America was predestined to become a nation of readers, Mathews contended, what they read was of the utmost importance. For the Whigs, the importance was moral--Americans had to be protected from influences that would sap their moral strength and threaten their social stability. "A nation can never acquire a profound, permanent character, until she owns a home literature, whose roots are planted and nourished in the habits and nature of her people," argued the writer of "Necessity for a National Literature." "Public opinion, founded on foreign experience, must be unstable and divided, and often inapplicable under a different state of affairs."²² The Whig position was conservative and insulating; they wanted to isolate and preserve the strengths of American society.

The Young Americans saw the issue as a political rather than a moral one, and they extended their argument into

territory that the Whigs were unwilling to traverse. To read foreign works, William Gilmore Simms argued, was to

denationalize the American mind. This is to enslave the national heart--to place ourselves at the mercy of the foreigner, and to yield all that is individual, in our character and hope, to the paralyzing influence of his will and frequently hostile purposes.²³

It was important to declare our independence not for conservative, but for generative reasons, he insisted. America needed to develop that profound, permanent national character so that it could extend its sway over those foreign and inferior nations around it--Simms' explanation of Manifest Destiny--and it was imperative that the national literature emphasized the superiority of democracy. William A. Jones may have put the argument most succinctly: "nationality in literature" he wrote, "is only one of the many forms of patriotism."²⁴

But if it was patriotic to read a national literature, as Young America argued, then relatively few Americans were patriotic. Compared with the sale of sentimental books such as Fanny Fern's Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio, which sold 70,000 copies in 1853, Mathews' and Simms' books did not fare well.²⁵ At the center of the controversy over who in fact would create this national literature was disagreement over the importance of popularity.

Young America argued that a truly national writer should, in Simms' words, "write from a people," not for them. Authors should not pander to their readers' tastes, because the people were still dependent on European books

and European criticism. Rather, in a democracy, it is the public's duty to read American books and cultivate a spirit of nationality. These, Mathews contended, were among the higher aims of life. Our institutions, Simms noted, make knowledge a responsibility, so if authors follow their own inclinations in writing, then the multitude will be raised by following the ramblings of the leading minds. "A liberal devotion to literature," Mathews said, "is perhaps of all human means, best calculated to expand and exalt our character." Of primary importance for Young America was the writer; the reader had a democratic duty to read those writers who had declared themselves free from the intellectual yoke of Europe.²⁶

The Whigs of course would have none of Young America's argument that it was the reading public's responsibility to recognize "new, vast, and sublime creations" and urge "them on the world."²⁷ Rather, they argued that if a writer's audience was small, it was a sure sign that he or she had not tapped the national spirit.

"The tone of a great work," Rufus Griswold argued, "is given or received by the people among whom it is produced, and so is national, as an effect or as a cause." A piece of writing was national, the Whigs believed, if it spoke to the people and, by implication, if it was read. Clark, particularly, delighted in noting that for all the books that either of them had published, Mathews and Simms simply were not read. Griswold observed: "it is always a fault in a book that appeals to human sympathies that it fails with the

multitude."²⁸ He was careful, of course, to distinguish between taste and feeling--the multitude was no authority in the one, but the highest authority in the other. If one purported to write a book that was to stir the national feeling, then one's success was determined by one's readership. Both Clark and Griswold pointed out that the readership had passed its silent judgment on Mathews and Simms as national writers.

Clark's and Griswold's argument for the importance of readership in gauging nationality seems more democratic than Young America's insistence that the great body of the people will be lifted by listening to the interplay of an intellectual elite. But the natural influence of democracy, Simms pointed out, was to encourage every individual to compete in the interplay. In a democracy, according to Mathews, "it is the peculiar privilege of genius and eloquence" to create the spirit of nationality in their readers' minds, "and to win their way to the heart and there plant the everlasting seeds of truth in a soil thus genially prepared for their welcome."²⁹ Readers, Young America contended, did not accurately identify true national literature; rather true national authors engendered in readers the spirit of nationality. Writing was a means of educating the public, of creating a social equality at the highest level. To write down to mass taste, Young America argued, was to betray the promise of democracy.

But if genius was the engenderer of nationality, what

qualities identified genius? The most important quality, according to Young America, was originality, and the most pervasive fault that the group found in American writing was that it lacked originality. Because American writers were "taught to look up to certain names [particularly Shakespeare] as unapproachable and only to be copied with assiduous care, they have feared to give full scope to their natural genius." To emulate British authors like Shakespeare and Milton by copying their content and forms was wrong. Instead, American writers should "emulate that intellectual intrepidity [apparent in Shakespeare and Milton] which dares to search for and walk new paths." Because most American writers did not evince that independence "we see delicate and tasteful artists and adapters rather than original authors."³⁰

This independence did not develop from the encounter between American authors and foreign books, Young America argued; rather originality developed from the encounter with the American landscape. We could not expect immediately a "mature, harmonious, complete literature," Mathews acknowledged, but the best of American books should be "spontaneous in their growth, and akin in some measure to the life of man in a world full of suggestive newness both to eye and spirit."³¹ Although Young America only grudgingly admired New England transcendentalism, they agreed with Emerson's declaration that "the ancient precept 'Know thyself,' and the modern precept 'Study nature,' become at last one maxim."³² They contended as did Emerson that the unique importance of

the American experience lay in the possibility of creating a new world morally, spiritually, and physically, out of the American wilderness. America had no past, no tradition, no literature in which to clothe the present. Mathews saw the possibility of strength in this condition. Our very nakedness, he observed should "drive us upon a profounder delineation of the inner life."³³ It was the delineation of the inner life as revealed through this encounter with the unique American experience that was the proper way to develop the spirit of independent nationality according to Young America.

Because it was the inner life that Americans should be exploring, egotism was another important quality of genius. The writer's discovery of self in relation to the world was the appropriate central theme of a national literature, according to Young America, so it was essential for American writers to have strong personalities and confidence in the value of revealing themselves to the reader. Egotism, Duyckinck snidely observed, was "a much dreaded word . . . in society and among critics," but it was egotism that allowed for plain speaking, downright thinking, and honest dealing. The personality that declares its importance and demonstrates it is a genius. "What is genius but this secret spring of egotism," Duyckinck asked, for it was egotism that gave life to books. Great authors revealed themselves in their writing, thus "egotism will be valued always in proportion to the character of the author." It was the de-

lightful obligation of American readers to encounter the inner lives of American geniuses, Young America claimed.³⁴

Whig writers agreed that originality was an important quality for authors, but they contended that none of Young America's writers were original. Clark called Mathews the 'American Boz' and Cornelius C. Felton, Professor of Greek Literature at Harvard, reiterated Clark's view that Mathews was a pale imitator of Dickens. Felton was no easier on Simms in his article discussing the Library of American Books editions of Simms' stories and essays, calling him a pale imitator of Scott. Griswold charged that all of Young America's critical standards were drawn from fifth rate English writers. Even Young America's name was a parody of one used in England.³⁵ Despite Young America's argument that a national literature was necessary to help fulfill the American destiny, that reading national literature was a political and social duty, that the inculcation of the unshackled democratic spirit of America was the responsibility of every reader, despite all this, Young America had yet to produce an example of original national literature that could fulfill their definition. The reason they had not succeeded, the Whigs argued, was that their list of the qualities that an American literature should have was wrong.

Young America was surprisingly prescriptive, despite their insistence on originality and the organic development of literature, when they described the form that a national literature should take. William Alfred Jones, in his 1847 article, "Nationality in Literature," listed the ingredients

of a piece of home writing:

First and foremost, nationality involves the idea of home writers. Secondly, the choice of a due proportion of home themes, affording opportunity for descriptions of our scenery, for the illustration of passing events, and the preservation of what tradition has rescued from the past, and for the exhibition of the manners of the people, and the circumstances which give form and pressure to the time and spirit of the country; and all these penetrated and vivified by an intense and enlightened patriotism.³⁶

Home writers, dealing with American themes, set in the American landscape, examining American characters and American milieus, drawing on the myths of an American past, writing from an intensely patriotic point of view, may have found their originality circumscribed to a degree. Mathews even had defined the American style. It should be "rugged . . . as the mountains and cataracts among which they were produced. . . . [It should have] something of a lusty strength--the vigor of a manly and rough-nurtured prime. . . . A certain grandeur of thought, a wild barbaric splendor," he said.³⁷

What Jones described was what Simms advocated in his 1845 collection, Views and Reviews--an historical romance, based on a myth of the American past, refined by the writer's imagination which is "moulded to an intense appreciation of our woods and streams, our dense forests and deep swamps, our vast immeasurable mountains, our voluminous and tumbling waters," and in which the writer must "write a people--to make them live--to endow them with a life and a name--to preserve them with a history for ever."³⁸ It was what Cooper had written so successfully; it was what Haw-

thorne, in some tales and in The Scarlet Letter, had done, if not commercially, at least critically with success; it was the kind of book that established Simms' reputation. It was the sort of historical romance derived from Sir Walter Scott. To write such a romance, with the prescribed subject, set of characters, setting, point of view, style, and aim described by Jones, yet to do it with originality, to copy neither Scott nor Cooper, was a demanding task. Jones insisted that "the literature of a country should, as from a faithful mirror, reflect the physical, moral, and intellectual aspects of the nation." But considering the size and shape of the mirror that Young America was willing to give home writers, it is not surprising that he would lament that America "has no native literature."³⁹

The most obvious manifestation of Young America's wrong-headedness to the Whigs was embodied in Jones' definition of nationality. Nationality did not define for them a subject, setting, set of characters, or style, and Young America's insistence that it did led them into innumerable literary blunders. To confine oneself to American subjects, both Clark and Griswold argued (carefully ignoring Jones' qualifier of "a due proportion") was narrow and exclusive. A national work, Griswold said, "may as well be written about the builders of the Pyramids as about the mound builders" (the reference is to Mathews' novel, Behemoth). In his review of Simms' stories and reviews, Felton contended that Simms' use of the American frontier to pro-

vide subject, character, and setting, led him to deal with details of daily life that could not be "raised out of the region of squalid, grovelling, repulsive vice and barbarism." To deal with such scenes and characters was to violate "the laws of ideal beauty, under which all the works of imagination must necessarily arrange themselves." If Simms' writing was indeed true to nature, Griswold added, "it is not true to nature as we love to contemplate it." And in reference to Mathews' strictures on style, Clark delighted in quoting a Mr. Biddle who observed that a "crude abundance is the disease of our American style." Felton complained that Young America never specified which of the thousands of American dialects was to be the American language that national writers were to use.⁴⁰

The Whigs defined a national literature not in terms of form but in terms of origins. Felton argued that a national literature

embodies the intellectual efforts of a nation, through all ages of its existence. It will be rich and varied and precious in proportion as the nation's intellectual culture is thorough and profound, and as its morality is pure and lofty. . . . The more universal its intellectual acquirements, the grander and more imperishable will be the monuments of its intellectual existence.⁴¹

A true national literature does not grow out of myopic intellectual isolationism, the Whigs argued. Though America should not allow its intellectual development to be controlled by European ideas, it must acknowledge its European heritage. To deny that lineage is to be parochial. If, as Young America contended, writers were supposed to turn exclusively to the self discovered in nature as the sole

source for their writing, if they were to turn away, both physically and intellectually, from the past they shared with Europe, then, as J. K. Kennard argued, the only truly original American writers alive were the slaves, who, because they could neither read nor travel, could not be infected by foreign opinions.⁴²

The essential difference between Young America and the Whigs was that the Whigs considered the public to be preeminent in dictating the nature and purpose of a national literature; Young America considered the writer to be preeminent. The Whigs trusted the public to respond to the proper patriotic, moral, and social qualities, the ones which reflected the national spirit. Popularity indicated nationality. Young America, on the other hand, argued that the writer was obliged only to himself to discover the meaning of the American experience as it was revealed in his own life. The reading public was obliged to identify true genius and participate vicariously in its explorations. Genius talked with genius, Young America contended, and the common mass was elevated by eavesdropping on the conversation.

It was in the context of this debate that Melville formed his opinions about what the acts of writing and reading were and it was against the backdrop of Young America's definition of nationality that he developed a theory of romance which culminated in Moby-Dick. An examination of Melville's career in light of Young America's arguments will

help explain both Melville's development as a writer and the pressures under which American writers worked during the 1840s and 1850s.

Notes

Chapter I

¹Miller, p. 187.

²Miller, p. 80.

³Leyda, 263.

⁴Davis, Gilman, pp. 141, 47.

⁵Leyda, I, 313.

⁶Stafford, p. 4.

⁷Davis, Gilman, pp. 126-127.

⁸Herman Melville, Typee, A Peep at Polynesian Life, ed. Harrison Hayford et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 124; "Mr. Parkman's Tour," The Literary World, March 31, 1849, p. 291.

⁹See William Charvat, The Profession of Authorship in America (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), and James D. Hart, The Popular Book (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950) for discussions of the state of professional authorship in America during the 1840s and 1850s.

¹⁰Davis, Gilman, pp. 91-92.

¹¹Charvat, p. 175.

¹²Miller, p. 12; Lewis Gaylord Clark, "Editor's Table," The Knickerbocker, Oct., 1845, pp. 378-379; Dec., 1845, p. 579.

¹³For a thorough account of the history of Anglo-American copyright negotiations, see James J. Barnes, Authors, Publishers and Politicians (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974).

¹⁴"Literary Property," The United States Magazine and Democratic Review, June 1838, p. 294, 295.

¹⁵Cornelius Mathews, "The Better Interests of the Country, In Connexion With an International Copyright," The Various Writings of Cornelius Mathews (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), pp. 364-365.

¹⁶Cornelius Mathews, "International Copyright, A Speech on International Copyright Delivered at the Dinner to Char-

les Dickens," The Various Writings of Cornelius Mathews, p. 355.

¹⁷Charvat, p. 31.

¹⁸Mathews, "International Copyright," p. 356. For a discussion of the development of the sentimental novel in America see Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), and Fred Lewis Pattee, The Feminine Fifties (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1940), pp. 110-129, 146-166.

¹⁹Mathews, "An Appeal to American Authors and the American Press in Behalf of an International Copyright," Graham's Magazine, Aug. 1842, p. 124; "The Better Interests . . ." p. 366.

²⁰Clark "Editor's Table," The Knickerbocker, Oct. 1843, p. 388; Dec., 1845, p. 582.

²¹Rufus Wilmot Griswold, "The Intellectual History, Condition, and Prospects of the Country," The Prose Writers of America (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1847), p. 15; L. M. P., "Necessity for a National Literature," The Knickerbocker, May, 1845, p. 417; Charles F. Briggs, "International Copy-right," The Knickerbocker, Oct., 1843, p. 362; Clark, Oct., 1843, p. 388.

²²L. M. P., p. 422.

²³William Gilmore Simms, "Americanism in Literature," Views and Reviews in American Literature History and Fiction (1845; rpt. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 8.

²⁴William A. Jones, "Nationality in Literature," The United States Magazine and Democratic Review, March, 1847, p. 267. This article is variously attributed to Jones (by Perry Miller), Mathews (by Richard Ruland, The Native Muse (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1976)) and Duyckinck (Leonard Engel, "Melville and the Young America Movement," Connecticut Review, 4 (1971)). It seems not nearly hyperbolic enough for Mathews, though he was perfectly capable of the kind of self-puffery evident in the article, and Duyckinck was involved in beginning the Literary World, so his time would have been limited. Jones is the most likely author.

²⁵Hart, p. 93.

²⁶Simms, p. 12; Mathews, pp. 296-297.

²⁷Mathews, p. 300.

²⁸Griswold, pp. 16, 265.

²⁹Mathews, p. 300.

³⁰Evert Duyckinck, "Traits of American Authorship," The Literary World, April 17, 1847, p. 245; Jones, p. 267; Duyckinck, "Traits of American Authorship" p. 245.

³¹Mathews, p. 367.

³²Emerson, "The American Scholar," in Selections From Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957), p. 66.

³³Mathews, p. 367. Of course not all American writers were so enamored of the untrammelled wilderness. See for example James Fenimore Cooper's Notions of the Americans and the preface to Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables for discussions of the difficulty of writing without a past. See also Benjamin T. Spencer, The Quest for Nationality (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1957), pp. 195-205, for a concise discussion of this organic concept of originality.

³⁴Evert Duyckinck, "On Writing for Magazines," The United States Magazine and Democratic Review, May, 1845, pp. 457-458.

³⁵Clark, "Editor's Table," May, 1844, p. 506; Cornelius C. Felton, "Simms' Stories and Reviews," The North American Review, Oct., 1846, p. 376; Griswold, p. 16.

³⁶Jones, p. 267.

³⁷Mathews, p. 367.

³⁸Simms, pp. 16, 12.

³⁹Jones, pp. 267, 265.

⁴⁰Griswold, p. 16; Felton, p. 376; Griswold p. 504; Clark, "Editor's Table," May, 1844, p. 506.

⁴¹Felton, p. 376.

⁴²J. K. Kennard, "Who Are Our National Poets?" The Knickerbocker, Oct., 1845, p.331.

CHAPTER II

TYPEE AND OMOO

Melville's first two books, Typee, a Peep at Polynesian Life, and Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas, were written essentially from professional motives and taught Melville much about the book-trade. He began to discover the boundaries that would circumscribe his writing --boundaries created by the sensibilities of the reading public, by the publishing formats which defined the length and genres of books, and by the reviewers who defined Melville as a professional writer.

After returning from his voyage as a sailor to the South Seas, Melville decided to turn his travels to a profitable account. J. E. A. Smith, an acquaintance of Melville, related this story of the genesis of Melville's writing career in his 1891 biographical sketch:

He was now 25 years old and, with little disposition to return to the sea, was considering what pursuit in life he should choose. . . .

The family had given their interesting wanderer a warm welcome home: and, one day, one of them, or one of their intimate friends, said to him: "Why don't you put in book form that story of your South Sea adventures which we all enjoy so much?" He at once accepted the suggestion.¹

The story may be apocryphal, but it does seem an accurate reflection of the casualness with which Melville's otherwise intense career began.

Both Typee and Omoo were written to attract a popular

audience. Melville announced in his preface to Typee that he hoped "that the story could scarcely fail to interest those who are less familiar than the sailor with a life of adventure."² It was written as a travel book, a form which had established appeal and popularity. Irving and Longfellow had earlier capitalized on a romanticized version of the form, and Melville, with his fresh vision and descriptive ability brought a new life and liveliness to a relatively unexplored subject, the South Seas.³

With Omoo Melville hoped to capitalize on and assist the sales of Typee by continuing the narrative of his adventures where he had left it in the first book. He defined Omoo, in a letter to his London publisher, John Murray, "as a work calculated for popular reading,"⁴ and he considered Typee to be in the same vein. While explaining to Murray the reasons for a revised American edition of his first book (in which his criticisms of the missionaries and his comments on recent political events had been excised), he reasoned: "the book is certainly calculated for popular reading, or for none at all.--If the first, why then, all passages which are calculated to offend the tastes or offer violence [sic] to the feelings of any large class of readers are certainly objectionable."⁵ The fact that Melville was willing to produce a revised edition of Typee (he acknowledged to Evert Duyckinck that it was in fact expurgated) is perhaps the clearest indication of how concerned he was with the delicacy of public opinion and the sales of his first two books.⁶ He did not change his opinion about the detri-

mental effects of the missionaries in Polynesia. In fact, he resumed his attack in Omoo, explaining in the preface that "nothing but an earnest desire for truth and good" led him to discuss the issue at all.⁷ It is inconceivable that later in his career Melville would have stricken from his writing material that he considered to be the unvarnished truth, however unpleasant it may have appeared to his public. But at the beginning of his career, Melville considered the primary goal of writing books to be to sell them, to find and keep a steady audience, and he was willing to meet the requirements of that audience.

Melville's publishers obviously agreed. Melville's brother Gansevoort, on the advice of his acquaintance, Thomas L. Nichols, took the manuscript of Typee to England, hoping to arrange simultaneous publication there and in America. Though he had reservations about the book, John Murray agreed to publish it in his Colonial and Home Library which was designed to be "cheap enough to be purchased by a mass audience." Gansevoort was also able to interest G. P. Putnam, of the American firm Wiley and Putnam, to publish it in his Library of American Books, an inexpensive series. In both England and America the book was marketed in a form that was designed for large sales.⁸

Though Murray thought the book might be popular, the manuscript that he received from Gansevoort was in need of extensive editing. He had to hire a reader to revise it at a cost of a bit more than half what he paid Melville. Be-

cause the manuscript was too long for one volume and too short for two, Murray requested additional material from Melville to fill it out. Melville was a quick learner, and the manuscript of Omoo was "in a rather better state for the press" than was his first manuscript. One aspect of the second manuscript that he took care with was its length, which was proper for a two volume edition in the popular travel library formula. "A little experience in this art of book-craft," he wrote Murray, "does wonders."⁹ Melville's concern with book-craft is another indication of his willingness to subordinate the demands of his art to the requirements of his publishers and his audience during the creation of his first two books. This is not to say that Melville drastically altered his plan or content in Omoo to please Murray. Rather, he wrote to the requirements of his chosen form. As we will see, it was only while writing his third book, Mardi, and a Voyage Thither, that Melville began to feel the tensions that existed between the demands of his art and the demands of the public.

Melville was paid well for his first two books. Murray paid him 100 pounds for the manuscript of Typee and an additional 50 pounds for the revised edition, including "The Story of Toby." Wiley and Putnam agreed to pay Melville half of the net profits for the book, which came to 12 1/2 % of the retail price on each copy sold. Gansevoort optimistically assumed that 5,000 copies per year would be sold, which would have brought Melville over \$600 dollars each year. In fact over the two and a half years that Wiley

and Putnam owned the rights to Typee, Melville earned only \$732.75, a bit less than Gansevoort's prediction. For Omoo Murray paid 150 pounds and Harpers, who became Melville's regular publisher, agreed to pay him a straight royalty of fifteen cents per copy, including a \$400 advance. This was good pay for an author in the 1840s; Melville had reason to be optimistic about the possibility of writing as a viable profession.¹⁰

The reviews of the two books provided further encouragement. The reviewers indicated that the two books were popular. The New York Evening Mirror, one of Melville's constant supporters, in May of 1847 echoed many other American journals when it observed that Melville had not lost any of the freshness and vigor of style that had made Typee so popular. When in October of that year the Evening Mirror reported that Typee and Omoo had been received more favorably in England than in America, Melville was emboldened to write Murray:

if the probable sale of Omoo in England is to be estimated by the notices of it which have appeared there, & also by its known sale here, you can not be surprised, that to say the least, the book in my estimation brought less than it has proved to be worth, in a merely business point of view.¹¹

Murray's response may have given Melville his first indication that the reviews did not reflect accurately the tastes of the reading public.

Murray responded that though the two books were greatly admired in England they were not selling particularly well. As of December 3, 1847 (the date of Murray's letter), he had

not yet made a profit on them. "You and your Friend[s] suppose me to be reaping immense advantages in which you ought to be participating," Murray wrote, "but I cannot anticipate from what has occurred that I shall be any great gainer except in credit as the publisher of these two Books." Murray was willing to accept some of the blame because of "so cheap a form of publication," and he expressed a desire to continue as Melville's publisher. But the implication of his letter was that Melville should not trust the reviews to predict sales.¹²

Sales in America did not justify the inflated claims of popularity made by reviewers either. In two and a half years Typee had sold a bit under 6,000 copies; it took Harpers almost three years to sell Omoo's first printing of 5,500 copies. Compared with Fanny Fern's sales in 1853 of 70,000 copies of one book, or more spectacularly the sale, in 1852, of 100,000 copies of Harriet Beacher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin in eight weeks, Melville's sales were modest. They certainly did not justify the National Anti-Slavery Standard reviewer's claim that Typee "proved the most successful hit in book-making, since the publication of Stephens's first book of Travels."¹³ The reviewers, it seems, were reflecting public taste not as it was, but as they would have liked it to be.

The overwhelming majority of reviewers in America during the 1840s and 1850s were male, and they seemed unconcerned with the fact that most of book buyers and readers,

as well as many of the biggest selling authors, were women. There was a latent bigotry evident in many reviewers' attitudes about women writers. Evert Duyckinck, for example, who consistently talked of national writers as men, promised in his first issue as owner of the Literary World that, though the magazine would include Tales and Sketches, he would insist upon

something more than the vicissitudes of Amanda Jenkins's affection for Peter Stubbs for a story, the wonderful narrative connected with Penelope Smith's new bonnet, and all that flatulent kind of thing, which is so interesting in the Milliner's Magazines.¹⁴

On the other side of the New York debate, Rufus Griswold was only a bit more kind. He included no women writers in his Poets and Poetry of America, but he did create a separate anthology, Female Poets of America.

Although the domestic, sentimental romance was the most popular form of fiction during the 1840s and 1850s, and thus could claim to be the national literature, at least in terms of Clark's and Griswold's definition, it did not embody the grander design for an American literature that Young America had outlined. That so many people read the books of Grace Greenwood, Fanny Forester, and Augusta Jane Evans indicated to many reviewers that not enough people had been educated about the necessity and value of a national literature, rather than that these authors had more of a claim to public attention than did Simms, Mathews, Hawthorne, or Melville.¹⁵ Young America's idea that it could dictate the taste of American readers was woefully mistaken, but Melville, in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," attempted to follow Simms' and

Mathews' example by doing just that. By trying to dictate what should be popular rather than by recognizing what was popular, Young America writers, including Melville, severely limited the sales of their books.

The Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review was not accurate when it identified novelty, originality of style and matter, and deep interest from first to last as the elements that would make Typee popular.¹⁶ The truly popular sentimental fiction displayed little novelty, returning to the life of the home and the way of the household for its subject matter, and little deep interest, telling stories based on one or two simple and often repeated themes.¹⁷ Yet virtually all of Melville's reviewers agreed that those qualities identified by the Merchants' Magazine were indeed both Typee's and Omoo's qualifications for popularity. The novelty of Typee, and to a lesser extent that of Omoo, drew frequent comments. Even the London Spectator, whose reviewer did not admire Typee, nonetheless considered it to be curious in at least one respect--in the originality that the book evinced as an account written by a person who actually lived among the natives.¹⁸ The originality of subject matter in both books was frequently discussed, if often with incredulity. Melville's style was considered "vivid and forcible, clear, lively and pointed," by the London Critic, as piquant by the Albany Argus, as having peculiar animation and vivacity by the Democratic Review, and as clear and simple by the John Bull.¹⁹ The deep interest generated by

the two books was reflected in two controversies--the question of their veracity, and the offense taken by reviewers over Melville's morality. Both Typee and Omoo, many critics contended, were dangerous books because they claimed to be something they were not, and because they were diseased in moral tone.

The question of veracity arose even before Typee was published. According to Frederick Saunders, a reader for Harpers (to whom Typee was first offered), the publishers refused the book on the ground that "it was impossible that it could be true and therefore was without real value."²⁰ This charge, which was repeated in the reviews, implied that the value of a production lay not in its intrinsic interest or the skill with which it was executed, but in the authenticity of its content. A book could not instruct if its facts could not be trusted and to question the veracity of any of the book was to question all of it. Murray deliberated for a long time before he decided to publish Typee in his non-fiction series because he also "scented the forbidden thing--the taint of fiction."²¹ In the reviews of Typee and Omoo Melville was so frequently compared with Daniel Defoe, and the two books with Robinson Crusoe, that the comparison became a short hand for acknowledging the fictional element.

Not every reviewer who doubted the veracity of the two books felt that Melville's supposed fictionalizing was bad. Hiram Fuller, in the Evening Mirror, observed that Typee "has the vraisemblance of Robinson Crusoe--we hope it is at least as true. Certainly, if it is not, we shall set the

writer down as second only to Defoe." And the London Times observed that Omoo "is not a whit less charming than Typee; neither does it appear to us one shade more authentic. Quite as fascinating a production as Robinson Crusoe, it is twenty times less probable." Those reviewers who did not consider factual accuracy the central value of travel books found Melville's productions delightful. Though no one was as exuberant as Mordecai M. Noah, who, in his Sunday Times and Noah's Weekly Messenger, declared, "Melville is the greatest writer of the age, in his way, and has deservedly been styled the 'Defoe of America'," many reviewers considered the question of veracity relatively unimportant.²²

But the Morning Courier and New York Enquirer, a conservative Whig paper, felt differently. "In all essential respects, it is a fiction," the reviewer said of Typee.

This would be a matter to be excused, if the book were not put forth as a simple record of actual experience. It professes to give nothing but what the author actually saw and heard. It must therefore be judged, not as a romance or a poem, but as a book of travels,--as a statement of facts;--and in this light it has, in our judgement, no merit whatever.²³

Implicit in this statement is the assumption that genres are not to be mixed. If the boundaries and limits of genre are to be honored then originality and the organic development of a piece of writing are seriously limited. Melville encountered the same objection to his melding of fact and fiction in the reviews of every book through Moby-Dick. This accusation ultimately challenged, we will see, Young America's concept of the nature of romance; it more immedi-

ately endangered the commercial success of Typee and Omoo.

Another implication of the Courier and Enquirer's assessment, and of Murray's and the Harper's reason for hesitating to publish Typee, was the belief that fiction was intrinsically inferior to tales of real events. At issue here is the definition of truth that the various responses to Melville's books implied. If truth was a matter of historical evidence and graphic accuracy in relating observations and events, in short, if truth was the statement of facts, then Melville's claim to have "stated matters just as they occurred" in Typee, and his less assertive claim that "every occurrence has been put down from simple recollection" in Omoo left him open to attack. Melville had indeed stretched the time of his visits to the island; he had embellished the book with dramatic exaggerations; he had similarly exaggerated the Typees' beauty and moral perfection. Further, he relied much more on contemporary travel books than on personal observation for his facts about the life of the Typees. But his readers could not prove that Melville had misrepresented anything. Rather, they questioned whether or not Melville had the adventures he described at all. If Melville did not tell the truth about his adventures, the Courier and Enquirer argued, then the book had no value as travel literature.²⁴

For Melville truth did not lie so much in the accurate statement of facts as in the honest relating of thoughts and observations. Truth was created in the act of remembering and ordering experience through writing, he felt, and this

concept of truth became the defining characteristic of his definition of the method and nature of romance. As far as he was concerned Typee and Omoo were true in a more fundamental sense than the Courier and Enquirer required.²⁵

Still, for pragmatic reasons, Melville felt compelled to defend Typee against the charges of fictionalizing. If the charges persisted, he feared that the book would not sell. The repeated charges in both the English and American presses worried Murray. As early as March 4, 1846 (less than a week after the book's publication in England) Murray indicated to Gansevoort Melville that the authenticity of the book was doubted. And in the December 3, 1847 letter in which he discussed the finances of Typee and Omoo, Murray was still concerned with the charge: "I wish some means could be taken to convince the English Public that your Books are not fictions, imitations of Robinson Crusoe," he wrote. "'Tis this Feeling of being tricked which impedes their Circulation here." The London People's Journal could argue that Melville was representative of a new class of authors who demonstrated that "experience--whether the experience be of the outer or the inner world--whether it be what a man has seen or done, or thought, is the only thing worth listening to," but the Courier and Enquirer and Melville's publishers considered that what a man had seen and done was more valuable than what he thought. It was clear to Melville that the strident if minority voice of the critics who condemned his books as fictions had to be con-

fronted. He feared that the Courier and Enquirer article could seriously impair "the success of the book as a genuine narrative."²⁶ He did not agree with the paper's definition of truth, but he did want to sell his books.

On April 21, four days after the Courier and Enquirer review, it was reported in the Albany Argus that Melville desired "to state to the public, that Typee is a true narrative of events which actually occurred to him." On May 9, N. P. Willis reiterated the point in the Evening Journal: "we are requested to state, on the authority of the writer himself of this universally read, though suspected book, that the work is a genuine history of actual occurrences, and not by any means the fiction it has been represented."²⁷ But Melville felt that these statements were insufficient. On May 23 he wrote to Alexander W. Bradford, a family friend and co-editor of the American Whig Review, requesting Bradford's assistance in placing an article, penned by Melville, but made to "appear as if written by one who had read the book & believed it," in the Courier and Enquirer. The review never did appear in that paper, but with the surprising reappearance in July of Richard Tobias Greene, the Toby of Typee, Melville was sure he had proven his case. The Buffalo Commercial Advertiser reported that Toby was living in Buffalo and printed a letter which declared that he was "happy to testify to the entire accuracy of the work so long as . . . [he] was with Melville." The letter was quickly reprinted in the Albany Evening Journal, the Albany Argus, and on July 9 it was grudgingly acknowledged by the Courier

and Enquirer.²⁸ Melville interviewed Toby and wrote a sequel for the Revised Edition of Typee as final proof of the book's authenticity.

Melville was anxious about Murray's complaints and quickly informed him of Toby's resurrection. On July 15, Melville wrote Murray:

I send to you by steamer several papers . . . containing allusions to him. Toby's appearance has produced quite a lively sensation here--and "Truth is stranger than Fiction" is in every body's mouth. . . .

However the impression which Toby's letter has produced is this--ie--that everything about it bears the impress of truth.--Indeed the whole Typee adventure is now regarded as a sort of Romance of Real Life.²⁹

Despite Melville's defense, controversy over the authenticity of his books continued, especially in England. John Wilson, reviewer for Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine considered Omoo "a skillfully concocted Robinsonade, where fictitious incident is ingeniously blended with genuine information," and thought that Melville's name sounded like "the harmonious and carefully selected appellation of an imaginary hero of romance."³⁰ Melville convinced neither Murray nor many of the other skeptics of the authenticity of his narratives. The Columbian Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine in June 1847 summed up the assessment of reviewers on the issue of authenticity: "the reliability of its narrative and descriptions is still one of the disposable questions in 'literary circles'" the reviewer observed, "but whether romance or reality, all voices are unanimous in laudation of its interest and pleasantness."³¹ The books may have been liked, but Melville's defense of himself for professional

reasons as a writer of factual travel books was to cause him problems when he began to write romances with Mardi.

One critic that Melville did eventually convince of the authenticity of Typee and Omoo was Evert Duyckinck. As editor of Wiley and Putnam's Library of American Books, Duyckinck did his duty by Typee, sending review copies to Nathaniel Hawthorne and Margaret Fuller among others. He seemed not terribly excited by the book, telling Hawthorne that it was "lively and pleasant . . . [though] not over philosophical." Later, in a review of Mardi, Duyckinck exhibited a certain prejudice against travel books and when Typee was published he probably was not convinced of its authenticity. When Toby surfaced, Melville wrote to Duyckinck: "there was a spice of civil scepticism in your manner, My Dear Sir, when we were conversing together the other day about 'Typee'--What will the politely incredulous Mr. Duyckinck now say to the true Toby's having turned up in Buffalo."³² Duyckinck did not review Typee, but after the publication of Omoo, he wrote reviews for both the Literary World and the Evening Mirror. By this time the friendship between the two had been firmly established, and Duyckinck came to Melville's defense. In both reviews he defended the truthfulness of Typee and Omoo, claiming in the Literary World that

while the world abroad were showing their acuteness in detecting Mr. Melville as a veteran book-maker who, being master of a brilliant style, had ingeniously fashioned a most readable piece of Munchausenism while sitting in his library, his work was at once recognized as a genuine narrative in the city where it was pub-

lished.

Duyckinck's statement, as we have seen, was not completely accurate; some American reviewers were as skeptical as the British. But if the incidents seemed incredible, he added in the Evening Mirror, it was only because they were novel to the reading public.³³

These articles were not the only ones written by members of Young America in defense of Melville's first two books. Duyckinck, Mathews, and Jedidiah Auld were all disturbed by a series of articles in conservative journals that attacked Melville's morality.

The Washington National Intelligencer, in a May, 1847 review, ascribed the popularity of Melville's first two books to the degenerated morality of the American public. "Few books," the reviewer observed,

have for a long time, more excited the easy enthusiasm of our time than that of which the present is the sequel --namely Mr. Melville's Typee. . . . In a word, Typee was, we take it, an almost unmingled Sea Romance of lands, waters, and people, skilfully chosen to affect the fancy of a generation highly sensuous and wonder-loving, much-rejoicing in its refinement and its morality, but exceedingly content to be helped into such a state of Nature as the loosest voluptuary may sigh for.³⁴

Melville's fictionalizing was bad, this reviewer contended, because it tapped into the prurient interests of the American public. Horace Greeley reached the same conclusion about Melville's books in his review of Omoo. Typee and Omoo, he contended, were "unmistakably defective if not positively diseased in moral tone, and will very fairly be condemned as dangerous reading for those of immature intel-

lects and unsettled principles."³⁵ The two books were dangerous for the readers of popular literature, the conservative reviewers felt, because they attacked Christianity by attacking the missionaries in the South Seas, they attacked civilized life by finding it in many ways inferior to savage life, and they attacked the staid sexual and social mores of American society by reveling in the voluptuosness of South Seas life. Indignant responses to Melville's morality came from conservative American religious periodicals--the Evan-gelist and the Christian Parlor Magazine of New York, and the New Englander, the Universalist Quarterly and General Review, and the Christian Observatory of Boston.³⁶

Though small in number, the religious periodicals were effective in labeling Melville a traducer. How can someone be trusted, the New Englander wondered, "when according to his own showing, he has not been on a course of life calculated greatly to improve his moral eyesight[?]" Their arguments led to the revised edition of Typee, as we have seen, and thus had more impact than one might expect. Melville waited six years, until the writing of Pierre, finally to have his say about the religious periodicals. But the most malicious attack was by George Washington Peck in the American Whig Review. It demanded an immediate response from Young America.³⁷

Peck began his July 1847 review by claiming that other reviewers really did not like Typee and Omoo, but that they had such trouble expressing the causes of their dislike that they wrote complimentary reviews instead. Peck would ex-

plain for them their reasons.

The books lacked vraisemblance, Peck claimed, and worse, there was a "perfect want of heart" in the writing. His suspicion of Melville's veracity and his dislike of Melville's "cool, sneering wit," immediately aligned Peck with the other conservative estimations of his books. In asserting that Melville "has all the confidence of genius, all its reckless abandonment, but little of its power," Peck echoed the London Spectator's charge that Melville's mind was not trained to observe with profit and that he had little control over his language.³⁸ Thus the roots of Peck's literary ideology were quickly revealed. Next Peck revealed the school of reviewing in which he had been trained. His abusive tone was in the tradition of Clark's.

Peck felt that the books were morally dangerous because in them Melville "gets up voluptuous pictures, and with cool, deliberate art breaks off always at the right point, so as without offending decency, he may stimulate curiosity and excite unchaste desire." The Evangelist had made the same point in discussing Typee, arguing that immorality lay "not so much [in] what is plainly expressed, as [in] what is left to be imagined by the reader." The stimulation of imagination clearly offended the sensibilities of many conservative reviewers, but Peck carried the complaint further. He argued that "when a man glories in his licentiousness, it raises a strong presumption that he is effete either by nature or through decay." Melville not only wrote to those

people who were in a state of moral decay, Peck implied, but as also himself a prime example of the dangerous degeneration of voluptuous Americans. If Melville was morally degenerated, the argument continued, then his statements on missionaries were clearly untrue. Peck followed the example of the New Englander, relying on the argument ad hominem to question Melville's truthfulness about life in the South Seas.

Peck acknowledged in conclusion that the attack was personal. "We have felt obliged," he wrote, "to say many severe things--the more severe, because they are against the tone and spirit of the book, and therefore apply more directly to its author." His excuse for the attack was that he was "a conservative in literature" and thus a true lover of it. In expounding the conservative position on the proper nature of literature, Peck illuminated the political ideologies that underpinned reviewers' complaints about Melville's veracity and morality, and he provoked Young America into claiming Melville as one of their own.

On July 10, Duyckinck noted in his diary: "The Whig Review grossly abusive of Melville's *Omoo*." But it was not until after the Morning Courier and New York Enquirer (for which Peck was an editor) had on July 14 commended the article for its "uncommon critical acumen and a clear-sighted discriminating sympathy with what is sound and healthy in literature and morals," that Young America publicly expressed its opinion. On July 24, Mathews printed in Yankee Doodle (the same issue in which Melville's "Authentic

Anecdotes of Old Zack" began) a brief comment, written by Duyckinck, that criticized Peck's "high parsonical style." But the full defense had already appeared three days earlier in the Evening Mirror.³⁹

Jedidiah Auld began his article with the same sort of personal attack that Peck had employed. He noted that "critics and snarlers are the crawling and creeping things of the world of letters," and this particular review was execrable. Peck's central contention that readers and reviewers did not like Melville's books, Auld argued, was simply wrong. "We happened, like the vast majority of readers here and abroad, to read Omoo with feelings of unmixed delight." Peck's complaint of sensuality revealed his own "over sensitive or querulous" nature, Auld wrote; Peck's review pandered much more to depraved taste than did Omoo. In writing the review, Peck found "a fair chance to disgorge on the public a little of his own filth, in the pleasant disguise of a moralist and conservative, he launches forth as much disgusting loathsomeness and personal blackguardism as could be crammed in the compass of his few pages." Stranger, though, than the appearance of Peck's article in the American Whig Review was its endorsement "in an austere morning paper famous for stern conservatism"--the Courier and Enquirer. Auld concluded that there must exist "among the numerous writers for that journal a societe d'admiration mutuel." Clark had leveled exactly the same charge against Young America six months earlier and indeed

Henry M. Raymond, editor of the Courier and Enquirer, had connections with many of the attackers of Young America and of Melville's books. He was a friend of Rufus Griswold and of Horace Greeley, for whom he had been an assistant editor. He had endorsed in the Courier and Enquirer Cornelius Felton's 1846 article on Simms and in the process approved the various Whig attacks on Young America.

In his review of Omoo Auld clearly claimed Melville as an ally in the debate over the development of a national literature. The reviews of Typee and Omoo identified for Melville some of the issues around which the argument was being waged: whether or not writers should adhere to the restrictions of particular forms, whether or not they should tell the unvarnished truth even if it flies in the face of public opinion and sentiment. The reviews had established Melville as a popular writer (even if sales did not prove the definition accurate) and Melville defined himself as a writer of travel books in response to the reviews. And Young America, in search of a talented writer who might be able to embody its program in his writing, adopted Melville as an author worth cultivating.

NOTES

CHAPTER II

¹Joseph Edward Adams Smith, "Herman Melville," in The Early Lives of Melville, ed. Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), p. 128.

²Herman Melville, Typee, A Peep at Polynesian Life, p. xiii.

³William Charvat, p. 208.

⁴Davis, Gilman, p. 53.

⁵Davis, Gilman, p. 39. Information on Melville's revisions can be found in Leon Howard, "Historical Note," in Typee, a Peep at Polynesian Life, pp. 289-291.

⁶Davis, Gilman, p. 43.

⁷Herman Melville, Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas, ed. Harrison Hayford et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. xiv.

⁸Leyda, p. 197; Howard, p. 279.

⁹Davis, Gilman, p. 41; Gordon Roper, "Historical Note," in Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas, p. 327.

¹⁰Information about Melville's finances has been garnered from Howard, pp. 294-296; Roper, pp. 338-339; G. Thomas Tanselle, "The Sale of Melville's Books," Harvard Library Bulletin, 17, (1969), 195-215; and Charvat, pp. 190-203. It is Charvat who points out that Melville's average income of \$1,600 per year during the first five years of his professional career was good for the time.

¹¹New York Evening Mirror, May 1, 1847, in Brian Higgins, Herman Melville: an Annotated Bibliography, 1846-1930 (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979), p. 22; Evening Mirror, Oct. 6, 1847, in Higgins, p. 35; Davis, Gilman, p. 67. I would like here to acknowledge the value of Higgins' Bibliography not only for its thorough list of reviews and articles but also for its valuable summaries to which I referred when I was not able to locate the original articles. Hugh Hetherington, Melville's Reviewers: British and American, 1846-1891 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961) identifies Hiram Fuller, editor of the Evening Mirror, as the possible author of these notices.

¹²Leyda, p. 917.

¹³Howard, p. 296; Roper, p. 340; Hart, p. 93; Charvat, p.301; National Anti-Slavery Standard, May 27, 1847, in Melville: The Critical Heritage, ed. Watson G. Branch (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 112.

¹⁴"Editorial," The Literary World, Oct. 7, 1848, p. 701.

¹⁵See Hart, pp. 85-105, and Pattee, pp. 146-166, for a full discussion of the preeminence of women writers and domestic sentimental fiction in popular reading during the 1840s and 1850s.

¹⁶["Review of Typee"], New York Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review, May, 1846, in Higgins, p. 12.

¹⁷Hart, p. 91.

¹⁸["Review of Typee"], London Spectator, Feb. 28, 1846 in Branch, pp. 53-55. Hetherington identifies Thornton Hunt, son of the English poet Leigh Hunt, as the reviewer.

¹⁹["Review of Typee"], London Critic, March, 1846, in Branch, pp. 56-60; ["Review of Typee"], Albany Argus, March 26, 1846 in Higgins, p. 6; ["Review of Typee"], United States Magazine and Democratic Review, May, 1846, in Branch, p. 83; ["Review of Omoo"], John Bull, April 17, 1847, in Branch, p.93.

²⁰Leyda, p. 196.

²¹Leyda, p. 200.

²²["Review of Typee"], Evening Mirror, April 4, 1846, in Leyda, p. 210; "Omoo--By the Author of Typee," London Times, Sept. 24, 1847 in Branch, p. 135; ["Review of Omoo"] Sunday Times and Noah's Weekly Messenger, May 2, 1847, in Higgins, p. 22. Hetherington identifies Hiram Fuller as the reviewer for the Evening Mirror.

²³["Review of Typee"], Morning Courier and New York Enquirer, April 17, 1846, in Zoltan Haraszti, "Melville Defends Typee," More Books: The Bulletin of the Boston Public Library, 22 (1947), pp. 204-205.

²⁴For a thorough discussion of the biographical and ethnological accuracy of Typee see Charles Roberts Anderson, Melville in the South Seas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), pp. 179-195.

²⁵Edgar A. Dryden, Melville's Thematics of Form (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968) is the best book

length study of Melville's theory of romance and its relation to the form of his works. My approach to Melville's sense of romance is indebted to Dryden's study.

²⁶Leyda, pp. 205, 917; ["Review of Omoo"] London People's Journal, April 17, 1847, in Branch, p. 93; Davis, Gilman, p. 27.

²⁷"Herman Melville's Book," Albany Argus, April 21, 1846, in Higgins, p.11; "Typee, a Veritable Narrative," Evening Mirror, May 9, 1846, in Higgins, p. 13. Willis, whom Hetherington identifies as the reviewer for the Evening Mirror, was a friend of Gansevoort Melville's, and he was a consistent admirer of Melville's books. The first full account of Melville's response to the Courier and Enquirer article appears in the Zoltan Haraszti article, previously cited.

²⁸Haraszti, p. 207.

²⁹Davis, Gilman, p. 37.

³⁰Christopher North, ["Review of Omoo"], Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, June, 1847, in Branch, p. 115, p. 116. Christopher North, Hetherington notes, is John Wilson's pseudonym.

³¹["Review of Omoo"] The Columbian Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine, June, 1847, in Critics on Melville, ed. Thomas J. Rountree (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1972), p. 14.

³²Leyda, p. 206; Davis, Gilman, p. 35.

³³["Review of Omoo"], Literary World, May 8, 1847, p. 319; ["Review of Omoo"], Evening Mirror, May 21, 1847, in Branch, pp. 99-104. Both Leyda and Miller identify Duyckinck as the author of both reviews, even though he temporarily lost control of the Literary World shortly before May 8.

³⁴["Review of Omoo"], Washington National Intelligencer, May 26, 1847, in Branch, p. 105.

³⁵Horace Greeley, ["Review of Omoo"], Weekly Tribune, June 23, 1847, in Branch, pp. 121-122.

³⁶[Review of Omoo] New York Evangelist, May 27, 1847, in Higgins, p. 27; William Oland Bourne, "Typee: the Traducer of Missions," Christian Parlor Magazine, July, 1846, in Branch, pp. 85-89; ["Review of Typee"], The New Englander, July, 1846, in Herschel Parker, The Recognition of Herman Melville (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), pp. 4-5; ["Review of Typee"], Universalist Quarterly and General Review, July, 1846, in Higgins, p. 14; ["Review of

Typee"], Christian Observatory, May, 1847, in Higgins, pp. 21-22.

³⁷["Review of Omoo"], American Whig Review, July, 1847, in Branch, pp. 123-132. Leyda, Miller, and Hetherington all identify the review as Peck's.

³⁸["Review of Typee"] London Spectator, Feb. 28, 1846, in Branch, pp. 53-55.

³⁹Leyda, pp. 250, 253; "Notes on New Books," Evening Mirror, July, 1847, in Branch, 133-134.

CHAPTER III

MARDI

"If 'Omoo' succeeds I shall follow it up by something else, immediately," Melville wrote John Murray on March 31, 1847, but it was nearly two years before his third book, Mardi, and A Voyage Thither, was published. The book he had originally intended--"another book of South Sea Adventure (continued from, tho' wholly independent of 'Omoo')"--became something quite different by March of 1849. Instead of another "bona-vida narrative" like Typee and Omoo, Melville wrote what he called a "Romance of Polynesian Adventure."¹ This "romance" contained a section of straight-forward adventure narrative in the vein of his first two books, a love story derived from the romantic tradition of Keats, Byron, and Shelley, and a travelogue-satire on such current events as the French Revolution, the British Chartist movement, the California Gold Rush, and the American presidential campaign of 1848.² During the writing of Mardi Melville, for a number of reasons, recast himself as a writer of romance in the school of Young America and began his exploration of the possibilities and limitations of being a self-conscious national writer.

Melville felt that Mardi as he originally conceived it had more earning potential than his first two books because it would "enter into scenes altogether new . . . [and would]

possess more interest than the former, which treated of subjects comparatively trite." Even during this early stage of composition (the end of October, 1847), Melville planned to deal with more serious subjects than he had in Typee and Omoo, though he was not aware of how different Mardi would be from those two. He felt that the success of the first two books would guarantee the success of Mardi (it was in reply to this letter that Murray informed Melville of the limited sales of Typee and Omoo). And in hopes of greater pecuniary returns, Melville suggested that the book be published in a more expensive format than his first two had been. Melville may have been aware as early as October, 1847 that Mardi would not pass Murray's strict rule against publishing fiction, and he may have been trying subtly to prepare Murray for a romance by suggesting that Mardi be distinguished from Typee and Omoo. Two months later he stopped just short of admitting that his book would not be a travel narrative, saying he had clothed "the whole subject in new attractions & combine[d] in one cluster all that is romantic, whimsical & poetic in Polynusia [sic]."³

Melville had another reason for feeling that his third book could be financially rewarding. He reported to Murray in the October letter that he had "received overtures from a house in London concerning the prospective purchase of the English copyright of a third book." The firm was probably Richard Bentley's, which ultimately did publish Mardi. Although Melville assured Murray that the first chance of

publication would be his, this unsolicited offer affected the publishing arrangements that Melville would be satisfied with. It made him confident that the manuscript of Mardi was worth at least double the 100 guinea advance that Murray had offered. Because Murray had yet to see the manuscript he was underestimating its worth, Melville explained in January, 1848, and the "very liberal offer" that Melville had received from the other firm gave him the confidence to bargain with Murray. This other offer may also have given Melville the confidence to proceed with a book that Murray was unlikely to publish.⁴

By March of 1848 Melville had completely thrown over all pretensions of writing a "narrative of facts," he told Murray, because he

began to feel an incurable distaste for the same; & a longing to plume my pinions for a flight, & felt irked, cramped & fettered by plodding along with dull common places,--So suddenly standing the thing altogether, I went to work heart & soul at a romance.

Melville gave two reasons for his dramatic shift in plan. First, as he explained to Murray in his March letter and reiterated in the Preface of Mardi, he was becoming increasingly irritated with the skepticism that Typee and Omoo generated. Even Murray had continued to ask Melville for proof of his voyages to the South Seas; Blackwood's had questioned the existence of a Herman Melville; the veracity of the two books was still an open question. "The reiterated imputation of being a romancer in disguise," he wrote Murray, "has at last pricked me into a resolution to show those who may take any interest in the matter, that a real

romance of mine is not Typee or Omoo, & is made of different stuff altogether."⁵ Melville felt that his reviewers did not know what romance was, and his new book would instruct them in the meaning of the term by embodying the qualities of real romance. He was paying attention to his reviewers, and their goading along with Murray's disbelief elicited the response of Mardi.

Melville's second and more important reason for attempting a romance was a compulsion, "a longing to plume my pinions for a flight." The romancer and poet, Melville felt, were allowed "that play of freedom & invention" that the writer of a narrative of facts did not have.⁶ During the composition of Mardi, Melville began reading books borrowed from Evert Duyckinck and from the New York Society Library (his right to borrow was purchased from Duyckinck)--books which did not directly pertain to research for his narrative of facts. Among others, he read Shakespeare, Montaigne, Rabelais, Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, and volumes of Sir Thomas Browne. Duyckinck, for one, was surprised with the range of Melville's interest, writing his brother, George, "by the way Melville reads old Books. He had borrowed Sir Thomas Browne of me and says finely of the speculations of the Religio Medici that Browne is a kind of 'crack'd Archangel.' Was ever any thing of this sort said before by a sailor?" It is not within the province of this study to outline the specific impact that various books had on the development of Mardi. The point I wish to make here

is that Melville's reading indicates that he found himself in the sort of intellectual ferment that would make the writing of self-exploratory romance an intellectual necessity.⁷

The book that Melville produced from this need to write a romance was considerably different than Typee or Omoo and he felt that Mardi should be distinguished from them. When he finally sent the sheets of the book for Murray's inspection in January, 1849, he suggested that "it would be advisable to publish the book in handsome style, & independently of any series.--Unless you should deem it very desirable do not put me down on the title page as 'the author of Typee and Omoo.'"⁸ He was already dissatisfied with the image of the man who lived among the cannibals that his first two books had fostered. With Mardi he hoped to change that image. By the time Melville had finished Mardi he had recast himself as a romancer and discovered a new method of writing which had the sanction of Duyckinck and Young America as the proper method and subject of a national literature.

Melville's impulse to "out with the Romance" developed from his hope that this new form would be popular, from his disgust with the critics for labeling his first two books romances, and from his personal impulse as an artist. But his sense of what constituted romance was in accord with Young America's definitions. "Romance" was a fluid term in nineteenth-century criticism; any book which was not strictly factual was called a romance. But with Mardi Melville

began exploring the meaning of the term as it related to his own act of writing. Thus he asserted to Murray that his new romance "is no dishwater nor its model borrowed from the Circulating Library." In other words, the book would not be the sort of domestic moral tale that Duyckinck and much of the literary establishment held in contempt. "It is something new I assure you, & original if nothing more," he continued. His instinct, Melville claimed, rather than his reason, led him into romance. Because "instincts are prophetic and better than acquired wisdom," Melville cared very little whether it was wise to follow Typee and Omoo with a romance. He trusted his inner need of expressing himself through romance rather than allowing monetary considerations to dictate in what genre he would write. In doing so, he was awakening to that overriding egotism which Duyckinck had identified as the source of genius in books.⁹

For the first time in his books, Melville discussed in Mardi his developing sense of the process of composing and through this discussion he revealed his affinity with Young America's theory of a national literature. Very near the end of Mardi, Melville, in one of his innumerable digressions, attempted to explain the reason for the book's rambling structure. The occasion is a discussion between the philosopher Babbalanja and others of the wandering party about the writing of an ancient book, the Koztanza, by Babbalanja's mentor, Lombardo. It quickly becomes clear that the Koztanza is linked to Melville's own book. Abraz-

za, one of the myriad of kings encountered by the party, complains to Babbalanja that the Koztanza "lacks cohesion; it is wild, unconnected, all episode." Babbalanja replies: "and so is [the atoll of] Mardi itself:--nothing but episodes; valleys and hills; rivers digressing from plains; vines, roving all over; boulders and diamonds; flowers and thistles; forests and thickets; and here and there, fens and moors."¹⁰ The Koztanza reflects Mardi's landscape and character, (Simms and Mathews had argued that any national literature should embody its native landscape) and the description of Mardi reflects the organizational pattern of Melville's book--nothing but episodes which cover the landscape of the writer's mind. By clear analogy Melville was suggesting that the ensuing discussion about the composition of the Koztanza applied also to the composition of Mardi.¹¹ It is difficult to identify any character as an authorial voice in Mardi, but the statement of Melville's sister (and copyist) Augusta in a letter to Melville's wife--"'Mardi's' a book!--'Ah my own Koztanza! child of many prayers'"--suggests that this section was seen by those involved in the creation of the book as a commentary on the experience of its making.¹²

In writing the Koztanza, Lombardo "did not build himself in with plans; he wrote right on; and so doing, got deeper and deeper into himself; and like a resolute traveler, plunging through baffling woods, at last was rewarded for his toils." Similarly, the method of writing Mardi was to plunge into the self. In Chapter 169, Melville explained

the method of his travels and the terrain that he covered in writing the book:

Oh, reader, list! I've chartless voyaged. . . . Those who boldly launch, cast off all cables; and turning from the common breeze . . . with their own breath fill their own sails. . . .

And though essaying but a sportive sail, I was driven from my course, by a blast resistless. . . .

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

But this new world here sought, is stranger far than his who stretched his vans from Palos. It is the world of mind.¹³

Mardi is romance, Melville explained here, because its impulse came from the imagination unrestrained by the cables and breeze of every-day life. It is not a book of facts; it is rather an exploration of the world of the mind, the imagination, transmuting the world of facts and events. The book grew spontaneously, Melville claimed. Its impulse could not be resisted. And in its subject it fulfilled precisely Mathews' stated aim for an American literature: the "delineation of inner life."

Lombardo, and by extension Melville, were aware of the special requirements and traps that were inherent in the writing of such a romance. The romance of the mind cannot rely on models or external rules to dictate its development. It cannot succeed through imitation. The writer must do as Babbalanja claimed Lombardo did: abandon "all monitors from without" and retain the "one autocrat within--his crowned and sceptered instinct." Lombardo's method of composing romance was the one that Young America had delineated, and Babbalanja's argument for its validity echoed Duyckinck's.

"All mankind are egotists;" he says. "The world revolves upon an I; and we upon ourselves; for we are our own worlds: --all other men as strangers, from outlandish, distant climes, going clad in furs. Then, whate'er they be, let us show our worlds; and not seek to hide from men." By exploring the inner world, the writer reveals "a world of suggestive newness both to eye and spirit" (to borrow Mathews' words) and the reader is elevated by sharing in the exploration of that world.¹⁴

Exploring the inner self could reveal much about himself and his world to the writer, but to complete the transaction the professional author had to produce a book that could find an audience and face the judgments of reviewers. "Genius is full of trash," Babbalanja observes, and it is incumbent on the writer to clear away the dross and reveal only the refined metal to his readers. This process Melville later would acknowledge he had not fully accomplished in Mardi, but it was one, he knew even this early in his career, that was not ever wholly possible. Lombardo acknowledged that the Koztanza was "but a poor scrawled copy of something within, which, do what he would, he could not completely transfer."¹⁵ This belief, that the romance of the mind was flawed because of the method of its creation, had serious implications for the act of reading which Melville would outline in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," and for the act of writing which he would portray in Pierre. He did not discuss in Mardi what he considered to be the proper

way of reading, but he did explain why most critics read badly.

Most critics, Babbalanja asserts, are fools. "In their eyes, bindings not brains make books. They criticise my tattered cloak, not my soul caparisoned like a charger." The act of reading a romance of self exploration demanded special sympathies of the reader, sympathies that most critics did not have. They looked only at the surface, at the book as artifact, rather than diving into the content of the book which is the embodiment of the author's intellect and spirit. Melville took a sly shot at the argument of those who opposed an international copyright law here, for to consider the binding to be the book is to consider the bookmaker, not the writer, to be the true producer. If the bookmaker controls production, then the rights of authors are of little importance. Melville was also criticizing those whose central criteria for judgment rested on the outward appeal of books--the admirers of smooth style and decorous phrasing, of well defined genre and inoffensive content--rather than on the rough but original exploration of self which was, according to Young America, the stuff of a national literature. There are true critics, Babbalanja acknowledges, but they "are more rare than true poets."¹⁶ George Washington Peck, the reviewers for the religious periodicals, and those for the National Intelligencer and the Courier and Enquirer clearly were not true critics. Duyckinck, Auld, and the other members of Young America were.

It is difficult to prove that Melville's source for his developing theory of a romance that would contribute to the national literature was *Young America*. He had subscribed to Duyckinck's Literary World since its inception in February, 1847. During the composition of Mardi, Melville was writing reviews for the journal and his series of satires for Yankee Doodle. As we have already seen, he was a frequent visitor at Duyckinck's house where the conversation often must have revolved around writing, Melville's as well as others, and he was a frequent borrower from Duyckinck's library. Still, Melville had read Coleridge, from whom the idea of the preeminence of the imagination could have been derived, and he made nightly visits to a reading-room in New York City where he examined the papers and magazines of the day.¹⁷ The issues surrounding the creation of a national literature were frequent topics of the New York papers and magazines throughout the 1840s and Melville certainly could have been aware of them without having contact with *Young America*. His developing disgust with critics and his realization that the impulse to write stemmed from two sources--"primus and forever a full heart:--brimful, bubbling, sparkling; and running over. . . . Secundo, the necessity of . . . procur-[ing] his yams"--clearly were garnered from his own experience.¹⁸

Nonetheless the circumstantial evidence does indicate that Melville was formulating his definition of a national romance during the composition of Mardi under the direction

of Young America. The question of influence at this point in his career is much less important than the sharing of sympathies, and in Mardi it is clear that he agreed with Young America's concept of the form, method and content of a national literature.

Initially the experience of writing Mardi was both economically and intellectually profitable for Melville. He received from Bentley 200 guineas--the most money he received for any book in England--and he received a \$500 advance from Harper and Brothers on a contract that called for Melville's share to be half of the profits.¹⁹ Perhaps more important for him as a writer, though, was that Mardi had started Melville on a process of self-exploration which would dictate the method and content of his books, and would reveal the irreconcilable contradictions embedded in the dual impulses of writing--sounding the soul and earning a living.

On March 3, 1849, after Mardi was completed but before it was published, Melville wrote Duyckinck about a lecture that he had heard Ralph Waldo Emerson deliver. In the letter Melville described what he found appealing about Emerson:

there is a something about every man elevated above mediocrity, which is, for the most part, instinctully [sic] perceptible. This I see in Mr. Emerson. And, frankly, for the sake of the argument, let us call him a fool;--then had I rather be a fool than a wise man.--I love all men who dive. . . . I'm not talking of Mr. Emerson now--but of the whole corps of thought-divers, that have been diving & coming up again with bloodshot eyes since the world began.

Melville was beginning to cluster metaphors around the act

of romancing. Writing a romance was at once to fly, to journey through unexplored terrain--the governing metaphor of Mardi as romance--and to dive, to penetrate the surface of reality and sound the depths that lay underneath. The journey and the dive were to become the metaphoric modes of action in Melville's next three books and in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" as Melville began to explore the possibilities and limitations of his concept of romance. Melville was careful to indicate that Emerson's and Shakespeare's influence lay not in their content or style, but in their examples. "I do not oscillate in Emerson's rainbow," he assured Duyckinck, "but prefer rather to hang myself in mine own halter than swing in any other man's swing." Both Emerson and Shakespeare were divers, Melville implied in the letter, and it was their intrepid explorations that he admired.²⁰

This first flush of financial success and personal growth was quickly tempered by the reviews of Mardi. None of the early English reviews of the book were entirely positive (including that of Bentley's Miscellany, the house organ of Melville's British publisher), and three of them--those in the Athenaeum, the Examiner and the Weekly Chronicle--attacked the book. The American reviewers were generally more positive (though a few, like Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book, who considered it an interesting travel book of Polynesian life and custom, clearly had not read it), but even at home some of the reviews were negative.²¹

Many of the objections to Mardi grew out of the sur-

prise and puzzlement that reviewers felt when they encountered a book so different from Melville's first two. George Ripley, who had liked Typee and defended its attack on the missions, recognized that Mardi aimed "at a higher mark" than did Melville's first two books, but he argued that it failed to reach that mark. Melville failed, Ripley said, because he left his sphere, "which is that of graphic, poetical narration," and launched out "into the dim, shadowy, spectral, Mardian region of mystic speculation and wizard fancies."²² Melville's movement into romance did not resolve the question of genre that surrounded Typee and Omoo. Critics instead rephrased the question in their response to Mardi. It was clear that this book was not true, the Examiner argued; instead it was "an outrageous fiction; a transcendental Gulliver or Robinson Crusoe run mad."²³ Henry F. Chorley, in the Athenaeum, concluded that the book was bad because it was uncategorizable. "If the book be meant as a pleasantry," he wrote, "the mirth has been oddly left out--if as an allegory, the key of the casket is 'buried in ocean deep'--if as a romance, it fails from tediousness--if as a prose-poem, it is chargeable with puerility."²⁴ And Charles Gordon Greene in the Boston Post decided simply that Mardi was "a really poor production." Melville felt that the Post's and the Athenaeum's attacks were "matters of course, and . . . essential to the building up of any permanent reputation," but they indicated the inability of some reviewers to accept his mixing of genres and an unwillingness to follow Melville in his journey. This is

not to say that these reviewers' responses were not justified. Mardi is a very difficult work and readers who approached it expecting another Typee or Omoo (an expectation that the first part of the book reinforced) had difficulty readjusting those expectations. Henry Cood Watson, reviewer for Saroni's Musical Times, summed up the feeling of those who found Mardi unpleasantly different from the first two books:

we have been deceived, inveigled, entrapped into reading a work where we had been led to expect only a book. We were flattered with the promise of an account of travel, amusing, though fictitious; and we have been compelled to pore over an undigested mass of rambling metaphysics.²⁵

Melville attributed at least part of this confusion and the resulting negative response in England to the way the book was marketed. "I can not help but think," he wrote Bentley in June, 1849, "that its form must have led to the disappointment of many readers, who would have been better pleased with it perhaps, had they taken it up in the first place for what it really is." The book was published in the three-decker style, the form in which most popular novels, like those of Cooper, were published.²⁶ The book was not written for popularity, Melville implied, and to market it as such had misled those critics who pay attention to bindings.

Even the positive reviews of Mardi acknowledged that it was difficult, though. The London Critic, Bentley's Miscellany, and the New York Albion all emphasized that the book was not for everyone. Parts of the book, William Young of

the Albion observed, "may be read by the most careless reader." But the reviewer of the Critic agreed with Young when he commented, "it will better please the refined and thoughtful reader." Even Bentley's acknowledged that Mardi was a book "which the reader will probably like very much or detest altogether, according to the measure of his own imagination."²⁷ In one sense Melville was satisfied with this distinction in appropriate readership. He explained in the June letter to Bentley that "the metaphysical ingredients (for want of a better term) of the book, must of course repel some of those who read simply for amusement." Mardi was not written for amusement, Melville implied. "It will reach those for whom it is intended," he told Bentley, "and I have already received assurances that 'Mardi' in its higher purposes has not been written in vain."²⁸ Despite those assurances, primarily from Young America, one point became painfully clear from the reception of Mardi. It was those who read for amusement rather than those who read for higher purposes that bought books. The Harper edition of the book sold 2,054 copies in its first six months, but only 2,900 copied during Melville's lifetime. In England the book fared worse. Bentley had not yet sold in 1851 the first printing of 1,000 copies.²⁹ The sales of Mardi led Melville to recognize that it would be difficult to write one book that was designed to be both popular and the kind of exploration of the inner life that as an artist he felt compelled to write.

Many of those who did not like the book nonetheless respected Melville for the new direction that he had taken. George Ripley felt justified in criticizing Mardi because he considered Melville "a writer not only of rare promise, but of excellent performance." In separate notices in Graham's Magazine, Bayard Taylor and Frederick Cozzens distinguished between Melville and his book. Taylor was one of the few reviewers who accepted Mardi as evidence of the authenticity of Typee and Omoo, and he felt that Melville's romance was the most striking work that he had produced. Yet its defects indicated that Melville had "not yet reached the limits of his capacity, and that we may hope from him works better even than the present." And in August of 1849, Cozzens showed remarkable intuition by picking up Melville's private metaphor to describe the reason for Mardi's intriguing failure: "who knows but what the author, after attaining a comfortable elevation by his former works, may not have made this plunge on purpose, as men do who climb to the top of a high mast that they may dive the deeper." Both the American Whig Review and the Southern Literary Messenger (in a letter from New Yorker Park Benjamin) felt that the book failed because Melville was too ambitious in an effort to maintain his growing reputation as a man of genius.³⁰

At the same time that Melville's first romance was meeting with puzzlement if not open hostility in the reviews, his motives for writing it and the genius that he evinced were being lauded at least in some quarters. Charles Gordon Greene, whom Melville styled "the common

hang-man . . . [of] the Boston Post," could argue that Mardi "ought not to make any reputation for its author, or to sell sufficiently well to encourage him to attempt any thing else," but the Spirit of the Times, the Merchant's Magazine and Commercial Review, and Peterson's Ladies' National Magazine all could hail the book as a work of genius. Mardi may have failed--Melville would soon acknowledge that it had--but his impulse to "out with the Romance" was encouraged.³¹

The members of Young America were among Melville's most exuberant encouragers. Duyckinck, in the Literary World, ran an advance notice of the book, a long two-part review, a reprint of the London Morning Chronicle review, and a translation of an essay on Melville's works by Philarte Chasles that had originally appeared in La Revue des Deux Mondes. In addition, William Alfred Jones wrote for the Democratic Review one of the most perceptive and sympathetic reviews of any of Melville's books. The gist of Young America's defense of Mardi was the proclamation that in Melville a new, original, truly American genius had emerged.

Both Duyckinck and Jones stressed Mardi's originality as its chief virtue. In his April 14, 1849 review, Duyckinck called the book "a purely original invention," and in July Jones echoed Duyckinck's sentiments.³² "The manner of the book is unique," Jones observed, and it was this uniqueness that drew the criticism of some reviewers. Any new thing runs the risk of being called ugly, Jones asserted, but it is the eye of the beholder, the reader, rather than

the conception of the creator, the writer, which is at fault. Jones seemed to agree with Melville's argument that most critics looked at the wrong things in judging a book, that they did not approach reading with the generosity and liberality that they should. If the book seemed confusing, Jones contended, the confusion was for a purpose. "The veil of mystery thrown over *Mardi*," he said, "enhances its beauty to those who have sympathy with the author, and can finish his creation with a corresponding or heightened sublimity." The key phrase in Jones' assessment is "those who have sympathy with the author." The reader, Jones implied, has a responsibility to follow the author wherever he may go; the author is not obliged to lure the reader into the text. "Whoso wishes to read a romance--a novel of the sentimental or satiric school--has no business in *Mardi*. He need not open the book," Jones continued. The implication of preferring a book of the sentimental or satiric school, of course, was that one was not willing to participate in the intellectual and artistic development of the country. As we have seen, Young America argued that such participation was a duty. Those who do choose to open *Mardi* do so because they "reverence a man when God's must is upon him, and he does his work in his own and other's spite." Melville would make the same argument for the necessity of reading Nathaniel Hawthorne a year later.

Duyckinck contended that in *Mardi* Melville revealed himself as a national writer. His first two books, though palpable hits and excellent of their kind, were nonetheless

only books of Travel, Duyckinck observed. "And books of Travels, though written in a highly artistic style, will not sustain a great literary reputation." Melville could not build a reputation as a representative national writer as long as he wrote books designed primarily for popularity.

But in Mardi, Duyckinck argued, Melville made a greater claim. "Is it not significant that our American mariner, beginning with pleasant pictures of his Pacific Ocean, should soon sweep beyond the current of his isles into the world of high discourse, revolving the conditions, the duties and the destiny of men?" Mardi displayed what Typee and Omoo did not--that overriding egotism which Duyckinck believed colored all works by writers of genius. Both Jones and Duyckinck endorsed Melville's experiment of writing a romance of diving and Duyckinck acknowledged that the form was appropriately American. "There is a world of poetical, thoughtful, ingenious, moral writing" in Mardi, Duyckinck said, "which Emerson would not disclaim." Melville had already given his opinion of Emerson to Duyckinck; the comparison must have confirmed for Melville Duyckinck's admiration of his dive in Mardi. To the public, for whom Emerson was an eminent lecturer and essayist and a representative American writer, the comparison would have implied that Melville was also representative. Duyckinck ended his review with an overt declaration of Melville's stature as a national writer:

America has gained an author of innate force and steady wing, a man with material and work in him--who has

respect for his calling, in company with original powers of a high order; with whom the public, we trust, may walk hand in hand, heart in heart, through many good years of goodly productiveness.

Melville had written a book that fit the parameters of Young America's definition of a national literature, and both Jones and Duyckinck acknowledged the effort.

Chasles' article, "The Actual and Fantastic Voyages of Herman Melville," which Duyckinck ran on August 4 and 11, 1849, provided further evidence that Melville was becoming a representative national writer.³³ "It vastly enlarges the motives of an American author," Duyckinck declared, "when he can look to an influential European journal on the Continent for so cordial, appreciative a reception." His motivation need no longer be simply to write books for money if he could gain an international reputation by writing books of genius.

Chasles did consider Mardi "as relating to an entirely new literature" which America was producing, but he was not completely pleased with the qualities of that literature. Mardi illustrated its faults: a pretension to excessive novelty in response to the absurd demand for originality in a nascent literature, a lack of simplicity and truth of detail, an incorrectness arising from rapidity of execution. But the book also illustrated the new literature's scope and grandeur: "it might be compared to the gigantic original American panorama," Chasles wrote, "now placarded on the walls of London."

Several things attracted Duyckinck to Chasles' essay.

First, Chasles declared himself exactly the kind of reader that Jones had defined as appropriate for Mardi. He claimed "that love of truth and that necessity of going to the bottom of things" as the motive for his fascination with Melville's books. Second, he defended the veracity of Typee and Omoo and attributed the confusion over the books to "that ancient English and Puritan custom, cultivated with remarkable dexterity by Daniel Defoe, to entrap the public . . . by fictions adorned with the details of verisimilitude." Those who were fooled did not recognize the new "type of Anglo-American character, living for and by sensation, curious as an infant, adventurous as a savage, the first to throw himself head-foremost into unheard of adventures, and carrying them through with desperate enthusiasm." Melville, in short, maintained the independence of vision that Young America insisted upon in a national author. Third, by praising this article and the London Morning Chronicle review, which considered Melville "undoubtedly a very fascinating gentleman" but Mardi "not . . . altogether a very fascinating book," as fair estimations of Mardi, Duyckinck seemed to be indicating a dissatisfaction with the book beyond the comments in his own review. By praising others who found faults in Mardi but not in its author Duyckinck hinted that he still considered Melville a writer of more promise than accomplishment.³⁴

In December of 1849, Melville wrote Duyckinck: "I am but a poor mortal & I admit that I learn by experience & not by divine intuition." Melville had learned much about the

profession of authorship through the experience that Mardi provided and the lesson was not a happy one. The attempt at something higher like Mardi left him with a hollow purse. Melville was left with a clear choice as a writer. He could write books that would fulfill the higher aims of a national literature and thereby establish a lasting reputation but not earn a living, or he could write books designed for popularity which would not satisfy his needs as an artist. This irresolvable conflict embedded in the profession of authorship would prove to be one of the overriding problems that eventually forced Melville to retreat (to use Mathews' term) to the magazines and abandon Young America's program for a national literature. But he was not prepared to abandon the pursuit yet. He appreciated the lesson that Mardi taught him; he considered himself "wiser for it,"³⁵ and he would continue to explore the implications of the romance of diving while trying to produce books that would sell.

NOTES

CHAPTER III

¹Davis, Gilman, pp. 59, 66, 70.

²Merrell R. Davis, Melville's "Mardi": A Chartless Voyage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 75. This book, which outlines in detail the process of composition of Mardi, has provided me with valuable insights into Melville's changing perception of himself as author while composing the book.

³Davis, Gilman, pp. 66, 68.

⁴Davis, Gilman pp. 66, 67.

⁵Davis, Gilman, p. 70.

⁶Davis, Gilman, p. 70.

⁷Davis, pp. 63-64; Leyda, p. 273. For a list of books known to have been owned or borrowed by Melville, see Merton M. Sealts, Jr., Melville's Reading: A Checklist of Books Owned and Borrowed (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966). For specific literary influences on Mardi, see, in addition to Davis, Edward H. Rosenberry, Melville and the Comic Spirit (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), Dorothee Metilsky Finkelstein, Melville's Orienda (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), and Nathalia Wright, "A Note on Melville's Use of Spenser: Hautia and the Bower of Bliss," American Literature, 24 (March, 1952), 83-85.

⁸Davis, Gilman, p. 76.

⁹Davis, Gilman, pp. 70-71. In discussing Melville's sense of romance, I am following the approach of Michael Davitt Bell, The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), who does not attempt to identify a genre of romance, but rather examines what the term "romance" meant to various writers including Melville, and how the understanding of the term affected their writing. I am less concerned with attempts to define the genre either in terms of subject matter or form as exemplified in such studies as Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1957). But my assumptions about Melville's sense of romance differ from Bell's in two important ways. First, Bell contends that Melville was not a member of a group "engaged in and identified with a common endeavor" (p. 34). I argue that it was within Young America that

Melville found both common interests and support for his efforts to create a national romance. Second, I place more emphasis on Melville's sense of romance as a method of composing, as well as a means of establishing a rhetorical position and defining a form, than does Bell.

¹⁰Herman Melville, Mardi and A Voyage Thither ed., Harrison Hayford, et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 597.

¹¹Most critics who have written about Mardi have at least acknowledged the book's episodic structure even if they have not attempted to find coherence in it. For example see Davis; Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957), pp. 66-149; and F. O. Matthiessen, The American Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941) pp. 384-386.

¹²Leyda, p. 287; see also Stern, p. 78 n.

¹³Melville, Mardi, pp. 595, 556-557.

¹⁴Melville, Mardi, pp. 597, 559.

¹⁵Melville, Mardi, p. 601.

¹⁶Melville, Mardi, p. 599.

¹⁷Davis, p. 62; Leyda, p. 266.

¹⁸See Miller, *passim*, for evidence of the debate in New York journals. Melville, Mardi, p. 592.

¹⁹Davis, pp. 95-98.

²⁰Davis, Gilman, p. 79.

²¹Sarah Josepha Hale, "Editor's Book Table," Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book, June, 1849, in Higgins, p. 54. Hetherington identifies Hale as the reviewer. See Hetherington, p. 100-134 for an overview of the reviews of Mardi.

²²George Ripley, ["Review of Mardi"], New York Tribune, May 10, 1849, in Parker, Recognition, pp. 16-17.

²³["Review of Mardi"], London Examiner, March 31, 1849, in Branch, p. 143.

²⁴Henry Fothergill Chorley, ["Review of Mardi"], Athenaeum, March 24, 1849, in Branch, p. 139.

²⁵Charles Gordon Greene, ["Review of Mardi"], Boston Post, April 18, 1849, in Parker, Recognition p. 15; Davis, Gilman, p. 84; Henry Cord Watson, ["Review of Mardi"],

Saroni's Musical Times, Sept. 29, 1849, in Branch, p. 184.

²⁶Davis, Gilman, pp. 85-86, 86n.

²⁷William Young, ["Review of Mardi"], New York Albion, April 21, 1849, in Branch pp. 157-158; ["Review of Mardi"], London Critic, April 1, 1849, in Leyda, p. 295; ["Review of Mardi"], Bentley's Miscellany, April, 1849, in Branch, p. 149.

²⁸Davis, Gilman, p. 86.

²⁹Elizabeth S. Foster, "Historical Note," in Mardi, p. 671; Tanselle, p. 199.

³⁰Ripley, p. 16; Bayard Taylor, ["Review of Mardi"], Graham's Monthly Magazine of Literature and Art, June, 1849, in Rountree, p. 16; "Lender's Books," Graham's Monthly Magazine of Literature and Art, Aug., 1849, in Leyda, p. 311; ["Review of Mardi"], American Review: A Whig Journal, Sept., 1849, in Higgins, p. 58; "Letters from New-York," Southern Literary Messenger, May, 1849, in Leyda, p. 305.

³¹Davis, Gilman, pp. 84-85; Greene, p. 15; ["Review of Mardi"], New York Spirit of the Times, April 14, 1849, in John T. Flanagan, "The Spirit of the Times Reviews Melville," Journal of English and German Philology, 64 (1965), p. 60; ["Review of Mardi"], New York Merchant's Magazine and Commercial Review, 20 (May, 1849), in Higgins, p. 50; ["Review of Mardi"], Peterson's Ladies' National Magazine, June, 1849, in Burton R. Pollin, "Additional Unrecorded Reviews of Melville's Books," Journal of American Studies, 9 (1975), p. 66.

³²"Mardi," The Literary World, April 14, 1849, pp. 333-336, April 21, 1849, pp. 351-353; "Melville's Mardi," The United States Magazine and Democratic Review, July, 1849, pp. 44-50. Hetherington and Parker both identify the reviewers as Duyckinck and Jones, respectively.

³³Philarte Chasles, "The Actual and Fantastic Voyages of Herman Melville," The Literary World, Aug, 4, 1849, pp. 89-90, Aug. 11, 1849, pp. 101-103.

³⁴["Review of Mardi"], London Morning Chronicle, May 19, 1849, in Leyda, p. 304. Duyckinck reprinted the review, claiming that he was quite satisfied with it in The Literary World, June 30, 1849, p. 556.

³⁵Davis, Gilman, p. 96.

CHAPTER IV

REDBURN AND WHITE-JACKET

There are several reasons for pairing Redburn and White-Jacket in an examination of Melville's development as an American writer. The books were the products of a common motivation, explored similar aspects of Melville's definition of romance, and elicited a reception that Melville found ironic. The two books were written in a space of five months, between April and September, 1849.¹ Both books were composed for money and Melville tried to direct both to popular taste. Though neither of them was a romance in the sense that Melville employed the term for Mardi, he explored in them certain themes that deepened his understanding of the nature of romance. He examined the implications of self-exploration, intellectual and spiritual independence, and the role of a national literature in America. The overwhelmingly positive critical reception of the two books ironically confirmed for Melville the obtuseness of most critics and helped him define more precisely the type of reader who would appreciate what could be called a romance of diving. The reviews also firmly established Melville's stature in both England and America as a representative national author and prompted him to revise his estimation of the importance of fame. And the experience of contracting for the publication of White-Jacket in England combined with

the disappointing sales of the two books made even clearer to Melville the financial difficulties inherent in the profession of writing in America.

In the June 5, 1849 letter to Bentley that contained Melville's apologetic explanation and defense of Mardi--that despite its financial failure, partly attributable to poor marketing, it nonetheless succeeded in its higher purposes--Melville also proposed a new work "of a widely different cast from 'Mardi.'" The book was not going to be another romance, he assured Bentley. It would be "a plain, straightforward, amusing narrative of personal experience . . . no metaphysics, no conic-sections, nothing but cakes & ale."² In short, Melville promised Bentley that he would return to the sort of book upon which his reputation had been established. He considered both Redburn and White-Jacket to be designed for popularity, and he stated bluntly to his father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw, that the need of money was his main motivation in writing them. "They are two jobs," he wrote, "which I have done for money--being forced to it as other men are to sawing wood."³ Melville did indeed need the money. He was supporting a growing family primarily on the advances from his books. His first child was born on February 16, 1849, and as he explained to Duyckinck in a December letter, the "duns [were] all round him, & looking over the back of his chair--& perching on his pen & diving in his inkstand--like the devils about St. Anthony." He owed Harpers, for one, \$832.⁴ And he was planning a trip to England, part of which he was hoping to

finance by selling White-Jacket there to the highest bidder.

Because of its nature as a straight-forward narrative and because of the rapidity of its composition, Melville did not think highly of Redburn. He called the book beggarly in his letter to Duyckinck and he confessed: "I hope I shall never write such a book again." His estimation of its financial value was similarly humble. He wrote Bentley, "I value the English Copyright at one hundred & fifty pounds, and think it would be wise to put it forth in a manner, admitting of a popular circulation."⁵ This request, and the final agreement that he signed with Bentley which netted him only 100 pounds on account of half profits, indicated that both Melville and his publisher considered the book much less valuable than they had supposed Mardi to be. Similarly, he received only a \$300 advance on account of half profits from Harpers, \$200 less than he had garnered for Mardi.⁶ Melville was aware that he owed Harpers money and that Bentley had lost money on the romance, so his requests may have been tempered partly by these financial considerations. Still, Melville cared little for Redburn. For the book, he wrote Judge Shaw, "I anticipate no particular reception of any kind. It may be deemed a book of tolerable entertainment--& it may be accounted dull."⁷ The book was a bald attempt to fill his purse, which had been left hollow by Mardi, but it was less successful as a money-maker than his earliest efforts had been.

For White-Jacket he felt a bit more affection. Though

the prefaces to both the English and American editions indicated that, like Typee and Omoo, Melville's "experiences and observations . . . [had] been incorporated" into the book, Melville took more interest in it than in Redburn because of the controversy that the book might raise.⁸ He told Judge Shaw that he expected White-Jacket "to be attacked in some quarters," and he asked Richard Henry Dana, Jr., author of the popular Two Years Before the Mast which Melville admired, to defend the book while Melville was in England. "If it is taken hold of in an unfair or ignorant way," he wrote Dana, "& if you should possibly think, that from your peculiar experiences in sea-life, you would be able to say a word to the purpose--may I hope that you will do so[?]"⁹ After a protracted effort at selling the book in England himself, Melville settled for Bentley's handsome offer of 200 pounds (at six months) and a \$500 advance from Harpers, both on account of half profits. Melville was able to do well by White-Jacket despite the increasingly uncertain state of the copyright laws in England (about which I will say more) and the two books combined brought him a needed \$2,148 in cash and credit.¹⁰

Despite the fact that the two books fulfilled their primary goal, putting money in Melville's purse, he felt a certain frustration at writing books for which his "only desire for their 'success' (as it is called) springs from my pocket, & not from my heart." The excitement of the experience of Mardi had whetted Melville's appetite for writing books that had a higher purpose than did Redburn or White-

Jacket, or, for that matter, Typee and Omoo. "Independent of my pocket," he wrote Shaw, "it is my earnest desire to write the sort of books which are said to 'fail.'" He realized that the kind of book that Young America encouraged would not find a large audience and could not support a writer in America. He had not compromised his vision in Redburn and White-Jacket; he had only limited it: "I have not repressed myself much," he told Shaw, "but have spoken pretty much as I feel."¹¹ But he had compromised his method and form, returning to proven popular formulas--the popular sea novel for Redburn, books of factual nautical travel for White-Jacket.¹² He acknowledged as egotism his desire to write books that would not sell, but he also argued in his letter to Duyckinck that "we that write & print have all our books predestinated--& for me, I shall write such things as the Great Publisher of Mankind ordained ages before he published 'The World.'"¹³ Melville would be a romancer despite the demands of professional authorship, but with the endorsement of those readers, like Young America and Charles, who shared his growing scorn for the demands of popularity. His experience in writing Redburn and White-Jacket confirmed for Melville the kind of writer he wanted to be--a romancer rather than a writer of popular travel books--but even though the two books were not romances, Melville continued to explore certain themes and attempt certain methods in them that were important to his understanding of romance.

In both Redburn and White-Jacket, Melville explored the

personal and national necessity of maintaining independence of thought and action in the face of a seductive and tyrannous past, and he examined the relationship between that independence and the act of self-exploration. Through the narrative structure of Redburn, Melville discovered a method of writing a romance that could be self-exploratory and at the same time be readable. Although he hinted in each book that the narrator would be introspective, he did not allow either narrator to undertake the journey.

Melville promised Bentley that Redburn would not include any metaphysics (the term Melville had chosen for his dives into personal rhapsody in Mardi), but the first chapter promises differently. In the hall of Redburn's house is a glass ship in a large library case. He has been attracted to this family heirloom for some time and for a particular reason. "When I was very little," he explains, "I made no doubt, that if I could but once pry open the hull, and break the glass all to pieces, I would infallibly light upon something wonderful, perhaps some gold guineas, of which I have always been in want, ever since I could remember." The two impulses that drive Redburn--to break through the surface to find hidden things of value, and to make money--are the two impulses that drive Lombardo to compose the "Koztanza." Redburn himself is revealed as a writer who desires to tell his "Sailor-boy Confessions and Reminiscences of the Son-of-a-Gentleman, in the Merchant Service." The book is the mature Redburn's opportunity to follow in his father's footsteps. "Just as my father used to entertain strange

gentlemen over their wine at dinner," Redburn says, "I would hereafter be telling my own adventures to an eager auditory."¹⁴ The implicit structure of narration in Redburn is the same as that in Moby-Dick--an older narrator is looking back and relating the experiences of his youth. By remembering, ordering, and interpreting of his experiences, the narrator can recover a complex sense of himself and reveal this process of self-discovery by retelling his story, that is explored in the retelling. Melville utilized a similar structure in his earlier books, but in Redburn for the first time he began to explore the possibility of self-exploration that is inherent in the structure. In Typee and Omoo, the distance between narrator and subject matter is simply temporal, in Redburn it becomes thematic.¹⁵

Redburn's lust for gold breeds in him a temporary madness in which he contemplates breaking the glass ship to get at its hold, a desire that is reinforced by reading a story about Captain Kidd's gold-laden ship lying at the bottom of the Hudson, and the men who "were trying to dive down and get the treasure out of the hold." The convergence of poverty, a naive and romantic perspective of the world engendered by the books and art that surround Redburn as a youth, and a mad impulse to dive, spur Redburn to his first voyage. Redburn's family, formerly well to do, has fallen upon hard times since the death of his father. After "sad disappointments in several plans" that he contemplates as ways of regaining the family fortune, Redburn chooses to

follow the path to wealth that his father had taken by going to sea. His attraction to the sea comes not from personal experience, but from a romantic image that grows out of the two portfolios of French prints, the paintings, and the glass ship in his house (all brought from foreign lands by his father), his father's stories, and his aunt's story about the "person who had been in Stony Arabia" and now occupies a pew in Redburn's church. Redburn's thoughts become "more and more prone to dwell upon foreign things," and he develops "a vague prophetic thought, that . . . [he] was fated, one day or other to be a great voyager," in the tradition of his father. He hopes to be able to tell stories to strange gentlemen over wine after dinner, just as his father had done. But Redburn begins his voyage as a common sailor, not as a gentleman, and his tale is told in a book (to make money), not at the dinner table. What Redburn expects to be a journey in his father's footsteps becomes instead an awakening realization of the fundamental independence of each person facing the world.¹⁶

Such a journey out is also metaphorically a journey in, and Melville is careful to establish this. The glass ship, which represents Redburn's motivation and aspirations, also represents the nature and consequences of his journey. "We have her yet in the house," Redburn says of the ship,

but many of her glass spars and ropes are now sadly shattered and broken,--but I will not have her mended; and her figure-head, a gallant warrior in a cocked-hat, lies pitching head-foremost down into the trough of a calamitous sea under the bows--but I will not have him put on his legs again, till I get on my own; for between him and me there is a secret sympathy; and my sisters

tell me, even yet, that he fell from his perch the very day I left home to go to sea on this my first voyage.

In this passage the older Redburn concisely summarizes the nature of his experience and indicates its failure. The gallant figure is clearly frozen in the act of diving just as Redburn, in his first voyage, and indeed in his subsequent life, has been. Redburn has his romantic concept of the world shattered, just as the ship was, but he has not yet found a meaning in his experience which would put him on his legs again. One appealing implication of this argument is that in the act of writing his book Redburn might find his legs, might, through the act of retelling his experiences, discover the importance of them. But this closing of the equation must wait for Moby-Dick where the act of writing becomes a subject. In Redburn Melville examines the inevitability of self-exploration, but he does not discover the implications of the act.¹⁷

The youthful Redburn relies on a number of external sources of authority as potential guides for his journey but every one is a failure. Each of the guides presents a surface which is attractive but Redburn discovers that each offers unusable advice. Redburn's most important guide is his father, or more precisely, the story of his father's life. As a young boy Redburn dreams of making his father's life his own, of creating his story as his father had done by becoming a great voyager to foreign places, and then retelling his story (and by implication his father's story) to the same eager auditory. In the subtitle to his book,

"Sailor-boy Confessions and Reminiscences of the Son-of-a-Gentleman, in the Merchant Service," Redburn still identifies his story as intimately connected with his father's, but that story undercuts the identification.

Redburn goes to sea like his father, but because he has not inherited his father's guineas, Redburn also does not inherit his position. His father was a passenger; Redburn is a sailor. By trying to keep up the pretense of being a son-of-a-gentleman (Redburn's friend, Mr. Jones, introduces him as such to Captain Riga), Redburn only manages to get bilked out of the money that he desperately needs. Riga argues that since he has wealthy relations, Redburn will not suffer from the low pay of three dollars that he is to receive from the voyage. Rather than aiding him to gain one of his prime objectives in going to sea--money, Redburn's association with his father costs him.

Still Redburn persists in following his father's path. When he arrives in Liverpool, he attempts to use his father's guide book to explore the city. This is not the first time that another source of misleading authority, books, steers Redburn wrong. Earlier he attempted to read Smith's Wealth of Nations, which Mr. Jones had loaned him. Jones suggested that Redburn "would soon discover hidden charms and unforeseen attractions" in the book and that it would teach him "the true way to retrieve the poverty of his family, and again make them well to do in the world." Redburn approached the book expecting to find "something like the philosopher's stone" in its depths, but he found it

instead to be dry as sawdust, and he used it as a pillow. The Wealth of Nations can not help Redburn retrieve the family fortune, and his father's guide book can not help Redburn make his way in the world.¹⁸

Redburn plans to follow his father's path through Liverpool, visiting

Riddough's Hotel, where . . . [his] father had stopped, more than thirty years before; and then, with the map in . . . hand, follow . . . [his father] through all the town, according to the dotted lines in the diagram. For thus would . . . [he] be performing a filial pilgrimage to spots which would be hallowed in . . . [his] eyes.

The book not only embodies his father's history, it also carries Redburn's past, represented by the childish scrawls that he wrote in it during the various stages of his life. Yet this impressive representative of Redburn's personal and familial past proves inadequate as a guide to the present. "It never occurred to my boyish thoughts," the older Redburn observes, "that though a guide-book, fifty years old, might have done good service in its day, yet it would prove but a miserable cicerone to a modern." The lesson to be learned, Redburn decides, is that "every age makes its own guide-books, and the old ones are used for waste paper."¹⁹

Implicit in this theme is a defense of Young America's argument for the egotistical, original genius, who follows nothing but his own sceptered instinct (as Lombardo had) to create a viable national literature. Only those writers who abandon the guide-books of the past, and draw their inspiration, their form, their content, and their style from the world they observe around them can write a new guide-book

for the age.

Self reliance, independence of thought and action, is essential for the person trying to understand his or her place in the world, Melville explains in Redburn. Only the sceptered instinct can be a useful guide. And what is true for the individual American is also true for the country, he demonstrates in White-Jacket. America too must display self reliance if it is to realize its place in the world. The guide books of America's past--European history and culture--are useless in discovering the country's destiny.

America's relation to its history and its future is very much like Redburn's, White-Jacket argues:

The Past is dead and has no resurrection; but the Future is endowed with such a life, that it lives to us even in anticipation. The Past is, in many things, the foe of mankind; the Future is, in all things, our friend. In the Past is no hope; the Future is both hope and fruition. The Past is the text-book of Tyrants; the Future the Bible of the Free.²⁰

White-Jacket never shares Redburn's delusion about the past. One of the central social targets of White-Jacket, the Articles of War, is attacked because "they can not [sic] be the indigenous growth of those political institutions, which are based upon that arch-democrat Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence." They are importations from England and impose a tyranny that America has hurled off in every other facet of life. As a guide book for American behavior the Articles of War are at best useless, at worst antipathetic. America is special, White-Jacket argues, because, by its nature, it is the nation of the Future. "We are the

pioneers of the world," he declares,

the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours. In our youth is our strength; in our inexperience, our wisdom. At a period when other nations have but lisped, our deep voice is heard afar. Long enough have we been skeptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in us if we would but give utterance to his promptings.²¹

Some critics have found in White-Jacket's exuberance an implied criticism of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny and its implicit expansionism that justified the war with Mexico. Indeed Melville did criticize political and military expansion in *Mardi*, and White-Jacket calls the "whole matter of war . . . a thing that smites common sense."²²

But as Melville makes clear when he resumes the argument in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," the concept of Manifest Destiny is an important and valid reason for the necessity of a national literature. It is not consistent to attempt to spread democratic ideals with force, Melville felt, but to convince others of the superiority of American intellectual independence and political equality is the central task of a democratic literature. William Gilmore Simms in 1845 and William Alfred Jones in 1847 had also argued that an aggressive national literature could fulfill the same aims as an aggressive expansionist policy by spreading the American idea to other nations. In calling for a literature that reflects America's stature as "the Israel of our time," Melville was following Young America's position. Rather than relying on other nations and histories to show it the way through the wilderness, it was America's role to lead

others.

Thus White-Jacket reiterates Young America's argument that the intellectual independence of American writers can lead to America's political and cultural eminence:

In our hearts we mold the whole world's hereafters; and in our own hearts we fashion our own gods. Each mortal casts his vote for whom he will to rule the worlds; I have a voice that helps shape eternity; and my volitions stir the orbits of the furthest suns.

By freeing themselves from the tyrannies of the past, American writers can create the Future, Melville argues. And American literature, as the Bible of the Future, can show the world the essential mission of a democratic literature--to reveal the path to intellectual independence by revealing the interplay of those natural geniuses who help shape the Future. Melville mentioned to Bentley that Mardi was written for higher purposes; in Redburn and White-Jacket he delineated those higher aims.

He also delineated the sort of reader to whom the national literature should be directed. The poet Lemsford, in White-Jacket, explains to Jack Chase the difficulties inherent in publishing a work aimed at more than popularity:

I'm a poor devil of a poet. Not two months before I shipped aboard here, I published a volume of poems, very aggressive on the world, Jack. Heaven knows what it cost me. I published it Jack, and the cursed publisher sued me for damages; my friends looked sheepish; one or two who liked it were noncommittal; and as for the addlepated mob and rabble, they thought they had found out a fool. Blast them, Jack, what they call the public is a monster, like the idol we saw in Owhyhee, with the head of a jackass, the body of a baboon, and the tail of a scorpion.²³

This work, very aggressive on the world, was clearly not

written for popularity. Lemsford's experience in publishing it lampoons Melville's own with Mardi, but as in much of his humor and irony, there is a grain of serious, honest, opinion embedded in the passage.²⁴ The public is not to be respected for they do not recognize the higher value of books. Jack Chase objects to Lemsford's description of the public since he is a member of it, but Lemsford corrects him. "Your pardon, Jack; you are not," says Lemsford. "You are then part of the people, just as you are aboard the frigate here. The public is one thing, Jack, and the people another." The public is amorphous, dictatorial, cruelly judgmental. It is an entity that constricts free expression. The people, though, are individuals with whom a writer can communicate. The writer does not attempt to appeal to the public, an act which would be valueless if it was not futile. Instead the writer appeals to those individuals who distinguish themselves from the mob by their natural superiority of intellect and sympathy.²⁵

In Jack Chase, Melville portrays the qualities of the "people" which distinguish them from the "public." Jack has a poetic temperament: "I've that here, White-Jacket," he says,

touching his forehead--"which under happier skies--perhaps in yon solitary star there, peeping down from those clouds--might have made a Homer of me. But Fate is Fate, White-Jacket; and we Homers who happen to be captains of tops must write our odes in our hearts, and publish them in our heads."

Jack is a gentleman sailor, a voracious reader who can recite all of Camoens' Lusiad. Perhaps most important, he

understands the necessity of self-exploration. "There never was a very great man yet who spent all his life inland," Jack observes. "Having been out of sight of land, has been the making of many a true poet and the blasting of many pretenders. . . . The sea is the place to cradle genius." Melville was out of sight of land metaphorically in Mardi as well as physically while a sailor. The final image of Mardi, Taji flying directly out to sea in a canoe followed by the three specters, and the interpretation of that scene: "thus the pursuers and pursued flew on, over an endless sea," captures that image of journeying away from land which is one of Melville's metaphors for the exploration of self. Landlessness also becomes a major subject of Ishmael's philosophizing in Moby-Dick. Launching out and diving, component metaphors for the act of self-exploration, are actions of reading as well as writing, Jack Chase implies, but it is an act that only those readers with a poetic temperament similar to the writer's can perform. The general public will hoot at such divers as fools. "'The public and the people,'" Jack Chase philosophizes, "'Ay, ay, my lads let us hate the one and cleave to the other.'"²⁶

In Redburn and White-Jacket then, Melville defined more precisely the narrative structure of a romance of self-exploration, the appropriate audience for such a romance, and the importance of the genre for America. The two books were essential steps in Melville's movement toward the coherent statement of Young America's program for a national literature in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" and its embodiment

in Moby-Dick.

But with this said I must reiterate my point that neither Redburn nor White-Jacket is a romance of self-exploration. Though the first chapter of Redburn promises a bildungsroman, and on the surface the narrative develops as a youth's awakening perception of the naivete of his own interpretation of the world, the older Redburn refuses to recognize the implications of his own story. We expect that as Redburn learns the necessity of independent thought and action, as he confronts the horrible poverty, squalor, and hypocrisy of Liverpool, that he will mature. But we do not see such a change. Redburn's realization that he is loose in the world with no reliable guides to help him find his way is the essential posture from which he could dive. But instead of exploring the ways in which Redburn's newly found independence affects him, the older Redburn introduces Harry Bolton into the story and essentially retells the comic tale of the greenhorn on his first voyage. The youthful Redburn continues to observe with the same naive perspective that he left home with during his encounter with Harry. When Harry brings Redburn to a London gambling house, entombs him in a room, and goes off to squander the remainder of his fortune, Redburn has no notion of the sort of establishment that he is in. The implied comparison between Harry and Redburn, between the dissipated, helpless English youth who, for all his experience, is unable to function in the world and the robust, naive and resourceful American

youth whose very innocence allows him to survive, this comparison invites interpretation, but the narrator refuses to impose meaning on it. The difference that the narrator perceives between himself and Harry is that he chanced to survive, Harry did not. A belief in chance denies a perceivable order, and the older Redburn refuses to impose meaning upon his story. He remains poised like the glass figure in a posture of diving, but he never breaks the surface.

Melville backed away from the rich promise of a romance of self-exploration implied by the first chapter of Redburn, but his reasons for doing so are not entirely clear. Certainly the rapidity of composition did not allow Melville to indulge the blast resistless that took him on a new course in Mardi and Moby-Dick. His need for money and his promise to Bentley that the book would contain no metaphysics locked him into a formula that did not allow for self-exploration. The public had shown more interest in the innocent who remains a fresh observer in Typee and Omoo than in the narrator who probes the nature of the world and in the process becomes his "own soul's emperor . . . [whose] first act is abdication" in Mardi.²⁷ Despite his growing disgust with the public, Melville could not take the professional risk of alienating them further when he needed a profitable book. Melville was not happy with the results of Redburn--he called it a nursery tale in his letter to Dana, and his unhappiness stemmed from the fact that Redburn was not the kind of book he wanted to write, the kind said to fail.

In White-Jacket Melville explicitly invites an interpretation of the book as a romance of diving but he again undermines the interpretation. In the final chapter, White-Jacket provides meaning for his story and thus seems to complete the process of self-exploration that Redburn refuses to enact. He describes with two significant metaphors the Neversink, his ship. First he observes: "as a man-of-war that sails through the sea, so this earth that sails through the air." This metaphor indicates that the ship is a microcosm of the world, thus implying that his observations of ship-life are in fact analyses of human nature and of the politics and societies of the world. Then White-Jacket inverts the metaphor. "Outwardly regarded," he declares, "our craft is a lie; for all that is outwardly seen of it is the clean-swept deck, and oft-painted planks comprised above the water-line; whereas the vast mass of our fabric, with all its store-rooms of secrets, forever slides along far under the surface." The ostensible subject of this sentence, the craft, is transformed subtly into the self with the description of what lies below the surface as "our fabric." "We ourselves," White-Jacket says, "are the repositories of the secret packet" of orders under which each of us sails through life. "There are no mysteries out of ourselves."²⁸ The ship, then, also functions as a macrocosm of the self. His voyage on the Neversink, White-Jacket implies, is simultaneously an investigation of the world of which each person is a part, and an exploration of the

secret store rooms of the self in which lies the reason for the journey out from land.

These metaphors imply a more complicated text than the ostensible popular form of the book would lead us to expect. In White-Jacket's examination of the ship we could find probings of the nature of identity in confrontation with the world if the promise of these metaphors is upheld. The last chapter is reflexive and demands that the reader dive back into the text to explore the implications of the closing metaphors. But in pursuit of these complexities we are stopped short. White-Jacket admits that he does not have access to those secret store-rooms:

though for a period of more than a year I was an inmate of this floating box of live-oak, yet there were numberless things in it that, to the last, remained wrapped in obscurity, or concerning which I could only lose myself in vague speculations. I was a Roman Jew of the Middle Ages, confined to the Jew's quarter of the town, and forbidden to stray beyond my limits. Or I was as a modern traveler in the same famous city, forced to quit it at last without gaining ingress to the most mysterious--the innermost shrine of the Pope, and the dungeons and cells of the Inquisition.²⁹

Autocratic rule is not conducive to the sort of intellectual independence essential to such an exploration of the inner life, White-Jacket contends, and the autocratic rule on a man-of-war, does not allow the freedom to explore the innermost recesses of the ship. In his March 3, 1849 letter to Duyckinck in which he discussed diving, Melville also discussed the difficulties that writers faced in trying to maintain their freedom to dive. He regretted "that the muzzle which all men wore on their souls in the Elizabethan day . . . [had] intercepted Shaksper's [sic] full articula-

tions." Shakespeare was not completely frank, Melville contended, but, he asked, "who in this intolerant Universe is, or can be?" Significantly though, Melville qualified this observation. "The Declaration of Independence makes a difference," he declared.³⁰ He would change this opinion in light of the reception of Redburn and White-Jacket, but here he argued that American political institutions allowed for more honest and true expression from writers than had any other. White-Jacket's lack of freedom to explore and reveal the innermost recesses and secrets of the ship, and by extension of himself and the world around him, is his final condemnation of the autocratic rules of the Navy. This arch-Jacksonian democrat is assailing naval law because it does not allow for the independence of thought and action that is necessary for self-exploration.

The reviews of Redburn and White-Jacket confirmed for Melville both his sense of what kind of writing would be popular and his belief in the foolishness of most critics. Both books were overwhelmingly well received. While Melville was in England attempting to sell White-Jacket, he recorded in his journal his reactions to the English reviews of Redburn. On November 6, 1849, he noted:

happened to see "Bentley's Miscellany" with something about Redburn. . . . Also saw Blackwood's long story about a short book. It's very comical--seemed so, at least, as I had to hurry over it--in treating the thing as real. But the wonder is that the Old Tory should waste so many pages upon a thing, which I, the author, know to be trash, & wrote it to buy some tobacco with.

Two days later, when shown the notices of the book at Bent-

ley's office, Melville found them "laughable."³¹ It is not surprising of course that Bentley's house organ would publish a positive review of the book. But Blackwood's, after soundly condemning Mardi, was more of a surprise.

In its review, snidely positive, (a "snobbish patronizing tone of expression of the London cockney school," Duyckinck would call it in the Literary World) Blackwood's reviewer, Frederick Hardman, addressed virtually every issue that was raised about both Redburn and White-Jacket.³² Hardman first tied Redburn to Typee and Omoo, rather than to Mardi, by again raising the issue of veracity. "An unmerited importance has perhaps been given to the inquiry whether Mr. Melville's voyages were made on quarterdeck or on fore-castle," he wrote, "and are genuine adventures or mere Robinsonades. The book, not the writer, concerns the critic. . . . We accept Mr. Melville, therefore, for what he professes to be." Such grudging acceptance was echoed by most other reviewers. Both Redburn and White-Jacket elicited questions about the extent of fact and fiction, but not in the tone of disapprobation with which the same issues had been discussed earlier. Redburn was generally declared an imaginary narrative (though not a novel, according to the London Morning Post, because it had neither plot nor a love interest), but one that was the most life-like and natural fiction since Robinson Crusoe according to the Southern Literary Messenger. The comparisons with Defoe resumed, but not with the implication that the taint of fiction was a bad thing. Many reviewers agreed with Duyckinck's assessment in

the Literary World that Melville proved himself in Redburn "the DeFoe of the Ocean."³³

White-Jacket was not considered a novel either, nor was it considered fictional at all. Charles Gordon Greene, the common hangman of the Boston Post, in one of the few negative reviews of the book, echoed the general opinion of other reviewers when he observed that "the literary feature of the book is its least prominent. . . . On the whole, White-Jacket assumes to be a didactic rather than an ornamental book--a description of fact rather than a romance." The social criticism in White-Jacket, particularly the argument against flogging which, at the time of the book's release, was being debated in Congress, clouded reviewers' perceptions of the fictionalizing that Melville had done. None of the critics recognized the sophisticated narrative voice of White-Jacket, and few questioned the relationship between Melville's experience and his narrative.³⁴ That these fictionalized narratives were more readily accepted by the reviewers than were Typee and Omoo was partly due to the way Melville described the two books. The sub-title of Redburn: "Being the Sailor-boy Confessions and Reminiscences of the Son-of-a-Gentleman, in the Merchant Service," implied a fictional narrator and described the parameters of the narrative. Reviewers were free to speculate on its biographical accuracy--Charles F. Briggs in Holden's Dollar Magazine did discuss the direct biographical connection between Melville's life and the book--but Melville did not do as he

had done in the prefaces of Typee and Omoo. He did not insist on the book's veracity. Most reviewers settled for a judgment similar to that issued by the Spectator: Redburn "is even more remarkable than his stories founded on fact. . . . It reads like a 'true story'--as if it had all taken place."³⁵ And though in both the English and American prefaces to White-Jacket Melville explained that he had served on a United States frigate, he insisted only that his "man-of-war experiences and observations . . . [were] incorporated in the present volume," not that the book was a direct rendering of his experience. Melville learned much about reviewers' tastes from the reception of his first three books, and he was developing a more precise sense of the relation of fact and fiction in his writing. He made no claims for Redburn and White-Jacket that the books couldn't bear.

Perhaps a stronger impetus for reviewers not to quibble about the fictional elements of the two books was their sense of relief over Melville's return to familiar forms and grounds after the flight of Mardi. Hardman, in Blackwood's, expressed what many other reviewers also discussed, that "after a decided and deplorable retrogression [in Mardi], Mr. Melville seems likely to go ahead again, if he will only take time and pains and not over-write himself, and avoid certain affectations and pedantry unworthy a man of his ability." The London Literary Gazette was glad to see that Melville had "descended from his sublime, not to the ridiculous, but to common and real life." Both the reviewer for

the Athenaeum and George Ripley in the Tribune declared that Redburn was a remarkable improvement on Mardi. Even after Melville had published White-Jacket, Frederick S. Cozzens in the Knickerbocker continued the indirect assault on Mardi:

We are glad to find the author of "Typee" on the right ground at last. When we read his "Mardi," or rather tried to read it, for we never could get quite through it, we feared that the author had mistaken his bent . . . and that we were thenceforth to hear from him in a pseudo-philosophical rifacciamento of Carlyle and Emerson. "Redburn" reassured us, and now comes "White-Jacket," to reinstate the author in the best good graces of the reading public.³⁶

Whether or not they liked Mardi, many of the reviewers recognized in Redburn and White-Jacket Melville's return to a form that was written consciously to attract popularity. The majority of those reviewers were avowedly pleased with Melville's concern for public opinion. George Ripley, in his Tribune review of Redburn, felt that Melville had shown "his good sense, or his respect for public opinion, by leaving the vein of mystic allegory and this transcendental, glittering soap-bubble speculation which he [had] 'done to death'" in Mardi. Charles Gordon Greene feared that Melville "might follow up his Mardi with others of similar sort, to disgust rather than to amuse the public," and he was happy to find that Redburn was an amusing book. But the Britannia, which was not as fond of either Redburn or White-Jacket as were most reviewers, recognized Melville's attempt at money making as a "slap-dash kind of writing," and warned him, "unless he changes his style, his popularity, at least with those who read for amusement, will not survive the

issue of another White-Jacket." Even those who liked Mardi recognized the difference between the attempt at popular writing in Redburn and White-Jacket and the serious romance of Mardi. "The popularity of . . . [Redburn] will far exceed any of the previous ones," Nathaniel Parker Willis predicted in the Home Journal, "though it will not perhaps raise the author's literary reputation from the pinnacle where Mardi placed it."³⁷

And here we have the crux of the conflict between competing motives for Melville as a writer. Does Melville write those kinds of books said to fail--those kinds of romances which he defined as constituting an American literature--and thus enhance his literary reputation among the kind of reader that he admired, or does he write books that would perhaps be popular and thus enhance his purse? Mordecai M. Noah, in his Sunday Times and Noah's Weekly Messenger, understood the conflict. Mardi, Noah felt, was the book on which Melville, "would probably choose to rest his fame--a work of great thought and wonderful power." But Redburn, written in the old vein of Typee and Omoo, was written for the million who would delight in it. Melville's reviewers implicitly expressed their opinion by valuing Redburn and White-Jacket more highly than Mardi: it is better to write for the public, to give them what they want, than to give them what the writer thinks they should have. This is the distinction between Young America's and the Whig's identification of national authorship. To reiterate: if one is not read, if one is not popular, then one has no

claim to the title of national writer, the Whigs argued. It seems that most reviewers agreed that writing for amusement was more important than writing romances of self-exploration. The reason for such a proclivity is embedded in a statement by Greene. "Mr. Melville, for great fame, has lived a century too late," Greene observed, "and while he undoubtedly equals, and, in some respects, excels the greatest masters in his peculiar work, he must be content with the name of having written some very clever books, and be overjoyed if thereby he put money in his purse." The age does not allow for literary fame, Greene argued, so do not try to achieve it. Melville seemed to have reached the same understanding, if for different reasons, in Redburn. If each age needs to write its own guide books, then literature can only be transitory. Fame was meaningless, as Melville was soon to realize. But if he could write for neither fame nor popularity, then his profession offered very little reward.

Paradoxically, though, it was in the reviews of Redburn and White-Jacket that Melville's reputation as a representative American writer blossomed, particularly in England. Chasles' article on Mardi, as we have seen, convinced Duyckinck that Melville was finally beginning to be grouped with Cooper, Irving, Bryant, and Prescott as a national writer. Hardman's Blackwood's review of Redburn again set the tenor of the reviews. He listed three reasons why "it always gives us pleasure to speak favourably of a book by an

American author, when we conscientiously can do so." First, since Americans are strangers, it is an act of courtesy to compliment them. Second, "because we hope thereby to encourage Americans to the cultivation of literature." And third, because if many good books are written in America and receive foreign praise, Hardman hoped that America would "at last awake to the advantages of an international copyright."

The first reason is perhaps what prompted Duyckinck to accuse the Blackwood's reviewer of snobbishness. We find in the Britannia review of White-Jacket a snobbish elaboration of the second.

If Americans are to be encouraged in the cultivation of letters, the reviewer of the Britannia assumed that they must first be instructed on what the aims of literature are. Melville "resembles the great majority of his countrymen who aspire to literary eminence," the reviewer observed:

they imagine everything depends on mental vigour, and nothing on mental discipline. Their aim is to astonish and horrify rather than to elevate and please. They revel in exaggeration of all kinds; and even when they deal with simple nature they know not how to select and combine, so that its representation shall at once give an impression of truth and a sentiment of delight.

This complaint echoes the Whig position on Young America's definition of romance--its expansiveness, roughness, and vigor were reprehensible. The reviewer for the Britannia did not agree with Young America's definition of American writing. He insisted instead

on the principle that even nature, to be pleasing, must be represented by art, and that the coarse exaggeration which aims at improving nature is but a miserable substitute for that skill which can make it, in its truth and simplicity, the most delightful object of contempla-

tion.

Strikingly reminiscent of Griswold's dictum, quoted above, that Simms' writing "is not true to nature as we love to contemplate it," the Britannia's attack defines the qualities of American literature as those which Young America advocated, but aligns itself with the Whig definition of what that literature should be. The London Morning Post, though much more sympathetic to White-Jacket, saw the same faults in a book in which the "mind of young America, keen, sensitive, but unmaturred, lies before us." Melville, the reviewer declared, lacked taste, delicacy, and good judgment.³⁹

Melville then, in British eyes, became a representative of excessive, immature, but energetic and forceful American literature. And as Hardman's third reason for discussing American writers indicates, Melville also became a representative of the profession of writing in America.

Two American reviewers, those for the Democratic Review and the Philadelphia Pennsylvanian, assumed that Melville found the British market more lucrative than the American and accused him of writing White-Jacket for the English. Melville "betrays the fact," the Democratic Review reported, "that London pays him better for his copy-right than New York; and the puffs for English officers, with the left-handed compliments to the American service, doubtless had their value with Bentley."⁴⁰ But that value was affected by the copyright situation in England.

America needed to awaken to the necessity of an inter-

national copyright, Hardman knew, because the country's authors, after June, 1849, no longer could safely count on supplementing their incomes with money from English editions. It was in June that the British Court of Exchequer ruled that no citizen of a country which did not have a reciprocal copyright agreement with Great Britain could obtain copyright there. Since America had no such laws, Cooper, Irving, Prescott, Melville, and other American authors could no longer expect to be well paid for their books in England. Melville felt the impact of the law immediately.

Although Bentley assured James Fenimore Cooper on June 20, 1849, that the court decision "shall not interfere with my course of business, for I rely upon the common sense of the matter and the principle of justice," he nonetheless offered only 100 pounds for Redburn in view of "the want of success of Mardi and the stupid decision at present with regard to copyright." While accepting Bentley's offer, Melville indicated his concern over the copyright issue and speculated that "ere long, doubtless we shall have something of an international law--so much desired by all American writers--which shall settle this matter upon the basis of justice." History proved Melville optimistic--the first such agreement was signed in 1891--and his attempts to sell White-Jacket in England caused a spate of articles on both sides of the ocean about the issue of copyright.⁴¹

In September, 1850, an item in Punch addressed the new

copyright decision. "Literary Johnathan made a piratical war on Literary John Bull," it noted.

An English book was an American book--in all but the profit it brought in to its author. . . . International copy-right was occasionally talked of; but Johnathan knew better. . . . Meanwhile an American copy-right was respected in Great Britain. Washington Irving received his well-earned 10,000 [pounds] from Mr. Murray. Mr. Melville pocketed the (equally well earned) price of his Typee and Omoo and White-Jacket. . . . The recent decision of the Chief Baron has decided, that a foreigner can have no copy-right in England; and as Americans are foreigners, English copy-right in American works are good for nothing.⁴²

The decision was issued just four months before Melville travelled to England with the manuscript of White-Jacket, hoping to bargain for a healthy downpayment to finance the trip. But he had more difficulty selling the book than the Punch item indicated. He wrote to Duyckinck that his "travelling 'tail' had been cut off . . . by the confounded state of the Copyright question in England. It has prevented me from receiving an immediate supply of cash."⁴³ Although he eventually struck a good deal with Bentley for the book, Melville visited at least eight publishers in an effort to find a better offer.

Melville's efforts to sell White-Jacket prompted an "Importer of Foreign Books" to write a letter to the London Times, stating that Melville "wearily hawked this book from Picadilly to Whitechapel, calling upon every publisher in his way, and could find no one rash enough to buy his 'protected right.'" Richard Bentley replied that he had indeed bought the book and, he believed, the copyright for a handsome sum. Duyckinck published both letters and the text of

the English Court's decision in the Literary World.⁴⁴

N. P. Willis, who admired all of Melville's books, had already discussed Melville's efforts and the effect of the British decision in the Home Journal. Referring to a letter Melville had written him from England, he wrote:

Our friend Herman Melville is one of the first and most signal realizers of the effect of the recent repudiation of copyright. . . . To punish us for our wholesale thieving of English books, [the British publishers] have broken up this protection, by mutual consent, and now, an American author can no more sell a book in England than Dickens can sell one here.⁴⁵

Willis was not entirely accurate about the solidarity of the British publishers--John Murray and Richard Bentley sued pirates of Irving and Melville to test the new law--but he was accurate in identifying the law's impact on Melville.

Public interest in the copyright situation made very clear both Melville's stature as an author and the difficulty American writers faced in earning money. Hardman considered this difficulty to be an example of America's lack of concern for the development of its art. "Surely it is little creditable to a great country," he wrote,

to see her men of genius, her Irvings and Prescotts, and we will also say her Coopers and Melvilles, publishing their works in a foreign capital, as the means of obtaining that fair remuneration which, although it should never be the sole object, is yet the legitimate and honourable reward of the labourer in literature's path.

Reviewers, then, generally recognized that Melville was attempting to fill his purse by writing Redburn and White-Jacket, and applauded him for it. By writing books intended to amuse, Melville pleased his reviewers and enhanced his reputation. But the reviewers' enthusiasm over two books

that Melville considered jobs confirmed for him the estimation of critics that he had articulated in Mardi. They did appreciate nice surfaces rather than profound depths.

Duyckinck, of course, was the other sort of reader. He gave the two books the kind of support Melville must have come to expect in the Literary World. In addition to his favorable reviews, he gave advance notice for each book, discussed Blackwood's long review of Redburn, quoted a statement from Holden's Dollar Magazine that claimed, "the two most popular writers among us just now, are Melville and Headley; and much of their success is undoubtedly owing to the perfect fearlessness with which they thrust themselves bodily before their countrymen," and he reprinted the material concerning the impact of the copyright decision on Melville.

In his reviews of Redburn and White-Jacket, Duyckinck emphasized the intellectual depth and allegorical perceptiveness of the books. He found Melville "true to his title, the world in a man-of-war," in White-Jacket, and found a similar microcosm in Redburn, observing, "the fore-castle of any ship is the world in miniature. You will find all governments of the world represented there in individuals." Further, Melville's representations of the world "are conveyed . . . [with] the thorough impression and conviction of reality." Redburn, Duyckinck claimed, "belongs to the great school of nature," and in White-Jacket "is a sound humanitarian lesson which . . . [Melville] teaches, or rather that life teaches, which he records." Both books

stirred him as a reader to "the profoundest depths of manhood." In giving this sort of support to Melville's books, Duyckinck was perceiving those qualities which Melville had defined in Mardi, Redburn, and White-Jacket as appropriate for a national romance, and he was declaring himself the kind of reader for whom Melville was writing.⁴⁶

In Redburn and White-Jacket, Melville's concept of the nature and mission of American literature coalesced and the reviews helped him to define an audience that would appreciate that literature. He was ready to issue a coherent and concise statement on literary nationalism, which took form in "Hawthorne and His Mosses."

NOTES

CHAPTER IV

¹William H. Gilman, Melville's Early Life and "Redburn" (New York: New York University Press, 1951), p. 168, convincingly hypothesizes that Melville began Redburn after April 11; Harper & Brothers agreed on September 13 to publish White-Jacket (Leyda, p.313).

²Davis, Gilman, p. 86.

³Davis, Gilman, p. 91.

⁴Davis, Gilman, p. 95; Charvat, p. 237.

⁵Davis, Gilman, pp. 95, 86.

⁶Willard Thorpe, "Historical Note," White-Jacket, or the World in a Man of War, ed., Harrison Hayford, et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 407.

⁷Davis, Gilman, p. 91.

⁸Herman Melville, White-Jacket, or the World in a Man of War, ed., Harrison Hayford, et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), pp. ix, 487.

⁹Davis, Gilman, pp. 91, 93.

¹⁰Thorpe, "Historical Note," p. 407.

¹¹Davis, Gilman, p. 92.

¹²Gilman, pp. 170-172.

¹³Davis, Gilman, pp. 92, 96.

¹⁴Herman Melville, Redburn, His First Voyage, ed., Harrison Hayford, et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), pp. 8, 7.

¹⁵See Berthoff, pp. 115-132 for a useful general discussion of Melville's narrators, and Dryden, pp. 59-67 for an illuminating discussion of the implications of recognizing the older Redburn as narrator, a discussion which has at various points informed my own. The question of narrative point of view had been frequently considered in criticism of Redburn: both Mathiessen and Gilman argue that a "shift in the angle of vision" (Gilman, p.208) from young Redburn to a more mature narrator is the central flaw of the book; Laur-

ance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel With God (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952) argues that there are three points of view--young Redburn's, the older Redburn's, and Melville's; Merlin Bowen, "Redburn and the Angle of Vision," Modern Philology, 52 (November, 1954), 100-109, argues that it is only the older Redburn who tells the story. More recently William B. Dillingham, An Artist in the Rigging: The Early Works of Herman Melville (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), argues for a fourth voice, a "gremlin who confuses the reader and tries to spoil Melville's art, [who] slips into the dialogue, mostly in the latter part of the book"(p. 34). Clearly Melville established a structure of narration which implies only one narrative voice--the older Redburn, but his failure to fully realize that voice, I argue, is caused by his failure to fully utilize the narrative situation.

¹⁶Melville, Redburn, pp.3, 5, 7.

¹⁷Melville, Redburn, p. 9; Dryden, p. 62, also discusses the symbolism of the glass ship, arguing that Redburn's "entire account of his youthful journey to Liverpool may be seen as a commentary on the symbolic object which instigates it." I would reverse this observation. In fact, the ship comments on the journey, and implies at the outset of Redburn's story the essential failure of the journey. See also Dillingham, pp. 35-36, for a brief discussion of the ship's symbolic importance.

¹⁸Melville, Redburn, pp. 86-87.

¹⁹Melville, Redburn, pp. 152, 157; See Dillingham, p. 51, and Charles Feidelson, Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 180 for similar discussions of the meaning of the guide-book.

²⁰Melville, White-Jacket, p. 150.

²¹Melville, White-Jacket, pp. 297, 151.

²²See, for example, John Gerlach, "Messianic Nationalism in the Early Works of Herman Melville: Against Perry Miller," Arizona Quarterly Review, 27 (Spring, 1972), 5-26, and James Duban, Melville's Major Fiction: Politics, Theology, and Imagination (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1983), pp. 61-81. Dryden says that White-Jacket's argument "constantly doubles back on itself and ends by ironically destroying the validity of both the social and religious quest"(p. 71). Melville did already perceive a difference between the ideal and pragmatic worlds that he outlined in Pierre, but in his argument for a national literature he was still attempting to mediate between the two.

²³Melville, White-Jacket, p. 192.

²⁴There is a linguistic cue to the similarity of experiences. Lemsford's comment, that Jack Chase's appreciation made his soul "mount like a balloon," echoes Melville's earlier comment to Duyckinck about the reception of Mardi that "it is not with a hollow purse as with a hollow balloon--for a hollow purse makes the poet sink."

²⁵Melville, White-Jacket, p. 192.

²⁶Melville, White-Jacket, pp. 271, 192; Mardi, p. 654.

²⁷Melville, Mardi, p. 654.

²⁸Melville, White-Jacket, pp.398-400; see Howard P. Vincent, The Tailoring of Melville's "White-Jacket" (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 72-78, for a discussion of the ship as microcosm.

²⁹Melville, White-Jacket, p. 128.

³⁰Davis, Gilman, p. 80.

³¹Leyda, p. 327.

³²Frederick Hardman, ["Review of Redburn"], Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Nov. 1849, in Branch, pp. 196-201; The Literary World, Dec. 1, 1849, p. 469. See Hetherington, pp. 135-188 for an overview of the reviews of the two books.

³³["Review of Redburn"], London Morning Post, Oct. 29, 1849, in Branch, p. 194; ["Review of Redburn"], Southern Literary Messenger, Dec., 1849, in Leyda, p. 355; "Mr. Melville's Redburn," The Literary World, Nov. 17, 1849, p. 418.

³⁴Charles Gordon Greene, ["Review of White-Jacket"], Boston Post, April 10, 1850, in Branch, p. 233. See Vincent, *passim*, for information of the fictional elements in White-Jacket.

³⁵Charles F. Briggs, ["Review of Redburn"], Holden's Dollar Magazine, Jan., 1850, in Branch, p. 214; ["Review of Redburn"], London Spectator, Oct, 27, 1849, in Branch, p. 191.

³⁶["Review of Redburn"], London Literary Gazette, Oct. 20, 1849, in Branch, p. 188; ["Review of Redburn"], Athenaeum, Nov. 10, 1849, in Higgins, p. 63; George Ripley, ["Review of Redburn"], New York Tribune, Dec. 1, 1849, in Branch, p. 210; Frederick S. Cozzens, ["Review of White-Jacket"], The Knickerbocker, May, 1850, p. 448.

³⁷Ripley, in Branch, p. 210; Greene, in Branch, p. 233; ["Review of Redburn"], Britannia, Feb. 2, 1850, in Branch,

p. 219; Nathaniel Parker Willis, ["Review of Redburn"], New York Home Journal, Nov. 24, 1849, in Branch, p. 208.

³⁸Mordecai M. Noah, ["Review of Redburn"], Sunday Times and Noah's Weekly Messenger, Nov. 18, 1849, in Higgins, p. 65; Greene, in Branch, p. 204.

³⁹Britannia, in Branch, p. 219; ["Review of White-Jacket"], London Morning Post, Feb. 12, 1850, in Higgins, p. 75.

⁴⁰["Review of White-Jacket"]. Philadelphia Pennsylvanian, May 3, 1850, in Higgins, p. 87.

⁴¹Leyda, p. 307; Herschel Parker, "Historical Note," in Redburn, His First Voyage, p.320; Davis, Gilman, pp. 88-89.

⁴²Leyda, p. 397.

⁴³Davis, Gilman, p. 94.

⁴⁴"A Letter From the Times," The Literary World, Feb. 24, 1850, p. 184; "Mr. Melville and Copy-right in England," The Literary World, March 2, 1850, p. 205.

⁴⁵Leyda, p. 361.

⁴⁶"Mr. Melville's Redburn," The Literary World, Nov. 17, 1849, pp. 418-420; "Mr. Melville's White-Jacket," The Literary World, March 16, 1850, pp. 271-272, March 23, 1850, pp. 297-298.

CHAPTER V

"HAWTHORNE AND HIS MOSSES"

On August 2, 1850, Evert Duyckinck and Cornelius Mathews visited Melville who was summering at his uncle's farm in the Berkshires. The following week and a half was to prove one of the most important periods in Melville's professional life. On August 5, Melville, Duyckinck, and Mathews, in company with Oliver Wendell Holmes and Nathaniel Hawthorne among others, took a one day excursion up Monument Mountain. It was the first meeting between Melville and Hawthorne, and the beginning of their intense friendship. On August 6 Melville began reading Hawthorne's Mosses From an Old Manse, and on or shortly before August 11, he began writing "Hawthorne and his Mosses," which Duyckinck took to New York the next day and published in two installments, on August 17 and August 24, in the Literary World. This essay drew immediate inspiration from three sources. The most obvious was Melville's meeting with Hawthorne and reading the book. Also, after the excursion Mathews and Melville debated with Holmes over the quality and prospects of Americans and their literature. Finally, Melville received editorial assistance and encouragement from Duyckinck and Mathews while writing the essay.¹ But its roots were firmly planted in Melville's experience as a professional author in America. The essay was perhaps the most cogent of the Young

America manifestoes, and was certainly as exuberant as any piece by Jones, Simms, Mathews, or Duyckinck. But it was not only a political manifesto; it was also a personal one. In Mosses From an Old Manse Melville found the traces of a kindred spirit who hinted at ideas on readership, writing, and the nature of romance that Melville had been working through in his earlier writing. And the essay announced Melville's intention to produce a work that would embody Young America's definition of a representative national book.

Melville adopted the guise of a Virginian vacationing in Vermont, perhaps to allay the impression of partisanship with Young America that any identification as a New Yorker would have engendered, perhaps to emphasize a homogeneity of Americanism by creating a narrator who, as a Southerner appreciative of a New England writer, transcended sectional and political lines. Melville very well may have been aware of Mathews' plan to write an account of the trip up Monument Mountain, published in three parts in the August 24, 31, and September 7 Literary World, and hoped to disassociate his essay from its autobiographical origins. But the political affiliation of "Hawthorne and His Mosses" would have been clear to any reader familiar with Young America's arguments.²

"In our point of view," the Virginian declared, "this matter of a national literature has come to such a pass with us, that in some sense we must turn bullies."³ And bully the Virginian did. He identified the appropriate qualities

of readers of a national literature, instructed them on how to read, explained that reading was a political and civic duty, and defined the type of literature that should be considered national. Through the act of reading Hawthorne, the Virginian demonstrated that he was an ideal reader of American literature, and thus was the appropriate person to explain what reading is.

Reading, the Virginian argued, cannot be merely the act of inspecting the artifact, the book, because the book is only the outward index of that "ever-eluding Spirit of Beauty" that possesses all men of genius. Reading is rather the act of adopting the orphan book, of eventually "incorporating the stuff" of the book so that the reader can share the writer's genius. The reader cannot be a "mere critic" if he is to plumb the genius's depths. He must look through the book to the "dimly discernable greatness to which these immediate products are but the infallible indices." The reader, as well as the writer, must be a poet. The mere critic inspects only with the brain; the true reader must intuit with the heart as well. In his preface, "The Old Manse--the Author Makes the Reader Acquainted With His Abode," Hawthorne provided the justification for this active sort of reading. He considered that "all the artifice and conventionalism of life was but an impalpable thinness upon its surface," and that "the earthliest human soul had an infinite spiritual capacity, and may contain the better world within its depths."⁴ The reader must dive through the

artifice and conventionalism that lie on the surface of life and seek that better world. Melville had portrayed such a reader in Jack Chase; now he explained the implications of reading as an act of diving.

Reading, the Virginian contended, is ultimately a journey with the writer through his inner landscape to glimpse that truth that "is forced to fly like a scared white doe" through the forest of each person's soul.⁵ Hawthorne, too, considered the act of reading to be participation in the writer's display of egotism, but he was less bold than Melville in the invitation he offered readers. Melville would have the reader participate in the hunt, Hawthorne would have him observe. "Has the reader gone wandering hand in hand with me, through inner passages of my being," asked Hawthorne,

and have we groped together into all its chambers, and examined their treasures or their rubbish? Not so. We have been standing on the green sward, but just within the cavern's mouth, where the common sunshine is free to penetrate, and where every footstep is therefore free to come.⁶

The Virginian would not be put off by Hawthorne's description. He indeed wandered in Hawthorne's inner being, as the essay illustrates, and he thought it was unfortunate that more readers did not enter the cave mouth.

Most readers, the Virginian argued, are drawn to surfaces. In responding to Shakespeare, for example, they were drawn to the "popularizing noise and broad farce" of his plays rather than to the inner landscape of his genius. The Virginian echoed Duyckinck's argument when he concluded that

most American writers created nice surfaces which covered a paucity of original exploration, and that most readers did not look past the surface. Thus the reading public honored Washington Irving who "owes his chief reputation to the studied avoidance of all topics but smooth ones," and did not read Hawthorne who, because of his intellectual and emotional depth, was "too deserving of popularity to be popular." American readers may yet have had "many a genial hour's delightful toil to come, in making the acquaintance of the inner life of many who are but little understood" as Duyckinck claimed, but only if they began to look past the appealing but timid surface.

It might seem that the Virginian was severely limiting the potential audience by requiring readers to have a generous, poetic, and self-effacing enough temperament to participate in and appreciate another's self-exploration, but he felt differently. There were not many readers who dove into the inner landscapes of books, but there were many who were capable of diving. "Most men have felt at some time great thoughts," the Virginian observed. To feel rather than to think great thoughts is to heed the heart rather than the head. Most men are capable of transcending the response of mere critics; they have the stuff of the poet and can be stirred to travel inward.

And if most men were capable of performing this act of reading, the Virginian contended, then it was those men's civic duty to read, recognize, and publicize versions of American genius. Melville had made the same argument in

White-Jacket; Simms and Mathews had made it earlier. "We are rapidly preparing for that political supremacy among the nations, which prophetically awaits us at the close of the present century," the Virginian bragged, but American literature was not keeping pace. That "unshackled democratic spirit of Christianity" which America was to bring to the world was not being fostered in the country's writing. It could only be fostered by recognizing and diving into the genius of writers like Hawthorne. It was the American reader's duty "to carry republican progressiveness into Literature as well as into Life." The Virginian emphasized that this political responsibility was less for the benefit of the American geniuses than for the benefit of the world.

How then could American readers recognize true genius? The Virginian named those qualities that Young America had earlier identified, originality and independence of mind. "It is better to fail in originality, than to succeed in imitation," the Virginian contended; nonetheless, America was rife with imitators of British models. American readers must "boldly condemn all imitation," he enjoined, "and foster all originality, though, at first, it be crabbed and ugly as our pine knots." Only in original form, content, and style could the American writer begin to understand the unique position and possibility of America in the world. As long as American writers imitated British models they would not begin to embody the unshackled spirit of democracy.

It was because of Hawthorne's independence of mind, his

egotism, that the Virginian picked up Mosses From an Old Manse and put down Dwight's Travels. Dwight was one of those slavish imitators of European models and his intention "to describe New England in a manner resembling that in which a painter would depict a cloud" indicated that he studied surfaces, not depths. On two counts, then, Dwight's Travels were inappropriate material for American readers.⁷

In contrast, the New England landscape that Hawthorne painted mirrored the depths of the human soul. The surroundings of the Manse in their "variety of natural utterances" provided each of the previous occupants with "something accordant with every passage of his sermon, were it of tenderness or reverential fear." And Hawthorne found in the Concord River his own reflection, a dream picture, an image of ideal beauty. "Which, after all, was the most real--the picture, or the original?" Hawthorne wondered while looking in the river, "the objects palpable to our grosser senses, or their apotheosis in the stream beneath? Surely the disembodied images stand in closer relation to the soul," he felt. In this landscape Hawthorne, in company with Thoreau, claimed the independence to write his own romances of diving. "The chief profit of those wild days," he declared, lays "in the freedom we . . . won from all custom and conventionalism, and fettering influences of man on man. We were so free to-day, that it was impossible to be slaves again tomorrow." Hawthorne found himself, or rather, as Melville described it in Mardi, the gold inside of himself, while living at the Manse, and the stories to which this

sketch is an introduction were written with the independence of mind, the excitement of egotism, and the originality that this encounter of a great mind with the American landscape could spark.⁸

In Hawthorne's embodiment of the American landscape rested his nationality, the Virginian argued. The American reader could discover in Hawthorne "the smell of your beeches and hemlocks; . . . your own broad prairie . . . in his soul, and if you travel away inland into his deep and noble nature, you will hear the far off roar of his Niagara." By arguing that Hawthorne's writing embodied the American landscape, Melville was revising one of Young America's criteria for an American literature--the necessity of home topics. Melville only tangentially wrote about home topics in his books, and he was probably aware of Griswold's and Felton's attacks on Jones' and Simms' insistence that an American literature deal with American subjects. More importantly, though, he needed to resolve the paradox embedded in Young America's insistence on both originality and a restrictive form as components of home literature. The Virginian argued that American writers were American not because they dealt explicitly with American settings and subjects, but because they examined the internalization of the American experience and thus became natural representatives of that experience. "Great geniuses are parts of the times, they themselves are the times, and possess a correspondent coloring," the Virginian observed. When Hawthorne

revealed his inner landscape by writing, when so bold a reader as the Virginian participated in the writer's search for the apotheosis of nature in his soul, the reader and writer both encountered the democratic spirit of equality that was the ideal of American experience.

Melville identified fiction writing as the act of diving and reading as vicarious participation in the dive. And he identified the pursuit of Truth as the goal of diving. Both Hawthorne and Shakespeare were divers, the Virginian contended; both practiced the "Great Art of Telling the Truth." They revealed their store-rooms of secrets (which White-Jacket could not do) and were not afraid of the darkness as well as the light of Truth. "Every new book, or antique one, may contain the 'Open Sesame'--the spell to disclose treasures, hidden in some unsuspected cave of Truth," Hawthorne observed in his preface.⁹ Mosses From an Old Manse, the Virginian contended, was just such a book--a work of genius that was, because of its method of diving, because of its pursuit of Truth, and because of the virtue of its independent and original creator, a prime example of the national literature.

"Hawthorne and His Mosses" was an attempt to subvert the genial, pleasant image of Hawthorne held by the Whig reviewers--Clark, Griswold, and Briggs--and to align him, by identifying his dark genius, with the cause of Young America. Further, the essay is clear evidence of the impact that Young America had on the development of Melville's idea of what constituted a national literature. Melville agreed

with Young America that the appropriate subject matter of a national literature was the delineation of the inner life, that the American writer's duty was to follow his unencumbered instinct to produce original work, and that the reader's duty was to actively participate in the writer's exploration. Filled with the group's rhetoric, following its line of argument with only one important exception, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," illustrated the extent to which Melville's theory of a national literature was in accord with Young America's.¹⁰

Melville was the sort of author that Young America needed. Not only did he agree with the group's position on the necessity of copyright and with their argument for the nature and necessity of a national literature, he also had achieved a reputation as a creator of representative national works and had proven himself an able theoretician and propagandist for the cause.

According to the Whigs, though Young America talked often about a national literature, they had done nothing as yet to produce it. "The growth of American Literature cannot be forced by any hotbed process," Griswold argued. "It must be in a large degree but an incidental consequence of energetic and well directed action for the moral and spiritual liberation and elevation of man."¹¹ When Melville began his writing career, Young America had yet to bring any of its greenhouse plants to flower; they had yet to show America that their program for the development of a national

literature could produce anything more than weeds. In addition to being a manifesto for Young America, "Hawthorne and His Mosses" was Melville's declaration that he was about to produce a book that would embody Young America's creed.¹²

The world may be mistaken about Hawthorne, but clearly the Virginian thought he was not. He was no mere critic; he was able to plummet Hawthorne's depths. More importantly, though, Hawthorne "dropped germinous seeds into [the Virginian's] Southern soul." The Virginian's own landscape came to fruition while reading, and if the American reader were to encounter his next book, he would be in the presence of flowering American genius. "I have been braying myself," the Virginian said, "but then I claim to be the first that has so brayed in this particular matter; and therefore, while pleading guilty to the charge, still claim all the merit due originality." In claiming originality and in claiming the egotism implied by braying, the Virginian is declaring his genius.

Melville, then, by implication counted himself among the "new and better generation of . . . writers." He was claiming the sort of recognition that he gave Hawthorne. "I am content to leave Hawthorne to himself, and to the infallible findings of posterity," claimed the Virginian, "and however great may be the praise I have bestowed upon him, I feel that in so doing, I have more served and honored myself than him." Melville was making his case in the essay for his own position as an American genius. By declaring that reading is a civic duty, and that the trumpeting of American

writers to the world, even in their failures, is a political necessity, Melville was attempting to develop and instruct a readership. Mardi, though it was the sort of book that allowed Melville to dive, was a failure financially and critically. Melville acknowledged as much when he wrote Duyckinck that the book "tho' now unblown . . . may possibly--by some miracle, that is--flower like an aloe, a hundred years hence--or not flower at all, which is more likely by far, for some aloes never flower."¹³ He was aware that the book was an unnatural production from Young America's greenhouse, but it is, he insisted, the American public's duty, "if any of our authors fail, or seem to fail . . . to clap him on the shoulder, and back him against all Europe for his second round."

Melville was in the process, while writing "Hawthorne and His Mosses," of preparing for the second round. In the essay, he instructed the reading public in the proper response to an American genius who has at last found the searoom to tell the truth. He was preparing them for Moby-Dick.

NOTES

CHAPTER V

¹Among the documents that create a full picture of this vacation are Evert Duyckinck's letters, Hawthorne's journal entries for the time, an account by another participant, Hawthorne's publisher James T. Fields, and an account written by Mathews, "Several Days in Berkshire," The Literary World, August 24, 31, September 7. Much of each of these documents is reprinted in Leyda, pp. 382-391. Among many retellings of the events perhaps the best is in Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 154-160.

²Howard, p. 160, suggests that the disguise of a narrator was to disassociate the essay from the New York literary scene.

³All quotes from the essay are from "Hawthorne and His Mosses," The Literary World, Aug. 17, 1850, pp. 125-127; Aug. 24, 1850, pp. 145-147.

⁴Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Old Manse--the Author Makes the Reader Acquainted With His Abode," in Hawthorne: Tales and Sketches, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (New York: Library of America, 1982), pp. 1142, 1127.

⁵In "A Thought on Book-Binding," The Literary World, March 16, 1850, Melville argued that books "are a species of men, and introduced to them you circulate in the 'very best society' that the world can furnish." Melville was complaining about the inappropriate binding of Putnam's revised edition of Cooper's The Red Rover in the review.

⁶Hawthorne, p. 1147.

⁷Marvin Fisher, "Portrait of the Artist in America: 'Hawthorne and His Mosses,'" The Southern Review, 11 (Winter, 1975), 156-166, identifies Dwight as a leading example of bland imitators of European writing; Dryden, p. 23, quotes Dwight's aim and calls the Travels "a complete if somewhat dull guide book of New England."

⁸Hawthorne, pp. 1124, 1139, 1141.

⁹Hawthorne, p. 1138.

¹⁰Miller, p. 286, discusses the implications of Melville's assessment of Hawthorne and argues that "Hawthorne and His Mosses" "for virtually the last time in The Literary World, resounded that fine war cry of Young America."

¹¹Griswold, p. 48.

¹²Marvin Fisher also contends that Melville's essay is "ultimately self-serving and far more revealing of the tastes, ambitions and anxieties of the reviewer than of his subject" and that Melville was covertly grouping himself with the community of literary genius. But by not giving weight to Melville's genuine appreciation of Hawthorne or to his involvement with Young America, Fisher does not acknowledge the multiple purposes of the essay.

¹³Davis, Gilman, p. 101.

CHAPTER VI

MOBY-DICK

Early in February, 1850, while Melville was just beginning the book that was to become Moby-Dick, he was also beginning to take stock of his career. He was a relatively well-paid writer if not a highly popular one. He had established an international reputation as a representative American author. And he had crystalized and was prepared to test a theory of the nature of a national literature--its method of composition, its subject matter, its form, its relation to its readers. But Melville was not pleased with the reasons for his reputation, and he considered irreconcilable the demands of writing for money and of creating a representative national work.

During this time White-Jacket was selling well--Harpers announced in April the printing of the fifth thousand of the book--and it was making Melville's name well enough known to create a telling if unusual sort of accidental publicity. In July the New York Journal reported:

It appears that some individual ambitious of notoriety has become enamored of the good name and reputation of our townsman, Herman Melville . . . and has been so far successful in his attempts to pass himself off for that gentleman, that persons near the scene of his exploits have been induced to correspond with the Messrs. Harper, of this city, Mr. Melville's publishers, for the purpose of getting reliable information on the subject of this stranger's claims to the authorship of Mr. Melville's books.¹

Melville's family was aware of the impersonator, and though

Melville was in the Berkshires at the time, he probably was apprised of the man also.² Melville may have been fascinated by his impersonator considering his interest in the figure of the confidence man, but he would not have been happy that it was in the name of "the Author of 'White-Jacket'" that this "Curious Fraud" was being perpetrated. Such publicity could make his name better known perhaps, but Melville felt that the wrong book was drawing attention. If reviewers and readers were building for Melville a reputation based on "these books of mine," as he wrote Richard Henry Dana, Jr., "written almost entirely for lucre," rather than on Mardi, it was not the sort of unprofitable reputation that he wanted.³

Melville gave Duyckinck a copy of the English edition of Mardi on February 2, 1850, and in the accompanying letter he indicated both his sense of Mardi's limitations and of its accomplishments. In addition to comparing the book to an aloe that might flower in the future, but then again might not, Melville also explained the gift using a political metaphor. "Political republics should be the asylum for the persecuted of all nations," he wrote,

so if Mardi be admitted to your shelves, your bibliographical Republic of Letters may find some contentment in the thought, that it has afforded refuge to a work, which almost everywhere else has been driven forth like a wild, mystic Mormon into shelterless exile.

Melville acknowledged the unusual, unpopular quality of Mardi by comparing it to the wild, mystic Mormon; he also acknowledged his affection for the book by calling it exotic

and rare.⁴ Implicit in his compliment of Duyckinck's eclectic tastes and Republican library is Melville's denunciation of most critics as autocratic, rigid, and shallow arbiters of taste. Rather than being accepted, or at least tolerated, Mardi was persecuted by the critics, Melville felt. Only Duyckinck and the other Young America members had shown the generosity toward it that should prevail generally in a republic. And Mordecai M. Noah, in his review of Redburn, had been correct in assuming that it was upon Mardi that Melville would have wanted to rest his reputation.⁵

Because his reputation was based not on Mardi but on those books written to attract a popular audience, Melville revised his opinion of the importance of fame. In June of 1851, while attempting to finish Moby-Dick, he discussed in a letter to Hawthorne his dissatisfaction with the public's perception of him as an author. "What 'reputation' H. M. has is horrible," he complained. "Think of it! To go down to posterity is bad enough, any way; but to go down as a 'man who lived among the cannibals'!. . . . I have come to regard this matter of Fame as the most transparent of all vanities." Melville was not dissatisfied because he had no reputation; rather, he found fame to be transparent because it defined the profession of authorship in terms that he disliked. The kind of romance that Melville found most rewarding as a writer would not sell and was not generally appreciated. The other kind he detested. Melville reached the same conclusion that Charles Gordon Greene had expressed in his review of Redburn: "What's the use of elaborating

what, in its very essence, is so short lived as a modern book?" Melville asked Hawthorne. "Though I wrote the Gospels in this century, I should die in the gutter."⁶ Melville lived in a time in which the kind of lasting fame awarded a century earlier (at least in Greene's version of literary history) was not forthcoming. Greene's advice to Melville was to look after his purse, to write books for the general public rather than attempting to create a new Gospel. But writing simply for money was no longer something that Melville could do.

Melville had learned by the Autumn of 1851 the lesson that his career had to teach--that the American public would not support the kind of book that he and Young America defined as national--and he explained why in a letter to Bentley. "This country and all its affairs are governed by sturdy backwoodsmen . . . who care not a fig for any authors except those who write those most saleable of all books nowadays--ie--the newspapers & magazines."⁷ Melville's disdain of magazine writing echoed Mathews' opinion that it was inferior to book writing. His identification of sturdy backwoodsmen as his potential audience not only ignored the fact that women made up the majority of those who bought books and thus governed, at least financially, the affairs of literature in America, but also admitted that the male audience he looked for did not exist. Melville had renounced fame as transparent; here he seems also to admit that he would not follow the avenues of writing which would

lead to a profitable career. Yet it was not as easy to forgo the desire for fortune as it was to ignore the calling of fame for a professional writer. In the same letter in which Melville renounced fame, he described to Hawthorne the continuing tension he felt between the demands of popular writing and the necessity of romancing:

The calm, the coolness, the silent grass-growing mood in which a man ought always to compose--that, I fear can seldom be mine. Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is forever grinning in upon me, holding the door ajar. . . . What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,--it will not pay. Yet altogether write the other way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches.⁸

As a professional author Melville needed to support himself and his family through the sales of his books, yet he acknowledged that he was no longer able to write books that would sell. Of the three motives that drove Lombardo to write the *Koztanza*--his desire for lasting fame, his need to procure yams, and his drive to explore the self--only the last remained an attainable goal for Melville while he was composing *Moby-Dick*.

Still he was compelled to write, driven by the "blast resistless." His realization that reputation was unimportant and the possibility of monetary reward was limited freed him to concentrate more fully on writing the kind of book that was "said to fail." Melville qualified his definition of the American audience in his letter to Bentley by noting that there were a number of "cultivated, catholic men," who had an interest in a national literature.⁹ Duyckinck, with his bibliographic Republic of Letters was one; in Nathaniel

Hawthorne Melville felt he had found another. Shortly after meeting Melville during the Monument Mountain excursion, and before he was aware that Melville wrote his flattering essay, Hawthorne wrote to a friend: "I met Melville the other day, and like him so much that I have asked him to spend a few days with me before leaving these parts [the Berkshires]." After Duyckinck sent all of Melville's books to Hawthorne as a present (using Melville as the unwitting deliverer) Hawthorne wrote back:

I have read Melville's works with a progressive appreciation of the author. No writer ever put the reality before his reader more unflinchingly than he does in "Redburn" and "White-Jacket." "Mardi" is a rich book, with depths here and there that compel a man to swim for his life. It is so good that one scarcely pardons the writer for not having brooded long over it, so as to make it a great deal better.¹⁰

Even while acknowledging the difficulties of Mardi, Hawthorne offered the sort of appreciation for the book that Melville was looking for. There is no evidence that Melville read this letter but there is a great deal of evidence indicating that Melville's friendship with Hawthorne influenced the development of Moby-Dick. Melville and Hawthorne corresponded frequently between 1851 and 1853, and though unfortunately Hawthorne's letters have been lost, Melville's letters reveal both the inspiration and the intellectual clarity that he gained through his contact with Hawthorne.¹¹

The most important insight that Melville gained from his contact with Hawthorne was a clearer understanding of both the posture from which to dive and the object of pursuit. In an April, 1851 letter to Hawthorne, written while

Melville was still composing his book, he discussed his admiration for Hawthorne's new romance, The House of the Seven Gables. What was stunning about the book, Melville felt, was the "intense feeling of visible truth" embodied in it, and, by extension, in its author. Melville defined visible truth as:

the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not, though they do their worst to him--the man who, like Russia or the British Empire, declares himself a sovereign nature (in himself) amid the powers of heaven, hell, and earth. He may perish; but so long as he exists he insists upon treating with all Powers upon an equal basis. If any of those other Powers choose to withhold certain secrets, let them; that does not impair my sovereignty in myself; that does not make me tributary.¹²

Writing, Melville argues here, is the intrepid act of discovering a self by penetrating the secrets of the world. By taking the posture of an overriding egotism, by insisting that the writer maintain his sovereignty, the writer can confront and tell the truth. Melville never stated the personal mission of the romance of self-exploration more clearly; the telling shift in this letter from the abstract "he" to the clearly personal "me" reveals that once again Melville, while writing about Hawthorne, was in fact writing about himself. He was close to finishing a book in which two characters, Ahab and Ishmael, attempt to make truth visible in exactly these terms. "'Now I am my own soul's emperor; and my first act is abdication!'" declares Taji at the end of Mardi. Melville here declares the same sovereignty, but he does not abdicate. In Moby-Dick he explores the implications of that sovereignty.

By the Spring of 1851 Melville was fully aware of the complexity and depth of his romance, as the above letter indicates, but even when he was beginning the book he was aware of the unusual demands that his new romance would place on him. As early as May, 1850, Melville knew that his new book would be different from Redburn and White-Jacket. In a letter to Richard Henry Dana, Jr., Melville described the book as a "whaling voyage," thus acknowledging its source in his experience, but he also indicated that he would be treating that experience differently:

It will be a strange sort of book, tho; I fear; blubber is blubber you know; tho you may get oil out of it, the poetry runs hard as sap from a frozen maple tree;--& to cook the thing up, one must needs throw in a little fancy, which from the nature of the thing, must be ungainly as the gambols of the Whales themselves. Yet I mean to give the truth of the thing, spite of this.¹³

In one sense Melville's description could be about any of his books--he threw a little fancy into all of them--but in this new book he very early was aware that his purpose was not to describe whaling; rather he would probe the experience for its poetic quality, for the truth of the thing which lay under the surface. This definition of the subject of the book aligned it with Mardi rather than those designed for popularity.

One month later, in his letter to Bentley, Melville was even more explicit about the nature of his "whaling voyage." "The book," he wrote, "is a romance of adventure founded upon certain wild legends in the Southern Sperm Whale Fisheries, and illustrated by the author's own personal experi-

ence, of two years & more, as a harpooneer."¹⁴ Melville seems to have exaggerated his personal experience in this description. He was on a whaler for only eighteen months, and it is unlikely that he was a harpooner.¹⁵ But more importantly, Melville announced his return to romance. Moby-Dick was only the second book that he labeled a romance, and as with Mardi, Melville valued his new book highly because of its genre. He requested 200 pounds from Bentley, the same that he had received for White-Jacket, but added, "could you be positively put in possession of the copyright, it might be worth to you a larger sum--considering its great novelty; for I do not know that the subject treated of has ever been worked up by a romancer; or indeed by any writer, in any adequate manner."¹⁶ Melville did not try to represent the book as designed for popularity as he had with his earlier ones; instead he argued that its originality as a romance would be its appeal. He would acknowledge shortly that the book was not designed for a female audience and it seems that even in the early stages of composition he had forsaken the requirements of popularity. Instead he valued the book for its artistic merits.

Even in the first rapid flush of composition, when Melville felt that he would have a book ready for publication by the late summer of 1850, he conceived of Moby-Dick as a return to the field of romance.¹⁷ But meeting Hawthorne, who "dropped germinous seeds" into Melville's soul, reading Mosses From an Old Manse, and exploring the implications of his own thoughts while writing the book drove

Melville into a much more protracted and thorough revision than he seemed to have anticipated. Almost a year later, in June of 1851, Melville wrote Hawthorne that the "'Whale' . . . [is] in his flurry."¹⁸ Melville's description of the personal consequences of this year indicates the extent to which he considered romancing to be self-exploration. into the self. "From my twenty-fifth year I date my life," he explained. "Three weeks have scarcely passed, at any time between then and now [1844 to 1851], that I have not unfolded within myself. But I feel that I am now come to the inmost leaf of the bulb, and that shortly the flower must fall to the mould."¹⁹ His whole career, he realized, had been an exploration of the self, and in Moby-Dick he felt that he had played the process out.

In Moby-Dick, Melville created the kind of romance for which Young America had been calling.²⁰ It was a sprawling, boisterous book that reflected in its size and variety the grandeur and immensity of the American experience. Its subject, whaling, was an inherently American enterprise, as the book makes clear. And in its flights of philosophy the book reflected the egotistical intellectual vigor which was, for Young America, the image of genius. At the same time, though, Melville explored thematically and structurally the intellectual and artistic implications of the pursuit of truth that lay at the heart of his definition of romance and he concluded again, as he had in Mardi, that the pursuit of truth rather than its discovery was the focus of romance.

Structurally Moby-Dick is similar to Redburn. As many critics have observed, there are two Ishmaels, an older narrator and a younger character, just as there are two Redburns.²¹ The younger Ishmael goes on a whaling cruise to "see what whaling is, . . . to see the world."²² But even though he sees what whaling is, he does not understand the experience. He must follow the advice of Stubb to the Pequod's cook, Fleece: "you must go home and be born again;" Stubb says, "you don't know how to cook a whale steak yet"(p. 252). The older Ishmael, by ordering, examining, and relating the story of this voyage, is cooking the whale steak.

Young Ishmael goes to sea in a whaler partly because of "the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself" (p. 16). He is fascinated by the idea of the whale, and by hunting it he hopes to possess it. But young Ishmael is better equipped for the action of the chase than he is for self-exploration. Despite his meditative bent, the young Ishmael is not able to declare himself a sovereign nature. Instead, he is absorbed into Ahab's vision and quest. By taking Ahab's oath he becomes Ahab's tool. "Ahab's feud seemed mine," he confesses. Ishmael, during his voyage, has neither the time nor the freedom to reflect on the significance of his journey. That reflection is left until a later time when, older and wiser, he can write the experience and invest it with the significance that he discovers while writing.

The older Ishmael is a romancer in Melville's sense of the term, and the first chapter of Moby-Dick promises the

sort of romance that Melville had been defining more and more precisely since the writing of Mardi. Ishmael justifies his need to write about his whaling cruise by recalling the two metaphors of self-exploration that Melville established in his earlier romance. He describes the cruise in terms of a journey out and a dive.²³ Ishmael finds in water (the common element in which the two metaphoric acts occur) something magical. "I am in the habit of going to sea," he says, "whenever I begin to grow hazy about the eyes, and begin to be over conscious of my lungs"(p. 14). At sea, Ishmael's vision can clear; he has the room and the freedom to expand, to breath. Going to sea is an escape from the oppressiveness, both physical and spiritual, that life on land imposes. It is Ishmael's alternative to murder or suicide. Further, he contends that he is not alone in being drawn by the sea. "Posted like silent sentinals all around the town, stand thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries"(p. 12), he observes. All men dream of landlessness, of voyaging out, but few go. Only those who are meditative, who need unbounded space to expand the imagination, dare to go to sea. Jack Chase had observed that being out of sight of land was the making of many true poets and Ishmael, by declaring his need for landlessness, is declaring his poetic temperament. "Meditation and water," he observes, "are wedded forever"(p. 13).

It is in water that one can find the apotheosis of the self, Ishmael contends. The opening statement of the book,

"Call me Ishmael"(p. 12), claims an identification which, in a sense, denies identity. By naming himself an Ishmael, the narrator is identifying himself as an outcast and a wanderer, separated from the common continent of men. But his claim of a typological identity, of being a symbolic representative of other men, is not a claim for individuality. By refusing to identify himself as more than a representative man, Ishmael can begin his self-exploration without the encumbrance of an identity.²⁴

The self can be seen reflected in the world, he believes. It was in pursuit of that reflection of the self that Narcissus plunged into the fountain. That image, "the ungraspable phantom of life"(p. 14), is what every man sees in water, and it is that phantom, Ishmael says, "that is the key to it all"(p.14). "What they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance"(p. 41), he believes, and to perceive that shadow is the goal of Ishmael's book. Melville had read essentially the same observation in the preface to Hawthorne's Mosses. Hawthorne felt that the disembodied images that one finds reflected in water stand in closer relation to the soul than does the corporeal self. Ishmael's retelling of the tale is an attempt to know himself better, to delineate his inner life as it is reflected in the world.

Ishmael chooses the Whale as a subject for his book because of "the virtue of a large and liberal theme"(p. 378). Writers, he contends, expand to the bulk of their themes and a theme as huge as the Whale can allow in him

unlimited expansion. The young Ishmael has an unarticulated sense of the Whale's importance, but it is only through the act of writing that its significance can be articulated. Ishmael explains the Whale's importance by analogy. Ahab, Ishmael's tragic hero, nails a doubloon to the main mast as a reward for the first man who sings out the sighting of Moby Dick. "This round gold," Ahab says, "is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self"(p. 359). The doubloon is a mediating symbol between each character and the White Whale; it reveals each man through his rendering of its text and it reveals the nature of the Whale through the variety of interpretations of Moby Dick that it collects. Moby Dick, in turn, is another, infinitely larger doubloon for Ishmael. He chooses the White Whale as theme because to know him is to see the self from all perspectives. If he is to write of the whale and prove himself "omnisciently exhaustive," Ishmael must include "the whole circle of sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and mastadons, past, present, and to come, with all the revolving panoramas of empire on earth, and throughout the whole universe"(p. 378). The Whale is the deepest diver of all, Ishmael contends; to know the Whale is to treat "with all Powers upon an equal basis," (as Melville described the posture of seeking Truth to Hawthorne). Ishmael can probe into the deepest secrets of the world by probing into the nature of Moby Dick. And he

can explore his own vast self. "Unless you own the whale," he claims, "you are but a provincial and sentimentalist in Truth"(pp. 285-286).

Ishmael knows that if he is to understand the whale, he must maintain his "sovereign nature in himself" (again as Melville described the pursuit to Hawthorne). The acts of voyaging out and diving are metaphors for self exploration, for deep thinking, and deep thinking, Ishmael says, is "but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea"(p. 97). Ishmael, then, declares that the act of writing is the pursuit of the phantom image of the self reflected in nature. He claims the independence of soul that one must have to confront the visible truth (which is akin to Young America's overriding egotism) and he finds in the Whale a text so massive that it demands an omniscient vision, an ability to see from all perspectives. He equates owning the whale with perceiving truth and he acknowledges that the pursuit is an effort to expand the self, to see the ungraspable phantom reflected in the whale. To own Moby Dick is ultimately to grasp that phantom.²⁵

Ishmael allows his subject to dictate the structure of his book. He describes the book's development as organic: "out of the trunk, the branches grow; out of them, the twigs. So in productive subjects, grow the chapters"(p. 246). Where one subject suggests another, Ishmael follows the relation. The ordering of subjects is a direct index to Ishmael's thought, a reflection of him. His physical journey was pure action but in writing he can be meditative and

introspective. "With little external to constrain us," he says, "the innermost necessities in our being, these still drive us on"(p. 145). When the pursuit of the whale is imaginative, the writer can reorder experience to reveal his innermost necessities, and discover that phantom image of his soul.²⁶

In "Cetology," Chapter 32, Ishmael asserts his control over his subject by systematizing the types of whales, using the different sizes of books as a controlling metaphor of categorization. Taken together, these various books "will comprehend them [the various whales] all both small and large"(p. 120), Ishmael claims. And he asserts an authority over both books and whales which qualifies him to write those books: "I have swam through libraries and sailed through oceans; I have had to do with whales with these visible hands; I am in earnest; and I will try." Yet in constructing this system of knowledge, this way of perceiving and ordering the world, Ishmael can "promise nothing complete"(p. 118). The task is too large. He is the architect of the system, he claims, but he is not the builder. To know the whale Ishmael admits that he must be omnisciently exhaustive, yet he readily acknowledges that he does not have the capacity to examine all the whales in their multitude of forms. His system is tentative, and the book that he writes constitutes only the first chapter, the "Sperm Whale," of the first book, the "Folio Whale," of the volume that he projects. Even the book that he writes "is but a

draught--nay, but a draught of a draught"(p. 128).²⁷

Even with these limitations Ishmael finds the book to be an enormous task. You cannot compress the sperm whale, he says; "by good rights he should only be treated in imperial folio"(p. 378). Ishmael considers his book, though but a draught, nonetheless a draught of a mighty book. He may not confront and comprehend all of the secrets which the deep-diving whales embody, but he will confront the largest and the deepest of them. "To grope down into the bottom of the sea after them [the sperm whales]; to have one's hands among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world; this is a fearful thing"(p. 118), Ishmael claims. It is the expansion of the self that is realizable in Ishmael's act of writing rather than the apprehension of an ultimate truth.

To be omnisciently exhaustive Ishmael must examine the whale from a variety of perspectives. He explores the anatomy, physiognomy, and physiology of the whale in an effort to include the "whole circle of sciences;" he relates the history, mythology, and superstition surrounding whales and whaling; he analyzes the business of whaling; and he attempts to capture the live whale in its physical and metaphysical enormity by telling the story of the Pequod. By adopting various postures Ishmael can render the whale through fact and story; he can build a structure which contains the sum of knowledge about the whale. And in so doing he can expand himself by containing the various postures that he adopts.²⁸

One posture that Ishmael adopts to know the whale is that of historian. He claims that he has not been "at all sparing of historical whale research, when it has seemed needed"(p. 371), and in Chapter 45, "The Affidavit," he yields up some of the fruits of his swim through libraries. This material is important to present, he feels, because

so ignorant are most landsmen of some of the plainest and most palpable wonders of the world, that without some hints touching the plainest facts, historical and otherwise, of the fishery, they might scout at Moby Dick as a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory.(p. 177)

Melville may have been taking a swipe here at those critics who made an issue of the authenticity of Typee and Omoo and at those who railed at Mardi because it was an allegory, but for Ishmael there is much at stake in convincing landsmen that his observations are accurate. If his readers do not grant the authenticity of Moby Dick, they will not accept the validity of Ishmael's dive and will not fulfill the transaction which, we will see, is the ultimate goal of Ishmael's act of writing. Ishmael's method as an historian indicates again his intellectual control over his material. "I care not to perform this part of my task methodically," he says of his historical investigation, "but shall be content to produce the desired impression by separate citations of items . . . and from these citations, I take it--the conclusion aimed at will naturally follow of itself"(p. 175). Ishmael is the architect of his system, not the builder, he says. He gives the plan and the materials by which the whale can be known, but he leaves to the reader

the task of using this information.

Ishmael adds to his history the wild rumors and superstitious beliefs held by sailors. These rumors "still the more horrify the true histories"(p. 156) of disasters caused by whales. They add a psychological understanding of the whale's power. Moby Dick becomes the apotheosis of the terrifying power of whales to sailors; it is he "who haunted those uncivilized seas mostly frequented by the Sperm Whale fisherman"(p. 155). The sailors make of Moby Dick the phantom embodiment of all whales. He seems to them ubiquitous, immortal and a capriciously intelligent agent of destruction. Ishmael knows the myth of Moby Dick created by the whaling men. He was one of them and shared their encounter with the whale. Yet he refuses his connection with the crew. "What the White Whale was to them," he says, "or how to their unconscious understandings, also, in some dim, unsuspected way, he might have seemed the gliding great demon of the seas of life--all this to explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go"(p. 162). Again Ishmael is emphasizing his control over material as a writer rather than his absorption into the material as a crew member. He divorces himself from the process by which the sailors made of Moby Dick a mythic beast and he leaves to the reader the task of understanding the sailors' obsession.

But Ishmael does probe his own obsession with the whale. It is the whiteness of Moby Dick which is significant to Ishmael as he writes his book, yet he finds it

difficult to explain the power of that whiteness. "How can I hope to explain myself here," Ishmael wonders, "and yet in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be naught"(p. 163).

If Ishmael cannot communicate the source of his own pursuit of truth, he will not be able to provide the foundation for his structure. He can refuse to render the meaning of other people's interpretations of the Whale's significance, but he must render his own. The whiteness appalls and attracts him, Ishmael explains, because "in its profoundest idealized significance it calls up a peculiar apparition to the soul" (p. 166). The White Whale is for Ishmael a symbol that embodies the phantom image of the self in the world. To know Moby Dick is to penetrate the mystery of his soul. Ishmael attempts to know the White Whale by adopting still other postures as scientist, whaler, and ultimately as story teller in an effort to probe the heart of those mysteries.

As scientist, Ishmael takes the point of view alternatively of the physiognomist, the phrenologist, and the anatomist of the whale. He has had ample opportunity to inspect the sperm whale while he was a crew member of the Pequod, and he also claims to have had the opportunity to examine the skeleton of a full grown sperm whale on the Island of Tranque. Ishmael describes the various parts of the whale in detail, but at each turn he discovers that these systems of perceiving the whale are limited. The skin or blanket of the whale (and Ishmael is not sure what exactly constitutes

the skin) is filled with marks, hieroglyphics Ishmael hypothesizes, but "the mystic-marked whale remains undecipherable"(p. 260). It presents a text, like Queequeg's tattoos, which no man can read. Similarly, Ishmael finds the whale's physiognomy uninterpretable. Physiognomy, he says, is "like every other human science, . . . but a passing fable"(p. 292). And "if the Sperm Whale be physiognomically a Sphinx, to the phrenologist his brain seems that geometrical circle which it is impossible to square"(p. 293). The whale may be a genius, but that genius is revealed in his pyramidal silence. The whale's aspect and his head remain uninterpretable. After exploring the nature of the whale's spout, Ishmael can only conclude that it is still "a problem, whether these spoutings are, after all, really water, or nothing but vapor"(p. 310). Rather than pursuing the question further, Ishmael concludes that "the wisest thing the investigator can do . . . is to let this deadly spout alone"(p. 313). Even the tail is a text that Ishmael cannot render. "The more I consider this mighty tail," Ishmael declares, "the more do I deplore my inability to express it"(p. 317). Ishmael is a careful observer and describer of the appearance of the whale, but he cannot invest what he sees with meaning. He cannot render the separate parts of the whale and he does not begin to explore the relationship of those parts. Even the full skeleton of the whale gets Ishmael no closer to understanding it, for the whale's bones are "by no means the mould of his invested form"(p. 377).

"Dissect him how I may," Ishmael admits, "I but go skin deep; I know him not and never will"(p. 318). The posture of scientist, as analyzer and dissector, does not reveal that phantom image to Ishmael. It only allows him to examine the surfaces of the whale. Science as a system of knowledge only can describe surfaces, Ishmael's posture reveals. It does not yield an understanding of the significances which the skin masks.

Ishmael also examines the business of whaling, which is the closest man has come to owning the whale. As commodity the whale is made to serve and is mastered by man. Considering whaling as enterprise is a perspective from which Ishmael can describe the essence of the whale, and thus approach that phantom image which the whale reflects. But Ishmael must convince his readers of the symbolic value of the enterprise of whaling if they are to accept his argument for its importance. "This business of whaling has somehow come to be regarded among landsmen as a rather unpoetical and disreputable pursuit," Ishmael complains; "therefore, I am all anxiety to convince ye, ye landsmen, of the injustice hereby done to us hunters of whales"(p. 98). The hunter of whales, he contends, is in pursuit of truth in the same way that writers are. Oil, the product derived from the whale, Ishmael describes as "the food of light"(p. 355). The writer's creation is also the food of light; it sparks the recognition of truth in the reader. Ishmael describes in detail the process of procuring that pure oil--the hunt and the killing, the cutting in, the trying out, the stowing

down and cleaning up. But even in making the whale commodity, in distilling it literally and metaphorically to its essence, Ishmael realizes that the whale cannot be fully apprehended:

Hardly have we mortals by long toilings extracted from this world's vast bulk its small but valuable sperm; and then, with weary patience, cleansed ourselves from its defilements and learned to live here in clean tabernacles of the soul; hardly is this done, when--There she blows!--the ghost is spouting up, and away we sail to fight some other world, and go through young life's old routine again (p. 358).

However much the whale is abstracted from its element, however successfully it is distilled, it still remains fully invested in the world. Only in the living act and the undoubted deed can the whale be known. "Only in the heart of quickest perils; only when within the eddyings of his angry flukes; only on the profound unbounded sea, can the fully invested whale be truly and livingly found out"(p. 378) Ishmael explains. His best hope of knowing the whale is to tell the story of his encounter with it.

In telling the story of the Pequod, Ishmael again asserts his role as writer. Ahab, Ishmael observes, "sometimes masked himself; incidentally making use of . . . [the forms and usages of life at sea] for other and more private ends than they were legitimately intended to subserve"(p. 129). Ishmael uses the forms and conventions of tragedy for similar purposes. The lesson of masking that Ahab teaches should not be forgotten by "the tragic dramatist who would depict mortal indomitableness in its fullest sweep and direst swing"(p. 129), Ishmael says, and as the tragic drama-

tist who creates in Ahab a man who declares his sovereign nature in the face of the Powers that be, Ishmael is making use of drama for private ends.

Ishmael emphasizes his role as the creator of the Pequod's tale by describing the process of transforming his main character into a tragic figure. His tragedy does not deal with emperors and kings, he asserts, but only with a poor old whale-hunter and the meanest of mariners, renegades and castaways. To make tragedy from such a cast is an act of imaginative will. "Oh Ahab!" Ishmael opines, "what shall be grand in thee, it must needs be plucked at from the skies and dived for in the deep, and featured in the unbodied air"(p. 130). He emphasizes here the process of making the tragedy; it is Ishmael who will invest the story with its tragic meaning.

Ishmael also emphasizes that his tragedy is a part of his times; its impulse comes from "that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself!"(p. 104). The tragedy that Ishmael creates is, he claims, an American one. It reflects that "just Spirit of Equality"(p. 105) which is the informing principle of American democracy, by examining the range of characters taken from the common continent of men.

And in Ahab Ishmael creates a particularly American hero. Ahab is not invested with the outward trappings of royalty. He is only a "poor old whale-hunter"(p. 130). But he has those natural qualities from which true greatness

develops.²⁹ He is "a man of superior natural force, with a globular brain and a ponderous heart" who has been "led to think untraditionally and independently; receiving all nature's sweet or savage impressions fresh from her own virgin, voluntary, and confiding breast." Such a man "makes one in a whole nation's census--a mighty pageant creature, formed for noble tragedies"(p. 71). Ahab is the type of representative American character that Melville and Young America had predicted would spring up out of the great American wilderness. He is invested with an inherent nobleness and scope and an independence from the tyrannies of society and the past; he is able to keep the open independence of his sea. Ahab has the strength, the independence, and the thunderous voice of the nay-sayer. Ishmael makes his quest to know the whale the subject of a tragedy with a main character who confronts the whale in its fully invested form. Ishmael, in his postures as historian, mythologist, scientist, and whale-man, creates a context within which the magnitude of Moby-Dick is evident. As tragedian he delineates the implications of the pursuit of that phantom self which is reflected in the whale.

Ahab has the strength of character and the nobleness of soul to dive deeply. He insists, in the face of that "speechless, placeless power" in the world, that "a personality stands here"(p. 417). He declares the sovereignty of his soul. His soul, like the Catskills eagle, occupies a more rarefied atmosphere than most. His soul "can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them

again and become invisible in sunny spaces. . . . Even in his lowest swoop . . . [he] is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar"(p. 355). The White Whale is to Ahab

the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them. . . . All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life, and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick (p. 160).

For Ahab owning the whale does not mean understanding it. Rather, he feels that he must dominate it. His voyage is physical; the world of action is his province.

Ishmael knows well the danger of the physical pursuit. To pursue the whale, he says, is to take "a cool collected dive at death and destruction"(p. 197). The deeper meaning of the story of Narcissus, Ishmael says, was that Narcissus drowned plunging after the ungraspable phantom. And in telling the tragic story of the Pequod, Ishmael again commits Ahab to that plunge. But by making the world of thought his province, by imaginatively recreating the plunge, Ishmael can remove himself from the dangers of the chase while still exploring the meaning invested in the physical confrontation with Moby-Dick. Writing allows him to use Ahab's active pursuit as a referent for his own self-exploration. He is not in danger of being absorbed by the quest as he was when a crew member.

Ishmael's tragic hero sees the same relation between the world and the self as does Ishmael: "not the smallest

atom stirs or lives in matter," Ahab says, "but has its cunning duplicate in mind"(p. 264). And he knows, as does Ishmael, that the surfaces of the world are deceptive. "All visible objects . . . are but pasteboard masks," he declares, "but in each event--in the living act, the undoubted deed--there some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask"(p. 144). Ishmael too knows that the whale "like all things that are mighty, wears a false brow to the common world"(p. 293). The whale, Ahab knows, is the deepest diver of all. It has "moved amid the world's foundations. . . . [It has] seen enough to split the planets and make an infidel of Abraham," yet it remains inscrutable; it utters "not one syllable"(p. 264). The whale, for Ahab, is the wall that must be thrust through to uncover the hidden mechanisms that would make meaning of his life of woe. Thrust through the wall he will, or he will die in the effort.

As one of the crew of the Pequod, Ishmael shared Ahab's quest. The whole crew was "welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to"(p. 455). Ishmael alone survived the confrontation. He alone is left to tell the story and invest it with meaning. Ishmael, quoting from Job, explains his understanding of his survival: "And I only am escaped alone to tell thee"(p. 470). Like the Ancient Mariner, Ishmael is left to tell and retell his story to any who will

listen.³⁰ He has been recreating it since his voyage. He recites the Town-Ho's story, he tells us, to friends in Lima, and he does not tell the whole story of Moby Dick there only because he lacks the time.³¹ The book is his full effort at telling.

But, as we have seen, Ishmael does not render his tale as a parable. Instead he explores his own powers of shaping fact, various angles of perception, and story telling into a structure that contains meaning, but he assigns the duty of interpreting the latent import of his story to his readers. Ishmael considers his readers to be Loose-Fish and Fast-Fish; to have independence of free thought and interpretation, but at the same time to be held fast by the book, to be captured by it and thus to be participants in it. The book's epilogue is reflexive; it sends the reader back into the tale. The drama is done, but only until it is repeated through the act of reading. Ishmael knows that he cannot fully understand the whale. He can only design a structure in which the whale can be known. Ishmael leaves his cetological System standing unfinished, he says, because "small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity"(pp. 127-128). It is left to the reader encountering the text to add to the structure and attempt to finish it. "I but put that brow [of the whale] before you. Read it if you can"(p. 293), Ishmael challenges.

The type of reader Ishmael is demanding in his book is the ideal reader that Melville defined in "Hawthorne and His

Mosses." The text that Ishmael presents, "but a draught of a draught"(p. 128), invites the reader to actively participate in the creation of meaning underneath its surface. The reader is frequently implicated in the interpretation of facts, particularly when Ishmael does not render meaning. In Moby-Dick, Melville made the rhetorical transaction between writer and reader into a structural framework that allows the reader to participate in and analyze the act of self-exploration. As a romance of self-exploration, as a text that forces involvement from its readers, and as a conscious display of genius and originality, Moby-Dick was the culmination of Melville's and Young America's search for a national literature.³²

Moby-Dick was reasonably well received in both England and America. Fully two thirds of the reviews were, in their general estimates, positive, and the book elicited more thoughtful and perceptive comments than did Melville's other books. Many reviewers concurred with Horace Greeley's opinion that Moby-Dick was "the best production which has yet come from that seething brain." It was generally agreed that the book was unusual, and highly original. William T. Porter, in The Spirit of the Times, who confessed "an admiration for Mr. Melville's books, which, perhaps, spoils us for mere criticism," went past mere criticism to declare that Moby-Dick was "amongst the largest and freshest contributions of original thought and observation which have been presented in many years." The reviewer for Graham's Maga-

zine was more specific: Melville's "late books are not only original in the usual sense, but evince originality of nature, and convey the impression of a new individuality."³³ In short, this reviewer recognized, as did many others, that Melville not only dealt with original subjects; he was a genius, an original. The London Atlas, comparing Moby-Dick to Melville's other works, summed up the strengths of the book that were frequently noted by other reviews: "in none of his previous works," the Atlas reviewer wrote,

are finer or more highly soaring imaginative powers put forth. In none of them are so many profound, and fertile, and thoroughly original veins of philosophic speculation, or rather perhaps philosophic fancy, struck. In none of them, too, is there a greater affluence of curious, quaint, and out of the way learning brought to bear upon the subject in hand. In none of them are the descriptions of seafaring and whaling matters so wonderfully graphic, and in none of them is there to be found a more thorough command over the strength and beauties of our language.³⁴

In content, in execution, in style, most reviewers felt that Melville was at the height of his powers. True, there was his tendency to extravagance, to commit the "sin of rhapsody," as the critic for the Atlas put it, but Melville had tempered this fault, at least in comparison with Mardi. Melville's humor, though highly commendable, was at times aimed at the wrong targets according to a few critics. And a few felt that the form of the work was too confusing. But the London Leader boldly claimed, "criticism may pick many holes in this work; but no criticism will thwart its fascination."³⁵

Particularly in Britain, Melville's status as an American writer, and Moby-Dick's identity as an American book,

were commented on. The Britannia considered the only flaw in Melville's style to be "a few Americanisms, which sometimes mar [its] perspicuity and . . . purity." But the otherwise fastidious reviewer for John Bull found the American idiom appealing. "These things," the reviewer observed,

belong to the individuality of the author and the book. The perfect Yankee, surrounded as he is, in reality, no less than in Mr. Melville's fiction, with savage and demi-savage life, is a picture which, like everything that is true to nature, possesses a charm of its own, though it may not fall within the ordinary canons of beauty.

This strange beauty, the London Leader felt, was the defining characteristic of "such genuine outcoming of the American intellect as can be safely called national." This reviewer felt that Americans had made "a wild and mystic love of the supersensual" their original province; that only Americans had the ability to "move a horror skilfully." The writers who were most clearly American in this sense, the reviewer argued, were Poe, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Melville. Melville's name increasingly was being connected with a national literature by the English. The London Morning Advertiser went so far as to declare that The Whale (as Moby-Dick was called in England) was a more honorable reflection of American literature than books by Irving, Cooper, Dana, Bryant, and Longfellow, among others. If Melville had paid as close attention to these reviews as he had to those earlier in his career, he would have discovered the reputation that he had sought.³⁶

Reviewers, of course, did find faults in the book. The

two major objections raised were the same that had followed Melville throughout his career--his irreverence toward organized religion, and his commingling of fact and fiction. Many reviews that otherwise had good things to say about the book had to enter their decided protests, in the words of the reviewer for the National Intelligencer, "against the querulous and cavilling innuendos which he so much loves to discharge like barbed and poisoned arrows, against objects that should be shielded from his irreverent wit." And one of the few wholly negative reviews of the book, in the New York Independent, opined that Melville, for all his powers, could not write better because "there is a primitive formation of profanity and indecency that is ever and anon shooting up through his writings."³⁷ In general, though, the reviewers seem to have become accustomed to Melville's irreverence, for the complaints about it were neither as frequent nor as strident as they had been over Typee and Omoo.

As with Melville's other books, reviewers had difficulty labeling Moby-Dick. A few tried to say what it was. The London Weekly News and Chronicle thought it was a Romance of Travel; the Washington National Intelligencer called it a prose Epic on Whaling; Peterson's Magazine labeled it a philosophical romance.³⁸ But most critics agreed with William T. Porter that Moby-Dick was a "many sided" book. Some found this variety admirable. The London Leader considered the book neither a romance nor a treatise on Cetology, but "something of both." Its form, this re-

viewer contended, reflected "the tangled overgrowth and luxuriant vegetation of American forests, not the trim orderliness of an English park." This estimate Mathews would have found apt. And George Ripley, writing for Harper's New Monthly Magazine (printed by Melville's publisher) was impressed by the book because it was at once a romance, a tragedy, and a natural history.³⁷

Other reviewers, though, were less comfortable with Melville's mixture of genres. The book could not be a novel, the Hartford Daily Courant contended, because "there is the same want of unity of subject--of a regular beginning and end--of the form and shape and outline of a well built novel--which we find in real life." Yet it had to be a fiction, because there was too much romance and adventure for it to be fact. And the Britannia reviewer, who felt that the book could be neither a novel nor a romance since it had neither a heroine nor a single love scene, declared "we are at a loss to determine in what category of works of amusement to place it." (The fact that the reviewer considered it a work of amusement rather than of instruction is itself significant, though.) The genre of Melville's other books, as we have seen, caused confusion among his reviewers, but Moby-Dick caused more. As the reviewer for Peter-son's Magazine remarked: "those who have read 'Typee' and 'Mardi,' and can imagine a book compounded of the two, will have as correct an idea of this work as it is possible for a critic to give."⁴⁰

Some liked this compound. Horace Greeley felt that the "occasional touches of the subtle mysticism, which is carried to such an inconvenient excess in *Mardi*, . . . is here mixed up with so many tangible and odorous realities, that we always safely alight from the excursion." But more reviewers were dissatisfied with Melville's "mysticism." Peterson's Magazine, To-day: A Boston Literary Journal, and the London Morning Chronicle, all of which finally approved of the book, felt, as the Peterson's reviewer commented, that "had the story been compressed one-half, and all the transcendental chapters omitted, it would have been decidedly the best sea-novel in the English language."⁴¹

The Athenaeum, the Boston Post, the Spectator, the London Literary Gazette, and the Charleston Southern Quarterly Review felt the book was irredeemable because of its form. The Post agreed with the Athenaeum's judgment that the book "is an ill-compounded mixture of romance and matter-of-fact." The Spectator and the Literary Gazette felt that the rhapsodic chapters were bad stuffing, "serving only to try the patience of his readers, and to tempt them to wish both him and his whales at the bottom of the unfathomable sea." And the Southern Quarterly Review argued that Melville's and Ahab's ravings "are such as would justify a writ de lunatico against all parties."⁴² One of the reasons that the English reviewers may have lost all patience with Melville's defiance of critical standards was that in The Whale the epilogue was not included. This raised a question of narrative logic that those reviewers who were ill-dis-

posed toward it could exploit to solidify their objections to Melville's salmagundi of a book. "It is a canon with some critics," argued the Spectator's reviewer (who clearly was one of those critics),

that nothing should be introduced into a novel which is physically impossible for the writer to have known: thus he must not describe the conversation of miners in a pit if they all perish. Mr. Melville hardly steers clear of this rule, and he continually violates another, by beginning in the autobiographical form and changing ad libitum into the narrative.⁴³

Those relatively few reviews, like those in the Athenaeum and the Spectator, that said nothing positive about Moby-Dick at all based their criticisms on preconceived critical tenets. These reviewers did not like the book's form, Shakespearean language, and discomfoting speculations. They were not willing to perform the act of reading that Melville had called for in "Hawthorne and His Mosses." Those more disposed to Melville's books, like William T. Porter, predicted the response of more conservative reviewers: "as a romance its characters are so new and unusual that we doubt not it will excite the ire of critics. It is not tame enough to pass this ordeal safely."⁴⁴ Jedediah Auld had defended Mardi against George Washington Peck's attack with the same argument. And if Melville had been paying attention, he would have noticed that many more reviewers read Moby-Dick with sympathy than had liked Mardi.

But there is little indication that Melville paid as much attention to the reviews of Moby-Dick as he had to those of his other books. Shortly after the Christmas of

1851, Melville's friend and neighbor, Sarah Morewood, wrote to George Duyckinck: "I think . . . [Melville] cares very little as to what others may think, of him or his books so long as they sell well."⁴⁵ But despite the optimistic predictions of some reviewers that the book would have a wide circulation, it sold less well in the United States than did Typee, Omoo, Redburn, or White-Jacket, and in England Bentley had distributed through sales and review copies only 283 of the 500 copies he had printed. As we have seen, Melville renounced before the publication of Moby-Dick any concern for fame. And Moby-Dick put less money in his pocket than had any of his previous books. Even Mardi brought a larger advance in England and earned more money from sales in America though it sold fewer copies than did Moby-Dick.⁴⁶ The one source of solace remaining for Melville as a professional author attempting to create a book that exemplified his idea of a national literature was the response he received from the readers who understood what he was trying to do--Hawthorne and Young America.

Hawthorne clearly liked the book. He wrote Melville a "joy-giving and exultation-breeding letter" (now lost) which revealed to Melville "the specialty of many of the particular subordinate allegories . . . [and] intimated the part & parcel allegoricalness of the whole." Melville felt an "unspeakable security" because Hawthorne had understood the book, had read with the kind of involvement that Melville felt a reader should. "You understood the pervading thought that impelled the book," Melville wrote Hawthorne, "and that

you praised. . . . You were archangel enough to despise the imperfect body, and embrace the soul."⁴⁷ Melville was amazed to discover that Hawthorne's wife Sophia also appreciated the book. In rejecting popular fame, Melville had written Moby-Dick with no intention of appealing to the largest segment of the reading public, women. In September, while Moby-Dick was in press, Melville wrote to Sarah Morewood warning her not to buy and read it. "It is not a piece of fine feminine Spitfields silk," he explained, "but is of the horrible texture of a fabric that should be woven of ship's cables & hausers. A polar wind blows through it, & birds of prey hover over it. Warn all gentle, fastidious people from so much as peeping into the book."⁴⁸ Sophia Hawthorne, Melville claimed, was the only woman who expressed pleasure about the book, and he was hard pressed to understand her satisfaction. He explained to Sophia in a letter that she did not see "the same things that other people see, but things which while you think you but humbly discover them, you do in fact create them for yourself."⁴⁹ In short, Melville thought that she did not see the soul behind the book, only her reflection in it. Melville was skeptical of the ability of a woman to participate fully in the act of reading, but it was a prejudice he could ill afford since before he had written this letter, he had lost the sympathy and support of the very group for whom Moby-Dick should have been a triumph. Evert and George Duyckinck both expressed serious reservations about Moby-Dick.

The Duyckincks, as George wrote his friend Joann Miller, were "out of all patience with Melville for almost wilfully spoiling his book."⁵⁰ In a long, two-part review in the November 15 and 22, 1851 issues of The Literary World, Evert Duyckinck explained his objections to Moby-Dick and in doing so he effectively ended Melville's effort to combine the contradictory elements inherent in the attempt, as a professional writer, to create a book that would fit Young America's definition of a national literature.

Duyckinck's review cannot be considered wholly negative. He acknowledged "the acuteness of observation, the freshness of perception, . . . the weird influences of his ocean scenes, the salient imagination which connects them with the past and distant, the world of books and the life of experience--certain prevalent traits of manly sentiment."⁵¹ But he did have strong objections to the book. He objected to the handling of the story of Ahab. "As a bit of German Melodrama, . . . it has its strong points," he acknowledged, but he expressed boredom with it. "After pursuing him and his melancholic company over a few hundred squares of latitude and longitude, we begin to have some faint idea of the association of whaling and lamentation, and why blubber is popularly synonymous with tears." Much less than reading Melville's high tragedy with the kind of sympathy that Melville must have expected of him, Duyckinck snidely called this part of the novel "an allegory on the banks of the Nile." By not responding to the story of Ahab, Duyckinck was not acknowledging the implications of Mel-

ville's form. The interweaving of Ahab's story with the literal perils of the fishery, he felt, was "a noble and praiseworthy conception," but its execution did not accord with Duyckinck's sympathies. Ahab, he complained, "is too long drawn out;" there was not enough left to the reader's imagination. Duyckinck felt that Melville had not allowed in this section of the book the kind of participation from the reader that had been asked for in "Hawthorne and His Mosses."

A much stronger objection, though, indicated Duyckinck's shift from supporting Melville to joining some of his most strident critics. Duyckinck felt that

this piratical running down of creeds and opinions, the conceited indifferentism of Emerson, or the run-a-muck style of Carlyle is, we will not say dangerous in such cases . . . but it is out of place and uncomfortable. We do not like to see what, under any view, most be to the world the most sacred associations of life violated and defaced.

To object to Melville's position on missionaries in Typee and Omoo was not to assail the very core of those books. But to intimate that Melville should not communicate the truth that he had perceived at such cost in the production of Moby-Dick was to question the validity of the act of writing as he defined it. Duyckinck, who had not raised objections to the content of Melville's earlier books, here must have seemed to Melville to be rejecting the act of authorship that he had so long been fostering. Melville, Duyckinck implied, was one of those "bilious people . . . filled with megrims and head shakings, . . . who are con-

stantly inveighing against the religious melancholy of the priestcraft." Ishmael, to whom these remarks refer, exhibits, Duyckinck said, "the painful contradictions of this self-dependent, self-torturing agency of a mind driven hither and thither as a flame in a whirlwind is." For Melville, who argued in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" the necessity of masking, of dissembling, as the posture a writer must take to perform the "Great Art of Telling the Truth," these comments must have seemed an unexpected attack on the whole enterprise of authorship as he understood Young America to define it.

We do not have a great deal of evidence revealing Melville's immediate reaction to Duyckinck's review. But Hawthorne's objection, in a December 1 letter to Duyckinck, that "it hardly seemed . . . that the review of [Moby-Dick], in the Literary World, did justice to its best points," is a greatly understated reflection of the feelings Melville must have harbored.⁵² On February 14, 1852, just four months after Melville had reminisced about the gatherings in Duyckinck's basement, he gave an indication of his reaction to the review. He wrote to the "Editors of the Literary World:"

You will please discontinue the two copies of your paper sent to J. M. Fly at Brattleboro' (or Greenbush), and to H Melville at Pittsfield.

Whatever charges there may be outstanding for either or both copies, please send them to me & they will receive attention.⁵³

The implication of the cold tone of this letter, especially in comparison with Melville's earlier correspondence with

Duyckinck, and the cancellation of his subscription to a journal that he had earlier considered a personal letter from Duyckinck, is unmistakable. Melville was breaking away from the group that had fostered his early growth as a professional writer. But Duyckinck had to await the publication of Pierre, or the Ambiguities to discover the extent of that break.

NOTES

CHAPTER VI

¹Leyda, pp. 372, 377-378.

²On July 20, the Morning Express reported that Melville had gone to Europe. Duyckinck mailed the clipping to Melville's sister, Augusta, who assumed that the man who had been posing as Melville in Georgia and South Carolina to collect orders for his books was also the person going to sea. She wrote Duyckinck: "do you think something should be said or done about this duplication of an unoffending individual.--I fear it may eventuate in something disagreeable to Herman--for I suppose there is no doubt of this voyager to Europe being other than the Knight of the Umbrella & of the Planters" (Leyda, p. 380).

³Davis, Gilman, p. 106.

⁴ Francis Parkman's The Oregon Trail, which Melville had reviewed, includes a revealing portrait of the fears and prejudices with which the Mormons were regarded.

⁵Davis, Gilman, pp. 101-102.

⁶Davis, Gilman, pp. 126-131.

⁷Davis, Gilman, p. 134. William Charvat also notes that Moby-Dick was "the work of a writer who was in a state of creative tension with a reading public whose limitations he had at last defined" (p. 240).

⁸Davis, Gilman, p. 128.

⁹Davis, Gilman, p. 134.

¹⁰Leyda, pp. 389, 391.

¹¹Harrison Hayford, "Melville and Hawthorne," Diss, Yale, provides an illuminating discussion of the influence of Hawthorne on Melville. See also Howard P. Vincent, The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1949), pp. 35-49, for a delineation of the relationship.

¹²Davis, Gilman, pp. 124-125.

¹³Davis, Gilman, p. 108.

¹⁴Davis, Gilman, p. 109.

¹⁵Anderson, p. 52, shows that Melville's whaling experience was of eighteen months duration; Perry Miller, p. 280, observes that "the improbability of Melville's ever having been a harpooneer has, of course, inspired reams of comment," the most generous of which is Vincent's statement that harpooneer was "a title which he had held, probably, for only part of [the whaling voyage]"(p. 94).

¹⁶Davis, Gilman, p. 109.

¹⁷The generally accepted view, developed most fully by George R. Stewart, "The Two Moby-Dicks," American Literature, 25 (Jan. 1954), pp. 417-448, is that Melville began with a simple whaling story, and then completely revised the book as a romance. He makes a convincing argument for a theory of revision in Moby-Dick, but I disagree with his judgment that the original plan was a continuation of Typee. Others have also argued that Moby-Dick was originally to be a travel book, notably Vincent. Melville's concern with truth as its subject matter and his labelling of the book as a romance indicate that from its inception Moby-Dick was to be a romance along the lines of Mardi. The theme of diving, as I will illustrate, was central to the first chapter of Moby-Dick, one which Stewart identifies as surviving from the original draft.

¹⁸Davis, Gilman, p. 129. See Vincent, pp. 13-52, for a discussion of the composition of Moby-Dick.

¹⁹Davis, Gilman, p. 130.

²⁰Virtually every critic has identified Moby-Dick as a representative American novel. For example, Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: William Sloane, Ass., Inc., 1950) contends that the book could only have been written by an American of Melville's generation, and Richard Chase labels it a democratic epic and the grandest expression of the American imagination. Larzer Ziff, Literary Democracy: The Declaration of Cultural Independence in America (New York: Penguin Books, 1981) argues that Melville's primary theme is an examination of social democracy while much criticism has focused on Moby-Dick as a political novel: Alan Heimert, "Moby-Dick and American Political Symbolism," American Quarterly 15 (Winter, 1963), pp. 498-534; Willie T. Weathers, "Moby-Dick and the Nineteenth Century Scene," University of Texas Studies in Literature and Language 1 (Winter, 1960), pp. 477-501, and more recently James Duban, in his chapter on Moby-Dick, for example. Matthiessen, p. 458, and Harold Kaplan Democratic Humanism and American Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 159-197 identify Ahab as the symbolic American hero. Vincent sums up the book's "Americanness" most concisely: it "is a thoroughly American book: in themes, in style, and in subject matter." Although my analysis of Moby-Dick centers on the way in

which it embodies Young America's definition of a national literature and thus I do not explicitly examine Moby-Dick in all of these perspectives, I take as a starting point the variety of ways in which critics have identified the "Americanness" of the book.

²¹Among those who first made this distinction are Matthiessen and Feidelson. Walter E. Bezanson, "Moby-Dick: Work of Art" in "Moby-Dick Centennial Essays, ed. Tyrus Hillway, Luther S. Mansfield (Dallas: Souther Methodist University Press, 1953), pp. 30-58, and Glauco Cambon, "Ishmael and the Problem of Formal Discontinuities in Moby-Dick," Modern Language Notes, 76 (June, 1961), pp. 516-523, offer useful discussions of the thematic and formal implications of recognizing the two Ishmaels.

²²Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1967), p. 69. All further references to this work appear in the text.

²³Matthiessen observes that "the departure from shore . . . provided Melville with one of his key-symbols, the contrast between land and sea, between a life of safety and the search for truth" (p. 417).

²⁴A number of critics have noted that Ishmael's self-naming is a way of denying identity. Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1949) discusses Ishmael as a biblical type. Paul Brodtkorb, Jr. Ishmael's White World: A Phenomenological Reading of "Moby-Dick" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965) considers the name a mask, and Dryden, p. 87, says: "the verbal identity assumed by the narrator of Moby-Dick . . . seems a paradoxical one. He deliberately chooses a name with a rich Biblical and literary tradition and then goes on to deny the identity attributed to him by the name."

²⁵Brodtkorb, in his phenomenological reading of Moby-Dick, recognizes also that the self, the animating force, is reflected in the outer world and that it is this reflection that Ishmael pursues.

²⁶Many critics have offered readings of the book that begin with the assumption that Ishmael as narrator fully controls the form and content of the book. The most fully developed are Brodtkorb's and Dryden's. See also Michael Davitt Bell, Glauco Cambon, Robert A. Lee, "Moby-Dick: The Tale and the Telling," in New Perspectives on Melville, ed. Faith Pullin (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1978), pp. 86-127, and Richard H. Brodhead, Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

²⁷Dryden makes a further relevant point about this book

metaphor. He says that it is "a device which always serves to remind the reader that he is encountering an imaginative reality which is the invention of an isolated consciousness"(p. 84).

²⁸Dryden, Brodhead, Cambon, and Lee all recognize a similar function in Ishmael's efforts to own the whale through knowing from a variety of perspectives, but estimations of his success are divided. Cambon feels that Ishmael "attains the liberation of imaginative objectivity," but Lee, Dryden and Brodhead feel that Ishmael's efforts fail.

²⁹Vincent, p. 109, argues that Ahab conforms to the Aristotelian definition of the tragic hero. I agree that he is invested with classical tragic qualities, but it seems more important to me that it is Ishmael who had invested a purely American character with those qualities. Also see Arvin for a discussion of Ahab's mythic qualities.

³⁰See Vincent, pp. 210-211, for a discussion of specific allusions and thematic similarities between Moby-Dick and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

³¹Dryden, p. 112, argues that "The Town-Ho's Story" is in fact Ishmael's rehearsal of the later and longer book.

³²Many critics, among them Feidelson, Charvat, Berthoff, Brodhead, and most recently Lee, all discuss the way in which Melville implicates the reader in the creation of the text. Feidelson states the process most concisely: "the reader inherits the job" (p. 179).

³³Horace Greeley, ["Review of Moby-Dick"], New York Daily Tribune, Nov. 22, 1851, in Moby-Dick as Doubloon: Essays and Extracts (1851-1970), ed. Hershel Parker, Harrison Hayford (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970), pp. 47-49; William T. Porter, ["Review of Moby-Dick"], New York Spirit of the Times, Dec., 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 62-64; ["Review of Moby-Dick"], Graham's Magazine, Feb. 1852, in Doubloon, p. 89. Moby-Dick as Doubloon is an invaluable compendium of most of the reviews of Moby-Dick discovered, and reveals, as Parker and Hayford indicate in the "Foreward," many omissions and inaccuracies in Hetherington's study of Moby-Dick's reviewers. In its general outline, though, Hetherington's assessment of the reviews remains valid.

³⁴["Review of Moby-Dick"], London Atlas, Nov. 1, 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 13-18.

³⁵["Review of Moby-Dick"], London Leader, Nov. 8, 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 25-27.

³⁶["Review of Moby-Dick"]. London Britannia, Nov. 8, 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 22-24; ["Review of Moby-Dick"], London John Bull, Oct. 25, 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 9-10; London

Leader, in Doubloon, pp. 25-27; ["Review of Moby-Dick"], London Morning Advertiser, Oct. 24, 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 2-7.

³⁷ ["Review of Moby-Dick"], Washington National Intelligencer, Dec. 16, 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 65-69; ["Review of Moby-Dick"], New York Independent, Nov. 20, 1851, in Hershel Parker, "Five Reviews Not in Moby-Dick as Doubloon," English Language Notes, 9 (1972), pp. 182-185.

³⁸ ["Review of Moby-Dick"], London Weekly News and Chronicle, Nov. 29, 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 53-56; National Intelligencer, in Doubloon, pp. 65-69; ["Review of Moby-Dick"], Philadelphia Peterson's Magazine, Jan, 1852, in Doubloon, p. 84.

³⁹ Porter, in Doubloon, pp. 62-64; Leader, in Doubloon, pp. 25-27; George Ripley, ["Review of Moby-Dick"], Harper's Monthly Magazine, Dec., 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 57-58.

⁴⁰ ["Review of Moby-Dick"], Hartford Daily Courant, Nov. 15, 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 32-33; Britannia, in Doubloon, pp. 22-24; Peterson's, in Doubloon, p. 84.

⁴¹ Greeley, in Doubloon, pp. 47-49; Peterson's, in Doubloon, p. 84; ["Review of Moby-Dick"], To-day: A Boston Literary Journal, Jan. 10, 1852, in Doubloon, pp. 84-86; ["Review of Moby-Dick"], London Morning Chronicle, Dec. 20, 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 69-78.

⁴² ["Review of Moby-Dick"], London Athenaeum, Oct. 25, 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 7-8; Charles Gordon Greene, ["Review of Moby-Dick"], Boston Post, Nov. 20, 1851, in Doubloon, p. 40; "Herman Melville's Whale," London Spectator, Oct. 25, 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 10-12; ["Review of Moby-Dick"], London Literary Gazette and Journal of Science and Art, Dec. 6, 1851, in Doubloon, pp. 60-62; ["Review of Moby-Dick"], Charleston Southern Quarterly Review, Jan. 1852, in Doubloon, p. 80. Perry Miller assumes that Simms authored the last review, and he was the editor of the journal. He was angered by Melville's portrayal of the South in Mardi, and may have been getting even here.

⁴³ Spectator, in Doubloon, pp. 10-12. Hetherington speculates that Bentley, who in other ways bowdlerized The Whale, for some reason also omitted the epilogue.

⁴⁴ Porter, in Doubloon, pp. 62-64.

⁴⁵ Leyda, p. 441.

⁴⁶ Tanselle, pp. 195-215.

⁴⁷ Davis, Gilman, pp. 141-142, 146.

⁴⁸Davis, Gilman p. 138.

⁴⁹Davis, Gilman, p. 146.

⁵⁰Leyda, p. 438.

⁵¹[Evert Duyckinck], "Melville's Moby-Dick; or the Whale," The Literary World, Nov. 15, 1851, pp. 381-383; Nov. 22, 1851, pp. 403-404.

⁵²Leyda, p. 438.

⁵³Leyda, p. 447.

CHAPTER VII

PIERRE AND BEYOND

As this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there is one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half-known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return! (Moby-Dick, p. 236)

In Pierre, or the Ambiguities, Melville declares that Young America's program for creating a popular national literature is impossible to realize. In his portrait of Pierre's woeful, aborted career as an author, Melville satirizes his own attempt to realize Young America's program. He also satirizes the tastes and reading habits of the public to illustrate the futility of attempting to earn money by writing serious literature in America. And through his delineation of Pierre's attempt to practice the "Great Art of Telling the Truth," Melville lampoons the naive understanding of self-exploration that his own earlier work embodied and Young America espoused.

Melville promised Sophia Hawthorne, after the salt water of Moby-Dick, a "cup of rural milk."¹ But in Pierre he did not so much abandon the tragedy of Moby-Dick as wrap it in a new guise. Pierre seems to be Ahab and Ishmael collapsed into one character. Pierre's tragic journey out from the Tahiti of his soul is the same journey that Ishmael takes, and the tragedy of his life is a travesty of Ahab's tragedy. The act of writing allowed Ishmael to cast off from

that peaceful island in the soul without having to face the possibility of annihilation inherent in the act of diving. But for Pierre writing is no longer a means of surviving the dive; instead, writing reveals its own limitations. The failure of writing spurs Pierre to self-destruction.²

In Pierre's pastoral days at Saddle Meadows Melville literalizes Ishmael's description of the Tahiti of the soul. Life is almost perfect for Pierre. His ancestors were natural aristocrats of action; he is a legatee of the social position and wealth of his grandfather and father, both military heroes who influenced America's development. He has a doting and adoring mother and an angelic, fair-haired fiancée. He has an uninterrupted life of leisure and a sympathetic relationship with his natural surroundings that takes form in "that delightful love-sonnet, entitled 'The Tropical Summer.'"³ The Campbell clan of editors (those who, like the Campbellites, propound a belief in a simple rendering of texts) admired the poem "for the highly judicious smoothness and genteelness of the sentiments and fancies expressed"(p. 245). There was nothing astonishing, coarse, or new in the poem. In short, Pierre's juvenilia was exactly the sort of imitation of British literature that Duyckinck had condemned American authors for producing but which in its literary merits had appealed to more conservative critics. The poem was so tame that it even drew "the tribute of . . . [the] severer appreciation"(p. 245) of the editors of the various moral and religious periodicals. Unlike Pierre's poetry, Melville's first two books were not

universally admired. But by referring to the religious periodicals, Melville called up to those who knew his career the objections that caused the revision of Typee. Further, Typee, especially in expurgated form, was Melville's own "Tropical Summer." Pierre's early career and critical reception, then, is an exaggerated reflection of Melville's.

The impulse to explore the self, to push off from his insular Tahiti, comes from Pierre's encounter with the mysterious olive-skinned Isabel. She stimulates a "profound curiosity and interest" in Pierre that "agitated his . . . soul"(p. 51). She awakens certain vague, dark impulses in him which Pierre fears. As long as Isabel's identity remains a mystery for Pierre, he attempts to stay in that Tahiti of his soul, to not cast off as Ishmael had warned. He refuses to journey from his house and roam the neighborhood in search of the mystery girl; rather, he diligently strives, "with all his mental might, forever to drive the phantom"(p. 53) of her image from him. But after reading the letter in which she declares herself his sister, Pierre sees "all preceding ambiguities, all mysteries ripped open as if with a keen sword"(p. 85). Pierre is awakened like Taji in Mardi by a mysterious woman. But Taji resists the corporeal attractions of Hautia and instead pursues the ideal Yillah. Pierre's darker longings are awakened because he responds to his Hautia (Isabel) rather than to his Yillah (Lucy).

Pierre's world at Saddle Meadows is not as it seemed.

His heroic father was an adulterer with an illegitimate child. His doting mother is a stubborn, vain, proud woman who will not welcome this orphan sister into her home and heart. When Pierre first sees Isabel, he shrinks "abhorringly from the infernal catacombs of thought, down into which this foetal fancy beckoned him"(p. 51). He fears the intimation that "not always in our actions, are we our own factors,"(p. 51) but after reading Isabel's letter, Pierre nonetheless feels "the irresistible admonitions and intuitions of Fate"(p. 62). Pierre declares a goal in life similar to Ahab's: "'Henceforth I will know nothing but Truth; glad Truth, or sad Truth. I will know what is, and do what my deepest angel dictates'"(p. 65).

Pierre is struck by the "blast resistless" that Melville described as his excuse for following Mardi into romance and for revising Moby-Dick. Pierre is answering to that higher call of the writer, the one to which his genius answers. He adopts a posture from which he can pursue the truth. It is because of his perception that the surface of reality is ripped away, that there is a hidden truth to be pursued, that Pierre feels compelled to push off from the isle to which he can never return.

Pierre bundles up Isabel and Delly (who also has been cast off by her parents and community for having an illicit affair) and proceeds to the city, his version of Ishmael's ocean. He plans on supporting the three of them by writing. Emboldened by his success with his early sonnets, Pierre feels that it is "not altogether impossible for a magazine

contributor to Juvenile American literature to receive a few pence in exchange for his ditties"(p. 260). But in outlining Pierre's attempt simultaneously to pursue truth in his writings and to make money from them, Melville exposes the irresolvable contradiction at the heart of the attempt to make an American literature.

Melville places the onus for the impossible situation of writers squarely on the American reading public and their spokesmen, the critics. Pierre learns "that though the world worship Mediocrity and Common Place, yet hath it fire and sword for all contemporary Grandeur; that though it swears that it fiercely assails all Hypocrisy, yet hath it not always an ear for Earnestness"(p. 264). Because the world does not see what is valuable in a book or a writer, the fame that the world can bestow is meaningless. Pierre decides during his days at Saddle Meadows that anonymity is the most dignified way in which to publish his juvenilia, yet he feels

the sincerest sympathy for those unfortunate fellows, who, not only naturally averse to any sort of publicity; but progressively ashamed of their own successive productions--written chiefly for the merest cash--were yet cruelly coerced into sounding title-pages by sundry baker's and butcher's bills, and other financial considerations.(p. 249)

He rejects requests for his daguerreotype and for his biography made by those editors of the Captain Kidd school of literature. Melville here takes a subtle poke at Duyckinck, who had requested from Melville a daguerreotype for Holden's Dollar Magazine and had received virtually the same excuse

from him that Pierre offers, ("when everybody has his portrait published, true distinction lies in not having yours published at all"(p. 254)). Melville reveals here what he had earlier written to Hawthorne about the "utter unsatisfactoriness of all human fame"(p. 255).⁴ The world honors the wrong thing--a man's face, "a neat draft of his life"(p. 255)--rather than the grandeur and truth revealed in his writings. When critics declare an "immediate literary success, in very young writers," as they did for both Melville and Pierre, on the grounds that, because a book contains original matter, "the author himself is to be considered original"(p. 259), they do not understand what real originality is. This most important tenet of Young America's literary program, Melville argues, is not properly understood by its proponents. To declare a book original because of its subject matter rather than because of what is made visible through the author's self-exploration is to be "forever babbling about originality"(p. 259). Duyckinck and Young America, Melville implied, babbled.

Success, Pierre discovers as he tries to write his more mature work, is only nominally associated with merit. Yet, because he must make a living from his writing, "circumstances . . . put him in the attitude of an eager contender for renown"(p. 259). To receive either plaudits or censures from a group that does not understand what it reads breeds in Pierre "the pyramidal scorn of the genuine loftiness for the whole infinite company of infinitesimal critics"(p. 339). Melville had expressed such scorn for critics before,

but he had always excepted those true critics who read with sympathetic generosity. In Pierre, Melville makes no such exceptions. Of old, he observes, "poetry was a consecration and an obsequy to all hapless modes of human life"; it performed an important function. But in this "bantering, barren and prosaic heartless age"(p. 136), writing is whelmed by the commonality. In Mammonish America art has no such divine function. No critic recognizes the value of a romance of self-exploration.

Even if the professional writer eschews fame he still must pursue money. But the kind of book that great writers are driven to write, the kind that will establish a great national literature, will not sell. Pierre, caught by that "blast resistless" into a pursuit of the truth, realizes that the "wiser and the profounder he should grow, the more and the more he lessened the chances for bread"(p. 305). Pierre cannot be "entertainingly and profitably shallow in some pellucid and merry romance,"(p. 305) anymore than could Melville when he wrote Mardi and Moby-Dick. Pellucid and merry romances do not reflect truth. Common novels, Pierre learns make "false, inverted attempts at systematizing eternally unsystemizable elements"(p. 141). Pierre discovers that life "partakes of the unravelable inscrutableness of God"(p. 141); so to write a common novel or romance denies the mission to "know nothing but Truth"(p. 65).

To write a romance that pursues the truth, then, is to reject both fame and fortune. It is also to commit an act

of self-destruction. Pierre "Immaturely Attempts a Mature Work" the title of Book XXI tells us. He perceives that

most grand productions of the best human intellects ever are built round a circle, as atolls (i.e. the primitive coral islets which, raising themselves in the depths of profoundest seas, rise funnel-like to the surface, and present there a hoop of white rock, which though on the outside everywhere lashed by the ocean, yet excludes all tempests from the quiet lagoon within), digestively including the whole range of all that can be known or dreamed.(p. 283)

This passage describes the setting, shape, and content of Mardi. Melville acknowledged to Duyckinck that Mardi had failed to reach an audience and despite the growth that he underwent while writing the book, he realized that it did not succeed as a work of art. In delineating Pierre's attempt at a mature work, Melville satirizes his own naivete. His expectation that Mardi would be a popular and financial success indicated that he confused personal growth with artistic realization. But Melville's main target is larger than his own naivete. He also illustrates that Young America's definition of the subject for a national literature--the delineation of the inner life--leads inevitably to truths which readers and reviewers will not accept.

In attempting to write his mature work Pierre is trying, like Ishmael, to sound his own soul. Because he "began to see through the first superficiality of the world," Pierre believes that in writing his book "he had come to the unlayered substance"(p. 285). Pierre possesses the poetic nature, the genius which would allow him to dive, but his soul has not yet been accosted "by the Wonderful Mutes, and through the vast halls of Silent Truth, . . .

been ushered into the full, secret, eternally inviolable Sanhedrim, where the Poetic Magi discuss, in glorious gibberish, the Alpha and Omega of the Universe"(p. 244). Pierre is deluded in his sense of discovery, for there is no unlayered substance. The world and the soul are "found to consist of nothing but superinduced superficialities"(p. 285). The act of exploring the soul "is as descending a spiral stair in a shaft, without any end, and where that endlessness is only concealed by the spirality of the stair, and the blackness of the shaft"(p. 289).

The act of diving, Pierre discovers and Melville reveals, inevitably loses one in barren mazes. The more he writes of his book, "the deeper and deeper that he dived, Pierre saw the everlasting elusiveness of Truth; the universal lurking insincerity of even the greatest and purest written thoughts"(p. 339). For Ishmael the pursuit of Truth expands the self; for Pierre it only confirms the inscrutability of the self. Any act of writing is insincere because no language can capture the Truth, no diver can know the self.⁵ Plotinus Plinlimmon's pamphlet, "Chronometricals and Horologicals" would have told Pierre as much if Pierre had understood it.

Plinlimmon theorizes that there are two truths, God's and man's. "Heaven's own Truth" is manifested by a life of "divinely right conduct, obedience to a moral imperative, a creed in action"(p. 211). Man's truth is a modification and moderation of absolute standards of conduct. The two truths

have little in common. Plinlimmon says: "in an artificial world like ours, the soul of man is further removed from its God and the Heavenly Truth than the chronometer carried to China, is from Greenwich"(p. 211). God does send an occasional chronometer, like Christ, to earth, but the chronometer's task is to let man know that, "though man's Chinese notions of things may answer well enough here, they are by no means universally applicable"(p. 212). Man should not live by chronometric laws, for he "is a man and a horologe"(p. 214). He should not govern his life by chronometric standards.

If a man seeks to "regulate his own daily conduct" by chronometrics, Plinlimmon argues, "he will but array all men's earthly time-keepers against him, and thereby work himself woe and death"(p. 212). When Pierre reads Plinlimmon's pamphlet on the coach he is not able "to master the pivot idea . . . and as every incomprehended idea is not only a perplexity but a taunting reproach to one's mind, Pierre . . . at last ceased studying it altogether"(p. 292). By committing himself to know nothing but the Truth, he is committing himself to the life of a chronometer. By diving after the Truth, he is attempting to uncover the divine voice within him. Pierre mistakes those impulses awakened in him by Isabel as the divine voice. He does not know that "Silence is the only Voice of God"(p. 204).⁶

Thus, launched on a journey that can only lead him through a maze in the vast empty soul, searching for Truth from a God of Silence, Pierre can only conclude that Truth

is everlastingly elusive. He sees that his attempt to live by chronometrics in a horological world is fruitless, a travesty, and that he is "the fool of Truth, the fool of Virtue, the Fool of Fate"(p. 358). Duyckinck had criticised Melville for his violation of "the most sacred associations of life" in Moby-Dick. Melville countered in Pierre that such sacred associations were chimeras, and if Duyckinck found such assertions to be uncomfortable, it was only because they were.

The book that he is writing cannot be finished because Pierre can find no conclusion to his dive. And he can make no money, for his publishers accuse him of being a swindler. They write Pierre: "upon the pretense of writing a popular novel for us, you have been receiving cash advances from us, while passing through our press the sheets of a blasphemous rhapsody"(p. 356). Duyckinck had called Melville's "piratical running down of creeds and opinions" in Moby-Dick rhapsody. The London Spectator and the London Morning Chronicle both considered sections of that book to be "rhapsody run mad."⁷ The public, Melville implies, will not accept uncomfortable truths as the subject matter of literature.

Pierre's realization of the unresolvable ambiguities of existence makes his pursuit a travesty of Ahab's tragic quest. Ahab must punch through the pasteboard mask; Pierre too must "step out before the drawn-up worlds in widest space, and challenge one and all of them to battle"(p. 357). But Glen Stanley, whom Pierre kills, is not the symbol of

ineffable divinity that Moby Dick is; Pierre's death is not the tragic act of challenge that Ahab's is. He commits suicide as the final act of withdrawal from a world that has already rejected him.

In Pierre, Melville declares that the romance of self-exploration cannot succeed as a national work. The public will not read it because it inevitably contains uncomfortable truths. They refuse to undertake the act of reading as Melville and Young America defined it, looking past the book to see "the strange stuff, which in the act of attempting that book, has upheaved and upgushed"(p. 304) in the writer's soul. Melville's public did not do it with Mardi or with Moby-Dick; instead, they declared the genius' act of diving to be a blasphemous rhapsody. Rather than reading such serious works, the public settles for the pellucid and merry romance and the common novel. Pierre is Melville's last exploration of romance as he and Young America defined it, but the book indicates the formal and thematic direction that his writing will take.

Pierre is Melville's only book that takes the guise of a domestic romance. One frequent comment in the reviews of earlier books which critics did not know how to label was that the books, particularly Mardi and Moby-Dick, could not be called romances or novels because they had no plot or love interest. In creating his "rural bowl of milk," Melville was writing a kind of romance that he considered very different from his earlier books. In trying to convince John Murray, his first English publisher, to print Mardi,

Melville promised that the book was "no dish water nor its model borrowed from the Circulating Library."⁸ But the sentimental domestic fiction was the sort that sold in America; not the romance of self-exploration that Melville was writing. Melville clothed Pierre with the trappings of that fiction--the ethereal fair heroine, the dark, dangerous rival, the hero trapped between them, a theme of lost and abandoned love.⁹ It is unlikely that Melville considered the book to be designed for popularity as he wrote Bentley, because Melville's treatment of the sentimental form undercuts his use of it.¹⁰

The great failing of the "countless tribe of common novels," Melville argues, is that they do not accurately reflect life. They "laboriously spin veils [sic] of mystery, only to complacently clear them up at last"(p. 141). But the mysteries of human life "never unravel their own intricacies, and have no proper endings; but in imperfect, unanticipated, and disappointing sequels (as mutilated stumps), hurry to abrupt intermergings with the eternal tides of time and fate"(p. 141).

Melville includes plot elements that are characteristic of sentimental fiction in Pierre; there is a seduced maiden who has been abandoned, pregnant, by her lover. But the maiden is not a main player in the book; she is Isabel's mother and the seducer is, perhaps, Pierre's father. Further, it is never absolutely clear that the seduction has occurred. What seems to be a book about seduction becomes

rather a book about incest. And Melville does not rely on the complacent clearing up of the complications and mysteries that he weaves. Instead, when the mystery is at its most complex, when Pierre begins to suspect that Isabel is not his sister, that his idealized motives may be no more than self-deception which has led him into an exploration of the darker side of his psyche, Melville abruptly merges all of his main characters with the eternal tides of time and fate by killing them. In his effort to disguise his darker ponderings with a coating that is palatable to the reading public, Melville begins to discover the new thematic concern and method that he explores in his later fiction--the ways in which surface appearance can be manipulated to disguise what lies beneath. The disguising surface of Pierre--the trappings of sentimental fiction--were too transparent for the book to be successful. Its theme of incest, though never fully explored, was obvious to Melville's readers and they found it abhorrent. But, as one of the survivors in Pierre, Charlie Milthorpe, says, "the whole world's a trick. Know the trick of it, all's right; don't know, all's wrong"(p. 319). Pierre had not learned the trick, but Melville was learning it. In a Mammonish society like America, the trick for a professional author was to give an audience what it wanted, but to use the surface to disguise the personal aspects and the profounder ruminations that were the spur to Melville's writing. "Fortunately for the felicity of the Dilletante in Literature," Melville observes in Pierre, "the horrible allegorical meanings of the Infer-

no, lie not on the surface"(p. 169). In his short fiction and The Confidence-Man Melville learned to bury his own allegorical meanings. Pierre is a flawed novel. The intrusion of the chapters on writing interrupt the organization of it, and Melville's refusal to explore the implications of the incest theme abort the story. But as a private letter to Duyckinck, the book must have made its point. In Pierre, Melville announced that he was abandoning Young America's program for a national literature and with it the romance of self-exploration.¹¹

Pierre was an unmitigated failure critically and financially. Melville received an early indication of the book's limited financial potential when Richard Bentley not only refused to grant Melville an advance for it, but also refused to print it unexpurgated. In his letter refusing Pierre, Bentley offered an unsolicited estimation of the reasons for Melville's poor sales in England:

I conceive if you had revised your work "Mardi" to the latest, the "Whale," and restrained your imagination somewhat, and had written in a style to be understood by the great mass of readers--nay if you had not sometimes offended the feeling of many sensitive readers you would have succeeded in England. Everybody must admit the genius displayed in your writings; but it would have been impossible for any publisher with any prudent regard to his own interests to have put out your books here without revisal & occasional omission.

In short, if Melville had not been Melville, if he had been more concerned with writing to public taste, less with exploring his own imaginative pathways, he would not have written himself out of a readership in England. Bentley would publish Pierre, he said, only if Melville would permit

him to "have made by a judicious literary friend such alterations as are absolutely necessary to 'Pierre' being properly appreciated here." Melville had agreed to such alterations for the American edition of Typee, but the fact that in the case of Pierre he refused publication in England rather than allow "alterations" in his text indicates how radically his priorities about authorship had changed. The subjects that Pierre explores--incest, the absence of a beneficent God, the hypocrisy of the world--clearly would have offended many sensitive readers, but Melville was no longer concerned with appeasing an audience. Bentley concluded his letter with a gratuitous, somewhat petulant piece of advice: "perhaps somebody ignorant of the absolute failure of your former works might be tempted to make a trifling advance on the chance of success."¹² Bentley clearly was done with Melville, and he predicted that the rest of the British publishing world would concur.

Because no edition of Pierre was published in England (Sampson, Low, Harpers' British distributors, sold the American sheets there) the book was not widely reviewed and it was not sold to the English circulating libraries. Melville earned almost nothing in England and his earnings were not much greater in America. In a bit less than a year Melville's royalty amounted to only \$58.25, and he made only \$157.75 from Pierre during his lifetime.¹³ Clearly Melville's career as a writer of books was at an end unless he drastically changed his approach to their production.

Critically the book fared no better. Not one positive review of Pierre has been uncovered, and two of Melville's least admiring critics, George Washington Peck in The American Whig Review and Charles Gordon Greene in the Boston Post, found for the first time overwhelming agreement with their opinions of a Melville book. Greene declared that Pierre was "perhaps, the craziest fiction extant." He admitted that the writing had power, that it revealed "an intellect, the intensity and cultivation of which it is impossible to doubt. But the amount of utter trash in the volume," he concluded, "is almost infinite--trash of conception, execution, dialogue and sentiment."¹⁴ In 1847 Young America had been provoked into a full defense of Melville's moral nature by Peck's scurrilous attack on Typee and Omoo; now Peck had a chance to vindicate his earlier review. In Pierre, Peck said, Melville "dare[d] to outrage every principle of virtue; when he . . . [struck] with an impious though, happily, weak hand, at the very foundations of society." Peck again declared it his duty to defend public morality, and in this posture he passed a final, resounding judgment on Melville:

We have, we think, said sufficient to show our readers that Mr. Melville is a man wholly unfitted for the task of writing wholesome fictions; that he possesses none of the faculties necessary for such work; that his fancy is diseased, his morality vitiated, his style nonsensical and ungrammatical, and his characters as far removed from our sympathies as they are from nature.¹⁵

This attack, though less personal, was more damning of Melville as a writer than was Peck's earlier review. But this time no defense was forthcoming. Duyckinck, in The

Literary World, tacitly agreed with the general condemnation of Pierre.

Melville, Duyckinck declared, had abandoned the principles of art from which he had been working. He "may have constructed his story upon some new theory of art," Duyckinck hypothesized, but "he evidently has not constructed it according to the established principles of the only theory accepted by us until assured of a better, of one more true and natural than truth and nature themselves, which are the germinal principles of all true art." Melville does not tell the truth in Pierre; instead he portrays life and character "as they are not and cannot be." This is not a book that reveals insights about nature through self-exploration; it reveals only the "eccentricity of the imagination."

Duyckinck decided that he had misjudged Melville. In his review of Mardi, he had disparaged travel narratives, arguing that they would not sustain a great literary reputation. But in this review he concluded that "the author of 'Pierre; or the Ambiguities' . . . is certainly but a spectre of the substantial author of 'Omoo' and 'Typee,' the jovial and hearty narrator of the traveller's tale of incident and adventure." He encouraged Melville to return "to his narrative of a traveller's tale, in which he has few equals in power and felicity." In short, Melville had not fulfilled the promise he had shown in Mardi of becoming the creator of a national romance because he had driven past the

theories of Young America and had begun to explore issues that profoundly disturbed Duyckinck. Melville did not have sufficient control of his abilities, Duyckinck felt. He allowed "his mind to run riot amid remote analogies, where the chain of association is invisible to mortal minds."¹⁶

Melville did not lose his energy as a writer after the experience of Pierre, but he did radically redirect it. Mathews' observation on the state of authorship in America, made in 1842, proved prophetic of Melville's career. "Under any law--oppressed by whatever bondage or tyranny custom chooses to lay upon them--men of great genius will struggle into light and cast before the world the thoughts with which their own souls have been moved," Mathews observed.¹⁷ Melville's understanding of professional authorship, through the production of his first seven books, epitomized the struggle against oppressive public fastidiousness, the impoverished life of the writer of books, and the dictums of literary critics in an effort to lay claim to the title, "great man of genius." But, as Mathews observed, most authors were defeated by the oppressions of custom and retreated to the magazines in an effort to live as a writer. Melville also retreated to the magazines, but his retreat was precipitated by causes more complex than Mathews had identified.

Melville would have agreed with Mathews' argument that Americans were forced to write for magazines because they could not earn a living selling books, but he would not have agreed with Mathews' explanation of why American books did

not sell. Mathews argued that Americans bought reprints of British books because they were cheaper than American productions. Given a fair pricing system, Americans would buy an American literature out of a sense of patriotism. But Melville discovered that Americans did not buy British reprints (and their American imitations) solely because they were inexpensive. He learned that when the public, including Duyckinck, was confronted with uncomfortable perceptions, it found fault with the writer for harboring them. It would not read those American books that did not complacently clear up the mysteries of life. Melville had been encouraged by Young America to conceive of the act of writing as a revelation to the world of the thoughts with which his soul had been moved, to paraphrase Mathews. But when Melville fully realized this act in Moby-Dick, he discovered that the world considered such revelations unpalatable. It made no sense for a professional author to write his perceptions if his books were not read.

By following Young America's assumption that a writer of a national literature should follow his own inclinations and not heed public opinion, Melville wrote himself out of a reading public. However appealing in theory was Young America's notion that citizens in a democracy would, from a sense of duty, read writers who explored the significance of the American experience, such in reality was not the public's inclination. They did not read Mardi or Moby-Dick. The citizens of the democracy, Melville discovered, were

more interested in being entertained than in being instructed.

Melville also discovered that there were limits to the concepts of originality and egotism, as defined by Young America. When, in Moby-Dick, Melville allowed free rein to his egotism and originality, he was chided by Duyckinck for his "piratical running down of creeds and opinions . . . [that] is out of place and uncomfortable." Young America, Melville realized, meant something different by originality than he did. Books should contain original matter, Duyckinck's reviews implied, but that matter should be comfortable and congenial. And the character of the author should be revealed as felicitous and jovial. "Egotism will be valued always in proportion to the character of the author, as a soil that betrays a vein of gold is worth more than one of coal or slate," he argued in an 1845 article.¹⁸ Clearly Melville's character, which ran "riot amid remote analogies," yielded not "gold" but moral and intellectual dross.

It is not surprising that Melville turned to magazine writing as a way of earning a living given the financial and critical failure of Pierre. The alternative to writing books for a professional author was considered by Young America to be writing for magazines. Melville shared Young America's disdain for magazine writing, but he also was aware that magazines and newspapers were "the most saleable of all books nowadays."¹⁹ And new opportunities for earning money through magazine publishing were appearing. In addition to Harper's New Monthly Magazine (which, as the organ

of Melville's publisher, had excerpted "The Town Ho's Story" from Moby-Dick), Melville found a new forum for magazine pieces when he was asked to contribute to Putnam's Monthly Magazine in October, 1852. Between November, 1853 and May, 1856, Melville published fifteen essays and stories and one serialized novel, Israel Potter, in these two magazines. Melville was paid five dollars per page, occasionally as much as six, from the two magazines, whose normal rates were three dollars per page.²⁰ In addition to being well paid for his pieces he was very successful placing them. Only one sketch, "The Two Temples," was rejected. But it was turned down for a reason that must have been cautionary to Melville: "my editorial experience," Charles F. Briggs explained to Melville, "compels me to be very cautious in offending the religious sensibilities of the public, and the moral of the Two Temples would array against us the whole power of the pulpit to say nothing of Brown and the Congregation of Grace Church."²¹ Melville's writing experience taught him that religious sensibilities were indeed easily offended. Though by publishing in magazines Melville was no longer dependent on the whims of the reading public for his livelihood, since he was paid regardless of the popularity of his pieces, this rejection must have reminded him that his content still had to confront a fastidious public.

In addition to this large and steady output, Melville worked on two longer pieces that never were published. The first of these was the "Agatha Story." It was derived from

an actual case of bigamy related to Melville by John H. Clifford, a New Bedford lawyer who found the story to be "one of the most interesting and romantic cases" he had encountered.²² Melville was intrigued by the story and sent the information (along with a complimentary copy of Pierre) to Hawthorne in an effort to persuade Hawthorne to write it. But Hawthorne declined and urged Melville to take up the project himself. Melville decided to "endeavor to do justice to so interesting a story of reality" and began work on the piece in late November or early December, 1852.²³ By April 20, 1853, he had a work, presumably this one, "nearly ready for the press."²⁴ Why the work was never published is a matter of speculation, but Melville's attitude toward his other long piece that was not published, Tortoises and Tortoise Hunting, and his long piece that was published, Israel Potter, may help explain what happened to the "Agatha Story."

Melville indicated in a letter to Harper Brothers that he had taken a manuscript to New York in the Spring of 1853 but was "prevented from printing [it] at that time."²⁵ Chronology suggests that the manuscript was the "Agatha Story"; the letter suggests that Melville had shown the story to publishers, perhaps to the Harpers. In this same letter, written on November 24, 1853, Melville offered his publishers "another book--300 pages, say--partly of nautical adventure, and partly--or, rather, chiefly, of Tortoise Hunting Adventure." Harpers advanced Melville \$300 for this book, but again it was never published. Melville promised

the original manuscript in January, 1854; in February he expressed his "concern, that, owing to a variety of causes, the work, unavoidably, was not ready in that month, & still requires additional work to it, ere completion."²⁶ On June 22, he wrote Harpers urging a response to the Extract of the book that had been sent earlier. His explanation of the book's tardiness reveals much about Melville's changing priorities as a writer:

Though it would be difficult, if not impossible, for me to get the entire Tortoise Book ready for publication before Spring, yet I can pick out & finish parts, here & there, for prior use. But even this is not unattended with labor; which labor of course, I do not care to undergo while remaining in doubt as to recompense.²⁷

For the first time the delay in a book does not indicate the "blast resistless" for Melville; rather, it seems that Melville now lacked any motivation besides money for producing his books. It may be that Harpers showed no interest in the Agatha story, and Melville dropped it because he could find no buyer. "Tortoises" or "Tortoise Hunting" also was not pursued by Harpers and Melville probably did not finish a manuscript already six months late.²⁸

The one long piece that he did publish as a book during this period, Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile, was first written as a serial piece for Putnam's Monthly. It ran in nine installments between July, 1854 and March, 1855. The book was printed and marketed by Putnam as soon as the final installment appeared. Melville earned \$421.50 for the magazine publication, and his total profit, as of July 1, 1855, was between \$614 and \$748.²⁹ Israel Potter was rela-

tively profitable for Melville, and, as the letter in which he proposed the book to Putnam indicates, profit was his main motive in writing his only serialized novel. In this letter Melville was very specific about the terms under which the work would be published, terms which Putnam agreed with but for one exception. He did not give Melville the requested \$100 advance.

Melville, in turn, agreed "to provide . . . matter for at least ten printed pages in ample time for each issue." He did not quite meet this quota every month, but there seemed to be no complaints from Putnam when Melville delivered shorter sections than promised. More important for this study, Melville promised "that the story shall contain nothing of any sort to shock the fastidious. There will be very little reflective writing in it; nothing weighty. It is adventure. As for its interest, I shall try to sustain that as well as I can."³⁰ Melville kept to his word in the book, providing lively (and somewhat critical) portraits of such American heroes as Benjamin Franklin, John Paul Jones, and Ethan Allen. This description, very much like that which Melville had given Bentley about Redburn, indicates how thoroughly Melville had revised his concept of professional authorship. The central motive of publishing his writing was no longer a concern for reputation or for contributing to the national literature. The important gain was money. The audience was no longer to be instructed; it was to be appeased. The medium for writing no longer was

books, which did not provide a guaranteed amount of money; it was now magazines, which offered money per page.

Melville followed the same path with his next book, The Piazza Tales. This book, published by Dix & Edwards who had bought Putnam's Monthly, was a collection of stories and sketches that had appeared in Putnam's. Only one sketch, the introductory piece "The Piazza" was written specifically for the book. George William Curtis, an editorial advisor to Dix and Edwards and a friend of Melville's, only very guardedly recommended that the firm publish the book, noting that Melville "has lost his prestige,--& I don't believe the Putnam stories will bring it up." But, he added, "I don't suppose you can lose by it."³¹ Melville, it seems, would have agreed with Curtis about his reputation, for he wrote Dix and Edwards: "about having the author's name on the title-page, you may do as you deem best; but any appending of titles of former works is hardly worth while."³²

Between 1853 and 1856 Melville turned to magazine writing because it provided him with the best means of satisfying the only motive that still impelled him to put his works before the public--the need, as Babbalanja put it in Mardi, of procuring yams. Reputation was no longer worth pursuing both because Melville had decided that it was unimportant and because, by 1856, he had lost what reputation he had. This is not to say that Melville had abandoned his sense of craft or his concern with perceiving truth. The best of his short pieces are finely crafted explorations of the deceptive, malleable, and impenetrable surface of

reality. His fiction in this period became static, a slowly unfolding tableau rather than an active movement of quest or pursuit. Melville's examination of the complex irony inherent in the limits of human perception replaces his earlier examination of the effort to transcend those limits embodied in the quests of Taji, Ishmael, Ahab, and Pierre. The narrator of "Bartleby the Scrivener" and Captain Delano in "Benito Cereno" are confronted by surfaces which mask the true nature of reality. "The Lightning-Rod Man" unfolds a confrontation between interpretations of reality that each character manipulates to his own advantage. And in such pieces as "I and My Chimney" and "The Tartarus of Maids," Melville buried private allegories (of his own failing health and of the biological prison created by the process of childbirth) under a surface that disguises through geniality and clever description his more serious concerns.³³ The shorter form required by magazines was appropriate to Melville's new thematic concerns. If necessity drove Melville to magazine writing, the inventions that he developed to meet the requirements of the form made him a more precise craftsman.

Considering Melville's productive and relatively profitable work as a magazine writer during this period, his return to book writing for his last production as a professional writer is puzzling. Some critics have speculated that Melville wrote the book intending it to be serialized, but their arguments are not thoroughly convincing. One line

of argument suggests that, because Melville had found magazine publishing profitable, and had written one other serialized novel, that The Confidence-Man must also have been intended for serialization. Yet, as we have seen, Melville abandoned two earlier works when their profitability could not be insured. The Confidence-Man was not serialized though it was published by Dix and Edwards, who also published Putnam's Monthly. If indeed the publishers did refuse to serialize it, Melville must have had more than mercenary motives for writing the book if he was not daunted by the refusal.³⁴ Leon Howard argues that, "as a serial, designed for a magazine which was interested in picturesque sketches with a meaning to them, it was admirably planned."³⁵ Yet the most generous readings can grant this as an accurate description of only the first half of the book. When the Confidence Man assumes his last masquerade as the Cosmopolitan the sketches develop a philosophical rather than a picturesque character. Melville was clearly aware, as his letter to Putnam about Israel Potter indicates, that the fastidious public did not want reflective writing, "nothing weighty." It is possible that Melville wrote the earlier section of the book with an eye toward serialization, and when Dix and Edwards refused it for Putnam's but accepted it as a book, Melville was free to develop the much longer section on the Cosmopolitan. But there is no external evidence to support the theory that the book was intended for serialization, and the same internal evidence that has been used to argue this theory has also

been used to implicitly refute it.

Both Watson G. Branch and Tom Quirk, who have formulated the most detailed theories of the genesis of the book, argue against a sequential method of composing chapters, the most likely pattern of composition had Melville planned the book to be serialized.³⁶ With Israel Potter, for example, he wrote sequentially and did not revise the text of the magazine for book publication. The surviving sheets of The Confidence-Man indicate that Melville revised very carefully both its content and style.³⁷ Howard's and Branch's suggestion that Melville may have intended the stories in the book, especially "The Story of China Aster," to be published separately in magazines seems more plausible--they are self contained and do not rely on the surrounding text for clarity. But even the function and nature of these stories have their precedents in Melville's earlier writing. "The Town-Ho's Story," for instance, is similar in function to the stories in The Confidence-Man, and though Harper's New Monthly Magazine excerpted the story from Moby-Dick, there is no evidence that Melville considered it a separate short story.³⁸

In short, there is no external evidence to suggest that Melville intended the book to be serialized; there is scant but convincing evidence--the fact of the book--that he wrote it not primarily for the magazines, and thus for profit, but for other purposes. In The Confidence-Man, Melville argued for the last time that he had been right in demanding what

he had from an audience, that the transaction between writer and reader was that which he had defined as early as the writing of Mardi.

Most readers, the narrator of The Confidence-Man observes, look for a "severe fidelity to real life" in works of amusement. Many of Melville's reviewers expected as much from his books and criticized Melville for not providing it throughout his career. From the charges of fictionalizing in Typee and Omoo to the accusation that the characters of Pierre "are as far removed from our sympathies as they are from nature," his reviewers demanded that fidelity. But, the narrator observes, as had Melville in White-Jacket and "Hawthorne and His Mosses," there is another class of readers "who sit down to a work of amusement tolerantly as they sit at a play, and with much the same expectations and feelings." This generous class of readers looks not only for entertainment when it reads, "but, at bottom, even for more reality, than real life itself can show." This may be a subtle jab at Duyckinck, who in his review of Pierre argued that Melville's new theory of art was not "more true and natural than truth and nature themselves." There is truth that can only be expressed by transcending fidelity to real life, Melville argued, and fiction, to express that truth, "should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie."³⁹

In Melville's earlier books that other world was the inner one, the exploration of the self, but in Moby-Dick and Pierre, Melville carried that exploration as far as he could

and found at its end no absolute truth, only ambiguities. Ishmael could rest in that realization; Pierre could not. Melville in his short works and in The Confidence-Man, moved to the next logical step. Truth is not absolute; it is provisional. "A fresh and liberal construction would teach us to regard those four players--indeed, this whole cabin-full of players--as playing at games in which every player plays fair, and not a player but shall win," observes the Confidence Man in his guise as the Black Rapids Coal Company Representative.⁴⁰ Though there are complex ironies embedded in this statement--not every one of course will win the game and such a perception would surely make one a loser--this statement accurately describes the world aboard the Fidele. The reader as well as each of the characters is called upon to make "fresh and liberal constructions" of the ways of the world, to provisionally try out a variety of perspectives and perceptions in an effort to keep up with the ever-shifting nature of the game. The Confidence Man, because he controls and changes the rules of the game, is able to manipulate the face of reality and the ways in which his victims perceive it.⁴¹

In Melville's last piece of professional writing he displaced the romance of self-exploration with a fiction that, as the above quote indicates, examines reality as a game (or alternatively as a play) in which all the participants are players or actors. Originality no longer resides in the character of the deep diver; the original character

is now "like a revolving Drummond light," illuminating all that lies around it but shielding its own nature by its own brilliance.⁴² By extension the act of writing is no longer perceived as an act of self-exploration; it is instead deception, the layering of ironies so thick that only the most perceptive reader can uncover the unpopular opinions that Melville continued to sequester in many of his tales and his last novel.

The Confidence-Man was Melville's last effort at writing something intended, at least on the surface, for mass consumption. His books never attracted the mass of readers and with each successive piece he had found fewer and fewer reasons for continuing to write as a professional. He earned progressively less for each book; fame was meaningless because it was based on the wrong conception of his writing; the theory upon which he was attempting to develop a lasting, nationally representative book was not conducive to popular appeal and was not fully understood by those who had led Melville into it. When Melville returned from his trip to Europe and the Middle East, taken after writing The Confidence-Man he declared that he was "not going to write any more at present."⁴³ In fact Melville did not stop writing, he wrote a great deal of poetry and toward the end of his life Billy Budd. In his poetry he continued to work for the precision of language that he had developed in his short fiction, but he knew that poetry was not a popular medium. His final piece of self-exploratory writing, the long poem Clarel, was privately printed and Melville ex-

pected no income from it. He never again attempted to earn a living as a professional author.

A good part of the reason for Melville's long silence was his sense of irreconcilable differences between his concept of what literature should do and should be, of what the acts of reading and writing were, and his audience's ideas of literature. Melville demanded active participation from his audience and true and honest telling from himself. The public did not conceive of reading as work. It was leisure activity, and the readers of Melville's day had little patience for difficult and morally challenging texts. Melville had shown with his magazine pieces that he could earn money as a writer, but the definition of authorship within which he grew to understand his profession considered magazine writing to be second-rate at best. Melville in the end decided to withdraw from public writing rather than to compromise the image of the lofty role of author that had directed his career.

NOTES

CHAPTER VII

¹Davis, Gilman, p. 146.

²A number of critics consider Pierre to be about the failure of fiction as a means of pursuing the truth. See for example Raymond J. Nelson, "The Art of Herman Melville: The Author of Pierre" Yale Review, 59 (1969), pp. 197-214, who argues that the book is Pierre's insane, imaginative creation of his own life, which he turns "into a literary role, becomes a tragic hero, and destroys himself;" Nina Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," PMLA 94 (Oct., 1979), pp. 909-923, who argues that, in Pierre "the discovery of the limits of literature meant that no literature could be serious, because limitation precluded the discovery of truth"; Dryden's assessment of Pierre as "the story of the necessary failure of the author-hero," and Brodhead's contention that Pierre alludes to its own fictionality "to demonstrate the illusoriness and invalidity of all imaginative creations."

³Herman Melville, Pierre or the Ambiguities, Harrison Hayford, et al. eds. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), p. 245. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁴Melville wrote Duyckinck on Feb. 12, 1851: "The fact is, almost everybody is having his 'mug' engraved nowadays; so that this test of distinction is getting to be reversed; and therefore, to see one's 'mug' in a magazine, is presumptive evidence that he's a nobody" (Davis, Gilman, p. 121). Henry A. Murray, "Introduction," in Pierre or the Ambiguities, by Herman Melville (New York: Farrar Straus, 1949), is simply wrong when he asserts that "Melville's less intimate friendships, such as that with Duyckinck, are not portrayed" (p. xxii). Hershel Parker, "Why Pierre Went Wrong," Studies in the Novel, 8 (Spring, 1976), pp. 7-23, notes that "since the 1930s it has been known that Evert Duyckinck himself was the model for the impudently aggressive joint editor of the Captain Kidd Monthly" (p. 14). See also Perry Miller, pp. 307-308, for a brief discussion of the references to Duyckinck embedded in Pierre.

⁵This is essentially the conclusion that both Baym and Brodhead reach. Matthiessen notes the failure of Pierre's self-exploration, observing, "having struck through the pasteboard mask of appearance he had found nothing in reality to sustain him" (p. 474).

⁶Plinlimmon's pamphlet is of course central to every critical reading of Pierre. One central question frequently raised is the relation of the pamphlet's argument with Melville's own opinions. Some critics see the pamphlet as a reflection of Melville's own views: William Braswell, Herman Melville and Christianity (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1936), pp. 150-155; Newton Arvin, pp. 221-222; and Floyd C. Watkins, "Melville's Plotinus Plinlimmon and Pierre," in Reality and Myth, ed. William E. Walker, Robert E. Welker (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1964) pp. 39-51, for example. Murray, Stern, Laurance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952) pp. 272-279; and more recently Brian Higgins, "Plinlimmon and the Pamphlet Again," Studies in the Novel 4 (Spring, 1972) pp. 27-38, argue that the pamphlet is satiric. I think that Melville does portray in this book and later pieces a world that in its hypocrisy reflects the tenets of Plinlimmon's pamphlet, but that he is satirizing that world. My reading is closest to Higgins.

⁷"Herman Melville," London Spectator, Oct. 25, 1851, in Parker, Recognition, p.33.

⁸Davis, Gilman, pp. 70-71.

⁹Nina Baym argues that "there seems to be no evidence that Melville had read any of the sentimental or domestic romances then coming into vogue, and in all likelihood Pierre is modelled, not on ladies' fiction, but on bildungsroman." But Melville refers to common novels and merry and pellucid romances in the text, and he had read Sylvester Judd's Margaret and Edward Bulwer-Lytton's Zanoni, two very popular romances. The point is not that Melville was modeling Pierre on fiction by women, but that he was adopting and parodying the conventions of romance popular with an audience mainly comprised of women. Murray, p. xliii, Leon Howard and Hershel Parker, "Historical Note," in Pierre or the Ambiguities (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971) p. 369; and Brodhead, p. 171, argue that Melville was making use of the conventions and parodying the genre of domestic sentimental romances. See also Brian Higgins, Hershel Parker, "The Flawed Grandeur of Melville's Pierre, in New Perspectives on Melville, ed. Faith Pullin (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1978) for a detailed analysis of Melville's use of the conventions of romance.

¹⁰Given Melville's reference to his book as a "rural bowl of milk" in his letter to Sophia Hawthorne and his claim to Bentley that the book was "very much more calculated for popularity" than his others (Davis, Gilman, p. 150), Melville's opinion of Pierre is still very much an open question. Some critics, notable Leon Howard in the "Historical Note," have taken the statements at face value. I agree with those critics, Robert Milder, "Melville's 'Intentions' in Pierre," Studies in the Novel, 6 (Summer, 1974)

pp. 186-199; William Braswell "Melville's Opinion of Pierre," American Literature, 23 (May, 1951) pp. 246-250, and Brodhead, who argue that, in Brodhead's terms, "a wish to deceive . . . is present in Melville's letter to Bentley." (p. 165).

¹¹Hershel Parker, "Why Pierre Went Wrong," argues convincingly that Melville's chapters on literature were written after seeing many of the reviews of Moby-Dick and that his writing of those chapters spurred his break with Duyckinck.

¹²The text of the letter is reprinted in Leyda, p. 931.

¹³See Leon Howard, Hershel Parker, "Historical Note," pp. 379-380, and Tanselle, p. 199, for the publishing and financial history of the book.

¹⁴Charles Gordon Greene, [Review of Pierre, or the Ambiguities], Boston Post, Aug. 4, 1852, in Branch, 294-296.

¹⁵George Washington Peck, [Review of Pierre, or the Ambiguities], The American Whig Review, Nov., 1852, in Rountree, pp. 27-30.

¹⁶[Evert Duyckinck], "Pierre, or the Ambiguities," The Literary World, Aug. 21, 1852, pp. 118-120.

¹⁷Mathews, "An Appeal. . ."p. 124.

¹⁸Evert Duyckinck, "On Writing for Magazines," p. 458.

¹⁹Davis, Gilman, p. 134.

²⁰Merton M. Sealts, "The Chronology of Melville's Short Fiction, 1853-1856," in Pursuing Melville, 1940-1980 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982) pp. 221-231 gives a detailed accounting of the payment received for Melville's stories. Leyda, p. 490, notes that Melville received eighteen dollars for the three page story, "The Lightning-Rod Man." Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), I, pp. 20-21, notes that the normal rate of pay for these two magazines was three dollars per page. Melville still clearly was an author in demand if he could command more than the normal rate of pay. Sealts calculates that Melville earned \$1,329.50 from his magazine publishing during these three years (p. 229).

²¹Leyda, p. 487.

²²See Davis, Gilman, pp. 153-161 for the complete text of the letter to Hawthorne. Harrison Hayford, "The Significance of Melville's 'Agatha' Letters," ELH: A Journal of English Literary History, 13 (Dec., 1946) 299-310, discusses

the possible line of development of the story. Eleanor Melville Meltcalf, Herman Melville, Cycle and Epicycle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 136, identified the lawyer as Clifford.

²³Davis, Gilman, p. 162.

²⁴Leyda, p. 468, quotes from a letter Melville's sister Maria, written on April 20.

²⁵Davis, Gilman, p. 164.

²⁶Davis, Gilman, p. 167.

²⁷Davis, Gilman, pp. 170-171.

²⁸The Harpers suffered a fire on December 10, 1853 which destroyed a warehouse containing, among other things, 2,300 bound and unbound copies of Melville's books. Sealts, "The Chronology of Melville's Short Fiction," speculates that it was because of the fire that the Harpers may have been unable to publish the book. The only piece to be published that may have been a part of "Tortoises" or "Tortoise Hunting" is "The Encantadas."

²⁹See Walter E. Bezanson, "Historical Note," in Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile, Harrison Hayford, et al., eds., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1982), pp. 173, 207, 219.

³⁰Davis, Gilman, pp. 169-170.

³¹Leyda, p. 510.

³²Davis, Gilman, p. 177.

³³It has long been a critical commonplace that most of Melville's short stories as well as The Confidence-Man are veiled biographical or political, or social commentaries. Elizabeth Foster puts the case most directly: "In The Confidence-Man Melville was again engaged in double-writing. . . . Perhaps he felt that, because of the profound antagonism between his views and most of the dominant faiths of his America, it was dangerous or hopeless to try to make himself heard, but that he must nevertheless stubbornly record his convictions; if readers deplored pessimism and allegory, then parabolic meanings could be shifted beyond their focus" (p. xix). This layered writing has inspired innumerable arguments over interpretation, with most critics agreeing only that Melville's meaning is very difficult to uncover. For a good summary of a variety of interpretations of The Confidence-Man, see Watson Branch, et al., "Historical Note," in The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1984), pp. 330-350.

³⁴Elizabeth S. Foster, "Introduction," in The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade (New York: Hendricks House, 1954), p. xxiii, suggests that "Melville proposed a novel to Dix & Edwards, perhaps for serial publication," in a letter, now lost, written in the early summer of 1855.

³⁵Leon Howard, Herman Melville, p. 228.

³⁶Watson G. Branch, "The Genesis, Composition, and Structure of The Confidence-Man," Nineteenth-Century Fiction 27 (March, 1973) 424-428; Tom Quirk, Melville's Confidence Man: From Knave to Knight (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982). See also Hershel Parker, "The Confidence-Man and the Use of Evidence in Compositional Studies: A Rejoinder," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 28 (June, 1973) 119-124, for a necessary cautionary argument about Branch's (and, by extension, Quirk's) theory of composition. Parker argues that "the whole procedure of reasoning about priority of composition on the basis of critical rather than physical evidence is open to attack" (p. 120).

³⁷The Manuscript Fragments are reprinted in Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, Harrison Hayford, et al., eds. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1984), pp. 401-499. Elizabeth S. Foster, who made a careful comparative study of these fragments, states: "if any testimony were needed that artistry, taste and genius presided at the composition of this novel, it could be found in the consistency with which Melville's tireless revision pushed towards one wished-for, clearly defined, and hitherto uncreated style, the style proper to the mood and matter" (p. 376), an opinion seconded by Bezanson.

³⁸See Parker, ". . . A Rejoinder,": "there is no physical evidence . . . for thinking that any particular tale in The Confidence-Man was not written concurrently with the nearby chapters" (p. 123).

³⁹Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, Hershel Parker, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1971), pp. 157-158.

⁴⁰Melville, The Confidence-Man, Norton edition, p. 46.

⁴¹For an illuminating discussion of the nature of the game see Gary Lindberg, The Confidence-Man in American Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 15-47. This chapter, along with Dryden's reading of the book (pp. 151-195), have most influenced my own reading of it.

⁴²Melville, The Confidence-Man, Norton edition, p. 205.

⁴³Leyda, p. 580.

APPENDIX

THE MELVILLE REVIVAL

Gradually I learned that to love Melville was to join a very small circle. It was like eating hasheesh.¹

Frank Jewett Mather's confession of intoxication with Melville's exotic works was an accurate expression of the state of Melville's reputation in 1919, the centenary of his birth. The circle of admirers was small, but his readers were addicted. Melville was not widely read in 1919, but it is not accurate to say (as many critics of the Melville Revival of the 1920s did) that he was completely forgotten. After his death in 1891 a flurry of appreciative articles in England and America resulted in the republication of Typee, Omoo and White-Jacket in London, and of these three books and Moby-Dick in New York. Articles about Melville's South Seas books and Moby-Dick appeared sporadically between 1900 and 1919, and a small group of readers, most in England, continued to show enthusiasm for Melville.² But only with the centenary tributes of Raymond Weaver, Mather, F. C. Owlett, and several anonymous writers did an effective revival begin.³ Between 1920 and 1929, seventy three editions of Melville's books were printed in England and America; an audience clearly had developed for his writing.⁴ But why? What did the critics of the 1920s find in Melville that his contemporaries had missed? And what sort of audience began to read him? The answers to these questions lie, I think,

in the larger reevaluation of American literature that occurred during the 1920s.

Melville was one of six authors discussed in a series of articles that appeared in The Outlook during 1928. The aim of the series was to reevaluate "eminent American literary figures of the Past."⁵ The spirit that prompted this reassessment of the American literary canon had its roots in Van Wyck Brooks' pivotal 1915 essay, "America's Coming of Age." This essay, and those written for The Seven Arts and collected under the title "Letters and Leadership" in 1918, provided a context within which a reexamination of American literature could occur. Waldo Frank, who was an editor of The Seven Arts, explained in 1929 the importance of Brooks' early essays:

Brooks gave us a "usable past." He interprets the sources of American life not in terms of their forms, political, economic, aesthetic; but in terms of their energy. . . . Instead of exposing or condemning, he releases . . . He breaks the moulds of the old America in which the youth are stifling; frees the living elements of that dead life, to be nurtured for a new.⁶

Brooks inspired examinations of specific authors, such as those in The Outlook series, and identified a schism in American society which spurred a vigorous sociological criticism by such later writers as Lewis Mumford. He also advocated the development of a unifying world view which could assimilate the contradictions inherent in American life, a goal which informed the critical tastes of those writers who were in search of a usable past.

Of the authors who were reevaluated between 1915 and

1930, none was more eminent than Walt Whitman. For Brooks, who had not yet read Melville in 1915, Whitman was the one writer who had managed to lay "the cornerstone of a national ideal capable . . . of releasing personality and of retrieving for our civilization . . . the only sort of place in the sun that is really worth having." For Mumford, Whitman represented the High Noon of America's literary Golden Day.⁷ Other writers also were finding a place in the American literary tradition. The Outlook articles dealt with Poe, Longfellow, Dickinson, Hawthorne, and Emerson in addition to Melville. Waldo Frank included Emerson, Poe, and Thoreau with Whitman as part of "the mystic tradition." It was this tradition, he felt, including "such works as 'Walden,' 'Leaves of Grass,' 'Eureka,' 'Moby Dick' [which form] the text of an American tradition."⁸ Mumford included Thoreau, Emerson, Hawthorne and Melville in the Golden Day.

It did not take long for Melville to be included among the first rank of American writers. In 1927, Fred Lewis Pattee observed: "overnight Melville became a classic, rated by the younger critics as the peer of Whitman and Mark Twain, and the superior of Poe." By the late 1920s, Melville was firmly ensconced with Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne and Poe as the great nineteenth-century American writers. Dickinson's reputation had not yet been fully realized; Longfellow's was on the decline despite Howard Mumford Jones' strident defense of him in The Outlook. Waldo Frank argued that those members of the "practical tradition"--Thomas Paine, Irving, Cooper, Nathaniel P. Wil-

lis, Simms, and the New England poets, Longfellow, Lowell, and Holmes--were rightfully being ignored.

Invariably the argument for reevaluating particular writers was that they had been misunderstood by their own times, and modern readers had allowed faulty judgments to rest unchallenged. In The Outlook series, for example, Malcolm Cowley argued that Poe's accomplishments were not respected because critics considered his life sordid and seedy and imputed similar deficiencies to his art. Poe's reputation was still suffering from Rufus Griswold's damning (and libelous) biography. Dickinson was misread, according to Alan Tate, because readers were trying to unlock the secrets of her life rather than recognizing the value of her art. Robert E. Spiller saw in Hawthorne a profound critic of American culture and a pioneering psychological novelist rather than the pleasant spinner of tales that Hawthorne's contemporaries admired. Sherlock B. Gass argued that despite Emerson's optimism, he was still a valuable writer because he remained a voice of conscience who spoke for the sanctity of the common man in the face of oppressive modern life. And in the most radical defense of the group, Howard Mumford Jones defended Longfellow against the growing opinion, perhaps best expressed by Brooks, that Longfellow "is to poetry, in large measure, what the barrel-organ is to music."⁹ Jones argued that Longfellow's well known poems should be thrown out, that the Longfellow nobody reads was a thinker, a pessimist, a true poet--a portrait that the

lesser known work would paint. All of these writers were represented as critics of American culture, as rebels in one vein or another, who had been defused or misunderstood by a pragmatic, philistine society.

The article on Melville by Mathew Josephson which ended this series followed the others in arguing that the current image of Melville was faulty, that he was a victim of misrepresentation at the hands of his contemporaries. But there was a major difference between Josephson's approach and that of the other critics. The other articles in the Outlook series invariably decried biographical criticism as the source of distorted judgments about the authors. But Josephson's article, like virtually every other study of Melville between 1919 and 1929, had at its core the attempt to explain Melville's life. The three books about Melville written during this time--Raymond Weaver's Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic, John Freeman's Herman Melville, and Lewis Mumford's Herman Melville--were all critical biographies.¹⁰ Most of the Revival critics would have agreed with Mumford's justification for approaching Melville in this way: "in a great degree," Mumford wrote, "Herman Melville's life and work were one. A biography of Melville implies criticism; and no final criticism of his work is possible that does not bring an understanding of his personal development."¹¹ Very little was known about the details of Melville's life. The general outline of his career--early fame as the man who lived among the cannibals, a slowly developing alienation from the reading public, the final,

bitter denunciations, and the "obscure tragedy" of passing "half his life in silence as a clerk in the customs office" (as Mathew Josephson described Melville's final years)--left enormous factual gaps which could only be filled by reading his books as autobiography.¹² The image of Melville that the Revival critics drew made of him the kind of writer-as-hero that others, except for Whitman, could not be. Too much was known of Poe, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Longfellow, The Outlook articles argued. Each new biographical detail deflated the public image of these writers. But Melville's life fascinated his admirers because it seemed as large as his books, as dramatic as the hunt for the White Whale. Reading Typee, Omoo, Redburn, White-Jacket, and Pierre as factual accounts of Melville's life allowed Weaver to make of him a tremendous man of action. Freeman warned against reading Pierre as strict autobiography; nonetheless he too relied on the books to detail Melville's life. And Mumford saw in Melville's books spiritual as well as literal autobiography.

The image of Melville that emerged during the Revival was similar to the image of Enceladus in Pierre--a Titan buried half in the ground, hurling insults at the sky. Fred Lewis Pattee's exuberant description of Melville epitomized the other portraits: "all of Melville's major characters are Byronic, Titans in rebellion, supermen who flaunt their defiance in the face of the Almighty. . . . He was Nietzschean when Nietzsche was but a schoolboy. . . . He him-

self was a superman. In all his characters we see only Melville." The critics who were involved in the general reassessment were rebelling against American life; in Melville they created a kindred spirit. Of course, such a heroic rebel was drawn for a purpose.

The rebel needs an authority to rebel against, and the Revival critics found that authority in all of American civilization. "His life," Vernon L. Parrington wrote in his influential five-volume Main Currents in American Thought, "even more than Emerson's--laid upon America, was a yardstick to measure the shortcomings of a professed civilization."¹³ Melville's parents Mumford characterized as "monsters"; Weaver assumed that Mrs. Glendinning was an accurate portrait of Melville's mother. Fred Lewis Pattee described Melville's domestic life in telling terms:

[Melville was] married to . . . Elizabeth Shaw of the Boston aristocracy, dainty, conventional, and ingrained to helplessness with New England taboos. . . . Failure, poverty among the New England rocks, supported at length by the wife's father. A jungle lion chained by the leg, burning out his soul in rage, powerless save for his roar.¹⁴

As Pattee's assessment indicates, the Revival critics did not consider Melville's family to be the primary authority against which Melville rebelled; rather, the family was symptomatic of the cold, pragmatic, smug, and shallow society in which Melville became a writer.

That society, according to Mumford, was a provincial one before the Civil War. It found its "sources and motives within its own region" and achieved "a certain balance and continuity by a restricted development." America rested in

a superstructure of comfort and complacency, a leathery optimism, a cast-iron self-righteousness, according to Mumford. It was smug and shallow according to Weaver, coldly moral and crudely practical according to Parrington. Mumford had little good to say about provincial New York--the city was the counterfeit of a great metropolis, filled with a literati that "were a slick and shallow parcel of journalists with a few scholars . . . as makeweight."¹⁵ But he agreed with Pattee that the most stifling influence on American society was the New England intellectual tradition.

Van Wyck Brooks, as early as 1915, had laid the blame for America's intellectual and spiritual shortcomings on the Puritan Theocracy which was for him "the all-influential fact in the history of the American mind." Puritanism could find no middle ground to mediate between eternal and practical issues, between Highbrow and Lowbrow, and this abyss between idea and practice was at the center of America's spiritual failings. American society was similarly divided, Brooks argued:

we have in America two publics, the cultivated public and the business public, the public of theory and the public of activity, the public that reads Maeterlink and the public that accumulates money: the one largely feminine, the other largely masculine. . . . They do not mitigate one another;--they are, in biological phrase, infertile with one another.¹⁶

Just such a division was apparent in readership during Melville's writing career, and Brooks found the rift to be the pervasive characteristic of American life. Other critics did not treat New England quite as harshly as did

Brooks, Mumford, or Pattee, but even the most sympathetic reached the same conclusion about the stifling effect of the Puritan tradition. Mathew Josephson, for example, argued that Melville's peers "were not purely stupid and insensitive" as other critics had charged. They were simply in a less developed stage of society. "In the conquering and building-stage of a nation there is generally little place for the reflective spirit that breeds works of art," he argued. "When this spirit does exist, in the minds of the directing class, it tends to prudence and conformity. This was the temper of the most talented New Englanders."¹⁷

Prudence and conformity, comfort and complacency may have been the American temper in the 1850s, but it was not Melville's. He had inherited "the smooth creed of a respectable Christianity, with its neat schemes of rewards and punishments and its nonsense about the beneficence of the universe toward mankind," according to Carl Van Doren, but Melville rejected the inheritance.¹⁸ Most critics portrayed Melville as being beyond the influence of New England. Van Wyck Brooks wrote in 1923 that Melville's concern for both thought and action marked "the great gulf that separates him as it separates Whitman from the New England mind."¹⁹ Pattee argued that Melville was able to blend the Puritan and cosmopolitan heritage and thus free himself from both. With very few exceptions, he noted, American classics were "extra-New England in origin," and were damned by prudent New Englanders for flouting "the old order." Melville was a primary flouter.²⁰

Many critics blamed Melville's disillusionment and silence on another component of the New England intellectual tradition. Carl Van Doren argued that, like many other young men of his day, Melville "got his vitalizing touch from transcendentalism." Like "the smooth creed of a respectable Christianity," transcendentalism had taught him "that the cosmos had a meaning, and that the meaning was simple and good, [but] his experience denied that conclusion." Parrington argued similarly that Melville's profound pessimism was "the natural end and outcome of his transcendental speculations once those speculations had come into intimate contact with life."²¹ These critics saw in transcendentalism the same radical fault that Brooks had found in Puritanism--thought and action, idea and life were irreconcilable.

The reason for the shifting reputations of various writers during the 1920s becomes clearer when this attitude toward the New England intellectual tradition is considered. The fireside poets, Whittier, Longfellow, Lowell, and their New York counterparts, Bryant and Irving, represented the complacent, prudent tradition against which these critics were rebelling. Their reputations were devalued. Dickinson, Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne escaped censure to the extent that they could be portrayed as critics of that tradition. Whitman, Poe, and Melville had the advantage of being extra-New England, and thus outside the range of its influence. Alternatively, for those critics during the

1920s who did not appreciate Mardi, Pierre, or The Confidence-Man the cause of Melville's alleged failure was easy to pinpoint. Hoyt H. Hudson said of those books: "Melville does not realize, it seems, that he was spoiling a good writer to make a philosophaster. Speculation, of course, was in the air: perhaps we should say that the deterioration of Melville is one of the prices American literature has paid for transcendentalism."²² To the extent that Melville had been infected by New England's intellectual tradition, he was a failure.

The Revival critics painted Melville as a bold iconoclast attacking a sterile intellectual and religious tradition, who fell victim to that tradition because he could get no hearing. He had, in Brooks' words, suffocated; he was "a mighty genius in a social vacuum." Melville as rebel was very appealing to a generation also in cultural rebellion. The traditions of American culture were profoundly challenged by World War I.²³ Percy H. Boynton considered the renewed interest in Melville to be a direct result of this challenge. "Tradition had been so upset and trampled under in the years just past," he wrote, "that a challenger of tradition and an inquirer into the ways of God and man found hearers." The tradition being repudiated in literature was, according to Weaver, the cherishing of literature "for its embodiment of Queen Victoria's fireside qualities." Any critic who found those qualities dominant in America during the 1850s could reach only one conclusion about Melville's relation to his time, and Fred Lewis Pattee drew it most

forcefully: Melville "was a genius born into a perverse generation which stoned him and left him for dead: a genius born two generations too soon."²⁴

It was not only the American culture of the 1850s with which the Revival critics were finding fault. In fact, Mumford thought that for all its faults, ante-bellum America was a watershed period in the development of a culturally rich society compared with the spiritual wasteland that was a precipitate of the Civil War. He argued that if pre-Civil War society was provincial, post-Civil War America was hollow and chaotic. The defining characteristic of post-bellum America, he felt, was "the failure to achieve form." In an elaboration strikingly reminiscent of Henry Adams, Mumford argued: "where there is form and culture, there is truly conservation of energy through the arts: where there is only energy without end or form, the mechanism may be speeded up indefinitely without increasing anything except the waste and lost motion."²⁵ Van Wyck Brooks had painted the same image of formlessness in his metaphorical description of America as a vast Sargasso Sea, "an unchecked, uncharted, unorganized vitality like that of the first chaos."²⁶ This new, formless culture was materialistic, aimless, with grand facades that concealed its eternal emptiness. Its ultimate outcome, these critics argued, was World War I.

In this culture an American literary tradition was invisible. English critics recognized as much when they repeatedly chided America for not recognizing its great

writers, particularly Melville and Whitman. D. H. Lawrence, in his pivotal 1923 book, Studies in Classic American Literature, challenged Americans to "let the precious cat out of the bag"; to reexamine their literary heritage and uncover the truly American works in it. John Freeman was harsher:

from 1850 . . . to 1925, when the present commentary is published, America has gone like Jews a-whoring after strange gods, worshipping French idols, Japanese and Chinese idols, even bowing before English idols; forgetting America in a desire to become European or Asiatic.²⁷

And some Americans agreed with Freeman's charge. Weaver, for example, charged his fellow citizens with "being before all the world--as, assuredly, we sometimes are--in recognizing our own merit where it is contestable, and in neglecting it where it is not."²⁸ The influence of foreign books and foreign opinion on American literature was as much of a problem during the 1920s as it was during the 1840s and 50s, it would seem.

Percy Boynton contended that there were two reasons why Americans neglected their literature: they were timidly self-conscious as a people, and those who had the power to bring a national literature to the public were not doing so. Americans, he argued, always looked to Europe for an intellectual and literary tradition because they felt that the home product was inadequate. But it was inadequate, Boynton contended, only because it was not documented or readily available. The central, if obvious, difference between Young America's and the 1920s critics' searches for a national literature was that the former group had to create

one, while the latter had to identify one. The responsibility of bringing a national literature before the public had shifted from the publishers during the 1850s to the colleges in the 1920s. "Not one eminent university man in this country today has devoted his whole career to studying or teaching the literary history of America," Boynton noted, and because he considered the educational system, particularly the colleges, to be the prime disseminators of opinion to the masses, the state of American literature was woe-ful.²⁹

It was vital that this neglect be addressed, according to Boynton, because America had

reached the point where, as a community, we must at last be able to think clearly in terms of international relations, and where, as a first step toward any clarity of thought, we must have some clear and unified approximation, not merely as to our 'manifest destiny,' but as to what we are and what we should be.

A national identity had to be developed, he argued, as the "first essential of a national life," and the information necessary for that development was imbedded in the national literature.³⁰

Boynton's argument for the necessity of a national literature echoes Young America's--both felt that the development of a national identity was incumbent upon the sense of a national literature--and Boynton, like Mathews and Simms, ran directly into the problem of identifying and nurturing an audience for that literature. Here the two arguments diverged. "There is no use pretending that either the theory of equality or the experience of a century and a

half of democracy has developed any high level of aesthetics in America," Boynton said. The "unintellectual masses" still did not read "good books," and the effort to resuscitate a national literature would hold no interest for them. He was not arguing for the creation and elevation of a large, patriotic reading public, as Young America had. Instead he contended that, for the first time in America, a "best-reader class" had developed that was large enough to "justify publication of good books" and encourage "new editions of neglected authors." Most Americans did not read or think, but there was "an increasing little minority of people who are wondering about themselves and the circumstances in which they are living, and who care to read such books as may throw light on the mystery."³¹

Boynton was not alone in willingly conceding popular literature to the masses and carving out a readership for a serious national literature that was self-consciously elitist. Melville's difficulty, his appeal to the sophisticated reader, was one of his strengths. His books, many critics noted, were not for everyone. "Only a fairly heroic reader can take this voyage," said Carl Van Doren of Moby-Dick. The audience had to be willing to abandon its preconceptions about art and life to enjoy Melville's masterpiece, according to Weaver. Pierre "is no book for idle readers," wrote E. L. Grant Watson. "To understand it is an ordeal; and appreciating its strange, spiritual beauty, we should be purged of valuations."³² The revival critics identified an audience that possessed those qualities that Melville had

searched for his whole career.

In identifying a coherent tradition of American literature which spoke to the cultural malaise that Brooks, Mumford, and others identified, the critics who were reassessing the canon did not have to appeal to popular taste because popular taste was the most obvious symptom of the malaise. At the heart of the best of American literature the rebellious critics found a spirit of social analysis very much like their own. Hawthorne shared the modern temperament as a critic of Puritanism and as a pioneer explorer of the American psyche; Emerson championed the individual against the masses; Thoreau hated materialism in all its guises. But only Whitman and Melville offered something more--a response to the empty, formless world in which Brooks, Mumford, Frank, Weaver, and many others found themselves.³³

Mumford put the case most eloquently for Melville. Moby-Dick, which virtually every Revival critic identified as Melville's masterpiece, was vital to America in the 1920s, Mumford argued, because it was

a challenge and affront to all the habits of mind that typically prevailed in the nineteenth century, and still remain almost unabated, among us: it comes out of a different world, and presupposes, for its acceptance, a more integrated life and consciousness than we have known or experienced.³⁴

America in the 1920s, as we have seen, was characterized by unresolvable dualities: "Highbrow" and "Lowbrow"; a "practical" and a "mystical" intellectual tradition; a class of "best-readers" and the "unintellectual masses"; a mammonish

world and an imaginative one. But Moby-Dick (and Leaves of Grass) managed to assimilate these opposites. Melville's book brought together "the two dissevered halves of the modern world and the modern self--its positive, practical, scientific, externalized self, bent on conquest and knowledge, and its imaginative, ideal half, bent on the transportation of conflict into art, and power into humanity." Melville and Whitman spoke to modern America, according to Mumford, because they show how life can be made significant and durable. Out of the chaotic welter of experiences they found form and meaning--"Whitman with his cosmic faith and Melville with his cosmic doubt."³⁵

We have inherited much from the Melville Revival and the larger reassessment of American literature that occurred during the 1920s. Most obviously, Melville's place has been secured in the canon of American literature and his most famous book has penetrated the American consciousness. Melville's first three novels formed the first volume of the new Library of America series which is our country's latest attempt to bring a national literature before the public. And it is my hunch that Moby-Dick is lampooned more often than any other American book in cartoons and comic strips. Current anthologies of American literature have left the canon as drawn by the critics of the 1920s essentially untouched. We still consider Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville to be our major nineteenth-century authors. Minority and women writers are finally

finding their way into our literary tradition, but they are not supplanting the major writers. Rather, they are standing alongside Melville, Whitman, and the rest, being honored (as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Kate Chopin, and Charles W. Chestnutt have been) as rebels opposing the same patriarchal, practical, material tradition that their better known contemporaries criticised. We hear echoes of the argument that art is the forming, energizing activity of a rich and healthy culture in one strain of current criticism typified by John Gardner's On Moral Fiction. Perhaps most important, we owe a sense of our own national heritage and literary tradition to the critics of the 1920s. They instituted the study of American literature as a serious endeavor fit for college and university curriculums and provided a context within which such a pursuit had meaning. Some may quibble over the value of taking the idea of a national literature out of the public realm and making it the matter of an intellectual tradition, but given the readers that such a system has brought to Melville, I think he would hardly have objected.

NOTES

APPENDIX

¹Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., "Herman Melville," New York Review 1 (Aug. 9, 1919), in Hershel Parker, The Recognition of Herman Melville, p. 156.

²For accounts of Melville's reputation between 1891 and 1919 see O. W. Riegel, "The Anatomy of Melville's Fame," American Literature, 3 (May, 1931), 195-203; V. L. O. Chittick, "The Way Back to Melville: Sea Chart of a Literary Revival," Southwest Review, 40 (Summer, 1955) 238-248; Michael P. Zimmerman, "Herman Melville in the 1920s: A Study in the Origins of the Melville Revival, With an Annotated Bibliography," Diss. Columbia University, 1963, pp. 1-25; and Merton M. Sealts, The Early Lives of Melville (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974). Sealts reprints articles by J. E. A. Smith, Titus Munson Coan, and Arthur Stedman. See also Henry S. Salt, "Marquesan Melville," The Gentleman's Magazine, (March, 1892), pp. 248-257; W. Clark Russell, "A Claim for American Literature," The North American Review, (Feb., 1892), pp. 138-149; Archibald MacMechan, "The Best Sea Story Ever Written," Queen's Quarterly (Oct., 1899), pp. 120-130, as examples of early, admiring articles.

³Raymond M. Weaver, "The Centennial of Herman Melville," The Nation, (Aug. 2, 1919), pp. 145-146; F. C. Owlett, "Herman Melville (1819-1891): A Centenary Tribute," The Bookman (Aug., 1919), pp. 164-167.

⁴This number is derived from a count of the editions listed in The National Union Catalogues.

⁵The six articles were Malcolm Cowley, "The Edgar Allan Poe Tradition," (July 25, 1928), pp. 497-499, 511; Howard Mumford Jones, "The Longfellow Nobody Knows," (Aug. 8, 1928), pp. 577-579, 586; Alan Tate, "Emily Dickinson," (Aug. 15, 1928), pp. 621-623; Robert E. Spiller, "The Mind and Art of Nathaniel Hawthorne," (Aug. 22, 1928), pp. 650-652, 676, 678; Sherlock B. Gass, "Emerson and the Forgotten Man," (Sept. 5, 1928), pp. 729-731, 756-758; Mathew Josephson, "The Transfiguration of Herman Melville," (Sept. 19, 1928), pp. 809-811, 832, 836.

⁶Waldo Frank, The Rediscovery of America: An Introduction to a Philosophy of American Life (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 317. In "Appendix A" of this book Frank provides a slanted but nonetheless very useful overview of trends in American criticism between 1909 and 1929. Although he aligns himself with the "Romantic Cri-

tics" like Brooks, he does represent other schools fairly.

⁷Van Wyck Brooks, "America's Coming of Age," in Three Essays on America (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1970), p. 84; Lewis Mumford, The Golden Day: A Study in American Experience and Culture (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926), pp. 85-156.

⁸Frank, p. 221.

⁹Brooks, p. 43.

¹⁰Raymond M. Weaver, Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic (New York: George H. Doran, 1921); John Freeman, Herman Melville (London: MacMillan and Co., 1926); Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929). O. W. Riegel observed in his 1931 article: "the important point is that the new interest in Melville is not so much belletristic as biographical, and it is the biographical interest that is responsible for the gradual reclamation of the literary 'failures'," (p. 200).

¹¹Mumford, Herman Melville, p.4.

¹²Mathew Josephson, Portrait of the Artist as American (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1930), p. xxi. See Robert Milder, "Melville and His Biographers," ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance 22 (1976) 169-182; and especially Zimmerman for analyses of the three books written during the 1920s.

¹³Vernon Lewis Parrington, "Herman Melville: Pessimist," in The Romantic Revolution in America, Vol. II of Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1927), p. 266.

¹⁴Mumford, Herman Melville, p. 15; Weaver, Herman Melville, p. 61; Fred Lewis Pattee, "Herman Melville," American Mercury, 10 (Jan., 1927), 38.

¹⁵Mumford, Herman Melville, pp. 15, 79.

¹⁶Brooks, "America's Coming of Age," pp. 18, 78-79.

¹⁷Josephson, "The Transfiguration of Herman Melville," p. 809.

¹⁸Carl Van Doren, "Lucifer from Nantucket: An Introduction to 'Moby Dick,'" Century Magazine 110 (Aug. 1925), 499. Parker, in The Recognition of Herman Melville, p. ix, credits Van Doren with beginning the Revival in 1917 with his essay on Melville in the Cambridge History of American Literature, ed. William P. Trent, et al. (New York: G. P. Putnam, Sons, 1917), and notes that Van Doren solicited

Raymond Weaver's article on Melville's centennial and, as Weaver's mentor at Columbia, stimulated his research for the first Melville biography. See also Zimmerman, pp. 23-25.

¹⁹Van Wyck Brooks, "A Reviewer's Notebook," The Freeman 6 (Feb., 14, 1923) 551.

²⁰Pattee, pp. 34-36.

²¹Van Doren, p. 499; Parrington, p. 264.

²²Hoyt H. Hudson, "The Mystery of Herman Melville," The Freeman 3 (April 27, 1921), p. 157. Carl Van Vechten in his 1921 essay "The Later Work of Herman Melville," in Excavations: A Book of Advocacies (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), p. 87, defended The Confidence-Man as "the great transcendental satire," implying again that Melville's success could be measured in terms of his distance from New England.

²³For the effects of World War I on the intellectual temper of the 1920s, see Frederick J. Hoffman, The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade (New York: The Free Press, 1962), pp. 67-107, et passim; and Malcolm Cowley, Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s (New York: Penguin Books, 1951).

²⁴Percy H. Boynton, "Herman Melville," in More Contemporary Americans (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), p. 49; Weaver, Herman Melville, p. 22; Pattee, p. 43.

²⁵Mumford, Herman Melville, pp. 292-294.

²⁶Brooks, "America's Coming of Age," p. 100.

²⁷D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p.3; Freeman, p. 154.

²⁸Weaver, Herman Melville, p. 22.

²⁹Percy H. Boynton, "Neglect of American Literature," in Some Contemporary Americans: The Personal Equation in Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), pp. 1-15.

³⁰Boynton, "Neglect of American Literature," p. 10.

³¹Percy H. Boynton, "The Public and the Reading Public," in More Contemporary Americans, pp. 119-135.

³²Van Doren, p. 501; Weaver, "The Centennial of Herman Melville," p. 146; E. L. Grant Watson, "Melville's Pierre," The New England Quarterly 3 (April, 1930), 216.

³³See, for example, Harold E. Stearns, ed. Civilization

in the United States: An Inquiry by Thirty Americans (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922). Stearns summarized the three major contentions that arose from these essays: first, there is a sharp dichotomy between preaching and practice in almost every branch of American life; second, American civilization is not Anglo-Saxon and cannot continue to consider itself to be an English colony; third, America is suffering from an aesthetic and emotional starvation. Each of these points also found a place in the arguments of Melville's reviewers.

³⁴Mumford, Herman Melville, p. 180.

³⁵Mumford, Herman Melville, pp. 193, 364.

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