

VERSIONS OF CONFINEMENT

MELVILLE'S BODIES AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONQUEST

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores aspects of Melville's presentation of both the whale and the human bodies in *Moby-Dick* and human bodies in other important novels. It argues that Melville uses his presentation of bodies to explore some of the versions of confinement those bodies experience, and by doing so, analyses the psychology which subtends that confinement. Throughout Melville's works bodies are confined, both within literal spatial limits and by the psychology which creates and/or accepts these spatial limits.

The thesis argues that perhaps the most important version of bodily confinement Melville addresses is the impulse to conquer bodies, both that of the other and one's own. It adopts a largely psychoanalytic approach to interpreting bodies and their impulse to conquer, so that the body is seen to figure both in its actions and its external appearance the operations of the inner psyche.

The figure of the body is equally prevalent in Melville's exploration of nationalist conquest, where, as with Manifest Destiny and antebellum expansionism, the psychological and physical lack experienced by characters can be read as motivating factors in the ideology of conquest. A final important strand of the thesis is its argument in favour of a gradual shift in Melville's interpretation of the value and possibility of genuine communion between human beings and between humans and the whale. One may read *Typee* as an attempt by Melville to explore the possibility of a this-worldly utopia in which human beings can return to a version of primitive interconnectedness.

This exploration may be seen to be extended in *Moby-Dick*, particularly in Ishmael's attempts to find communion with others and in some moments of encounter with the whales. The thesis uses phenomenology as a theory to interpret what Melville is trying to suggest in these moments of encounter. However, it argues, finally, that such encounter, or 'intersubjectivity' is eventually jettisoned, especially in the works after *Moby-Dick*. By the end of Melville's life and work, any hope of an intersubjective utopia he may have harboured as a younger man have been removed in favour of a refusal actually to assert any final 'truth' about social, political or even religious experience. Billy Budd, his last body, is hanged, and his final word is silence.

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PREFACE

This work began some years ago, spurred by a kind of blind instinct for what Melville might have to say to the present world in general and me in particular, rather than any specific expectation or knowledge of what he does say. The initial task I set myself was the somewhat amorphous one of exploring the ‘image of the body’ as Melville presented it. However, the more I read and wrote the more it became obvious that most of Melville’s bodies are in one way

or another confined, and in the process of trying to escape their confinement, endeavour to conquer other bodies, and so conquer and 'reconfine' themselves in the process. So the work became one which explores confined bodies and their psychology.

At the end of it all it does seem to me that Melville has something to say to the present world about its confinement of bodies and its urge to conquer what it finds in one way or another offensive. He turns his cutting spade to what he deems the world's 'false brow', and is not chary of striking out where necessary. But maybe the most important thing he has to say is what he leaves unsaid. He does not presume fully to understand what lies behind the brow and does not assume that he has to. And inasmuch as he refrains from didacticism, spends more time exploring the ambiguities of experience than its certainties, and falls eventually into a kind of silence at the end of *Billy Budd*, it seems about right to conclude that it would be wrong to read moral certitude in most of his work. What he may well leave us with is the lesson never to ignore the bodies which populate our world, and which dominate his novels. They are the repositories of all human and 'other' experience, and while all the physical and intellectual dissection possible cannot fully elucidate their secrets, their sublime awe and terror, beauty and horror, remain among the few certainties left by which to measure meaning. 'Read it, if you can!'

I have, in doing this work, come to owe a great debt to many people. I am very grateful to my colleagues at Vista University English Department, who encouraged me, gave me leave when I most needed it, and took up some of my teaching. The university also provided research funding which enabled important work to be done. My supervisor, Professor Paul Walters was, as always, unstintingly gracious and encouraging. Two friends and colleagues must be specially mentioned. Dr Beth Jeffery read an earlier draft of the work and offered invaluable comments. Dr Dan Wylie, in his inimitable way, took on the hefty task of using his own razor sharp cutting spade on a later draft. His acuity has done much to shape the first part of the thesis. Both Beth and Dan have my deepest gratitude. My parents gave me much encouragement too, from earlier than even I can remember. But last and most important I must thank my family for their long suffering patience. Sheena listened, and listened, and listened and never (quite) tired. Much of what may be insightful or valuable in this work comes from her. Shari reminded me, lovingly and gently, that Melville is not very important when you're sixteen. And Ianthe, with the ingenuous enquiring mind of the five year old, wondered what I could possibly be so busy doing. She thought the monster was, sort of, interesting, but expressed a distinct preference for dragons and dinosaurs. To them, with much love, this work is dedicated.

INTRODUCTION

‘FAST FISH AND LOOSE FISH’: INTERPRETING MELVILLE’S BODIES

‘From this the poem springs: that we live in a place
That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves
And hard it is in spite of blazoned days.’

Wallace Stevens, *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*.

In the chapter of *Moby-Dick* entitled ‘Fast Fish and Loose Fish’ Ishmael the narrator distinguishes between two kinds of fish, those which have been made ‘fast’ by the captor’s harpoon, and those which still remain ‘loose’ for the taking by other predators. ‘A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it’, and ‘A Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it’, he says (308).¹ A number of things are blended in this brief commentary. There is the literal capture and confinement of the fish. But there is also the question of ownership of what is captured. In other words, there is the moral issue of rights to what seems freely available. Ishmael expands on this latter question when he asks, ‘What was America in 1492 but a Loose-Fish?... What are the Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World but Loose-Fish?’ (310) Ownership is, to him, a moral issue which is closely related to colonialism and the conquest, not only of fish, but of whole continents. Moreover, not only is the conquest that of continents, it may also be conquest of Rights and Liberties too.

¹ All references to *Moby-Dick* are taken from the Norton Critical Edition, edited by Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford (2002).

Yet having provided these apparently neat definitions of 'Fast' and 'Loose', Melville plays 'fast and loose' with us by undermining himself. He questions the nature of all definition in the first place. 'But what plays mischief with this masterly code is the admirable brevity of it, which necessitates a vast volume of commentaries to expound it' (308). No definition is actually 'fast'. His own 'vast volume', mirroring the 'vast fish' which is its subject, will not provide a final 'masterly code' by which to interpret that subject. This suggests that we are left with yet another dimension of 'Fast' and 'Loose', that of defining not only the morality of ownership, or the nature of definition itself, but also the nature of Being in its wider sense. Can Being, the Fish in this case, be 'known' via the 'masterly code' used to interpret it? And since this same 'code' is used to determine ownership and results from conquest of the Fish, what is the relation between the 'code' and the Fish's confinement?

In this short chapter Melville sets out, a little tongue-in-cheek, the essential concerns of most of his fiction, from *Typee* through to *Billy Budd*. Most of his novels explore the relation between bodies, the knowledge of bodies, their confinement to and by that knowledge, and the discourses which go to support such knowledge. Throughout his work Melville places bodies before us, in our faces, as it were, and demands that we interpret them. Most often those bodies are in one way or another confined, either literally by the harpoon, the ship, the prison, and the gibbet, or figuratively by the ideology that defines their meaning and value in their world. They are either conquered or conquering bodies, or, in many cases, both simultaneously. And the conquest may be both literal and figurative too. They suffer physical, but also intellectual and ideological dismemberment.

The aim of this thesis is to explore these versions of confinement, and the psychology of conquest which Melville sees as so integral to it. While numerous scholars have worked on Melville's presentation of bodies, the nature of their confinement and its relation to conquest has thus far been explored only tangentially. Moreover, few have considered directly the relation of confined bodies to psychology, which, I will argue, is one of Melville's primary concerns. Confined bodies is itself a leviathanic domain of exploration, so the present study will limit itself to a few important aspects of it.

The first, and most obvious, is the socio-political milieu in which Melville places his bodies. Human and whale bodies are, in most of the novels, 'pinned', as-it-were by the social world in which they exist, and by the roles they are forced to play in that world. One cannot read Melville's interpretations of his bodies without tracking their progress through the social

world they inhabit, and by implication, Melville's commentary on that world. Even here, however, one must cut one's study down in order not to become lost in unending labyrinths. So the present study will focus on one primary aspect of the socio-political; the impulse to conquer and to achieve utopia that threads through both American history and Melville's texts.

The second important theme is the impulse to conquer. By interpreting that impulse through its psychology, I hope in this study to add to an already substantial body of criticism² which has explored Melville's depictions of family, both personal and national. For it is the Oedipal complex which governs the actions of many Melville characters in their quest to conquer. While criticism has been consistently aware of this thread, it has not related it to Melville's depiction of bodies, and the relation between physical and psychological experience. Throughout his work he presents bodies which are in one way or another lacking, physically and/or mentally, and which use that sense of lack as a drive towards a greater fulfilment, the very drive which spurs conquest. Confined by lack, bodies seek to conquer in Melville. Being confined, often to unresolved Oedipal desires, causes certain psychological phenomena to rise to the fore: aggression and abjection, like Ahab's, hysteria like Pierre's and Isabel's, catatonic rebellion against social pressures, like Bartleby's, and acceptance of it, like Billy Budd's, to mention just a few.

The third important aspect of bodily confinement is its own metaphorical nature. Melville may be seen as a precursor to post-structuralism in the sense that he is aware of and examines in detail the relation between bodies and signs, and finds that relation to be both freeing and confining. The chapter upon chapter of cetology in *Moby-Dick* may be read as his examination not only of the methods of nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific practice, but also of the nature of linguistic 'fixing' of the body itself. The bodies carry meaning, 'signs', imposed upon them by culture. Those meanings may, and often do, create a degree of identic stability. But they may, and in Melville more often do, create a sense of confinement from which the individual seeks to escape. Melville's lifelong interest and exploration revolves around whether the individual could, in fact, escape the sign or signs which had defined him, her or it.

² Most notable among these are Simpson (1982), Rogin (1983), Duban (1983), Jehlen (1986), Girgus (1990), and Wiesenthal (1997), all of whom assume psychoanalytic approaches to the text, even if some, like Rogin, do not overtly strictly apply such a reading.

This study situates itself in the tradition of Melville scholarship about the body. That tradition has explored each of the three above aspects in varying and very fruitful ways. Seminal within it is the work of particular scholars. Sharon Cameron's *The Corporeal Self* (1981) provided, in many respects, the foundation for later body studies in Melville. Showing that most scholarship had hitherto interpreted *Moby-Dick* to be a book about hermeneutics, while masking that interest in an apparent emphasis on the body, Cameron explored Melville's presentation of bodies as versions of identity. The novel is, in her reading, an allegory of identity, but one which is largely concerned with the individual, and with the relation between identity and epistemology. Her focus on the allegorical meaning of bodies is an attempt to show how Melville 'literalizes questions about identity'. 'Bodies are incomplete' in *Moby-Dick*, she suggests, because they suffer the same dualism of body and soul which is central to western society and philosophy. To deal with Melville's bodies, then, is to deal with this philosophy. The study that follows will attempt to do just this, but not from quite the same perspective.

Cameron's work is set in the 'liberalist' tradition of the emphasis on the individual and its relation to what later, largely Feminist, writers on the body would term an 'essentialist' self, assuming that an 'essential' identity can be experienced largely outside the confines of culture. The idea that the self can have an 'essential' being, even if it is divided by Cartesian dualism, permeates much liberalist thought in the time before post-structuralism questioned it. It is difficult now to read the body, in any context, without questioning these earlier assumptions, no matter how fruitful they still are. Richard Blau had explored the meaning of Melville's bodies in similar vein to Cameron just prior to her work. But his work *The Body Impolitic* (1979), while offering similar essentialist readings to Cameron's, pays attention to the body's role in society. The self and its identity is interpreted in relation to 'the surrounding world'. Like Cameron, Blau offers a psychological reading of the body as a figure of the ego, and identity as mostly ego-based. The 'surrounding world' is used in his study, mostly to explore the personal relations between characters, not their economic and political milieu.

'Surrounding world' has taken on a different connotation in more recent studies of the body. The rise of interest in colonialist discourse and its impact on social and individual identity, has led to some important studies which attempt to place Melville's readings of bodies in the context of the discourses of the time. New Historicist in essence, and strongly influenced by post-structuralist and post-colonial discourse analysis, these studies unpick the

nineteenth-century rhetoric of bodies which have such a determinative affect on Melville's own reading. Geoffrey Sanborn's *The Sign of the Cannibal* (1998) and Samuel Otter's *Melville's Anatomies* (1999) are, deservedly, the foremost. Sanborn reads Melville's presentation of, mostly black, bodies in the context of the rhetoric of cannibalism, and finds Melville to be both a child of his time in some respects, participating in the racist assumptions extant, and also in many ways beyond his time. My own argument will, in fact, adopt a position closer to the one Sanborn says he eventually felt forced to eschew, that Melville's readings of race and class are often ironic and that it is through irony that he undoes the assumptions of his day. While Melville may use and be influenced by the stereotypes of his time, like the primitive as innocent or child and the 'savage' as symbol of an 'essentialist' aspect of human nature, his use of these crude stereotypes allows him to undercut the very basis upon which they are erected.

Otter carefully delineates these stereotypical discourses of the pseudo-sciences of phrenology and craniology, applies them to Melville's presentation of whale and human bodies and argues that Melville is largely dismissing their assumptions in favour of a knowledge based on inner being rather than outer form. The assumption of his study is shared by the present one, that Melville is able to distance himself from current racist discourse, but the readings of the body offered here seek to take into account metaphysical aspects of being and its relation to identity, racial or otherwise, which neither Otter nor Sanborn claim as a focus.

By exploring the three primary aspects of bodily confinement as political, psychological and discursive, this study situates itself not just in the context of Melville scholarship, but also that of the burgeoning theoretical debate about the nature and interpretation of bodies as signs, and signs as bodies. Cameron and those like her assume essential selfhood, and Sanborn and Otter take such selfhood's uncertainty for granted and explore the discourses which so deeply determine it, alienating the self from its body and its context. The present study hopes to come to some mid-point between these two, exploring bodily confinement as both the result of discourse and the result of the attempt to find essential and stable identity.

More recent theory of the body focusses largely on the intersection between the three areas of politics, psychology and language. Since Melville is, in so many ways, its precursor, his work can usefully be interpreted through the lenses provided by this theory. The fundamental question which dominates the debate about how to interpret bodies is very similar

to that which dominates Melville's work. It is the question of 'essentialism' mentioned above. Can the body be said to have a meaning of its own, outside that imposed by the inscriptions of culture and the ideology which informs culture? Can we accept the body, and identity, and therefore those forms of knowledge which accompany them, to be something available and 'present' as a transcendental 'truth'? Or are the body, identity and knowledge always subject to the 'absence' that results from being products of culture? The three primary modern thinkers here are, of course, Foucault, Derrida and Lacan. And while most of the argument that follows will use Freudian and Lacanian ideas, those of Foucault, and to some degree, Derrida, are necessarily assumed.

Foucault, by analysing the 'great confinement' of the body in western culture, explores its 'absence', as it were, from itself, an absence which is caused by submission to systems, both physical and intellectual. Bodies are made 'docile' (1977: 135) not only by their literal confinement in prisons, as soldiers and in 'service', which is 'a constant, total, massive, non-analytical, unlimited relation of domination, established in the form of the individual will of the master' (1977: 137), but also controlled by the language used to define them. Definition, or the inscription of meaning by culture becomes the greatest master. Foucault's 'archeology of knowledge', aims, as Major-Poetzl describes it, 'to dispense with "things"' and seeks rather to examine the intellectual or discursive 'space' in which 'the various objects emerge and are transformed'. But his most radical assumption of all, she suggests, is Foucault's intention 'to dispense with the subject and thus to reject all speculation based on the continuity of consciousness or the universality of human nature' (1983: 5). Foucault's great insight, though not exclusive to him, is that the individual is not to be defined in terms of a single, unchangeable and fixed consciousness, but rather in terms of one affected by and affecting the 'master codes' of culture. Following Nietzsche, he reads knowledges about the external world, not as having inherent truth or value, but as markers of power, whose value is determined by the power structures they support. There is no neutral knowledge because all knowledge is the expression of the will to power. If all interpretation is a will to power, then it is essentially self-reflexive. 'The last characteristic of modern hermeneutics is that interpretation has become infinite self-interpretation. Consequently, one no longer asks what the sign signifies, one asks who is speaking; one interprets the interpreter' (1983: 35).

Melville's awareness of the force of 'masterly codes' which determine identity and control bodies signals his intention to unpick those codes in a way not dissimilar from

Foucault. He too, can be read as interpreting the body as a great code of knowledge whose ‘meaning’ resides not in anything inherent to it, but rather in the interpreter. The whale is sliced into ‘leaves’ to be read, but its meaning remains either elusive or confined to the reader’s interpretation, or both. The most powerful conquering force, for both Melville and Foucault, is the force of interpretation itself, and the psychology which underpins it.

That interpretation may itself prevent access to the thing interpreted. Such is the constructionist view of language espoused by Jacques Derrida, and again, Melville can be seen as one of his precursors. While he does not entirely come to the position of linguistic and cultural relativism Derrida does, much of his writing does explore similar questions, with not dissimilar conclusions. Even though the present argument will not focus much on Derrida, an overview of the central aspects of the current debate about the body and its meaning is not complete without some explanation of his theory. If Melville questions Platonic and Kantian understandings of the unified and transcendent self, as the present study will argue he does, then he may be read as sharing with Derrida a sense that there is a fundamental gap between the word and the thing it signifies.

Disavowing the Platonic *eidos*, or the Kantian ‘idea’ of ‘pure reason’ outside interpretation, where the self and its interpretation are ‘unified’, and the result is an experience of transcendental *ousia* of Being, together with its neatly definable *telos*, Derrida proposes a version of interpretation which insists on the arbitrary relation between sign and signified, where no *telos* is possible and no *ousia* is fully knowable. Central to this relation is what he calls ‘différance’, which is the conjunction of the terms ‘difference’ and ‘deferral’. There is a ‘difference’ between signs and their signifieds, as there is between signs and other signs. Without this difference there can be no meaning. At the same time, however, meaning is always ‘deferred’, never absolute or a transcendent ‘truth’, since it depends on ‘difference’. He explains it thus:

On the one hand, [différance] indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility (sic); on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a *spacing* and *temporalizing* that puts off until ‘later’ what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible.... We provisionally give the *différance* to this *sameness* which is not identical: by the silent writing of it’s *a*, it has the desired advantage of referring to differing, *both* as

spacing/temporalizing and as the movement that structures every dissociation (Rivkin and Ryan, 1998: 385).

The 'différance' between words and things which is entrenched in language becomes an expression, and even a cause of the difference between selves and others in the world of identities. Since one concept and one person depends for their meaning on distinction from other concepts and persons, 'difference' is central to every association. In other words, every association, linguistic or personal, depends on a dissociation, which works both spatially and temporally. Similarly, the inability finally to define exact meaning leaves such meaning constantly, even eternally, deferred. The sign is emptied of its absolute transcendental signified, so that there is 'no concept simply present for thought, independent of a relation to language' (1981: 19). In other words, no 'essential' thing or body exists outside the language which defines it.

The result is that Derrida questions 'consciousness as meaning [*vouloire dire*] in self-presence'. 'We thus come to posit presence', he says, '-and, in particular, consciousness, the being-next-to-itself of consciousness - no longer as the absolutely matrilineal form of being but as a "determination" and an "effect". Presence is a determination and effect within a system which is no longer that of presence but that of différance' (1998: 397). Not only is there no 'presence' outside consciousness, but whatever presence there is, is an 'effect', not an essence, based on difference and deferral.

It is not difficult to see how these ideas may be fruitfully applied to Melville's own exploration of the relation between bodies and language. 'Fast' and 'Loose' fish are exactly those which, like Derrida's signs, refuse fixing to particular and transcendent or essentialist meaning. Meaning appears in much of Melville's work to belong to those who presume to 'own' it, however briefly. And if his final 'message' is that no-one really 'owns' meaning at all, and that it is perpetually 'deferred', as is any real sense of a unified self, he is certainly in agreement with Derrida. Melville's refusal to pin meaning and to assert final presence, whether through the conscious or the unconscious, is akin to Derrida's 'différance'.

Foucault and Derrida are useful entry points into Melville's awareness of political discourse and language. Their contemporary Jacques Lacan is an equally fitting entry point into aspects of Melville's study of psychology. Lacan writes in a post-Freudian world in which the individual ego, as Freud understood it, with its suggestion of 'essential' selfhood, is

subtended by culture and no longer fixed. Writing against transcendental 'truth', what he calls 'phallic' truth, just as Foucault and Derrida do, Lacan criticizes the notion of the 'centre', of making any 'centre' the point of view from which to evaluate human Being. For him such a centre suggests a unified ego who directly encounters the world without the filter of language. Language, on the other hand, because it is the product and creator of culture, prevents any non-dialectical encounter, so that there is no individual ego outside language. Knowledge of the thing in itself, be it body or even sexuality, is not possible outside the level of representation. What is taken to be an 'essence', like gender, for example, is merely cultural form, which is given hierarchical status. We never know the body except as a form or figure, he says:

In order to give oneself an image of what is called the world, man conceives it as ... unity of pure form, which represents for him the body. It is from the surface of the body that man took the idea of privileged form. And his first apprehension of the world was the apprehension of his 'semblable'. Then this body, he saw it, he abstracted it, made a sphere out of it: *good form (Scilicet 6/7, 1976: 54)*.

Taking his cue from one of the same places Melville takes his, Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, Lacan understands 'culture' to mean that which structures the desire of the individual to be a part of social forms, and in so doing, splits the individual from itself, in a way similar to the 'split' between the linguistic sign and signified. By handing over one's desire for meaning to culture, the 'subject', as Lacan calls it, is created in relation to the Hegelian master-slave relation, where the subject is slave to Culture, which is itself slave to labour. Culture provides endless deferral of desire by ensuring the subject, whose self is split by having to 'share' work and goals, moves 'from satisfied necessity to satisfied necessity' (McCannell, 1986: 80).

In the same way that Derrida interprets 'différance' as endless deferral of meaning, Lacan interprets the subject, as 'subject' to culture, being one for whom meaning is endlessly deferred, and whose body, site of meaning, is handed over to culture to be interpreted, and so is lost to any fixed 'self'. The 'savage' sleeps when his needs are met, said Rousseau in the *Second Discourse*, but the 'civilized', when his needs are met, finds new desire arising out of the fulfilment of earlier lacks. This happens because of language, which is the link between

social beings, so that shared needs create further desire and a sense of lack. Culture is based on lack, then, as Lacan, Rousseau and Hegel all see it. ‘Signification’, Lacan says in *Ecrits*, ‘proceeds from a deviation of man’s needs from the fact that he speaks, and in the sense that in so far as his needs are subjected to demand, they return to him alienated’. That alienation occurs in ‘the turning into signifying form itself, from the fact that it is from the locus of the Other that its message is emitted’ (1977: 286). Culture becomes the ‘Other’ to which the self gives over its desire, and so is alienated from itself. That alienation leads to a constant search for, and constantly deferred satisfaction of, unified selfhood, or universal meaning.

‘The drive towards unity’, as McCannell (1986: 84) puts it, ‘powers the machinery of culture, its productivity, while denying satisfaction to those desires its productions were supposed to satisfy’. This ‘appears in the form of *eros* and is, of course, for Lacan as well as for Freud, the tragic irony of civilization from the point of view of the inter-human relation, which depends on open recognition of shared desire’. In the Lacanian, and psychoanalytic model generally, the body becomes the site of this encounter with culture and its Otherness, and one may therefore fruitfully examine bodily forms and their confinements as ways of analysing the wider functions of alienating culture, politics and language.

While the work that follows below uses the ideas of the three thinkers so briefly outlined here, and in particular Lacan, it is not the object of the study to claim Melville for a post-structuralist reading. He shares with these thinkers a similar suspicion of all claims to final and universal meaning, to fixing bodies to particular signs and vice-versa. In this sense Foucault, Derrida and Lacan are useful lenses through which to read his analysis of antebellum and even postbellum American culture. For Melville’s bodies are seldom shown exclusive of their political environment, and in so many cases, they are, like Lacanian bodies, both socially and self-alienated. One can read Melville’s works as a lifelong exploration of the nature of that alienation and the attempt to find the same kind of ‘unity’ which post-structuralism, in the forms outlined above, has claimed not to be any longer feasible. This is the drive to conquer, which is as much a drive to conquer the self, Melville says, as it is to conquer the Other. What follows will be an attempt to explore the nature of that confining alienation, and the drive to conquer that results. However, while these forms of alienation are evident from *Typee* through to *Billy Budd*, with the last possibly the most bleak in its rejection of any vision of a future ‘unity’ of being, there nevertheless remains an aspect to Melville which is not, in my view, easily explained even by a Lacanian reading.

While the cultural construction model helps to make sense of much of Melville's presentation of confined bodies, it has little to say about those moments of what might be called 'epiphany' in his texts which seem to allow for, or at least seek to open up, the possibility of a 'unity' which does not include the 'lack' and the desire Lacan speaks of. Such moments are mostly to be found in *Moby-Dick*, though some are assumed too in *Typee*, and certainly explored in *Pierre* and *Billy Budd*. These are those times when the narrators experience a sense of identity outside the cultural categorising which 'overdetermines' them, moments like 'A Squeeze of the Hand' and 'The Grand Armada', or Ishmael and Queequeg's 'marriage', or the temporary 'paradise' of the island of the Typees. Cultural construction theory eschews such epiphanic moments as false assumptions of a unity of being or transcendental 'truth'. The early Melville, I will argue, does not necessarily agree, though the later one generally will. If anything, the early Melville wishes longingly for just such unity of being between people and within the self, and between people and their bodies, or between 'heads and bodies' as he puts it. However, he does not quite believe in its final possibility in a world controlled by the political systems which go to make up what Lacan calls the Symbolic Order, where the 'head' of Order controls the acting and subject body.

One way of reading these moments in Melville, which he often talks of in sacramentalist terms, is through the same lens Derrida and Lacan use, as the one against which they are reacting: the phenomenology of thinkers like Hegel and Heidegger. While Melville may not be a phenomenologist as such, some of these moments of 'intersubjectivity' suggest a similar kind of thinking, and at least one of his influences, apart from Hegel and Feuerbach, may have been Arthur Schopenhauer. In modern times it develops into the existential phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Hegel's effort in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) is to achieve, as Doyle (1995: 55) puts it, a 'science of the *experience* which consciousness goes through'. Seeking to combine reason and feeling, it does not assume objectivity but rather its opposite, as the only means towards rendering an account of reality. The world of phenomena is accessed by an agreed relation between dialectical points of view, one of which will be accepted as the master the other as the slave. It is dialectical because there is always a necessary tension between the two (subjective) viewpoints, each dependant for its being on the other's. As Pinkard (1996: 59) explains about this Hegelian formulation: 'The master is the agent whose subjective point of view, whose own projects, are accepted by the slave as the truth, and the slave therefore becomes a

“being-for-another” in that he accepts his own subjectivity - that what for him is an authoritative reason for belief or action - counts only in terms of how well it contributes to satisfying the master’s desires and projects’. This is hardly different from what will become Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’. Hegel’s idea, not dissimilar from Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Idea* (1818), nevertheless allows for a necessary ‘intersubjectivity’ between master and slave. It is one which assumes what Derrida and Lacan would call an unacceptable notion of ‘presence’ inherent in the thing-in-itself, free from language.

Understanding the ‘thing-in-itself’, (which is Kant’s phrase, adopted by Schopenhauer and later phenomenologists), becomes a subjective agreement between points of view. That agreement, however, will offer an entry-point into knowing phenomena, since in ‘being-for-another’ the self and other, object and subject, find an agreed upon congruity. Schopenhauer, whom Melville read later in life, builds on this. If for Kant the ‘thing-in-itself’ is lost in the mists of uncertain representation, for him the body becomes the object and subject of knowledge, the means by which it is achieved, and that achievement is immediate. Representation can bring the thing-in-itself into being. The body, in Schopenhauer’s thought, is the ‘appearance’ of Will, which is the ‘reality’, but that Will is not a Platonic, Idealistic and otherworldly phenomenon, but rather one of which the body and identity are a part.

Ishmael’s experience of the whale and whaling, I will argue, is inseparable from the whale itself, so that knowledge and representation combine in a way which can be seen as a version of epiphany. His experience of the whale represents for Melville one of the few moments in which epistemology and ontology are combined, as they are in Schopenhauer’s ‘Will’, or in later phenomenology’s ‘intersubjectivity’.

But phenomenology, as so many commentators quickly point out, is not without its own problems, problems which Melville himself had, inevitably, to face and deal with. It can be accused, as Terry Eagleton (1996: 54-90) points out, of ignoring ideology and history. For the return to the subject as the foundation upon which reality is to be read or made, (since by reading one is, in phenomenology, in a sense, ‘making’), is another way of separating mind from body, and both from material history. The Husserlian ‘epoché’ or ‘reduction’ of the external world to what the senses are able to perceive, and the assumption that the perceiving subject and perceived object attain being only in an ‘intersubjective’ modality, insists that it is able to return to the ‘experience’ of the event, or literary work, and reproduce the ‘feeling’ in an unbiased way. It can, in other words, reach ‘essences’. These ‘essences’ are all too similar to

Kant's transcendental ones, discounting ideology, and assuming that the perceiver can act 'innocently'. As Eagleton (1996: 59) describes it: 'To seize these transcendental structures, to penetrate to the very interior of a writer's consciousness, phenomenological criticism tries to achieve complete objectivity and disinterestedness. It must purge itself of its own predilections, plunge itself empathetically into the "world" of the work, and reproduce as exactly and unbiasedly as possible what it finds there.' This criticism is, as he says, idealist, essentialist, and organicist in its looking for 'wholes'.

Despite this very serious objection, one which the later Melville will take more seriously than the earlier, there remains room for an assumption of 'essences' being encountered without the proscription of external definitions. We do not necessarily need to assume that if there is no 'innocent' knowledge, there can be no experience of 'intersubjectivity'. Melville's effort in *Typee* and *Moby-Dick* is exactly to find such a space for human relations. His later works spend more time analysing why and how these very relations break down. In *Moby-Dick* he asks what the 'essence' of whaleness is, and if it can be known outside the perceiver. His insistence on a mystery beyond human knowledge maintains his option for something epiphanic, for if a multitude of perceivers all find different essences, why should they not all be equally valid? Who is it that would presume to impose their history on another, and become an Ahab? The phenomenological reduction can be creative rather than limiting, if it is allowed to be. It need not reduce reality to discursive cultural constructions, only one side of the coin, or assume an absolute knowledge of the thing-in-itself, without first acknowledging that perceiver and perceived cannot be totally separated.

One final aspect of the argument remains to be introduced. Because this work makes the assumption that it is important to read bodies in relation to the political milieu in which they are presented, a particular argument about the wider political aspects of antebellum and postbellum America will be traced. I will suggest that those political and ideological explorations on Melville's part follow a certain trajectory throughout his life, particularly in relation to the family and the nation as a family, the wider 'body'. This runs from exploring the meaning of the search for utopia in the first novel, through to a dystopian vision in the final work. The psychology of conquest is as much about the conquest of land and the building of nationhood, as it is about bodies. Bodies are, in Melville, the sites of such conquest, but the 'sub-text' of their conquest is the wider search for a utopia which can sustain nationalist

energies. Between the impulse to find a utopia, in *Typee* and *Moby-Dick*, and the final experience of dystopia in *Billy Budd*, it is possible to see in Melville a gradual but steady progression away from any of the early hopes of 'intersubjectivity' between beings, either between people or between people and the natural world, and finally even between people and God.

The reading of *Typee* is one which attempts to understand not only how bodies mean in the novel, but also to explore allegorical features of the text as a colonial and anti-colonial novel. As such it suggests that the novel is not to be read only as an allegory of the search for paradise, but also as an allegory of the Fall. Tommo is as much the conquering western as he is the 'innocent' explorer of the paradisaal. Moreover, since America was itself seen in paradisaal terms as a body to be conquered, the allegory can be interpreted as being as much about America as about the South Seas, and as much about the 'Fall' of America after its initial settlement as about the destruction of 'native' innocence.

Intersubjectivity is seen in this argument as an important theme of *Moby-Dick*, particularly in the readings of the bodies of the whale and of Queequeg. But these are counter-balanced by Melville's presentation of Ahab. Freudian psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on Oedipal substitution as central to the psychology of both self-identity and of conquest, is central to *Moby-Dick*. What Ishmael attempts to achieve by phenomenological 'encounter' between self and other, Ahab eschews because he is obsessed with substituting the whale for his own sense of lack. He thus becomes the figure *par excellence* of the split western self. But Ahab's sense of lack is not just a personal or Oedipal one. It also figures political and, more specifically, colonialist and capitalist forms of conquest. The 'lack' of meaning, and the lack of the leg Ahab tries to fill with his hunt is balanced by the possible union encountered between some characters in the text at certain moments. Ultimately, however, neither union nor final conquest is achieved.

Pierre maintains the Oedipal theme that runs through *Moby-Dick*, and transfers the quest to fulfill lack from the national conquest and the personal obsession to the nuclear family, the real 'heart', as it were, of the American nation. Melville shows that 'family' to be founded not on the 'normal' Oedipal triangle of conquest over the Father and the rise of the son, but rather on a twisted Oedipal relation between repressed fathers and repressive mothers, between repressed 'others' in the midst of society, and self-destructive utopianists trying to forge a new world.

'Bartleby' becomes the dystopian vision of the literally and psychologically confined worker who suffers, not only at the hands of an unjust system, but more importantly, one which no longer understands itself to be unjust. In the last three texts examined here, 'Bartleby', 'Benito Cereno', and *Billy Budd*, Melville explores the utopian dream of Oedipus finding a 'father' who will help create a familial world in which neither body nor mind are confined. However, in all three, especially after the bleakness of *Pierre's* autobiographical narrative, the paternal becomes not only the blind and ignorant, but the murderous. The possibility of 'intersubjectivity' that existed momentarily in *Moby-Dick*, or on the South Seas island, is no longer available. Whatever moments of 'sacramental' encounter become possible are found to be empty of meaning. The body in its confinement to the systems which control it is lost not only to the possibility of freedom, but even of redemptive sacrifice. That loss is figured most strongly in the nature and function of language as Melville presents it in the later works. Pre-figuring cultural constructionism, he reduces the body to a language which no longer stakes any claim over final or even approximate 'truth', remaining in its confines of ambiguity and equivocation, it refuses to fix meaning, make 'fast' any fish and in its 'looseness' falls eventually into silence as the only acceptable means of 'telling' bodies. Not only does this figure the loss of a connection between bodies and the words that describe them, but also the relation within the groups of which bodies are a part. More importantly, it brings the political, social and psychological history Melville maps throughout his novels to a close in ambiguous but dystopian silence.

CHAPTER ONE

UTOPIA AND ITS DISCONTENTS: *TYPEE*

‘Ill fenced for heaven to keep out such a foe
As now is entered’

Milton, *Paradise Lost*

‘This is the place where bodies are their own signs.’

J.M. Coetzee, *Foe*

Melville’s first novel, *Typee* (1846), purports to be a retelling of his 1842 sojourn on the island of Nukuheva in the Marquesas islands of the South Pacific. Jumping from the whaling ship *Acushnet*, Melville and his companion Tobias Greene spent but three weeks on the island before leaving it for Tahiti. They lived among the Typees, who were understood to be cannibals. By writing about a stay with the cannibals, Melville’s work fits comfortably into the genre of adventure and captivity narrative popular with readers of the time. In the novel itself Melville changes the names of the characters to Tommo, the protagonist and his friend Toby. He multiplies the length of the stay on the island to four months (Parker, 1996: 385) and writes a novel about what is meant to be a romantic stay on a South Seas island in which the western man finds himself trapped, both literally and figuratively, between the opposing forces of apparent primitive ‘innocence’ and western ‘experience’. On the one hand Tommo feels a certain freedom among the islanders, especially after the escape from the (renamed) *Dolly*, where the captain was ‘tyrannical’ and the crew ‘inhumanly treated’ (13).¹ On the other hand, he is quite literally held captive on the island, and finds that the limited physical and mental

¹ All references to the novel are taken from the Wordsworth edition, (1994).

space soon makes him wish to escape what at first seemed paradise. The threat of having his face tattooed, and so losing his western identity, leads him to seek a daring escape which finally results in what he feels is unavoidable bloodshed.

It is not a work for which Melville himself cared much, largely because he saw it as too populist. He implies as much in his May 1851 letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne. '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'.² Even so, despite the disavowal, one can see in it the beginnings of important themes which were to dominate many of his later works. In particular it begins the dominant exploration of the conflict between 'primitive' and 'civilized', between western mind and 'primitive' body. And, as will later on be the case, Melville's exploration of bodies in this novel renders them ambiguous. On the one hand the 'savages' have bodies of sublime, even 'Apollonian' beauty, like Marnoo (110), or which glide 'with ease and grace' (106) through the water. But on the other hand they are also still 'othered' and savage, particularly when they will not allow the western man either fully to know their 'barbaric' customs or to leave them. This ambiguity makes the novel a fitting and important place to begin an exploration of Melville's use of bodies as a site of confinement and conquest.

² The letter is cited in the Hayford and Parker edition of *Moby-Dick*, (2002: 539).

The novel has most often been read as one about the conflict between cultures.³ But more recent scholars, in particular Breitweiser, (1982) and Schueller (1994) have read it as Melville's critique of the American colonialist mind. The present argument seeks to do much the same, though from a different, psychoanalytic, perspective. Both Breitweiser and Scheuller point out that Tommo and Melville are not to be confused, an assumption which the present argument takes to be central to the novel. Both point out how Tommo's conflicting readings of the Polynesians, either as 'savages' or as 'Adamic' is in common with the colonialist rhetoric of the time, and is Melville's way of exploding that rhetoric. As Breitweiser (1982: 405) puts it: 'The ambiguity lies in the observing consciousness, not in the culture observed'. The present argument will seek to add to these readings by showing that Melville's focus on the body is central to his critique of his own narrator and his colonialist assumptions. More importantly, it will show that Melville uses the stereotypical imagery of the body to analyse the psyche of the exploring, conquering Western, a psyche which is a mirror of the same conquest taking place in America as Melville writes.

Two recent writers have dealt with the body in *Typee*. Geoffrey Sanborn (1998) and Samuel Otter (1999) have read the novel as one of the first anti-colonial texts of its time, in which the body is the major symbol of how the ideologies of colonial discourse interpellate the Polynesians themselves. Sanborn (1998: 79) shows how the standard reading of South Seas islanders as cannibals and as sexualised images of lust is partly re-enforced in Melville's readings of the Polynesians. He also shows how Melville walks a fine line between showing the islanders to be cannibals, while ensuring that they are not depicted as absolutely barbaric savages. The result is that he can titillate his readership with an ambiguous picture of lust, horror and yet comeliness in the image of the Polynesian body. The romantic and Edenic South Seas island retains its attractiveness for the Western reader, while there remains an element of realism about the actual encounter with 'savages'. He suggests that Melville's own position in this debate remains opaque, so that Melville can be accused of racism. The present reading is more generous towards Melville's own level of ideological awareness.

Otter (1999: 21-49) reads *Typee* as an exploration of the western man 'losing face', quite literally when Tommo is threatened with being tattooed on the face, and figuratively

³ Those who read the novel as Melville's first exploration of the cultural conflict between west and the 'other' or between 'civilized' and 'primitive' are T. Walter Herbert (1980), Milton R. Stern (1982) and Lawrence Buell (1992).

when such tattooing will cost him his western identity. The horror of the primitive and its impact on the western body is quite literal. It either cannibalises the intruder or marks him with its own markers, forever removing from him the sense of intellectual ('facial' or cranial) superiority over the primitive 'body'. When Karky wants to tattoo Tommo's face he is 'horrified at the bare thought of being rendered hideous for life' (171). The 'bare thought' suggests a sense of nakedness which the western mind finds unacceptable, so that its 'face' would be compromised, ironically left 'bare' by the tattoo, and unable to change or hide a decision perhaps taken in the heat of the moment. The conflict within the western self which this action produces is central not only to *Typee*, but to most of Melville's later work. In the primitive world head and body are not to be separated. Both are equally marked, and there is no real ambiguity in its actions, no face to hide what the heart desires.

Tommo's ambiguous response to the Polynesian body, both as horrifying and as exotically attractive, suggests that the concern with the body may be equated with what Peter Brooks calls an 'epistemophilic object'. Brooks refers (1993: 99) to the attempt to read bodies as an 'epistemophilia', where one sees 'The body held in the field of vision [as] par excellence the object of both knowing and desire, knowing as desire, and desire as knowing. But since the epistemophilic project is always inherently frustrated, the body can never be wholly grasped as an understandable, representable object'. This is a key concept which has in many respects come to govern approaches to the body generally. It can be seen to operate in *Typee* with particular relevance because of Melville's concern with bodies as the site in which the desire to see an object or body as one thing, and what it may actually be in itself, is confused. What the viewer's gaze sees is what it wants to see. Such deliberate 'overdeterminism', common to colonialist readings of the body, are the sites in which one may read the psychology of conquest in operation. To read Tommo's reading of the Typee bodies is to read psyche of the coloniser.

Projecting the self's desire onto the other, is, Brooks points out, following much post-colonial theory, a central trope of the western colonialist mind. The awareness of a racial 'difference' between bodies is possible only in the context of a 'sign' language which specifies a body's meaning in relation to what the viewer desires to see. So that, as Brooks (1993: 9) puts it, 'the body, in literature, often signifies what is most desired, not only erotically, but in terms of meaning, power, knowledge, satisfaction, etc.' Tommo's readings of the islanders

do not really escape his own preconceptions, which are built, as Breitweiser shows (1982: 405), on an ambiguous need both to castigate America for its colonial mentality and yet also unwittingly to support that mentality.

There is no doubt that Melville intends to show up Tommo's ambiguous responses. For the first encounter with the islanders is one riddled with desire and the erotic, with images of utopian perfection and Edenic sexuality. The sailors yield themselves prisoners to the young maidens swimming out to the *Dolly*, a 'dashing and irresistible party of boarders' (11) who ensure 'an abandoned voluptuousness' so 'unsophisticated and confiding' that Tommo feels he must bemoan their 'contaminating contact with the white man' (12). These are not, however, images which the islanders themselves may be able to grasp or share. While Tommo the narrator claims to be 'withdrawing the veil from regions so romantic and beautiful' (5), he nevertheless presents us with the very stereotypes on which western desire for and fear of the primitive is based. The sailors are all in expectation of finding '*heathenish rites and human sacrifices*' (4), and the novel never really frees us from of this expectation. And when the *Dolly* is 'fairly captured' by the beautiful naked maidens with 'the light clear brown of their complexions, their delicate features, ... and free unstudied actions' (11),⁴ Tommo is merely repeating an opposite but equally extant colonialist stereotype. We are seldom, in other words, outside his eyes his desire. This makes Tommo something of an embodiment of the colonial eye, which, as Brooks (1993: 9) defines it, is one which equates knowledge of the Other with possession, for it is not a knowledge which really questions its own assumptions. 'The drive for possession', he says, 'will be closely linked to the drive to know, itself most often imaged as the desire to see. For it is sight, with its accompanying imagery of light, unveiling, and fixation by the gaze, that traditionally represents knowing, and even rationality itself'.

Melville can thus be seen to be using Tommo in a highly ambiguous way. He seeks an island utopia strongly reminiscent of the search for an American utopia by the early settlers. He does not, however, leave his island utopia as peaceful as when he entered it, and the value of what he has brought to its inhabitants remains highly ambiguous. To attempt to interpret him is to interpret the psychology of colonial conquest, and its destruction of the Edenic utopia it

⁴ William Heath (1988: 46) shows how western readings of Marquesan eroticism was deliberately blind to the islanders' own less 'innocent' objectives. One of these was to acquire nails from the sailors in return for sexual favours, so that the apparent 'free' sexuality was not as free as it was assumed.

seeks.⁵ His ‘peep’ at Polynesia, his desire to ‘see’ as Brooks puts it, can be interpreted as equally a version of possession, a different kind of confinement from the one he himself undergoes at the hands of the islanders. But it is through the image of the body that we can best see what Melville is trying to do by re-interpreting the American expansionist psyche.

Pacifying the Oceanic

⁵ A number of critics have read the novel as a search for utopia. Beauchamp (1981) reads the text as a return to the old world after the promise of the new has come to nothing. Carole Moses (1987) reads it as a return to a Spenserian ‘Bower of Bliss’ where eroticism becomes the symbol of social and psychological freedom, which is what Heath (1988) also concludes. Harvey (1993) reads the island as a place where the laws ‘graven on every breast’ are not imposed as they are in western society.

A number of elements in the text invite a reading which interprets it as critical of American expansionism, as much as it is of Polynesian conquest. The island of Nukuheva has itself been taken over by the French, under Du Petit Thouars (9), just as the *Dolly* arrives. Tommo's sarcastic reference to 'the invincible French nation' suggests we are meant to read the colonisation with suspicion. When Tommo escapes the *Dolly* he is also escaping the influence of French colonialism and looking for a utopian world away from 'tyranny'. The only member of the west the Typees encounter in any close proximity in the novel is Tommo himself. He becomes, willy nilly, the west's representative among primitives. But if French colonisation is evident, then so is American. The American Captain David Porter had, Tommo informs us, called the bay after Massachusetts during the war of 1812, and that Captain Ingraham of Boston had, in 1791 actually claimed discovery of the islands (8), which formed part of what was known as 'the Washington Group' (7). From the outset American colonisation is placed at the fore, despite all Tommo's carping at the French possession.

But the fact that Melville writes his novel during the decade of the 1840s, when westward expansionism was gaining momentum and the annexation of Texas would follow in 1848, suggests that one might equally read the text as a commentary on the American psychology of conquest and expansionism, with Tommo as its representative. John L. O'Sullivan had coined the phrase 'Manifest Destiny' on 27th December 1845, and with the Mexican War imminent, and Indian wars looming, it would be difficult not to read the entry of a single white explorer into a new utopia as something of an allegory of what was happening at home. The avowed, if not real, rationale behind Manifest Destiny, that it was, as Sullivan put it, the 'great experiment of liberty' (Dimock, 1989: 9), may sound like the missionaries Tommo criticizes for their interference on the island, but it can also be shown to apply to Tommo himself in his paternalistic attitude to the islanders.

That expansionism included, in the American mind, conquest far beyond its own borders, is evidenced by the speech in 1844 of Major Davezac to the New Jersey State Convention on new 'pasture grounds'. He invokes the image of the buffalo, when Melville will soon invoke that of the whale, and declares:

Make way, I say, for the young American buffalo - he has not yet got land enough; he wants more land as his cool shelter in summer - he wants more land for his beautiful pasture grounds. ... and the region of Texas as his winter

pasture. Like all of his race, he wants salt, too. Well, he shall have the use of two oceans - the mighty Pacific and turbulent Atlantic shall be his (Dimock, 1989: 4).

Many questioned the value and the psychology of this conquest. But one man in particular who stood against it was also able to perceive the impact it would have in Polynesia. More importantly, he was able to perceive that land itself was not the actual object of conquest, but something deeper in the psyche. Henry Thoreau was writing *Walden* even as Melville wrote *Typee*. He equates land with inner being and the body which inhabits both, and interprets (1995: 218) all South Seas journeys as versions of escape from moral dilemmas.

What was the meaning of that South-Sea Exploring Expedition, with all its parade and expense, but an indirect recognition of the fact that there are continents and seas in the moral world, to which every man is an isthmus or an inlet, yet unexplored by him, but that it is easier to sail many thousand miles through cold and storm and cannibals, in a government ship, with five hundred men and boys to assist one, than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean of one's being alone.

All outward explorations, searches for utopia, or attempts at conquest are but versions of a desire for inner exploration and conquest, suggests Thoreau. Tommo's escape from western tyranny of his boat re-enacts the attempt by Manifest Destiny to find a physical and mental liberty. 'But you don't bounce me out my liberty, old chap, for all your yarns; for I would go ashore if every pebble on the beach was a live coal, and every stick a gridiron, and the cannibals stood ready to broil me on landing' (22). Like Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, he asserts his own right to escape from 'tyranny' and begin a new political order. The captain of the Dolly would not alter his conduct, so a version of UDI was inevitable.

His journey through the densely foliated island is allegorical of both a self-conquest and one of the land before him. He is a 'Robinson Crusoe' (30) who, entering paradise, suffers a 'Fall' (31) both literally and figuratively. Falling into the valley of the Typees he and Toby fall into a version of utopian dream and are 'concussed' (31), and find themselves 'in utter darkness' (32) before entering the maternal and sexualised 'bosom of the valley' (35), a place

which relieves Tommo of his ‘anxiety to reach a place which promised us plenty and repose’ (37). But the utopia found by the explorer will present further discontents, for, as Thoreau knows, real contentment comes from within and not from conquest. *Typee* follows the same tack, for it shows the utopia to be ambiguous, and in the process questions the psychology behind the search for utopias. The return to the ‘natal’ of humankind is also an attempt to return to the childhood within the self, and to the unconscious, pre-natal as it were. What Tommo and Toby find is ‘unconscious repose’, a kind of Lotos-eating somnambulance in the ‘enchanted gardens in the fairy tale’ (35). The mind is shut down or dulled, for the most part, and the body begins to ache. Tommo’s leg becomes lame so that ‘I half suspected I had been bitten by some venomous reptile’ (34).

The novel’s allegorical link of inner with outer journey, where the return to the primitive is also a return to the primitive within the self, when placed beside Manifest Destiny, suggests a similar journey on the national level. National conquest is a version of self-conquest, as Thoreau sees, but it is also an attempt to return to Edenic origins so that society can begin again. The search for the maternal in a journey that has ‘sanctity’ (40) as Tommo’s sees his having, is a common trope in the national journey of conquest. And it is reflective of the inner journey of self-exploration.

Freud, in his important essay ‘Civilization and its Discontents’ (1930, 1985) makes this connection between individual and national psychology. Like a descendant of Thoreau, he blends the religious impulse with the national impulse for conquest and sees both as an attempt to achieve the ‘oceanic’, a ‘sensation of eternity’. The ‘feeling’ of the oceanic which religion excites, he suggests, is not objective, but subjective, a version of pathology. ‘Pathology has made us acquainted with a great number of states in which the boundary lines between ego and external world become uncertain or in which they are actually drawn incorrectly’ (1985: 253). He makes an important link between such boundary lines and the nation of Israel, which, like the Christian church of the early Pilgrim Fathers, constitutes itself as the physical body of the divine on earth, and which exists as a physical version of the ‘Oceanic’, whose history it sees as sacred.

The people of Israel had believed themselves to be the favourite child of God, and when the great Father caused misfortune after misfortune to rain down upon this people of his, they were never shaken in their belief in his relationship to

them or questioned his power or righteousness. Instead, they produced the prophets, who held up their sinfulness before them; and out of their sense of guilt they created the over-strict commandments of their priestly religion. It is remarkable how differently a primitive man behaves. If he has met with a misfortune, he does not throw the blame on himself but on his fetish, which has obviously not done its duty, and he gives it a thrashing instead of punishing himself (1985: 319).

Western sacred history, the search for national and individual identity is largely Oedipal in Freud's reading. It is born of a guilt which insists on a version of reparation, and which divides the individual nation or person from itself. It turns to the 'oceanic' to compensate for its lack and as a fulfilment of its utopian dream. Israel takes its 'promised land' to be a symbol of divine favour, but also as a physical embodiment of its 'oceanic' experience. Having the 'promised land', of 'milk and honey' returns it to its maternal origins and also satisfies its sense of lack. Primitive man, in Freud's reading, knows no such distinction between self and 'oceanic' and hence has no need to compensate for lack. The fetish does the job for him. Equally, he has little or no need to conquer land or the body of the Other as a way to compensate for his own lack. Neither does he have any need to return to the maternal origins of his society, for he has no sense of having fallen and become tainted.

Typee, set in Oceania, returns the western man to his primitive, maternal origins. Like the Rousseauan trying to avoid the evil created by the constructed society, it shows an attempt to return to 'natural man', as Rousseau puts it in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755). It goes backwards in order to begin the cycle of life again, both for the nation and for the self. Tommo enters a land of Adams and Eves in the valley of Typee (51) and it becomes for him the 'Promised Land' (86). It is a place without history (127), which does not cultivate crops (135) and has no 'synods or councils' (139). Entering its fecund world of 'bosoms' and 'gardens', deep below 'vast roots' (31), where there is abundant paradisaical fruit, and where those who carry it might 'be taken for the Hebrew spies, on their return to Moses with the goodly bunch of grapes' (86). Tommo enters a maternal originary world obviously meant to remind us of the land of milk and honey. It is a world complete unto itself, a version of Rousseau's 'natural man'.

Natural man is complete unto himself: he is the numerical unit, the absolute whole that has relation only to himself or to one like him. Civil man is only the fractional unit dependent on the denominator, and whose value is in his relation to the whole, which is the social body. The best social institutions are those that know best how to denature man, to take away his absolute existence to give him a relative one, and to transport the I into the common unit,... (*Emile I*, Cited in Strong, 1994: 52).

Utopian rhetoric of 'natural man' joins the image of the body and its need for physical fulfilment to that of the land which is entered to provide such fulfilment. Social institutions like the *Dolly* have degenerated, so that going back to the maternal land of the 'primitive' allows the society to be reborn as a new body.

This is an important trope for all of Melville's work, where the Oedipal saga operates within the realm of the nuclear and national family. Lacan, following Freud and Rousseau, calls this doubling back to the maternal pre-Oedipal world a return to the 'Imaginary'. It functions as a state prior to the 'Symbolic'. The Symbolic is the Order which 'has the power of effecting distinctions essential to the subject's registration of himself in the surrounding world; ... between the interior and the exterior;' (Lemaire, 1994: 56). The Symbolic, denominated 'paternal' by Lacan, allows the self differentiation from the other, mostly through language. It is the world of the 'civilized', the self-alienated and also of the desiring, since built into language, as the Introduction has outlined, is the lack which it seeks to fill. The Lacanian Imaginary, by contrast, is much like the world Tommo enters in Typee. It is one of non-differentiation, pre-linguistic, denominated 'maternal' by Lacan, in which the imagination holds sway over the differentiating sign. 'The imaginary', says Lemaire (1994: 61), explaining Lacan, 'concerns the intuitive lived experience of the body (the receptive hollow, the erectile form, for example), of the affects, ... lived experiences which overlap, accumulate and overflow into infinite successions of sensorial, emotional and conceptual jugglings'.

Rousseau's 'natural man' exists in much this state, as does Freud's delusional religious thinker and seeker after the 'oceanic'. In returning to the island of humankind's birth, as it were, one may read Tommo as returning to just such a state of the maternal. Lacan is useful in analysing what Tommo does, however, because the return to the Imaginary he undergoes

follows the very route Lacan outlines. The non-differentiating world he enters does not satisfy him because he continues to suffer the desire which structures the ‘civilized’ world of the Symbolic. In his journey ‘back’ to ‘civilization’ then, he must cross what Lacan calls the definitive ‘Mirror Stage’. This stage represents the moment the self experiences its image in the ‘mirror’ of society and knows itself differentiated for the first time. Yet in that knowledge, also experiences itself as divided, a double image, a self and an other, inaugurating a deeper desire for self-unity. This stage, says Lacan (1977: 12) ‘exhibit[s] in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject’.

The nation, as much as the individual, can be seen to experience the same journey towards differentiation, from ‘primitive’ unity to ‘civilized’ self-alienation. The desire for utopian Eden and for the maternal accompanying it, can thus be read as the attempt to recapture the lost unity within the self which Thoreau hints at above, and which Rousseau takes for granted. The rhetoric of conquest and of New World desire can be seen to follow the same cycle of a return to mother and an Oedipal remove to the father, with a consequent desire once again to return to mother. It is an action built on discontent with civilization, but also with most of its alternatives. *Typee* shows Tommo to be locked in much this kind of cycle, where his ‘imperial eye’ looks to the mother in the garden of Eden, but also destroys what it sees.

Imperial Eyes

Three bodily parts take important symbolic meaning in *Typee*: eyes, legs and the skin. Melville begins with eyes since it is through eyes that the new Eden is perceived and the bodies of the Other are known. His objective is to show Tommo’s eyes in contrast to the eyes of the islanders. But it is also, if we take the rhetoric of American settlement and expansionism and its Polynesian counterpart seriously, to analyse the imperial eye Tommo brings to his quest for utopia. Legs and skin carry important symbolic meaning throughout the rest of the novel, and the attack on Tommo’s skin, if not his entire body, marks the final breakdown of his utopian dream.

When Tommo and Toby first espy the land of the Typees they are overwhelmed at the sight. But their eyes are those of Milton’s Satan. ‘Had a glimpse of the gardens of Paradise

been revealed to me, I could scarcely have been more ravished with the sight', says Tommo.

From the spot where I lay transfixed with surprise and delight, I looked straight down into the bosom of the valley, which swept away in long wavy undulations to the blue waters in the distance.... Over all the landscape there reigned the most hushed repose, which I almost feared to break, lest, like the enchanted gardens in the fairy tale, a single syllable might dissolve the spell. For a long time, forgetful alike of my own situation, and the vicinity of my still slumbering companion, I remained gazing around me, hardly able to comprehend by what means I had suddenly been made a spectator of such a scene (35).

The sexual imagery, while standard traveller fare, and suggestive of the return to the mother, is also a reference to the Fall.⁶ What the narrator assumes to be a journey to innocence and paradise, his author shows to be one of conquest. And while the valley is unreal, a place of spells and fairy tales, where one expects to find the pre-rational, pre-linguistic child, it is also a place of transfixing, in which otherness, from both sides, is fixed by the 'spell', and in which there is no 'comprehending'. Satan in *Paradise Lost* (Bk. IV. 350-400) gazes upon paradise as if under its spell. He loses speech temporarily. He is 'stupidly good', and he proceeds with the imperialist's argument: 'yet public reason just,/Honour and empire with revenge enlarged,/By conquering this new world, compels me now/To do what else though damned I should abhor'. The ambivalence of paradise lies in the fact that the one who comes into it cannot see it as paradise and remain contented. Desire undoes him because it allows no final paradise.

Tommo looks with Satan's eyes in this passage because Melville has just shown him to

⁶ By the time Melville writes *Typee* it is no longer unusual to depict the explorer as serpent in the garden. See for example, the French-American Paul du Chaillu's *Explorations and Adventures in Equatorial Africa* (1861), and, in the previous century, the work of Philip Freneau, another French-American, secretary to Jefferson. Freneau's poem 'Discovery' (1772) describes the South Seas in terms similar to Melville's: 'Some gay Ta-ia on the watery waste,/Though Nature clothes in all her bright array,/Some proud tormentor steals her charms away/.../Howe'er the groves, howe'er the garden bloom,/A monarch and a priest is still their doom'. On Freneau see Kolodny (1975). Melville probably knew the work of Freneau, and the name Tommo may have been suggested to him by Freneau, whose adopted literary persona was a Creek Indian named Tomo Cheeki. Creeks were one of the few Indian tribes which used tattoos.

have fallen. The return to the fecund world of 'roots' and 'bosoms' may be a return to the maternal Imaginary, but in the context of the novel it carries with it an ambiguous sexuality. The 'civilized' cannot enter Paradise without Satan's eyes, because it has long since traversed the 'Mirror Stage' and become self-alienated. It reads the body in lustful terms, as it reads the landscape in sexual terms, where desire and possession are coterminous. The imperial gaze, turning its desired object into a fetish, which becomes in many respects a projection of its own sense of lack, engenders the very loss from which it seeks to escape. The land is fetishised as paradise which the explorer feels he lacks, but that very paradise is undone by his desire to control it. Tommo and Toby 'fall' into their island paradise as into a fecund but, to them, dark place:

Five foaming streams, ... swelled and turbid by the recent rains, united in one mad plunge,...and fell with wild uproar into a deep black pool scooped out of the gloomy-looking rocks that lay piled around, and in one collected body dashed down a narrow sloping channel which seemed to penetrate into the very bowels of the earth. Overhead, vast roots of trees hung down... dripping with moisture, and trembling with the concussions produced by [our] fall (31).

The passage is marvellous for its combination of sensual and fearful, destruction and awe. Introducing the titillating sexuality expected of the Polynesian narrative, Melville adds an element of destruction inherent in that sexuality, but does not attribute it solely to the 'primitive'. Going beneath masculine roots and feminine penetrated channels, the explorer leaves the place he enters 'trembling with concussions', just as he will become concussed by his own fall. Connecting with nature, Tommo and Toby leave that nature 'concussed', and themselves fallen into darkness rather than clarity. There is no way of seeing clearly in a fallen state, Melville suggests. The plunge brings 'madness'. The pool into which the narcissistic explorer will seek to see his satisfied reflection is 'black'. The pool will not show what the explorer demands of it, or, in another nuance, what it shows will be black, with all its various meanings of both black people, and black as evil.

Robert Johnson had feared the Puritan fathers were in danger of being, 'in a golden dreame', as he put it in *Nova Britannia* (1609), and become indolent in the wilderness. Tommo and Toby fall into this very indolence. The only answer to it, for Johnson, was to tame

the wilderness, to ‘*make* Virginia a beautiful and prosperous garden’ (Kolodny, 1975: 21). In the ideology of conquest, where the eye demands fixity of meanings, evanescence and indolence is either something to escape or to conquer. Tommo must admit often to the reader that ‘I know not how to describe the alternate sensations I experienced’ (37) and that when he and Toby enter the world of ‘pendant roots’ they find themselves ‘suspended over the yawning chasm [swinging] to and fro’ on the root which ‘vibrated violently’ (45) making the ‘brain [grow] dizzy’ (46). From the outset Melville warns the reader not to trust Tommo’s reading of the Polynesian utopia, for it is the product of an ‘unconscious’ or ‘indolent’ state.

By knitting together the imagery of the conquered feminine and the ‘darkness’ perceived to reside in the land Melville in the above passage is emulating the rhetoric of utopian ideology applied on the American mainland, and that which is used by settlers about Polynesia. The garden of Polynesia becomes the new garden which that of the New World had been two centuries before. The Typees could just as well be the Niagaras (46). The new American Adam entering the New World garden in the days of the first settlers, reads the landscape as a symbol of a fecund feminine Nature, an Eve, as John Winthrop puts it in his ‘Modell of Christian Charity’ (1630). To him Eve is ‘fleshe of my fleshe ... and bone of my bone, and shee conceives a greate delighte in it, there shee desires nearnes and familiarity with it’.⁷ Tellingly, when Tommo and Toby encounter Adam and Eve in the garden, ‘a boy and a girl, slender and graceful, and completely naked’, they are ‘half inclined to flee from our presence’ (51). If Winthrop’s theocracy has not managed to create ‘the model of Christian charity’ in the New World, then it is no surprise that Melville makes Adam and Eve desire to run from the intruders. The ‘Adam’ who enters the Typee garden is fallen, and will contaminate it.

⁷ See Winthrop, ‘A Modell of Christian Charity’. Cited in Hollinger and Capper, eds. Vol I (1993: 12). Hereafter Hollinger and Capper will be cited in the text as HC 1 and HC 2 respectively.

He will probably 'rape' the land in the same way early settler rhetoric showed a rape of the American landscape. As Annette Kolodny (1975) has shown, settler rhetoric traditionally understands the land to be like the maternal, fecund new bride awaiting her lover the settler. John Smith's (1616) description of New England, for example, sees the coast as a virginal garden: 'her treasures having yet never been opened, nor her originalls wasted, consumed or abused'. And Thomas Morton (1632) reads the New England landscape as 'a faire virgin, longing to be sped,/And meete her lover in a Nuptiall bed'. William Byrd (Girgus, 1990: 36) saw in the Blue Ridge Mountains 'A single Mountain very much resembling a woman's breast' and a 'Ledge that stretch't away to the North East... in the shape of a Maiden's Breast'. When Tommo looks at the 'bosom of the valley' (35), he is seeing with Byrd's eyes. And when he sees the world of Typee with water flowing 'so temptingly at their base' (38) where the rocks were, a little like those of Moses entering the Promised Land, 'oozing forth moisture at every crevice' (39), he is seeing with the eyes of the early American settlers. In both, sight of the land becomes fraught with desire, and the desire soon leads to an attempt to possess. For the early Pilgrims possession develops into a fusion of nationalist and sexual desire, which includes a sizeable portion of religious 'oceanic' fervour. Sexual and spiritual lack become filled, or partly filled, in the 'nuptial' with the land. But it can go too far, as John Hammond (1656) says when, in 'Leah and Rachel', he berates the indolence of settlers and their rape of the land. A land 'once courted as a refuge' has now become 'deflowered by her own Inhabitants', become a 'widow', 'weeping for her children'. Tommo himself will soon experience just this kind of indolence, and become the symbol of the settler who will eventually play a part in 'deflowering' the island. 'Sometimes I was too indolent for exercise', he says somewhat pompously, 'and, accepting one of the many invitations I was continually receiving, stretched myself out on the mats of some hospitable dwelling' (124).

The land Tommo gazes at is hardly less of a demure but passionate maiden awaiting her 'marriage'. 'The beautiful aspect of the shore is heightened by deep and romantic glens, which come down to it at almost equal distances, all apparently radiating from a common centre. ... Down each of these little valleys flows a clear stream, here and there assuming the form of a slender cascade, then stealing invisibly along until it bursts upon the sight again in larger and more noisy waterfalls, and at last demurely wander along to the sea' (16).

Expansionism becomes a way of keeping the social body whole, for it extends the body of the nation. As Dimock (1989: 26) shows, expansionist rhetoric sought whole bodies,

implying that the social body was in some way lacking, either a limb or a 'wife', and would find one in conquest. 'John Quincy Adams, for instance, envisioned the "finger of nature" in the Pacific Northwest; President Monroe thought of Cuba as "the mouth of the Mississippi"; the New Orleans Gazette presented Florida as the nation's "natural appendage"; C.J. Ingersoll discerned in the Great Lakes America's "national ligaments" and spoke reverently of "the spinal Ohio and Mississippi",...'. Parke Godwin, discussing 'Annexation' in 1854 would use bodily assimilation as the primary metaphor. 'Nor would the incorporation of those foreign ingredients into our body ... swell us out to an unmanageable and plethoric size. ... this tendency to the assimilation of foreign ingredients, or to the putting forth of new members, is an inevitable incident of our growth' (Dimock, 1989: 27). Melville's Typee valley is as 'pregnant' with future expectation of plenty as Godwin's America.

Applied to the Mexican war the rhetoric of women and children becomes useful as a way of convincing the aggressor of the paternalist and husband-like nature of the enterprise. *The New York Morning Herald* of 8 October 1847 could revert to early settler imagery about the land as a way of wondering whether there was any aggression at all in the war.

It were more desirable that she [Texas] should come to us voluntarily, but as we will have no peace until she be annexed, let it come, even though force be necessary, at first, to bring her. Like the Sabine virgins, she will soon learn to love her ravisher (Duban, 1983: 27).

'Under the influence of Utopianism, nationalism and sentimental idealism', says Edward Burns, 'war ceased to be regarded as an inevitable calamity and came to be thought of as a kind of rainbow of promise'.⁸

The islands of Polynesia are read by Tommo and others as just such appendages to the American body politic, if not literally, then as the children of the parent culture which is to protect them. To enter Polynesia is like entering the American mainland, full of maternal, fecund comfort. But it is also to 'fall' back into human origins and to find oneself in an ambiguous space of happy unconsciousness and sensual pleasure, but to remain trapped in the child's world. The psychology of conquest must either see the native as child or mother or

⁸ Edward Burns, 'War as an Instrument of Mission', in *The American Idea of Mission*. Rutgers UP, (1957: 239).

wily, as Tommo does the ‘Adam and Eve’ he meets (52). Its body is either perfect, an ‘Apollo’, a very western image of beauty Tommo uses, or it is evil, a one-eyed Mow-Mow, or an over-tattooed hag.

The rhetoric of Polynesian conquest itself shares Tommo’s ambiguity about the natives of the islands. This suggests that Melville is setting Tommo up not as an ideal which he himself seeks to emulate, or as his own voice, but rather as the image of the beneficent explorer who is unable to discern his own satanic eye at work. Three of the important travellers relevant to Melville’s depiction of the islanders are Commerson, the physician to Captain Bougainville during his 1766-69 voyage to the islands, the Reverend Charles Stewart, whose 1830 work Melville read and used extensively, and the American whaler Captain David Porter.

Commerson, physician on the *Boudeuse*, represents the kind of fetishizing of the instinctual that both Rousseau and Freud attribute to the savage. His hagiography of Tahitian natives is echoed by Tommo in some parts of the novel.

Every day is sacred to him, the whole island is his temple, all the women are his altars, all the men his priests. ... There, neither shame nor false modesty exercises its tyranny A hypocritical censor might see in all this only the lack of civilized manners, a horrible prostitution, ... but he would be wholly mistaken in failing to recognize the state of natural man, born essentially good, exempt from all prejudice, and following, equally without fear or remorse, the sweet impulses of an instinct which is always right because it hasn’t yet degenerated into reason (Brooks, 1993: 167).

Tommo sounds like Commerson when he offers a similar hagiography to Fayaway’s beauty. ‘The easy unstudied graces of a child of nature like this, breathing from infancy an atmosphere of perpetual summer, and nurtured by the simple fruits of the earth; enjoying a perfect freedom from care and anxiety, and removed effectually from all injurious tendencies, strike the eye in a manner which cannot be portrayed. This picture is no fancy sketch; it is drawn from the most vivid recollections of the person delineated’ (68). Tommo does seem to protest the verity of his account too much, but whether real or imagined, Melville has him emulate the sentimental explorer here and elsewhere.

It is a sentimentalism which, as Pratt puts it (1992: 77) in her description of Mungo Park in Africa, limits sight to what it wants to see: 'information is textually relevant (has value) in so far as it bears upon the speaker-traveller and his quest', so that the discourse of science and anthropology become absorbed into the narcissism of the sentimental. Melville makes Tommo gaze on the islanders 'transfixed with surprise' (35) precisely because he intends to show us a Tommo who thinks like Mungo Park and other colonialist explorers. He cannot really read the sentimentalism he brings with any degree of self-criticism. His fear that the islanders will be forced into degenerating reason by contact with the white man is based on his claim to awareness of how the western eye operates. But if he says he cannot fully describe Fayaway it is also because she represents the standard image of the exotic beauty. She fulfills the role demanded by the exploring psyche, and can be shown to be beautiful only in the terms of Tommo's western eyes.

He is not so generous earlier on in the text with his reactions to the *Dolly* being 'fairly captured' by the nymphs (11). He sounds like Stewart's smug Calvinism, declaring the 'capturing' of the *Dolly* by the maidens to be 'the grossest licentiousness' and the most 'shameful inebriety' (12). Stewart's words describing the same kind of event are almost identical. Describing the reluctant Polynesians being dismissed from the *Vincennes* in 1829 he says:

And I doubt not it is the first [occasion] in which they have ever known any restriction to be placed on the grossest licentiousness.... After the vessel was thus cleared of noise and nakedness, and the perfumes of cocoa-nut oil and other strong odors, which had greatly annoyed and disgusted us, Captain Finch invited me to a seat in his gig in a row round the harbor, or rather that part of it within our anchorage. The excursion was delightful, and the scenery, mantled in the softness of a sunset tint, certainly as wild, if not as beautiful, as any I ever gazed on (1970: 230-31).

Stewart will not gaze on anything he does not wish to. He cannot see beauty which is not western. Melville gives Tommo Stewart's words to make him a representative of the less sentimental readings of Polynesia, even as he will later on make him the sentimentalist. The ambiguity, one must assume, is deliberate on Melville's part. These are, after all, merely two

different versions of the same imperialist eye at work, for it will not be long before the sentimentalist Tommo will kill the 'innocent' islander in order to escape his 'wiles'.

The project of going back into the world of 'natural man', to the early childhood of humankind, as if to return to the womb in a new Eden, becomes one as fraught with difficulty as the American expansionist project has become fraught. If it was the American David Porter who appropriated the bay of Nukuheva in the name of Massachusetts, then it is the same Porter Melville encourages us to investigate as the representative of America's treatment of its 'children'. Porter becomes explorer, paternal father, and later killer of the Marquesans. Embracing both of the opposing positions represented by the French Commerson and the English Stewart, the American, representative of the New World, treats the islanders first as innocent children, refuses to believe in their cannibalism, and when provoked ruthlessly massacres large numbers of inhabitants.⁹ Amasa Delano will become a later version of the same kind of American willing 'blindness' turned ruthless.

⁹ See David Porter's *A Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean*. 2 Vols. Philadelphia, 1815. On Melville's relation to Porter see Charles R. Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas*. New York: Columbia UP, 1939. Porter's war on the Marquesans is seen by him as an extension of the war of 1812 and a defence of American nationalism.

‘They rank high in the scale of human beings’, Porter says paternalistically of the Marquesans. ‘We find them brave, generous, honest, and benevolent, acute, ingenious, intelligent, and their beauty and regular proportions of their bodies, correspond with the perfections of their minds’.¹⁰ Porter attempts to do what the Enlightenment required of the one seeking the new utopia, join mind and body and find in the perfection of the one an image of perfection in the other. He is quite happy, as T. Walter Herbert points out, to adopt the Marquesans as junior members of the American polity. He cannot, however, bring himself to make the Polynesian his equal. His description confuses perfect ‘natural man’ with the primitive and underdeveloped. Not quite ‘savage’, he is also not quite, and never will be, ‘civilized’, despite perfect symmetry between body and mind, a symmetry long lost to western man.

Porter tries to walk a middle path between the liberal Commerson and less liberal, Calvinist, Stewart, but in fact only succeeds in presenting the ambiguity inherent in the settler and colonialist rhetoric of the New World. It is a ‘blind spot’, as Herbert puts it,¹¹ whose origins lie in the rhetoric of American settlement, and more particularly on the physical nature of the land and people encountered and conquered. For paradise must, by its very nature, engender opposing experiences, one of apparent perfection, of mind united to instinctual body, of place and beauty; and then by contrast be measured against its opposite, mind split from body, place lost of beauty. It is Melville’s primary aim, throughout *Typee*, to expose the ideologies of the western eyes encountering ‘paradise’ as themselves the primary generators of how that paradise will be painted. But even as he exposes the bias of those eyes, he shows that the ‘real’ Marquesans are not to be fully known by the outside world, for that world does not have the tools for a clear knowledge. The ‘black and yawning chasm’ which gapes at Tommo’s and Toby’s feet (39) is as much a chasm of meaning as it is a literal one preventing full entry into the world of the islanders. Any knowledge, Melville suggests, is ambiguous at best.

¹⁰ Porter, *Journal* (1815: 62). Cited in T. Walter Herbert (1980: 84).

¹¹ Herbert argues that Melville shares this ‘blind spot’ (1980: 19) with Porter and Stewart, preventing him from really ‘seeing’, as it were, the Marquesans. The present argument disagrees, suggesting that Melville’s aim is nevertheless not so much to show the ‘truth’ about Polynesia, since it is not something to be fully known anyway, and exists in a space of ‘darkness’ (39) as it is to show the ‘truth’ about the New World’s ideologies.

Tommo's rhetoric about the Polynesians contains similar ambiguities to those of Commerson, Porter and Stewart, just as it does earlier commentators on America. It makes Polynesia slippery. On the one hand it exists outside the confines of culture and by 'essential' instinct. But on the other hand it is locked into the gaze of the culture which colonises it. The rhetoric fits in with the type offered by the popular travel narrative, but also questions its assumptions by making its presentation of Polynesia slippery, as ungraspable a phantom as the whale. Polynesia is present, yet not present. Savage yet not. Civilized yet not.

If we have come to suspect Tommo's reading of Polynesia because of the evanescence of its nature and his inability to hold on to it, it is also because Melville intends to make us question perhaps the foremost American authority of his time on the eye and on its relation to nature. Ralph Waldo Emerson's approach to nature proposes a sentimentalist inclusivism which Melville's reading disallows. In 'Experience' (1895: 92-93), Emerson agrees that nature is 'evanescent and lubricious', objects 'which slip through our fingers when we clutch hardest', but he sees this evanescence as 'the most unhandsome part of our condition.... We animate what we can, and we see only what we animate'. Melville would agree with this reading, and that we 'we see only what we animate', but, unlike Emerson, accept that it is all we have. If Emerson sees this evanescence as something from which to escape, Melville treats it as the inescapable state of fallenness.

Emerson, perhaps against his own inclinations, becomes

something of an expansionist
when he assumes that the
valorising of the individual as the
progenitor of universal possibility,
is the best way of containing the
very ambiguities between desire
and fulfilment that dominate
utopian expansionism. 'To believe
your own thought', says Emerson
in 'Self-Reliance' (1895: 10), '
to believe that what is true
for you in your private heart is true
for all men, - that is genius.

Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost. - and our first thought is rendered back to us by the Trumpets of the Last Judgement'. 'Discontent', he says, 'is the want of self-reliance: it is infirmity of will'. That the 'inmost' is not considered to be in any way influenced by the social structure is both Emerson's great weakness and his great strength. The idea that it is the individual who harnesses the oceanic, and who can make his own oceanic the nations', drives the western, let alone the American, dream. Emerson's self-reliant explorer of souls cannot, and need not, see bodies or cultures that define bodies. He believes he sees through them, and believing, as Freud points out, is what gives the oceanic its power, and desire its object.

Tommo, the self-reliant explorer, attempts to see the same way, reducing all worlds to his own eye, but is undone by Melville's insistence on the 'blackness' of his sight, and the impenetrability of his eye. Emerson's self-reliant explorer is meant to turn all worlds into a version of paradise, since his 'transparent eyeball', as he puts it in 'Nature' (1895: 548), a state where 'all mean egotism vanishes'.

Standing on the bare ground, - my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, - all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me.

But Emerson's sentimental effusions joining the eye to nature, engendered in the self-reliant 'aboriginal self', is undermined by his own dismissal of social responsibility. 'Do not tell me' he says, 'of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they my poor? I tell thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong' (Duban, 1983: 59). Emerson's psychology of conquest joins land, body and soul, and sees no conquest at all, but only what is 'natural'. In the process it reduces all to the self, an 'aboriginal' essence, which does not see any bodily confinement operative, much less any mental one.

Tommo, seeking just such a transparent eyeball and an 'aboriginal self' in his self-reliant journey into the paradisaal island, finds only the confinement of ambiguity. Nowhere is this made clearer than in Melville's depiction of the islanders' gaze on the white intruders. If the white imperialist usually takes little or no notice of how the native sees him, or assumes that sight to be inferior, Melville shows it to be a balancing force in the colonial encounter. He overturns both the racial and the gender stereotype by depicting black females gazing lustfully at white males. Tommo and Toby are accosted by a number of young women one morning, who are

attended by no jealous duennas, ... and void of artificial restraint.... gave full play to that prying inquisitiveness which, time out of mind, has been attributed to the adorable sex.... Long and minute was the investigation with which they honoured us, and so uproarious their mirth, that I felt infinitely sheepish; and Toby was immeasurably outraged at their familiarity.... my feelings of propriety were exceedingly shocked, for I could not but consider them as having overstepped the due limits of female decorum (59).

On the one hand such a gaze is in the tradition of cross-cultural marriages common to the colonial encounter, and the reader is doubtless intended to see Tommo's outrage as less serious

than he purports.¹² But on the other hand, it undermines just such a 'marriage' by the dismissive attitude of the maidens to the white bodies. The female Polynesian gaze in this little vignette is at least as self-contained as any gaze by the self-reliant western explorer. It leaves the western man feeling exposed, if titillated, and in the process undoes the hierarchical structure of power which presumes that the west has the right and the means to eye the primitive as subject to his authority. Here the west is subject to the primitive, and is made to feel not only wanting but othered. There can be no Emersonian Transcendental unity between groups here, only mutual acceptance or rejection.

¹² On the common motif of the western maroon and the native woman as extensions of already prevalent European equivalents: Inkle and Yariko, Smith and Pocahantas, Abelard and Eloisa, Anthony and Cleopatra, see Peter Hulme (1986).

Much the same divisions are created when Tommo undergoes yet another gaze by the islanders, this time the men. When Tommo tries to reach the sea after hearing of some passing vessel, he discovers Mehevi looking at him and his 'countenance assumed that inflexible rigidity of expression which had so awed me on the afternoon of our arrival at the house of Marheyo'. On the occasion in question, the savage gaze had completely fixed Tommo with a power he had not yet experienced. 'Never before had I been subjected to so strange and steady a glance; it revealed nothing of the mind of the savage, but it appeared to be reading my own' (54). Taking out some tobacco to pacify the natives has no effect, so that Tommo's stereotypes of natives 'devoted to my service' (54) are thrown into disarray. And later, when he attempts to make a dash for the beach, he is ordered not to by the chief. 'It was at this moment, when fifty savage countenances were glaring upon me, that I first truly experienced I was indeed captive in the valley' (97). The eye of the islander has the final power in this setting, not that of the intruder, at least for the present. These primitives may appear to desire what the west has to offer, and will even retain the western man as captive, but they will not assume him inviolable. The western man comes to be regarded by chief Mow-Mow as 'a froward child, to whose wishes he had not the heart to oppose force, and whom he must consequently humour' (194). Melville makes the native gaze the equal of the imperial one, and Tommo's apparent beneficence towards the native a mask, even to himself, since his future actions often unmask his naturally imperialist mentality.

And it is this same one eyed chief who finally attempts to keep Tommo from escaping. If he has only one eye, Melville seems to be suggesting, it is as a symbol of the same fixedness with which the west views Polynesia. To knock Mow-Mow from the boat with his boat hook and escape the island captivity, is to escape single-mindedness, and a world unable to appreciate the difference between cultures. The great irony, Melville forces us to face, is that in the escape from such rigidity Tommo must perform an equally rigid and destructive action, attack his host.

One final reference to eyes is important. The islanders have lines tattooed across their faces. Kory-Kory, Tommo informs us, 'had seen fit to embellish his face with three broad longitudinal stripes of tattooing, which, like those country roads that go straight forward in defiance of all obstacles, crossed his nasal organ, descended into the hollow of his eyes, and even skirted the borders of his mouth. Each completely spanned his physiognomy; one extending in a line with his eyes, another crossing the face in the vicinity of the nose, and the

third sweeping along his lips from ear to ear'. He reminds Tommo 'of those unhappy wretches whom I have sometimes observed gazing out sentimentally from behind the grated bars of a prison window' (65).

Tommo's reading of Kory-Kory's facial tattoo turns the face into geography. Without pre-empting the discussion below on tattoos, it is important here to show how Tommo's reading of the islanders' eye tattoos is made deliberately ambiguous by Melville. Tommo refers to 'those country roads' with a tone of dismissal, forgetting that he and Toby have just traversed a landscape where they have 'descended into the hollow' and 'defied all obstacles' to get where they are. In a sense, Melville seems to be implying, they have traversed Kory-Kory's face to get where they are. This is perhaps the ultimate form of conquest. And it is made even more damning when Tommo reads the line crossing the eyes as a version of prison, suggestive of a lack of intellectual or moral 'sight'. The very reading implies that he himself is in the trap he accuses Kory-Kory of being in, unable to reach outside the prison bars of his own perspective. If the line across the eyes suggests a prison bar, that along the lips might equally suggest a bar to speech, but with the words 'from ear to ear', Melville also lends a second meaning, a grin. We are left with Tommo trapped by his own perceptions, and with Melville only hinting at possible alternatives. Neither one shows us the real Polynesian, and only the naive Tommo purports to be able to.

Legs and Metaphor

The second important part of the body Melville uses in his exploration of the nature of confinement on the island is the leg. Tommo's 'severe lameness' (78) from the 'imaginary demon located in the calf of my leg' (63) inaugurates for Melville the symbolic use of the leg as a symbol of the Oedipal swollen foot, a loss of power, which he will take into *Moby-Dick* and beyond. Going backward into the natal world is, Melville suggests, a return to a pre-Oedipal childhood, which will have to face its conflict with the Father (Law) if it is to grow up. The search for maternal utopias is a desire never to 'grow up'. Tommo acquires the lameness early on in some mysterious fashion, never knows what it precisely is, and thinks he may have been bitten by 'some venomous reptile' (34), except that later he makes it clear 'there are no venomous reptiles, and no snakes of any description to be found in any of the valleys' (166). 'Sin' against the Father, breaking the Adamic agreement, leads to the destruction of the garden,

makes the 'Adam' a version of Satan, but at the same time assures the onset of 'adulthood' in the form of 'civilization'. The swollen foot suggests that it is 'civilization' Tommo carries with him into the valley. The lameness prevents him from walking properly throughout his stay, necessitates Tommo's further suffering at the hands of the islanders' own questionable healing arts (62), and finally becomes the paramount reason for him having to leave the island to find medical attention.

Melville uses the leg to tell a story Tommo himself does not quite discern. We are invited to read the lame leg as a symbol of castration, because its disease provides Tommo at once with his greatest anxiety and also with his greatest desire, to leave the island. 'It was idle of me', he says, 'to think of moving from the place until I should have recovered from the severe lameness that inflicted me;' (78). As a result of this confinement, Tommo allows himself to be carried on the back of Kory-Kory wherever he goes. Moreover, he is turned into 'an infant' by being fed by Kory-Kory. 'All my remonstrances against this measure only provoked so great a clamour on his part, that I was obliged to acquiesce; and the operation of feeding being thus facilitated, the meal was quickly despatched' (70). The smug but embarrassed tone is sufficient for us to discern Melville's disapproval. The next morning Tommo awakes to find that Kory-Kory will carry him to the stream. Again, he 'acquiesces'. But his reading of the event shows a divide between author and narrator which leaves us in little doubt about Melville's own ideological position. Tommo, on the back of the slave-like Kory-Kory, and about to have his limbs 'tenderly bathed' by the servant, has time and audacity to pass an imperialist's eye over the onlookers. 'They reminded me of a group of idlers gathered about the door of a village tavern, when the equipage of some distinguished traveller is brought round previous to his departure' (71). Tommo becomes the epitome of the imperialist, repressive explorer whose very lameness and incapacity in the wilderness has ensured that he finds the native to be his bearer.

In the context of the narrative, however, the leg is made a symptom of a repressed anxiety, one which may be seen to dominate the psychology of conquest as Melville explores it, both here, and in *Moby-Dick*. Symbol of power that the leg is, it is also a symbol of a disease within the colonising body, one which is as much psychological as physical. In a Freudian reading the repressed anxiety emerges as a version of the lost phallus, the loss of western control of the world in which Tommo finds himself. Finding himself back in the world of the Imaginary and the maternal, Tommo's anxiety is sparked by the loss of the phallic sureties of

the Symbolic. He is confined by his own attempt to pacify his desire for the oceanic, and the leg is the symbol of his confinement. He must get used to a world where the Lotos-like dream of pre-thetic insouciance dominates. Since the disease is so mysterious, Melville seems to be suggesting that its origin is psychological more than physical, a reading supported by the fact that the leg strangely heals at times. Those times are the very ones when Tommo begins to accept his new dream-like, Imaginary state. 'Gradually I lost all knowledge of the regular recurrence of the days of the week and sunk insensibly into the kind of apathy which ensues after some violent outbreak of despair. My limb suddenly healed, the swelling went down, the pain subsided, and I had every reason to suppose I should soon completely recover from the affliction which had so long tormented me' (100). Tommo's leg becomes a barometer of his integration into the life of the island, and his ability to see with new eyes. The western man is sick. In contrast, the islanders 'had ample reason to felicitate themselves, for sickness was almost unknown' (102). The symptom of the leg is a metaphor for his imperialist mentality, for it shows a diseased body not united with itself, a body whose mind prevents it from functioning fully because the mind is ill-at-ease. Not surprisingly, the leg heals when Tommo experiences 'an elasticity of mind' (100). This suggests that when he is able to jettison his imperial eye, the division between body and mind, a Cartesian one on which the western capitalist project is based, will be healed. The islanders, after all, have no such problems, and cannot fathom Tommo's desire to leave, much less any quest for a utopia, either in the present or the after-life.

The symptom, as both Freud and Lacan have insisted, is itself to be read as a version of metaphor, for it is a sign of something beyond itself, a sign of a desire which remains unfulfilled. It is also a sign of the divide between mind and body, available only in the post-Oedipal stage. When he enters the island Tommo becomes a child again, returns to the mother, as if re-entering a pre-Mirror Stage, and re-enacting the Oedipal journey to become his own individuated self. In the post-Oedipal Symbolic which obtains in the adult world of the west he has the Law, the superego, the 'thou-shalt-not', as Brooks (1993: 13) puts it. But on the island, he must find himself in a mental battle between returning to the undifferentiated, whole bodied world of the pre-Mirror Stage child, and the one from which he has come.

In the Freudian and Lacanian formulation, metaphor is a symptom or even a function of desire. Like metaphor, desire is for what is not present, and attempting to make anything present, particularly in the form of language, creates yet another lack which reinaugurates

desire once again. In the world of the Symbolic, we are never out of desire just as we are never out of metaphor. This, essentially, is how culture is created, for, as MacCannell (1986: 68) explains it, 'the passion of the signifier to become the signified, of the image to become the concept', is what inaugurates culture. The promise of culture is, however, a scandal, since 'as Freud well knew... the promise is never kept. ... Once inside the space of metaphor [one is] in the world of presence and absence now formed into a deferral - for ever ...' (MacCannell, 1986: 69-70). Castration anxiety may therefore be seen to represent the loss of cultural certainty, an anxiety which resides within metaphor itself. Not only is the symptom a metaphor, but the metaphor is itself a symptom.

This is important theory both in relation to Melville's presentation of Tommo's leg, and his later presentation of Ahab's. The 'phallogocentric' world of the Symbolic out of which the imperialist Tommo has emerged has brought with it a castration anxiety he cannot get rid of. He is therefore caught in the western, phallic reading of himself where the phallic leg may also be read as a metaphor for the culture of 'lack' he brings to the island with him. He assumes a western cultural, dominating 'presence' when in fact he finds an 'absence', so that his reading may be termed 'logocentric', as Derrida might say. And since the phallus is so much involved in the sense of power that this 'presence' feels it has, one might suggest that what Tommo suffers is what Derrida calls 'phallogocentrism', a version of cultural hierarchizing which sees phallic, western culture as both 'naturally' dominant over the islanders' culture, and also as something which should always make meaning 'present'.

But Tommo's 'fall' into the ideal world of the Typees questions those phallogocentric hierarchies, and so his own self-definition, his own way of seeing, leaves him 'castrated'. It also leaves him the purveyor of an anxiety which is itself a disease. He is healed mysteriously when he achieves 'an elasticity of mind', suggesting that he gives up his demand for absolute 'presence' or certainty in his hierarchizing readings. He allows those elements of the Symbolic, like the structure of time on which the west bases its culture, to slip away, and so experiences less of the anxiety of absence and a split self which comes with his culture. Metaphor is his greatest anxiety, then, for he cannot live without a world of 'presence' and 'absence', a world where there is some future hope to be attained. This is most evident in his response to the islanders' religion. While he values the fact that they have no capitalism, no property, metaphor for wealth, and no money, declaring ecstatically, 'no Money! That "root of all evil" was not to be found in the valley' (101), he nevertheless cannot abide a world without

an eschatological hope. Such hope would be the metaphor attempting to show a 'presence' of the eternal future in the temporal, and retain the split on which western society is based.

In contrast to the west, the islanders have, he agrees 'an unbounded liberty of conscience', with no need of settling any principles of faith 'by agitating them' (139). But he finds difficulty with the way Kory-Kory dismisses the 'Polynesian heaven'. "A very pleasant place", Kory-Kory said it was; "but, after all, not much pleasanter, he thought, than Typee" (141). Addressing the statue of the warrior heading out in his canoe to this 'heaven' Tommo cannot help distinguishing between the 'material eye' and the 'eye of faith', something the Polynesian cannot and does not care, to do. "Ay, paddle away, brave chieftain, to the land of spirits! To the material eye thou makest but little progress; but with the eye of faith, I see thy canoe cleaving the bright waves, which die away in those dimly looming shores of Paradise" (141). Even in paradise, Tommo, afflicted with metaphor which always defers the presence it seeks to capture, cannot cease desiring paradise.

Desire, as Rousseau has it in his *Second Discourse*, is for desire itself. Melville is, in many respects, following Rousseau here. As MacCannell (1986: 80-81) shows, Rousseau distinguishes clearly between the desire which structures the 'civilized' and the lack of desire which informs 'savage' life. 'His needs satisfied, the savage sleeps'. In contrast, the western man, has what Rousseau calls 'new needs', which, ironically, result from the very tools created to help satisfy the earliest need within a community - language. Language, connecting groups rather than satisfying only singular or unique need, creates deferral because it shares between self and Other. The savage, according to Rousseau, knows no such need to share, and acts singularly. The savage 'natural man' lives by instinct, Rousseau asserts, not by desire: 'instincts of nature which correspond to his physical needs, so that the only goods he knows are food, sex and sleep, and the only evils, hunger and pain' (Charvet, 1974: 9).

With his diseased leg Tommo brings the divisive 'new need', a demand for a linguistic connection between self and Other foreign to the islanders, one which creates the very difference and distinction between groups it attempts to heal. Like all colonial theatres, this lack and difference becomes filled by hierarchizing control on the part of the coloniser. Castration anxiety, as Melville will show in the figure of Ahab, leads inevitably to the search for the phallus to replace it. What Tommo brings the islanders, assuming he brings them a version of enlightenment, is hardly different from the same 'enlightenment' brought by the missionaries.

He brings a mind that seeks to 'compute' (39) meaning. Divided from the sensualized body and unable to exist in the world of instinct soon comes to 'fairly loathe' the fecund nature of the 'dank rocks oozing forth moisture at every crevice' (39). It is a mind which sees the Polynesian language as inadequate and unsophisticated, since it has little or no metaphorical structure, and is as circular as children's rhymes. It is full of repetitions and duplications, like 'lumee lumee' and 'poee poee'. Similarly, their singing constitutes to his ear a 'monotonous chant', or a 'frightful incantation' (177-178). Its forms suggest a world turned in on itself, without the expanse of metaphor or the functions of desire which accompany it, symbolized by the circle in which the people sit and sing or talk. Tommo takes over the role of 'court minstrel' because he is deemed to have 'a preternatural faculty which Heaven had denied [the islanders]' (179). Even savages, Tommo assumes, can discern higher civilization, though they cannot presume to emulate it, as Marheyo vainly attempts when he puts on Tommo's clothes.

Clothes become the other important metaphor of civilization and its disease which Tommo brings to the island. If Benjamin Franklin had declared with his 'natural rights' philosophy that 'natural aristocracy' based on work, was the means to determining 'natural right' to the land (Jehlen, 1986: 65), then property like western clothing, the result of 'work', becomes the symbol of western conquest. The fact that Tommo does little or no work while on the island, and uses his (western) disease as an excuse to be carried, is Melville's own scathing attack on Franklin's aristocracy. Tommo brings the notion of property to an island which had existed, in true Rousseauan fashion, largely without it. On the one hand Tommo deplures western clothes as nothing but 'cunning artifices' (148) which, if the west did not have to hide its flaws, 'the effect would be truly deplorable'. Yet he shows his value of these clothes just the same, offering calico to the young 'Adam and Eve' as a matter of course (52), and giving his own clothes to Marheyo (99). Clothing, the very symptom of western artifice, and everything that Fayaway's 'summer garb of Eden' (69) is not, is made the metaphor for Tommo's continued sense of false superiority, making his actions undermine his stated beliefs. Claiming to value the savage's 'artlessness' (133), he shows that it is really his own artfulness which he most values.

Two important instances support this. Like all imperialists, Tommo brings division to what was before a place of peace. The united social body of the Polynesians becomes nearly as divided as the diseased one of the west is. 'During my whole stay on the island I never witnessed a single quarrel, nor anything that in the slightest degree approached even to a

dispute' (160), Tommo declares with romantic, sentimentalist awe. This may be Melville's way of showing Tommo's blinkers, for even his own text shows arguments between the islanders, especially when he is about to escape. More importantly, however, Melville is able to show us a Tommo who quite deliberately brings the 'art' of war to the island, one which he apparently values for its artlessness. As a game he introduces the making of pop-guns. But the guns, and the game of guns, divides the social body and introduces western images of conquest and expansionism. 'What community, for instance', asks Tommo, with Melville's ironic tone weighing heavily upon the words, 'of refined and intellectual mortals would derive the least satisfaction from shooting pop-guns?' (118) Pop-guns make adults into children, demean the islanders, but the words are ironic too because the children of the west, and Tommo himself, are the very ones enjoying the guns. Soon the language Tommo uses is that of war. 'There, you were assailed by the intrepid garrison of a house, who levelled their bamboo rifles at you from between the upright canes which composed the sides. Farther on, you were fired upon by a detachment of sharpshooters, mounted upon the top of a pi-pi' (119). Comic effect and harsh satire are blended.

Tommo's boxing showmanship carries hardly less irony on Melville's part, turning the young western explorer into the self-satisfied imperialist, as childlike in his vanity as he has just accused the primitives of being. As a metaphor of 'civilized' and orderly conflict turned into a game, boxing is the example par excellence of the divided social body, and of an individualism unknown among the islanders. Only a sick society can turn physical conflict into a game, and presume to measure manhood by it. We are meant to laugh at the image of Tommo shadow boxing, but that the shadow is as much a mirror image of himself as anything shows him to be the symbol of the imperialist boxing his own shadow while showing off his apparent conquering prowess. Tommo simply cannot discern that the pleasure the islanders take from his displays may be at his own expense.

Nothing afforded them more pleasure than to see me go through the attitudes of a pugilistic encounter. As not one of the natives had soul enough in him to stand up like a man, and allow me to hammer away at him, for my own personal gratification, and that of the king, I was necessitated to fight with an imaginary enemy, whom I invariably made to knock under to my superior prowess (179).

If boxing is a metaphor for division and aggression, and the leg a metaphor for the diseased body needing to fulfill its lack by colonising other bodies, then the final important metaphor governing Tommo's imperialist endeavours is that of the Taboo. Its most important example, apart from the fear of cannibalism in the Taboo Groves, on which Sanborn (1998) has done much work, is the gender taboo. Women are not allowed onto the canoes. Only men are. They are clearly phallic symbols, so that to make use of them is to overturn gender identities.

His attitude and language describing the taboo is that of the imperialist describing the idiosyncratic ideas of children. 'Although the "taboo" was a ticklish thing to meddle with, I determined to test its capabilities of resisting the attack. I consulted the chief Mehevi, who endeavoured to persuade me from my object: but I was not to be repulsed' (107). Fayaway's ride he depicts, in typically missionary fashion, as 'emancipation' (108). Reading the 'taboo' with the western eye Tommo assumes it to be 'capricious' (175), as slippery as the metaphor. The facts which are closer to the truth, however, are that the taboo is not interpretable by the western eye, and in the face of mystery, the west imposes its own readings. Tommo himself proves as capricious, for while he can castigate the white captain at Tior bay for flagrantly breaking it (175), he does just the same. Having colonised the island beauty, Tommo fulfills the western traveller's stereotype, eminently acceptable at home as a necessary indulgence. He leaves her, of course, as others like Gaugin would do later, without thought of the consequences. Both become but commodifiers of the exotic.¹³

¹³ On Gaugin's experiences in Polynesia as commodification of the exotic see Brooks (1993).

But there is another way of reading the taboo. To Tommo it is a version of repressive law against which he desires to react, asserting individualism, a kind of ‘castration’ which he must overcome. To the islander, however, it is not an imposed social institution, but more a way of life. While it may be ironic that the very place associated with ‘natural freedom’ should have engendered the idea of the ‘taboo’, this does not suggest that the islanders exist in the same Symbolic realm the west does. For while the taboo is a Law, which one associates with the restrained desires of the west, rather than with the maternal singleness of the islanders’ Imaginary, it is nevertheless something never questioned. To question it, as Tommo presumes to do, is to question a mode of being. In this sense the taboo does not quite operate as a metaphor, a symptom of an unfulfilled desire, but is more akin to metonymy.

Metonymy plays a large role in Melville’s work, so it is useful to define it more carefully here. It does not join conflicting notions in analogical approximation as a way of expressing a third, inexpressible notion, as metaphor attempts to do, but works more by contiguity, as, according to Roman Jakobson, whom Lacan uses (MacCannell, 1986: 96). Word and thing are contiguous, not merely approximatory or functioning as what Lacan considers ‘substitution’. Metaphor substitutes one idea for another, and so blocks a third (e.g. roses = ‘love’, must block out, ‘hate’= roses), metonymy assumes ‘contiguity’ between sign and signified. Hugh Bredin (1984: 57) defines it as a figure which

...neither states nor implies the connection between the objects involved in it. For this reason, it relies wholly upon those relations between objects that are habitually and conventionally known and accepted. We must *already know* that the objects are related, if the metonymy is to be devised or understood. Thus, metaphor *creates* the relation between objects, while metonymy *presupposes* that relation.

Metonymy assumes a perspective the reader or adherent must accept, as in religious or allegorical and typological language, rather than the substitutions and associations of metaphor.

As metonymy the taboo is a socially assumed and accepted relation between thing and meaning, not a contested one. Tommo contests it, but can do so only from outside the culture and from the position of the Symbolic. The islanders cannot and do not contest it, for it structures their social world as one of presence rather than absence. The taboo does not relate

to abstracts so much as to places or people. It is embodied rather than ideational. The 'groves' are taboo, the 'lake' is taboo, 'canoes' are taboo, and Marnoo the messenger is 'taboo'. Polynesia makes its laws embodied not in institutions, but in actual places and people, which have the feeling of the sacral. It is the west which adopts the name of the prohibition, but applies it to the institution of desire, like incest, not a thing in itself. Oedipus becomes a prime example of such appropriation, because it embodies repression, a metaphorical deferral upon which the west's institutions are based. The 'disease' of the metaphorical that Tommo brings with him cannot appreciate such embodiment because it does not contain within it the drives of desire. Metonymy, we may suggest with Lacan then, is the trope of the Imaginary, and in the context of Melville's work, the trope that operates most commonly among those of his characters who represent the near-achievement of a version of sacral 'presence' rather than the western Symbolic, which is obsessed with its own sense of absence. What Emerson's 'transparent eyeball' attempts to fuse (self and nature, Imaginary and Symbolic) the metonymically thinking 'savage' in *Typee* and elsewhere in Melville sees no point in fusing, for he exists in a pre-Cartesian realm where the separation between body and head, self and world has not yet taken place.

The final, and perhaps most important, metaphor Tommo brings to the island is textuality itself. His text itself imposes difference and deferral on the otherwise contented, if islanded, Typees. It is another way of bringing an awareness of property to the island, not just physical, but intellectual. Tommo presumes to write a history of the island, when in fact it is pointedly a place without history, at least one accessible to the western mind. 'Nothing can be more uniform and undiversified than the life of the Typees' (122) he says. The only history he can offer is of himself on the island, and it is the history of the difference between himself and the islanders, of his struggle not to slip into their life of indolence. But his 'history', like so many western travelogues before, reinforces stereotypes, making the native life 'little else than an often interrupted and luxurious nap' (125). That the 'interruptions' are filled with uninterpretable activity remains unimportant to him. He can interpret only through the categories of indolence and activity. Even the islanders' religion is suggestive of indolence and lack of history. Its equivalent of Stonehenge has 'no inscriptions, no sculpture, no clue, by which to conjecture its history;' (127), leaving the western eye disconcerted at 'nothing but the dumb stones'. Melville's oblique reference to Christ's declaration (Lk 19.40) that even the stones will cry out his 'truth' if people cannot perceive it, and that these Polynesian stones

might indeed offer the ‘real’ truth, escapes Tommo. He must insert difference and therefore his own notion of history in order to feel comfortable. The islanders have no ‘story’ because they do not need one. Tommo cannot, finally, exist in a world that sees no point in the deferred desires of metaphor and creates stories to fill their spaces.

Tattoos

The tattoos on the bodies of the islanders signify more directly than any other social phenomenon this ‘essentialist’ nature of the island and its existence in what may be termed a metonymic Imaginary.¹⁴ The tattoo undoes Cartesian divisions between word and thing, body and sign by reducing the metaphorical value of the sign to the body itself. When the body dies, the meaning of the sign dies with it. The sign literally takes on the shape of the body, changes with its age, where ‘the bodies of these men were of a uniform dull green colour - the hue which the tattooing gradually assumes as the individual advances in age’ (74). Tattoos mark the social status of the person, like mature women having marks on one hand and one foot, young girls having but marks on the shoulder and lip (154). It is a metonym making body and sign contiguous, rather than a metaphor expressing future fulfilment of desire. Tommo interprets tattooing as a ‘barbarous art’ (68) because it ‘desecrates’ nature. But such an interpretation is possible only from one who sees art as separate from nature, an imposition of a desire not realisable, or the confinement of the body to an idea in the mind of the artist. The Typees, not thinking in such Cartesian ways, see no such distinctions between body and art, object and idea, or desire and fulfilment. Bodies are their own signs in the Typee valley, because what is written on them represents a function of their being.

¹⁴ Sanborn (1998: 106-107) has also used the figure of metonymy as a description of the function of the tattoos. His argument is similar to the present one when he says: ‘Mehevi’s self-display merges the ornamented body with the body as ornament. In light of the continuum that Tommo establishes between the bone and hair appended to Mehevi’s body and the “lacework” shapes tattooed on it, that body is not so much the metaphorical expression of Mehevi’s inner being as it is one more metonymic appendage to it’. He, however, does not read metonymy in relation to a psychological state, but merely as a textual form. Tommo’s fear of tattoos is clearly a psychological one, and the islanders’ use of the art a version of inscribing identity, though for them not an individualist identity one would expect in the west. Instead, it inscribes the bearer as part of a greater, communal whole, a synecdoche, rather than a metaphorical identity.

Marnoo has the 'diamond checkered shaft of the beautiful "artu" tree' (110) tattooed on his back. Queequeg will have similar checkerboard marks on his back. In him they will suggest his 'game-cock' nature. Tommo will be offered a similar 'freemason badge upon my countenance in the shape of a mystic triangle' (173). Melville will take up the relation between tattoos and freemasonry in *Moby-Dick*. But here with Marnoo the artu tree suggests something archetypal and primal, like the Tree of Life common to the Kabbalah, and known in freemasonry, but the rest of his tattoos are an integral part of a pattern which cannot leave one part separate from any other. 'A rear view of the stranger might have suggested the idea of a spreading vine tacked against a garden wall. Upon his breast, arms, and legs, were exhibited an infinite variety of figures; every one of which, however, appeared to have reference to the general effect sought to be produced'. The artwork of the tattoo is in perfect relation to itself, the parts and whole co-existent, as is the relation between the parts of the artwork and the body. The tattoo puts life and art into the same realm. The facial tattoo is acceptable to the islanders because their notion of identity is neither personal, separate from another's, nor facial. The communal society gives its communal markers as identification. The individualist, self-reliant western explorer is not in a position to understand this communalism. The sign of the body and the sign of the tattoo are one, but equally importantly, the signs of the one body and that of the communal body are also one.

Tommo's anxiety to escape the island is as much out of fear of being tattooed, particularly on the face, as being kept in a small and (to him) intellectually barren place. 'Horried at the bare thought of being rendered hideous for life if the wretch were to execute his purpose upon me, I struggled to get away from him' (171), 'what an object he would have made of me' (172) he says when he is accosted by Karky the tattooing artist. Melville's choice of adjective is instructive. Tommo, presuming subjecthood resides in his face, cannot bear the idea of being made an object. But the Typees, having no distinction between subject and object, use metonymic art to show their inseparability from nature.

The metonymy is an important one for Melville, for here he begins an exploration that will continue into *Moby-Dick*, and become one of its main themes. If Tommo cannot abide the world of metonymy and must suffer the desire inherent within metaphor's search for closure, then Ishmael will face a similar dilemma later. But he, unlike Ahab whose desire will drive him on trying to 'close down' the metaphor of the whale, will at least attempt a form of metonymic oneness. He will learn it from his umbilical-like tie to the South Seas islander

Queequeg. As with these islanders, however, the metonymic world of a 'natural' unity will not prove enough keep the western, desiring self from his quest. This natural world is itself too much like a maternal Imaginary to which the split, post-Mirror Stage subject cannot happily return. Tommo feels trapped in his paradise the same way Ishmael will become encircled by the whales in 'The Grand Armada', experiencing a version of paradise, but not being able to abide long in it, for the 'tornadoed Atlantic of [his] being' thrashes against docility and repose. At least part of that discomfort resides in the western sense of superiority, which Tommo cannot, finally, jettison. He reveals it when he suggests that the artist 'was overwhelmed with sorrow at losing so noble an opportunity of distinguishing himself in his profession'. He has, finally, no other eyes to read with but his western, metaphorical ones, and cannot appreciate the island for its lack of distinction between desire and reality. He must escape because he cannot exist in a space without desire.

What, however, is Melville's own view of the island and its tattoos? For the most part, one must suggest that he retains an ambiguous distance from his own protagonist, and also from the islanders. The tattoos on their faces (65), so reminiscent to Tommo of the stripes of prison bars, to Tommo symbolise the captivity of the islanded world. But by leaving Tommo's racist interpretation exposed, Melville keeps open further interpretive possibilities. Reading a culture as 'captive' is possible only from the position of the 'outsider' who imposes an interpretation. Read from the 'inside' it does not carry the same connotation. Instead of attempting to carry out a reading of the 'primitive' then, Melville, all too aware of the dangers of such readings, rather questions those processes themselves, and leaves any claims to final 'knowledge' ambiguous. By making his own narrator unreliable he ensures that any interpretation of the islands is to be questioned, so that the expansionist, colonialist project itself is left open to question.

What his text does show is that the explorer/settler type, now become the American expansionist of the late 1840s, participates in a way of seeing which is utopian, and in being utopian shares the same 'absences' and 'lacks' at the heart of the metaphorical and the Symbolic. For, like the metaphorical, the utopian looks to a future closure which is inseparably linked to the sense of lack or desire which it carries and is trying to 'close down' or fulfill. The Imaginary may be a 'maternal', essentialist place to seek to return to, both for the individual uncertain of his identity and for the nation discontent with the 'civilization' it has so far achieved, but ultimately for the western mind the 'oceanic' is never fully pacified, because it

exists as the central drive of desire which can only be fulfilled by itself.

Tommo becomes, then, the butt of Melville's first satire on expansionism. Much of his succeeding work will develop along the same dichotomy between Imaginary and Symbolic, metonymy and metaphor, insular fulfilment and expansionist desire. Queequeg and Ahab will represent these opposites in *Moby-Dick*, Isabel will suggest the 'primitive' metonymic in contrast to Pierre's expansionist programme in *Pierre*. Bartleby's silences will be metonymic, as will Babo's in contrast to Delano's colonial eye. And lastly, Melville will return to the contrast between 'primitive' utopian and desiring 'civilized' in *Billy Budd*, where the stuttering young sailor falls victim to the Law of the Father, as metonymy does to the exigencies of the more expansionist metaphor.

Desiring destiny to be manifest in the self-reliant assertion of the nation 'escaping tyranny', as Tommo does the *Dolly*, fearing the evanescence of nature and of meaning, that self cannot escape the insatiable gap within metaphor, any more than it can accept the repose of contiguous metonymy, where bodies can be their own signs, as they are for the Typees. Just as Tommo reads his paradisaical experience as an allegory of either/or, either being swallowed, as if by a whale, into a world of primitive uniformity and loss of identity, or fighting to retain selfhood built on the assertion of otherness, so he must inevitably choose to escape either one or the other. Melville presents the alternatives, but rejects the final choice. Neither position is necessarily a workable one, either for the self or the nation. To escape Tommo must use violence, as he does against the one-eyed Mow-Mow (199), in a gesture symbolic of the future of western enterprise to find its own identity in relation to the primitive. To choose the primitive will lead to what later becomes the 'insular Tahiti' of *Moby-Dick*, a place of contented repose, but one not really feasible in the long-term. To choose the 'civilized' will be to adopt the assumptions of a Manifest Destiny which narcissistically sees no difference between the individual's desires to appropriate meaning, history and land, and moral value. Both are versions of utopia, but both are also versions of confinement, and their dual existence is what Melville will ultimately show to be his most lasting vision.

Frantz Fanon (1967: 119) describing some of the pitfalls of a national consciousness, suggests that one of the greatest ones may be when the national interest is passed over in favour of those of the race. 'National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, ..., will be in any case only an empty shell.... [if] the tribe is preferred to the state'. At the end of *Typee*, this is this dilemma with which Melville

leaves Tommo and his reader. The dictates of the 'tribe', whether your own or an adopted one, have become too insular, but they are not yet those which can be incorporated into the multifarious nation. Yet at the same time, that very multifariousness, the power and the lack that is in the desire signified by metaphor, driving nationalist expansionism, is not yet fully understood or accepted by the nation itself. Tommo hovers in the 'imagined' space Benedict Anderson (1983: 136) has outlined with regard to nations. While nationalism, like utopianism, 'thinks in terms of historical destinies', racism or tribalism, works circularly by endless repetition of past 'contaminations'. In many respects the two are inimical to each other, especially within the boundaries of the political state. The latter seeks satisfaction in present divisions or in islands of repose. The former awaits a chiliastic future. The conflict between these two drives will lead to the 'hypos' that takes Ishmael to the sea, and, when not checked, the monomania that engulfs Ahab. *Moby-Dick* will explore the conflict in minute detail, and conclude with similar ambiguities about which form of existence is preferable, the shadowed eyes of the 'primitive' not desiring more than he is, or the monomaniac hunt of the western imperialist, disgruntled with his lack of conquest of the 'oceanic', seeking to objectify utopia in the bodies of the conquered.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF WHALING

‘Such as appear in their pure and natural simplicity easily escape a vision as coarse as ours. Theirs is a delicate and hidden beauty; it needs a clear and a purified sight to discover their secret brightness.’

Montaigne, ‘On Physiognomy’

‘To pierce the lack of knowing is to die.’

Sydney Clouts, ‘What Remains’.

Melville’s most important work, *Moby-Dick*, published in 1852, is the one in which bodies loom largest. The whale body is literally and philosophically probably the largest of them, but some of the human bodies in the novel cannot be ignored either. One can read the presentation of these bodies in terms of confinement because they are literally confined to the ship, confined to the dissecting spade in the case of the whale, and to the borders of the physical ship in the case of the men. However, the confinement is as much philosophical as it is physical. By cutting up the whale in his text, Melville is exploring the meaning of its body. And by doing that, he is exploring the epistemologies which are used to dissect the meanings of the bodies. Bodies are confined, not just to the literal ship, but also to the minds which are interpreting them.

In both the whale and human bodies, the psychology of conquest is an integral part of the dissecting epistemology. The whale bodies are conquered, and part of the conquest is that they are interpreted in all the categories of the capitalist hunt which commodifies them. The ‘iron mouths’ with their ‘iron lips’ (326) of the try-pots in which the whale bodies are burned down, suggests not only the gluttonous mouth of capitalism, but also the textual explanation, with its psychology, behind the conquest. Melville will explore the ‘iron lips’ of this psychology which can turn the whale body into a ‘plethoric burning martyr’ on the one hand, or a ‘self-consuming misanthrope’ (326) on the other, depending on the individual and the point of view. To define the whale body is to define the mind trying to define it. The human bodies confined to the ship not just as a place of physical limitation, but also as a symbol of social and

psychological captivity in which the individual body must play its role and within whose laws it is judged to be acceptable or not. They either accept the role of conquest they are forced to play by Ahab, or become pawns in the game. As pawns, they may be essentially different, as Queequeg is, from the hunt's rationale and represent alternative ways of being, but they remain trapped in the capitalist hunting action, if not psychology.

In many respects *Moby-Dick* takes up the same arguments that first held Melville's attention in *Typee*. It is, as many scholars have shown, a novel not only about bodies, but more about what they mean, and the methods of determining such meaning. This is the view taken by Cameron (1981), who deals with the body as function of identity and epistemology. Joan Burbick (1994) objects to Cameron's possibly 'essentialist' reading of the text and offers a more cultural constructionist one, focussing on the discursive nature of epistemology. Sanborn (1998) and Otter (1999) also take this route but deal with the post-colonial discourses on the body. The approach of the present study is to seek some kind of middle ground between an essentialist reading of the body as identity and the constructionist reading of discourses, without ignoring the value of either. Body, epistemology and identity are inextricably linked. Dissecting the whale body and attempting to decipher the human ones, Melville is trying to determine how it is possible to 'read' bodies and their meaning at all.

The question the novel attempts to deal with is similar to that of 'essentialism' so prevalent in present-day debates about bodily meaning. Can a body have an 'essential' meaning all of its own, a kind of transcendent being complete unto itself, even if that meaning is not fully decipherable? Or is the body perpetually confined to the meanings given it by culture? The first interpretation may appear Idealist, a version of Kantian dualism which assumes that there is the perfect Transcendental 'meaning' inherent in a body, which can't necessarily be reached. There are 'things in themselves', to use the Kantian phrase, but we can't necessarily reach their meaning (Pinkard, 1996: 128). The second, more along the lines of Foucault and Lacan's cultural constructionism, assumes that no such Ideal meaning or body exists, and that bodily meaning is dependant on cultural constructs, and so identity remains always tenuous and attenuated. A third possibility, however, arises in the form of the theory of phenomenology, which, as Laura Doyle (1994: preface) has shown, offers something of a mid-point between these two extremes. To read history and culture 'only through the lens of discourse risks perpetuating the transcendentalist subsumption of sentience into speech, of things into words'. The alternative is to seek a 'hybrid' relation between things and words,

sentience and speech in which there is ‘intersubjectivity’, not subsumption.

I argue that Melville is engaging these three options in *Moby-Dick*. It is possible to read Ahab’s response to the whale body as an anger born of the fact that he is unable to reach the transcendental ‘meaning’ behind the ‘mask’ of the whale, symbol of the universe. He becomes a frustrated Idealist, and the whale becomes, to him, the symbol of division between a largely fallen human knowledge and the possible Reality beyond. A cultural constructionist reading of the whale places it in its function as social and capitalist object, giving it identity only in relation to its literally and figuratively ‘dissected’ being. It is an object of culture, which is much the way Starbuck thinks when he sees the voyage only in terms of the ‘business we follow’ (139). Can the body be wholly conquered by culture and by the text attempting to define/confine it? The novel’s ‘chopping up’ of the whale examines this type of reading. The fact that both readings are shown, by the end, to be palpably inadequate, suggests a third possibility, and this is Ishmael’s attempt to see the whale in phenomenological terms. Such terms suggest that there may be a form of ‘essence’ of whaleness, but that it can be known only through interaction with the knowing self.

Three bodies will be examined in what follows. The whale’s itself and how its body is read, but also two human bodies, for they hold fundamental importance both for *Moby-Dick* and much of the later works. These are Ahab’s and Queequeg’s. The premise of the argument in relation to these two bodies is the psychoanalytic one used in the chapter on *Typee*, that the body is a sign or symptom of its inner being, so that to examine the outer form, and the actions it performs, as Melville does in great detail, is to examine the inner motivations.

This particular chapter will explore how Melville presents the relation between the whale body and the psychology of conquest. Since he, as Otter has shown, consistently equates whale and human physiognomy, suggesting that the confinement of the whale symbolises that of the human, it will be appropriate to explore some of the relevant discourses on human physiognomy extant at the time. But the primary thrust of the argument will be to suggest that Melville, through Ishmael and Queequeg, offers a phenomenological reading of the whale body and the action of whaling which is at odds with much of the rapacious hunting around them. The phenomenological does not seek conquest or a knowledge based on objectifying control and confinement, but rather an intersubjectivity of the kind Ismael and Queequeg share. The question to be answered by the end of the novel, however, is whether such an intersubjectivity remains a viable *modus vivendi*. Put in the imagery Melville uses of

the try-works, if Ahab's 'fiery hunt' represents the mind of a 'self-consuming misanthrope', will the alternative be nothing more than the actions of a 'plethoric burning martyr'?

Knowing Bodies

When, in 'Cetology' Ishmael describes his task of explaining the meaning of the whale to his reader as having one's hands 'among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world' (116), he is using imagery which quite deliberately fuses the mysterious and unspeakable, with bodily intimacy. He could be citing Emerson's transcendentalist view of Nature in which we can 'penetrate bodily this incredible beauty;...dip our hands in this painted element; our eyes are bathed in these light forms' ('Nature', 1895: 119). But if he is gesturing towards Emerson, it is only to dismiss the assumptions of transcendentalist absolutism. Emerson assumes that his eyes can be 'bathed' so that there is little or no distinction between them and the elements. From the beginning of *Moby-Dick*, however, as he did in *Typee*, Melville has questioned the value of the eye as a tool of measurement. 'No man can ever feel his own identity aright except his eyes be closed; as if darkness were indeed the proper element of our essences,' says Ishmael (58). The eye is rejected in favour of a darkness in which the hand becomes the most useful object of measurement. Darkness, however, suggests an equal uncertainty about what hands can tell anyone, for what they encounter may not be able to be 'told'. The body's foundation, ribs and pelvis remain 'unspeakable'. While it may be knowable, that knowledge cannot be fully transmitted, not even in the text Melville is himself composing. 'I have swum through libraries and sailed through oceans;' says Ishmael, 'I have had to do with whales with these visible hands; I am in earnest; and I will try' (116). Turning the whale body into 'leaves' (325) and 'sheets' (324) to be written on or read out of, Melville explores not only the form of the body, but more importantly, the discourses on the body and what assumptions those discourses make.

While the eye sees only the external features of the creature, the hand may be able to get deeper into the inner being of the creature. To define a whale by its externals is quite simple for Ishmael, so simple that it becomes ludicrous. 'Next: how shall we define the whale, by his obvious externals, so as conspicuously to label him for all time to come? To be short, then, a whale is *a spouting fish with a horizontal tail*. There you have him' (117). The eye viewing externals may be able to tell differences between whales, as the entire chapter on 'Cetology' catalogues, but it is not really able to tell essences. Hands are preferable because they are the

purveyors of tactile experience, instruments of encounter which do not limit their 'sight' to the external only. However, they present a problem as well, for it is the 'visible' hand which writes the narrative and describes what the eye sees, and what the eye sees is declared to be, ultimately, unspeakable. Hands are tainted too, for while they may experience the whale, they may not necessarily be able to articulate that experience. Both forms of epistemology remain open to question. The eye is limited by its obsession with externals, and the hand by the fact that it cannot speak. Eye and hand measure, and eye and hand are, for Melville, symbols of both idealism and empiricism.

In the context of the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, questioning eye and hand as epistemological tools is to question the dominant epistemologies of the time. Melville deliberately asks the question. Discussing whiteness, as Ishmael does, he presents an external feature as essentially unknowable, with multiple associations, and concludes that the 'indefiniteness it shadows forth' is like the 'heartless voids and immensities of the universe' (165). What the eye attempts to contain and the hand measure becomes a 'shadow'. And the shadow, if empiricists like Locke are to be believed, reside in the viewing and measuring self, not necessarily in the thing itself. 'And when we consider that other theory of the natural philosophers, that all other earthly hues - [are] but subtile deceits, not actually inherent in substances' (165), says Ishmael of Locke, and concludes that it is 'the great principle of light' which defines the colour and nature of things. But to define 'light' is to be like the 'wretched infidel' who 'gazes himself blind at the monumental white shroud' (165). Knowledge, here, is based not on sight or on touch and measurement, but on the mystically indefinable. It is based, Ishmael seems to imply, on a kind of faith. The infidel will see only a shroud and be blinded if he looks for specifics. To understand the impact of what he is suggesting, however, one must understand something of the empiricist and idealist readings of the body extant as he writes.

As commentators like Otter (1999) and Burbick (1994) have shown, Melville addresses the assumptions of nineteenth-century craniology and phrenology, as the most influential versions of applied empiricism available. They are foundational to much of the colonialist thinking of the time, which saw non-Europeans as phrenologically inferior to Europeans, and so worthy of conquest. To use the same theories about whales is therefore to imply that the readings of whales is to be taken as symbolic of readings of conquered humans. It is also to investigate the psychology of conquest as it is found in the discourses which emerge from the

colonising enterprise. An examination of the empiricist discourses, however, shows them to be versions of idealism, masquerading as empiricism.

Otter (1999: 132) points out that Melville moves from whale to human anatomy and back with ease because this is precisely what those like Thomas Beale and Frederick Bennett did, who were ships' surgeons and so had no other means of depicting whale bodies. When he does attempt to make use of cetological categories, he takes his information second hand from the *Penny Cyclopaedia* article 'Whales' (1833-1844), and uses only some works first hand, like William Scoresby's *An Account of the Arctic Regions, with a History and Account of the Northern Whale Fishery* (1820), Thomas Beale's *Natural History of the Sperm Whale* (1839) and Henry Cheever's *The Whale and His Captors* (1850). They are summed up, however, in a single dismissive sentence. 'Though of real knowledge there be little, yet of books there are plenty;' (115). He quotes Beale with some enthusiasm as saying 'utter confusion exists among the historians of this animal (Sperm whale)', and is much less interested in the physical aspects of whales than in the inability of language to define their essence, or of the human being to know them fully.

This in itself suggests a laconic attitude to the discourses of craniology and phrenology as forms of description claiming objective knowledge. It implies on the one hand that the pseudo-sciences were disregarding the fact of the difference between species, and on the other that there is no reliable method of interpreting whales, and a 'false' one usually applied to humans is the only option. One must agree largely with Otter that Melville's cetology chapters are not merely tangential to his argument, and that he is not merely dismissing 'nineteenth-century corporeal enquiry', but rather using it to show that whale knowledge is 'not about the gap between expendable surface and philosophical depth but about how bodies become saturated with meaning and how "race" was seen as key to it all' (1999: 133). Without any other scientific means to 'measure' whale bodies, the cetologists used those pseudo sciences applied to human bodies. Melville does the same, if only to undermine their assumptions, both regarding whales and humans. His final word is to dismiss these systems as inadequate. There can be many books, and his own will be yet another, but there is very little 'real knowledge'. 'I hereupon offer my own poor endeavors. I promise nothing complete' (116), Ishmael says. This is to undermine the final claims of empiricism, and of the written text adequately to describe its subject. The gap between object and word, between world and book remains the mystical one which no science or pseudo-science can close.

Phrenology, however, assumes it can, and in the process unknowingly combines empirical with idealist reasoning, while not acknowledging the gap between word and thing. Turning the body into a 'type', it combines mind and eye, where the eye's image of the external assumes authority in the mind of the viewer and over the physical body of the object. Inherent in the racial stereotyping so common to phrenology is the dehumanizing ideology it takes to be 'natural'. It is this 'naturalism' Melville questions. As Josiah Nott claims about racial types, 'How indelible is the image of a *type* once impressed on the mind's eye!' (Otter, 1999: 120). This suggests an idealist use of empiricism in which the external feature is taken to represent internal being, and the mechanism of reading the feature remains unquestioned. It also assumes that the eye has full penetrative and classifying power. More importantly, phrenologists read metaphysics into or out of the physical. External symbolises internal. Franz Gall and Johann Spurzheim, whom Melville mentions, but with some disparagement, in 'The Prairie', read the bumps on the skull, find moral distinctions in physical difference, and relate morality to racial difference. American followers like George Morton in *Crania Aegyptiaca* (1844) and Henry Patterson in his 'Memoir of the Life and Scientific Labors of George Morton' (1854) relate those differences to the races of America. Josiah Nott and George Gliddon, in their *Types of Mankind* (1854), following Morton, develop a racial typology which concludes that the different races had been created separately by God. Human being becomes assured by 'those primitive or original forms which are independent of Climate or other Physical influences. All men are more or less influenced by external causes, but these can never act with sufficient force to transform one type into another'(1854: 80). Nott, in his 1843 article 'The Mulatto a Hybrid', had already argued for the separate existence of blacks and whites on the grounds that miscegenation would see the extinction of the white race.

The assumptions of comparative craniology are formed, not by biology, but, as Otter puts it 'the discourses of biology, theology and printing' (1999: 120), where 'type' is both theological distinction and written word, and assumes fixity. This suggests a combination of empirical with idealistic philosophies, with little or no place for knowing the actual object in itself. Such object, be it whale or human, is trapped in the discourse used to describe it. Biology becomes a discourse, as Foucault has shown in *The Order of Things* (1970), which ensures that the 'looker', who is generally Caucasian, places his own race above any others, privileging fair skin, long hair, 'full and elevated' and 'well-proportioned features', as Morton puts it. Finding the abstracts of 'spirituality' and 'hope' in the shape of the skull, the phrenologists,

like the Fowler brothers in 1852, are effectively attempting what Emerson would have the Idealist do, 'dip [his] hands in the painted element' of nature, as if to combine empirical measure of the 'element' with the abstract 'paint'. What they want to see, in other words, they will see, and claim it to be scientific. The conquest is not just of the object under view or the population stereotyped, but really of the viewer's own mind, which remains closed to any 'shadow' within its line of vision, the shadow Melville highlights in 'The Whiteness of the Whale'.

Phrenology asserts a version of positivism which reduces the metaphysical to the physical. While asserting ideal forms, as a transcendentalist might, it nevertheless fixes them into socially constituted hierarchies which are nevertheless given the status of 'essential truth' by virtue, not of ideal beliefs, but by ostensibly rational, materialist measurement. The phrenologist is at heart an Idealist using Empiricist methods to prop up his Idealism. To dismantle his circular logic, one must dismantle, or at least unpick, the claims of both systems of knowledge.

Melville delights in such an unpicking. He attempts what Emerson says is possible for all those who wish to encounter Nature, dipping his hands in the painted element: 'I shall ere long paint to you', says Ishmael, 'as well as one can without canvas, something like the true form of the whale as he actually appears to the eye of the whaleman when in his own absolute body the whale is moored alongside the whale-ship...' (214-5). The choice of imagery is salutary. He 'paints', admitting the fact of artistic interpretation necessary for any 'science', and the fact of discourse as instrumental in the description and experience of reality. The result is that he offers only 'something like the true form', which 'appears' to the 'eye' of the whaleman. Eye is contrasted with 'absolute body', neither in materialist control of it, nor idealistically transparent within it. But the eye is prisoner to appearance. Even when you can get a view from various positions, you are never quite able to envisage the entire body. He has warned the reader of this very problem from the outset, when the painting in the Spouter Inn, seen through an air 'besmoked' shows an apparent whale which could be 'a Black Sea in a midnight gale', or a 'blasted heath', or a 'Hyperborean winter scene', or 'the unnatural combat of the four primal elements' (26). Painting and empirical truth are not to be equated, so one must not, then, expect the writer's own 'painting' to be any more empirical. Emerson's Nature is not available to Melville, the painted element is in 'unnatural combat'. So is Morton's and Spurzheim's version of Nature. Science, and with it the knowing of bodies, becomes for

Melville trapped in the ‘fable’, and by implication, in the vicissitudes of discourse. ‘Physiognomy, like every other human science, is but a passing fable’, he says in ‘The Prairie’ (275).

This suggests that any attempt actually to know the ‘thing in itself’, as Kant tries to and assumes cannot be known, devolves onto discourse. Like Foucault, for whom ‘the formal conditions of the appearance of meaning’, rather than the so-called ‘meaning’ itself is important, so for Melville, that discourse and the powers it holds take precedence over any assumption of innate meaning (Major-Poetzl, 1983: 14). He examines the forms of knowledge of bodies that are available, finds them wanting, and asks instead about the function of language as the tool of knowledge. But if the discourses developed to explain the meanings of bodies have been shown to be inadequate, then one must attempt to go to experience prior to discourse, if that is possible. When Melville turns his attention away from bodies he looks at the value of heads, not so much their external as their internal features. When he has done with that, he looks at the value of experience where head and body are not separated and where language and being are still combined.

Melville satirizes those discourses like phrenology which presume to read the inside of the head by measuring its outside. ‘Sir William Jones, who read in thirty languages, could not read the simplest peasant’s face in its profounder and more subtle meanings’ (275), he says, suggesting that there is more to meaning and character than any external marker. He is more interested in the other aspect of heads, what goes on inside them, and how their assumptions about others and themselves are developed. The discourse of heads becomes not only one about racial categories, but about epistemology itself.

Controlling Heads

The forms of knowledge and discourses which are associated with the head, both idealist and empiricist, are based on a Cartesian divide between head and body. In ‘The Battering-Ram’ and its preceding chapters, Melville offers a view of the head which dismisses both the idealist and empiricist options. The two previous chapters have presented various views of the decapitated heads of a Right whale and a Sperm whale, together balancing the *Pequod*. Each head has been associated with a type, the Right whale as inferior to the Sperm. The Right whale is presented as a ‘Stoic’ who is ‘greyheaded’ (262) suggesting the aged but also the mulatto.

The Sperm whale, largely with a 'white' forehead, is suggestive of white America, and a 'Platonic' (267). The 'superior' Sperm can afford idealism, Melville suggests, while the less superior Right, symbol of the slave, must develop Stoicism. Reading heads, Melville reads racial and class difference, balances the two opposites over the *Pequod* and then jettisons them both as inadequate. Both 'venerable hooded heads' will soon sink 'unrecorded into to the sea' (266).

In 'The Battering Ram' Melville shows us another way of looking at heads. Ishmael seems at first to be looking with the eye of a Spurzheim or a Morton. The Sperm whale's forehead has a great 'vertical plane' which makes it the apparent 'superior' of the Right whale's. But what he sees is not what either Spurzheim or Morton may have expected. The viewer 'must now have perceived that the front of the Sperm Whale's head is a dead, blind wall' (267), and it is as though it is 'paved with horses' hoofs. I do not think any sensation lurks in it' (268). The words 'you observe', 'you remark' and 'you perceive' are repeated throughout the passage, emphasising the function of the eye. The eye is undermined by the 'dead blind wall' it encounters, and with it idealism and empiricism. And if these forms of knowledge are left with only their 'hands' and powers of sensation, even those powers are removed. Melville's method of removing this power is by a subtle but effective transposition. The dumbness of the whale, its own blind wall and its lack of sensation, become the only real things the perceiver retains. If the object cannot speak for itself, then all knowledge about it, and all attempts to speak for it, must be questionable. The nature of the object is transposed to the nature of the viewer.

You cannot read into the whale head anything that is not your own hypothesis. 'I do not think' and 'as far as I know' replace phrenological certainty, so that the passage which begins with an attempt to explore 'full cranial development', ends with a deliberately obscure hypothesis about the inner workings of the head having 'an unsuspected connexion with the outer air' (268). Not only is phrenology an absurd form of fixing meaning, but the versions of 'sight' and language which go to make up definition of the real world are equally open to question. The head of 'The Sphynx' is dumb when Ahab demands knowledge from it. It is 'a black and hooded head; hanging there' (249), reminiscent not only of the lynched slave, but of the darkness that Melville sees as the essence of knowledge, uncertainty. 'O head! Thou hast seen enough to split the planets and make an infidel of Abraham,' says Ahab, 'and not one syllable is thine!' (249) If the head does not speak for itself, then one must examine the heads

which presume to speak for it.

But even this is fraught with difficulty. What transpires is the sick head, which is presented in the novel as a symbol of the sickness of those heads interpreting it. Ishmael is a hypochondriac, who needs to go to sea as a way of ‘driving off the spleen’ and ‘regulating the circulation’ (18). He suffers what John Hill had called the ‘civilized disease’, one where head and body are separated and the desire to reunite is the malady of hypochondria.¹ Ahab is the monomaniac, whose attempt at a cure is to control heads and bodies outside his own, to ‘dismember my dismemberer’ (143) so that by using the head to control the body he can attempt to compensate for the divide between them.

Sick heads confine bodies and make them sick. Sick heads attempt to conquer bodies, their own as much as any others. The high-foreheaded ‘civilized’ transcendentalist Platonian Sperm whale has the droopy jaw, is dispirited and ‘hypochondriac’ (264). The sick head, confined by its illness, becomes in the novel as much a sign of what is wrong with society as it is the object of what needs to be controlled. Locke, as Philippa Foot (1990: 86) points out, had shown that desire is the psychological version of physical pain: ‘the idea of desire implies a sufficient degree of pain to determine the will to action’. Sick heads suffer from unfulfilled desire, just as Tommo’s diseased leg on the island represents a version of desire.

Ishmael’s hypochondria,² his version of Tommo’s leg, links him with the Sperm

¹ See George Cheyne, *The English Malady; or, A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of All Kinds* (London, 1733); John Hill, *Hypochondriasis: A Practical Treatise on the Hypo* (London, 1776); B. Mandeville, *A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases in Three Dialogues* (London, 1711, 1730). These and other works are discussed in Carol Houlihan Flynn’s ‘Running Out of Matter: The Body Exercised in Eighteenth-Century Fiction’, in G.S. Rousseau, ed., (1990: 147-185).

² Hypochondria, the male version of hysteria in Enlightenment medicine, was closely linked to fear, and seen by those like George Miller Beard (1880) as the pre-eminent disease of American civilization, though he called it ‘neurasthenia’. It was generally considered to come from too much thinking, too much reflection of a transcendentalist nature, brought on, as the modern-day existential crisis is often deemed to be, by too much leisure time. Writers like George Cheyne, John Hill and Bernard Mandeville all prescribed bodily exercise as the best way of overcoming the infliction. Cheyne invents the ‘hobby horse’, others suggest swinging and travelling. But while the early Enlightenment still assumed mental illness could be controlled by bodily means, like the whippings at Bedlam, the later Enlightenment had begun to realise that insanity, as Andrew Harper put it in his 1789 *Treatise on the Real Cause and Cure of Insanity*, ‘must depend upon some specific alternation in the essential operations and movements of the mind, independent and exclusive of every corporal, sympathetic, direct, or indirect excitement...’ (Porter, 1990: 67). The rise of psychology is,

whale as the sufferer of the 'civilized' disease, and in the process makes him one who experiences a sense of separation between body and mind. Like all psychosomatic disorders, hypochondria, and its 'sister' disease hysteria, become the external appearance of an internal reality which overwhelms the carefully structured forms of bodily and social order. They are, in Lacanian terms, diseases of the Symbolic, of the mind fallen into metaphor which has displaced it from its body and to which it seeks a return, one which is endlessly deferred.

ironically, a further step in the splitting of mind and body. It is also available only to the higher classes so that the diseases of spleen, hypochondria and hysteria are regarded as being suffered only by those of 'worth'.

Moby-Dick makes thinking itself too much a control of bodies. Ahab knows this. ‘Gifted with the high perception, I lack the low, enjoying power; damned, most subtly and malignantly! damned in the midst of Paradise!’ (143) This could be Tommo speaking, with a head disallowing his full enjoyment of the purely sensual. In antebellum America the same dilemma would lead to a further disease, one which Melville takes up in his narrative style of cataloguing. Obsessed with the ‘high perception’ yet never sure of controlling the ‘low enjoying power’, the habit of cataloguing, as Melville does with the whale, becomes in the work of important thinkers, a way of head controlling an errant body. Ahab, having the sense of one who has fallen and is damned, at least desires the utopian unity of the primitive Paradise where head and body are not separate. Others, like Benjamin Franklin and George Bancroft obviate their sense of fallenness by letting the head dominate. In many respects, *Moby-Dick*’s interpretation of the body is a writing back to the interpretations placed on being offered by the likes of Franklin.

The natural scientist in Franklin leads him to find ‘Virtue’ and ‘Veritas’ in the catalogue. In his autobiography he divides up the Virtues as he does the days of the week in order to live by them, ‘my intention being to acquire the habitude of all these Virtues’ (HC 1, 1993: 100). Not only does he, like many Enlightenment cataloguers, pin nature to description, but he also pins himself to rigorous daily and weekly schedules of activity. He cuts up morality the way Melville cuts up the body of the whale, and the way phrenologists try to section off the head. Dividing morality into thirteen precepts ranging from ‘temperance’ to ‘silence’, to ‘order’ and down to ‘chastity’ and ‘humility’, he carries out the precepts by adherence to a daily ritual which dissects every twenty four hours into parts each of which concentrate on achieving a moral goal. ‘I determined to give a Week’s strict Attention to each of the Virtues successively’. Cutting up his life becomes Franklin’s way of containing the horror of disorder lurking beneath its surface, disallowing the possibility of hypochondria.³

³ See Franklin’s *Autobiography* (1784-1788). Cited in HC,1 (1993: 95-108).

George Bancroft, by placing a high value on the innate conscience, tries to join body and mind once again. In the process he sometimes sounds like Emerson, simply assuming the fallen body is hardly there. 'If reason is a universal faculty', he says, 'the universal decision is the nearest criterion to truth' (HC 1, 1993: 237). The intellectual eye, in some may be 'dull' and in others 'quick', but 'the relation of the eye to light is in all men the same'. Rejecting empiricism he nevertheless falls back into an idealised version of it. 'I mean not the faculty which deduces inferences from the experience of the senses, but that higher faculty, which from the infinite treasures of its own consciousness, originates truth, and assents to it by the force of intuitive evidence; that faculty which raises us beyond the control of time and space, and gives us faith in things eternal and invisible' (HC 1, 1993: 235). The head transcends the senses. Truth lies in an intuition which is not the head's, yet Bancroft still valorises 'consciousness' and 'reason'.⁴

What is for Franklin habit of work, and for Bancroft innate, becomes for Charles Peirce habit of mind and habit of faith. Peirce places the burden for truth on the social body. 'That which determines us, from given premises, to draw one inference rather than another, is some habit of mind, whether it be constitutional or acquired'. It is habit which forms belief and belief which then generates habit which in turn determines opinions. 'The feeling of believing is a more or less sure indication of there being established in our nature some habit which will determine our actions....We may fancy that this is not enough for us, and that we seek not merely an opinion, but a true opinion. But put this fancy to the test, and it proves groundless; for as soon as a firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied, whether the belief be false or true'(HC 2, 1993: 15, 16, 17).⁵ Using the same syllogistic logic which informs the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, Peirce renders scientific investigation a process of faith in finding what one already knows to be there before looking.

In these thinkers the head becomes the controlling force over the individual or social body. All would give the 'high perception' the privileged place over the 'low enjoying power', controlling it by habit, instinct, or invention. Melville shows Ahab to be dominated by a

⁴ See George Bancroft, 'The Office of the People in Art, Government and Religion: An Oration Delivered Before the Adelphi Society of Williamstown College in August, 1835'. Cited in HC, 1 (1993: 234-243).

⁵ See Charles Peirce, 'The Fixation of Belief' (1877). Cited in HC, 2 1993: 13-24).

similar logic. He must invent, like a Franklin, the institution of the ship's hunt to control his low enjoying power. He must use faith but turn it on its head in the form of the harpooneer's chalices. His monomania is the devolution of power and knowledge to a single head. Starbuck, though contrasted with Ahab, is not entirely different. He will look to sheer habit and duty as the mind's guide to his actions. What will 'fetch thee much in the Nantucket market' (139) is his objective. Ishmael and Melville will accept neither of these options, for the head should not be seen as so separate from the body that it can have such control of it. Can the head ever adequately define the body? is Ishmael's question.

In answer he indulges Franklin's cataloguing in 'Cetology', showing that what becomes habit of opinion born from habit of practice is one way of explaining Nature. But he shows the foolhardiness of trusting habit as a judge, just as he does the limitations of any cataloguing system. 'Philologically considered, it is absurd'(118) he says of the name of the Sperm whale. The Sperm whale was a misnomer taken from the Greenland whale centuries before, and so habit and tradition had dictated its false usage. Designations of whales are 'indiscriminate' from the fishermen, so that 'there is a deal of obscurity concerning the identity of the species thus multitudinously baptized' (119). Habit shapes the meaning of the whale here, but contradicts itself, leaving catalogues pointless. Any reading of skulls or crania is equally futile: 'In connexion with this appellative of "Whalebone whales", it is of great importance to mention, ... it is vain to attempt a clear classification of the Leviathan, founded upon either his baleen, or hump, or fin, or teeth'. These particulars 'are indiscriminately dispersed among all sorts of whales, without any regard to what may be the nature of their structure in other and more essential particulars' (120). Reliance on mere sight has led to inferior cataloguing systems, and the habit of popular belief has justified the catalogue.

As 'The Sphinx' points out, there is no distinction in the whale between body and head. Any such distinction in other species is therefore merely a matter of form, not of essence. The only way to make a clear judgement about the head and whatever versions of sickness to which it is confined is to go inside the head itself, dismissing external appearances, and the assumptions based on either habit or belief. The head is a 'Sphinx', mysterious and unknowable. No mere reason, or habit of mind or cataloguing will do.

Melville shows that getting inside heads is dangerous. As he will illustrate in carnivalesque moments later in the novel, the neat order of the catalogue or of reason does not apply in the bloody encounter with whales. You can lose yourself in a head, so that all the

forms of control developed in social and philosophical realms have little or no effect. Tashtego, who, like Queequeg, is more body than head, and dismisses most types of abstract philosophy that are not somatic, almost dies falling into the head. In 'Cistern and Buckets' he falls into the whale head suspended beside the *Pequod*, head first, in a way deliberately reminiscent of the innocent Fall into sinfulness, into 'Plato's honey head' (273). One reading of this is that of a Fall from the intuitive into the intellectual, or idealist, which becomes associated with loss, a Fall into desire and the Symbolic that drives it, a loss of body in favour of mind. Another reading, however, is to suggest that Melville may be saying that to separate heads from bodies is to Fall.

The 'momentous idea' that appears 'throbbing and heaving' in the head in 'Cistern and Buckets' turns out to be but 'the poor Indian unconsciously revealing by those struggles the perilous depth to which he had sunk' (271). The 'idea' becomes an 'unconscious' person drowning and sinking to unplumbed depths. Too much indulgence in ideas kills the body, Melville seems to be suggesting. Or, put differently, philosophy without body drowns Nature, just as nature indiscriminately ruled by philosophy drowns 'truth'. Phrenology is disproved by the fact that from the outside the whale appears to have the high intelligence of a Shakespeare or a Melancthon (274), but from the inside, when one has baled out all the 'junk', the brain proves but a 'handful', a full 'twenty feet from his apparent forehead in life', so that '... phrenologically the head of this Leviathan, in the creature's living intact state, is an entire delusion', and the whale 'like all things that are mighty, wears a false brow to the common world' (275). One can never fully know the inside of the head, and what passes for knowledge is mostly delusion, supposition, hearsay and habit of mind, with some 'faith' added, as Peirce and Bancroft require. The 'delusion' of a phrenologically correct whale head, for Ishmael, is certified by the fact that 'as for his true brain, you can then see no indication of it, nor feel any' (275). Attempting to find out the truth becomes deadly, is Melville's message. From another point of view, any attempt to let the head have full sway over the body leads to the body being lost. No western person can save Tashtego from the head. Only a similar, intuitive, bodily-oriented being can, so it becomes Queequeg who turns the head back into the body when he plays midwife and rescues the Indian.

What becomes born from the head in this episode is not an idea, or even the symbol of a new civilization, since birth from the head suggests Minerva, but rather the recognition that all birth, physical and intellectual is from a primal 'formless mass', and that the actual birth is the

human link between the two men created by the saving process.⁶ Melville therefore, finally, alters the question when it comes to asking what heads control or what controls heads. He replaces idealism, rationalism and even ideology with the more foundational question of ‘character’ and human and natural symbiosis. That symbiosis is figured in the way the whale skull can simulate the human. ‘Put [the skull] among a plate of men’s skulls, and you would involuntarily confound it with them’ (275). So it must be that if the whale spine looks like little skulls, then so, as they do to a South Seas islander like Queequeg, would the human. What, then, is a real man, and a real whale, and how would we know? ‘Much of a man’s character will be found betokened in his backbone’ (276), says Ishmael finally. The same substance that fills the brain fills the spinal column, joining body and mind, making the neck of any creature an illusionary marker of difference between the mental and the somatic. The ‘truest’ description of a whale is its character, figured not in its head, or brain, but in its hump, as sign of its indomitability (276). Whatever little knowledge we have of humans and whales, must be found in the combination of epistemology and ontology, not in any exclusive and limiting use of either.

The disease of the head and of the Symbolic is the Idea built on a sense of lack and deferral, a loss of contiguity and communion between beings, or between ideas and things. The rationalist or empiricist or idealist forms of knowledge represented by both Ahab and those like Franklin and Peirce, struggle to recover this contiguity. In his attempt to answer his own question about what can be an alternative to the head-controlling and controlled culture he finds himself in, Melville turns, albeit briefly in the wider context of his whole work, to the intimacy of human relations. It is figured most strongly in those actions where human bodies join in a fusion of physical and mental character, not merely idea.

The Phenomenology of Whaling

⁶ The image of Minerva was a common trope supporting Manifest Destiny, assuming that America itself was the new civilization born of the head of Jove. As the *Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette* 21 May 1825 put it: America was born ‘like Minerva from the head of Jove, sprung at once into full maturity and symmetry, and armed in sovereign panoply’ (Dimock, 1989: 26). That Melville makes that ‘America’ the Indian and his midwife the South Seas islander, is to undercut the expansionist rhetoric of ‘head bound’, if you like, hierarchies.

Character, and ‘backbone’, as Ishmael puts it, may be the most important signifiers for both whales and humans. How to interpret these signifiers, however, is the remaining question. If the whale bears a ‘false brow’ to the world, is one left only with its impenetrable ‘wall’, and the inadequacy of one’s own signifiers, or is there an alternative? In answer, Ishmael removes himself from reliance on absolutes. ‘My original opinion remains unchanged; but it is only an opinion’ (245) he says in ‘The Blanket’, walking a subtle line between total relativism and absolutism. One can go one of two ways with the information about whales at one’s disposal. One can either fix on the obvious inadequacy of the information, and give up the attempt to understand, falling back upon habit as the best epistemological method; or one can plunge into that very abyss of meaning and take from it what it is possible to remove. Ishmael initially appears to do the former by the cataloguing of the cetology chapters. Finally, however, he must give up the cataloguing as inadequate, ‘leave the copestone to posterity’ and discard his system ‘standing thus unfinished’. What is ‘finished’ is incomplete, for it overlooks its own inadequacies. ‘God keep me from finishing anything’ (125). Having ‘swum through libraries’ and finding that ‘the sperm whale, scientific or poetic, lives not complete in any literature’, product of the head as it is, the explorer must ‘grope down into the bottom of the sea’ and put his ‘hands among the unspeakable foundations’ (116). The means to epistemological verity shifts from the ‘object’ itself to the means of knowing the object, and such means include non-empirical ‘experience’ and non-idealist ‘sight’, or rather ‘darkness’, as Ishmael would have it.

A number of important moments in the novel present the possibility of just such a ‘groping’ down into unspeakable foundations. They do this in the form of interrelation between those attempting to ‘know’ and the thing known. Chief among these is the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg, both in ‘The Spouter Inn’ and in ‘The Monkey Rope’, and in relation to whales and their bodies, the chapters on ‘The Grand Armada’ and ‘A Squeeze of the Hand’. Each of these presents a possible alternative vision or epistemology of interrelatedness where the eye is not the primary tool of measurement and where the head is not the primary subject or object. Instead, interrelated bodies are.

Melville’s emphasis on interrelation, the ‘joint stock company of two’ Ishmael refers to in ‘The Monkey Rope’ may have been influenced in part by Hegel, who himself emphasises that no individual identity or real knowledge of the ‘Other’ is possible outside a ‘social space’. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, published in 1807, Hegel dismisses the pseudo-sciences of

craniology and phrenology. These sciences, he points out, make the assumption, akin to transcendental idealism, that identity can be fixed and determinate, and exist outside the 'social space'. As Pinkard (1996: 89) puts it:

The 'science of self-identity' could not affirm for modern agents that who they took themselves to be was in fact who they are because it rests on the wrong assumptions about the nature of character and self-identity. Individual self-consciousness is one's taking oneself to be located in a determinate 'social space'; an individual's self-identity is made up of his actions in that 'social space' and how those actions are taken by others. The 'social space' is both the basis of the principles on which actions are taken and the basis of the interpretations of those actions by others. Self-identity cannot be something determinate and 'fixed' that an individual could have outside of acting in any determinate 'social space'. The pseudo-sciences of self-identity however, see it as exactly that: as something that is completely formed and is then expressed in actions.

One of the primary differences between Ishmael and Ahab is that the former is able to explore the lacunae within meaning as part of the meaning itself, whereas the latter insists that such gaps mask hidden malevolence. Accepting such lacunae is a way of encountering being without colonising it ideologically. Ahab must 'strike through the mask' (140), conquer and colonise in the process. When he cannot fix meaning, he seeks to destroy the uncertainty that threatens him. Ahab's famous address in 'The Sphinx' to the hoary head of the decapitated whale assumes the Platonic division between body and head, seeing the 'black and hooded' head's silence as maddening, demanding to know 'what secret thing that is in thee' (249). The obsession with the Platonic 'secret' rather than with what Hegel would call the 'social' leads Ahab to see Nature itself as 'cunning'. 'O Nature, and O soul of man! How far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies! Not the smallest atom stirs or lives in matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind' (250). Perceiving analogies between Nature and the soul of man, he still chooses the Platonic, divided, rather than the Aristotelian route of connection by analogy. The linkages are there, but 'beyond all utterance' and have but a 'cunning duplicate in mind', where mind duplicates but does not actually embody. Ishmael, on the other hand, is able to read

meaning in the lacunae presented by the head's silence, to the extent that it may reflect the essence of the whale's meaning. The great genius of the whale, he says in 'The Prairie', 'is declared in his doing nothing in particular to prove it. It is moreover declared in his pyramidal silence' (274).

Ishmael turns primarily to silence, non-rational mystery, and nothingness as ways of determining the nature of the whale's being. These are the tools of what was, after Hegel, to become existential phenomenology. Being does not lie in the words that will describe it, and so is not to be reduced to textuality. But textuality may be, as phenomenology, in the person of Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, has always said of science, a second-order expression of being, necessary but not fundamental (Solomon, 1980: 319). Ishmael accepts the whale's silence as part of its meaning, and its 'false brow' as false only to those who wish to read it in particular terms, for nothing is in essence false to itself, only in relation to another, external, system of belief. Forcing belief, as the phrenologists and those like Peirce and Franklin do, prevents an actual encounter with the object itself, only with one's own interpretation of the object. In this sense the whale's 'mask' is part of its larger whole, and if the mask is silence, then it is to silence one must go to encounter the 'true' whale.

Silence does not allow the forms of habit, be they religious or scientific, to have a determining influence on meaning. It might perform something of the role Derrida ascribes to 'différance', that endless deferral of fixed meaning caused by the disjunction between sign and signifier. But since it is mere silence, it might not. Its meaning is 'slippery', in a way that Ahab understands about his own body when he says to the carpenter making him a new leg 'I like to feel something in this slippery world that can hold, man' (359). While Ahab cannot accept fixed meanings of the pseudo-scientific kind, he also cannot accept slipperiness. Ishmael, on the other hand, can.

He revels in the slipperiness of hands in 'A Squeeze of the Hand', he accepts the slipperiness of selves in the dark with Queequeg during his night in the Spouter Inn, he finds comradely fusion in the slipperiness of the 'Monkey Rope' and a strange inner peace amidst the 'tornadoed Atlantic' of his being in 'The Grand Armada'. Personal experience, social role, and lack of certainty all combine to provide a version of self-identity with which Ishmael is strangely at peace. In the process he is living out what phenomenology attempts to show is the better option over mere, ultimately unsatisfiable, empirical thought or idealistic transcendental assumption. He appreciates what Heidegger refers to as 'the thingly element of things'

without letting limiting thought obtrude. To quote Heidegger (1971: 21) more fully, as representative of phenomenology:

Occasionally we still have the feeling that violence has long been done to the thingly element of things and that thought played a part in this violence, for which reason people disavow thought instead of taking pains to make it more thoughtful. But in defining the nature of the thing, what is the use of a feeling, however certain, if thought alone has the right to speak here? Perhaps however what we call feeling or mood, here and in similar instances, is more reasonable - that is, more intelligently perceptive - because more open to Being than all that reason which, having meanwhile become *ratio*, was misinterpreted as being rational.

Ishmael's approach to the whale may be interpreted as phenomenological because it seeks a pre-reflective essence in which the being of the whale can, as it were, speak for itself in its silence. If such phenomenology can readily be accused of disregarding the ideology of perception, as most modern-day readers would point out, then one must suggest that Ishmael is not blind to ideology, or to the limits of espousing the pre-reflective. All knowledge is filtered through the consciousness, which is always ideologically interpellated. But Ishmael must still make a choice. He can either see the slippery signifier of the whale as a destructive impenetrability, or he can allow the deferral of meaning to become part of meaning itself, and participate in the nature of phenomenal being. Ahab's position is the former. Ishmael appreciates and explores both stances.

To him knowledge of the whale becomes an incarnation of whatever the perceiver desires it to be, usually of themselves. Like the whale head, which, as you come nearer to it 'assume[s] different aspects, according to your point of view' (265), neither the whale nor reality itself is fully available outside perception, which is relative. To define the whale is to define the lacunae in one's own perception. For this reason the 'Leviathan is that one creature of the world which must remain unpainted to the last' (218), or, as Ishmael puts it elsewhere, 'Dissect him how I may, the, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will. But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? Much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none?' (296) But such relativism does not necessarily mean that the

whale is either reduced to a text, or must be fixed in its meaning for its essence to be grasped. The essence of whaleness for Ishmael is its ungraspability.⁷ There is an 'essential' link between consciousness and being, even if consciousness is all too aware of its own inadequacy.

The Platonist Ahab cannot follow Ishmael here. He cannot bridge the gap between body and mind, so that he is 'gnawed' by the 'fangs of some incurable idea' (158). Melville reverses Feuerbach's well-known aphorism 'man is what he eats'. The cannibalistic idea eating Ahab is the necessity of finding a body for the idea. The 'sick' head, fallen into endlessly deferred desiring, cannot but eat up its own and others' bodies. Ishmael moves instead in the direction of Feuerbach and Schopenhauer, both precursors to modern-day phenomenology in their search for an essence of being which is not entirely subject to cultural formations, and where the link between epistemology and ontology is primary. 'In a being which awakes to consciousness', Feuerbach says, 'there takes place a qualitative change, a differentiation of the entire nature. ... for as man belongs to the essence of Nature, - in opposition to common materialism; so Nature belongs to the essence of man, - in opposition to subjective idealism.'⁸ Ishmael's reading of Ahab's monomania is itself along these lines. 'The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living with only half a heart and half a lung' (156).

⁷ Most commentators would agree with this difference between Ishmael and Ahab. Among them, see Maclean (1979), Boughn (1987), and Pitts (1989). Each of these argue for a view of the narrator Ishmael not insisting on fixed identity, either his own or the whale's, unlike Ahab, who does precisely the opposite.

⁸ Cited in Hayden White in 'Feuerbach', in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 191.

Stewart and Mickunas (1990: 8) suggest that the task of phenomenology is to ‘suspend all such [empiricist] questions while returning to the content of consciousness itself - to the phenomena - and to see philosophy’s task as being that of describing the essences of phenomena, the explication of various levels of meaning of phenomena, and their interrelationships’. This implies that such a task must also include lack of meaning as something real in itself. Relativism is not necessarily negative, as Ahab would have it, and as many cultural theorists assume,⁹ but may become, as post-colonial critics like Stuart Hall suggest, a positive space in which hybrid identities can be nurtured.¹⁰

Melville seeks to nurture just such a space when he lavishes praise on Hawthorne’s ‘blackness’ in ‘Hawthorne and His Mosses’. All excellent books should, as Ishmael himself is, ‘be foundlings’, he declares, and Hawthorne’s are just such because they are ‘shrouded in a blackness, ten times black. But this darkness but gives more effect to the ever-moving dawn, that forever advances through it... [producing]... lights and shades’.¹¹ The writer’s task is not only to encounter darkness and impenetrability, but to show that such darkness of perception and the light of meaning are inseparable. Describing the existential experience of ‘Nothingness’ common to phenomenology, in this case Heidegger, H.J. Blackham (1978: 104) could well be describing *Moby-Dick*.

⁹ For an argument which sees phenomenology as an alternative to post-structuralism see Doyle (1994). She argues that a healthier alternative to pure textualization such as that proposed by new historicism is one in which a hybrid of historical event and textual representation is found, where ‘event and expression, act and word’ are not terms which subsume each other. She is supported in this by Leder (1990) who emphasises the phenomenological alternative to post-Freudian identity theory, like Fanon’s, Lacan’s and Bhabha’s, in which the self is alienated from itself by the gaze of the Other, and suggests, with Hegel, that it is just this ‘gaze’ which is essential to the attribution of social meaning. The present argument concurs largely with these, though it will suggest that Melville does not entirely accept phenomenological ‘intersubjectivity’ as a fully satisfactory alternative to radical Cartesianism.

¹⁰ See Hall’s ‘Cultural Identity and the Diaspora’, in Mongia, ed., (1996: 110-121).

¹¹ ‘Hawthorne and His Mosses’, in Parker and Hayford, eds., *Moby-Dick* (2002: 521).

Nothing is not merely a notional negation, not-anything, and thus the counter-concept opposed to being; it can be experienced and is itself the source of all forms of negation and negativity. Dread is the experience of Nothing. What happens? The intelligible world constructed by personal existence, in which man feels safe and at home, the world of meanings, is nihilated and he is plunged back into the sheer 'is-ness' of what is, his ship on which he is riding and voyaging disappears in the night and he finds himself in the deep waters and tastes their saltiness. This is an experience of brute existence denuded of meanings, the high-tension power of raw actuality; it uncovers the marvellousness of pure 'is-ness', contingency, which reason covers up, and is therefore a revelation of Being,....

The relationship between 'darkness' and the world is that which is described by phenomenology as the overcoming of the subject-object relationship, for meaning resides not so much in the object itself, or in the subject interpreting the object, but in the 'intercorporeality' between the two. The experience of Nothingness is just such an experience of intercorporeality, one which Edmund Husserl (Stewart and Mickunas, 1990: 37) describes as the relation between the '*ego-cogito-cogitatum*' in which the ego is inconceivable apart from its conscious life (*cogito*), and there is no conscious life apart from the content of consciousness (*cogitatum*).

Schopenhauer, whom Melville read only later in life, but found congenial to his own thinking, offers a philosophy of Being which, while ostensibly misanthropic, is nevertheless not that dissimilar from phenomenology, especially in its use of eastern religion. Schopenhauer, too, attempts to find the midpoint between idealism and materialistic forms of empiricism, using the terms Will and Idea as opposing forces which can be combined when universal Will meets individual Idea, and vice-versa. In essence, it involves a version of self-abnegation common to eastern thought, particularly Buddhism, and not dissimilar from the Medieval emphasis on the 'dark night of the soul' or the 'via negativa'.¹²

¹² The 'via negativa', describing the divine in terms of what it is not, rather than what can be said of it, is a tradition going back to Plotinus, Moses Maimonides, and Aquinas. No word, suggests, Aquinas, can be used literally of God, since we only apply what we know to what we don't know. But in that usage of 'form', the actual 'matter' is referred to, making a 'composite subject'. So, 'whiteness', he says, 'signifies the form as that by which something

is white', making its subsistent thing a composite subject. See *Summa Theologica*, Q 13 Art 1.2 Cited in Ramsay (1971: 37).

The shift from the usual way of perceiving individual objects to their perception as Idea occurs abruptly when the act of perception has become dissociated from the service of the will, because the seeing subject has ceased to be merely ego-oriented and is now a pure, will-less subject of knowledge, no longer attentive to relationships in a causal context, but resting and fulfilling itself in fixed contemplation of the presented object, out of all connection with any other....

When one ... lets go even all abstract thoughts about [things], ... gives over the whole force of one's spirit to the act of perceiving, ... lets every bit of one's consciousness be filled in the quiet contemplation of the natural object immediately present,... *losing oneself* in the object: ... to such a degree that one might no longer distinguish the beholder from the act of beholding, the two having become *one* ... then what is beheld and recognized is no longer that thing as commonly known, but the Idea, the timeless Form, and the immediate, self-standing objectification of the will at this grade of being.¹³

Schopenhauer's Ideal perception, while neo-Platonic, nevertheless suggests something of Aquinas's 'composite subject'. It also suggests phenomenological 'intersubjectivity', based not on epistemological certainty, but rather on its opposite. The will to be or to create meaning, and that meaning itself, are, in Schopenhauer's universe, made one.

This is at least something of what Melville means when he refers to Hawthorne's shrouds of blackness which themselves produce light. In *Moby-Dick* he changes the metaphor from blackness to whiteness, but the intention and effect are hardly different. The chapters 'Moby-Dick' and 'The Whiteness of the Whale' set out, after all the pseudo-empiricist 'measuring', the true elusive nature of actual being. That being may be elusive, captive to 'rumour', but it is not without a relation to the real. The force of *Moby-Dick* the whale lies not so much in what he is, but in what he is imputed to be, whether it be his apparent 'ubiquitousness', 'malignant intelligence', his 'ghastly deception'. Ironically, the very force of habit that shapes Franklinesque empiricism with its religious underpinnings, is used by Ishmael to show that whatever attribute one wishes to impose on an object is possible, so that,

¹³ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*. Vol III. 34. Cited by Campbell (1976: 351-352).

to the perceiver, the object in reality does bear the attribute. But Ishmael can stand back from imputed meaning, Ahab can't.

Melville uses whiteness as a form of what may be termed negative knowledge. Whiteness is 'ineffable' (159) in which 'there lurks an elusive something', which carries 'transcendent horrors' (160) and a 'nameless terror' (161). It is a kind of knowledge which frees the individual from what Schopenhauer regards as the primary cause of all suffering, the egotistical will, for the ego has no place in a world of 'muteness or universality' (163) where even a 'dumb brute' (164) knows by instinct rather than reason what whiteness means. With the surrender of the will, Schopenhauer says

all those phenomena are also abolished; that constant strain and effort without end and without rest at all the grades of objectivity in which and through which all the world consists; the multifarious forms succeeding each other in gradation; the whole manifestation of the will; and, finally, also the universal forms of this manifestation, time and space, and also its last fundamental form, subject and object; all are abolished. No will: no idea, no world. Before us there is certainly only nothingness (Russell, 1984: 726).

For Ishmael, the whiteness of the whale is not presence, but absence, not so much colour as the 'visible absence of color' (165). The chapter is Ishmael's response to the whale, in contrast to Ahab's in the previous one. And while Ahab gives way to the 'corporal animosity' (156) within himself, Ishmael examines the psychology of his own reactions. This psychology is inseparably tied to language and its inadequacy to describe reality. Acknowledgement of such inadequacy leaves the body trapped in 'blankness' or 'nameless horror', but it also leaves the body and mind in a sense freed from absolute fixity. Unpicking whiteness Ishmael unpicks the linguistic forms of habit and the stereotype. There is an indefinable gap between the meanings attributed to ordinary phenomena or beings that are white, and the fact of whiteness itself. For whiteness is nothing, it is emptiness, an aspect of being not penetrable or fully describable. The descriptions available are but from social usage, range variously across cultures and through history, often contradictory, used in one instance to suggest holiness, and in another terror and murder.

But whether whiteness refers to the white steed or the snow-white bull or the sacred dog

or the white Hoods of Ghent (as in 1865 it would for the Ku Klux Klan), or the white race terrorizing dusky ones, or the white squall or endless snowscapes; the fact of reference is itself a social mask covering the actual thing in itself, given by 'untutored ideality' (162). The 'essence' of that thing may be penetrated not by words, but only, to some degree, by 'imagination'. 'To analyse it, would seem impossible'. 'Nor to the unimaginitive mind', says Ishmael, 'is there aught of terror in those appearances whose awfulness to another mind almost solely consists in this one phenomenon [whiteness], especially when exhibited under any form at all approaching to muteness or universality' (163). 'Ideality' gives names to the unnameable, but the person of imagination will see behind the names and the muteness that results will bring the real terror. 'Imagination' is not Bancroft's 'intuition', or Franklin's catalogue of rules, or even Peirce's 'belief'. It combines, rather, the elements of intellect, feeling and emotion in an acceptance of the 'social' roles played by phenomena.

The words describing whiteness are multi-referential and even self-contradictory, and dependent on the use of imagination's vicissitudes. The object then is not just words, or the phenomenon of whiteness, but the imagination imputing meaning to both. 'Without imagination no man can follow another into these halls' (162). What is real for the imagination is real, simply is or is not. The terror of whiteness becomes the real object, not whiteness itself, so that the greatest fear comes from the fact that the words don't cover the imagination, don't circumscribe as neatly as they should or claim to, and leave the imagination to run riot on what is not verifiable, an emptiness. But since this very emptiness is all there is, and the imagination presents it, then it may be said to make present Being in itself. Absence is made present, as it were.

The body and knowledge of the body are, for Ishmael, inseparable, so that the actual thing is not objectified outside the perception and the language defining it. However, in seeking an alternative to the trap of the stereotyping formulae of the pseudo-sciences, Ishmael is able to turn to literal encounter with the whale, rather than hearsay and theory. Such literal encounter avoids the 'civilized' disease Ishmael most despises, the head superior to the body: 'For be a man's intellectual superiority what it will, it can never assume the practical, available supremacy over other men, without the aid of some sort of external arts and entrenchments, always, in themselves, more or less paltry and base' (126). In his effort at achieving a phenomenological reading of whales, Ishmael attempts to encounter others without any such 'arts and entrenchments'. The result is something akin to a sacramentalism where the body of

the whale, trapped and dissected, is still able to offer a mystical experience of what lies beyond the limits of words.

The Sacramental Carnival

Ishmael turns the encounter with that Nothingness into a form of sacramentalism, a symbolic system in which the object is assumed to have the power to make 'present' what is seen as absent or untouchably transcendent. Having cut up the whale, found its 'bible leaves' (325) to have no final message beyond that which any sermonizer or candidate for an 'archbishoprick' would give it, rejecting the imposition of a largely linear (even 'phallogocentric') narrative demanding eschatological closure, Ishmael, in the face of Nothingness, must find an alternative. Ahab's hunt, like America's search to realize Manifest Destiny, is linear, though a linearity trying to reduce the future to the present, Otherness to itself. Like the devouring shark, and like Ahab, it must eat whatever is before it, eventually even itself. Just as Manifest Destiny, like the 'self-consuming misanthrope' may be interpreted as a narcissistic and cannibalistic 'self-consuming artifact',¹⁴ so the linear narrative of hunting a self-created image becomes a version of self-consuming circularity.

¹⁴ The idea is Stanley Fish's, from *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1977. Self-awareness in the reading process, says Fish, adopting aspects of post-structuralist arguments along the same lines, can become 'self-destructive, since ... it involves abandoning the perceptual and conceptual categories within which the self moves and by means of which it separately exists' (1977: 156-157).

Ishmael's alternative is another version of the circle.¹⁵ Dismissing linear progression as ultimately self-consuming because it rejects alternatives, he replaces it with a relativism that is a rejection of totalizing political ideologies like Manifest Destiny. Relativism, like that found in 'The Doubloon', allows the juxtaposition of different viewpoints of the same, circular object, symbolic of the earth and of the ship's circumnavigation. It never assumes an absolute, or a reduction of the untellable future to the restricted present. Pip, speaking with Lear's 'sane madness of vital truth' (522), as Melville puts it in 'Hawthorne and His Mosses', elides language and perception into a single act which is not one of fixity but rather of relativism and openness: 'I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look' (335). One could read this as aimless and repetitive circularity, unrealizable destiny. But a more profitable reading may be in conjunction with the other images of circularity in the text. The word/idea and the perception which do not eat themselves must be at once open to alternatives, yet never so open as to disallow meaning, and become so slippery that the navel becomes unscrewed, as Pip fears, and the centre cannot hold.

In the place of Ahab's destructive circularity, figured in his diabolical reversal of sacramental eschatology of 'The Quarter-Deck', reduced to his own round, harpoon chalices, pinning meaning in blood, Ishmael places the 'insular Tahiti', surrounded by 'the horrors of the half-known life', the 'isle, [from which] thou canst never return' if you should choose to leave it (225). The trope is a central one for him. Like the repose in the midst of the 'tornadoed Atlantic of my being' (303) in 'The Grand Armada', temporary, islanded peace, mysteriously knowable only in the midst of the storm, remains the one answer to the syllogistic logic of destroying the projection of the self's inadequacies, and so cannibalising that self. Just as the narcissistic projection of the self onto the Other had caused the cannibalising war of 1848, and would bring that of 1861 in a few years, so Ishmael would have to turn from such self-consuming projection to an admittedly islanded space where 'being' in its complex

¹⁵ Numerous critics have noted Ishmael's focus on the circular. Sheila Post-Lauria (1990) sees it as a version of Kantian Idealism, rejecting the linearity of Lockean empiricism; Randall Bohrer (1983) understands it as a reflection of an analogical world view; Terry Roberts (1992) interprets it as an aspect of phallicism which penetrates by 'mystical vibration'; while Andrew Delbanco (1993), much like the present argument, interprets it as an aspect of sacramental style. Though he reads this sacramentalism as reflected in the similarity between post-structuralist slipperiness and Melville's style. The present argument suggests that while narrative circularity connotes slipperiness, it can also be read as a form of 'presencing' within absence, which is Ishmael's intention.

interrelation between self and Other could be encountered. In these brief moments in the text, self and Other balance, the horror of what is 'half-known' creates a space for repose in what is known, and in the mystery of what isn't, if one wishes to accept it.

In 'The Grand Armada' Emersonian epistemology becomes replaced by Schopenhauerean ontology. Emerson's 'transparent eyeball' reduces the self to 'nothing' while still seeing 'all;' with 'the currents of the Universal Being circulat[ing] through me;' (1895: 548). It is not so much a merging of opposites, but a reduction of difference to sameness. The self is obliterated, and reduced to the eye.¹⁶ In contrast, Ishmael's eye looking into the 'enchanted pond' created by the circle of self-immolating whales, sees through the water, not into its reflection. It does not merge opposites, merely revels in the 'inscrutable' (303).

¹⁶ Cameron (1981: 67) makes a similar point about Ahab, when she suggests that he sees no distinction between world and mind, so that he is spatially confused, with no mid-point between monism and dualism.

And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternations and affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the centre freely and fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concernments; yea, serenely revelled in dalliance and delight. But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve around me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy (303).

For a moment Ishmael is able to see through surfaces, unlike Ahab who sees it as mask, and unlike Pierre, who sees only 'surface stratified upon surface'. This is reminiscent of Schopenhauer's unity of seeing and being cited above: 'When one ... lets go even all abstract thoughts about [things], ...lets every bit of one's consciousness be filled in the quiet contemplation of the natural object immediately present,... *losing oneself* in the object: ... to such a degree that one might no longer distinguish the beholder from the act of beholding, the two having become *one* ...'. Ishmael repeats the movement evident in *Typee* from the 'fall' into the utopian islanded 'serene valley lake', past the 'storms in the roaring glens', which are 'heard but not felt' (302), and on to the realisation that the fall can be into the mysterious and the fearful. But he can do with it what Tommo could not, rest, albeit momentarily, in its uncertainty. The vision of peaceful repose is a social one, reminiscent of Hegel's 'social space' in which identity and being are defined by social interaction. 'Keeping at the centre of the lake, we were occasionally visited by small tame cows and calves; the women and children of this routed host' (302). 'Host' suggests both the host of the army of whales and also the sacramental host, offered in sacrifice. The mother and child whale Ismael refers to as 'hardly a day old' and later as being confined by their own umbilical cord (303) are reminiscent of the Madonna and child.

But Melville cannot present the picture of inner calm without questioning its verity. The maddened whale caught in his own line and whose 'keen spade' was 'wounding and murdering his own comrades' (304) is both an image of suffering and unnecessary killing. The child will grow up to suffer the fate of the host, either as a Christ-like sacrifice, or as the murderous host of the army. Melville compares him to Benedict Arnold the victorious American general in the battle of Saratoga in 1777, who later turned traitor against those he had defended. The comparison leaves us with the same ambiguity we find in the try-works, where

the whale is either a 'plethoric burning martyr' or a 'self-consuming misanthrope' (326). One certainly should read Melville's depiction of the suffering of the innocents here as a terrible indictment on the war-mongering capitalism that spills their blood. Without suffering there can be no sense of inner peace, the martyr is required, is one reading. But the other, balancing it, is that the action of the martyr is itself the foundation of suffering. The sacramental moment of calm amidst suffering is a release valve, but it is one which only enables the continuation of a status quo which itself might not be entirely desirable.

If there is any particular literary precedent to his thinking it lies, at least partly, with his interest in Rabelais while writing *Moby-Dick*. Rabelais's work, as M.M. Bakhtin has interpreted it, undoes the divisions between sacred and profane, self and Other, conscious and unconscious which govern the post-Cartesian world. His depiction of what Bakhtin calls the 'carnavalesque' feast in which the medieval world celebrated social unity by dismissing traditional social hierarchies, suggests an ambivalent experience of an uncomfortable uniting of opposites, not a romantic fusion, but a parody of the Church's cult, sensuous and playful, spectacular and dramatic.

Bakhtin, as Morris (1994: 21) points out, 'stresses the sensuous, concrete forms of carnival gesture and ritual because its whole meaning derives from the physical materiality of the human body. Gargantuan size, huge protuberances, vast excretions and appetites are all presented in gross and exaggerated form. ... the fundamental ambivalence of all carnivalesque [is that it] always simultaneously ridicules and celebrates, crowns and decrowns, elevates and debases. ... This communal body of the people brings together in one sensuous image life and death as a continually renewing process of generation'.

Melville's vision via Ishmael is, in these crucial scenes, just such a communal one, for Ishmael moves deliberately away from the individualism of Ahab hunting his own whale, to a group ethos in which carefully delimited bodies and their supposed meanings are dismembered. That 'dismemberment' and, as it were, 're-memberment', as in the touching hands in the sperm, is not so much a physical event, as a social and imaginative one. The carnival 're-members' the broken social body by allowing experience, not hierarchizing sight to dominate. It emphasises disruption of the neat structures of the physical. As in the try-pots, it focusses instead on the orifice, the sliding border between mouth and anus, vagina and penis, head and body, part and whole, it dismembers the body in a way which deliberately upsets rationalist determinism. But that very upsetting of the rationalist control of the body provides

an entry into a new communal unity between bodies. The carnival, then, becomes the society's release valve. It works both cyclically and sacramentally by turning linear time in on itself.

Carnival in Melville dismisses the eye as the way to determine final meaning, and turns to the hand. As a result it turns from a psychology of conquest to one of social interrelation. In 'A Squeeze of the Hand' Ishmael returns to physical experience without the aid of eyes, in much the way he did when he encountered Queequeg in the dark, and overturned racial hierarchies. Bodies are not trapped in hierarchical divisions or by sight, but are equal in the circle. The equality, engendered by the experience of the sperm, is a primal one. Ishmael is Tommo back on his island, but this time accepting its gift, albeit momentary.

As I bathed my hands among those soft, gentle globules of infiltrated tissues, woven almost within the hour; as they richly broke to my fingers, and discharged all their opulence, like fully ripe grapes their wine; as I snuffed up that uncontaminated aroma, I declare to you, that for the time I lived as in a musky meadow; I forgot all about our horrible oath; in that inexpressible sperm, I washed my hands and my heart of it; ... I felt divinely free from all ill-will, or petulance, or malice, of any sort whatever (322).

This richly sacramentalist passage counters Ahab's diabolical reversal of the sacrament by introducing a renewing baptism of the senses in the body of the whale. Eye is replaced by hands and heart, rationalism by emotion, the external body of the whale by its ineffable innermost essence. Ishmael does not bathe his 'eyes ... in these lights and forms', as Emerson does in 'Nature', but closes eyes and bathes hands. He does not remove the individual from society, as Emerson does when he goes off alone on his boat, or as Thoreau does beside his pond, but rather, like Schopenhauer, subsumes the individual will in communal encounter with a Will greater than its own. Just as traditional social divisions are lost in a carnival of globules and fingers, the sperm of life being brought back from death, ends circling back into beginnings. The implication seems to be that the whale is not to be interpreted as a being separate from those beings sharing its aroma and its material essence. Knowing the essence of whaleness is another version of knowing the self. That self is not to be sought outside its social world.

But the passage must be read with care, for in the grand scheme of the novel it is but a momentary utopian ‘musky meadow’, another ‘insular Tahiti’ which, like the flower in that meadow, is temporary, and like the umbilical cord between mother and calf whales in ‘The Grand Armada’, can become strangled by the hunter’s hemp. Carnavalesque and celebratory, even comic, the moment may be, but one of its effects is to release the pent-up energies of the crew to re-engage with their daily round, which has become that of implementing Ahab’s monomania. The ‘release-valve’ of the carnival carries a heavy irony within it, therefore, so that the influence of Schopenhauerean pessimism may seem stronger than the incorporationism of his more beneficent moments. Terry Eagleton makes a similar point, useful for the present discussion, in an article on Bakhtin and Schopenhauer, where he suggests that the latter’s incessant, even ‘monomaniac’ pessimism is not as absurd as it seems.

Absurdly one-sided though this viewpoint may be, it is a fact that throughout class history the fate of the great majority of men and women has been one of suffering and fruitless toil. The dominant narrative of history to date has been one of carnage, wretchedness and oppression; and any Bakhtinian celebration which has not in some sense gone through this belief and emerged on the other side is politically futile.¹⁷

While Melville has Ishmael seek alternatives to such carnage, he is never far from appreciating Ahab’s Schopenhauerean frustration at the blind will of the world. ‘There is no grand *telos* to this ‘battleground of tormented and agonised beings’, says Schopenhauer, only ‘momentary gratification, fleeting pleasure conditioned by wants, much and long suffering, constant struggle, *bellum omnium*, everything a hunter and everything hunted, pressure, want, need and anxiety, shrieking and howling; and this goes on *in saecula saeculorum* or until once again the crust of the planet breaks’.¹⁸ Only the liberal humanist, maintaining bourgeois order, says Eagleton, takes such carnivalesque celebration of carnage to be a mark of renewal. And Melville is no liberal humanist.

¹⁷ Terry Eagleton, ‘Bakhtin, Schopenhauer, Kundera’, in Hirschkop and Shepherd, eds., (1989: 182).

¹⁸ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol II, trans. E.F.J. Payne, New York (1969: 354).

But while Eagleton makes an important point about carnival relevant to *Moby-Dick*, his point nevertheless allows us to see Ishmael's sense of sacramentalism more clearly. The *bellum omnium* of the try-works, into whose great orifice the various parts of the whale are thrown, to be excreted as oil, made from pieces of whale comically (carnivally) named 'white horse', 'plum pudding', 'slobgollion', 'gurry', 'nippers', and 'blanket-pieces' (323-324), suggests that it is only in the face of the absurd, fruitless, hysterically comical suffering of the world that sacramentalism may make any sense at all. Its mixture of suffering and 'joy' as Ishmael puts it, is always ambiguous, but it nevertheless does achieve an important objective in relation to the psychology of conquest. All order is dismantled, and if order, then hierarchy, though only temporarily. The great body of the whale, symbol of the suffering but also destructive world, is thrown into the gaping cannibalising mouth/anus of the try-pots. But these pots the final circle Ishmael presents, which become the place where self-immolating suffering, turning cannibalistically back on itself, brings not only darkness, as Ahab's does, but light as well. 'Like a plethoric burning martyr, or a self-consuming misanthrope, once ignited, the whale supplies his own fuel and burns by his own body' (326). On the one hand the whale can be like Manifest Destiny, consuming itself misanthropically as *bellum*. But the self-consumption also brings, to those who wish to see it, a version of light. To read the whale as Ahab does is to see a misanthrope and so to become one, self-consuming. But with Ishmael's eye, one might also see the martyr, and the light emanating from him.

While such 'light' from sacramental suffering may be abused as a liberal humanist pacifier, Melville does not offer it as pacification. It stands in tandem with misanthropic self-destruction, balancing it. Unlike Schopenhauer, Melville as Ishmael does not deny the value of self-sacrifice, or see it as always comically futile. If he does not presume to define the 'light' it offers, it is because he leaves such definition to the reader. In the way of 'negative theology', the 'bible leaves' of the whale, like the leaves of the book, are there to be read, interpret them as you will, seems to be his message. But the one certainty he offers, is that no light or peace are possible outside relation to others, a relation which often, as with Queequeg and Ishmael, takes place in darkness. Such relation has already been figured in 'The Monkey-Rope', where Queequeg the 'savage' and Ishmael the 'civilized' are joined together, as it were 'at the hip' by an umbilical cord reminiscent of the one joining whale mothers and calves creating a 'siamese ligature' (255). The 'hempen bond' creates both danger and connection. It creates a knowledge of Being, of whales, but turned too tightly, will be a prison.

Any knowledge used for conquest, Melville suggests, will become imprisoning. Linked to Queequeg, Ishmael feels his 'own individuality... now merged in a joint stock company of two' so that 'my free will had received a mortal wound'. He is in an egoless space. Ahab will abuse the 'hempen bond' by misconstruing its purpose as a colonising one rather than one symbolising 'the joint stock company'. The bond will kill him, not unite him to the Other.

By the end of the text our knowledge of the whale is of nothing but the 'ineffable' and the 'nameless horror' (159), or of the whale which 'might have seemed the gliding great demon of the seas of life' (158). But while that may appear to be a knowledge of 'nothing', an epistemology of 'seeming', cut loose from ontology and left, like the forgotten Pip to bob alone in the empty watery world, it is nevertheless a knowledge of 'life'. Pip is important in closing the present discussion on sacramentalist epistemology. In 'The Castaway', the chapter preceding 'A Squeeze of the Hand', Melville does offer an individualist ethos, opposing the communal one. Pip's experience as the still point of 'a ringed horizon [that] began to expand around him miserably' (321) could be interpreted as a parody of any kind of sacramentalist or phenomenologically 'pre-rational' knowledge. The 'jeering', carnivalesque sea delivers insanity, drowning the soul. Pip's circle is too wide, and he is lost in its centre. Rather the alternative of the close-knit hands.

But such a reading does not fully satisfy either, for Melville clearly means Pip to represent the kind of 'sane madness' he praised in Lear, and Pip as an alternative to Ahab. He has seen 'God's foot upon the treadle of the loom', (321) but could do so only with 'passive eyes' and a 'drowned' soul, so that his body, black and othered and alone as it is, becomes the means to knowledge. His individualism, however, is not a viable one for the rest of society, for its speech, despite its 'Wisdom', is unintelligible. It is, as it were, the final carnival. Pip becomes the one human to take on the truly mystical nature of the whale. Knowledge comes from bodily encounter, not from words or from attempts at reason and sight. Only the 'insane', or perhaps the Ishmaelian hypochondriac, may be able to see 'heaven's sense' in it. That sense is the acceptance of nothing at the heart of being, the same 'indifference' that the 'uncompromised' wise man will find in his God (322).

And this, finally, may be interpreted as Melville's ultimate position regarding sacramentalist or phenomenologically 'intersubjective' epistemologies. They have their place and offer glimpses of what may be between human beings, and between all Beings. But the person who has seen the divine most clearly is unable to approach any kind of intersubjective

‘dialogue’. His carnivalesque dislocations are not necessarily rejuvenating, but forced into a confining and destructive fusion of opposites, ‘sane-madness’. Ishmael escapes confinement to this opposition only in short, luminous moments. Ultimately, he must accept that these are an ‘insular Tahiti’ from which he has, like Tommo, had to escape and so has fallen into the Cartesian divide. And ultimately, it is Ahab who will have the most dominant word on the confined body and its confined head: ‘The dead, blind wall butts all enquiring heads at last’ (391). Head and ‘butt’ are conjoined in a circle, but a self-consuming one. It is for this reason that Ishmael and the reader can both sympathise with Ahab, the arch-representative of that grand Satanic Fall, heroic and rebellious in its own self-destructive way.

CHAPTER THREE

AHAB'S BODY AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONQUEST

‘The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego’.

Freud, *The Ego and the Id*

‘As the general human form corresponds to our general human will, so the individual bodily form to the individually inflected will of the personal character; hence, it is in every part characteristic and full of expression’

Schopenhauer, *The Ground of Morals*

Ahab is Melville's foremost character when it comes to the psychology of conquest. He has a monomaniacal desire to kill the white whale as a revenge for having ‘reaped away’ (156) his leg and left him with a lunacy which Ishmael says ‘subsided not’ (157). From the outset of the narrative, therefore, Melville links mental and physical experiences. He takes us back to *Typee*, where Tommo's diseased leg is a symptom of a mental and ideological constraint against which he struggles, but which nevertheless also confirms his identity as a western individual, who has desires which cannot be fulfilled on the island. In the figure of Ahab, Melville explores further the nature of that desire, its relation to the physical body, and how it attempts to satisfy itself through the actions of conquest.

The loss of Ahab's leg, and the markings on his body are, as Ishmael puts it, ‘a furious trope’ (157) which may be used to define his actions. The lost leg is both literal and a figure for a psychological loss whose impact is variously felt in the text. As Ishmael puts it, ‘his special lunacy stormed his general sanity’, suggesting that Ahab's specific ailment created a greater sense of general metaphysical loss which is the real focus of his monomania. That monomania is also a transfer of inner hatred onto an objectified thing in the form of the whale. The sense of loss created by the reaped leg is presented in the text as the primary desire which drives Ahab's hunt for the whale, a conquest which is meant to alleviate the loss. His ‘torn body and his gashed soul bled into one another’ (156), says Ishmael, suggesting a confusion, if not fusion, of body and spirit, physical and metaphysical. Not only do Ahab's own body and soul

bleed into one another, after he attacks Moby-Dick, but he loses the ability to distinguish between the physical being of the whale and his own bodily and intellectual woes. 'Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations' (156). The result is a body mirroring the inner being. His 'moodiness ... sat brooding on his brow' (158). Since the physical loss is a symbol of inner monomania, Ahab's body is the incarnation of his own illness. To interpret this monomania and the hunt which is its outcome, then, is to interpret his body and the relation between physical loss and mental torpor. Since the physical loss becomes the primary motivation for conquest, Melville invites us to read the psychology of conquest through the symbol of the dismembered body.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the 'trope' of Ahab's loss as a version of castration, with its attendant sense of lack and desire for fulfilment. From this desire, a psychological event, follows the impulse to conquer, to turn the psychological into the physical. That impulse, however, can be read in relation to three tropes which themselves figure the nature of the psychology of conquest. These are, the sublime, the abject and the line, a dominant motif in Ahab's thought. Freudian and Lacanian psychology interpret the loss of the leg as a version of castration. Those meanings include the Oedipal desire and lack which figure so strongly in theories of castration. But an important coda to the psychology of castration is Lacan's theory that it relates strongly to metaphor itself, that metaphorical language, carrying the lack it tries to fill with its figure, simultaneously perpetuates the lack. This is the same relation between body, figure and conquest evident in *Typee*. Closely linked to this is the relationship between the castrated body's meaning and what Julia Kristeva calls the 'abject', which will be used here as a theory interpreting Ahab's gender identity. And while desire, metaphor, the sublime and the abject focus on Ahab as an individual, a further aspect to be explored in relation to the symbol of castration is the political one, where the motif of the line so dominant in Ahab's psyche figures the nature of conquest and expansionism as Melville reads it.

Castration

The loss of Ahab's leg, possible castration, and final madness take place in stages. In the

chapter 'Moby Dick' Ishmael narrates the original event in which the whale reaped away Ahab's leg, 'as a mower a blade of grass in the field' (156). Ahab's quixotic attempt while in the water to use a six-inch blade against the whale 'to reach the fathom-deep life' emphasises powerlessness more than the physical loss of a leg, and it is powerlessness which Melville focusses on as Ahab's monomania. Moreover, Ishmael makes it clear that whatever monomania overtook Ahab, was not just as a result of the attack. 'It is not probable that this monomania in him took its instant rise at the precise time of his bodily dismemberment. Then... he had but given loose to a sudden, passionate, corporal animosity,... nothing more'. Only after 'long months of days and weeks' did his 'torn body and gashed soul [bleed] into one another; and so interfusing, made him mad' (156).

The whale's attack becomes an agent eliciting a deeper rage already present, one against the fact of death itself. 'He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it' (156). Turning general pain into a particular hatred, the physical into the metaphysical, Ahab in fact does what he most hates doing, joins body and head, eradicates the difference between the physical and metaphysical. He has, ironically, broken through the mask before he turns his life into a drive to 'strike through the mask' (140), simply by assuming that in attacking a physical thing he can be eradicating a metaphysical dilemma. Complaining that the mask is 'unreasoning' (140) because there seems no reason for the universe's seemingly malevolent actions, he nevertheless subsumes that very unreasoning nature into his own, and so mirrors the malevolent universe he castigates. This is the primary nature of his emotional castration.

The castration, however, has a second, perhaps more literal phase. In the chapter 'Ahab's Leg', Ishmael explains how Ahab had been found one night, long after the whale attack, 'lying prone upon the ground, and insensible; by some unknown, and seemingly inexplicable, unimaginable casualty, his ivory limb having been so violently displaced, that it had stake-wise smitten, and all but pierced his groin;' (355). What has heretofore been partial physical disablement has now become a literal castration, one caused less by the whale than by Ahab himself. The sick and monomaniac mind has made the body sicker than it already was, and the first castration has led to yet another, both physical and psychological.

In declaring that he would 'strike the sun' if it offended him (140) Ahab is shown to be reacting to a perceived aggression from the paternal universe like a child reacting to the parent.

And when he is equated with ‘Adam staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise’ (406), it is God the Father who is the target, and with Him, the culture which divides the self from the fulfilment of its desires. Ahab is trapped in the archetypal western split between a culture which acknowledges its fallenness from a perfect state, and its anger that it should be placed in such a position in the first place. The trap is Oedipus’s.

Freud’s reading of the castration complex links it specifically to the Oedipal encounter between child, mostly son, and father.¹ The castration complex emerges, akin to the Lacan’s Mirror Stage, from the fact that paternal or Symbolic culture ‘does not keep its promise’, as MacCannell (1986: 69) puts it. Giving the self over to culture in exchange for acceptance, the subject finds itself alienated by having to obey the Laws of culture. ‘The human forsakes the simple, combinatory (in structural terms, metonymic) mode, love in the familiar form, for the metaphorical promise of free and future combinations. But the promise is never kept.’ Here the father-figure is not, of course, the literal father, but culture, society, the Law or the super-ego itself. What Freud says of animal phobias is useful in describing what may be happening to Ahab. He points out (1983: 280-281), that fear is transferred specifically to an animal as the symbol of the cultural, paternal punishing power.

We have said that as soon as the ego recognizes the danger of castration it gives the signal of anxiety and inhibits through the pleasure-unpleasure agency... the impending cathectic process in the id. At the same time the phobia is formed. Anxiety is directed to a different object and expressed in a distorted form, so that the patient is afraid, not of being castrated by his father, but of being bitten by a horse or devoured by a wolf. This substitutive formation has two obvious advantages. In the first place it avoids a conflict due to ambivalence (for the

¹ As in the famous case of the ‘Wolf-man’ (Freud, 1983: 278-287; Lemaire, 1994: 238-246) the little boy, waking to find his parents having intercourse, discovers his mother’s lost penis, associates this loss with the power of the father, and falls into a state where he both desires the affection of his father, but assumes he can only have it by losing his penis. Phobia’s develop around this which later become worked into the super-ego, where the paternal conscience demands obedience, but also elicits desire for some kind of sexual contact or acceptance, which, being repressed because it is socially unacceptable, is then transformed into either phobia or hatred of the object representing what will castrate. In the case of the wolf-man it is the wolf who comes to him in a boyhood dream, reminding him of his father who had affectionately said he would ‘eat him up’, and of the wolf in children’s stories.

father was a loved object too), and in the second place it enables the ego to cease generating anxiety.

Ahab, one may suggest, has transferred his fear of castration from the father, both literal and symbolical, to the whale. His phobia has been realized. He actually has been 'castrated'. His attempt to 'substitute' animal for father then, has been partly undercut by the imagined becoming real. His fear of dismemberment, and his assertion that he will 'dismember my dismemberer' (143) who is to him 'outrageous strength' (140), suggests a conflict with a potency he abhors. But his insistence that his conflict must be a devilish one, where potions 'hot as Satan's hoof' and 'forking out at the serpent-snapping eye' (141) are used, implies a phallic conflict with an equally phallic paternal God. God and Satan become blended in his mind.

That anger and fear have a further dimension, however. Loss of a sense of bodily integrity and with it power leads, as Peter Brooks (1993: 8) has argued, to one of the more important social phenomena, that of the desire to replace absence or lack not only with a physical object, but with language itself, so that language becomes the phenomenon in which desire and lack are embodied. Brooks's argument is as relevant here as it was for *Typee*. 'Desire for the body may appear to promise access to the very *raison d'être* of the symbolic order', he suggests, 'thus narrative desire, as the subtending dynamic of stories and their telling, becomes oriented toward knowledge and possession of the body'. Castration may then be read not only as one of the primary drives, but also a foundational one in western culture. Brooks (1993: 9) suggests that 'The drive for possession will be closely linked to the drive to know, itself most often imaged as the desire to see. For it is sight, with its accompanying imagery of light, unveiling, and fixation by the gaze, that traditionally represents knowing, and even rationality itself.'

Lacan, and by implication also Derrida with his theory of 'différance', explores this aspect of castration in suggesting that metaphor itself, with its effort to find a substitute for an absent thing by offering a figure, is the primary way in which the psyche works. He (1977: 26) suggests that: 'Metaphor must be defined as the implantation, in a signifying chain, of another signifier whereby the supplanted signifier falls to the level of the signified and, as a latent signifier, perpetuates there the interval in which another signifying chain may be grafted'. What this elaborate, and perhaps obscure, definition suggests is that metaphor exists in the state

of 'latency' where sign and signified never quite meet. That latency perpetuates 'deferral' and desire, both of which are the 'wound' within the social symbolic. Metaphor reflects the 'wound' of loss at the same time that it engenders the wound. 'Psychoanalysts showed that there were symptoms without any cause other than this: that the human is afflicted, if I may say so, with language. By means of language he supplements the incontrovertibility of the lack of sexual relations. What is social is always a wound' (*Silicet* 6/7, 17: MacCannell, 1986: 46).

Freud had already identified the same drive for possession with the drive for language as one of the earliest experiences of childhood. His metaphor is, pertinently, that of fishing. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Rivkin and Ryan, 1998: 168-169) he reads the Oedipal saga in the actions of a little boy in his cot playing the 'fort-da' game. He interprets the game as the self's search for the primary lost object, the mother. One can also read it in terms of castration, the loss of meaning and its attempted recovery, as well as something of an allegory of the origins of metaphorical language. The little boy, Freud tells us, 'had an occasional disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business. As he did this he gave vent to a loud, long-drawn-out "o-o-o-o", accompanied by an expression of interest and satisfaction'. Freud interprets this as the German word 'fort' ('gone'). Later, when the child has a toy attached to a string he repeats the procedure and the word, but then reels in the lost toy, saying 'da' ('there'). Disappearance and return become the game. Freud interprets it as 'the child's great cultural achievement - the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction, the same renunciation the adult makes to culture) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting. He compensated himself for this, as it were, by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach. Adding words to describe loss, a version of castration, or the loss of the mother, presents the primal scene of language, where the word comes to stand in for the primary lost object. In a way, then, all language may be seen as such an enactment, and particularly metaphor which figures the very lost object in its structure. It does this by ensuring that the link of a vehicle to the tenor of a metaphor never quite closes the gap between what the figure aims to express and what it manages to achieve. As with all cultural forms, the desire is never quite fulfilled, spurring further cultural endeavours.

To read Ahab's psyche through these lenses is to suggest that he makes the whale the symbolic object of his desire for completion, both of his own physical loss, but also the loss

within the metaphorical itself, the absence which is actually at the heart of his initial desire to attack the fish. His 'wild vindictiveness' and his 'spiritual exasperations' (156) are as much a response to the gap within metaphorical language as they are anger at the universe. He interprets his own life as a metaphorical game akin to Freud's boy. "Here some one thrusts these cards into these old hands of mine; swears that I must play them, and no others". And damn me, Ahab, but thou actest right; live in the game, and die in it!' (379). At the heart of the 'game' lies the force of chance, and chance both gives and takes away. Like metaphor, it suggests possibilities while at the same time never quite allowing their full realisation, leaving the player trapped in the game. Queequeg will be comfortable with it, Ahab simultaneously loves and hates it.

He looks for 'linked analogies' between Nature and the Soul of man and finds them to be 'beyond all utterance'. The 'game' he plays is not only with Fate, but with a Cartesian divide that sees the Parent figure as missing and all human actions as empty substitutions. In 'The Candles' he cries for his mother, and not finding her, chooses his sterner Father, the fiery candles themselves, and the game they play with him. He loves and hates them. 'There burn the flames! Oh, thou magnanimous! Now I do glory in my genealogy. But thou art but my fiery father; my sweet mother I know not. Oh, cruel, what hast thou done with her? There lies my puzzle; but thine is greater. Thou knowest not how came ye, hence callest thyself unbegotten; certainly knowest not thy beginning, hence callest thyself unbegun. I know that of me, which thou knowest not of thyself, oh, thou omnipotent. ... Oh, thou foundling fire, thou hermit immemorial, thou too hast thy incommunicable riddle, thy unparticipated grief' (383). The riddle of what is missing, the link in the analogical chain, traps Ahab in the game of chance meanings, making all foundlings. The 'unparticipated grief' at the heart of language and culture, and for which the whale hunt is a substitute, is to bring back the lost mother, primal unsullied connection.

Without the mother he is left with the father, his genealogy. 'The Log and Line' shows his 'fishing' to be a choice of the lost phallus in favour of the lost mother. As the Freudian infant pulls the line with its toy attached, symbol of the lost parent, and of his own potency, back into the cot, so Ahab chooses log and line, symbol of the fishing line, symbols of phallic, masculine, strength. They are his answer to the puzzle he faces. Phallus replaces maternal warmth. As instruments of navigation, the log and line are also a metaphor for direction and the hunt for closure of meaning. But pulling in the log and line he finds them worn, snapped off

from being unused. Melville makes an important play on this lost object, as he will do with Ahab's false leg. Ahab himself can read the meaning of the loss. 'The skewer seems loosening out of the middle of the world'. But just as the line with the log snapped off is brought to the surface, Pip steps up, a symbolic replacement of the lost phallus. His interpretation of what is happening proves instructive. 'Pip's missing', he says, placing himself in the position of the lost log, and by implication the whale, object of the hunt, and the means by which all 'hunting' can take place, metaphor. The black boy is the absence within the heart of metaphor, Melville suggests, the 'other' whose presence, like the whale's defeats closure, retains deferral and spurs the hunt. 'Let's see now if ye haven't fished him up there fisherman.... Captain Ahab! Sir, sir! Here's Pip, trying to get on board again' (391). Pip stands, in Melville's economy of race and gender, as substitute for the lost paternal object, and for the inability of the white male to 'father' any son, marry any woman, but slaves who stand in for his own inadequacy. Yet he revels in just this inadequacy and its deferrals.

For it is only through deferral of pleasure that the drive towards pleasure can be forwarded. This is one of the reasons Freud suggests in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that tragedy can be highly enjoyable. 'This is convincing proof', he says, 'that, even under the dominance of the pleasure principle, there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind' (Rivkin and Ryan, 1998: 170). Deferral and unpleasure both spur the drive for conquest and closure, and yet can never be closed or they will lose their own energy, the very negative energy which charges them. Two important ways in which the bodily link between pain and pleasure, and pleasure in castration is evinced in Ahab's personality may be explored through the theories of the sublime and the abject. The first is one common to Melville's own time, and one he himself has in mind in his presentation of both the whale body and Ahab's, especially as it relates to 'negative pleasure'. The second is a term adopted from post-structuralist, Freudian feminism. Both explore metaphorical deferral as it relates to bodily identity as central to the psyche.

The Sublime Body

When Ahab tells Starbuck that 'I am all aleak myself' (362), after just having suggested to the carpenter that he might 'order a complete man after a desirable pattern' (359) he seems to be

taking a kind of perverse pleasure in his own castration. Trying to make a new, Promethean man is possible only from the position of one chained as Prometheus was. If he sees man as ‘manufactured’, as Ishmael thinks he does in ‘Surmises’, and assumes man’s greatest quality to be ‘sordidness’ (178), then his attempt to remake himself is both an attempt to rid himself of his sense of sordidness, and to revel in it. He is both trapped in sordidness and yet not unhappily trapped, as it were. Such a paradox is to be found in the theory of the sublime, especially Kant’s version. One may read Melville’s presentation of Ahab’s and other bodies in relation to this theory.

Kant defines the sublime as a kind of ‘negative pleasure’. His definition captures the mixture of awe and repulsion Melville presents as important to the whale. He says in the *Critique of Judgement* (1.1.24: 102): ‘As the mind is not merely attracted by the object but is ever being alternately repelled, the satisfaction of the sublime does not so much involve a positive pleasure as admiration or respect, which rather deserves to be called negative pleasure’. The sublime, terror of the other, and of the self as ‘othered’, is possible only in a Kantian or Cartesian universe, where the divide between mind and body, self and other still obtains. Ahab is, at least partly, the representative in *Moby-Dick*, of that divide, and the anxious desire to bridge it, fight against it, or take revenge for it. His own body, trapped in its deficiencies, is a site of what Kant would have called ‘negative pleasure’, a mixture of anguish, pain and pleasure in that pain.²

² Edmund Burke’s views on the sublime also shed light on Ahab’s character and the motivation for the hunt. Writing in 1757, he associates the sublime more directly with terror, but still suggests a kind of pleasure that may be equated with what Freud would later call the ‘death wish’, ‘Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling’ (Meaney, 1993: 193). For Burke the sublime is a psychic space where logic and reason are overcome by the terror of the object, and where sight is useless in the face of imagined ills. ‘The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully is astonishment: and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror’ (Meaney, 1993: 194). This certainly describes the horror evinced by the whale. It also, though, suggests Ahab’s own body, which, in its monomaniac dismemberment, is equally demon-like.

The trap of the sublime can therefore be read as another version of Freud's 'fort-da' too, in which the 'negative pleasure' experienced by the boy confined to his cot enables him to be satisfied with the loss of the mother, because he takes pleasure in being able to substitute her with his game. The fact that metaphorical language carries a similar structure implies that it too, exists in the trap of negative pleasure. The 'game' as it were, of metaphor, where vehicle and tenor are meant to 'close' the gap between them but never quite do, is as much a negative pleasure of the sublime as the body itself may be. The Cartesian subject, stuck in the division between subject and object, head and body, remains trapped in the logic of the sublime, and his only recourse is to find a form of satisfaction in the division, the divide between sign and signified. Ishmael, as the previous chapter showed, can accept that divide as part of existence. He represents the person Kant would refer to as being 'in security'. 'If we are in security we willingly call these objects sublime, because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height, and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind, which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature' (*Critique of Judgement* 1.1.28: 125). Ahab tries to measure himself against Nature's apparent almightiness, but he is stuck in metaphor, desires to close it down by dismembering the sublime 'great gliding demon of the seas of life' (158), and so is left in the ambiguous space of still gaining pleasure from the hunt to substitute his sense of loss.

His words to the mentally deranged Pip, who has symbolically 'stood in' for his loss of the log, show this kind of logic. "There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health" (399). Ahab recognizes his self to be split, knows the hunt to be a substitute for that split, but sees also that the black boy, equally split from himself after his abandonment by Stubb, is his 'like'. Like Ishmael, Pip accepts the split. The black slave has no choice in antebellum America. He lives in a world of unfulfilled desire and confined bodies. 'Who ain't a slave?', asks Ishmael. Ahab refuses the epithet, not wishing to be cured. The 'civilized', Cartesian disease is his 'most desired health', spurring the metaphorical substitution of whale for lack, demanding compensation by conquest.

But Melville shows us the a high price of that conquest. The divided self seeking substitutions for its lack turns against itself. In an important passage about the sleeping Ahab, we are shown that the body's confinement to the mind's psychomachic battle becomes a version of the self-destructive sublime. Ahab on his bed, unable to contain his unconscious

mind, is a raging Prometheus caught in a battle with himself as the sublime object of negative pleasure.

Often, when forced from his hammock by exhausting and intolerably vivid dreams of the night, which, resuming his own intense thoughts through the day, carried them on amid a clashing of phrensies, and whirled them round and round in his blazing brain, till the very throbbing of his life-spot became insufferable anguish; and when as was sometimes the case, these spiritual throes in him heaved his being up from its base, and a chasm seemed opening in him, from which forked flames and lightnings shot up, and accursed fiends beckoned him to leap down among them; when this hell in himself yawned beneath him, a wild cry would be heard through the ship;.... this Ahab that had gone to his hammock, was not the agent that so caused him to burst from it in horror again. That latter was the eternal, living principle or soul in him; and in sleep, being for the time dissociated from the characterizing mind, which at other times employed it for its outer vehicle or agent, it spontaneously sought escape from the scorching contiguity of the frantic thing,.... Therefore, the tormented spirit that glared out of bodily eyes, when what seemed Ahab rushed from his room, was for the time but a vacated thing, a formless somnambulistic being, a ray of living light, to be sure, but without an object to color, and therefore a blankness in itself. God help thee, old man, thy thoughts have created a creature in thee; and he whose intense thinking thus makes him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart for ever; that vulture the very creature he creates (169-170).

The unconscious acts like a metaphor here, in which the divide between the desire and the object, the word and the thing becomes a 'chasm' which torments. The sense of castration inherent in the experience of being unable to contain the unconscious mind may be interpreted as a version of the sublime because the unconscious becomes both the terror from which to escape, but also the 'negative pleasure' trapping the individual in a perpetual cycle of desire. Ahab's literally dismembered body is here a figure for a dismembered sense of being, a 'tormented spirit glaring out of bodily eyes', which maintains the 'chasm' between body and

soul. The 'vacated thing' tormenting Ahab is himself, emptiness of meaning, the gap within metaphor, the lack within desire. As Paul Brodtkorb Jr puts it, Ahab is 'a blankness, a whiteness ... with all the ambiguity of that color; but he is also a strange kind of emptiness, a lack, and perhaps a lack in Ishmael's and our rationalizing understanding of him as well as a lack in himself'.³ The sublime terror of the object is that it is a projection of the same emptiness residing in the subject, a whiteness, like language, which can be 'painted' any colour, and whose real terror is that it is not from the outside but from the inside of a man, self-created.

³ Brodtkorb's reading of this passage is extracted in the Norton *Moby-Dick* (2002: 669-674). The original is from *Ishmael's White World: A Phenomenological Reading of 'Moby Dick'*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1965.

This lack within the self is, in Ahab, replaced by the figure of the whale, the sublime 'blank wall' through which he seeks to break. It is, however, not the whale itself so much as the 'idea' of the whale that is the object. Loss and castration are replaced with an 'idea' which Ishmael describes as 'infix'd', with 'unrelenting fangs' and 'incurable' (158). Confusing the physical for the metaphysical becomes just another way of falling through the hole between the two, into what Ishmael describes as 'Descartean vortices' (136). For by confusing idea and thing, or insisting on a fusion of sign and signified while nevertheless being unable to accept that a fusion is in fact possible, seeing all as a 'mask', Ahab merely locks himself into an untenable position of 'blankness' between desire and fulfilment. He can never really escape the terror of the sublime, and must find relief rather in a negative pleasure with it.

The endless substitutions, for what is essentially a sense of castration, leave the subject in a position of confinement to pathological awareness of a slippery world. When Ahab declares to the carpenter making his new leg that 'I like to find something in this slippery world that can hold, man' (359), he is also referring to the endless hole within meaning, where the sign only approximates its signified and where even the great phallus of the whale is but another substitution in an endless chain. The endless chain of desire that results is the most sublime of all objects, the *idea* of coming to an end of the chain the most powerful drive ensuring the chain is endless. So it becomes the head with its ideas which continue castration, Melville suggests, because it ultimately disallows full union with the body.

Like Tommo, Ahab's 'game' with the sublime seeks a return to the maternal primordial in which his own desire is finally 'fixed'. The whale is his island utopia. But whereas Tommo succumbed to it and had to escape the island's metonymic, contiguous existence, Ahab is not yet entirely in a state where he accepts the metaphoric world of distinction between self and other, sign and signified. While culture and the social are formed out of metaphorical divides between selves and others, those divides are not always entirely negative. They provide structure even as they cause deferred meanings to abound. The psychologically mature person accepts the deferral as part of the structure. Ishmael can under the darkness of the sheets and even in daylight with the 'other' Queequeg. The psychologically immature person, however, is unable to accept such deferrals and lacunae. The extreme version presented in Ahab is of one turned 'monomaniac' because dualism is untenable but inescapable. Julia Kristeva has described this experience as 'abjection', and it is a useful way of interpreting a further aspect of Ahab's castration, because it helps us understand the aspect of gender central

to Melville's exploration of bodily confinement and the drive for conquest. It is, one may suggest, a gendered version of the sublime experience of negative pleasure.

The Male Subject

Ahab's castration, as Newton Arvin long ago showed, and as more recent gender-centred commentators have suggested, is not just a question of a lack of power, but more specifically of manhood.⁴ Ordering the 'complete man' from the carpenter is also an ordering of the complete (ivory legged, white) *man*. Male identity was under threat from various quarters as Melville wrote *Moby-Dick*. On the frontier, it was at war with Indians and the wilderness, in the labour market of the city by corporations' monopolies, by the rise of the anti-slavery movement, and by the increasing calls from women for greater equality. Melville's story may also, then, be read as an allegory of the male hunt for its symbol of masculinity. Melville's interpretation of that hunt, however, is that it is doomed to failure because, mirroring each other, subject and object of the hunt are one, and the hunt merely suicidal. This may not be so if the object were clearly differentiated from the self, so that, as Starbuck sees the whale, it is merely an external, largely senseless other. Instead, Melville presents Ahab's maleness as in a state of abjection, unable, as when Ahab meets Pip, to tell itself from the 'other', since it interprets that 'other' merely as an image of its own lack.

Kristeva, as Smith (1996: 150) points out, derives her understanding of 'abjection' from Freud's castration complex. She re-reads Freud to suggest that what the superego represses in the castration complex is actually the splitting from the mother, or the lack of desire to split from the mother. The result of this repression is a castration complex founded on an inability to distinguish self from the maternal, and one not yet fully integrated into the paternal world of language and the Symbolic. The result is a disjointed and sexually undifferentiated body, which exists on the margins of social structure and of language. Ahab

⁴ See Newton Arvin, *Herman Melville* (New York: Sloane, 1950). Among important recent works on masculinity and gay writing in Melville are Robert K. Martin's *Heroes, Captains, and Strangers: Male Friendship, Social Critique, and Literary Form in the Sea Novels of Herman Melville*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1986; Also his 'Melville and Sexuality', in Robert Levine, ed., (1998: 186-201); Caleb Crain's 'Lovers of Human Flesh: Homosexuality and Cannibalism in Melville's Novels'. *American Literature* 66 (March 1994): 25-53; and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. (New York: Columbia UP, 1985).

himself calls it 'slipperiness'. Citing Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1982: 3, 15), Anna Smith (1996: 149) describes 'abjection' in a way useful for interpreting Ahab.

Kristeva believes that those individuals who suffer from abjection are either estranged from language, or live a precarious existence on its margins. Neither language nor social relationships are sufficiently sustaining to permit an identity to be articulated that can withstand the existence of an other without paranoia. However, according to Kristeva abjection also appears to be a founding moment for *all* subjects. As a revolt of and against the being that gives us existence, Kristeva argues that before we have yet been formed as speaking beings and before our world has acquired the coherence of objects for us, there exists an abject borderline state we inhabit. Our identity runs all over the place, and in this phase of psychic development, whenever it meets up with boundaries and barriers, we experience a traumatic sense of upheaval. This moment therefore marks the beginnings of separation from the undifferentiated relationship previously experienced with the mother (thus 'I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out'). The maternal relation is the most primitive representation of intimate space, yet this relation opens on to a landscape of estrangement. For the peculiar organisation of abjection actually *founds* the signifying economy of our culture and its characteristics of 'rejecting, separating, repeating/abjecting'.

The state of abjection is, then, a state somewhere between the Lacanian Imaginary (Maternal) and the Symbolic (Paternal). The maternal entity from which the subject has come is neither 'us' (as it would be in the Imaginary) nor 'not-us' (as in the Symbolic). Final differentiation from the 'other' has not yet come about, but neither has full 'parturition' as it were, from the mother. He has no final language with which to define himself. Thomas Woodson (1992: 449) points this out in relation to Ahab: 'Stylistically, Ahab's tragedy consists in his failure to keep saying "I" meaningfully; striving to remain the grammatical subject of his world, who acts upon objects or "things" and creates or destroys them, he constantly lapses into the passivity of an object, acted upon, created or destroyed'. Kristeva (1982 a: 3) puts it similarly. 'The abject has only one quality of the object - that of being opposed to "I".' Elsewhere (1982 b: 90-91) she says, the abject 'becomes what culture, the sacred, must purge,

separate, and banish so that it may establish itself as such in the universal logic of catharsis. ... The *Sachverhalt*, the abject, is then embodied in the figure of a maleficent agent, both feminine and phallic, miserable and all-powerful, victim and satrap, idiot and genius, bestial and wily'. If this describes both Ahab and the whale, it also suggests why Ahab is often seen as paranoid. He is paranoid, Chris Wiesenthal (1997: 162) suggests, because he speaks alternately as one arrogant and self-delusional enough to 'strike the sun if it insulted [him]' (140), while at other times he speaks dejectedly about being the victim, one 'dismembered' (143).

His 'dismemberment', however, is more suggestive of abjection than just paranoia, for, lacking a language with which to speak his 'I', demanding the death of the whale as compensation, he may be seen to be one still attached to the primal chaos of maternal instinctuality, while not yet fully in the ordered system of the Symbolic. The Symbolic would designate gender identity. Outside the Symbolic such identity remains unclear. Lacan would suggest that he is yet in the pre-Mirror Stage of both emotional and sexual differentiation, a stage where the body is perceived by the child or the subject to be, 'a fragmented body bursting forth in images of castration, mutilation and dismemberment' (Lacan, 1977: 11). To be stuck in this phase is to be stuck in aggressivity, because the subject is stuck in the gap between its own sense of self and the *imago* which it offers to the world. Not yet in the full Symbolic where it will finally repress its own sense of fragmentation and accept the sacrifice of self to culture, and so be able to express verbally what the pain is it encounters, this 'polylogical' body (to use Kristeva's term) speaks itself by means of its own fragmentation and its aggressive actions. A male version of the hysteric, the body's 'speech' becomes its own nonsensical actions, and from the point-of-view of language, as Kristeva sees it (Boulous-Walker, 1998: 115), erupts in laughter 'indicating an aggressive negativity toward unity and the law'.

Ahab's abjection strongly suggests a disruption of gender-identity on his part. Traditionally the male relations on the *Pequod* are seen as belonging either to the Ishmaelian camp of sperm covered hands squeezing into each other in a not very veiled hint at homosexual enjoyment in 'A Squeeze of the Hand', or to Ahab's more stringent 'aggressive phallic system of power' inherent in the 'system of capitalism and colonialism', as Robert Martin (1998: 193) puts it. Ishmael and Queequeg represent a form of homosocial 'marriage', a 'serene household joy' (58). A closer look at Ahab himself, however, reveals that capitalist system of power to be based on a castration complex which may itself be a version of frustrated homosexual desire, or at least, a sense of incomplete manhood, leaving him in a state of abject

aggression against a sublime figure that is little more than a projection of himself. If Pip's madness is 'too curing to my malady' (399) it is because he offers the possibility of filling the space of the lack, physically as slave, but also perhaps sexually as boy and as child to the father.

Melville is quite clear about Ahab's quest being one for sexual potency. Having given up wife and child, Ahab has made a wife of his ivory leg, as the carpenter has it (361). Not only is the whale the 'pelvis of the world', but it is to Ahab a 'hip of power' (376). 'On life and death this old man walked' (192) says Ishmael of the one live and one dead leg, as if Ahab's second signifies dead masculinity, an 'Old Adam' (360), as he puts it to the carpenter, whose power and desire have become a (sexually charged) 'cindered apple'. To retrieve his potency he seeks, like Prometheus controlling fire, to enchain nature, take the phallic whale with a harpoon whose 'crotch' is on fire and from whose phallic point, as it does in 'The Candles', shoots a spermatic flame (383). If Ishmael chooses the path of homosocial connubiality, replacing the lost female with the 'female' man on board ship and so finds a version of identity in relation to an other, Ahab cannot follow suit. He is instead locked in a more powerful repressive, and Oedipal, psychosis in which his hunt is not for the lost female, a return to the rhythmic, gestational comforts of the Imaginary, but rather for the lost male, the paternal Law over which he feels he has lost power, yet to which he feels chained, and to which he cannot reach.

This may be something of the meaning behind Melville's unusual switch of traditional symbolism of the sea and sky, gendered as male and female respectively. In 'The Symphony' the sky is female, seemingly innocent, whereas the sea is masculine, mostly malevolent. Hidden beneath the sea are fearful phallic creatures, 'leviathans, sword-fish and sharks'. Its outer appearance, however, was like the 'lingering swells' of 'Samson's chest in his sleep' (404). It is not the sky that straddles the sea as man would woman, but the reverse, just as it is Delilah, the archetypally feared *femme fatale*, who straddles Samson to cut off his hair, an ironic, feminine, reversal of phallic power. It is to the male sea that Ahab turns to protect him from the 'stepmother world' (405), the same stepmother world which sent the young Ishmael to bed without supper. But finding the male protector absent, Ahab plays Freud's 'fort-da' game, hating its absence, and transferring all malevolence to its form, seeks to kill it. He transfers the hate and anger at the loss of mother to the paternal which he must then eradicate, for it is the paternal, as it was for Melville, which had failed him. Like the young man Pierre who struggles to distinguish between maternal authority and the memory of paternal affection,

and still feels a betrayal by both, Ahab is stuck in an abject space of unresolved Oedipal attachment, and hating the paternal for its detachment.

It is difficult to discern whether the psychosis is only Ahab's or whether Melville sees himself in some way sharing it, finding instead Ishmael's option of homosexual male union the most satisfactory alternative. Later works like *Pierre* and *Billy Budd* suggests that Melville is only beginning in *Moby-Dick* to deal with repressed sexuality, as he is with the loss of his father when a young man. He may be seen to read that repression, however, in relation to the distinction he makes between head and heart. The amputation Ahab experiences signifies a link between the loss of the bodily part, leg or penis, with the division between head and heart. Cartesian dualism becomes gendered in its depiction of 'dismemberment', primarily in the separation of head from heart. Head equals male and heart female. In *Moby-Dick*, and antebellum America, the head, filled with sperm, is as much a figure of sexual authority as it is of intellect. Separated from the more feminine 'heart', devoured as it is by the vulture of Ideas feeding on it (170), Ahab's head has become a 'burnt-out crater' (405), like the 'cindered apple', symbol of a burnt-out male and female sexuality as much as of intellectual acuity. At the same time, however, Ahab is dis-membered from the female, gentler, part of his own personality, and made abject since he is then neither fully male nor female.

The rhetoric of head and heart in domestic economy is standard during Melville's time, but it was fast coming under fire from the rising tide of feminist voices. In its context, Ahab must be seen as the representative of an abject patriarchy struggling to maintain its authority. His insistence on acting singly to overcome his lack smacks of Emersonian 'self-reliance'. But Emerson's rhetoric of self reliance is largely patriarchal, while appearing avant-garde. 'Whoso would be a man', he says in 'Self-Reliance' (1895: 11), 'must be a non-conformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind'. Mind, here, takes precedence over heart or body, just as man still does over woman. Ahab's 'wrinkled brow' mirroring the 'wrinkled charts' in 'The Chart' (167), themselves mirroring the 'wrinkled brow' of the whale, is a version of self-reliance locked into the decaying and heartless intellectual. In the 'Moby-Dick' chapter, the head has become a 'frozen brow', suggestive of both psychological and physical impotence. But Melville is also referring to genealogy and its impotence here. The 'very heart of this spiked Hotel de Cluny', he says, is its 'broken throne', where the 'great gods mock the captive king'. 'Wind ye down

there, ye prouder souls! Question that proud, sad king! A family likeness! Aye, he did beget ye, ye exiled royalties' (157). The head is in exile from the heart. The descendants in exile from the Father, the 'grim sire'. Self-reliance will bring no progeny but an impotent masculinity.

Melville uses Ahab to question the standard patriarchal views of gender presented in expansionist America. Chief among these is Tocqueville (1994: 601), who, following Emerson, presents gender relations in America as superior to those in Europe. In Europe 'equality [is] forced on both sexes ... degrades them both', and 'so coarse a jumble of nature's works produce[s] nothing but feeble men and unseemly women'. Democratic equality between the sexes in America is preferable in his view because:

In America, more than anywhere else in the world, care has been taken constantly to trace clearly distinct spheres of action for the two sexes, and both are required to keep in step, but along paths that are never the same. You will never find American women in charge of the external relations of the family, managing a business, or interfering in politics; but they are also never obliged to undertake rough labourer's work or any task requiring hard physical exertion. No family is so poor that it makes an exception to this rule.... Nor have the Americans ever supposed that democratic principles should undermine the husband's authority and make it doubtful who is in charge of the family.

Tocqueville's blinkered 'naturalism' and perceptions about who carries the burden of labour and what women want when it comes to equal power in public institutions are parodied by feminists. Margaret Fuller, in 'The Great Lawsuit. Man *versus* Men. Woman *versus* Women'(HC 1, 1993: 307-308) writing at much the same time (1843), turns the ostensibly masculine notion of self-reliance into a feminist slogan. Finding sympathy only from the anti-slavery movement, feminists become the 'Jacobins of their day' who must suffer the complaints of men that they seek to 'break up the national Union, and thus destroy the prosperity of our country' and now also seek to 'break up family union,... to take [the] wife away from her cradle, and the kitchen hearth, to vote at polls, and preach from the pulpit'. 'I will never consent to have our peace disturbed by any such discussions', Fuller has her male antagonist assert. But the female protagonist answers: ' "Consent" - you? It is not consent from you that is in question, it is assent from your wife'. 'Am I not the head of my house?'

‘You are not the head of your wife. God has given her a head of her own’. ‘I am the head and she is the heart’. ‘God grant you play true to one another then. If the head represses no natural pulse of the heart, there can be no question as to your giving your consent’. Fuller neatly plays the trick of ‘naturalism’ against its usual proponents, and breaks down the phallic linearity asserted by patriarchy.

If Ahab steadfastly represses the heart in favour of the head, it is as much out of fear of losing self-reliant control as it is of finding the hardened phallic exterior softened inside. The Melville of the letter to Hawthorne in May 1851 who chooses heart over head is not necessarily choosing the female, but he is suggesting, read in the context of *Moby-Dick*, that overarching singular choice will result in self-destruction, the head cannibalising itself, a heart abused, eaten by vultures. In a frontier world of anxious masculinity turning sperm into the ‘milk and sperm of kindness’ (323) as Ishmael does in homosexual community, becomes a way of replacing the lost ‘wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fireside, the country’ (323). Not to choose that path is to leave the head ‘cratered’, empty female, and burnt-out male, both sterile.

While, as Kolodny (1975) has shown, traditional imagery of conquest becomes inextricably linked to the ‘rape’ of the land, or the pacification of its female Imaginary as in *Typee*, Melville suggests in the figure of Ahab, that the quest to conquer may be linked, as rape usually is, to uncertain gender identity or a sense of impotence on the part of the man. Ahab’s false leg becomes his ‘wife’ (361), suggesting not only the incestuous self-love of the sailor stuck on the ship, but also the patriarch walking on the female, yet depending on her, hunting her in the form of the whale, to wear her bones, and blaming her for his sense of lack. The whale, then, is, a reversible male/female, for in conquering it Ahab conquers the female in himself, but also the fear of his own impotence. ‘Oh, trebly hooped and welded hip of power!’, he says to the dying whale, ‘Oh, high aspiring, rainbowed jet! - that one striveth, this one jetteth all in vain!... Yet dost thou, darker half, rock me with a prouder, if a darker faith. All thy unnameable imminglings float beneath me here; I am buoyed by breaths of once living things, exhaled as air, but water now’ (376).

The real state of abjection Ahab comes to, then, is that he has chosen a position he would rather not be in, and from which he cannot escape, one in which the ‘negative pleasure’ he takes from the chase is a replacement for the loss of potency and masculine identity. ‘Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?’ (406) Rejecting the feminine Imaginary,

as he rejects the arm of the stepmother world briefly enfolding him (405), he cannot fully accept the role of husbandly manhood, 'I see my wife and my child in thine eye' (406), he says to Starbuck, but will not return to them. The only space left is the 'fort-da' neurosis of hating what is the absent loved object, and wanting to punish it by making it more absent.

This is what he does with the quadrant. He smashes to the deck and tramples it, like a child having a tantrum, not just because he despises science as a 'Foolish toy! babies' plaything of haughty Admirals, and Commodores', but because he is enraged by the absence of knowledge (read: Father, Mother, potency, love, order) of which it is a constant reminder. 'Thou sea-mark!', he demands of the sun, 'thou high and mighty Pilot! thou tellest me truly where I *am* - but canst thou cast the least hint where I *shall* be? Or canst thou tell where some other thing besides me is this moment living? Where is Moby Dick?' And addressing the quadrant: 'Thou canst not tell where one drop of water or one grain of sand will be to-morrow noon; and yet with thy impotence thou insultest the sun!' (378). Giving up the quadrant he must also give up charting his course on his impotent ivory leg. But his replacement for that impotency is the game of cards. 'Here some one thrusts these cards into these old hands of mine; swears that I must play them, and no others. And damn me, Ahab, but thou actest right; live in the game, and die in it!' (379).

The game is an embracing of absence, but, unlike Ishmael, it is not an acceptance of it. Ahab is really confined in a repetition compulsion because, unlike the child passed through the Mirror Stage and into the cultural Symbolic, he has not accepted paternal and maternal absence, and the loss of his leg as its symbol. Instead, he remains confined to the game, where the sublime object of desire must be kept absent for it perpetuates the quest in an eternal, self-cannibalising circularity which becomes, finally, not a figure of wholeness or joined opposites, as in 'The Grand Armada' or 'A Squeeze of the Hand', but of stagnation and stasis, a 'tormented flaming life' (379) burning, like the whale, on its own flesh. Ahab destroys his quadrant on the equator, choosing the line in favour of the circle of the earth, monism instead of quartering multiplicity.

Abjection, as the psychological experience between Imaginary and Symbolic, assumes the line of progress. Like the metaphor seeking closure, it assumes a future movement away from maternal nascence to the paternal Law governing social institutions. Rejecting both the institution which confines and also the mother from whom he detachment, Ahab is left in a twilight zone where only his head and his 'incurable idea' have meaning. Rejecting the 'lower

layer', the head and its ideas remain the 'higher' one which symbolises a linear, hierarchical progression. But that progression is itself a trap. 'What things real are there, but imponderable thoughts?' (396) he asks. Nothing is real outside one's own thought. He is the Cartesian who will not take Ishmael's more phenomenological route and find value in the thing itself. But his thoughts themselves remain 'imponderable', so that he is trapped in the desire for linear progression yet never, finally, escapes an abject entrapment to a desire to find and conquer the thing in itself.

The Line of Conquest

The line, like the phallic log and line, and the desire for progression from 'lower' to 'higher' layer, symbolizes another aspect of the castration Ahab represents, the final, but perhaps most important one to be discussed here: that of political conquest. At the end of the hempen line in so many states of Melville's America, hangs the slave, male and female, lost in the abject space of the 'not-I'. They dangle as dark, indecipherable metaphors mirroring the lack and 'darkness' which lies at the heart of white America. Ahab's dangling log, like Ahab himself, must break from the line and sink into the sea, like Narcissus falling into his own dark image. This will happen a decade after the novel is published, in the civil war. Melville will offer the possibility of another log and line which might be a life-giving alternative to the psychomachia born of abjection. The life-buoy coffin in which a body lies which is not at odds with itself, and whose maternal figure represents the round world, and which gives itself for its brother, becomes the image of a future hope on which the text itself, like a live signifier fished from the sea of war, is based. Ahab addresses that coffin in the same scene where he declares his thoughts to be imponderable. 'Here now's the very dreaded symbol of grim death, by a mere hap, made the expressive sign of the help and hope of most endangered life. A life-buoy of a coffin! Does it go further? Can it be that in some spiritual sense the coffin is, after all, but an immortality-preserver!' (396) Ahab cannot 'go further' with the idea. Only one who is at ease with his own mortality will be able to. This is another 'line' of Melville's argument which, however, can only be examined after exploring the meaning of the strict line of conquest Ahab inaugurates on the political front.

'The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails', says Ahab in 'Sunset'. 'Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way', he concludes. (143). It is an aptly named short

chapter loaded with telling imagery. He feels that he wears an 'Iron Crown', delusionally sees himself in Christic terms, but accepts, reluctantly, that the crown is 'iron' not 'gold', and that, like his skull, it feels 'split'. ' 'Tis split too - that I feel; the jagged edge galls me so, my brain seems to beat against the solid metal; aye, steel skull, mine; the sort that needs no helmet in the most brain-battering fight!'. His self-image is of one embodying the new age of expansionism, with its iron rails, where his 'one cogged circle fits into all their [the crew's] their various wheels', where Ahab's head is the cog that can fit all the social body's wheels, and where the path to be followed will be 'fixed', full of teleological 'purpose' and straight as the rails stretching into the western interior.

The line becomes the dominant image in Ahab's understanding of himself. It takes at least three important forms. There is the literal line running down his face and his body. There is the line of his monomania, where his desire for revenge has no path but a single (mono) one. And finally, and most importantly, there is the line of political and ideological purpose figured in the 'iron rails'. All three are inextricably linked, both to each other, and to their functions as compensation for castration. The physical line running down Ahab's body figures the monomania within.⁵ The line, in this case, will become a figure for autocracy. As the psychological form of the autocratic line, monomania may be seen as the state leading to political conquest. The circle, in the realm of politics, can be taken as a figure of democracy. The iron rail as the symbol of a deeper purpose of conquest comes to replace the other 'line', the phallus and leg, which Ahab lacks, just as the head comes to replace the body, and the 'Idea' stand in for physical experience.

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The line that runs, like the iron rail, down Ahab's face figures this monomania, so that body mirrors soul or mind. Ishmael describes it as, 'threading its way out from among his grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it

⁵ David Mitchell (1999) also relates Ahab's loss of a leg to his monomania, but suggests that the prosthesis Ahab uses is to be interpreted as a symbol of a philosophical and linguistic rigidity which in itself becomes his downfall. Ahab's disability proves the source, in his reading, of an obsessive/reflexive personality. He does not, however, interpret the loss as one of castration, either literal or metaphorical and 'mental'.

disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish' (108). Melville seems to be hinting at Benjamin Franklin harnessing the lightning with his rod, human science controlling nature, and, if Franklin's obsession with habit and control are taken into account, then the habitual taking precedence over the natural. The straight rod of habit rules, and is figured in the face, a version of the tattoo, but its opposite for being a mark of self-alienation from one's own body, rather than a decoration of the body.

Ahab's rod-mark can be seen as a metaphor imprinted on his body, figuring his split from himself, embodying the very thing Tommo so feared among the Typees. It is not a figure of 'presence', as it is in Polynesia, but rather one of absence, for it divides the body from the self inhabiting it. As a line 'lividly whitish', it also suggests racial typing, but, in the context of 'The Whiteness of the Whale', absence too, for whiteness there becomes the figure of absence and terror. The nature of real whiteness, says Melville, can, ironically, be seen tattooed in the face. The white 'civilized' who have aversions to tattooing will nevertheless show their inner intentions written on their faces. The lines in Ahab's face are thrown 'in shifting gleams and shadows ... upon his wrinkled brow, till it almost seemed that while he himself was marking out lines and courses on the wrinkled charts, some invisible pencil was also tracing lines and courses upon the deeply marked chart of his forehead' (166-167).

Melville also interprets the mark as a metaphor for the line of primogeniture which, like the trunk of the tree struck by lightning, has been riven, and made hollow. The line 'resembled that perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight, lofty trunk of a great tree, when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it, and without wrenching a single twig, peels and grooves out the bark from top to bottom, ere running off into the soil, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded' (108-109). The castration is metaphysical, for the soul of the tree, like Ahab's, has been shriven. But the image of the tree suggestive of the paternal 'line' implies that Melville's reading of the white mark is that the white line of paternal authority of which Ahab is the symbol is both soulless and is at its very root 'branded' and 'blighted'.

One reason for the blighted tree is the capitalist rejection of the hearth in favour of the lonely, self-reliant journey. The price for that rejection is a continued sense of the weight of a lost past, like an old Adam 'faint, bowed, and humped, ... staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise' (406). It is a loss never to be recovered, Melville suggests, in the conquests of the future which try to salve the wounds of the past. Ahab's castration kills the future even before it begins. 'Like a blighted fruit tree he shook, and cast his last, cindered apple to the

soil'. 'Natural' heart, filled with 'all lovings and longings', is replaced with 'cindered' brain and the drive forward, 'pushing, and crowding, and jamming', dominated by a 'cruel remorseless emperor' (406). Crown replaces heart, but the crown is a hollow crater, like the hollow tree. Starbuck's desire is for the sap of hearth and home, a circular fatherhood of eternal return. "Come, my Captain, study out the course, and let us away! See, see! the boy's face from the window! the boy's hand on the hill!" (406) But Ahab's monopolizing line refuses a backward glance at the wife left behind, and, like 'a gnarled and knotted' tree (404) dismisses the circle as an empty crater, as he does any thoughts of infancy. 'Oh, immortal infancy, and innocency of the azure!...Sweet childhood of air and sky! how oblivious were ye of old Ahab's close-coiled woe! But so have I seen little Miriam and Martha, laughing-eyed elves, heedlessly gambol around their old sire; sporting with the circle of singed locks which grow on the marge of that burnt-out crater of his brain' (405). Contrary to Ishmael, he sees the circle as empty, uncontrolled Fate: 'By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike.... toil we how we may, we all sleep at last on the field' (407).

'Monomania' becomes the psychological version of the reduction of all to the line. As a way of coping with the 'split' and divided self Ahab feels himself to be, just as the American nation could be seen to be, divided between Indians and Whites and Negro slaves, between North and South, between Mexico and the Union, Ahab opts for monomania. It is a mental disorder defined by the *Penny Cyclopaedia* (1833-1843), from which Melville probably took his information, as one where '...the mind is occupied by some illusion or erroneous conviction', even though the individual maintains 'the power of reasoning correctly on matters unconnected with the subject of his delusion' (Burbick, 1994: 167). Monomania deliberately develops into a delusion as a way of displacing repressed angers and desires. Put differently, it reduces the ambiguity within the metaphorical, with which it cannot cope, by placing a final fixed meaning on itself, displacing reality with an 'idea'. Jeffersonian democracy, which, as Fisher (1988: 66) has shown, cuts up the land with a Cartesian map, can be seen as just such a reduction of form to idea, body to head. Dividing the American continent into 'townships', Jefferson imposes his mind on the body of the land, stretching, 'like the cells of the social body from border to border'.⁶ The line is Jefferson's own version of monomania, and is figured in

⁶ Fisher (1988: 66) describes Jeffersonian democracy in terms appropriate to Ahab's obsession with the line. 'He based the future American map on a one-mile-square (640

his notion that the best government is 'of the self by the self' (Dimock, 1983: 38). Similarly, Emersonian 'self-reliance' is suggestive of a mono-logical, if not mono-maniacal, subsumption of the varied world to the individual's single-minded eye. 'The Chart' combines the line in Ahab's face with the grand map of conquest akin to Jefferson's and the habit-controlling calendar of Franklin. In the process it makes the body a living emblem of its inner purpose, lining the face as its mind seeks to line the paper and the sea/land.

acre) section that could be subdivided to yield farms of 20, 40, 80, 160, or 320 acres, or, in the other direction, could be multiplied to define state borders that look as though drawn with a straight-edge ruler'.

Ahab does more even than Jefferson with this line, however. His expansionism turns space into time, makes of the line a teleological end he already presumes to know from the beginning. 'I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer. Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfiller one' (143). This suggests the logic of Manifest Destiny, presuming that to be in control of space is to be in control of the future. At the beginning of the chapter, however, Melville suggests the most important dimension of the line: its nature as political metaphor. 'I leave a white and turbid wake; pale waters, paler cheeks, where'er I sail' (142). This hint implies that Melville places the question of colour at the front of the line of conquest. White becomes both a symbol of the white conquest of the land, and of the whiteness of death with its 'wake' and 'pale' cheeks left behind.

Melville shows expansionism to be more a self-destructive version of aristocracy, one whose past as a 'wake' or a 'blighted tree' is perhaps a fitting symbol of its future. In this reading Jefferson with his neatly divided but separate states, or John C. Calhoun, fearing the 'numerical majority' which would take over the aristocratic rule after the abolition of slavery and the creation of the union, become avatars of Ahab.⁷ While Calhoun's argument for the validity of the notion of a political veto effectively entrenches slavery under the guise of a version of democracy, it also assumes Ahab's hierarchical, and monolithic structure. In response Melville goes back to (white) civilization's origins and shows the line of kings, like Ahab's purpose, to be rooted in death.

Yet Ahab's larger, darker, deeper part remains unhinted.... Winding far down from within the very heart of this spiked Hotel de Cluny where we here stand - however grand and wonderful, now quit it; - and take your way, ye nobler, sadder souls, to those vast Roman halls of Thermes; where far beneath the fantastic towers of man's upper earth, his root of grandeur, his whole awful essence sits in bearded state; and antique buried beneath antiquities, and thrones on torsoes! So with a broken throne, the great gods mock that captive king; so like a Caryatid, he patient sits, upholding on his frozen brow the piled entablatures of ages. Wind ye down there, ye prouder, sadder souls! Question

⁷ Calhoun, in *A Disquisition on Government* (1850) in typical southern aristocratic fashion, fears the pure 'numerical majority', and replaces it with the power of 'veto, interposition, nullification, check, or balance of power' (HC 1. 1993: 370-371).

that proud, sad king! A family likeness! Aye, he did beget ye, ye young exiled royalties; and from your grim sire only will the old State-secret come (157).

The line of progress taken back to its 'root of grandeur' finds only ruin. The new, American, city on the hill would end in ruins too, should the 'king' (head) continue building his empire on torsos. The 'secret' at the heart of the aristocratic state is that it is built on death, and on the emptiness of castration, a hollow tree, and its future royalties are, like Ishmael, exiled.

Two important elements of antebellum politics are suggested by Melville's references to the aristocratic line of progress. The first is the rise of a new republicanism, and the second is slavery. New republicanism represented the conflict within young America between the 'man of liberty' and the aristocratic gentry. American capitalism during the Jacksonian period, was spurred on, not just by its obsession with Manifest Destiny, but also by the loss of the force of the landed gentry and its accompanying idea of the self as a property. As Carol Smith-Rosenberg (1988: 163-164) points out, young America had inherited a classical republicanism which identified the virtuous citizen as the free man who valued his liberty and who devoted himself to serving the common good. 'His ability to do both depended on an economic independence rooted in unalienated and unalienable property - literally, in the gentry's real estates secured by entail and primogeniture'. This classical genteel republicanism saw new republicanism as the product of the corrupt new men of 'paper and place - the new capitalism's stock jobbers, government bureaucrats, and army officers'. The new working class 'virtue', epitomized by self-reliant independence, by talent, frugality and application, was necessary for the gentry, at the same time that it was 'cathected with desire' for the working class either to aspire to gentility or to eradicate it. Gentility is earned by labour rather than inherited, but the labour carries within it a self-abnegating sense of castration. Acquiring property, or seeing the self as property, becomes an important means to overcoming the lack. Ahab represents much this kind of new republican urge towards an earned gentility, with its mixture of a desire to emulate the higher classes at the same time as despising them for not appearing to work.

'Without property', says Arthur Schlesinger (1945: 339, 342), 'the working classes of the great cities must be without independence, factious and corrupt, the prey of demagogues and tyrants'. Melville is clearly presenting Ahab as the demagogue preying on his own social body the crew of the *Pequod*. Like the corporation controlling most of the economy in young

America, as Schlesinger (1945: 342) shows, Ahab becomes the new gentility, owner of land and of the workers working it, both desiring the power and status and simultaneously despising it. 'Free competition' is the very thing he offers his crew, acting like an apparent democrat, or the new capitalist monopolies, when he nails the doubloon to the mast and says it belongs to the first one to spot the whale. He knows, of course, he will claim it for himself. Appearing democratic, the Jacksonian institutes an autocracy

Melville's father-in-law Lemuel Shaw would argue for Jackson, seeing free competition as central to democracy. But, as Melville shows through the figure of Ahab, free competition amounted in reality to little more than universal control by the powerful monopolies. Shaw, as Schlesinger explains (1945: 342) stood for unions. But opponents such as Chief Justice Savage and Judge Thatcher, could use the very same rhetoric of free competition to enlarge the power of monopolies. 'It is through ... competition that the best interests of trade and industry are promoted', said Thatcher, dismissing unionisation in favour of monopolies. Calhoun too, the foremost of the autocrats, promoted just such 'competition' in the name of equality. Ahab is a Calhoun or a Thatcher here, turning the circle of 'free' democracy into the line of autocracy.

Toil and conquest lead to 'natural rights' over the land, as Franklin had declared. And, as John Quincy Adams had it (Dimock, 1983: 33-34), only 'unnatural' societies such as the native American knew no personal property acquired by competitive labour. 'Separate property', he declared, 'is [a] natural and indisputable right' and a 'community of goods without a community of toil' is not only 'oppressive and unjust', but 'counteracts the laws of nature' itself. Indians, practising such a 'community of goods' were disobeying the laws of nature and their 'right of possession' must stand 'upon questionable foundation'.

Melville satirises this position in the figure of the doubloon over which Ahab assumes a kind of natural right because he perceives his toil to be greater than any other's and his Fate to be more fixed by it, making him superior. 'No - the doubloon is mine, Fate reserved the doubloon for me. *I* only; none of ye could have raised the White Whale first' (408). And in the 'Doubloon' chapter itself, he reads the coin not in relation to its roundness, its suggestion of double meanings or ambiguity, but rather in relation to its figures of egotistical mountain tops, its norths and pinnacles. The round becomes the line, the hole within metaphor replaced by fixed meanings.

There's something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; look here, - three peaks as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab; and this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like the magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self.... Methinks now this coined sun wears a ruddy face; but see! aye, he enters the sign of storms, the equinox! And but six months before he wheeled out of a former equinox at Aries! From storm to storm! So be it, then. Born in throes, 'tis fit that man should live in pains and die in pangs! (332-333).

Phallic mountain, sexual, fighting ram in Aries, equally sexual cock and volcano all become figures for Ahab's ultimate aim of making the round into a line, compensating for castration. Starbuck sees valleys, the 'vale of death' (333), but Ahab sees instead phallic mountains. By assuming the right to the doubloon, he symbolizes the new gentry's assumption of just such 'crown' of 'natural right'. Being oblivious to roundness, he rejects the globe, figure of democracy, in favour of his own limited will. It is a will which, like the racism of the pseudo-sciences of phrenology and the monolithic thinking of Manifest Destiny, must reduce metaphor to unambiguous meaning. Ahab allegorises the meaning of the mountains on the coin to refer to his own quest, he reduces all the signs of the zodiac to Aries, and his reduction is born of anxiety about not fulfilling his desire, so is anxiously repeated. The repetition attempts to fix the capitalist 'coinage', constricting the round to the linear, keeping the coin as property to be controlled by the individual. He performs what Abdul JanMohamed (1995: 18-23) calls an 'anxious repetition' of the 'Manichean allegory' (good vs evil) as a way of ensuring a perpetually uncertain hegemony. Allegory, stereotyping the other and the self as a way of controlling both, becomes Ahab's, and America's, primary linguistic formula. It comes closest to reducing the absence within metaphor by fusing tenor and vehicle into a monad.

Pip's understanding of the capitalist coinage is very different. He knows, with his 'I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look' (335) that there is a link between ownership and grammar. The 'grammar' of racism and conquest determine the perceptions of those who carry it out and those who suffer it. The 'rules' of capitalist grammar try to fix

meanings. But even as Ahab tries to assume control of the rules, Pip shows that both grammar and perceptions have a multiplicity which cannot finally be constricted without force. To do so is to remove the 'navel' of the world, which is, after-all, round, and dismember its body. To attempt to embed a round coin in a phallic mast will result, he knows, not only in the loss of bodily and social integrity, but also in the 'green miser', Davey Jones, the keeper of ocean treasures (335), keeping the treasure for himself. To assume as a 'natural right' what is not your own, but the social body's, is to lose all, Melville suggests. And to pretend that free trade and open competition are acceptable while ensuring monopoly is to unscrew the navel of the economic body.

The antebellum economic body, feeling itself compromised and compensating for a perceived lack of potency, takes the slave as its compensation. For all Ahab's obsession with the line, the line of his own body remains broken. When he attempts to fix it by ordering a new man he asks for a body entirely self-serving, but one which remains ultimately dependent on the 'false leg' of slavery. Ahab orders 'a complete man after a desirable pattern' (359). It is a body with roots for legs, no heart at all, a brass forehead, no eyes but a skylight to illuminate inwards. Ahab's narcissism makes him a world unto himself and his own most fascinating specimen. To make a new man, like making a new nation, with its destiny manifest, is not unlike harnessing the absence within metaphor as Ahab does his new leg, and so make the (social) body complete by filling the spaces it feels are lacking. 'Look, put thy live leg here in the place where mine once was;' says Ahab to the carpenter, 'so, now, here is only one distinct leg to the eye, yet two to the soul. Where thou feelest tingling life; there, exactly there, there to a hair, do I. Is't a riddle?' (360). The riddle seems to be that what is absent is as present as the rest of the body or what seems 'real', for it drives the quest for completion. That completion, however, is founded on 'white heat'. Prometheus, as Ahab calls the carpenter, makes a 'fierce red flame', but does so with a 'white heat' (359). The new man and new nation is made in fire and blood, born of whiteness. While Ahab, looking for the 'complete new man', may read this as a Nietzschean version of 'genius', Melville does not. 'And if you are not yourself a great exception, well then be a small one at least!', says Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Campbell, 1968: 41) 'and so you will foster on earth that holy fire from which genius may arise'. The fire here, however, makes Prometheus a prisoner to himself, for it burns from the inside. The fire is Ahab's own self-reflexivity which cannot appreciate another as a being separate from him, but only as one to be a completion of his own lack. Pip comes

literally to figure that completion, when he offers his own leg to Ahab. ‘ “And who art thou, boy? I see not my reflection in the vacant pupils of thy eyes. Oh God! That man should be a thing for immortal souls to sieve through! Who art thou, boy?”’ (392).

Ahab cannot answer his own question because he sees with only a self-reflexive eye. Pip answers it for him. For Ahab neither the body nor language itself can hold the riddles of the immortal soul, but for Pip that slipperiness is given a fixity through the ‘Othering’ of slavery. Pip’s answer politicizes both the capitalist drive for conquest, metaphor itself as a functionary of ideology, and the notion of the self as property. ‘ “No, no, no! Ye have not a whole body, sir; do ye but use poor me for your one lost leg; only tread upon me, sir; I ask no more, so I remain a part of ye”’ (399).

As the true slave sees no distinction between himself and his master, and reduces his body to the master’s will, finds, as Lacan (MacCannell, 1986: 8) puts it, ‘desire and enjoyment’ in being the slave. Pip finds a version of completion in Ahab. Ahab, however, sees no such fit, only an insane, if flattering mimicry. ‘ “But I will never desert ye, sir, as Stubb did [Pip]. Sir, I must go with ye”. “If thou speakest thus to me much more, Ahab’s purpose keels up in him. I tell thee no; it cannot be.” “Oh good master, master, master!” “Weep so, and I will murder thee! Have a care, for Ahab too is mad. Listen, and thou wilt often hear my ivory foot upon the deck, and still know that I am there. And now I quit thee. Thy hand! - Met! True thou art, lad, as the circumference to the centre”’ (399).

The real thrust of this famous passage, so often read as a rare bonding between Ahab and Pip,⁸ is that it is an ironic presentation of two versions of the slave mentality. Pip cannot conceive of a world without the master, is almost outside the realm of desire and metaphor since he offers no being other than that of a part of Ahab. This could describe Ahab’s slavery to the quest for the whale, as it could Manifest Destiny, were it not that Ahab’s hubris at the slave’s pathetic pleas shines through his fatherly beneficence. As in the Hegelian model, he needs the slave at least as much as the slave needs him. He must fix the slave as the one bearing the weight of his own desire for authority, having him wait for the sound of his ivory leg walking over him. But in that waiting lies the absence at the heart of the quest, in metaphor,

⁸ Cameron (1981: 21) exemplifies these readings when she suggests that the passage means ‘That the self needs to be completed in the way made possible by relationship in order to be at all’. The present argument adjusts this reading a little by suggesting that Melville’s focus is not only on relation and fulfilment, but more on dismemberment and its psychoses.

and in racial conquest. It makes Ahab the fool spinning in circles, while he assumes Pip to be the circumference to his centre, himself the firm line. It shows a misreading of who is actually firm and unwavering, and who is spinning out of control in the circumference.

By keeping Pip topographically and ideologically 'below' him, Ahab uses the same allegorizing mentality Melville will present later in Captain Delano. He sees no double-speak, no irony when Pip asks to be tread upon, because he cannot leave the 'prison house', as it were, of his own allegorical reductionism. To conquer the other, one must conquer the self and also conquer multiplicity, ascribing it fixed universality. The conquered, as Homi K. Bhabha (1984: 125-133) points out, mimic the desire of the master, and by so doing fulfill his castrated sense of lack. Being but a mirror of the master's desire, the allegorical figure, like the slave, or the Indian, or the Texan conquest of 1848, performs the function of eradicating oppositional meaning. The reification of the conquered into figures of either good or evil, Indians into Baal worshippers, or into symbols of savage freedom, as Tocqueville saw them, or Negroes into Baal worshippers, or as, Lincoln saw them, children of Israel,⁹ is itself an anxious repetition of Manichean allegory. The myth developed from this allegorising becomes a narrative means of dismissing multiplicity, of controlling the gap in metaphor and replacing it with an attained object. Such myth turns in on itself, making a line of the circle, because it makes the object into the identification of the abstract idea which the object means, and the attainment of the object the justification of the idea. The fact that the object is never fully attained, what Lacan calls the 'objet a',¹⁰ keeps the circle incomplete, and the line shaky. The myth operates, as Slotkin shows,¹¹ metaphorically, but closes down the variety of different meanings that may be available within the metaphor. The open circle is turned into the phallic oneness of fixed, and mostly patriarchal, meaning, but meaning ever anxiously repeated.

⁹ See Rogin (1983: 127 & 128).

¹⁰ The 'objet a' is a way of looking both at the slave and the whale. The thing which constantly defeats the possibility of the closed circle of pleasure, or, as Slavoj Žižek explains it, 'the foreign body', or the 'internal limit' which becomes the 'reef, the obstacle that interrupts the closed circuit of the 'pleasure principle' and derails its balanced moment'. See: 'How to Give Body to a Deadlock', in MacCannell and Zakarin, eds., (1994: 75).

¹¹ See Slotkin (1985: 23). The reification within myth, says Slotkin, is an act 'of treating ideas about things as if they were the things themselves', or to 'treat the memory-symbol as if it actually reproduced the reality it symbolizes'.

This dismissal of multiplicity is figured in the schizophrenic divide of the ship's topography, not unlike the divide between the two parts of the doubloon, or the earth itself, or North and South in the impending war of 1861. Ahab is above and Pip below, just as conquest demands of the conquistador a divided psychological topography, the conquered mirroring the lack within himself. Melville's chapter, however, uses this divided topography to undo the reductionist decrees of the master. Ahab has the first voice, and Pip appears at first to mimic him. Yet the other side of the coin is of Pip in control. He sits in Ahab's chair, a screw chair, reminiscent of the doubloon 'navel', screwed to the centre of the world. He has the power to unscrew the navel, as the slave has the power to unscrew his master's world. To become Ahab's lost leg, the centre of his circumference, is to control him, because it is to reinforce the loss of the leg. To mirror what Ahab desires is (like the blank wall of the whale's head) to give him what he wants, but also to control what he sees. To stay below him, at the centre of the ship, so much here the figure of state, while Ahab paces the deck like the *Rachel* searching for the lost child, is to be the base upon which he walks. It is to keep doubleness at the centre when the conqueror assumes he has conquered doubleness. 'What an odd feeling, now, when a black boy's host to white men with gold lace upon their coats!' (400). The host, like the sacrament, is both the provider and what is provided, the very metaphoric doubleness Ahab and the golden laced men fear. The chattel assumed by the white capitalist to be under his control has become the property enslaving him.

To conclude this chapter it will be useful to examine the final moment where the line is made a circle for Ahab. The moment encapsulates much of the foregoing argument, and suggests that the confinement to a monomaniac obsession with the line of control is really a denial of the desire at the heart of the quest, of metaphor and of political endeavour. The white whale rushing the *Pequod* has the same white wall forehead Ahab has, evinces the same 'retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice' (425), and is the mirror to Ahab. The line of whiteness, Melville suggests, rejecting the circle of democracy, will turn ultimately in another circle, like the 'semi-circular foam' (425) rushing before the whale, and crash into itself. Ahab is caught by his own line when he flings the harpoon, and when he has disappeared, the sinking ship is seen through the mist, where 'concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the *Pequod* out of sight' (426). The 'vortex' is reminiscent of the 'Descartian vortices' (136) referred to earlier,

where the lone intellectual, valorising head over body, keeping the hierarchical line, climbing high into the masthead as he can, tumbles down like a fallen Satan, caught by his own ego. The upward line, like the ideas of the head, cannot be followed to the end because it falls back in a circular motion to its beginning, which is the lack within being and the body which spurs desire and the idea in the first place. The line cannot, finally, conquer the castrating hollow within desire, but which ultimately does not allow the absolute singularity of meaning or objective which Ahab, white America and Manifest Destiny seek. It is the head, the top of the line of the body, as it were, that has brought the boat to the circular vortex. The *Pequod* falls literally into metaphor when it becomes a metaphor for America's circular, self-defeating quest for supremacy. It falls, as it were, into the hollow at the heart of its quest to fix meanings and goals, and it replaces lack with plunder taken from conquest, like Ahab's white whale leg, bringing nothing but another lack, a chain of emptiness.

CHAPTER FOUR

DECIPHERING QUEEQUEG

‘The body is the great poem’.

Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*

‘Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.
What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
I never know what you are thinking. Think.’

T. S. Eliot, ‘A Game of Chess’, *The Waste Land*.

The previous chapter interprets Ahab as one who symbolises the castration anxiety at the heart of the quest to conquer both land and sea and to extend white domination. This anxiety uses the black slave like Pip to ‘stand in’ for the sense of lack it experiences. In the process, however, white domination merely perpetuates this lack by having anxiously to repeat its domination over the slave. At the heart of the drive for conquest is lack, and in antebellum America that lack is figured most strongly in the Negro and other marginalised race groups. This interpretation of Ahab is not that far off those of many post-colonial theorists, particularly Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha, who, in attempting to explain the psychology of colonialist ‘othering’ use the same psychoanalytic terminology, particularly that of castration anxiety and the fetish as replacement for castration.

Their arguments are a useful starting point for the present chapter, which attempts to decipher what Melville means in his presentation of Queequeg. The Polynesian harpooner may be seen as the single most important black body in *Moby-Dick*, one complemented by other black bodies like Pip’s, the other harpooners’ and the old cook’s. Melville invites us to read Queequeg as in some ways an alternative to Ahab. The white captain suffers physical and mental amputation, whereas the black harpooner seems perfectly self-contained. While Ahab is confined both body and mind to living out his destructive desires, Queequeg seems not to be confined by the same desires or needs. His body is well-nigh perfect in form. His mind seems untrammelled, and his actions are seemingly selfless. To attempt to interpret him, then, is firstly to investigate whether he is in fact intended as a viable alternative to Ahab’s

monomania, and it is also, as a result, to become engaged in important questions being asked by recent post-colonial criticism. From this perspective exploring Queequeg's body and its meaning is to ask whether Melville may be assuming he can present a black character who is not confined by the discourses of a desire-ridden colonialism, who suffers the stereotyped fixing common to colonialist discourse. On the other hand, it is to ask whether he is falling into the trap of just such a stereotyping fixity by presenting Queequeg as an alternative to Ahab, a version of the 'noble savage' whose primitiveness is meant to represent an alternative to civilization's ills. In which case Melville's own colonialist assumptions are laid bare.

This chapter will use post-colonial theories to attempt to explain Queequeg, at the same time that it will use Melville's presentation of Queequeg to question some of the assumptions of those theories. It will suggest that Melville places Queequeg somewhere between the two positions outlined above. His presentation of Queequeg is not entirely unaffected by colonialist discourses, and their versions of confinement and conquest. But it will also suggest that he does not entirely fall into the trap of fixity. Instead, Queequeg can be read as an alternative to Ahab, but only in a partial sense, much the way in which Melville presents Ishmael's democratic, phenomenological encounters with the whale. However desirable Queequeg's self-containment may be, it is, like the whale's comfort with its own Being, not one fully attainable outside the 'insular Tahiti' from which western society has, in the figure of Ahab, set sail.

An important aspect of deciphering Queequeg, the present argument will suggest, is his presentation as a sign of inner unity, in contrast to Ahab's presentation as a sign of inner (and outer) dismemberment. While Ahab can be interpreted as a version of metaphor, a figure for the desire and lack which govern the metaphorical, and one who is not yet entirely comfortable in the realm of the Symbolic, Queequeg, in contrast, can be interpreted as a version of metonymy, which is more a figure of the Imaginary. As an expression of contiguity, metonymy is as relevant to Queequeg as it is to *Typee*. Just as the islanders can be read as still existing mostly in the maternal realm of the Imaginary, so can Queequeg. Once the black man *knows* himself as 'other', he may be said to have entered the Symbolic which depends on difference/différance and desire for its meaning. He is affected by the gaze of the white which fixes him as other. But if he exists in the realm of the Imaginary, as the islanders do, and as Queequeg seems to do, no such 'othering' is yet possible, for he does not know himself to be

other, being yet unaffected by the fixing gaze. Such a position may seem possible only on a South Seas island, but Melville, it can be argued, presents Queequeg in much this light, even while he is on the *Pequod*. In this sense, he is extending the exploration of what it means to be a 'savage' begun with *Typee*. This chapter will explore these questions in three parts: first, by examining the post-colonial theories of the gaze as applied to Queequeg. Secondly, by exploring the silence of the 'subaltern'. And finally, by analysing aspects of Queequeg's role as metonym.

The Fact of Blackness

The title of Frantz Fanon's essay, taken from *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) is a useful starting point. Fanon's emphasis is on the first discovery by the black man of the 'fact' of his blackness, read in relation to the little white girl who is gazing at him. 'Look, a Negro ... Mamma, see the Negro! I'm frightened. Frightened. Frightened', says the little girl to her mother. Fanon concludes with: 'What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood' (1967: 79). Fanon is in Ahab's castrated position because he looks into the mirror of the white gaze and sees himself lacking. That lack is based on a contrast with a colour which is both all colour and no colour at all. As Bhabha puts it, interpreting Fanon: 'The girl's gaze returns to her mother in the recognition and disavowal of the Negroid type; the black child turns away from himself, his race, in his total identification with the positivity of whiteness which is at once colour and no colour. In the act of disavowal and fixation the colonial subject is returned to the narcissism of the Imaginary and its identification of an ideal ego that is white and whole' (1996: 46). Like Ahab chasing the white whale for its apparent wholeness, the cause of his own amputation, the Negro here is forever chasing the acceptance of the white gaze to make him whole, and also out of revenge for being the cause of his 'dismemberment'.

In Bhabha's reading the black man faced with the gaze of the white is rendered split, as in the Lacanian Mirror Stage. As a result he longs for the wholeness of the Imaginary, which he associates with whiteness. In order to reach this wholeness, he takes on the 'white mask' and 'mimicks' (1984) white behaviour or what he believes whites want him to do. He becomes like Pip may be seen to be, willingly becoming the white man's crutch. In 'Benito Cereno' Melville will openly play on this notion of mimicry in order to show up white racist

assumptions. Here, however, he presents a blackness which has no need of mimicry, and is entirely self-contained.

Pip is 'othered' and made schizophrenic by his own experience of being lost at sea, seeing 'God's foot upon the treadle of the loom' and realizing that his blackness makes him unimportant to the company of men he is with. He can be nothing more than a replacement for white inadequacy. Queequeg, on the other hand, suffers no such schizophrenia and has little or no sense of being 'other'. To him, blackness is not a realm to be feared or of which to be ashamed, but a place of comfortable being. More importantly, Melville uses blackness as an element which cannot be easily or stereotypically interpreted. Even before we meet Queequeg the place in which we will meet him becomes figured as one of darkness, not to be easily interpreted. The Spouter Inn is itself a 'dusky' place 'hung all over with a heathenish array of monstrous clubs and spears' (27). Entering it one enters the stereotypical imagery of savagery. But since it is run by whites, by 'Coffins', the suggestion seems to be that colour and creed are not sufficient markers of savagery, a suggestion Ahab will re-enforce. The picture on the wall of the Inn of a shipt and whale seems intended to symbolise a darkness which is impenetrable, or one whose meaning can be fixed. If 'The Whiteness of the Whale' disallows fixed meanings to the colour white, then 'The Spouter Inn' equally disallows fixed meanings to the colour black. The one gazing at the painting has no tools, phrenological, artistic or otherwise, by which to measure what he sees. Instead, the sublimity of the painting 'freezes' the viewer, in a way not unlike Fanon's little girl. But the freezing becomes epistemological, and throws the interpreter back upon himself.

But what most puzzled and confounded you was a long, limber, portentous, black mass of something hovering in the centre of the picture over three blue, dim, perpendicular lines floating in a nameless yeast. A boggy, soggy, squitchy picture truly; enough to drive a nervous man distracted. Yet was there a sort of indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity about it that fairly froze you to it,.... Even and anon a bright, but, alas, deceptive idea would dart you through. - It's the Black Sea in a midnight gale. - It's the unnatural combat of the four primal elements. - It's a blasted heath.- It's a Hyperborean winter scene.- It's the breaking up of the ice-bound sea of Time (26).

No mere 'idea' can be kept fixed regarding this dark image, so that all ideas are 'deceptive'. The blackness turns the viewer into questioning his own being and his own perceptions. The painting itself, an inanimate but half-alive object, remains unaffected, while the gazer's authority is questioned.

A similar deceptiveness and impenetrability apply to Queequeg's belongings, which Ishmael encounters before he does the man himself. The 'poncho' Ishmael takes up is not an article of clothing he understands. It has no 'fact' of meaning by which to measure its place in the realm of things, and by wearing it, Ishmael is himself 'othered' in his own sight. Melville turns the white man's gaze back on himself, and others him. Ishmael mimicks a 'savage' encountering a strange unknown thing, who reacts with animal-like curiosity. He does not have the vocabulary for understanding what he sees. 'But what is this on the chest? I took it up, and held it close to the light, and felt it, and smelt it, and tried every way possible to arrive at some satisfactory conclusion concerning it. I can compare it to nothing but a large door mat,.... There was a hole or slit in the middle of this mat, the same as in South American ponchos..... I put it on, to try it, and it weighed me down like a hamper,..... I went up in it to a bit of glass stuck against the wall, and I never saw such a sight in my life. I tore myself out of it in such a hurry that I gave myself a kink in the neck' (33).

On the one hand one may suggest, with Sanborn (1998: 127) that Melville is using the fixity of the idea of savagery as a mirror in which Ishmael must see his own deeper nature and run from it. On the other hand, however, it is possible to read the scene of self-discovery as Melville's way of rejecting the notion that savagery should be fixed to any particular race or colour, and that what savagery really is must remain open to deeper investigation, a task he sets himself in the rest of the novel. He is playing, as Sanborn (1998: 130) points out, with standard notions of savagery such as those evident in P.T. Barnum's circuses, but he is much more interested in the affect of them on the white gazer than on the 'savage' object of the gaze. He is unequivocal about the fact that the problem of savagery lies in the eye of the gazer. Ishmael cannot interpret Queequeg's body, and his lack of ability creates a version of castration anxiety similar to Fanon's little girl. Unlike Fanon's girl or Bhabha's native, however, Queequeg does not take on this anxiety as his own and so find himself lacking. It is the white anxious gaze which needs the circus to ensure its sense of racial and 'civilized' security.

When Ishmael describes his first sight of Queequeg it is with the stereotypical language of racism and savagery, in which the distinction between Christianity and savagery initially

features strongly. The tone, however, is just a little too tongue-in-cheek for us to take Melville too seriously. 'Lord save me, thinks I, that must be the harpooneer, the infernal head-peddler. But I lay perfectly still and resolved not to say a word till spoken to.... I was all eagerness to see his face, but he kept it averted for some time while employed in unlacing the bag's mouth. This accomplished, however, he turned round - when, good heavens! What a sight! Such a face! It was a dark, purplish, yellow color, here and there stuck over with large, blackish looking squares' (33). Ishmael's initial assumption that the man is white may be read as Melville's jab at racist assumptions about savagery. The marker of otherness is not colour. Strictly speaking, Queequeg is not 'black', but 'purplish, yellow'. He could be white, Chinese, Red Indian or a hybrid version of all of them. Ink, used for the tattooing on his face and body, and used for racial markings in all writing, merely alters the surface, not the interior. To read the ink is not to get to the facts, but more to investigate one's own interpretations.

To examine Queequeg's tools is to discover similar hybridity. He carries a tomahawk pipe, and 'moccasins' (33) associated with the Indian, a seal-skin wallet, associated with the Inuit, and a beaver hat, associated, according to Parker (34 n. 3) with Abraham Lincoln. His 'poncho' or 'grego' (35) is reminiscent of the South American Spanish or Mexican 'other', very pertinent after 1848, but it could also be a 'wrapall' or 'dreadnaught'. Like a Moslem he salaams (57) and has a 'ramadan'. He has 'Socratic wisdom' and is 'George Washington cannibalistically developed' (55). He is the African worshipping his 'Congo idol' (35). He is too, the image of the slave labourer, carrying the wheelbarrow on his back (61). The savage is, then, a hybrid of types, and once his chequered body is espied, a chess-game of possibilities.

But despite Ishmael's uncertainty and anxiety about how to read Queequeg, Melville uses him to make two very important anti-racist statements. 'Ignorance is the parent of fear' Ishmael says, admitting his fear is based on a lack of knowledge. Real knowledge, when found later, will remove the fear and turn the two men into 'bosom friends'. More importantly, Melville has Ishmael declare, initially only half-believingly, that it is not skin which marks one's knowledge of a man. 'And what is it, thought I, after all! It's only his outside; a man can be honest in any sort of skin' (34). Honesty becomes the measure of value over whatever external features are evident. In reading the whale, Ishmael determined that 'backbone' was more important than forehead or phrenological measures. With Queequeg much the same epistemology applies. Removing virtually all the markers of fixed blackness from Queequeg, Melville is able to suggest alternative ways of knowing human beings for what

they really are. Queequeg will, as the novel progresses, be measured by his character, not his looks. While Ishmael may initially assume that character to be Satanic, ‘the devil himself had thus broken into my room at the dead of night’ (34), it is not long before the reader is shown how the ‘savage’ is as afraid of the white man as the white man of him. ‘Who-e debel you?’ (36) are Queequeg’s first of the very few he has in the novel, suggesting that the real devil may be either man, dependent on one’s point of view.

A relative point of view allows space for racist fixing of stereotypes and its binary divisions, which many critics have assumed Melville himself does not escape.¹ It also, however, allows a space for the development of hybrid identity not based on racial stereotypes, because darkness prevents the final power of the gaze. ‘No man can ever feel his own identity aright except his eyes be closed; as if darkness were indeed the proper element of our essences, though light be more congenial to our clayey part’ (58), says Ishmael, seemingly rejecting the gaze as a way of interpreting truth or identity. In the process he opens up the knowledge of identity as something possible only in mutually accepting relationships, not fixed stereotypes. He is, in a sense, doing what Stuart Hall (1996: 111, 112) advocates as a way of reclaiming identities from colonialist readings.

... as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather - since history has intervened - ‘what we have become’. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity’, without acknowledging its other side - the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean’s ‘uniqueness’. Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future

¹ See in particular Sanborn (1998: 120-169), who argues that Melville’s ‘ethic of touch’ is presented as a ‘dream’ and that real difference between races cannot be escaped. Grejda (1974: 86) also suggests that it is difficult to disregard the possibility that Melville takes ‘ready-made from stock’ images of the native and the pagan. Caleb Crain (1994: 46), while interpreting Queequeg as Melville’s alternative to heterosexual love, still uses racially fixed terms to define him. Robert K. Martin’s reading (1991: 198) points out Ishmael’s reversals of the stereotypes of ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’, but in doing so retains an essentialist notion of racial identity. The present reading is closest to Carolyn Karcher’s (1976: 291) where she argues that Melville ‘blurred racial lines in portraying the savage’, and ‘related Queequeg’s ambiguously perceived racial identity to the issue of anti-Negro prejudice’. Essentialist, racialised identity is questioned in Melville’s account, even while stereotypes are still used.

as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power.

What Sanborn calls the 'ethic of touch' in the novel becomes Melville's alternative to the fixing gaze. It produces a different 'fact of blackness' from the racialized one, so that blackness means a forced intimate encounter with the other, without eyes. Like Ishmael with his hands in the sperm, true encounter with the other is shown to be physical. 'Yet see how elastic our stiff prejudices grow when love once comes to bend them' (58), says Ishmael after his matrimonial encounter with Queequeg.

The phallic joke is perhaps one which ought to be taken seriously. Not only has Ishmael been able to manipulate his 'stiffness' where he never thought he would, but the phallicism of the Symbolic paternal which fixes meaning as 'stiff' has been turned from Ahab's linear endeavours, to a more circular one, so that the encounter in the bed figures the same circularity and sharing of hands and goods that Melville will offer as an alternative to Ahab's 'iron rails'. The individualism of the eye, as it is apotheosized in Emerson's all-seeing 'transparent eyeball' is countered by the ethic of touch and sharing in darkness where no assumptions about final meaning can be made. Similarly, in a world of equal sharing, no hierarchical assumptions of conquest obtain.

But we need to be wary of reading too much into the ethic of touch, as Sanborn warns. There is another side to the fact of blackness which is not as positive as it first appears. For blackness does carry in the novel only its standard connotation of horror, danger and supernatural uncertainty. If blackness prevents a too-fixing gaze, then it may also be seen to prevent a full knowledge, limiting the experience of the other to brief, epiphanic encounters which remain but images of a larger, but unreachable possibility. Many of the incidents in which Queequeg figures seem to offer the intimacy of relationship as the barometer of human value. The 'marriage' scene, enacted in the 'blackness' of the bedroom; the comradely smoke between the two men; the maternal arm covering Ishmael when he awakes in the morning (37); the 'monkey-rope' later during the narrative, in which the two are joined as by a 'Siamese ligature' (255); even to the coffin life-buoy where the one's body symbolically 'saves' the

other (427); all these appear to suggest community as one of the answers to the dismembering function of desire. This seems to be an assumption along the same lines as Hall's, that the 'play of history, culture and power' becomes fundamental in determining identity, and allowing a fruitful hybridity.

Melville, however, proves himself sceptical of such a 'play', for while he is clearly exploring cultural 'elasticity' as one of the only viable options for human well-being, he nevertheless does not offer such relation as finally available in Queequeg. Ultimately Queequeg is self-contained, in a sense outside history and exists in a realm understood only to himself, and even then, not fully understood. 'I had noticed also', says Ishmael, 'that Queequeg never consorted at all, or but very little, with the other seamen in the inn. He made no advances whatever; appeared to have no desire to enlarge the circle of his acquaintances. All this struck me as mighty singular; yet, upon second thoughts, there was something almost sublime in it' (55).

Ishmael admires the sublimity of Queequeg's impenetrable self-containment, describes it as a 'Socratic wisdom' (55). It may suggest to the reader versed in Emerson something of his idea of the 'Over-Soul' (1895: 59-60), a kind of transcendental self-containment which contains all things.

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing, and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one.

This kind of quasi-phenomenological unity between subject and object would appear to apply to Queequeg. However, Emerson holds the 'beatitude' to be 'accessible', Melville does not. Queequeg is, quite literally, 'singular', and while there is a sublimity in this, Melville does not allow the reader to forget that this sublimity is mostly a function of darkness, not light. While light compromises unity, causes divisions between people on the basis of sight, it is nevertheless also division which structures the adult, paternal world of the Symbolic, and so creates order. The sublime darkness Queequeg represents is associated with the maternal, and

the originary, but also with chaos. Like the painting at the beginning of the narrative, which represents an artist who had attempted to depict 'chaos bewitched' (26), the sublime throws the gaze of the viewer into chaos and swamps him in disorder, at the same time that it takes him back to the Imaginary where he cannot distinguish himself from the creating hand.

This is much the experience of the sublime which swamps Ishmael the morning after sleeping with Queequeg. Like Edmund Burke's interpretation of the sublime as something which 'threatened to engulf the subject and deprive him of words' (Smith, 1996: 36), Ishmael suffers a kind of wordless awe at the uninterpretable. He is 'besmoked' with 'unequal crosslights' (26). The cannibal's arm is around him affectionately. 'You had almost thought I had been his wife' (36). The arm, tattooed all over 'with an interminable Cretan labyrinth', defies interpretation or words, and reminds him of some strange supernatural hand which had seemed to protect him as a child when he had woken in the dead of night after being punished by his step-mother. The hand, of a 'silent form or phantom, had made him 'frozen with the most awful fears' (37). While Queequeg does not elicit quite the same fear, the sense of supernatural strangeness still abounds. He remains 'other' not because of his race, but because he himself seems to have no need for relation. He exists, then, as something of a phantom in the text, much akin to the whale itself, in a realm outside the Symbolic, self-contained because he has not yet, in effect, left the Imaginary.

One must suggest, then, that Melville's interpretation of the darkness surrounding Queequeg is ambiguous. It offers a new epistemology of touch rather than sight, but at the same time marks that epistemology as a version of sublime uninterpretability. Queequeg reposes in this private world, but Ishmael, or anyone else for that matter, cannot always follow. 'Here was a man some twenty thousand miles from home,... thrown among people as strange to him as though he were in the planet Jupiter; and yet he seemed entirely at his ease; preserving the utmost serenity; content with his own companionship; always equal to himself' (55). The language is very reminiscent of 'The Grand Armada' where the circle of whales lie in a 'serene valley lake' (302). Ishmael momentarily shares the 'eternal mildness of joy' amid the 'tornadoed Atlantic of my being' (303), but it is a space where he is 'entranced', not a permanent feature of existence. It carries the double meaning of the sublime itself, therefore, of being at once an experience of transcendence outside the quotidian, but also of only a momentary transcendence. For just as Queequeg is from a 'true place', that true place is 'not down on any map' (59), remains essentially mystical and unreachable.

An important question which arises in relation to Queequeg, then, is to what extent we are meant to take him as an example 'black' experience, and if Melville is in any way using him as a symbol of white oppression of blackness. On the one hand his self-containment prevents an equation between Queequeg and someone like the 'othered' and schizophrenic Pip. But on the other hand, there are elements to Queequeg's representation which invite comparisons. Perhaps most important among these is his silence. It can be read as serene self-containment, but it can also be read as symbolic of his function as a subaltern within an oppressive economic and racist system. The means he finds to 'speak' can be seen, then, as alternatives to that system. And while they re-enforce self-containment, they nevertheless provide Melville's critique of a system which disallows the 'other' full participation in the patriarchal Symbolic.

Can the Subaltern Speak?

The phrase taken from Gayatri Spivak's (1985, 1995) paper of the same title is a useful starting point for exploring Queequeg's silence. Spivak's focus is on the 'epistemic violence' of colonialist language which defines the subject as Other, and in the process speaks, as it were, for the Other. She suggests that even those attempts by the west to recuperate a subjecthood for the subaltern fall into the trap of 'Othering' him/her, since 'all explanation and narrative of reality [has become] established as the normative one' (1995: 25). Her point is that to define someone as 'Other' or as 'subaltern', even if the definition is accepted by the individual or group it defines, is to maintain that group or person's silence, and impose an 'epistemic violence' which emphasises 'social rather than libidinal being' (1995: 27). If the subaltern must use the language of the elite world in which he finds himself, then he cannot actually speak, is her contention.

Two important responses to Spivak have been offered. Benita Parry (1987) suggests that when Spivak declares 'There is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak', she is assigning an 'absolute power to the hegemonic discourse in constituting and disarticulating the native' (1987: 34). No such absolute power exists, in her view, and to assume it does is to entrench essentialist modes of thought which fix racial and gender codes. Stuart Hall (1996) follows much the same path, finding hybrid identity in a cross-pollination of cultures as the only way to reject such essentialist fixing.

If one attempts to read the presentation of Queequeg in relation to these ideas, it seems

that we must again suggest that Melville is ambiguous about the harpooner. On the one hand his indecipherableness places him outside colonialist codes. And the fact that he alone is self-contained suggests that he does not share the psychological markers of colonialism that Fanon, for example, sees himself sharing. However, Queequeg's avowed 'otherness' and 'difference', no matter how self-containing, while keeping him outside any 'hybrid' realm, since the hybrid is possible only in the Symbolic, still ensure he is a representative of the slave and the Negro. As such, silence is one of the few forms of speech available to him.

There is an important sense in which Queequeg's silence (he has very few direct words in the text, fewer even than Pip) may be seen to represent the 'unconscious primitive'. As subaltern, he is primitive savage, a Caliban/Canibal who does not properly have the power of his master's language on his lips, except to curse. 'Who-e debel you?' ... 'you no speak-e, dam-me, I kill-e' (36), are his first words. That Melville is insinuating that colonial authority is indeed the devil in white is less obvious than the way he seems (at first anyway) to fulfill the stereotype of the silent primitive upon whom almost any meaning one chooses, as Torgovnik (1990: 9) points out, can be inscribed. 'The primitive does what we ask it to do. Voiceless, it lets us speak for it'. For most of the text Melville lets Ishmael speak for Queequeg, leaving him with only stereotypical pidgin phrases, such as that delivered at the greenhorn: 'Queequeg no kill-e so small-e fish-e' (63). Whatever we actually know about him is second hand through Ishmael. And mostly he interprets Queequeg as symbol of 'unconsciousness' (64) and a disregard for self. The fact seems to be, however, that most of what Ishmael says about Queequeg is based on his own supposition and particular reading. Melville makes it clear that it is not Queequeg himself who explains his motives, for he seems unable or unwilling to. As in the case of the greenhorn, Queequeg only 'seemed' to be saying to himself 'It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians' (64). It is unlikely that the 'unconscious' Queequeg would be able to use such capitalist analogies. And it is the western eye which imposes this reading on the primitive, even while assuming its own benevolence.²

² Sanborn has discovered, Parker (2002: 63 n. 9) points out, that Melville took his portrait of Queequeg from that of Tupai Cupa a Maori chief depicted in *The New Zealanders*. Cupa evinces the same 'good nature' as Queequeg. But even in this regard, Melville changes the picture by making his 'savage' much less malevolent than Cupa, or than the ordinary 'savage' may expect to have been depicted. If we keep in mind the fact that there may be a difference between Ishmael's interpretation of Queequeg and Melville's, however, it is possible to argue that the image of benevolence is Ishmael's, whereas Melville himself remains

largely uncommitted. The Polynesian is as impenetrable as the whale, as far as Melville is concerned.

Queequeg is silent because he is like the slave who has only the form and actions of his body with which to speak. Melville seems to retain that silence out of respect for the plight of the slave, and also because he cannot presume fully to interpret the meaning of the body. Frederick Douglass in 1852 talks with lavish irony about this silence. ‘Who [is] so stolid and selfish, that would not give his voice to swell a nation’s jubilee’, he asks in his Jubilee speech, ‘What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?’ (HC 1, 1993: 403). But concludes it to be impossible for those whose ‘chains of servitude had been torn from his limbs. I am not that man. In a case like that the dumb might eloquently speak, and the “lame man leap as an hart.” But, such is not the case’. And later, hinting at the Babylonian exile, he declares, ‘How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?’ Douglass’s eloquence is in stark contrast to the silence of most slave lives, but is echoed widely in the history of the slave narrative, beginning to gain prominence as Melville writes *Moby-Dick*.³ ‘The secrets of slavery are concealed like those of the Inquisition’, says Harriet Gilbert in her slave narrative. The slave must keep his secrets in order to preserve his own being, so that silence becomes a function of preservation as much as it does of imposed ideologies.

Turning secrecy against itself, Queequeg’s self-imposed exile pits him against the Christian west. Action becomes more important than speech because it reveals one’s true nature. Melville can take Ishmael’s questionable interpretations out of the picture, and show us a Queequeg who speaks with his body rather than one who has to be spoken for. He punishes and saves the greenhorn in one, apparently disinterested movement. He ‘dies’ and ‘rises’ from his coffin in a similar movement, just as he penetrates the dark head of the whale at the end of the monkey-rope. These actions replace words, and make him more the exemplar of a Christian ‘virtue’ than Christians themselves. His actions are indecipherable because they defy the categories of division set up by the fallen Christian west. When he rises from his coffin out of ‘a little duty ashore’ (366), the suggestion is not only of a Christ figure suffering for his duty, but also of the slave doing what must be done. Christ, after all, is the ultimate slave. As a result he, and Ishmael with him, must renounce the hypocrisy of the Church because its speech masks its real motives. In this they follow Douglass, who denounces the Church for

³ For just one prominent example see Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861), under the pseudonym Linda Brent. For various studies on this work see Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fishkin, eds., *Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994. Henry Louis Gates has collected slave narratives. See his *The Classic Slave Narratives*. New York: New American Library, 1987.

protecting the Fugitive Slave Law. ‘The fact that the church of our country, (with fractional exceptions), does not esteem “the Fugitive Slave Law” as a declaration of war against religious liberty, implies that that Church regards religion as simply a form of worship, an empty ceremony, and *not* a vital principle,...’ (HC 1, 1993: 408). Queequeg must choose the silence of the slave as the only viable answer to an all-too vocal hypocrisy, which talks the language of abolition, but which does not fully support it. ‘But, alas! The practices of whalers soon convinced him that even Christians could be both miserable and wicked; infinitely more so, than all his father’s heathens.... Thought he, it’s a wicked world in all meridians; I’ll die a pagan’ (60). ‘But what is worship?’, asks Ishmael, as if echoing Douglass, ‘ - to do the will of God - *that* is worship. And what is the will of God? - to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do to me - *that* is the will of God. Now, Queequeg is my fellow man. ... I must turn idolator’ (57).

Selling Heads

One of the primary markers of Queequeg’s acting rather than speaking, and a marker of his idolatrous nature, is his selling of heads. While his action is quite literal and the shrunken New Zealand head real, in the light of Melville’s economy of head and body it seems best to read the action symbolically. Such a symbolic reading is important in deciding whether Melville may be intending Queequeg to represent any kind of alternative epistemology of being from the nihilistic one Ahab represents, or in relation to the question of whether there is a space from which the subaltern can speak. Put differently, is speech with and through the body’s actions an adequate replacement for open, unfettered speech? Queequeg’s ‘idolatrous’ selling of heads places the focus on the physical and not the intellectual, which suggests that he exists in a pre-Cartesian realm where the split between self and other, head and body has not yet taken place. The function of the head in the west is as symbol of selfhood, and as container of the brain, organiser of the intellect and, in Platonic philosophy, agent of the soul. In the Polynesian islands where it is tattooed in life and preserved in death, it has an ornamental quality rather than an essentialist one. The *memento mori* function applied to the skull in Medieval and Renaissance culture is changed in the person of Queequeg in order to suggest that the Polynesian has no need of contemplating future death or dismemberment, since he does not see existence in these terms. The head is part of the body, not symbol of death or the person, or even the lost future, and happily sold or given away, as he gives his last one to Ishmael,

because it simply is what it is, ornamental.⁴

⁴ Sanborn (1998: 140) reads the head peddling as ‘degeneracy’, suggesting that it was common for white explorers to sell heads as curios, and that Queequeg’s exposure to the west has led to his being influenced to do the same. While one need not question the validity of this argument, it must be suggested that since Melville is clearly opposing Queequeg’s economy of body to Ahab’s of mind, the selling of heads is not only to be interpreted as a function of culture, but also of Melville wider philosophical purpose.

Queequeg rejects the intellectual in favour of the physical, so that the phallic in relation to him becomes everything it does not mean to Ahab. Ahab's castration complex leads to an obsession with the head, with order and power, and with the linear. Queequeg's phallic world is one which emphasises the gamesomeness of both sexual and religious experience. It has no final destination, but exists in the moment. The phallic idol Yojo is worshipped, but then 'bagged again in his grego pocket as carelessly as if he were a sportsman bagging a dead woodcock' (35). In 'The Doubloon' he does not find the 'sun', symbol of light, God and linear time, in his head, as Ahab tries to do, but 'in the thigh, or in the calf, or in the bowels' (335). The fact that he finds 'something in the vicinity of his thigh' (335) when trying to interpret the round world of the doubloon might suggest a reduction on his part of the round to the phallic linear, if not Ahab's intellectual one, then a more fecund one. But the thigh is also the centre of the man, the place of generation, and a focus on it suggests that he is not castrated, and so has no need to replace the lost phallic with the intellectual. With a body which comes to represent the whole round zodiac (335), it may be seen to be both life in death and death in life, a simultaneously positive and a negative interpretation. Even in the linear and phallic coffin, the object that will, in a sense, generate the text from out of the vortex of the *Pequod's* final sinking (427) Queequeg's eyes expand 'like circles on the water', rounding and rounding, like the rings of Eternity (364).

This rounding suggests a form of meaning which turns in on itself, a kind of completion and self-containment, a unique meaning which is not at the mercy of cultural or racial binary divisions. Queequeg's self-contained life makes his actions, like his tattoos, carry meanings which are not to be interpreted in the Symbolic, as metaphor, but rather as metonymies, like those common to the world of the Imaginary. He accepts a 'ring of eternity' which Ahab cannot, wanting to close down the gap within the ring. Queequeg has no such need, and so lives a life where body and action, writing and meaning are contiguous.

Metonymy was a function of the tattoos of the Typees, as it was of whale's, and it is a useful way of interpreting Queequeg as well. It can be read positively, as an alternative to the monomaniac quest, even if Melville holds, finally, that Queequeg is in a sense, not of this world. In a colonialist regime metonymic readings of the 'native' as 'naturally' one thing or another, fit only for certain forms of action such as servitude, is, as Bhabha (1984: 130) points out, the basis for racial discrimination, and he calls it a 'metonymy of presence'. It is the same literalising that engenders Spurzheim's phrenology, trapping the body in a discursive,

ideologically biased, 'naturalizing' field. In this sense, metonymy is a deliberate closing down of the ambiguous space at the heart of metaphor and a limitation of meaning to functionalism - and that functionalism determined by a particular (unquestioning) ideology. In the language of post-colonial theory, particularities become homogenised, and the subaltern, stuck in metonymy, has no place from which to break into the speech of metaphor. Bhabha and others are following Lacan here, who holds metonymy to be an expression of desire and a trope expressing how the 'fetish is petrified' (Lemaire, 1994: 195).

But there is another way of looking at metonymy, which need not be so reductive or literalising. Lacan also refers to it as the trope of unconscious desire, (Lemaire, 1994: 195) closely linked, in other words, to the Imaginary which is not yet in a state of full consciousness of self. As a literalising trope it may be a tool of 'othering' rhetoric. But the obverse is that it may also not be susceptible to the lacunae that engender the drives. Valorizing the relationship between action and meaning by assuming that action is not so much the result of any drive but more the embodiment of what simply is, the metonymic Imaginary makes for a version of 'presence' that leaves the whale, for example, simply what it is. This is a more positive way, akin to phenomenology, of looking at 'naturalizing'.

As metonymic actions, Queequeg's are not towards particular pre-determined ends, but are instead unconsciously gamesome and spontaneous. 'Oh for a game cock now to sit upon his head and crow! Queequeg dies game!' (366) exclaims Pip, marking the harpooner as both sexual symbol and spontaneous vital force. He can achieve what he wills because, in a way not dissimilar from Schopenhauer, he does not see a distinction between the world and his will. There is no 'head' to seek to appease, or body which lacks. Both are still in one, largely unconscious, state of unity. He embodies a version of the will-less action Schopenhauer sees as the goal of all relationships, where 'the seeing subject has ceased to be merely ego-oriented and is now pure, will-less subject of knowledge, no longer attentive to relationships in a causal context, but resting and fulfilling itself in fixed contemplation of the presented object, out of all connection with any other...' (Campbell, 1976: 351). 'It was Queequeg's conceit', says Ishmael when Queequeg rises from his coffin, 'that if a man made up his mind to live, mere sickness could not kill him' (366). The suggestion seems to be that the head retains full control of the body, not just partial control, as with Ahab, hating his own bodily incapacitation. Nothing makes him more a 'devilish tantalization of the gods!', as Ahab calls him (367) than his self-contained, desireless being. To be true philosophers, as Ishmael says, 'we mortals

should not be conscious of so living or striving' (55).

To sell heads is to play the game demanded by capitalism. But Queequeg's gamesomeness undoes capitalist idealism and its fetishizing. Giving what he cannot sell, he dismisses acquisitiveness, as does Ishmael by giving the head to a barber (60) which, with all the double meanings Melville will use in 'Benito Cereno' imply the 'barbarism' of Christianity for its buying and using of human heads. Sharing all his money, Queequeg undoes western greed and revenge motifs by reversing Judas. Carrying wheelbarrows instead of using them to carry, he is unfettered by labour. He is the 'true' Pauline slave,⁵ having no desire outside his friend's, and embodying those elements of servitude which early Fathers like Cotton Mather held to be exemplary of the true slave, and worthy of earthly freedom. 'Christianity', says Mather in 1706, 'directs a Slave, upon embracing the Law of the Redeemer, to satisfy himself *That he is the Lord's Free-man, tho' he continues a Slave. ... Howbeit, if they have arrived unto such a measure of Christianity that none can forbid Water for the Baptising of them, it is fit that they should enjoy those comfortable circumstances with us which are due to them, not only as the Children of Adam, but also as our Brethren...*'⁶ If America could not live up to the will of the founding fathers, and turned Christians into slaves, then it would be up to pagans to show what true freedom and true Christianity were.

In a crucial sense, then, Queequeg cannot be silenced because he does not exist in an Order which develops hierarchies on the basis of power. But while this is itself a romantic ideal, merely opposite to Ahab's, it is also one about which Melville is at best uncertain. Though it would be convenient to be able to point to a final judgement he places on Queequeg's gaming, such a judgement is hard to find, lest it be that gaming is the only available option to monomania or capitalist acquisitiveness. But this does not really satisfy. On the one hand he valorizes Queequeg by making it his coffin, metonym of his body, that saves Ishmael and brings to 'birth' the novel itself. On the other hand, it is only through the death of such a metonymic ideal that the text can be created at all, so that what the novel finally presents us with is a text born of the loss of a metonymic ideal and the imposition of the desire for completion engendered by the Symbolic, but which looks back to the metonymic unity of word

⁵ 'Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, ... in singleness of heart, as to Christ; not in the way of eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ...' (Eph 6. 5-7).

⁶ 'The Negro Christianized' (1706). Cited in Silverman, ed., (1971: 165).

and action with some degree of longing. Metonymy must die for metaphor to be born, even if the metonymic contiguity is an ideal held ever before us as a rupturing of the divisive Symbolic.

The fact that the ideal is figured as a kind of knightly virtue⁷ suggests that Queequeg is to be placed in a pre-modern, largely analogical framework which is in essence remote from modern desire, and strongly suggestive of myth rather than history. Queequeg lives in much the same place of 'linked analogies' that enrages Ahab as a 'devilish tantatization of the gods', because the analogies seem neither fully lost nor fully attainable. As a representative of the Knights Templar, and of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, (the Hospitallers) whose sign is the Maltese Cross which Queequeg uses as his signature (85) Queequeg (like Tashtego and Daggoo) may be read as the last remnant of 'barbaric virtue'. The 'virtu' is in stark contrast to racist epithets like 'Quohog', which, placed beside the cross, suggest a self-sacrifice not unlike Christ's. Chivalric sacrifice, harking back to a bygone pre-capitalist era, replaces the head. It also re-interprets the Crusades as wars which inaugurated the modern Christian west. If the best exemplar of their ideals is a 'savage' then the society they inaugurated is sorely lacking, seems Melville's subtext.

The imagery Melville uses of the three harpooners is consistently chivalric. Their harpoons are chalices, 'unholy' grails. Their status is ironically reversed to be knights over their own squires. The final actions in the text are those of Tashtego on the mast and Queequeg giving his body/coffin as a sacramental means to bringing the text to life. In each case the healing properties of their actions - true to the St John motto - place the focus of meaning on the 'lower layer', the enjoyed and enjoying body, at the expense of the head. The phallicism of the harpoons, of Yojo ('O Joy' meanings must be reversed - returned to their origins - in order to be fully interpreted), of the Spouter Inn, of the sword used to cut Tashtego from the whale's

⁷ The OED defines knightly virtue ('vertu') as 'valour, worth, merit and moral perfection'. It is both the action like that of a 'divine being', a 'miracle' and one which is a 'voluntary observance of the recognized moral laws'. Chatham (1865) is quoted as saying: 'Neither faith, hope nor charity enters into the virtues of a savage'. A sentiment Melville might not altogether discount, seeing that none of these virtues are required in the prelapsarian world Queequeg inhabits. The chivalric imagery is closely linked to Melville's use of Masonic ideas and images. The same applies to Queequeg's tattoos; from legs as tree trunks, reminiscent of the Kabbalistic 'tree of life', to the checkered marks, suggestive of the Chess-like royalty of the Solomonic temple, where the coffin is also the biblical 'ark of the covenant', and Noah the Father sailor, type of Christ.

head - an act in itself a rejection of heads in favour of bodies, of their 'game cock' personalities, and even of the coffin itself with its associations of the fertility rites of Osiris and Isis,⁸ may be interpreted as a retention of the pre-castrative, maternal Imaginary. The phallic is used to save and to 'bring to birth'. It is not Ahab's phallicism which is the 'head' battering or 'butting' the world.

⁸ On the myth of Osiris and Isis as it relates to Queequeg and Ahab see H. Bruce Franklin, (1963: 71, 75).

The chivalric nature of Queequeg's actions and their analogical frame suggest the influence of Rabelais with his carnivalesque overturning of standard order. Metonymy may be seen to break in to the metaphoric world of hierarchies, disrupt its structures by offering hints of a unity of being otherwise unreachable, an 'insular Tahiti' of the kind Ishmael finds in the 'Grand Armada' of the whale's suffering their carnival of blood. So Queequeg's gamesomeness may be seen as a version of carnival, where the Imaginary enters the Symbolic momentarily. Queequeg is in the position of the dying and feeding whales, revealing a carnival of life and death out of grotesque and unrepresentable action. Like Rabelais's *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, Queequeg becomes a carnival of the Imaginary in action, like the dying whales a version of sacramental circularity, turning the cycle of life and death - milk and blood - into a metonym of contiguous relation. Bakhtin's interpretation of Rabelais's carnival becomes, here too, as it did with the whales, a useful way of seeing what Melville is doing. The gross bodily excesses of the carnival blur the boundaries between conscious and unconscious, making the Rabelaisian world self-referential, insular, self-subsuming, even cannibalistic. Like the whale's sacramental carnival it reduces life and death, laughter and mockery to a single response, one in which the deity can be scoffed at, as Queequeg scoffs at Yojo when he wishes. He embodies Bakhtin's 'moments of death and revival', of feasts opposed to the official, 'celebrating temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order', where 'the utopian ideal and the realistic merge.' (Morris, 1994: 196-197).

Like the ancient Roman Saturnalias, this carnival turns the world 'inside out' through numerous 'parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings' (Morris, 1994: 200). In tandem with this upturning is the social acceptance of the Spectacle, its circus-like quality of the outrageous being kept under control - the unconscious revealing itself in a necessary social release but only under controlled circumstances. Carnival, ultimately, can only have meaning as a foil for 'normal' social practice. Both balance each other, and neither makes sense without the other. But like all carnival, Queequeg's actions remain largely outside the ordinary realm of history, break into it with mythic significance, and retain value as memory or as a possibility in a perfect world, but not as a present reality.

This is very much the carnival action of 'The Monkey-Rope'. The action between the two men joined to each other transforms the joint-stock world from a masculine, metaphorical, conquest into the umbilical tie of a feminine, metonymic contiguity. But more than that, the

cord uniting the two in a 'Siamese ligature' holds one in the 'masculine' sea and the other in the 'feminine' air, as Melville depicts them, giving neither one precedence. The suggestion is that gender and hierarchical divisions are, for the time being, overcome. If it is a 'hempen bond' which can kill, as it does Ahab, when abused, then it is also one which can offer an image of union outside self-interest, in a 'connexion with a plurality of other mortals' (255). But as with most monkey-like actions, it is largely a game, a connexion which Melville holds to exist in an islanded pre-Symbolic. One must finally admit that while the idealist ethic of tactile metonymic contiguity is a desirable alternative to capitalist divisiveness, it is still used by that very capitalism for its own material ends. Queequeg does remain a slave to Ahab's quest.

A similar ambiguity surrounds the 'midwife' scene in 'Cistern and Buckets' where Queequeg, embodying maternal and even soteriological roles, goes down into the hellish depths to bring forth from the head, a new-born Tashtego, like Athena/Minerva born from the head of Zeus, a new 'civilization' (anti-Platonic, since body survives and head does not) based on fraternity. Male and female are conjoined, since the head is both womb and also filled with sperm. The 'birth' is hermaphroditic, a version of sexual metonymy suggestive of homosexual coupling. But here too the fraternal moment is short lived. For birth from the womb was salvation from the tomb, and prefigures a return to it so that birth from one is entrance into the other.

The final scene in which Queequeg is prominent, the coffin scene, is also ambiguous in its suggestion of resurrection. It is possible, but may not be finally attainable. Read with 'Ambergris' in mind, where the squid bones are embalmed in the fragrance, and where 'incorruption' is found 'in the heart of decay' (318), the coffin must be interpreted, along with the Osiris/Isis story, as a symbol of new life out of death. The text begins and ends with coffins and coffins appear throughout, riddling portents of death, full of dual meanings of life in death. A [Peter] Coffin inaugurates the 'marriage' at the beginning, and a coffin consummates it at the end. It is womb and tomb, and lying in it Queequeg is reborn out of it, phallic male and womb-like female conjoining hermaphroditically. Between coffin-ends we have been presented with the legendary family of Nantucket Coffins, named in the chapter 'The Honor and Glory of Whaling' as modern avatars of Perseus and St George. Coffins are also the ship-makers of the *Charles & Henry*, one of the vessels in which Melville travelled.⁹ The

⁹ See Harold Beaver (1985: 848 n. 470) for a further explanation of the 'Coffin' name and its importance in Nantucket.

whale head is a coffin, and Captain Coffin's examination at the bar in 1791 is the subject of 'Ambergris'. All retain ambiguous hints of the circularity of death and life, old and new.

The coffin carries a political message too. The black 'savage' in a coffin is the slave in his coffin, or not in one as the case more likely was. The black 'savage' risen from his coffin is Melville's sign of what will come. The slave's sheer 'sovereign will and pleasure' (366) is to empower him. But while the political message of the piece is pointed, its metaphysical message remains ambiguous. To 'embalm' is to keep, but it is also to keep static. At base Queequeg's 'gamesome', riddling actions are a 'wild whimsiness' which, while they refuse definition and therefore 'enslavement', still leave us no place from which to interpret. He remains on his island Kokovoko, the 'insular Tahiti', which is unreachable to all those who do not speak his language, or can touch him. Resurrected from death, untrapped by the slave mentality, he leaves us nothing but hieroglyphics for a map by which to follow. His unconscious actions become like those Lacan (Lechte, 1990: 35) points to as actions which pose a problem for the conscious because *they* speak - as jokes, puns and other forms of tongue slips do - rupturing the system of control that informs representation.

If Queequeg is a carnivalesque version of the circus spectacle, he is so to disrupt the static racist meanings, and the silences such performances ensure. Rising from his coffin, however, he does not offer any real resolution to the 'moment of crisis' Melville encounters in the culture. Queequeg's mysteries are 'destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last' (367). He does offer an alternative to the single-minded, monomaniac vision, but it is not one fully accessible to the ordinary western person. Gamesomeness is not available to Ishmael or to Ahab. The mind wracked by the vicissitudes of the 'duties' within the Symbolic has no choice to return to the umbilical maternal, no matter how much it desires. It remains stuck in the hole within metaphor, the gap between head and body. Queequeg's actions, metonymic, unconscious, without the ravages of desire, hint at another world, but it is an islanded one, a signifier floating like an orphan in a landless sea. The great irony of Melville's novel, however, is that he chooses just this orphaned and unreadable signifier to be the one from which his text is born. To understand why, if it is possible to, one must examine Queequeg's tattoos and their significance in more detail. They represent the only other means by which he is able to 'speak' with his body, even in the midst of silence.

Writing Metonymies

If it is possible to depict carnival in written form, then Queequeg's tattoos are probably one of the more apt representations. They remain indecipherable and alien to ordinary forms of knowledge. They are a mystical 'living parchment' which will 'moulder away'. And though the bearer himself cannot interpret this 'wondrous work in one volume' made by a 'departed prophet and seer of his island', nevertheless 'his own live heart beat[s] against them' (367). They are to be associated, then, with heart and body rather than head.

As writing on the body, 'a complete theory of the heavens and the earth' (366), the tattoos function as figures of an analogical frame of mind, similar to that prevalent in Medieval thought, in which the body's proportions are symbols of creation - divided into the four quarters depicted in the commonly known Da Vinci drawing of Man as Cosmos, and dating from as far back as Pythagoras.¹⁰ Their complete theory is 'a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth' (366). As mystical, it would appear to be largely unreadable, and the province of feeling and faith rather than intellect. Melville's choice of words is important. They are a 'treatise', not the truth itself. They are a function of art, not necessarily of morality, though they may embody moral sentiments. If they remain impenetrable, however, then so must the 'truth' they refer to. Furthermore, on the one hand they alienate the body from others, 'othering' it as sign of the primitive, the fearful sublime, mark it as distinct from others, as Ahab and Moby Dick are marked. Yet at the same time they suggest some kind of mystical completeness, of the embodiment of the word outside any terms set up by the intellect or by social and historical forces.

¹⁰ See Leonard Barkan (1977). Describing the Pythagorean system, Barkan says:

The human body as microcosm is the quintessential *analogia*: as the creator is to man's body, so is man's body to the world. They do not have to be identical, but the body must be a proportional reduction (1977: 21).

Ahab's mark may be reminiscent of the mark of Cain, a Melvillean reversal of what standard racist ideology presumed,¹¹ but Queequeg's marks, though Cain to the average westerner, rest with him as innate to his being, a metonym rather than a metaphor since he is entirely comfortable in his not knowing their meaning, and suffers no desire for interpretive closure, and the marks themselves become a co-extension of his body. While they can be read as marking him as 'other' and 'different', they are also markers of his own self-containment. His body may be seen to become something akin to what Boudous-Walker (1998: 111) describes as bodies in the Imaginary: 'polylogical', speaking through their actions, rather than being spoken for as they are in the Symbolic, where in their 'pre-linguistic' state the 'experience of pain' which cannot be articulated becomes 'a phenomenological laser' which 'fractures appearance and the false, commonsense consciousness that rests on it'. He may be read, therefore, as an embodiment of a phenomenological epistemology of the kind Ishmael attempts to reach with his hands in the body of the whale.

¹¹ That blacks were seen to be descendants of Cain was commonly assumed, as Phillis Wheatley's verses 'On Being Brought from Africa to America' (1773) allow: 'Some view our sable race with scornful eye,/"Their colour is a diabolic die."/Remember, *Christians*, *Negroes*, black as *Cain*,/may be refin'd, and join th' angelic train'. Cited in Silverman, ed., (1971: 349).

But Queequeg's tattoos, 'devilish tantalization' that they are, invite Symbolic interpretation, even if Melville's final message is that all interpretation is at best provisional. Their similarity to Masonic symbolism has long been noted.¹² As such they represent a kind of secret code, titillating the interest in Masonry so prominent in New York when Melville was writing. The tattoos are a 'checkered' spread of 'blackish looking squares', both on face and body. The legs are marked 'as if a parcel of dark green frogs were running up the trunks of trees' (34).¹³ As a checkerboard they both symbolize the checkered floor of the Masonic temple, and the gamesomeness Melville imparts to Queequeg, show the black primitive to be the board on which the game of chess is played by those in power, just as little Flask is made to look like a chess-man beside Dago (107), and as the counterpane Queequeg and Ishmael sleep under, similarly checkered, becomes the symbol of America's equally checkered history, pieces of left-over culture sewn together. That Queequeg's arm is indistinguishable from it makes him, in Melville's eyes, part of that history, not alien to it. Melville does not offer neat explanations that make the black man a mere pawn in the game. He is part of the (black and white, light and dark) political game of history, in all its 'checkered' senses. But one cannot ignore the racially charged symbols. If he is a 'game-cock', it is not only as unconscious participant but also as a symbol of the slave's suffering in the fight for life under the hands of his ringside master, where his masculine potency is pawned in the gamble for 'checkered'

¹² See Harold Beaver, ed., (1985: 849) and H. Bruce Franklin (1963: 71). Franklin notes that Melville's Masonic references to St George, and other mythic figures like Vishnu are to be read as tongue-in-cheek. But the overall impact of the chapter 'The Honor and Glory of Whaling' remains, albeit tongue-in-cheek, a valorizing of whaling as a near-sacred activity, suggesting that we must read Queequeg as at least a type of sacred figure in Melville's eyes, even if the nature of his 'truth' remains opaque.

¹³ Geoffrey Sanborn's recently 'discovered' face of Tupai Cupa as the original tattooed one Melville may have used as a model for Queequeg (Hayford and Parker, eds., 2002: 464) does not have the same checkered face Melville describes. While the story taken from George Lillie Craik's *The New Zealanders* (London: 1830) was clearly used by Melville, the face itself does not have the 'checkered' look common to much Polynesian tattooing, some of which can be seen on the famous figures published by George von Langsdorff in his *Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World* (1813), and reprinted in Sanborn's book (1998: 66-67). In using the checkers Melville is not merely manufacturing. They were a common feature of the symmetrical forms of tattooing prevalent in Polynesia, particularly Hawaii and Tahiti, where they were known as 'papa konane'. They remain a feature in present-day tattooing. Melville merely uses the facts to his own advantage. See the diagram opposite for an image of the checkerboard in modern Polynesian tattooing. It is taken from Hilary Hammond, *A Practical Guide to Body Art*. London: Caxton (2000: 38).

supremacy.

The marks on Queequeg's back represent the marks of slavery, as they do in Mary Prince's 1831 publication, *The History of Mary Prince, a West-Indian Slave, Related by Herself*, the whip marks on her back are described by her amanuensis as 'full and authentic evidence' that 'the whole back part of her body is severely scarred, and, as it were, *chequered*, with the vestiges of severe floggings'. [There] are many large gashes on other parts of her person, exhibiting an appearance as if the flesh had been deeply cut, or lacerated with gashes, by some instrument wielded by most unmerciful hands' (Whitlock, 1995: 350). Slavery is a game played for money ('chequered') with the slave as pawn. While the meaning of the flesh's marks are those inscribed by colonial power, - just as those on the whale are made by the colonizing harpoon - the one way to turn that power against itself is to use the inscription to defeat the interpreter, to become inscrutable.¹⁴ Like Bartleby's blank wall of silence in the face of capitalist control, the only space left the slave is his own mask, which is not to be seen as separate from him, but rather adopted as the form most suited to a retention of his own sense of meaning. It is not a meaning based on subjecthood, since there is no veil or mask to break through to find a hidden essence. The veil - inscription - is the creation of the interpreter/slaver, whose marks merely re-enact the slave's inscrutability and the interpreter's increased monomania at the futility of his interpretive strategies. It is for this reason that not even Queequeg can interpret his own marks - they are mystical, and he does not have a language for them. More importantly, to interpret them is to separate himself from them, and this he is unable to do. 'Who can tell the dancer from the dance?' as Yeats might say.

¹⁴ 'Checkered' when read in relation to Masonic symbolism and slavery contains yet another of Melville's jokes. The Masonic apron given to Generals Washington and Lafayette represented just such a checkered floor, coffin, and rising sun. No new brotherhood is born of the peace the two generals inaugurate, but rather slavery and death, where Solomon's wisdom is marked on the backs of those flogged, and where the rising sun is a monomaniac Ahab. See Robert Macoy, *A Dictionary of Freemasonry*. New York: Gramercy, 1989. It is an irony strengthened by Alan Heimert's observation in *Moby-Dick and American Political Symbolism*, that Melville is using Queequeg's coffin to hint at Henry Clay's reference, 29 January 1850, to having a piece of Washington's in hand.

And so it may be argued that Melville makes the slave the one to carry on his body the marks of the wisdom of Solomon, the secrets of the Solomonic, Masonic temple. 'I read Solomon more and more', Melville says to Hawthorne in his letter of early May 1851, 'and every time see deeper and deeper and unspeakable meanings in him. ... It seems to me now that Solomon was the truest man who ever spoke,...' (Parker and Hayford, eds., 2002: 541). In 'the Try-Works' he explains himself. But the explanation suggests that the 'gamesome', Rabelaisian Queequeg may not fully embody in Melville's mind Solomon's wisdom. Bartleby will do later.

The truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows, and the truest of all books is Solomon's, and Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered steel of woe. 'All is vanity'. ALL. This wilful world has not got hold of unchristian Solomon's wisdom yet. But he who dodges hospitals and jails, and walks fast crossing grave-yards, and would rather talk of operas than hell; call Cowper, Young, Pascal, Rousseau, poor devils all of sick men; and throughout a care-free lifetime swears by Rabelais as passing wise, and therefore jolly; - not that man is fitted to sit down on tombstones, and break the green damp mould with unfathomable wondrous Solomon (328).

Solomon understands suffering, and sees that there is no escape from it. Queequeg the image of the slave embodies such suffering, is marked by it. But Queequeg the self-contained primitive child of the Imaginary, is outside this realm of suffering. As such he only partly represents the figure of suffering, for the 'game' is not final wisdom. It exists within the realm of the oppressive because it counteracts oppression by trying to reverse it, as Stubb does when he sings foolishly 'Oh! jolly is the gale,/And a joker is the whale,/A' flourishin' his tail,-/Such a funny, sporty, gamy, jesty, joky, hoky-poky lad, is the Ocean, oh!' (380). Taking suffering and destruction as a joke is, in one sense, to conquer it, but in another to dismiss its real force. The game breaks down hierarchies with outrageous action, word, laughter, but it does not, finally, see the game itself as 'vanity', the way Solomon does. Only Bartleby will be able to do this later. Knowledge of vanity is possible only from within the realm of the cultural Symbolic. Existing outside it in metonymy, Queequeg can offer a 'jolly', only half-serious and irreligious alternative, neither fully accepting nor dismissing even Yojo, because he lives

on a spiritual and mental island.

How is it, then, that Melville can adopt such an 'island' and the coffin as metonym floating like a slippery signifier on the wide ocean, uninterpretable symbol of death, to be the womb for his text? If neither the phenomenology of the pre-thetic, with its mystery of contiguity, nor the lost and divided being of the desiring subject caught in metaphor fully satisfy, then what purpose is there in offering the coffin tomb/womb as a symbol of the narrative's birth? Clearly, Melville does not offer Queequeg as an entirely viable alternative to oppression on which to base a new order. In answer one might suggest that the irony of using the unintelligible as the mother of textuality is perhaps Melville's most profound joke. 'I have written a wicked book and feel spotless as a lamb', Melville says to Hawthorne in his letter of 17 November 1851 (Hayford and Parker, eds., 2002: 545). The book is 'wicked' because, like Queequeg's tattoos in 'The Candles' burning 'like Satanic blue flames', and Dagoo 'looming up to thrice his real stature' and the parted, usually silent, mouth of Tashtego revealing 'shark-white teeth, which strangely gleamed' (381), its meanings are multiply-interpretable and combine good and evil, life and death, the game and seriousness within the same frame. Solomon's wisdom is that all is 'unfathomable' and that no final meaning ought to be placed on anything, and that it is vanity to attempt to fix final meanings, as Ahab insists on doing.

The metonym of the coffin is unreadable, and as unfathomable as the book. In a world where the text controls the body, as race, gender and class distinctions do now and in Melville's time, producing a work that leaves the question of the nature of textual production open, neither a function of divided subjecthood nor one of transcendentalist essential 'truth', the 'wicked book' can be the work of the 'spotless lamb'. If Queequeg remains on a metonymic 'insular Tahiti', on which Ahab cannot stand because he is caught in the vicissitudes of metaphor, the place of 'truth', like the 'true places' not on any map, is both and neither.

Speaking Silence

To return to the post-colonial question with which this examination of Queequeg began - can the subaltern speak? - it must be suggested finally that Melville places Queequeg in a unique position in the text. If he cannot or will not speak, it is because he is a living text. His meaning is to remain never fully decipherable, and his body is in a metonymic way contiguous with that meaning. He is the conquered slave, but also outside conquest by any western

epistemologies and so eternally free. In the death of his own living text/body he engenders the life of the author/narrator, becoming the Queen Mother of the text - the Queen/keg or womb from which meaning is born and the grave to which it must return. As metonymy he is (in Lacan's terms) the unconscious, the return of the repressed, the separate and different - savage - in Rousseau's terms, but he seems also to be intended as that savage in all of us whose dark unconscious and repressed elements largely determine how consciousness will be allowed to deal with its own desires. In a fundamental way, the 'savage' man and whale here represent the blank page upon which all meaning must be inscribed - the unconscious which invites interpretation but which also determines the limits of that interpretation. The white page, the white whale, the arm of the savage, and Ishmael's text (like his body a 'blank page for a pen I was then composing, 346-7), are signifiers that await inscription. Their natural meaning is blank. Whatever meaning is imposed by imperial authority - harpoons, pens, cords, ropes, cauldrons, carving knives - remains external to the 'blank' thing itself. It is a letter which kills. But the blankness is also a letter which in turn, saves - as it does Ishmael - but does so only because it is 'empty', floating, hieroglyphic, and never accepting of any closure which will allow final death - refusing Ahab.

In this reading Queequeg goes some way toward embodying Stuart Hall's (1995: 224) image of the post-colonial subject, accepting of its own ethnicity, not shying away from it as entirely colonially determined and imposed, who has an 'essential' self (not mere discursive subjecthood) but whose self is not to be seen as entirely differentiated from those discursive formations which have gone to make it up.

My own view [says Hall] is that events, relations, structures do have conditions of existence and real effects, outside the sphere of the discursive, but that it is only within the discursive, and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities, do they [sic] have or can they be constructed within meaning. Thus, while not wanting to expand the territorial claims of the discursive infinitely, how things are represented and the 'machineries' and regimes of representation in a culture do play a *constitutive*, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation - subjectivity, identity, politics - a formative, not merely an expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life.

Even so, Melville's agreement with Hall is only partial, as is his feeling about Queequeg's position of honour as the moral 'voice' of the narrative. Melville, it seems, accepts the value of ethnicity in subjecthood, counteracting the racism of his day. But the avenue he chooses for Queequeg is not one which fully satisfies either Spivak or Hall. The power of the subaltern to speak is not yet a space Melville can fully negotiate - either because he is himself not ideologically able, or because he does not feel it reasonable. Instead he reserves an islanded, but all-powerful place for silence and inscrutability. These become, as Hall attests, not merely affixed 'anti-discourses', but constitutive roles. They create an irrevocable difference between representer and represented and so confound the task of representation - which is ultimately Melville's own aim. But it is not one with which he remains contented. Despite Ahab's futile struggle to strike through the mask, and indelibly mark the blankness of the whale's white wall, one senses that Melville's own frustrated desire is to achieve similar epistemic clarity. Any attempt, he knows, is to fall into a Spivakian 'epistemic violence'. Its opposite, however, is to remain in an 'insular Tahiti' of moral and epistemic (even primitivistic) neutrality.

Queequeg becomes in *Moby-Dick* Melville's own version of a 'counter-discourse', attempting to offer alternatives to hegemonic forms of discourse which prevent full intersubjectivity. But as with Ishmael, that intersubjectivity between beings is limited to a few epiphanic moments. One might suggest, then, that if 'true places' are not on any map, final 'truth' may not to be encountered in any single text. What one may be left with are texts which become versions of counter-discourse as means to counter the confinements of hegemonic entrapment. In the next novel to be discussed, *Pierre*, Melville embarks on just such an attempt at open 'counter-discourse', far more open than anything he had written before. Moving from the discourses of race and conquest, he tackles those of gender and class, and in the attempt returns to the master narrative of desire which he sees as governing western culture, Oedipus. His novel becomes yet another way of trying to find an alternative to the seemingly unbridgeable opposition between the monomaniac desire to conquer Oedipal fears of castration, and the only half-satisfying response of indecipherable words and actions.

CHAPTER FIVE

MELVILLE'S ANTI-OEDIPUS: COUNTER-NARRATIVE IN *PIERRE*

'Is it now that I am nothing, that I am made to be a man?'

Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*.

'I waited for you
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine'

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*.

Oedipus and Anti-Oedipus

Pierre transfers the confinements of the Oedipal struggle explored in *Moby-Dick* from the sea to the land, and from the focus on revenge for Oedipal loss and castration, to self-sacrifice as atonement for the perceived sins of the father and mother. It also transfers the object of conquest from something external, like the whale, to the self and the nuclear family. Since both the self and the family are finally destroyed in the novel, the reader is left to decide whether the conquest is a successful or failed one.

Melville ended *Moby-Dick* with an image of the ship sinking, but with one member of its 'family', the 'outcast' Ishmael, surviving, being picked up by the *Rachel*, a biblical symbol of the maternal commonly associated with America as the New Israel. Ishmael was spared to write his story. Pierre is a version of Ishmael, as he is of Tommo, come home. He lives in the lap of the maternal comfort Ishmael seeks. He too, writes a novel. But Melville has entered the darkest phase of his writing career with *Pierre*, since *Moby-Dick* was being unfavourably received even as he wrote the next novel. In this novel the maternal is shown to be stifling rather than nurturing. One can be an orphan even with a mother and a father, Melville realises, and the 'Rachel' of the American state, and American letters, can orphan her own children all over again. Writing is a version of an escape from these maternal confinements, but also a trap. And here Melville explores the value of writing more directly as a tool of bodily freedom

and psychological identity. Yet he makes what may be a deliberate, suicidal error. He allows his own self to become interfused with the character who is writing, textual father and child collapse into one another in an unresolved Oedipus complex which is really the main theme of the narrative. Not even writers outwrite their history and the parental force that history exercises over them, so that, as an image of the young America, Melville shows us a man still caught, like Ahab fastened to his hempen line, in the umbilical cord of the mother and father.

While the plot is at times strained and was treated as such by the critics of Melville's time,¹ the novel is significant as an exploration of important versions of psychological and literary confinement. It foreshadows Melville's major works to come, not least the racial debates of 'Benito Cereno', the textual ones of 'Bartleby' and the Oedipal ones of *Billy Budd*. It examines the life of a young white rurally raised, upper class man who leaves the country, his paternal home, long under his mother's domination, and takes on the role of his father by caring for one he believes to be his illegitimate sister. In doing so he rejects his betrothed, Lucy, and takes the 'sister' Isabel, to the city in order to escape their mutual history. In this process he escapes his mother, who rejects him and dies. The failed novel he tries to write leads to his poverty, then an hysteria in which he kills his mother's heir, and he dies in prison, with the two women for whom he has sought to care. It is the story of young idealism gone awry, and may express much of the pessimism Melville was himself feeling at the time of writing.

¹ See Otter (1994: 55) who points out that there was a literary contest which challenged entrants to 'Describe the Plot of *Pierre* in Ten Sentences or Less'.

The Oedipal conflicts of the novel, as many critics have recognized,² are partly the result of its autobiographical nature. The Glendinning name is a thinly disguised version of Gansevoort, and the maternal forces depicted are a representation of Melville's own life dominated mostly by women and the memory of long-dead father. Tommo has his Oedipal swollen foot, which heals only when he accepts entrapment on the island. Ahab, never accepting his own castration, dies before accepting physical and metaphysical entrapment. *Pierre's* Oedipal confinements suggest the young adult trying to enter the fully adult world, shackled to a particular status and history, while being yet too immature to manage the transition. This struggle combines gender, genealogy and power. 'For in the ruddiness, and flushfulness, and vaingloriousness of his youthful soul, he fondly hoped to have a monopoly of glory in capping the fame-column, whose tall shaft had been erected by his noble sires' (8).³ The sexual male 'pillar' of the patriarchal past is presented as an uncertain one on which to base the future. 'In all this, how unadmonished was our Pierre by that foreboding and prophetic lesson taught, not less by Palmyra's quarries, than by Palmyra's ruins. Among those ruins was a crumbling, uncompleted shaft' (8). Palmyra is the city built by Solomon, a figure who will reappear constantly throughout the novel, and whom *Moby-Dick* reminded us is the voice declaring that 'all is vanity'. The city lies in ruins, symbolising the lost patriarchal past, and a stunted masculine future. In its place is a version of castration anxiety which suggests uncertainty both about patriarchy and History, and the class and race distinction underpinning them.

But while the novel is somewhat obsessed with Oedipus, it nevertheless does something unusual with the myth. It reverses much of the power within the gender roles normally ascribed to males and females. The standard interpretation of the myth and its application in psychoanalysis ascribes the role of Oedipus (boy) or Electra (girl) to the child having to symbolically 'kill' father (if a boy) and mother (if a girl) in order to take their place and win the affection of the opposite sexed parent. This becomes a rite of passage essential to

² See in particular Rogin (1983), who reads the political and the familial as interfused; Dimock (1989), who talks of Melville wanting to use the novel to 'transcend kinship'; Otter (1999) talks of Pierre trying continually to destroy his own family legacy; and Di Lalla Toner (1998) examines the text as Melville's rebellion against his own publicly constructed life. Girgus (1990) points out that much of Melville's work can be read as a search for the father he lost as a boy.

³ All references to *Pierre* are taken from the Penguin edition, 1996.

entry into adulthood. But since the parent is *not* actually killed, what takes the place of such a killing is, as Lemaire (1994: 7) shows, the acceptance of the parent's gender role, and with it the prohibition of union with the parent of the opposite sex. The Social Symbolic is structured by this taboo, and if it is not fully accepted, according to Freud and Lacan, neuroses set in. The plot of Melville's novel operates with this notion constantly in the background. But what is unusual about the novel is that the power structures normally associated with masculinity are given to females. Pierre is the 'noble boy and docile' (19) a 'Romeo' to his 'sister Mary' (18), the mother and has a 'lover-like adoration' (16) for her. She, on the other hand, maintains the power usually ascribed to the male. She carries the 'baton' of masculinity (20), while Pierre himself is unable even to wear his grandfather's military vest since it is too large for him. 'Pierre had often tried on his military vest, which still remained an heirloom at Saddle Meadows, and found the pockets below his knees, and plenty of additional room for a fair-sized quarter-cask with its buttoned girth (29).

The actions of the plot suggest that Melville seeks to write a novel in which the story of Oedipus dominates, but which is itself overturned and shown to be partly inadequate as a tool to explain the anxieties about power besetting American society. He is using Oedipus to undo Oedipus. The Oedipus complex cannot be fully resolved in the world Pierre inhabits because power and gender relations have become bedevilled. Mary Glendinning becomes Pierre's 'sister' (14) because he has a relationship with her which is neither that of son nor husband, but something in between. He 'marries' his apparent 'sister' Isabel, in an act suggestive of a marriage with his 'sister-mother'. One of the results of this is that the novel switches the Oedipal antagonism from between father and son to one between mother and son, so that it is not just the memory of the father Pierre must overcome but also the domination of the mother. In both a literal and a figurative way Pierre 'kills' his mother and 'marries' the idea of his father by 'marrying' Isabel. This 'marriage' results in class and gender conflicts which Melville desires to explore in some depth, and so the novel may be read as an extended analysis of the national Oedipal struggle towards maturity.

One may call the novel, then, 'anti-Oedipal', in that it offers a 'counter-narrative' to the 'master-narrative' of Oedipus which is usually accepted as the 'correct' path towards achieving social integration or personal individuation. The novel may be read as a version of what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'Anti-Oedipus'. They argue in their work of the same title (Rivkin and Ryan, 1998: 211) that Freud's analysis of the 'parental complex' and the patterns

of self-punishment resulting from the Oedipus complex as a confession of guilt, is not necessarily innovative, even for the time.

On the contrary: *it is completing the task begun by nineteenth-century psychology*, namely, to develop a moralized, familial discourse of mental pathology, linking madness to the “half-real, half-imaginary dialectic of the family,” deciphering within it “the unending attempt to murder the father,” “the dull thud of instincts hammering at the solidity of the family as an institution and at its most archaic symbols.” Hence, instead of participating in an undertaking that will bring about genuine liberation, psychoanalysis is taking part in the work of bourgeois repression at its most far-reaching level, that is to say, keeping European humanity harnessed to the yoke of mommy-daddy and *making no effort to do away with this problem once and for all....*

Melville may be using the ‘yoke of mommy and daddy’ as the central theme of his text, but in doing so he is attempting to break that yoke. He shows, however, that it remains ultimately unbreakable, since his characters all die confined to Oedipal desire, so that his ‘anti-Oedipus’ may be interpreted as a failed one.

The Oedipal struggle over patriarchal and matriarchal History and power is, initially, associated with the land of Saddle Meadows, so that one must read *Pierre*’s reading of the countryside in order to gain a sense of the Oedipal drama between son and parent. Here, countryside becomes a symbol of class and race relations, the battle between which is figured along gender lines. Saddle Meadows is an ‘Eden’, maternal and nurturing, but also upper class and racist, just as the ‘New Eden’ of America can be seen to be. The city to which Pierre escapes appears to be a more metropolitan and less biased alternative, but Melville will show it to be essentially similar in the end. The final, and perhaps most important, aspect of *Pierre*’s exploration of Oedipus is its relation to textuality itself. Writing is explored as a means by which the young writer can ‘kill’ his father/history and find a space for himself. Becoming the author, as Pierre does, may be read as his last means to overcome his own sense of castration, and Melville’s commentary on the futility of writing itself. By the end of the narrative the reader is left with no final perspective from which to measure the value of Pierre’s sacrifice or the writing itself. Each of these aspects will be examined *seriatim* in what follows.

Maternal Eden

The opening half of the novel sets the scene for much of this Oedipal struggle. It introduces a number of important themes Melville later plays with in his exploration of Oedipus. Some of the important themes are the notion of Saddle Meadows as 'Eden', a paradise where 'Spenserian nymphs had led [Pierre] into many a maze of all-bewildering beauty' (6). This Eden is specifically a place of 'maternal', womb-like nurture, full of 'blossoms and lilies of the valley' (34). The image of Eden, however, evokes both the Christian narrative of paradise and the Fall, as well as the adoption of that narrative by early American settlers, so that *Pierre* harks back in many ways to *Typee* which examined the settler/explorer mentality. The rural Edens of America are presented here as descendants of the Edens sought by early settlers. Country is, in Pierre's eyes, superior to town: 'but the country, like any Queen, is ever attended by scrupulous lady's maids in the guise of the seasons, and the town hath but one dress of brick turned up with stone; but the country hath a brave dress for every week of the year:' (13). This is not a primitive, wild, female land to be conquered, but has become a reversal of Thomas Morton's (1632) complaint that its 'fruitful wombe' was 'not being enjoy'd' (Kolodny, 1975: 22).

The land has become the symbol of maternal nurture, where the American was made an Adamic 'new man', as Crèvecoeur put it, 'by being received in the broad lap of our great *alma mater*' (1997: 44). In the pastoral vision, as in Pierre's vision of the land as Queen and his mother as 'Dowager Duchess' (14), mother and lover have become fused in Oedipal desire. It is a realization of the vision Philip Freneau believed the early settlers had not quite achieved, opting instead for 'the school of oppression', when they could have 'perceived that in Nature's wide plan/There must be that whimsical creature called Man' who is 'a link in creation's vast chain'.⁴ Pierre achieves this when he finds memory of the lost past and the reality of the present bound in one happy marriage. 'Through those woods, over these lawns, by that stream, along these tangled paths, many a grand-dame of his had strolled when a girl; vividly recalling these things, Pierre deemed all that part of earth a love-token; so that his very horizon was to him as a memorial ring' (8).

The memorial ring makes for a marriage between self and nature, but one in which the

⁴ Freneau, 'Sketches from American History' (1784). Cited in Silverman (1971: 362).

female, mostly in the form of the matriarch, is the dominant partner. And it is as matriarch that Nature controls the young Pierre, not just mentally, but bodily too.

She blew her wind-clarion from the blue hills, and Pierre neighed out lyrical thoughts, She whispered through her deep groves at eve, and gentle whispers of humanness, and sweet whispers of love, ran through Pierre's thought-veins, musical as water over pebbles (14).

In the country, as if still in the Imaginary and primitive world of the Typeean Eden, Pierre has 'thought-veins', is not distinct from mother nature, and is as one not yet passed through the Mirror Stage. He detects no difference between head and heart, as he later will after encountering Isabel.

'The heart! The heart! 'tis God's anointed; let me pursue the heart!' (91), says Pierre in 'Misgivings'. The heart becomes the symbol of the conflict with his 'head', both intellect, the past, and the authority of his progenitors. 'Well may this head hang on my breast, - it holds too much; well may my heart knock at my ribs, - prisoner impatient of his iron bars. Oh, men are jailers all; jailers of themselves, and in Opinion's world ignorantly hold their noblest part a captive to their vilest;' (91). Melville's tone of excess in both pieces seems, as Otter (1994: 56) points out, too leaden and too literal. Pierre seems half man and half horse. But one might argue that this is just Melville's point, to present the image of an ideal and largely primitive paradise in which no distinction can be made between creatures, where a kind of excessive universal oneness reigns. It quite deliberately ignores, as Otter also shows (1994: 59) the real disruptions taking place on the landscape at the time, with the removal of Indians to reservations. Like Thomas Cole whose 'Essay on American Scenery' (1836), this image of paradise insists that 'We are still in Eden', but need to learn how to view the scenery properly. Edenic excess may be read as a desire to retain a child-like link to the mother and refuse the Oedipal transition necessary for the child and in the nation itself as a maturing entity.

To keep the landscape as a vision of maternal Eden means perpetuating a mythical innocence of the land as '*alma mater*', where slavery and Indian wars are not recognized as real features, and where the actions of a child-like being inhabiting it seem both pre-Cartesian and pre-lapsarian. It is meant to be the kind of romantic paradise which frees the rich and pompous from their prison, as Timothy Dwight had it: 'And as a bird, in prison long confin'd,/Springs

from his open'd cage, and mounts the wind,/Thro' fields of flowers, and fragrance, gaily
flies,/Or re-assumes his birth-right, in the skies:/Unprison'd thus from artificial joys,/Where
pomp fatigues, and fussy fashion cloy, /The soul, reviving, loves to wander free/Thro' native
scenes of sweet simplicity'.⁵

Pierre's betrothed, Lucy Tartan, is pictured in just such innocent, angelic, pre-lapsarian terms, suggestive of the a-sexual, virginal Eve. She is a 'visible semblance of the heavens', her cheeks 'tinted with the most delicate white and red, the white predominating', and like all lovely women, in Pierre's view, 'is not entirely of this earth' (24). Whiteness here, as in the whiteness of the whale, becomes ethereal and otherworldly. Eden, then, remains a largely unreal place. Melville's deliberately ponderous tones of praise satirize the sentimental heroine of the time, but they still perpetuate the Edenic archetype, and Dwight's bird seeking freedom. 'It was very strange, but most eloquently significant of her own natural angelhood that, though born among brick and mortar in a sea-port, she still pined for unbaked earth and inland grass. So the sweet linnet, though born inside of wires in a lady's chamber on the coast,...; yet, when spring-time comes, it is seized with flutterings and vague impatiences;' (26). An Eden which denies seeing the human cost of its unearthly vision, Melville seems to be suggesting, will exist only as a flutter.

⁵ Timothy Dwight, 'Greenfield Hill' (1794). Cited in Silverman (1971: 381).

If there was discontent with the primitivist utopia in *Typee* and a rejection of its infantile ways as too ‘cloying’, to use Dwight’s word, how might utopia be found in the new world itself? It comes as no surprise, therefore, given the feminine rhetoric of Eden at the time, that the new Eden belongs to a mother and her son, where Pierre, remains a child in the lap of mother and of nature. Saddle Meadows is the image of maternal Eden found in much nineteenth-century American literature. The tattooed Indian John in Cooper’s *The Pioneers*, reminiscent of Tommo, dies by self-immolation in maternal nature, returning to the womb. William Gilmore Simms’ campsites all remind one of Spenserian wombs, ‘deeply embowered’, ‘girdled’. Rip van Winkle’s legend is of a maternal ‘sleepy hollow’, as female as the ‘flourishing village’ Dwight eulogises. And Pierre himself fuses his love for his mother with that of the land and Saddle Meadows, and his betrothed Lucy is hardly distinct from them both.

In a detached and individual way, it seemed almost to realize here below the sweet dreams of those religious enthusiasts, who paint to us a Paradise to come, when etherialized from all drosses and stains, the holiest passions of man shall unite all kindreds and climes in one circle of pure unimpairable delight (16).

While the ‘circle of delight’, like the ‘memorial ring’ earlier, reminds one of the democratic ethic in ‘A Squeeze of the Hand’ in *Moby-Dick*, it is also aimed at suggesting the feminine and a halting of the linear quest in a regenerative womb-like comfort.

But Melville, in what must be seen as one of the central thrusts of the text, undermines the ‘circle of delight’ by inserting into it a strongly phallic motif in which the neat resolutions of the Oedipal saga are questioned. The motif both places a question mark over the maternal Edenic as nurture at the same time that it uses the Christian narrative of the Fall to hint at an alternative to the American landscape and expansionist settlement as a new Eden. Mary Glendinning carries the authority of the male progenitors of the family, holds the baton of masculine rule (20) and demands obedience from her rather effeminate son, ‘Beware of me, Pierre. There lives not that being in the world whom thou hast more reason to beware,’ (130). This suggests that the maternal is not here necessarily a nurturing Edenic, but contains within it the possibility of an authoritarian ‘baton’ not unlike Ahab’s ‘iron rails’. ‘Mother Mary’, reminiscent to Pierre of the ‘Queen of Heaven’ (24) is actually the force of masculine power in

the text. She is the phallic within the circle of delight. Inasmuch as she replaces the male or the father for Pierre, the Oedipal narrative is maintained. Killing the mother here is another version of killing the father. But inasmuch as she is also a female, made phallic, the Oedipal narrative is turned on its head. Obeying the mother becomes a substitute for obeying the father. 'Thou art my son and I command thee' (95), she says to Pierre. In contrast, trying to preserve the father's 'fair fame' (172) is both to make the father the 'fair' feminine and to attempt to live up to an unreal image of manhood.

With the introduction of Isabel, however, the American Eden becomes further demythologized. The allegory of the Oedipal struggle in paradise presented in *Typee* was not complete without its serpent. Neither is this one. The phallic may have been there all along in the form of the mother, but with Isabel, it takes on even less ambiguous form. She is the 'sister' who had been sadly 'omitted from the text' (7), and been replaced by Pierre's own mother. While the replacement of the mother by the wife is standard Oedipal fare, the phallicism of both creates peculiar complications. Isabel becomes a version of the serpent, with a 'secret adder of self-reproach' in her bosom, which will eventually be the place from where Pierre takes his poisonous vial. She and Pierre 'coil' together mutely in their embraces (192).

The Eden of Saddle Meadows becomes suggestive of biblical allegory by containing its Lucy - 'light', as it does its mother Mary, in the form of Mary Glendinning, and its lost father, Pierre senior/Joseph, who after all, disappears from the Christian narrative early. It must, then, have its dark serpent. Isabel performs this function, as 'dark-eyed' (20) as Lucy is light, as 'Gorgon' (49) as Lucy is angelic. 'Beware the idol Bell', meaning 'Baal', Ishmael is warned. Here 'Bell' takes on flesh in female form, but with strongly masculine overtones, since she looks much like Pierre's father and has the power of a Medusa upon which 'Pierre's glance is palely fixed' (46). Between the earthy 'Baal' of Isabel and the transcendental 'Light' of Lucy stands 'Pierre' as the allegorical, Christ-like figure, as both victim and prospective saviour, an Adam before the fall and a Christ after it, but falling to the charms of the serpent who offers him fruit from the 'tree' of knowledge. In this case that 'tree' is genealogy. Knowledge of the sins of the father is the forbidden fruit in Saddle Meadows. Like the Christian saga, Pierre must finally seek redemption through suffering by carrying out his father's will, and replacing his father in the process. 'But through his father's sin, that father's fair fame now lay at the mercy of the son, and could only be kept inviolate by the son's free sacrifice of all earthly felicity;' (177). It is only after the encounter with the 'serpent' Isabel that Pierre can address

his mother not as a child does, but a growing man, 'in a voice that seems to come from under your great-grandfather's tomb!' (47). And it is only after his encounter with the knowledge she brings, like Adam's fall, that he emerges from the Edenic maternal of the Imaginary, sees himself as fallen in the mirror of his past, and so begins an entry into the Symbolic.

When that sister enters the narrative as the 'snake' into the Edenic garden, yet another cue is offered to encourage an anti-Oedipal reading, or at least one which is not Oedipal in the traditional sense. If it was common for the early settler and the sentimentalist author to complain about the rape of the landscape, a 'Maryland' turned into Leah and Rachel 'deflowered by her own inhabitants', as Thomas Hammond put it,⁶ then Melville may be seen to be offering in *Pierre* an alternative to the maternal Edenic as a place of nurture which needs protection from masculine rapine. The feminine in the garden is also a symbol of danger, possible deceit and oppression, not just the masculine. Pierre's 'Maryland' breeds its own suffering children. As a descendant of the Dutch Patroons, Melville is all too aware of the injustices suffered by many at the hands of his ancestors, particularly the landed gentry. They send against their own tenant farmers 'regular armies, with staffs of officers, crossing rivers with artillery, marching through primeval woods, and threading vast rocky defiles, ... to distraint upon three thousand farmer-tenants of one landlord, at a blow' (11). The language, so reminiscent of Tommo's expansionist advance into the valley of Typee, makes clear who mother nature's rapists are. 'America will make out a good general case with England in this' (11) says the narrator. But it is the 'Dowager', 'Queen' and 'Duchess' Glendinning who has taken the place of the Patroons in Pierre's life, turning feminine nature from one raped to one literally holding the baton of power. Mary Glendinning holds the old General's baton, so that 'she looked the daughter of a General, as she was; for Pierre's [like Melville's]⁷ was a double revolutionary descent. On both sides he sprung from heroes' (20). 'A powerful and populous family had by degrees run off into the female branches' (7-8).

⁶ 'Leah and Rachel', in *Narratives of Early Maryland*. Ed. C.C. Hall. N.Y. (1910): 281-304.

⁷ Herman's paternal grandfather, Thomas Melvill had participated in the Boston Tea Party at the age of twenty-two. His mother was 'the cousin of the grandest living New Yorker of all, Stephen Van Rensselaer, the Eighth (or "Last") Patroon, who ruled from the Manor House at the north edge of Albany, his feudal privileges intact' (Parker, 1996: 3). Melville's maternal grandfather, General Peter Gansevoort had in 1777 become the 'hero of Fort Stanwix' when he defended the fort against British occupation (Parker, 1996: 4).

The maternal power wielded by Mary Glendinning may make him the descendant of heroes, but it leaves him emasculated, one with whom nature proves 'ambiguous...in the end' (13). Falling in love with Lucy Tartan, he is merely obeying his mother's dictates, becoming her 'proud, loving, docile, vigorous boy' (20). His own masculinity becomes ambivalent as a result.

Me she loveth with pride's love; in me she thinks she seeth her own curled and
haughty beauty; before my glass she stands, - pride's priestess - and to her
mirrored image, not to me, she offers up her offerings of kisses. Oh, small
thanks I owe thee, Favorable Goddess, that didst clothe this form with all the
beauty of a man, that so thou mightest hide from me all the truth of a man.
Now I see that in all his beauty a man is snared, and made stone-blind, as the
worm within its silk (90).

Maternal narcissism leaves the boy blind as Oedipus, without the power to rule that Oedipus had, and with a masculinity locked in the 'silk' of the feminine, and become a 'worm'. That 'silk' cocoon is simultaneously suggestive of the womb/tomb and the phallic, so that gender identities are deliberately muddled.

Melville questions the Oedipal narrative by making Pierre take the place of the father in order to protect him, and rid himself of the mother. 'Marrying' Isabel in order to protect his father's name is to preserve a lie, and makes the action of the young 'saviour' in Young America merely foolhardy and the American Eden a place built on a lie. Despite this, however, Pierre's actual castration complex is shown to be more fear of the mother than of the father, the very sense of castration his father felt. He recalls the death-bed scene where the father spoke deliriously of a daughter, and the imagery is reminiscent of the novel's early reference to Palmyra's broken temple. 'And Pierre but dimly saw his father's face; and the fire on the hearth lay in a broken temple of wonderful coals; then a strange, plaintive, infinitely pitiable, low voice, stole forth from the testered bed; and Pierre heard, - "My daughter! My daughter!"' (70) The erect temple of manhood is broken here, just as the hearth's fire is dimmed. The rule of the female in the household, as was the case in Melville's own household as a child, has taken the fire from traditional male power and transferred it to a memory of old sires and dying fathers, whose force is but 'dimly' felt.

Trying to preserve the father's name is another way of trying to recapture male power now in the hands of the 'Dowager Duchess Glendinning' (14). The fact that such preservation is no more than the preservation of a lie, protecting the father's apparent indiscretion, undoes the value of the 'heroic' act even before it begins, and makes the son's sacrifice pointless. The American Eden, in Melville's reading, carries a lie at its heart, making all sacrifices to preserve it ironic. Melville, then, is not only deconstructing the Oedipal myth of Franklinesque 'natural rights'⁸ on which America has based much of its assertion to the land, but also the Christian narrative which lies behind it as the myth which is used by white America to give itself reason to act as conqueror over what it perceives as the 'evil' (Indian) serpent in the garden. Marrying the 'dark-lantern' (141) 'serpent' who still carries 'angelic childlikeness' (140), Pierre 'marries' archetypal 'otherness'. She may be the Indian, or she may be the slave or mulatto, not much different from Ishmael himself. 'No more, oh no more, dear Pierre, can I endure to be an outcast in the world for which our dear Savior died' (64), Isabel says in her letter to him. It is also, however, to marry the *serpent* who is temptress, for by doing so the lie on which Eden is based becomes perpetuated and protected.

One of the great difficulties in interpreting the novel, is the ambiguity of Isabel's character. She *is* the serpent in the garden, but the serpent is also innocent. She is both temptress and victim. She is a version of the phallic after which Pierre longs in order to have power over his mother, and profoundly feminine and sexual, in a way that the 'airy' Lucy is not. While Isabel can lift 'her dry burning eyes of long-fringed fire to him' with all the mixed suggestions of fatal, hellish sexuality, Lucy, by contrast, is 'heavenly fleece' and 'one husbandly embrace would break her airy zone' (58). Eden has a sense of the maternal and pure, the *alma mater*, but it will not bring the same kind of sexual energy that Isabel elicits with her 'magnetic night' and 'atmospheric spell' (151). In *Pierre* both the Edenic heavenly and the hellish charm of the vibrantly sexual are shown to be sterile and built on falsities.

If it is difficult to grasp why Melville is developing such 'Cretan labyrinths' (176) as the narrator himself calls them, one obvious answer is that the sexuality both 'heaven' and 'hell', Eden and its alternative, offer is compromised by a gender confusion. Isabel is as much the phallic snake as Mary Glendinning is full of 'reserved strength and masculineness' (180). It seems surprising, then, that Lucy should herself be presented in not dissimilar terms,

⁸ On Benjamin Franklin's 'natural rights' to the land theory see Jehlen (1986) and Chapter 1 above.

but she is. Pierre finds himself in the midst of different types of women, one domineering and manly, one light and airy, one dark and serpentine but strongly sensual, each of which is as much a representative of the masculine as she is of the feminine.

Pierre's unexpected entry into Lucy's bedroom (39), is a Freudian 'peep at paradise' (40) nodding at *Typee* with its hidden repressions. It both foreshadows the breakdown of their relationship, and reveals the deeper psychological ambiguities which Pierre hides from himself. The bedroom is 'holy ground' and a 'secret inner shrine' reflecting the 'piety of love' between the two. But the bed is covered 'in snow white' and hides 'an unbidden, most miserable presentiment', which '[steals]' upon the young worshipful man. The presentiment is of a future with two beds, not one, the second a reflected one, suggests, like the innocent white of the bed, a sexually barren future. What Pierre 'sees' is really his own unconscious at work.

But while the barrenness of the future is suggested by whiteness and Lucy's racial, supposedly moral 'spotlessness', an even more hidden reason for future barrenness is suggested by some of the ambiguous meanings Melville inserts into the symbols of feminine innocence. Lucy's fluffy slipper 'peeping into view from under the narrow nether curtains of the bed' is an all too Freudian object of fetishism, but it must be read in relation to an earlier event, where Pierre, the subservient boy/husband/brother to his mother, 'noticing the straggling tie of her slipper, knelt down and secured it' (15). The mother's slipper suggests a phallic symbol of power, not just hidden female hair, as one may assume Lucy's slipper to suggest. Similarly, the bedroll in Lucy's chamber, though it contains 'sacred secrets' suggestive of the feminine, is equally a phallic 'roll', a scroll of 'vellum' whose text remains undeciphered and secret. The 'secret' seems not to be just female impenetrability, but that a part of the desire for the woman Lucy is a deflected desire for the mother, of whom Lucy is a less threatening version. While this may be straightforwardly Oedipal, the phallic symbolism suggests that the desire for the mother is also a desire for the phallic power she has taken from the father. And if this is the case, then desire for Lucy and mother Mary becomes a substitute for a desire for the father. It is not merely the narrative of incest Melville is exploring by the symbolism of secret chambers. Incest here is itself a cover for another form of unacceptable desire. The hidden text of this archetypal Freudian scene of male castration and anxiety ('bow now, Pierre, bow', 39) turns out to be more homosexual desire for the power of the father, using the female as masculine fetish, than it is desire for the female.

Encountering Isabel as the fiery phallic serpent, whose face presents an image ‘inexplicably mysterious to him in the portrait’ (85) of the father, Pierre encounters a version of the father. And if he had sat in ‘midnight reverie before the chair-portrait’ (85), where ‘reverie’ would have been understood, as Vincent Bertolini (1996: 719) points out, as a euphemism for masturbation,⁹ the suggestion is of a homosexual attraction. This is as much the ‘secret’ within paradise as the father’s own ‘sin’ of illegitimate fatherhood. Maternal Eden is not necessarily maternal at all, but suffering from an anxious paternity and an even more anxious sonship which does not so much desire to replace the father, as to marry him, and become his consort. This is why Pierre longs for the sister, because it is a sister the father spoke of on his deathbed, and not a son. Rejecting his son, and keeping a hand ‘ashy white as a leper’s’ (71) where the little daughter’s was meant to be, the father instils in the son a lasting desire to replace the father’s lost love in the form of a sister, who ‘had been omitted from the text’ (7), so that Pierre’s story becomes one dominated by compensating for the lack of the father’s affection, keeping to women but making them versions of the man.

When the female replaces male as the power figure in Eden, full Oedipal resolution is prevented. Behind expansionist and phallic America seeking to kill its ‘whales’, Melville suggests, lies an anxious, feminized masculinity. ‘There was a striking personal resemblance between [mother and son]’ (5), says the narrator. In the absence of a clearly defined sexuality, ‘fraternal love’ of a sister becomes the most reliable alternative, but it does not allow for full entry into the Symbolic because gender identity, and therefore power structures, remain half-formed.

⁹ Citing, among others, Ik Marvel’s *Reveries of a Bachelor* (1850), Bertolini shows how acceptance of the ‘sister/angel wife’ helps the male protagonist in his reverie before the bachelor fire, so that love can ‘master self’. Beneath the ‘shadowy dreams’ of the reverie actually lie unfulfilled homosexual desire. The relationship between the ‘black’ Isabel and the white Pierre, like that between Ishmael and Queequeg, can also be read in terms of sentimental homosexual literature, where the white man, as in Joseph La Vallée’s *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans* (1801) was condemned for interracial benevolence, but not for seeing the black man as erotic object. See John Saillant (1995: 408). For further discussions of the sentimental literature of the time see Barker-Benfield (1976) and Samuels (1992).

In a world of 'no paternity' (199), as Pierre declares of himself, and therefore of absent paternal histories, as was the case with Melville and countless other young men, where the history of the Fatherland is an elusive myth perpetuated by mothers, all men have are images of past paternity: paintings of dead fathers, grandfathers' phallic 'phaetons' (named after the boy-god who rode too close to the sun in search of Helios his father), military vests too large for them, and batons only their mothers dare hold. It is a world where the mother has become dominant and it is really the Motherland for whom the boy/man longs, not just as a place of conquest, but of nurture. Like Enceladus only half-born out of Terra whom Pierre dreams of while writing in the city (347), the individual child remains trapped in a twilight world neither quite male nor female, neither child nor adult. This is the same hermaphroditic 'twi-light', between-two-worlds Isabel inhabits (282), just as 'twilight and peace' (271) is her constant refrain.

This very twilight world is suggested by Pierre's escape into the only part of his maternal Eden with which he is comfortable, the bisexual world of the Memnon Stone (133). It is one which not only foreshadows the departure for the stony city with Isabel and Delly, but which also figures the gender confusions which prevent a full resolution of the Oedipus complex. Having encountered Isabel for the first time, heard her 'Delphic shriek' (48) and had his first interview with her, Pierre questions the structures of power and maternal order that govern him. The questioning, however, leads to refuge in a place both phallic and vaginal. It is a pillared stone, containing a hollow, and covered with suggestive 'Mosses', strongly reminiscent of 'Mosses from an Old Manse' and Melville's own sexual attraction for Hawthorne. The stone, legendarily marked with the signature of 'Solomon the Wise' (133), a 'queer and crotchety conceit', reminds us of the stunted pillar of Palmyra's ruins. The mass could topple over from 'one seed from the beak of the smallest flying bird' (134). Planting the seed of androgynous love within it could bring the whole edifice down, like the Orders of gender authority found in Pierre's Eden. Rejecting the masculine height, the young Pierre enters the cleft at the bottom of the stone, as if entering the womb. The 'earth mother' is herself androgynous, a primitive not unlike Queequeg in his coffin. When he eventually emerges from his 'interspace', as the stone is denominated, it is to leave Eden, both as a literal place and as a figurative idea. As a result it is to reject the Edenic Oedipal 'master' narrative, since it has become the province of a feminine power in which the masculine has lost its identity.

Rewriting the 'Master' Narrative

In the biblical narrative leaving Eden comes after a Fall, a denial of the Law of the Father, temptation by the serpent and the woman Eve, which brings a loss of innocence. Adam must toil and labour to pay recompense to the Father. *Pierre* follows the biblical structure, but makes the 'fall' a denial of the Law of the mother, and an attempt to fulfill the father's wishes. The story becomes a 'counter-narrative' to the biblical one, but also to the Oedipal one since it is not the father who is 'killed' but the mother. Rejecting Eden leads to the rejection of a number of other 'master' narratives as well. Entry into the dark city with its phallic towers is a search for a new form of masculinity, but it is also a rejection of race and class divisions which ensured the continuing survival of Saddle Meadows. Writing a book, as Pierre seeks to do, also becomes another 'master' narrative, in effect a rejection of the one which has defined him. When Pierre's and Melville's books collapse into each other, as they do at the end of the novel, the final 'counter-narrative' is enjoined.

Class, race and gender divisions keep the Eden of Saddle Meadows in its own insular haven. But outside that haven, these divisions are seen by the narrator to be a master narrative which must be questioned. Moving with Isabel to the dark city is ostensibly a move into the masculine with its dark towers and its infernoes of hell (240), but it is a masculine which is shown to be ambiguous. On the one hand it is to go to a cousin (Glen Stanly) for whom Pierre has had what Melville clearly intends to be a form of homosexual attraction, 'beneath the cestus of Venus' (217), and on the other it is to enter the infernal city, a 'babel of persons and voices' (240) whose sexuality is explicit and multiracial: 'The torn Madras handkerchiefs of negresses, the red gowns of yellow girls, hanging in tatters from their naked bosoms, mixed with the rent dresses of deep-rouged white women, and the split coats, checkered vests [reminiscent of Queequeg's tattoos], and protruding shirts of pale, or whiskered, or haggard, of mustached fellows of all nations' (240). Male and female are mixed here in what seems a far cry from the 'rural red and white' of the country. It is, however, really just an extension of the same experience, the colours hardly different, only less repressed, just as the Tower of the Apostles, with its vaginal 'apertures' (265) and phallic erectness, is a less hidden version of the ambiguous Memnon stone. The city is not so much in opposition to the country, as much as it is a less repressed version of the country. What is in question in the city, however, is which

authority is in control, for the assured and time honoured forms of Eden do not apply here. The result is that the experience of the city may be seen as its own 'counter-narrative' in that it rejects the neat closures of the country's authoritarian forms and opens a world of race, class and gender exploration which is disallowed in Eden.

The master narratives of race and class dominate Pierre's attempt to find an alternative to his inheritance. The 'narrative' that keeps the small Glendinning family of mother and child and absent fathers together, is one based on sublimation and repression. The Glendinnings have stolen the land they call their paradise. 'The Glendinning deeds by which their estate had so long been held, bore the cyphers of three Indian kings, the aboriginal and only noble conveyancers of those noble woods and plains. Thus loftily, in the days of his circumscribed youth, did Pierre glance along the background of his race; little recking of that maturer and larger interior development, which should forever deprive these things of their full power of pride in his soul' (6). Paradise is built on a number of lies which have become its 'master' narrative. And Pierre's father's illegitimate child is reminiscent of many of the 'holy' fathers, America's ancestors, and Melville's own father,¹⁰ who have mixed their blood with other women, had illegitimate children by them, as countless slave owners were doing as Melville wrote. But the secret of such ancestry, which would confound the Oedipal drive which sees the 'pure' white son as the proper husband to the virginal mother earth, is kept from the son by the mother. For the displacement of the desire for the pure mother onto the 'less pure' black woman slave by the white man, kept a boy to his matriarchal mother/wife, is a thing not to be told. To tell is to compromise the slaveholding mother. Silence keeps her Virgin Mary, while allowing the man to express his sexual appetites on another.¹¹

¹⁰ For evidence that Melville may have had an illegitimate sister see Parker (1996: 65).

¹¹ Just one example of white maternal collusion in the sexual abuse of black women is offered by Harriet Jacobs, who mothered a number of children by her owner, 'Dr Flint'. In a letter to Amy Post she told how she 'never opened my life to Mrs. Willis concerning my children. In the charitableness of her own heart, she sympathized with me and never asked their origin. My suffering she knew'. 4th April 1853. Cited in Davis and Gates, eds., (1990: 266).

On the one hand it would not be difficult to accuse Melville of a kind of racism in his not openly declaring Isabel to be a slave or mulatto, leaving only suggestive hints; her 'jet' hair (112), her weeping for sorrow like an outcast in the wilderness (64), her image as 'Gorgon' (66), the fact that Pierre is depicted as the Egyptian Memnon, (135) when Egypt was a standard slave symbol for exile and imprisonment, and the slaves interpreted themselves as exiled Israelites.¹² Obviously, he wants her to represent the outcast generally, and not limit that function to the slave. On the other hand, however, his very veiling of the fact introduces the same technique he uses in both 'Bartleby' and 'Benito Cereno', leaving the reader to encounter his own prejudices and blindness as he will, cynically leaving the racist public to impose its master narrative even in the face of one which undermines it.¹³

The 'Delphic shriek' and the 'mystic face' (48) of the dark, inscrutable Isabel, who looks like death bringing 'immortal sadness' (112) introduces her own narrative which carries little or no history and has no point of verification. It is another version of the slave narrative, of a lost paternity and lost maternity. Isabel has no verifiable past, except obscure memories of living in dark places like the one where 'some of its occupants departed; some changed from smiles to tears; some went moping all the day; some grew as savages and outrageous, and were dragged below by dumb-like men into deep places, that I knew nothing of, but dismal sounds came through the lower floor, groans and clanking fallings, as of iron in straw' (119).

The racial markers Isabel carries ('Gorgon', 'Medusa', 'Dark', 'Evil', 'Silent', 'Fire' and 'Snake', to mention just a few) stereotype her in much the way common to the race theories of the time espoused by the likes of Josiah Nott and Robert Knox. Central to such marking is the relation between sex and race, with the notion that depravity in one is the result (and marker) of depravity and difference in the other. Any fraternizing between races would lead

¹² Phillis Wheatley would still see the Africa she came from as 'Egyptian gloom' from which 'thy gracious hand/Brought me'. See 'To the University of Cambridge, in New England'. Silverman, ed., (1971: 348). But later slave rhetoric turned this notion around. Slavery was exile in Egypt and the promised land was the north, and songs of deliverance and salvation were sustained in an oral tradition, as in: 'O Mary don' you weep don' you moan/Pharoah's army got drowned'. See Melvin Dixon, 'Singing Swords: The Literary Legacy of Slavery', in Davis and Gates, eds., (1990: 300).

¹³ Nancy Sweet (1998: 27) cites Henry A. Murray as suggesting that it was 'partly to avoid a barrage of gun shots that Melville concealed his truths in symbol, allegories and myths'. Race, slavery and homosexuality were just the topics which might elicit such gun shots.

not only to a breakdown of 'racial purity', such as the 'mulatto',¹⁴ but also sexual depravity. Following Josiah Nott, who in 1843 asserted that intermarriage would result in the extermination of white and black races (Young, 1995: 125), Knox insists (quite syllogistically) in his 1850 edition of *The Races of Men: A Fragment*, attraction and repugnance between races are a 'natural' way of telling them apart (Young, 1995: 15). By showing Pierre's repressed attraction for Isabel, and that the attraction is incestuous, Melville is not only contradicting these racial typologies, but also making the point that the sexual attraction for the 'other' is as much a love/hate for the 'darker', more repressed side of the self as for another being. To sleep with slaves, he suggests, is also to sleep with America's 'sisters'.¹⁵

¹⁴ On the prevalence of the 'Mulatto' in Nineteenth-Century Sentimental literature see: Susan Gillman, 'The Mulatto, Tragic or Triumphant? The Nineteenth-Century American Race Melodrama', in Shirley Samuels, ed., (1992: 221-243). The 'slave' child's killing of the white father becomes, in Twain's manuscript version of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, for instance, a dominant motif, foreshadowed by *Pierre*.

¹⁵ Robert S. Levine (1999) has shown in an important article, 'Pierre's Blackened Hand' how the novel deals with genealogy and miscegenation, both the Glendennings' and the Gansevoorts'. *Pierre*, in his reading, deconstructs the 'taint' within the family's history, presents horses and slaves as equals in the grandfather's eye. Pierre's 'blackened hand' when it is burnt in the fire in which he burns his father's portrait, is a symbol of a racial blackness lurking beneath, it matches Isabel's, and both together die with her hair as 'ebon vines' over them, suggesting further dark genealogies. The 'Black Swan Inn', to which Pierre takes Isabel and Delly after eloping, is a reference, Levine shows, to Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, the 'black swan', a renowned black singer of the 1850s.

As the 'lack' at the centre of Pierre's family narrative, Isabel *is* the dark place. As the 'half-sister' orphaned child of a mysterious French mother, and as the 'dark' lady, she symbolises the black, female and orphaned 'otherness', the lost narrative inhabiting antebellum society. As hybrid she carries opposing markers of identity - poverty presented regally, darkness and otherness presented as profoundly 'present', innocence and its opposite in one body, and the embodiment of Pierre's unconscious desire for both darkness and self-destruction. Coming from Post-revolutionary France, she is a figure also of the struggle for social equality, innocent victimhood, and the flotsam escaping tyranny. In the post-1850 American context, she is a fugitive slave, who, after Melville's father-in-law, Judge Lemuel Shaw's decision to return fugitives to the south,¹⁶ was uncertain of any legal support from the north, and felt justly abandoned by the 'Father' north. She is in this sense continuing the Oedipal search for paternity, and finds it in the brother/lover/father figure of Pierre himself.

¹⁶ On Shaw's involvement in the Fugitive Slave Act see Parker (1996: 817-819).

Ironically, Isabel replaces the mother by embodying the very thing Pierre thinks he is eschewing by caring magnanimously for her, pride and uniqueness. 'First, this wonderful story of the girl had displaced all commonness and prosaicness from his soul;' (128). Rejecting his parental class as unjustly proud and elitist, he falls into a deeper form of pride, that of his soul. Attempting to find his masculine identity in a rejection of the race and class pride for which the mother has come to stand, Pierre does little more than fall into the trap set him by his forebears. On the one hand the racial and class 'counter-narrative' is shown to be no counter-narrative at all, but a figment of Pierre's imagination. On the other hand, however, Melville suggests that despite Pierre's superficially self-righteous scheme to help the outsider and right his father's wrongs, the gaping hole of silence that is the history of the slave and the mulatto may still be interpreted as a counter-narrative which rejects the parameters set by the master, even a beneficent one. Isabel *is* unique and regal, another version of the Queen of Saddle Meadows, whose 'Nubian power' (145) makes her representative of the 'peasant-like... simplicity' in their midst. The 'unassuming maid', like all slaves, becomes in Pierre's eyes, a 'dark, regal being' (152), so that in a sense Melville's narrator undermines Pierre by showing the regal in all creatures, even black slaves. The 'inscrutable', as Isabel is often called, whose light is 'lidded' and the lid locked (141), can have readings imposed upon it, and so be made racially 'other' or racially 'pure', whichever way suits at the time. Pierre merely swops one for the other because it suits him. But that inscrutability, like the whale's, and like Queequeg's, can also be seen as standing alone, a counter-narrative to those seeking to write its story. In a similar fashion, Queequeg was able, in his limited way, to step outside the master narrative of black/white, master/slave by speaking with his inscrutable body. 'Bartleby' will end by giving up all speech in a kind of nihilism. In *Pierre* Melville finds himself between these two extremes. He has not yet come to the level of pessimism he will reach after *Moby-Dick's* commercial failure.

Here he gives the subaltern Isabel a narrative tool not unlike Queequeg's tattoos - the mystical guitar which she buys from a peddler one day while, fittingly, milking cows. Like the tattoos, the guitar returns us to a pre-thetic maternal world of origins. It suggests an alternative, sublimated Eden, an imaginary womb. Her narrative is artless and simple, and develops from a world where the body and mind are still one. Her 'mind's hand' gives her clues (153) to meanings, and her story is told 'in a manner so gently confiding, so entirely artless, so almost peasant-like in its simplicity, and dealing in some details so little sublimated

in themselves' (152) that Pierre cannot but believe them. The sublimations of Saddle Meadows do not apply to Isabel. The guitar is a version of Isabel's lost mother, singing to her and, shaped like a woman, pregnant with her story. 'All the wonders that are unimaginable and unspeakable; all these wonders are translated in the mysterious melodiousness of the guitar. It knows all my past history' (125). Like the birth of jazz as the speech of the slave and the keeper of slave history, the guitar keeps Isabel's origins as counter-narrative. Even her speech is, in a sense, pre-thetic, and a version of the Edenic Imaginary, a kind of collective unconscious, for her own tongue teaches her thoughts.

I have had no training of any sort. All my thoughts well up in me; I know not whether they pertain to the old bewilderings or not; but as they are, they are, and I can not alter them, for I had nothing to do with putting them in my mind, and I never affect any thoughts, and I never adulterate any thoughts; but when I speak, think forth from the tongue; speech being sometimes more the thought; so, often, my own tongue teaches me new things (122-123).

If she has no conscious history to tell, her mysterious being exudes a narrative which is almost bodily, so that in her body itself she represents the lives of others who have been kept silent by the 'head' of racist authority. 'No more, oh no more, dear Pierre, can I endure to be an outcast in the world, for which the dear Savior died' (64). She echoes countless Negro spirituals in their cry for deliverance from bondage.

Turning Pierre into her 'brother' is to turn the white master narrative on its head, and it is both to spur the birth of Oedipus, and to undo him. 'For thee thy sacred father is no more a saint' (65), says Pierre after reading Isabel's letter. And after being cast out by his mother for taking in Isabel, he declares melodramatically, 'Henceforth, cast-out Pierre hath no paternity' (199), echoing Ishmael, that illegitimate son of a slave woman. Seeing the Eden of Saddle Meadows for what it is beneath its veneer, he may be echoing Frederick Douglass's accusation of the fathers who had 'basely stooped', to 'palter with us in a double sense:/And keep the word of promise to the ear,/But break it to the heart'. Pierre's version of the same declaration is, 'I will be impious, for piety hath juggled me, and taught me to revere, where I should spurn. From all idols I tear all veils; henceforth I will see the hidden things;'(66). History has confined him to a master narrative as restrictive as it has the slave. But in his breaking of the confinement,

he approaches a hubris not unlike Ahab's, asserting that he can, alone, 'tear the veil' or 'strike through the mask'. Choosing Isabel, he presumes he is turning on its head the standard Christian narrative offered by the establishment like the Rev. Falsegrave, who is happy to accede to Mary Glendinning's demands to reject Delly, despite its patently uncharitable nature. Instead, he seeks the 'inflexible rule of holy right' (106) over Falsegrave's 'contingencies' where 'millions of circumstances modify all moral questions' (102). In the process, however, Pierre plunges forward in a way not unlike Ahab's, full of hubris and not questioning the 'innocence' of Isabel's narrative.

The danger in her narrative which Pierre refuses to see, is that its confinement to the mysterious and the maternal, via the guitar, which she sees as 'Mother - mother - mother' (150), is another version of being kept in the Imaginary and not finding either sexual or psychological differentiation. Turning to Isabel as a way of rewriting his own master narrative with her 'mistress' one, Pierre is falling into another trap in which the maternal phallic dominates. It places value and meaning in an intuitive, 'aboriginal' self which assumes moral responsibility to be its own province. Such an assumption, both 'majestical and menacing', is to Pierre a 'beautiful audacity' (160), but is to the reader and the narrator mere 'Mystery! Mystery! Mystery of Isabel!' (150), words which are 'wondrous, rebounding, chanted', but which are ultimately another 'Cretan labyrinth' (176).

Following Isabel's mystery Pierre plunges into what may be seen as a version of Emersonian 'self-reliance'. 'Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string', says Emerson in 'Self-Reliance' (1895: 11), and the image of the guitar evokes Melville's. When Isabel thinks with the hands of her mind she reminds us of Pierre's earlier 'thought veins', body and mind still combined. Again, this is suggestive of Emerson. 'Every man', he says, 'discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind, and his involuntary perceptions, and knows that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due' (1895: 15). Self-reliance becomes here a return to the instinctive, the simplistic and the pre-lapsarian. In its own way it is a counter narrative to the Oedipal master one which insists on a transference from the maternal Imaginary to the intellectual and paternal Symbolic. Isabel has not entered the Mirror Stage and remains in the maternal cord of her guitar. She can be an 'aboriginal self', as Emerson puts it (1895: 15) and do what he asks of his hearers in 'The Divinity School Address': 'Let me admonish you, first of all, to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil'

(1895: 579).

In a world where race, class and gender are seemingly fixed entities, and where the attempt to override that fixity results in social ostracism, such self-reliance appears brave, a version of the new Adam and the new Eve, an anti-Oedipus which does not fall into the master narrative dictated by society. But Melville feels, it seems, that he must rewrite even this anti-slavery text. Self-reliance is at heart a form of hedonism, and it is able to use what appear to be unquestionable moral stances to support what is actually subjective and relativistic morality. This Emersonian morality is much the same as Plotinus Plinlimmon's, whose pamphlet Pierre encounters on the stage into the city.

The distinction Plinlimmon makes between 'Horological' and 'Chronometrical' morality may be interpreted as another way of ensuring all morality to be provisional. 'The chronometer carried to China, is from Greenwich' (211), says the pamphlet, suggesting that there ought not to be any assumption of an absolute 'truth' or right 'time' imposed on any. Morality is horological not chronometrical. 'I hold that all our so-called wisdom is likewise but provisional' (211), so that 'as the China watches are right as to China, so the Greenwich chronometers must be wrong as to China' (212). Emerson's syllogistic arguments in favour of the self's own 'genuine actions' follow much the same lines, though they appear on the surface to be at odds. 'The intuition of the moral sentiment', says Emerson in the 'Divinity School Address, 'is an insight of the perfection of the laws of the soul. These laws execute themselves. They are out of time, out of space, and not subject to circumstance' (1895: 573). But taking that knowledge of morality into the space of 'intuition', as Pierre desires to do, and as Isabel does, is another way of making all morality subjective, relative to the self's own limited and provisional judgements. Plinlimmon and Emerson speak the same language of 'heavenly soul' (213) from different points of view, just as Pierre and Isabel, seeking 'all heaven [to] justify them' (173), are actually falling into moral relativism. They must still play the role, to 'assume before the world, by secret rites' (173), wear the mask they eschew, in order to achieve their 'right', so that it is compromised before they even make the attempt.

Rewriting the master narrative of slavery and class distinctions becomes an exercise in moral subjectivity, Melville suggests. Melville's criticism of his tragic hero, as is his implicit criticism of Emerson's all-too-unquestioning self-aggrandizement, is that he does not, in fact, make the discovery Oedipus does. He does not, ultimately, accept responsibility for his actions, even unconscious ones brought on by the whims of the Gods - or in this case, the parents. 'Lo!

'I leave corpses wherever I go!' (206) is Pierre's adolescent and self-pitying cry. Attempting to live the life of moral certitude, dismissing Plinlimmon and Falsegrave, he still falls into relativism, which turns out to be another version of self-reliant hubris. 'Good and Evil', says Locke, as Nietzsche would later,

are nothing but Pleasure and Pain, or that which occasions, or procures Pleasure or Pain to us. *Morally Good and Evil*, then, is only the Conformity or Disagreement of our voluntary Actions to some Law, whereby Good and Evil is drawn on us from the Will and Power of the Law-Maker.¹⁷

The relativism of that space, is akin to the 'interspace' of the Memnon stone, and to Isabel's 'twilight', the instinctive, historyless world she inhabits. When father and mother, conscious and unconscious, reality and imagination become confused, as they do in the androgynous Memnon stone, and in the figure of Isabel, and these are all confused with the effort to right/rewrite a nation's political wrongs, the individual comes to be in an 'interspace' between genders, morals and actions which leave him sterile. Pierre and Isabel can have no children except their unending book. Stuck in a sterile, androgynous world, and sitting in the 'interspace' of the androgynous Tower of the Apostles, his attempt to rewrite the master narrative of Oedipus leads him into the trap of a sexualized space where the imagination knows itself neither male nor female.

¹⁷ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II .xxviii, 5.

The Androgynous Text: From Abjection to Hysteria

When Pierre, Isabel and Lucy live together in the city, and Pierre attempts to write his novel, he falls into the greatest relativism, a text which one may describe as 'androgynous' since it is written both by himself and by the spirit of Isabel and her guitar. In the process, however, it has no fixed aim and little Symbolic identity, since it remains, like a pre-thetic child, in the arms of the maternal/paternal gender confusion which still besets Pierre. Isabel is mother and father, sister and wife, a mirror of his desires yet alien to him. In a state of the Imaginary, undifferentiated psyche such as this, no text can come to full birth.

Pierre is left, like Enceladus 'writhing from out the imprisoning earth' (345) in an abject space between maternal earth and phallic city. He is in the same twilight zone in which the abject Ahab finds himself. For abjection, as Anna Smith (1996: 151) describes Julia Kristeva's theory, blurs the distinction between self and text, text and body, rejecting the maternal womb of the Imaginary, but also not accepting fully the Paternal Symbolic.

When the body fails to acquire a coherent psychic and conceptual spatial organisation, there has been a corresponding failure to perceive the physical space occupied by the body. Obviously these two modes of perception (interior and exterior) are interrelated, and abjection occurs when their mutual differentiation is frustrated.

This lack of sexual and moral differentiation which both Pierre and Isabel begin to experience when together, as something 'magnetic' and a 'spell' (151) traps them in their world of twilight interspace. Their own narratives make each a 'states-prisoner of letters' (340). Any writing attempted in such a state will itself risk becoming poisoned by the inability to distinguish between imagination and reality. 'No common-place is ever effectually got rid of, except by essentially emptying one's self of it into a book; for once trapped in a book, then the book can be put into the fire, and all will be well' (258). But Pierre cannot finish his book, and leave it to the world of the Symbolic, the 'fire'. He must nurse it to death, as it nurses him to death. He is 'swayed ... by the widely-explosive mental tendencies of the profound events which had lately befallen him, and the unprecedented situation in which he now found himself' (283). The result is a desire to 'climb Parnassus with a pile of folios on his back' (283), just as Ahab carries

the 'piled centuries since paradise' on his. To conquer his paternity Pierre must conquer his own text, his own story. Melville must use the novel to conquer his. Neither, however, can manage to do so, because their paternity is indistinguishable from their maternity, and not yet having completed the Oedipal journey, they remain stuck in the Imaginary, collapsing into the maternal narrative.

The sufferer of abjection remains permanently a voyager, always straying, torn between opposing drives and lacking, as Smith puts it (1996: 150), 'a strong third term (the paternal function) that will attach him securely to language and the symbolic.' 'Pierre is neuter now' (360), says Pierre at the end of the story, suggesting not only 'castration' of his attempt to survive the city, but also the attempt to rewrite his paternity. 'Neuter' leaves him neither in the female space of the Imaginary nor in the male space of the Symbolic. Instead, his narrative shares with Isabel's the mixed gender that keeps them undifferentiated, entwined in each other. Like Agnello in Dante's *Inferno*, they are 'nor double now,/Nor only one!' (85). Giving him a narrative that shapes his life, Isabel steals it, as her life has been stolen by his narrative of privilege. 'Then they changed; they coiled together, and entangledly stood mute' (192). Their search, and Melville's, is for a new narrative which is not the stifling, unbending line of the patriarchal, nor the false Eden of the maternal, but one that is able to find the middle point between the two. But their inseparability, like their 'entwining', leaves them 'mute'.

When Pierre begins to write his novel, it will become a journey into self-reflexivity. Their two voices, hermaphroditic, will be indistinguishable, but the new story will be untellable. 'Pierre felt chapter by chapter born of [the guitar's] wondrous suggestiveness; but alas! Eternally incapable of being translated into words' (282). Because the narrative voice has no 'objective correlative' outside itself by which to measure its verity, everything is but surface. The image Melville uses is the same one he used at the end of *Moby-Dick*, but the meaning now is somewhat different.

But far as any geologist has yet gone down into the world, it is found to consist of nothing but surface stratified on surface. To its axis, the world being nothing but superinduced superficies. By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid - and no body is there! - appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of man (285).

The sarcophagus which was a buoyant, floating signifier pregnant with meaning in *Moby-Dick*, whose surface was used at least as the womb of the text, has now become mere, bodiless surface whose soul is vacant. It is covered in night and meaningless darkness. The most disturbing aspect of this declaration is its tone. We hardly know who is speaker, whether the narrator, or Pierre himself, or Melville too, or all three. The result is a fusion of voices in which author, narrator and character are deliberately mingled, as Pierre and Isabel are mingled. It is reminiscent of the abject world of Ahab unable to distinguish between himself and the whale. Pierre even sounds like Ahab.

Ye heavens, that have hidden yourselves in the black hood of the night, I call to ye! If to follow Virtue to her uttermost vista, where common souls never go; if by that I take hold on hell, and the uttermost virtue, after all, prove but a betraying pander to the monstrousest vice, - then close in and crush me, ye stony walls, and into one gulf let all things tumble together! (273)

‘Bartleby’ will fulfill this prophecy, crushed by the ‘wall’ of meaninglessness. But for now Melville still deals with one who carries within him the false assumption of virtue. Should desire and reality not coincide, and self-reliance betray, the individual subject, or nation, falls to railing against the system that defines what virtue and vice are.

The demigods trample on trash, and Virtue and Vice are trash! Isabel, I will write such things - I will gospelize the world anew, and show them deeper secrets than the Apocalypse! - I will write it, I will write it! (273)

Acceptance of the difference between ‘Virtue’ and ‘Vice’ is the product of a resolved Oedipus, and entry into the Symbolic. Rejecting it, but only partially, leaves the subject half-born, caught in ‘Hell’, which is ‘surface stratified on surface’, endless deferral, like constantly returning, like ‘Orpheus finding his Eurydice’ (59), with no redemptive end in sight.

By writing a novel about writing a novel, Melville packs layer upon layer, making novelistic expansionism ultimately fruitless and self-reliance aimless. The writer remains abjectly stuck between layers. The theory of textuality comes to replace the text itself, like the

sounds of the guitar remaining endlessly untranslatable, so that meaning is displaced onto reception. Affected in the latter part of *Pierre* by the negative reception of *Moby-Dick*, Melville's response is to write an even more obscure novel in which anti-realist novelistic technique is taken a step further into open self-reflexivity. If the reading public can see only what it wants and expects to see, collapsing value into reception may be a deliberately abject ploy to show the misguidedness of realist 'truth'. If Melville makes the 'mistake', as Wyn Kelley (1998: 10) has suggested, of writing a self-destructive text, or one in which 'Chronometrical' morality, is shown not to be able to take on novelistic flesh (Rogin, 1983: 178), then the 'mistake' of self-reflexivity may certainly be read as intentional.

Displacing literary value onto the receiving public is one way of 'fathering' one's own text, and an escape route when the text is rejected, because one can dismiss the public as both untutored and an inadequate father. Moreover, it switches paternity/maternity around by turning the harsh rod of public opinion into a womb of creation. Undermining the standard forms of author/public relations, Melville undermines the Oedipal narrative. He does not have to suffer either the 'anxiety of influence', as *Pierre* does, or be concerned about being unreadable, since unreadability is partly his objective. It places the burden of interpretation on the public, not the author. As a result he allows omissions and absences to inform the novel's plot. Examples of these 'omissions' are: the portrait of the father which is hidden by the mother from view, the letter and narrative of Isabel, the absent 'maternal' sounds of her guitar, the Shakespearean joke from *Othello* of the mislaid handkerchief where Isabel reads the initials of her father, the ambiguous paintings at the end, which suggest an interpretive confusion. Just as the narrative progresses by the characters forming suppositions about these absences and confusions, based on their own unconscious desires, as most of *Pierre*'s are, projections of what his unconscious tells him, so, Melville suggests, the absence of meaning at the heart of the text must be filled by reception, and become a projection by the readership. Author and reader collapse into one another.

What remains, however, is the 'talismanic secret' of how to reconcile the receiving world with the creative soul, which, as long as it remains secret, drives the text.

Hereupon then in the soul of the enthusiast youth two armies come to the shock; and unless he prove recreant, or unless he prove gullible, or unless he can find the talismanic secret, to reconcile this world with his own soul, then there is

no peace for him, no slightest truce for him in this life (208).

Without the 'talismanic secret' which might be the key to Pierre interpreting his own text, his history and his sexuality, he remains locked in a psychomachic battle which falls into silence. The failure of his novel and of *Pierre* itself foreshadow Melville's twenty year silence in the Custom House. Its final outcome in *Pierre*, and in parts of Melville's own life,¹⁸ will be hysteria, a catatonic silence akin to Bartleby's.

Hysteria is suggested by the wasting of the physical bodies of Pierre, Isabel, Lucy and Delly, and by the silence that comes to surround them. As Freud and post-Freudians point out, hysteria is characterised by a lack of speech and by the transfer of speech to the site of the body.¹⁹ Michelle Boulous-Walker (1998: 132) explains it as, '... the hysteric's symptoms signal an alarm that some violence or wrong is being committed and that there is an absence of a symbolic language in which to speak these'. Sublimating unfulfilled wishes, the hysteric uses the body to speak, and silence as a response to perceived social disapproval. While traditionally considered a female disorder, the male version of which is hypochondria, one may see in Pierre and Isabel the same symptoms accorded to hysterics in eighteenth and nineteenth-century physiology and psychology. Like 'spleen' and 'melancholia', they are seen as diseases associated, as Bernard Mandeville does, with those of vivid imaginations such as 'the lively, quick-witted, acutely sensitive, profoundly obsessive suffers ... cursed with imaginations that certify their worth'.²⁰ Those most prone to melancholy and hysteria were

¹⁸ Hershel Parker (1996: 62) points out that Maria Melvill was, after her husband's death from insanity 'forever after alert for signs that one or another of her sons might repeat his father's pattern'. Melville's travels in 1856 to England and the Holy Land were the result of being urged by his family to go abroad because of fears for his sanity. See Beaver, ed., (1985: 12).

¹⁹ See Breuer and Freud (1986). In the case of Freud's patient Anna O., for example, Freud shows how the hysteria leads to both loss of use of parts of the body as well as severe changes in linguistic usage (1986: 73-102). His description of Anna O is reminiscent of Isabel: '[She] fell into a twilight state and had a terrifying hallucination. ... She tried to pray but could find no words;... subsequently she could only speak, write and understand English, while her native language remained unintelligible to her for eighteen months'(1986: 55). See also Linda Ruth Williams (1995: 5) and Boulous-Walker (1998: 131) for further descriptions of the relation between hysteria and silence.

²⁰ Mandeville's *Treatise of the Hypochondriac and Hysteric Diseases in Three Dialogues* (1711, 1730), is cited in Foot (1990: 155).

understood by nineteenth-century thinking to be, as Philippa Foot (1990: 155) points out, ‘scholars, those weak, sedentary, and studious martyrs who wear away their eyes and their digestive tracts in their pursuit of phantom truth’.

While Kristeva equates the abject and hysterical, placing both in the Imaginary where they have creative potential, and where even catatonic²¹ body language remains speech, Melville sees hysterical silence less positively. Silence and catatonia may be forms of speech, but they are not readily intelligible.²²

Silence is the general consecration of the universe. Silence is the invisible laying on of the Divine Pontiff’s hands upon the world. Silence is at once the most harmless and the most awful thing in all nature. It speaks of the reserved Forces of Fate. Silence is the only Voice of our God... (204).

Melville’s paean to silence is largely tongue-in-cheek, for as a way of speech, it remains mystical and indecipherable, its meaning relative to who is interpreting, but its tone is itself somewhat hysterical, and it is one of those many places in the text where it is difficult to distinguish between authorial, narrative and figural voices.

²¹ Strictly speaking catatonia and hysteria belong to separate psychological states. The former is a symptom of schizophrenia, while the latter is a dissociative and somatoform disorder. Delly would be classified catatonic when she walks incessantly in her room, as would Lucy when she collapses prone on her bed after Pierre’s departure. Neither, however, would be classified schizophrenic, but rather something along the lines of ‘depersonalisation’. See Oltmans and Emery, eds., (1998: 260-261, 466).

²² French Feminists like Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement have offered opposing views about the nature of (mostly women’s) hysteria and silence. The latter argues that ‘the hysteric does not write, does not produce, does nothing - nothing other than make things circulate without inscribing them’. Cixous disagrees, declaring that the hysteric, while deprived of direct speech, is nevertheless able to burst the family structure to pieces, ‘with a force capable of demolishing those structures’. See Clement and Cixous, ‘The Guilty One’, in *The Newly Born Woman*. U of Minnesota Press, (1986: 37, 154). Cited in Boulous-Walker (1998: 130). Elaine Showalter in *Hystories* (Picador, 1997, 1998) has shown that hysteria may be understood as much as a male disease as female, a fact which has consistently been denied in traditional medicine and psychology.

Attempting to rewrite the Oedipal by recreating a narrative free from the chains of history, Pierre and Isabel fall into silence, largely because, in the wake of being both ‘neuter’ and to all intents and purposes, orphans, silence becomes a counter-paternity. Ambiguous in its essence, it carries the double meaning inherent in ‘Silence is the only Voice of our God’, much like the whale’s whiteness, for it is speech whose meaning resides chiefly in the mind of the interpreter. Pierre and Isabel, not being able to find in society or reading public the paternal acceptance they desire, incestuously become their own paternity. ‘Any, - all words are thine, Isabel; words and worlds with all their containings, shall be slaves to thee, Isabel’ (313). Ambiguity, such as the question in this case of whose words are whose, prevents the furthering of any utopian father narrative to correct the one jettisoned both at Saddle Meadows and later in the city. ‘If on that point [Virtue or Vice?] the gods are dumb, shall a pygmy speak? Ask the air!’ (274).

Pierre’s hysteria here becomes a master narrative controlling him, but it is also the result of not being able to escape his own tainted history. From the perspective of psychoanalysis, hysteria is partly the result of the realization of one’s refusal to acknowledge the repressed past, and one’s own role in it. Lacan points this out when he suggests that psychological trauma may be caused by ‘an encounter which *is* missed [*recontre manquee*].’²³ The final acknowledgement leads to guilt, which brings about remembrance, but also possibly hysteria. As with Freud’s patient Emma, who could not enter a shop, there are two ‘scenes’ or historical moments dominating the hysterical trauma. In Emma’s case the second was an innocent encounter with a man in a shop, which brought back repressed memories of a pre-pubescent sexual encounter in just such a shop. In Oedipus himself it is the repression of the fact that it may be his father he has killed. In Pierre’s case, the ‘memory’ is that of his dying father’s delirious reference to a daughter, while ignoring the boy child at his bed. The guilt and anger of the boy-child would naturally lead to a desire later to fulfill his father’s wish, as a way of finding paternal acceptance. Freud’s description of Emma describes Pierre.

Here we have an instance of a memory exciting an affect which it had not excited as an experience, because in the meantime changes produced by puberty had made possible a different understanding of what was remembered The

²³ See *Seminars XI*. Cited in Ellmann, ed., (1994: 62).

memory is repressed which has only become a trauma *by deferred action*.²⁴

²⁴ Freud, *Project* (1895: 1, 410). Cited in Ellmann ed., (1994: 61).

Coupled with the wish to fulfill his father's desires, may well go the guilt of not actually wanting to, because of anger at the father's apparent neglect. '*Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences*', says Freud (1986: 58). The reminiscences may not always be true, but still carry weight. Pierre's actions and his attempt to 'write/right' his father's wrongs by 'killing' the mother become ensnared in guilt. This is guilt at abandoning his first 'sister' (mother) in favour of the second (father reincarnate). But it is doubtless also guilt at his own sublimated dislike of Isabel (and mother) who have competed for the dying father's affections.

Silence is born of this guilt when Pierre realises that whatever action he takes to alleviate it will only result in further guilt. Like the true naive sentimentalist trying to make all happy (himself included), he must inevitably fail. He is caught in a narrative which has already written him, despite his avowal that 'I render no accounts: I am what I am' (325). In fact, he is as blinded by his writing as Oedipus becomes blinded after discovering his folly. 'Sometimes he blindly wrote with his eye turned away from the paper; - thus unconsciously symbolizing the hostile necessity and distaste, the former whereof made of him this most unwilling states-prisoner of letters' (340).

Pierre's hysteria, his 'reminiscence' of rejection by the father make him a prisoner to his own text, and by implication, Melville a prisoner to his. If his and Pierre's deepest guilts revolve around the father, then one must look to the male figures in the text to decipher Melville's assessment of the hysteria. The most prominent male figure other than the father is Glen Stanly. He becomes a symbol of the lost father by inheriting all Pierre's birthright. He is a lost love from Pierre's childhood. But, as Melville presents him, he is clearly also a mirror image of Pierre's father as a younger man, as he is a mirror of what Pierre cannot be, living out his own carefree androgyny, lounging on his chair, haughtily, as 'The dandy and the man; strength and effeminacy; courage and indolence, [which are] so strangely blended in this superb-eyed youth,' (238). Pierre's father is described in exactly the same language, strongly suggestive of the playboy and the homosexual, of, in short, the bisexual. His early portrait has him sitting on his chair, 'his hat and cane ... loungingly thrown over the back of the chair' (72). The only 'penetration' in the novel is, in fact, when Pierre shoots Stanly in his act of confused homoerotic love and aggression, ending their 'boy-love ... beneath the cestus of Venus' (216-217). Killing Stanly he kills his father, penetrating him he expresses his combined love and hate.

But reality intrudes upon the imagined union. ‘All round and round does the world lie as in a sharp-shooter’s ambush to pick off the beautiful illusions of youth, by the pitiless cracking rifles of the realities of age’ (218). Penetrating Stanly, he penetrates his mother and father, for Stanly has come to represent both as their heir. Moreover, the fact that ‘there was ever a black vein in this (Stanly) Glendinning’ (358) suggests that Stanly represents something of Isabel too, so that in penetrating Stanly Pierre is finally penetrating Isabel, symbol of his father, and the ‘sister’ omitted from the text, become his mother. In ‘penetrating’ his family, he both gains and loses simultaneously. ‘Spatterings of his own kindred blood were upon the pavement; his own hand had extinguished his house in slaughtering the only unoutlawed human being by the name of Glendinning - ’ (360). Killing the family Pierre kills the text and its history which he has been trying to write.

The spattered blood suggests the sacramental and sacrificial motif which has underpinned the narrative. Killing Stanly Pierre kills his own possible Christ-like role. The assumption of a Christian narrative for conquering America, Melville shows, is self-defeating, for even the one who presumes himself innocent sacrificial victim, becomes killer. The sacramental moment of the first encounter with Isabel, where both partake of bread and water (162), symbol of Pierre’s rejection of his own inherited future, and the sacramental ‘blood’ of the tears dropped on Isabel’s letter (64), suggestive of a consecrated future, come to nothing. The bread consecrates a narrative (Isabel’s) which, although taken on faith, is shown finally to be merely a fulfilment of Pierre’s own unconscious desire.

Both Melville and Pierre reject the sacramental as false presence, metonymic of a master narrative which leads not to a realisation of presence, but rather to hysterical repetition in the search to fill the lack evoked by the master’s absence. In a metaphoric world outside a paradisaic ‘insular Tahiti’, art without presence, or the creativity of metaphor, is poison, just as Isabel’s (the novel’s muse) final gesture is the secreting (in both senses) of poison from her breast. If in ‘The Grand Armada’ milk and blood signify the creative cycle of birth and death which spawns *Moby-Dick*, then in this scene milk and poison contiguous signify the death of writing. The symbolism is prefigured in Pierre’s final words to Lucy at her easel, painting a portrait of Pierre ‘in the skeleton’ (357), and using a crust of bread as instrument. ‘The floor was scattered with bread crumbs and charcoal dust.... “Dead embers of departed fires lie by thee, thou pale girl; with dead embers thou seekest to relume the flame of all extinguished love! Waste not that bread; eat it - in bitterness!”’ (357-358). Sacramental milk and blood, blood

and ink, become crumbs and charcoal, just as milk becomes poison. Hysterical reminiscence gives birth to death. What was a possible sacramental encounter for the outcast Ishmael between dying and birthing whales in 'The Grand Armada', has become for Pierre, just poison, a crust used for art, but which cannot reveal any transcendental truth. Loss of such 'truth' leads to the final realisation of the hysterical laughter which characterised Pierre's first piece of writing after leaving Saddle Meadows:

If fit opportunity offer in the hour of unusual affliction, minds of a certain temperament find a strange, hysterical relief, in a wild, perverse humorousness, the more alluring from its entire unsuitableness to the occasion; The cool censoriousness of the mere philosopher would denominate such conduct as nothing short of temporary madness; and perhaps it is,... (186).

Hysterical, circular and self-reflective action is figured in the two paintings in the gallery visited at the end of the novel. One is the 'Cenci of Guido' and the other 'The Stranger', and they represent narcissistic images of each other and the protagonists, as well as a kind of metonymic contiguity, 'half-identical with, and half-analogous to' (351). The former contains a 'doubling' image of Isabel and Lucy combined - light and dark contiguous. The latter contains a similar doubling of Pierre and his father. What results from the recognition of the paintings' meanings, however, is the final realization of what Lacan calls '*meconnaissance*', or 'misrecognition'.²⁵ Pierre recognizes, finally, that he may have 'misrecognized' Isabel as his sister, fulfilling his own wishes rather than reality, his desired future rather than his father's past, so that his anti-Oedipal counter-narrative is caught in the prison of its own illusion.

The final act of hysteria and silence is the suicide - outlandish and melodramatic. It represents, however, the culmination of a more hidden argument lying embedded in the novel, one which attempts to bring together Melville's own insecurities about himself, 'truth' and the

²⁵ About *meconnaissance* Lacan says: 'The subject's question in no way refers to the results of any specific weaning, abandonment, or vital lack of love or affection; it concerns the subject's history inasmuch as the subject misapprehends, misrecognizes it; this is what the subject's actual conduct is expressing in spite of himself,... His life is guided by a problematic which is not that of his life-experience, but that of his destiny, that - what is the meaning, the significance of his history?' *Seminars*, II. 58. Cited by Ellmann, ed., (1994: 81).

function of writing, and one in which all attempts to rewrite master narratives, Oedipus included, are shown to be futile, even if the narratives themselves remain questionable.

The Suicide of Oedipus

‘Who really is Oedipus?’ is perhaps the final question *Pierre* asks. For it is clear by the end of the novel that Oedipus the transgressor is any who may be seen to be transgressing the narrative that writes them, and that even their transgression may be predetermined. Oedipus can never escape the oracle, the ‘Delphic shriek’ Isabel represents. Inevitably, after the seeming failure of all virtue and the deconstruction of all good intentions as essentially self-interested, the novel reaches towards a Nietzschean conclusion. Not a Hamletesque one, allowing for recovery, but a nihilistic eternal return of the same power structures, despite revolutions. While the novel cannot offer a workable alternative to relativism, it cannot live with it either, for to do so would be to live with a Falsegrave and a Plinlimmon.

Such a trap transforms Eros into Thanatos as one of the ways of recovering a state of independence and selfhood. Fully to love is to stand alone, outside social bounds, and accept death, both of one’s life and one’s text. Like the boy Memnon fighting a cause bigger than he can manage, Quixotically fatal (135), Pierre and Melville both plunge towards a version of textual oblivion. ‘...how then can the life of Pierre last? Lo! He is fitting himself for the highest life, by thinning his blood and collapsing his heart. He is learning how to live, by rehearsing the part of death’ (304-305).

Melville’s and Pierre’s homosexuality, the real ‘talismanic secret’ hidden in the narrative, remains that which sucks the life out of both character and text, because it cannot be publicly acknowledged and so renders the text mute, or at least, split in two. From this perspective, anti-Oedipus lies in the fact that the father is the loved object, not the mother, and that women and texts merely replace what is lost or absent, but never with any full satisfaction. ‘Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that the bungled one. The larger book, and the infinitely better, is for Pierre’s own private shelf. That it is, whose unfathomable cravings drink his blood; the other only demands his ink’ (304). The book written in the blood of the father is, when the father is the real love object, symbol of death rather than birth. Like ‘*The love deep as death*’ (307) which sees all female ‘milk’ become poison, the blood-ink of the homosexual or bisexual writer is love-hate for the father and the

mother, hence the self. In Melville's analogy he is like the frontiersman seized by Indians, who, in order to cope with loss of wife and child, must fall into 'complete suicidal forgettings' though they 'prove practically impossible' (307). The impossibility of forgetting, giving up hysterical reminiscence, fuels the death drive at the same time that it fuels the writing process, so that writing becomes writing towards death.

The suicide from the breast of a woman who represents a man is ultimately a way of rejecting the notion of depth (associated with the feminine), psychological, historical or textual. The 'Cretan labyrinths' (176) of textual/sexual Oedipal politics have led to an empty sarcophagus - with its dual phallic/vaginal symbolism. The hermaphroditism of Pierre's desire elicits emptiness, the denial of the value of past, or of depth (female Imaginary) and also of the linear future (male Symbolic). Pierre, the character and the novel, finally encounters a state where difference, foundation of all cultural structures, has collapsed. Past, present and future, male and female, signifier and signified, are fused, but in a way that creates absence rather than presence. Melville's analogy for this state is Memnon and Mt Greylock, which both contain dual male/female aspects. Both reach back to an irretrievable past, and overlook, undecipherably, a confused present and future.

At the beginning of the novel, when Pierre crawls into the crevices of the Memnon stone, the experience foreshadows what is to come. '[He] slid himself straight into the horrible interspace, and lay there as dead. He spoke not, for speechless thoughts were in him' (134). Presuming that to those who in ancient times might have stumbled upon the stone it would have been but 'a huge stumbling block' (132), historical, intellectual and sexual, Pierre in his hubris assumes that it will not be so for him. But the stone is as much masculine as feminine, and when its 'Mute Massiveness' does not fall on him, he slowly crawls forth and stands 'haughtily upon his feet, as he owed thanks to none, and went his moody way' (135). By the end of the novel, however, Memnon will become Enceladus, held mute and half-born in Terra (Terror), Mother earth, left to 'bay his ineffectual howl' (345). Pierre never fully deciphers the 'interspace' of his own origin and homosexuality, and Melville remains unable finally to be 'born' to his own. Both exist in the 'twilight' that defines the interior of Greylock, the mount overlooking Melville's Pittsfield home (344), the same twilight Isabel inhabits.

The 'queer and crotchety ... conceit' (133) that the lamenting sounds heard at Memnon are those of a sweet antediluvian boy who may be Solomon the Wise, tester of Mother love, suggests that Mother love has failed, not only to nurse the child, but to nurse the text. For the

‘boy’ Melville is trapped, like Enceladus, armless in the struggle of birth/death, ‘fast frozen into the earth at the junction of the neck’ (345), as Pierre will soon be.

Oedipus punishes himself when he realises his incest and parricide. Neither Pierre nor Melville accept punishment because, as Bartleby will do later, they must reject the system that demands it. Memnon and Enceladus, boys still, are punished by the Symbolic (Troy’s wall, Titan stone) for presumption. Melville, as presumptuous, deliberately dives into his own text, daring the ‘Mute Massiveness’ of the Symbolic to fall on him, for to stay aloof from the text is to accede to the Symbolic Paternal and start the Oedipal cycle over again. The stories of Memnon and Enceladus rewrite, or overwrite Oedipus. They each represent moments in the text of hermaphrodite half-birth, and of ‘interspace’ which locks the text in the twilight of silent undifferentiation.

As he would now speed on, the lower ground, which from the manor-house piazza seems all a grassy level, suddenly merged into a very long and weary acclivity, slowly rising close up to the precipice’s base; so that the efflorescent grasses rippled against it, as the efflorescent waves of some great swell or long rolling billow ripple against the water-line of a steep gigantic war-ship on the sea.... Nevertheless, round and round those still enchanted rocks, hard by their utmost rims, and in among their cunning crevices, the misanthropic hill-scaling goat nibbled his sweetest food;... (343).

The hermaphroditic sexual energy throbbing in this passage is meant to undermine masculine and feminine social orders. Misanthropic ‘interspace’ replaces their neat Oedipal resolutions in its ‘*love deep as death*’. To remove yourself from the master narrative you have to change the way you think. If you cannot express that change openly, writing must be found in ‘cunning crevices’ like a ‘cunning alphabet’. Or, as Melville puts it in ‘Hawthorne and His Mosses’, ‘cunning glimpses’ ... ‘all but madness for any good man, ... to utter, or even hint of.’ (HC 1, 1993: 346).

Moby-Dick’s failure in the popular market drives the writer to ever more misanthropic regions. The misanthropic male goat finds his ‘sweetness’ only in crevices of hidden meaning. His actual desire, however, is a ‘swelling’ phallogentrism, accomplished by scaling the ‘precipice’ of acceptance. Throughout the text, the female mysterious undermines the attempt

to achieve the male monolithic - as the Tower of Apostles is 'pierced with apertures' (265). The text covers with mosses the femaleness of the writer by its 'cunning alphabet' but the mysteriousness becomes a deliberate choice in order to undo simplistic notions of what is 'transparent' or 'manifest', either Emerson's 'transparent eyeball' or Sullivan's 'Manifest Destiny'. In doing so it undermines its own authority. For to achieve a union of male and female would be, like the 'insular Tahiti' a pipe dream.

Keep, then, thy body effeminate for labor, and thy soul laboriously robust; or else thy soul effeminate for labor, and thy body laboriously robust. Elect! The two will not lastingly abide in one yoke (261).

If ambiguity lies at the heart of desire - sperm milk and milk sperm - the object of desire (and power) is also the object both loved and hated. The incestuous text must cannibalize itself.

What man who carries a heavenly soul in him, has not groaned to perceive, that unless he committed a sort of suicide as to the practical things of this world, he never can hope to regulate his earthly conduct by that same heavenly soul?
(213)

It is also where he leaves his text, 'shrunk up like a scroll' as Lucy is when she dies in prison (360), harking back to the 'scroll of vellum' she was at the beginning. Leaving character fused with the book, and the author with both, *Pierre* finally accepts the defeat by the master narrative, for in trying to write oneself out of such a master narrative, one is inevitably confined to it. 'Nor book, nor author of the book, hath any sequel, though each hath its last lettering!' (360). But in a world of 'horological' ambiguity, where the letter kills whom it pleases, enslaves whom it pleases, enthrones whom it pleases, killing the word is the only way to escape its imprisoning mastery. Such 'killing' will become the province of 'Bartleby the Scrivener'.

CHAPTER SIX

BARTLEBY'S CONFINEMENT

'Under a government which imprisons unjustly,
the true place for a just man is also a prison'.

Henry Thoreau.

'Thus, not only does democracy make men forget
their ancestors, but also clouds their views of
their descendants and isolates them from their
contemporaries. Each man is forever thrown
back on himself alone, and there is danger that he
may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart'.

Alexis de Tocqueville

'Bartleby the Scrivener' extends the exploration of catatonia and silence Melville began with *Pierre*, as it does the experience of the worker in the city. Pierre finds himself 'thrown back on himself alone' as Tocqueville says of the Jacksonian American, when he attempts to forget his ancestry and go to the city. Bartleby is the city dweller without any ancestry and without history, but who is the representative of the civilization which America's ancestors had fought to create. As such the text is a damning indictment of Manifest Destiny and the urge to conquer. Pierre may have lost his father, and found a substitute in the mother and the lover. Bartleby's only 'father' is the narrator of the story, who does his best not to be a father at all, even a surrogate one. The end of the line of conquest, Melville suggests with Tocqueville, is that man is 'shut up in the solitude of his own heart' with no-one to help break the confinement. The only way to register a protest against the confinement is to take that confinement to its uttermost conclusion, as Bartleby will do.

'Bartleby' explores the psychology of bodily confinement by labour. It also uses the issues of labour to examine the metaphysical questions of the morality of conquest and how the victim of the system he cannot escape can deal with his status as a victim. It asks the question which *Billy Budd* will later explore in more detail, but with slightly different conclusions: how can those who uphold a system of government be held accountable when they themselves are partly victims of their own system? And if they are victims confined to the system, can their collusion in it be excused? More importantly, and picking up where *Pierre* left off, it asks the

question whether the writer himself can use 'letters' to overcome the power structures confining bodies, or whether these very letters share, willy-nilly those structures.

Labour

Tocqueville's analysis of the effect of democracy on the individual American registers the same viewpoint from which Melville writes 'Bartleby'. Both writers locate the crisis at the heart of Jacksonian democracy in its paradoxical attitude towards the individual. Tocqueville could have been writing about Melville's uncle Peter Gansevoort, the one man in Melville's family who, at the cost of the education and relative well-being of his nephews, nieces and sister, endured the rigours of the self-reliant quest for wealth and became successful. At the age of twelve, for \$150.00 a year, Herman was sent by his mother, at Peter Gansevoort's behest, to become a clerk in the New York State bank. It was 1832, the 'cholera' year in New York, and while the rest of the family was kept protected from death on the Berkshire farm, the young boy, 'thrown back on himself alone', had to avoid his former schoolmates a few blocks away and find himself in, as Parker (1996: 68-69) puts it, 'this magnificent temple to Mammon and Progress', where he would learn how 'mildew' can fall 'on a young soul', as he puts it in *Redburn*, leaving a scar so deep as to make a young man 'unambitious as a man of sixty'. Like the young twelve year old 'Ginger Nut', he would work six days a week among other people's 'bonds and mortgages and title deeds' (4) as 'student', 'errand boy' and 'cleaner and sweeper' (9).¹

¹ All references to 'Bartleby' are taken from McCall, ed., (2002).

Those for whom he worked, like his uncle, would have seen themselves as benefactors, not the architects of child labour. They may have been something like the narrator in ‘Bartleby’, the lawyer who presumes himself a magnanimous benefactor, but who is shown by the end of the tale to be as self-centred and capitalist as most of New York society of the time. And in writing ‘Bartleby’ Melville would himself have remembered his time in the bank, being a version of ‘Ginger Nut’, and perhaps wishing he had been a Bartleby. Bartleby’s refusal to become part of the capitalist system, while also refusing to take his physical body out of it, since it is on bodies that the system mainly exercises its force, may be Melville’s way of exploring deeper feelings of rebellion he carried from youth. The confinement of the labour force resides in its physical bodies being under the control of others. To resist that control, while not removing the body from the presence of the authoritarian force, is to scrutinize the relation between bodies and labour, as well as self-identity and labour. Melville most likely has both Locke and Marx in mind when he writes ‘Bartleby’. ‘Every man has a property in his own person’, says Locke.² And Marx insists in *Das Capital* that if ‘labor-power [must] appear upon the market as a commodity’, the labourer must ‘have it at his disposal, must be the untrammelled owner of his capacity for labour, i.e., of his person’.³ Clearly, Bartleby has neither of these privileges. He is ‘motionless’ and ‘singularly sedate’ (9) in the face of those who rule in the belief, as the lawyer puts it, that ‘the easiest way of life is the best’ (4). Bartleby’s version of such ‘ease’, his refusal to work, is itself the most pointed way of undermining this philosophy, since what is ease for the ‘prudent’ and the ‘eminently *safe*’ (4) is intensive labour for the workers.

The lawyer/narrator, like Peter Gansevoort, and those who run Wall Street, is not unlike the ‘Peter’ who denies knowing the Christlike Bartleby and who works on the hard rock ‘Petra’ (17) of Wall street. Like Peter does after Christ’s death, he sees himself as ‘prudent’ and ‘safe’, a man of ‘method’(4). Bartleby’s self-sacrificial death in the ‘indulgent confinement’ (31) of the tombs, Christlike in its effect, leaves the actions of those around him either those of a denying Peter (‘in vain I persisted that Bartleby was nothing to me’, 29) or a Judas taking (in

² Locke, *The Second Treatise on Government*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952: 17.

³ Marx, *Das Capital*. Trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. New York: International, 1967. Vol 1.: 168.

this case, giving) money. ‘...slipping something in his hand. But it dropped upon the floor’ (28). In the economy of Wall Street, buying and selling are interchangeable.

Similarly interchangeable, it seems, are employees, about whom employers know or care to know very little. Apart from the fact that ‘nothing is ascertainable’ (4) about Bartleby, the narrator knows just as little about his other employees, who carry caricatured names like ‘Turkey’, ‘Nippers’ and ‘Ginger Nut’, all, pointedly, references to food, and suggestive of its scarcity. The lawyer’s apparent beneficence, giving of overcoats, turning a blind eye to tardy work, and entertaining the idiosyncrasies of his employees, not least Bartleby’s, suggests that he may see his role as a businessman in the light of the current Benthamite rhetoric of democratic reform, ‘the greatest good for the greatest number’, which strongly influenced Jacksonian thinkers. In this thinking the individual’s needs are only apparently a priority. More important are the needs of the group of which the individual is a part. But the problem would be, as the fierce debate around the monopolizing power of corporations showed during the decades of the 1830s through the 1850s, assuring the rights of the individual, when those rights did not conform to what was perceived as the general necessity. ‘When a workman is constantly and exclusively engaged in making one object’, says Tocqueville (1994: 555), ‘he ends by performing his work with singular dexterity. But at the same time, he loses the general faculty of applying his mind to the way he is working. Every day he becomes more adroit and less industrious, and one may say that in his case the man is degraded as the workman improves’.

Melville situates ‘Bartleby’ in this debate. His story is about the confinement of the body and the mind to labour, both the labourers’ and the employers’. That confinement to capitalist ideology, the power of the corporation over the individual, is realized mostly in the literal space in which the workers exist, and in the controls over time which apply to the working day. The story uses space and time as means to examine capitalism, but also suggest how the metaphysical may be at the background to all physical human actions and emotions. ‘Prudence’ and ‘safety’ and ‘prefer’, Bartleby’s favourite word, work on the levels of space and time since each suggests a control of time through a control of space. What the lawyer does with practised ease, control his time by keeping his space under surveillance, Bartleby takes to its uttermost conclusion, and in the process shows the underpinning utilitarian philosophy to be deeply flawed. It is based on an interpretation of the ‘letter’ of the law which proves to be a ‘dead’ one, since it cannot penetrate what is ‘inscrutable’ (24) as Bartleby proves

to be, following those other shadowy Melville figures Moby-Dick, Queequeg and Isabel. Controlling space and time by the letter, as the law attempts to do, controlling people as a result, will be shown to be fatuous since the letter is itself always open to varied interpretation and to silence. Bartleby permanently gives up 'copying' (21) because he will have neither his space nor his time controlled by a master narrative (the 'Master of Chancery's narrative) which writes him, any more than the whale, or Queequeg or Isabel can be fully 'written' over by the 'master'.

If Melville only hints at slavery here it is as a precursor to 'Benito Cereno'. But in both stories he will show the actual effect of the capitalist divide between head and body, where head is the controlling but wilfully blind force and the body the enslaved and enslaving 'intolerable incubus' (27) whose 'confinement' lies not only in the limited physical spaces as symbols of mental ones, but also in the 'pregnant' revolt waiting to be born. In the context of antebellum America, the narratives are pregnant with prophetic meaning. If the lawyer's chambers 'a little resemble a huge square cistern' (5), we are invited to interpret them in relation to *Moby-Dick's* 'Cistern and Buckets', where falling into the 'grave' of the capitalist whale head, the 'dead blind wall' of 'The Battering Ram', Tashtego, symbol of the marginalised servant, must be brought to birth from his confinement by Queequeg, the other regal symbol of slavery unconquered. Just as the new America was deemed to be born 'like Minerva from the head of Jove, sprung at once into full maturity and symmetry, and armed in sovereign panoply', as the *Cincinnati Gazette*⁴ had it, so Melville may be read as suggesting that the 'labour' to give birth of America from the 'Head' is done by the savage and the slave, by those who have no voice or will not speak: 'Will you not speak? Answer!' (12) demands the lawyer of Bartleby. He could be speaking to Queequeg, or Isabel, or Babo, or Billy Budd.

The narrator is none of the above, but rather much more a precursor of the self-interested Delano or Vere. He is the businessman whose 'business hurried me' (11) and would be too busy even to notice his own misgivings about the control and monopoly over others. The slavery he supports is much less obvious than that obtaining in the south, but nevertheless well-nigh equally dehumanizing. The 'incorporation laws' passed in the late 1830s had the effect, as Schlesinger (1945: 337) puts it, of 'cleansing them [corporations] of the legal status of monopoly and sending them forth as the benevolent agencies of free

⁴ *Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette*, 21 May 1825. Cited in Dimock (1989: 26).

competition'. In the *laissez-faire*⁵ economics dominant at the time, the principle of free trade was to be applied as much to corporations as it was to unions, which inevitably rose in response to perceived abuses. Free trade claimed to put into practice Benthamite and liberal ideals by limiting monopolies, and enforcing what it saw as a 'natural order' within economics, not to be interfered with by monopolization. Judge Lemuel Shaw himself made his support of unions clear in an 1842 Supreme Court judgement in favour of the Boston Bootmaker's Society, who refused to work for employers who would not employ union labour. 'We cannot perceive', he judged, 'that it is criminal for men to agree together to exercise their own acknowledged rights, in such a manner as best to subserve their own interests' (Schlesinger, 1945: 340). The problem with the judgement was, of course, that it could be supported with equal vehemence by both plaintiff and defendant.

⁵ *Laissez-faire* capitalism, Grob and Billias point out (1987: 72-73), was particularly prevalent in the decades of the 1830s and '40s, and harked back to the teachings of Adam Smith who 'favored free trade and opposed government controls which might affect the laws of supply and demand'.

Corporations could claim the same rights. However *laissez-faire* they were, claiming individual rights under the law, they were nevertheless seen in popular parlance as essentially non-human. ‘Corporations have neither bodies to be kicked, nor souls to be damned’, the popular phrase went. Or, as William Gouge wrote, aiming precisely at those like John Jacob Astor, America’s richest man and greatest monopoliser, whom the narrator so admires: ‘As directors of a company, men will sanction actions of which they would scorn to be guilty in their private capacity. A crime which would press heavily on the conscience of one man, becomes quite endurable when divided among many’.⁶ With the body of the corporation untouchable, that of the individual worker becomes most vulnerable.

The paradox inherent in ideas of personal and worker equality is adeptly pointed out by Tocqueville. In his chapter entitled ‘How the Americans Combat the Effects of Individualism by Free Institutions’, he defines equality and despotism as ‘two opposites’ which ‘fatally complete and support each other’. ‘Equality puts men side by side without a common link to hold them firm. Despotism raises barriers to keep them apart. It disposes them not to think of their fellows and turns indifference into a sort of public virtue’ (1994: 510). While Tocqueville interprets despotism more in terms of French aristocracy and revolutionary bloodletting, he is not blind to the confining nature of Jacksonian versions of ‘equality’. The narrator can, in the liberalist Jacksonian environment, assume equality, not understand why his employees do not see him as an equal, be irked at their presumption and peculiar behaviour because he believes himself beneficent, but all the while underpay them, overwork them, and think of them with relative disdain. The ‘intolerable incubus’ (27) as the narrator sees Bartleby, is, therefore, his growing ability to *see* Bartleby, to notice him as human and as an individual, and to remove his ‘indifference’ as a form of virtue. That ‘virtue of indifference’ is the same virtue on which *laissez-faire* politics is roughly based, whether in corporations or government, Equal rights and the right to earn a living if poor, would become the very means by which a ‘natural’ social order could be assured. Convincing the individual, as Foucault has shown, that his own best good is served by adhering to the will of the group becomes the most potent social force available.⁷ The lasting power of Melville’s story is in its undercutting of those group assumptions. It lies as much in the subtle questioning of the reader’s own bias, its

⁶ *Paper Money*, I, 43. Cited in Schlesinger (1945: 335)

⁷ See in this regard, Foucault (1991), and Dinwiddy (1990: 7-10).

own digging out of the reader his/her preconceptions and prejudices, as it does undercutting the narrator's naivete. To laugh at this story is to look with the narrator's eyes.

If individualism in a liberal economy is based largely on Lockean notions of selfhood as by natural law a 'property' owned by the individual and sold for economic protection, in the context of antebellum America, Melville's critique must be seen as taking Lockean selfhood as property to its ultimate conclusion. The slave, working for the 'Master', whether slave-owner or Master of Chancery (5), as Melville's narrator becomes for a short time, is a property owned by the master. 'Not only must I push the clerks already with me, but I must have additional help' (9), says the narrator, reminiscent of the southern slave owner. Blind to his slaves' suffering, the master/narrator cannot decipher the real meaning of their, to him, strange activities; their alcoholism and their aggression, suggested by Turkey's face being 'a grate full of Christmas coals' (5), his 'flighty recklessness', impatiently 'splitting [pens] all to pieces', and being at times even 'insolent', and making 'violent thrusts' with his ruler (6). These half-hinted examples indicate forms of revolt and signs of poverty even the workers do not fully comprehend. Seeing the world only in terms of the comforts of his own *laissez-faire* business, the narrator assumes any ambition on their part to be 'piratical' (7), that one who did not appreciate hand-outs of clothing was one 'whom prosperity harmed' (8). He blithely accepts that he should be 'mollified' rather than guilty when told his worker provides his own stationery (9). He assumes that if a desk is not adequate for the employee and he tries to make it workable, he 'knew not what he wanted' (7). He has no difficulty with Bartleby having 'a day and a night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light', even complains that he is not 'cheerfully industrious' (10). Even more scandalous, to him, is an employee who presumes to be 'a ward-politician', a kind of unionist, who entertains 'ambiguous-looking fellows' and visits clients at the Tombs, and is visited by those who are rather 'dun' (7), not just bill collectors in the parlance of the time, but also Negroes.

And if individual endeavour is the mantra of the new capitalist order, the narrator represents the apotheosis of its selfishness. For one who believes himself to be 'an indulgent employer', the lawyer is markedly self-interested, seeking by his apparently kind actions 'a delicious self-approval', and 'a sweet morsel for my conscience', at a cost of 'little or nothing' (14). Charity is not for its own sake, but rather 'a vastly wise and prudent principle' (26). And he gives up his 'charity' instantly his social image may be tarnished by it: 'But thus it often is, that the constant friction of illiberal minds wears out at last the best resolves of the

more generous' (27).

But Melville's object in the story is not just to expose *laissez-faire* liberalism's inadequacies. It is also to use that exposé to ask a much more serious question, not unrelated to the writer of Ecclesiastes' declaration that 'All is Vanity', quoted by Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* as being the wisdom of Solomon, and suggested once again by Pierre's Memnon stone, the 'Wall Street' of *Pierre*. 'Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters and sorting them for the flames? (34) If capitalist control of body and mind results in a pallid hopelessness, a living death, is there any space or time in the capitalist regime for the individual to exist without the letter of the capitalist law controlling him? Or is the slave to capitalism confined by a hopelessness entirely 'stifled by unrelieved calamities'? (34)

Space

'There is too much confinement about that'(30) Bartleby informs his beneficent employer upon the latter suggesting various alternative forms of employment when the scrivener has finally worn out the patience of even this employer. That the lawyer/narrator is able to protest 'why, you keep yourself confined all the time!' (30) indicates not only that confinement is a central issue of the narrative, but that the perception of what constitutes confinement is an equally central issue. For the eminently pragmatic and literal-minded lawyer spatial confinement is uppermost.

Like Jeremy Bentham's 'Panopticon', which was a design for a prison in which, as Dinwiddy puts it (1990: 7) 'a prison (or workhouse, or factory) could be constructed on a circular plan, with the central observation point from which the jailer or superintendent could keep the whole establishment under continuous surveillance', the lawyer/narrator has taken literal space to be a thing of value in itself. It allows the structure and function of an organisation and the gaze of the employer/warder to be used literally to control the minds and bodies of those under his charge. It is a socially controlled monasticism, an enforced hermitage. But it is not how much space one has, but what one chooses to do with it, that matters, is the implicit lesson Bartleby would teach Jacksonian democracy on Wall street. For Bartleby, as for Henry Thoreau, the greatest sweeps of civil disobedience can be achieved within even the smallest spaces. Walden pond could perhaps have been a small office on Wall

street, and Thoreau's 'hermitage' Bartleby's. But if Thoreau finds bliss and enchantment in his solitude, where 'every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy, and befriended me' (1995: 91), Bartleby finds the opposite in the hard confines between the brick walls. His solitude must bring death not life, a prison, not freedom. But there nevertheless remains a degree of contiguity between the two men. The profoundest social changes begin with mental ones. As Thoreau puts it in 'Resistance to Civil Government' (HC 1, 1993: 322), 'Why has every man a conscience, then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward'.

The lawyer's surveillance of his staff is seemingly beneficent. It pretends, even to itself, that its actions are 'natural' and necessary rather than enforced. It also assumes, as Bentham did, that separation of individuals from one another would enhance social control at the same time that it would provide space for individual endeavour. Controlling the body to control the mind, 'privacy and society' are 'conjoined' in his office, but more as military rule than genuine beneficence. The lawyer has 'a natural expectancy of instant compliance' (10). He sits 'at the head of [his] seated column of clerks' (11). Bartleby becomes 'a perpetual sentry in the corner' (12) who is able to offer but a 'passive resistance' (13). At the end Bartleby remains, reminiscent of Isabel, 'the last column of some ruined temple' (23). The military structure of the Wall street office, reminiscent of a Fourierist utopian Phalanstery,⁸ carry over from an idealised past golden age, is nothing but ruins after the lawyer's final departure.

This 'ruined temple' counters the notion of the Benthamite panopticon. It also appears to be a support of a popular expansionist phrase of the time, which interpreted the west as an 'abundance of vacant land [which] operates as a safety valve of our system'.⁹ City crowding, lack of place to stay, low wages, excessive working hours, a disgruntled working class meant to remain as ghostly as possible outside the work environment - all of which Bartleby represents - are problems meant to be alleviated by the west's 'safety valve'.¹⁰

⁸ On Fourier's Phalanstery as a social system see Holloway (1966: 139-140).

⁹ 'The West, the Paradise of the Poor', in *The Democratic Review*, August 1844. Cited by Schlesinger (1945: 344).

¹⁰ Numerous 'political' or Marxist readings of 'Bartleby' have been offered. In particular see Barbara Foley (2000), who outlines the major arguments.

But the 'ruined temple' only appears to support the safety valve ideology. Bartleby's continued presence before the lawyer (*'he was always there'*, 15) is a refusal to accept the safety valve option, and one which deliberately drives the representative of liberalism into his own confined space where he is forced to confront the inadequacies of his own system. What Bartleby makes into metaphor, the lawyer literalises. He attempts to escape the place, not the meaning of the person, when he cannot get rid of the incubus, whose 'lean visage' with its 'tattered dishabille' has to all intents and purposes become a squatter and 'unmanned' him as a result (16). He does what Ahab does, trying to literalize his castration in the form of the whale, and what Tommo does in the face of the 'inscrutable' islanders. Physical place replaces, for the narrator, moral idea or meaning, quite literally having 'petrified' it (17). 'Since he will not quit me, I must quit him' (28), says the narrator, the archetypal liberal pretending to himself he does not wish to cause harm to Bartleby. Bartleby, however, takes petrification to its ultimate conclusion, showing that morality and space are not co-terminous, that to control one is not to control the other, be it rock, whale, wall or human body.

The lawyer, in his extreme and sometimes laughable efforts to maintain the status quo embodies those traits the liberal J.S. Mill, in his essay 'On Liberty' (1859) attributes to the contemporary age.

These tendencies of the time cause the public to be more disposed than at most former periods to prescribe general rules of conduct, and endeavour to make everyone conform to the approved standard. And that standard, express or tacit, is to desire nothing strongly. Its ideal of character is to be without any marked character; to maim by compression, like a Chinese lady's foot, every part of human nature which stands out prominently, and tends to make the person markedly dissimilar in outline to commonplace humanity.

'Prudence' and 'method' are the lawyer's words for much the same attitude Mill describes. They constrain individualism which, like the Chinese lady's constrained foot, has value only in the context of the social customs they go to support. Mill would later repudiate Benthamite Utilitarianism as one where the space within which moral action may be carried out is restricted to a watered down will of the majority, who stand in a moral no-man's land. The Utilitarian is forced to stand, as the narrator does in his chambers, between the extremes of light

and dark, and not touch either.

At one end [my chambers] looked upon the white wall of the interior of a spacious sky-light shaft, penetrating the building from top to bottom. ... [at the other end] my windows commanded an unobstructed view of a lofty brick wall, black by age and everlasting shade (5).

Bartleby's place in these offices is to be virtually in the middle of these opposites, but with a suggestive 'shaft of light' above him.

I placed his desk close up to a small sidewindow in that part of the room, a window which originally had afforded a lateral view of certain grimy brick-yards and bricks, but which, owing to subsequent erections, commanded at present no view at all, though it gave some light. Within three feet of the panes was a wall, and the light came down from far above, between two lofty buildings, as from a very small opening in a dome.... I procured a high green folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined (10).

The 'dome'-like Panopticon is introduced where separation is created but control is ensured. The 'erections' onto which the office looks, present 'no view at all', so that the twin walls in the lawyer's office are deficient in what painters call 'life'. There is no space for imagination, which is replaced with Bartleby's 'dead wall revery' (18). 'Green' the one symbol of life available, has been made into a folding screen, and at the Tombs where Bartleby dies it will be made into the 'grass seed' constrained by 'dead walls' (33), the same 'blank wall' of the whale's forehead against which Ahab ineffectually strikes. The office walls are as constricting as the Chinese lady's foot, but represent metaphysical opposites. The lawyer's life resides between opposing metaphysical forces, neither one chosen as the final path. As on the *Pequod*, capitalism squeezes itself into a literalising space between metaphysical alternatives in which the individual bends to the general sense of necessity, while still believing that it is nevertheless choosing its own path. It is the very Ciceronian option the young Melville was accused of taking in the Philo Logos Society of debaters in 1837. Having left the defunct

Ciceronian Debating Society, Melville had joined its alternative, only to be publicly accused of being something like an incubus himself.

‘He, like a wary pettifogger’, wrote ‘R’ in the *Microscope* of 15th April 1837, ‘never considers “this side right, and that stark naught,” or in other words, has no fixed principles, but can bear as the wind blows without gripings of conscience. This he considers a masterly display of his political powers’. ‘Masterly I call it, and such it must appear to any dispassionate thinker’ (23) says the narrator of his way of escaping Bartleby by leaving the premises. But one suspects Melville is remembering ‘R’, and also punning on the word ‘master’, all too suggestive of the slave owner. The debater known as ‘*dignitatus melvum*’ is really, as ‘R’ puts it, a ‘Ciceronian Baboon’. Until he ‘was transplanted into the fertile soil’ of the society and become its ‘destroyer’, it had ‘continued to flourish and spread its branches like a green bay tree’ (Parker, 1996: 111). Behind the chair the lawyer/narrator sits in resides a ‘pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero’ (11), pale in its whiteness, representative of the new Roman regime (and doubtless white America), plaster-of-paris because it is not alive, not even Italian marble, but a pale imitation. It is this statue, the epitome of the orator who can use words to suit any occasion, and any political viewpoint, an archetypal ‘liberal’, eventually assassinated by his own emperor, at which Bartleby stares in his silent ‘passive resistance’ (13). A decade or so after ‘R’ had offered his less than brotherly criticism, Melville had taken it to heart and the ‘*dignitatus melvum*’ had become the lawyer, the uncle, and even that aristocratic part of Melville himself with which he remained uncomfortable.

The Ciceronian moral stasis in the lawyer’s office symbolised in the ‘mirror’ of Bartleby’s inaction, shows that when the individual will must adjust to the greater will of the majority, finding safety through conformity, the result is only superficial harmony and progress. More likely a stifling claustrophobia will develop, or worse still, a comfortable one, encouraged by a superficial toleration for the rights of others, so long as the general social objective is not disturbed. This is what the lawyer finds when he looks into ‘*Edwards on the Will*’ and ‘*Priestly on Necessity*’ as guides in dealing with Bartleby’s strange ‘I would prefer not to’ (11), an assertion which pits the individual against bland corporate whitewashing. Bartleby’s ‘I’ asserts the individual over the corporation and his ‘prefer’ asserts the will over social necessity.

As ambiguous and convoluted as one may find, Edwards leaves little space for certainty when it comes to interpreting the complexities of the individual will governing the

master-servant relationship.

Now it is no contradiction to say that we can do such a thing when we please, and yet that 'tis an impossibility that we should be what we please.... If a man who is a servant, exceeding wicked, debauched, and licentious, who has it offered to him whether he will choose a man of most exemplary holiness and strict piety for his master and submit to his government, it is perfectly (in my sense) in the servant's power whether he will take him for his master and governor or no; and yet it may be an impossible thing that it should be as long as the servant has such and such inclination and desire, judgment, and ideas.¹¹

¹¹ Jonathan Edwards, 'Free Will', in Silverman, ed., (1971: 190).

To choose the master would, presumably, be to go against his own self, whereas not to choose would be to show that self, in the eyes of society at least, 'licentious and wicked'. Choice, then, is actually irrelevant. To turn the self into a 'property', as Locke would have it, would be to make the self servant of the one owning the property, and to hand over that property, to a corporation in this case, or a system, would ensure slavery. Bartleby makes no choices in such a confining world, he offers only 'preferences', as ambiguous as the ambiguous will that controls him. Only one who knows himself a slave, as 'Cistern and Buckets' intimates, can free the slave.

And when social forms are questioned we are left with Locke's social contract as the liberal tool of control. As Locke puts it

If the supreme authority be conferred on the magistrate by the consent of the people, ... then it is evident that they have resigned up their liberty of action into his disposal, and so all his commands are but their own votes, and his edicts their own injunctions made by proxies which by mutual contract they are bound to obey.¹²

By handing over one's own will into the hands of another, the liberal ethos goes, one must joyously accept the governance of the other. The lawyer, 'repulsed by this lean, penniless wight' (15) who writes 'silently, palely, mechanically' rather than being 'cheerfully industrious' (10), cannot grasp the refusal to work because work is understood as a gift given by the employer. The fallibility of the social contract leads to public surveillance as the necessary means by which to enforce the general will. 'I like to be stationary' (30) says Bartleby ironically, figuring the slave's prison, but also glancing cynically at the 'dead wall' of moral stasis that puts him where he is. In the liberal democracy with *laissez-faire* principles, however, such surveillance is not openly espoused, since it must at least appear that government is by consent, and rewards for labour adequate.

¹² Locke, *Two Tracts on Government*. P. Abrams, ed. Cambridge (1967): 126.

The divide between what is assumed as the individual's freedom and his responsibility to capitalist society, becomes so thin that it virtually disappears. The individual owns himself, but ultimately not, as Marx would be quick to point out, his own labour. The lawyer may appear an 'indulgent' (13), liberal employer. His indulgence seems comically overdone even to the reader, but ultimately his desire for financial and social safety overcomes any efforts at equality, and turns beneficence into self-congratulatory paternalism.

The last space left for resistance to such falsely benevolent, blind dictatorship is the body. If the individual's body is his own property, then the logical means of asserting individuality is to refuse all external and unwanted control over the body. Bartleby rejects his body as a tool confined to labour, just as he rejects any such labour as either a part of his free will, or of social need. It is a way of taking liberal principles to their ultimate conclusion. He is not so much in opposition to the lawyer, as the ultimate logical conclusion of his avowed, if not practised, ideas, since, as Thoreau would insist, free will must mean the freedom *not* to.

Thus the State never intentionally confronts a man's sense, intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses. It is not armed with superior wit or honesty, but with superior physical strength. I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest. What force has a multitude? They only can force me who obey a higher law than I.¹³

If 'Bartleby' ultimately shows the individual succumbing to external force, unable to keep his own body from becoming what Foucault calls 'docile' in the face of the various regimes of control,¹⁴ it nevertheless shows that such deliberate succumbing is the only course of action left. Bartleby's catatonia, 'dead wall reveries' and anorexia are the last space remaining for the 'pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn'(9). They reflect one who is unspeakably angry too, and extend Pierre's self-imposed afflictions. While his predecessor's are the result of impetuous anger at social rejection, Bartleby's are the deliberate action of one

¹³ Henry Thoreau, 'Civil Disobedience'. Cited in Baritz, ed., (1966:356).

¹⁴ See Foucault (1977: 135-169). Foucault takes the soldier as the ultimate docile body, in much the way that Melville turns the Wall Street office into a militarized space.

who, in the face of the blank wall, is left no alternative. A social system which presents nothing but a blank wall to those who will not docilely accept its rule, makes free will pretentious and civil disobedience churlish.

Ensclosed behind his folding screen, Bartleby is a body, like all workers, both present and absent. He is 'cadaverous', an 'apparition' and a 'ghost' (27). At one moment he seems to his employer to be 'a bit of wreck in the mid-Atlantic' (22), reminiscent of both Pip and Ishmael as 'wise' orphans, rejected by capitalism. And in another moment of the lawyer's beneficence he seems to appear the ghostly vision of one 'in its shivering winding sheet' (18), reminiscent perhaps of Queequeg in his coffin, the otherworldly slave who is used by capitalism but not understood or respected by it. And Bartleby ensures that this state of indeterminacy is maintained by remaining physically present but seldom in sight or sound, and so carries the demands of capitalist society upon the worker to its ultimate conclusion. Human presence is made ghostly by reduction to labour, but if it has presence only as a labouring body, it becomes pretentious to assume that it ought to reveal itself in anything but a ghostly form. The lawyer, who cannot see the hypocrisy of his own assumptions, attempts to transform into one 'present' whom he has himself created 'absent' by hiding him behind a screen, using him only when required, knowing nothing of his personal life, until forced by circumstances to enquire. Bartleby speaks with 'a flute-like tone' (11), who, 'like a very ghost' (15), appears 'dismantled' (17) like the disembodied whale, and without a 'mantle', as only a few other choice Melville characters are: the innocent and otherworldly Fayaway, Billy Budd before his death, and Elijah the prophet. He comes only when summonsed, and retains an 'unalterableness of demeanour' (15) under all circumstances, the paragon of worker efficiency. Thoreau's 'disobedience' was to remove himself to a carefully self-controlled island hermitage till he grew tired of it. Bartleby's is not to offer 'disobedience', but merely to show the absurdity of the moral hypocrisy at the heart of the social body.

While the literal confinement of the body under the system is the primary metaphor of enslavement in the narrative, a secondary one is that of food. Free trade is meant to provide food for the poor, but in fact leaves the worker in poverty. 'I would prefer not to dine today, ... it would disagree with me; I am unused to dinners' (33), Bartleby says to the lawyer when at the Tombs. While suggestive of a literal starvation to which the lawyer seems all but blind, refusal to eat harks back to Nippers' 'indigestion' as it does Bartleby's initial copying without pause for 'digestion' (9). To eat with any degree of comfort on Wall Street is either to afford

it, or to 'digest' without question the degrading system that makes food and drink an escape from the daily round. Food gives not only life but identity. Nippers, Turkey and Ginger Nut embody what they eat and drink, function only on the most basic level of animal existence. Only Bartleby is given a name in the narrative. There is no food by which to identify him. In the case of the lawyer, social function will suit for personal identity. The quest for food reduces the entire working body to its physical needs. Those workers, like Bartleby, who choose a space outside the functions of their own bodies will die as a consequence. Capitalism's machinations even provide, via the 'grub-man' the fare in prison. Refusing this food is a way of refusing a system which 'liberalises' even its own punishments and attempts to smooth over its own wrongs.

So the absurdity of free trade is that its very attempt to provide the individual with an identity outside that of the controlled body of the serf or factory worker, ensures a reduction of value to bodily needs and social function. The myth of individual free will is exploded, as is the myth of the possibility of any serious civil disobedience that does not result in suicide. Bartleby must reject food, since it becomes the *raison d'être* of the system he cannot escape. It is a system that has neither a 'higher law', nor one which allows the individual to 'breathe'.

Time

As the last frontier of resistance, the body must deal with one of society's most pernicious form of control - time. Yet another important motif in 'Bartleby', as many scholars have pointed out,¹⁵ time is the space, or primary commodity, the individual has to give to the society in return for well-being. If the western frontier becomes a spatial 'safety valve', time becomes the valve controlling the city. In 'Bartleby' it takes both literal and metaphysical form.

¹⁵ See, among many others, William H. Hildebrand, (1988), Dennis Perry, (1987), and A.W. Plumstead, who sees Bartleby as caught in a 'no-time' zone, in: 'Bartleby: Melville's Venture into a New Genre', *Melville Annual* (1965: 89).

Time controls the actions of the worker in the Wall Street office, either through the acceptance or rejection of its constraints. Freedom and necessity are as much about time as about space, since they concern the meaning of human actions in time. To be imprisoned, either by labour or as punishment, is to have time stolen from you. If capitalism thinks of 'lay[ing] up' for the future (14), as the lawyer does, its workers have no such sense of a future, for being made a 'ghost' (15) is to have the future stolen from them, since a ghost lives outside the physical body and outside time. 'Bartleby', however, shows that temporal and physical stasis do not necessarily mean compliance with the daily demands of labour, or the acceptance of punishment. Instead, it might also be a way of protesting the force of a temporal which denies, or ignores, the influence of the eternal. To read the text from the former point of view is to see Bartleby as a protesting labourer. To read it from the latter, is to see him as a Christ-like figure.¹⁶

The average working day in New York in 1845, as Schlesinger points out (1945: 342), varied from eleven hours and twenty-four minutes in December and January to thirteen hours and thirty-one minutes in April, usually from sunrise to sunset. The noon meridian would be not only in the middle of the day, but also in the middle of the working day. If Turkey leaves the Wall Street office at six o'clock (4), and the length of morning and afternoon shifts are the same, it would appear that he works from six to six, a twelve hour day. It is not for nothing that his demeanour is, Ahab-like, influenced by the rise and fall of the sun. The joke the lawyer makes about Turkey's face 'which, gaining its meridian with the sun, seemed to set with it, to rise, culminate, and decline the following day, with the like regularity and undiminished glory' (4-5), shows as much his insensitivity to his workers as it does his apparent paternalism. And if Bartleby is 'moon-struck' (11) in his rejection of Wall Street values, then he must come both from a different world (as Queequeg is queen moon to Ahab's king sun), but also an inhabitant of 'night', worker in the dark, as slaves often did. Like a slave he 'ran and day and night line' copying 'by sun-light and by candle-light' (10).¹⁷

¹⁶ See Graham Nicol Forst, (1987), who outlines some of the traditional readings of Bartleby as a Christ figure aiding the 'redemption' of the lawyer.

¹⁷ On the use of the meridian in 'Bartleby' see Hildebrand (1988). That slaves often worked through the night and could be associated with the 'moon' is evident from Segal (1995: 56). He points out that in sugar plantations 'slaves in Louisiana were made to labor up to eighteen hours a day at grinding time. But cotton production was little less exacting. Most slaves engaged in this were roused to be ready ... before dawn, ... were kept for fifteen or

Throughout the 1840s Democrats presented ten hour working day proposals to the Massachusetts legislature, supported by Van Buren, but each time were defeated by Whig committees. ‘To work only ten hours in summer and eight hours in winter is to waste life’, was the verdict of the *New York Journal of Commerce*. Still, the ten hour campaign flourished during the forties and fifties. Many workers were threatened with dismissal if they supported them. Closely related to this issue, democrats also sought to repeal the sunset law, which made it well-nigh impossible for working men to vote by the close of polls at sunset. No matter how mobilised labour was, it could hardly make its voice heard at the polls, even less so in Massachusetts, where representation in the state senate was based on property, not population.

sixteen hours in the season of cultivation, often until well into the night’.

When the lawyer in 'Bartleby' professes admiration for John Jacob Astor, he places himself in the role of the landed aristocracy, as unconcerned with the struggles of the working man's day as he is with the next election, or with the means by which Astor acquired his status as America's wealthiest man. His 'absent-mindedness' (24) about the election shows his political naivete, as does his chagrin at losing the Mastership of Chancery, 'by a new constitution' (4) before the institution of which he could afford to be 'safely' and comfortably 'unambitious', and seeing no reason why his employees should be different.

For the lawyer, time has force mainly as a means to maintain a regimented equanimity. He neither desires improvement, hence needs no election, nor (like Delano later) is able to see anything unnatural in the eccentric actions of those around him. Happy that he 'never had to do with their eccentricities at one time', the lawyer accepts as a 'good natural arrangement under the circumstances' that Turkey's and Nippers' 'fits relieved each other like guards' (8). He turns, as Bentham would do, a physical experience of torpor into an abstract form of social control. The eccentric actions of the bodies of his employees become a clock measuring his day. They are, quite literally, the slaves of time. Oblivious to cause, the lawyer is concerned only with the effect on his own sense of order, and where he cannot explain or fully control, divides off spatially and temporally from himself. The opposite of Ahab in nature, the lawyer nevertheless thinks similarly about temporal reality - what he cannot control he reduces to an abstraction. If Ahab hates the abstraction and attacks it, the lawyer explains it away or pretends it does not exist, as he does when he abandons Bartleby in his rooms.

Bartleby brings the cause of the working man into the lawyer's office, but does so by playing the lawyer at his own game. Reducing all space and time to its uttermost, he stretches the lawyer's abstracting to its limits, defeating the attempt to remove the problem by giving it a particular space, time or role. Time is both the trap and the safety valve in the capitalist economy, both for employee and employer. Each depends on cyclical return to keep up the pressure and to provide an expectation of release at the end of the day, week, month, year. Bartleby rids time of its function as safety valve, and traps the lawyer in his own abstractions by re-interpreting the cyclical as eternal. 'His decision was irreversible' (12) he instructs the lawyer, bringing the forward-looking, linearity of capitalism to a halt by using the very language of linearity. He is another version of Ahab's 'iron rails', but in opposition to him, Ahab's linearity turned back on itself. He undoes linearity, however, by making it 'eternal', when he uses the word 'prefer' (12). The indefinite 'prefer' takes away the fullstop from time.

Bartleby never says a final 'no', but, like the cannibalistic sharks, or the timeless Ouroboros eating its tail, turns time and space in against themselves. In the process he asserts the right of the individual to make a decision about the use of his own time and space, over the general will of the majority.

In the same way that the lawyer wants to have Bartleby near him but not see him, he also wants him available perpetually, but only on his own terms. Bartleby, however, remains a 'perpetual sentry in the corner' (12), a little like a scolded child who refuses forgiveness just to show the unjustness of the punishment, whose 'unalterableness of demeanour' (15) can be seen by the lawyer only in terms the latter can understand, either as perverseness or as forlornness, eliciting a 'fraternal melancholy' (17). If there is a single desire regarding time which dominates the lawyer, it is for changelessness and certainty. He reads the cyclical as security and as a reminder of an aristocratic past - Cicero, Chancery, and Astor, 'a name which, I admit, I love to repeat' (4). In fact, his view of time fits that which Foucault (1991: 150-151) has shown dominated early industrialism, where the 'factory-monastery' was created. From the control of time in the school system, through to the army, and on to the factories, the emphasis began to fall on the quality of time used:

...constant supervision, the pressure of supervisors, the elimination of anything that might disturb or distract; it is a question of constituting a totally useful time.
... Time measured and paid must also be a time without impurities or defects; a time of good quality, throughout which the body is constantly applied to its exercise. Precision and application are, with regularity, the fundamental virtues of disciplinary time.

The lawyer's control of time, where his workers might 'proceed to business without the least delay' (10) and for a while Bartleby's mechanical writing works in this Utilitarian tradition, to the point where order and structure become more important, for the lawyer at least, than what is being produced. The structure of time becomes its own purpose.

Bartleby, however, by declaring that he had finally 'given up copying altogether' (21), shows that such dependence on the past is naive. Cicero, a dead statue, reminiscent of Melville's own dead aristocratic past, represents a lost colonialist empire with its dead language and moribund legal system. Astor is dead, and the Chancery will be removed by a

new constitution. When Bartleby is left in the deserted office 'like the last column of some ruined temple' (23) he represents not so much the past, but its passing, which the lawyer seems unwilling to acknowledge.¹⁸ Bartleby presents the unexpected as eternally present, but never so present that it can be controlled or kept absent.

In the face of a system which removes from the individual the value of his own time, and makes him a 'sentry' in a 'ruined temple', where he pays neither rent nor taxes nor owns the property (25), the only option for the labourer is to attempt to remove from time its power. If the lawyer attempts a static existence, where regularity becomes the primary objective, Bartleby takes that stasis to its ultimate conclusion as a way of defeating it. Both use the same method, Bartleby merely doing what it is the lawyer's nature to do. Each 'assumes' (24) a position hoping that assumption will determine reality. The word 'prefer' epitomizes the approach. Having no claim to specificity, it falls into a timeless zone of inactivity. 'Prefer' is the 'dead wall revery' of indecision and empty timelessness which Bartleby faces. It is the same 'dead wall' of Wall Street. Where bodies are allowed no space to dream, but must constantly perform in order to fill time usefully, the revery becomes a waking dream which attempts to defeat the clock.

This may be read as another version of the chronometrical entering the horological offered in *Pierre*. The eternal enters the temporal, but not as a support for its endeavours so much as to show its emptiness. 'He still preferred to abide with me' (27) complains the lawyer, but we are doubtless meant to hear the reference to the hymn 'abide with me' as we are the idea of the eternal not letting go even of sinners. But by making the reference ironic Melville merely shows the lack of 'eternal' morality in the lawyer, and in the moral stasis of capitalism generally. 'Prefer' makes the state of 'abiding' one which is without end, opposite to the 'thrust' (27), which the new tenants in the lawyer's chambers do to Bartleby, toward a definite closure, the very kind sought by capitalist endeavour. Moreover, the irony of a decisive indecision shows up the liberal capitalist for what he is, one who prefers not to

¹⁸ In the Masonic symbolism so prevalent in 'Bartleby' Time is often figured as the grim reaper standing over the Virgin, who leans against a ruined temple pillar. To 'mason up his remains in the wall' (27) as the lawyer wants to do with Bartleby, is to keep him ever in the space of Masonic initiation, in the journey through the 'Egyptian' temple/tomb, never to emerge fully on the other side. The lawyer's sense of 'fraternal melancholy' akin to Masonic fraternity (17) is false since it keeps him 'Master' and Bartleby initiate, finally perishing in the Tombs, rather than rising like Christ/Osiris from them. See Robert Macoy, *A Dictionary of Freemasonry*, Gramercy, 1989.

know the unhappy consequences of his apparently beneficent forms of control. Assuming, rather than seeking real knowledge, the lawyer is the one in the narrative who actually exists by 'preferring not to'.

This negative 'preference' may be seen as a form of the death wish, which both the lawyer and Bartleby, like Ahab and Pierre, share. Decisive indecision undermines linear time. For the death wish, as Freud points out in 'Civilization and its Discontents' (1985: 313), is another way of controlling nature, a narcissistic enjoyment in *not* achieving the desired end. 'Prefer' suggests an objective in the future, 'not to' removes the objective and makes time static, bringing the future into an eternal present. In the case of 'Bartleby', however, such a present offers no sacramental opening into divine vision. Bartleby's eyes, after all, so unlike Emerson's transcendentalist ones, are 'dull and glazed' (21). The lawyer's are as blind, for they cannot see beneath the surface of Bartleby's dull eyes to the real cause. 'Do you not see the reason for yourself?' Bartleby asks the lawyer as explanation for why he refuses to copy any longer. Unlike Ahab, the lawyer cannot imagine anything beneath the mask, and finds little reason to, replacing existential angst with the dull round of Starbuckian prudence. Bartleby's wall revery, once again, merely reflects and extends the lawyer's actual but unconscious state of mind. He is stuck in the reduction of all time to labour, where work and the regularity of bodily needs determine meaning (for 'dinner hour' is able to distract him from even the most distressing events). Bartleby halts the round of bodily need and the labour to fulfill it, but only by extending its 'blankness' to its uttermost.

Inevitably the 'round' must end where it begins, in the tomb/womb, where time is brought to a still point, and where even the shape of the body returns to its embryonic circularity of birth and death. Having, as Ronald Hoag (1992) points out, become a 'memento mori' in the office, Bartleby, is removed at noon (where the sun of capitalism defeats the moon of passive resistance) to the Tombs (32), like a Thoreau rejecting social control, but inevitably having no choice but to succumb to its physical force, showing the ultimate futility of Thoreauvian isolationism. The blank wall before which he dies symbolizes the reduction of all time and space to a single end. The foetal position of his body, like the rising and falling of the sun, and like the school of birthing and dying whales circling the *Pequod* in 'The Grand Armada' may be interpreted as a sacramental entry of eternity into the temporal. But it is hard not to think that the blank wall, both whale's and Wall Street's, defeats any such sacramental promise. Carrying no discernible meaning, it cannot offer either hope or despair. More like

Schopenhauer's blind Will so dominant in *Moby-Dick* than Edwards' attempt at a free one, the walls are their own meaning, or whatever meaning anyone gives them. As such their blankness is less an instrument of multi-valency than of occlusion.

Bartleby, like Ishmael and Isabel before him, and like countless slaves contemporary with him, is without a history. 'I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man' (4). In such a historyless state, multi-valency becomes occlusion, so broad as to be meaningless, defeating a trajectory towards the future. The 'history' the narrator offers, after all, is but his own interpretation of Bartleby, and by his own admission is based on his own 'astonished eyes' and a 'vague report' (4). Time ends in the text, but the text must be interpreted and may still, like the Egyptian seed, 'fall to mould'.

If the lawyer sees in the Egyptian stonework of the Tombs, seeds dropped 'through the clefts' (34) by birds to offer growth, such sight is defeated by the image of the dead Bartleby. The return to the ancient past, as to the captivity of Israel/Christ in Egypt as the typological beginning of a new era, does not, in 'Bartleby', fulfill its promise. For even if the lawyer cannot see it, the seed of history is rather like the one Melville mentions in his letter to Hawthorne: 'three thousand years and nothing but a seed', which will finally 'fall to mould'.

The 'dead seed', like those growing around Pierre's Memnon stone, combines space and time, past, present and future and can exist only in certain soil. Modern 'English soil' will not suffice, for its alien nature, whether political, social, economic or aesthetic, will suffocate. And any who dare to stand alone, like Bartleby, or Pierre, or Enceladus or Memnon, (or Melville himself) will fall to the paradox in which the figure of birth and strength, be it seed or great rock or Wall, is also the figure of death. For Bartleby's Tomb is another version of Enceladus's Titanic struggle against prison, like the American slave in his 'Egyptian' captivity, where ancient past and modern present, and future eternity are brought to a death-life standstill.

You paused, fixed by a form defiant, a form of awfulness. You saw Enceladus the Titan, the most potent of all the giants, writhing from out the imprisoning earth; - turbaned with upborne moss he writhed ... still turning his unconquerable front toward that majestic mount eternally in vain assailed by him, and which, when it had stormed him off, had heaved his undoffable incubus upon him, and deridingly left him there to bay out his ineffectual howl (*Pierre*, 345).

The 'bay tree' that should have been the young Melville/Cicero's reward has become but an 'ineffectual howl', and the struggle to emerge from the tomb of rebirth and become initiated into the mysteries of eternity, a writhing in prison.

Dead Letters

The 'ineffectual howl' is the 'dead letter' at the heart of 'Bartleby', bayed at the 'undoffable incubus' of the Wall. But Melville's story extends the meaning of the 'dead letter' beyond those which previous works have presented. *Moby-Dick* makes the dead letter a floating signifier, a coffin whose buoyancy nevertheless saves the teller and brings renewal in the form of the book. It, at least, looks for the mystical meaning behind the mask, if never finding it. *Pierre*, one pessimistic step further, turns self-reflexivity into its own dead end. The author/character 'dies' in the face of a narrative which traps him in self-reflexivity. The 'prison house of language' leads to textual and literal suicide. 'Bartleby' takes us yet further into the prison by removing from the narrator the status of reliability, and therefore from the reader any firm ground from which to interpret. It presents the labour of writing or of initiation through writing as the ultimately futile exercise.

For all the apparent 'certainty' of the interpretation of 'Bartleby' just offered above, which has, hopefully been a convincing argument in favour of reading the story as a form of social criticism, for all this interpretive certainty, no single interpretation can satisfactorily be offered as the story's final meaning, unless it is that there is no final meaning. 'Bartleby' foreshadows 'Benito Cereno' and to some extent *Billy Budd* by showing that perhaps the ultimate bodily confinement resides in the impossibility of finally reading the body, and so being unable to understand its actions. The ambiguity of language and its inability to pin meanings becomes a way of conquering language itself, leaving deferral as the final message. Bartleby may be a Christ-figure, or he may be a lunatic. He may be a symbol of the suffering slave, or he may be a version of other-worldly mastery. Or he may be all of them together. Likewise, the lawyer may be a redeemed figure, finding 'caritas' in his encounter with Bartleby. Or he may remain largely ignorant and the text largely ironic.

The narrator's unreliability having been demonstrated in his 'blindness' to Bartleby's 'real' desires, it is now compounded at the end of the narrative, by the 'rumour' of where

Bartleby has come from. The 'dead letter office' is not only the literal, but now extinct, place Bartleby *may* once have worked, it also suggests the *idea* of what may have been in the past, and what may be an interpretation of the narrative. The uncertainty turns multi-valency into a dead wall occlusion. In doing so the narrative becomes the ultimate protest against systems of confinement, the first of which is narrative itself.

Numerous commentators have pointed out that 'Bartleby' may be interpreted from whatever viewpoint the reader cares to take. As Milton R. Stern puts it, 'the seer of psychiatric, political, literary, metaphysical, or religious positions is sure to find in the tale a paradigm for his own advocacy'.¹⁹ Depending on the critic's Gestalt, says Stern, the lawyer may represent anything from the selfish capitalist society, to repressive law and order, to self-deceiving rationalization, to the world of surfaces, or all of the above. 'Bartleby' is as fluid and ungraspable as the whale, perhaps even more so.

But one must see this as Melville's point. Interpretations such as the one above, which limit themselves to particular aspects of the narrative, are not misguided. The narrative invites them, insists on them, and in turn they accept the confines of their own viewpoints. But such confines notwithstanding, Bartleby and the lawyer are symbols of an interpretive lacuna which, by refusing final confinement, slides into death rather than creative openness. Like the circular figure of the embryo Bartleby adopts in death, the self-cannibalising shark born of capitalism, or the eternal Ouroboros, interpretation rejects closure by turning in on itself, but leaving a hole in the middle. The opposite of the rebirth figured in *Moby-Dick* by the tattooed coffin, the blank wall before which Bartleby dies, becomes a little like the tale 'told by an idiot' (both lawyer and silent protagonist) 'full of sound and fury' but still 'signifying nothing'. The lawyer remains 'wholly unable to gratify' any final 'truth' about Bartleby, and all he is left with is a 'rumor' (34) as evidence of his interpretation.

Bartleby himself ultimately chooses silence as a way of rejecting social and aesthetic confinement, but here, unlike with Queequeg whose body speaks its strange language, silence becomes its own isolationist trap. It dies uninterpreted. Melville has by now ceased to believe in redemptive bodies or in redemptive silences. The 'rumor' is not unlike Isabel's guitar which inspires Pierre's endless pages, which can nevertheless not be interpreted. Here multi-valency

¹⁹ Stern, 'Towards "Bartleby the Scrivener"'. *Essays in Honour of Marston LaFrance*. Ed. Duane J. MacMillan. Toronto: U of Toronto P., (1979): 19-41. Cited in Thomas R. Mitchell (1990: 329).

rejects interpretive limitation, but still becomes in turn a prison of limitless meanings. No floating coffin emerges from this wall.

The result is that Melville moves away, inexorably, from the phenomenological interpretations in *Moby-Dick* where reality and perception are tantalizingly inseparable and meaning endlessly suggestive, to a far more pessimistic view where endlessness equals a desert of silence. The real truth is not one of 'fraternity' but rather one where the individual is permanently, unlike Ishmael, 'absolutely alone in the universe. A bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic' (22), and where death is not as a soon-to-be-resurrected Christ between murderers and thieves (310), but rather between Job's 'kings and counsellors' (Job 3.14) who are buried, however, in the place where murderers and thieves are to be found, and are, then, probably one and the same. Bartleby may be lying between thieves or between kings, and they may or may not be the same thing, there is no telling.

Silence becomes an analogue of the narrative itself. It is an ironic rewriting of the Job story which Melville chooses as Bartleby's epitaph. Job's complaint against existence would seem to be Bartleby's, who would, in the lawyer's eyes, rather 'sleep with kings and counsellors of the earth' than continue a life of suffering. A number of problems arise with such an interpretation, however. Bartleby never says or does anything which can reasonably support such an interpretation. His stubborn silence is the opposite of Job's 'sound and fury'. The silence leaves the burden of interpretation to the lawyer, who in the disruption of his 'safe' life by Bartleby, is himself more like Job in his complaints. He may well be reading into a narrative what is not there. On top of this Melville adds yet another layer of uncertainty: that the lawyer himself acknowledges his inability to judge Bartleby's motives, or really knows nothing about his history. The addendum about the dead letter office is included only because it suits a 'certain suggestive interest' (34).

Bartleby's silence is then symbolic of one of the more profoundly disturbing actions of conquest in Melville's works: that of being interpellated not only by the thinly disguised frustrations of the lawyer who cannot revolt as Bartleby does, but also by those readers who are made to interpret him in almost any way they choose. There is, finally, no 'real' Bartleby, and the 'dead letter' of the text is sent to those who cannot interpret it or who are long dead, by one himself 'dead' to the letter. The only Bartleby available is the one subject to the imposed meanings of others, and bears no reality outside those meanings. He is the body written upon by whatever grand narrative the interpreter offers, reducing selfhood to no more than a set of

signifiers which, in the face of the blank wall, the cold tomb and the circular body, are empty. The final thief Bartleby is left to die with is interpretation itself. 'These letters speed to death' (34) says the narrator, not fully seeing the implications of his own statement, and so being party to the 'death'.

As one subject to multi-valency he becomes, in Foucauldian fashion, a function of discourse. Inasmuch as labour will remove any transcendental 'selfhood' from the person and replace it with a function in the social structure, the body becomes the instrument of self-knowledge. Social discursive practice reduces the labouring body to a limited number of essential(ist) meanings. It does what Ahab attempts to do to the whale. Bartleby's refusal to perform the functions demanded, and 'Bartleby' the story's refusal to limit meaning, relying rather on 'assumptions', 'suggestiveness' and 'prefer[ances]', explodes discursive limitation. In the process the body becomes a figure of absence, rather than of presence, a 'ghost' both to meaning and to itself.

Put differently, such interpretive openness may be seen as another version of the liberal, Thoreauvian principle 'That government is best which governs least'. For the rejection of enslavement that obsesses Thoreau is another version of the rejection of discursive control over the body. 'The mass of men', he says in 'Resistance to Civil Government' (HC 1, 1993: 322), 'serve the State thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies'. The problem is that the alternative to machine-like control of little or no control serves to open the discursive domain so wide as to leave a gaping hole. The lawyer, who cannot control Bartleby's passive resistance because he attempts to live by Thoreau's dictum while still keeping a degree of surveillance and ignoring his employees' real physical state, falls into the trap of leaving all interpretation open as a way of not facing his own inadequacy.

If the letter of the law, which Bartleby copies 'silently, palely, mechanically' (10), kills, then a government without letters kills too because it offers no formal position from which to interpret its value. Resistance to the letter becomes pointless if it offers little more than an 'ineffectual howl'. This may be the hidden meaning, one suspects, of the blank wall; not the horror of blankness as a mirror of what lies in the viewer, so much as a blankness which can be written on in any way the writer chooses. And this is why Bartleby gives up all copying, not just because he is tired of copying the works of others as a servant, or tired of copying an identity not his own, but also because all words are themselves futile. It is ultimately Job's problem too, since he can do little but complain about his state in the face of a seemingly

uninterpretable series of events. Without a position from which to understand the meaning of what happens, there is no way to progress beyond stasis or to develop specific social/intellectual paradigms. Either way the body becomes a machine, whether in service or in resistance. This, as Frederic Jameson has pointed out, is much the problem Marx and Engels had with mid-nineteenth-century utopian reformers like Fourier and Owen.²⁰ The liberal-minded reformers, forerunners of Marxism itself, thrived on utopian ideals, without really putting into action on a large enough scale to make a difference, their various plans for social harmony. Resistance lay more in the letter than in the action. And resistance which leads only to its own isolated space, be it pond, phallanx or farm, leads ultimately to crumbling silence.

If anything this too may be seen as the hidden meaning behind the bust of Cicero which sits so inscrutably behind the lawyer's head, and on which Bartleby fixes his gaze. The bust would have shown a portly, bejewelled man with unseeing eyes which in this case may well represent the lawyer's own moral blindness, a 'baboonishness' Melville himself would have feared becoming as he grew older, and yet partly saw in himself. There is the Cicero, the Roman liberal, whose speeches, rhetorically powerful, show the letter of the state at its most benign, whose letters to ex-wives and daughter show the human side of the public figure. And then there is the Cicero who is a figure of political and social compromise, often supporting the safest option, dying, ironically, when cheated by the leader (Augustus) he blindly trusts. The letter that will most cheat him is his own, as the lawyer's letter, his own text where he consistently, unknowingly, undercuts himself, will be the one most dangerous to him. Cicero's answer to his time is the safety of language as a protest against injustice, but he remains blind to the possibility of his own collusion in that injustice. The bust, then, represents the same pallid silence of which Bartleby is the mirror, and moral compromise of which the lawyer is the descendent.

Returning to the tombs, a place of marble, Bartleby returns to the past, not just to the origin of modern civilization and its notions of social justice (now a prison), but also to its linguistic origins. Bartleby, like the hysteric in *Pierre*, reduces those linguistic origins to his emaciated body, and that he confines to the shape of a zero. For as long as language, and its correlative, moral epistemology, remain open-ended and subject to 'rumour', the body will

²⁰ See Jameson, 'To Reconsider the Relationship of Marxism to Utopian Thought'. In Hardt and Weeks, eds., (2000: 361-367).

become the final word which will have no choice but to speak for itself. Even that speech, however, will be open to too many interpretations. Returning to our origins to see if we can begin again, we find only the dead statue, the tomb, the dead letter, the moribund narrative. ‘Dead letters! Does it not sound like dead men?’ (35). Melville is here not only referring to the letters in Bartleby’s possible place of late employment, but to the letter of law, of ‘civilization’, of history, and ultimately, of his own narrative itself. The final cry, then, ‘Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!’ may not be so much an expression of despair for the fate of humanity, but perhaps more importantly an epistemological cry about how to determine what it means to be human, and how such a humanity could tell its own story without falling into pointless and moribund circularity. How can we be free of ourselves?

Melville’s answer to the question is an ironic one. For when Bartleby dies and goes to sleep ‘with kings and counsellors’ it might be assumed that he has broken all worldly barriers of class and knowledge, as the text itself seeks to do by its illimitable meanings. He does so, however, only in death. None of the counsel he may receive is available to the living. If Melville’s story reveals the hole at the heart of capitalist liberalism, it also takes the next step, which will be developed in the other two important texts to come, ‘Benito Cereno’ and *Billy Budd*, that of showing that even the attempt to undercut the liberal project is itself inevitably undercut by the inherent unreliability of the linguistic product. Meaning endlessly deferred becomes meaning best left to the confines of a blank wall, even if deferral itself creates huge epistemological and moral gaps, in which terrible tragedies wait to happen.

CHAPTER SEVEN

OF MIMICRY AND MASQUES:

'BENITO CERENO' AND THE NATIONAL ALLEGORY

'MASTER

Come my servant, follow me,
According to thy place
And surely God will be with thee,
And send the heavn'ly grace

SERVANT

Dear Master, I will follow thee,
According to thy word,
And pray that God may be with me,
And save thee in the Lord.'

Jupiter Hammon (1720-1800) 'The Kind
Master and the Dutiful Servant'

'The snake? It would not rust
On its forked tree.
The snake admired labour,
It would not leave him alone.'

Derek Walcott, 'New World'.

Pierre and 'Bartleby the Scrivener' both end in prisons and in the resigned silence of their primary characters. The first is an upper class Melville imago. The second is a working class waif, an Ishmael Melville was soon to join when he entered the New York Custom House and twenty years of relative silence. 'Benito Cereno' transfers the prison and its silence from the broken ideals of the working classes and the literary elite to America's most profound political and philosophical challenge, that of race-based slavery, and the Manifest Destiny which kept it afloat. If the object of the capitalist hunt in *Moby-Dick* finally destroys its hunter, then, like the whale, the slaves on board the *San Dominick* are the objects of capitalist and colonialist conquest turned against their own masters. Their bodies are literally and figuratively captive to the role society has demanded they play. The slave mimics the role he must play to please

the master. 'Benito Cereno' shows such mimicry to be but a mask/masque which is a primary tool of the psychology of conquest. Beneath the mask a more subtle psychology is at work, revealed only in those incidents like slave revolts and mutinies. Turning the slave role on its head by revolting, the slaves capture the western bodies of the masters, but more importantly, they show the assumptions of western, racist rhetoric which allots servile roles to be flawed. Melville's foremost objective in 'Benito Cereno', the present argument will contend, is to explore the relation between the mask/masque of rhetoric and confinement, both physical and intellectual. In the process he explores the psychology of conquest as it is presented in Amasa Delano, symbol of white America.

Many earlier readings of 'Benito Cereno' have also focussed on the rhetorical features of the work. The debate elicited has ranged from 'liberal' readings in which Melville is seen as racist in his depictions of the slaves (Matthieson and Fiedler) to more recent critics reading the text as largely ironic (Karcher, Rogin and Sanborn) to those which see even these readings as versions of a liberal ideology Melville is himself questioning (Kavanagh and Sundquist). The present reading concurs mostly with Kavanagh, and suggests that Melville uses his analysis of colonialist rhetoric to show that there can be no final moral position taken when either party in the master/slave relation has power over the other. Even using the 'mask' of empire against itself, as the slaves do, a 'violent hierarchy', as Derrida would say, is maintained. To explode such a violent hierarchy, as Melville seeks to do, he must provide a reading of events which disallows simplistic binaries, black/white or good/evil.¹

¹ For earlier readings see F.O. Matthieson's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*, New York: Oxford UP, 1941; Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel*, New York: Stein, 1966. For 'liberalist' ones see Carolyn Karcher's *Shadow Over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race and Violence in Melville's America*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1980; Rogin (1983) and Sanborn (1999). Kavanagh (1989) and Sundquist (1993) offer the 'materialist' readings which remain the most seminal by showing how Melville attempts to disclaim the point of view of either master or slave.

By confining the meaning of bodies, racist rhetoric which uses allegorical fixed meanings to 'pin' subjects to particular roles, is a version of the castration complex Melville analysed in the person of Ahab. A retention of the rhetoric ensures that neither slave nor master, as Hegel had shown in his analysis of the master/slave dialectic, is free. The dominance of the master's point of view, as Pinkard (1996: 60) explains Hegel, depends on 'the slave's *having to accept it* as dominant' so that it is 'fully dependent on the slave's *contingently* coming to accept it and on his *continuing* to accept it'. Only one point of view can be used to solve conflicts, and this is the master's, to which the slave is bound, but to whose binding the master is himself bound.

Since, as Dimock (1989: 21) has suggested, the 'empire for liberty' depends for its realization on allegory, a fixing of 'spatialized time' and of the 'other' as needing 'liberty' from itself, the allegorical mode presented in 'Benito Cereno' may itself be the subject of the narrative. It is not so much what happens, but how events are interpreted, which becomes not only the story's object, but also the reasons why actions are taken and the means by which bodies are confined, tortured and killed. Body, in this story, is the prisoner of rhetoric. 'Since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words' (102)² is what Babo's 'aspect seemed to say' to the narrator at the end of the tale. Words are masks which can trick. Having used all the rhetorical trickery of colonialism available to him, the captured Babo must fall silent. Like Delano, American expansionism can be seen to fall into its own blinkered ideological trap by presuming that by expanding the empire it is expanding 'liberty'. Melville will show that no such 'liberty' actually exists, and that the use of colonialist rhetoric underpinning empire-building is, by its very nature, a trap preventing either physical or intellectual and political freedom.

The pantomimic actions of the slaves on board the *San Dominick* are, as Eric Sundquist (1993: 138) has shown, a 'stylized enactment of a rebellion contained within the illusion of mastery...'. By creating such a stylized rebellion, and examining the nature of the pantomime that plays itself out on board the stricken vessel, Melville explores the nature of the mimicry within colonial master-slave culture. In Sundquist's (1993: 139) words, he is 'reconfiguring the machinery of slavery as a masquerade, exposing its appeal to natural law as the utmost

² All references are from *Melville's Short Novels*. Ed. Dan McCall (2002).

artifice', and perhaps suggesting that 'there was *no future*, as it were, for the experiment of American democracy so long as the paralysis of inequality continued'. Cereno himself explains why this may be the case in his famous rejoinder to Delano's puzzled question about his downcast aspect after being 'saved' from the slaves. The American, with a Transcendentalist and Whitmanian (supporter of Manifest Destiny that he was) flourish, gestures to the elements. 'But the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it. See, yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves'. 'Because they have no memory,... because they are not human', replies Cereno. And then, like a prophet of Manifest Destiny looking to the new sun in the west, 'You are saved' ... 'you are saved; what has cast such a shadow upon you?' 'The negro', is Cereno's reply (101).

That shadow is the 'mirror' in which the colonialist Cereno sees a part of his own self, and which the 'subtle' Babo merely reflects back to him in his play' It makes Babo like a 'Nubian sculptor finishing off a white statue-head' and Cereno 'the creature of his own tasteful hands (74). In both 'Benito Cereno' and *Moby-Dick* it is the shadow which finally kills, for it exists as much in the mind as it does in the flesh. Playing the mirror locks both master and slave in what JanMohamed (1995: 20) has termed 'Manichean allegory'. The allegory of empire is Manichean, he suggests, because in the unequal terms of the master-slave dialectic, the 'enforced recognition from the Other in fact amounts to the European's narcissistic self-recognition since the native, who is considered too degraded and inhuman to be credited with any specific subjectivity, is cast as no more than a recipient of the negative elements of the self that the European projects onto him'. 'Benito Cereno' is full of such projections. Pure allegory, as Angus Fletcher (1964: 180) puts it, 'lacks ambiguity in the same way that a diagram essentially lacks it'. As allegories fixing meaning they present, in Bhabha's (1985: 147) words, 'a normalizing myth whose organics and revisionary narrative is also the history of ... nationalist discipline'. Like most allegory, racial projection fixes the stereotype in what he terms 'a partial presence' because it pins the subject with a meaning which retains '*difference that is almost the same, but not quite*' (1984: 126). To exist within this paradigm is, for Bhabha, to live in a state of constant 'mimicry', where the colonial subject mimics the master but never quite 'becomes him and therefore represents an 'ambivalence'. 'In order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference', says Bhabha (1984: 126).

The 'pantomime' of empire is built on an allegorical rhetoric (the word itself taken

from the Greek ‘allos’ - ‘other’) which presumes itself to be merely ‘descriptive’ of the ‘natural’ differences between beings, but which in fact is prescriptive and has bodily force. Only those unable to perceive the prescriptive nature of the rhetoric take it lightly. Delano becomes the example for Melville of such a person, the northerner from Duxbury, Massachusetts (66), with ‘republican impartiality’ (67) who supposedly has an ‘honest seaman’s mind’ (73) and whose *modus vivendi* is ‘by ignoring the symptoms, to get rid of the malady’ (64). As he did with Bartleby’s lawyer, Melville makes the assumption of ‘honesty’ into one of deliberate blindness. Being northern, and hence probably a supporter of the ‘safety valve’ option of Manifest Destiny, he prefers to confine the racial threat to the level of rhetoric, that the way things seem is the way things are, and if the language changes then so does the thing itself. ‘These have turned over new leaves’, he says of the blue sky and blue sea, and echoing Daniel Webster after the 1850 Compromise: ‘A long and violent convulsion of the elements has just passed away, and the heavens, the skies, smile upon us’ (101 n 8). Both he and Webster assume that the word can overwrite memory and recreate the physical in its own image. As an apparent Transcendentalist, he offers an Emersonian ‘transparent eyeball’ which maintains its naive emphasis on superficial sight, and on a forgetting of the past in favour of a re-framed present and future. But Cereno, all too aware of mirrors and shadows, undermines such innocence. Humans have memory, and memory defeats any naive belief in the totality of the present, just as it ultimately defeats the fixing gaze of imperial allegory. Overwriting neither removes the ‘shadow’ of the past nor the corporeal fact of an imposed difference between master and slave. Cereno’s new leaf is stained with memory and with fear of the future. Melville’s ‘new leaf’, the narrative itself as an overwriting of the original Captain Delano’s deposition, places a mirror before the imperial allegory and unmasks its shadows.

One may read Melville’s novella, then, as a version of ‘anti-allegory’, which uses traditional allegorical motifs but which makes it difficult to ascertain the exact meaning of the allegory. If allegory assumes meaning to be ‘manifest’ in the particular ‘Other’ and its ‘destiny’ assured, then the force of Melville’s text may be seen to lie in a dismantling of allegory’s nationalizing mode. His most important ‘anti-allegorical’ mirror is his palimpsestic revision of Amasa Delano’s original account of his taking the *Tryal*. In its place he puts a theatrical masque/mask which is intended to veil neat allegorical meanings, so that he offers a revision of the theatre of colonial conquest. He does this, it will be argued below, by

presenting six primary scenes or acts in the drama of empire. Each of them refuses reductionist allegorical or nationalist readings, while nevertheless inviting them. They are: Atufal's chains, the shaving scene, the lunch scene, the stern-piece, the skeleton scene, and finally, the gibbet itself. In each of these bodies are confined not just physically, but by the allegorizing colonial eye represented mostly by Delano. These six scenes may be divided into two parts, which will be explored under the headings, 'The Sign of the Barber' and 'The Sign of the Scaffold'. Together, these two parts may be seen to balance each other as presentations of uninterpretable allegory, pointing simultaneously at the horrors of colonialism and at the horrors of revolt. Such a balancing prevents the hierarchizing forms of allegory from holding sway and replaces them with a version of timeless contestation, between nations, individual people, and within narrative meaning itself.

Theatrical Palimpsest

Amasa Delano's initial record of the events aboard the *Tryal* in 1804, bespeaks all the moralizing stereotypes one might expect from a liberal allegorical nationalism. Melville uses many of the actual words and sentiments from the original Delano in his recreation of the fictional one. Delano depicts himself as one 'whose temperament of mind [is] unusually pleasant', who offers 'every possible kindness' (203).³ He presumes he thinks favourably of the Negroes even after capturing them, and is able to see that they 'defended themselves with desperate courage' (207). He assures the reader that he must protect the captured slaves from the Spaniards 'prevent[ing] them from cutting to pieces and killing these poor unfortunate beings' (207). His own naivete and capitalist mentality are shown, however, by his un-selfcritical emphasis on monetary interests. 'All bad consequences may be avoided by one who has a knowledge of his duty, and is disposed faithfully to obey its dictates' (206). Duty is to finance and insurance. 'It should always be borne in mind,' he says with a homiletic flourish, 'that to do anything which will destroy the guaranty of their policies, how great soever may be the inducement, and generous soever the motive, is not justifiable' (205). After all his generous efforts to help the stricken Spaniard, however, he is mortified by the treatment he gets. 'After our arrival in Conception, I was mortified and very much hurt at the treatment

³ All references are to McCall's edition, which includes extracts from Delano's original narrative and the court depositions.

which I received from Don Bonito Sereno; but had this been the only time that I ever was treated with ingratitude, injustice, or want of compassion, I would not complain' (208). The incredulous tone is that of an impetuous, childish man who sees no ironies in his own point of view. 'He [Sereno] went to the prison and took the depositions of five of my Botany bay convicts, who had left us at St. Maria, and were now in prison here. This was done by him with a view to injure my character, so that he might not be obliged to make us any compensation for what we had done for him' (208).

With blithe innocence Delano tells us that many of his crew were actually escaped convicts, taken aboard because others had deserted, that in fact 'my crew were refractory' and 'ever unfaithful', that he had to exercise 'very strict discipline' by 'giving them wholesome floggings; and at other times treating them with the best I had, or could get, according as their deeds deserved' (201). The calculated nature of this admission is evident from Delano's carefully prefixing his account with that of his mate's journal entry, intended, doubtless, to show him in as good a light as possible, though it is as neutral an account as may be expected from a log book. His intention in giving his account, he tells the reader, 'is with a view of giving the reader a correct understanding of the peculiar situation under which we were placed at the time this affair happened' (201). He remains, by his own admission, a captain under siege from his own men, afraid of their imminent desertion or mutiny: 'never at any time after my arrival at this place [St. Maria], daring to let my whale boat be in the water fifteen minutes unless I was in her myself, from a fear that some of my people would run away with her' (202). He is, to all intents and purposes, the Northern version of the slave owner.

If there appears no American nationalist solidarity in his men's attitude, Delano tells the story precisely to impress upon the reader the change of heart his men undergo when having to take the *Tryal*. '...not one disaffected word was spoken by the men, but all flew to obey the commands they received' (202). In the logic of imperialism even deserting convicts, Delano asserts, will be transformed into obedient servants when they are faced with mutinied slaves. He glosses over the fact that he had offered his men financial reward, one which he himself takes some trouble recuperating from the 'ungrateful' and 'unjust' Sereno (208).

Delano's self-aggrandizing tone and actions may well have reminded Melville's contemporaries of the similar pseudo-liberalist logic on which the Wilmot proviso was based. Just as the thin line drawn in the Wilmot Proviso of 1847 between philanthropic sentiment and monetary gain allowed the North a neat means to avoid the slavery question in the conquered

territories, so the financial claims Delano makes are seen as duty to shareholders first, and to moral claims thereafter. 'I would preserve for free white labor' Wilmot declared, 'a fair country, a rich inheritance, where the sons of toil, of my own race and color, can live without the disgrace which association which negro slavery brings upon free labor' (Schlesinger, 1945: 451). Delano's 'rich inheritance' is, by symbolically aligning himself with the Proviso, and the Fugitive Slave Act, to entrench white, northern US capital, but at the least possible expense. Warning his readers of the dangers in not protecting the ship's insurers, he says: 'The law has wisely restrained the powers of the insured, that the insurer should not be subject to imposition or abuse (206). Using his supposed gallantry (though he himself never boarded the *Tryal* to take it) he extorts payment from Sereno, in order to help his crew stranded on various islands who 'had no method that I knew of to help themselves, or receive succor, except from me; and that if I was to defer the time any longer it amounted to a certainty, that they must suffer' (209). Like Wilmot's, Delano's is a mono-vision where 'duty' is unquestioned, conditional upon the correct monetary reward. Capital drives moral action in the North as much as in the South, so that Delano's taking of the *Tryal* may be read as a symbolic replaying of the Mexican 1848 as much as it can a prefiguring of the impending Civil War. Neither Delano nor his Northern counterparts can or care to break out of the stereotypes that dictate economic imperatives. One must not, Melville implies, understand the North to have any substantial interest in the well-being of slaves when they compete with northern workers for jobs.

Melville's novella is a palimpsest of Delano's original text. It places these representations of both self and others under a microscope, undermining their apparent certitude from the outset: 'Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come' (35), as much a reference to coming war as to the forms of representation that dictate it. He shows up white American hubris as happy to talk largely to itself. Parodying a mind that was 'unusually pleasant' as Delano describes himself (203), which does not want to offer any 'false representations' (209), Melville instead replaces self-serving monologic discourse with, as Sundquist (1993) suggests, theatrical, 'Hegelian' dialectic. He replaces the fixity of the allegorical figure with symbolic open-endedness. He balances Delano's presentation of himself with the actions of the rebel slaves but leaves the interpretation deliberately ambiguous, preventing fixed allegorical readings.

Foremost among these ambiguities is the change in the meaning of important symbols Melville makes. He changes the dates of the events from 1804 to 1799, suggesting, as many

scholars have pointed out, both revolutionary France and more specifically the revolts in Santo Domingo by Toussaint L'Ouverture, and that in Virginia of Nat Turner in 1831. The same reference is implied in the name change of the ship from the *Tryal* to the *San Dominick*. An allegorical reading is invited by the historical reference, which would read the ship as a figure of dark revolt and bloodshed. But such a reading is undermined by the fact that the black general Toussaint's rule proved both largely benevolent after the revolt and also the most economically prosperous ever for the island, in some ways seriously undermining American economic interests. Any trickery evident on Santo Domingo during Toussaint's rule it is, Segal shows (1995: 121) as much the actions of Thomas Jefferson and Napoleon as any of the black revolutionaries. For it was Jefferson who offered an army to support Napoleon once his men had landed on the island, despite having formally made a truce with Toussaint. 'Jefferson has promised that the moment the French army sets foot in the colony all necessary measures will be taken to starve out Toussaint and to aid the army', said Napoleon in a dispatch to the invading fleet of 1801. If anyone is being represented in the figure of Delano, it is Jefferson himself. Jefferson was masking from Toussaint his true intentions, as was Napoleon when he agreed, after great losses, to negotiations. Toussaint was arrested, secreted to France, and died in a dungeon. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803, an indirect result of Napoleon's inability to conquer Santo Domingo, would extend the United States by half, but also extend slavery.

The mask that both Jefferson and Napoleon use becomes the 'language' of politics, but one which only imperial politicians assume they know how to perfect. And, as Hobbes points out in *Leviathan*, this allegorical rhetoric is a form of drama which forces all players into roles where 'Face' and 'Person' become synonymous and where artificiality is the foundation of political structure: 'a *Person* is the same that an *Actor* is', and if not, political power would crumble for 'a *Kingdome divided in it selfe cannot stand*' (Lee, 2000: 508). The imperialist allegory makes 'players' typological figures, not unrelated to medieval morality plays and the court masque. Allegorical roles define by becoming what Coleridge in *The Statesman's Manual* calls 'a picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses'.

Melville's story replaces that assumption of abstraction and fixity with evidence that western imperialism is as stupidly naive as it assumes the 'native' to be and that the 'hive of subtlety' (102) which is Babo's mind becomes the controlling force in a drama which develops

into 'a discourse about discourse' where the text 'talks to itself', as Kavanagh (1987: 357) has suggested. Discourse determines what is 'savage' and what is 'civilized', not only actions, since it can easily be shown that the actions of both sides are equally 'barbaric' or 'savage'. Discourse is what traps Delano in a world view which prevents him from actually seeing what is happening around him, and discourse traps the slave in a body designated 'Negro'. By showing that there is a fundamental divide between (racist) expectation and reality, Melville reveals the assumptions of nationalist fixing allegories to be as crude and 'blithe heart[ed]' (71) as Delano.

Delano, the 'visitor' (66) to the *San Dominick* has his attention 'fixed by this [or that] scene' (67), but while he is 'oblivious of any but benevolent thoughts' carrying a 'republican impartiality' (67), he is nevertheless constantly undermined by Melville's narrator. He sees the negro as 'a Newfoundland dog' (64) while believing he serves him as equal to the white. He cannot believe any would actually presume to murder him. 'Who would murder Amasa Delano?' (64). He has a 'knot in [his] head' and 'stood mute' (63) says the narrator, showing the white American unable to discern the meaning of action beyond that which he expects. Slave revolts are not expected, so, like one ignoring the symptom (64) he simply doesn't see what is before him. 'Trying to break one charm, he was becharmed anew' (62). Delano even outlines to himself the crisis of meaning he is undergoing, but refuses to take the step towards the obvious conclusion:

First, the affair of the Spanish lad assailed with a knife by the slave boy; an act winked at by Don Benito. Second, the tyranny in Don Benito's treatment of Atufal, the black; as if a child should lead a bull of the Nile by the ring in his nose. Third, the trampling of the sailor by the negroes; a piece of insolence passed over without so much as a reprimand. Fourth, the cringing submission to their master of all the ship's underlings, mostly blacks; (66).

Delano's racist categorising undoes his own assumption of liberalism. He sees Atufal as a bull, the negroes as insolent, and yet also is confounded by their apparent submissiveness. In truth, he wears Hobbes' mask without knowing he does. Cereno and Babo have come to see the mask for what it is, a 'shadow'. Melville demonstrates that the 'kingdome' to which Hobbes refers does indeed stand against itself, for not only does the body politic stand divided

against itself, but the individual body and mind has no final knowledge of itself, taking its own actions to mean what they might well not, and remaining blind to its own excesses.

But while the story may appear to be an allegory about misinterpretation, Melville takes the drama a step further by undermining the allegory of misinterpretation itself, replacing it instead, with ‘the grayness of everything’ (65) and, as Kavanagh has suggested, leaving the reader with a text which has ‘no intrinsic meaning’ (1987: 360), because its meaning resides solely in the ideology of the reader, who may or may not think like Delano, or his opposite. Reader and ‘actor’ become subsumed in the ‘play’ of meanings, and by the endless deferral of closure, allegory is itself dismantled and empire becomes no more than ‘the creature of tasteful hands’ (74).

A still further irony with which Melville leaves us has to do with the imposition of force. It might seem that sheer physical force has, ultimately, overcome the vicissitudes of rhetoric on the ship, turning it into a macabre game which ultimately has no effect. However, Melville’s chronology in this regard becomes salutary, a potent lesson in the face of the impending Civil War and the consequences of both Manifest Destiny and the 1850 Compromise. Neither Delano nor the authorities in Lima understand the actual meaning of what has taken place on board the *San Dominick*. Both assume that when physical force is sufficiently exerted, the totalizing function of imperialist rhetoric is re-entrenched. But the ‘blindnesses’ evident in Delano’s original deposition and narrative, coming ‘after the fact’ as it were, reveal a liberal mind unaffected by actual events. He has learned nothing from the drama of empire enacted before his eyes. Re-enacting the events, as the story does, inserting into it an imagination sharper than Delano’s and more like Babo’s own ‘hive of subtlety’, becomes a way of both replaying the past, and re-interpreting the future. Melville has his narrator, and by implication also his reader, play a game akin to Babo’s, unmasking the simple-minded Delano. The palimpsestic re-enactment disallows the stasis of Delano’s interpretive wall, and shows all nationalist allegorical fixing to be a prison.

The Sign of the Barber

The form the unmasking takes in the six ‘scenes’ that dominate the narrative is the overturning of standard colonialist assumptions and the rhetoric supporting them, by a mimicry which shows itself to be as dominant as the force mimicked. The enactment of the dramas is

Melville's analysis of the 'shadow' (101) the negro represents on the colonial stage. A shadow, like an actor or a mask, is both present and absent, part and yet not part of the thing it shadows. Cereno believes the negro 'shadow' is created because 'they have no memory' and 'because they are not human' (101), but the 'pall' he feels is his own projection, for clearly, the actions of the slaves are motivated by their very memories and because they object to being regarded as less than human. The nationalist allegory with its fixed hierarchical meanings attempts to ignore the shadow, but the colonial encounter, as Bhabha has shown, develops the shadow into a version of selfhood and identity. The 'shadow' of the negro lies in the fact that the rhetorical forms used to define him, having to be anxiously repeated to ensure their force, leave a gap for uncertainty because of their very insistence. They trap the definer in his own definitions, as Delano is trapped by his. That gap, as Bhabha (1994: 118) puts it, 'marks the site of an ambivalence', so that '[the colonized's] representation is spatially split' and its meaning ultimately deferred. The result of the shadow is the mimicry in the attempt to gain favour, but which itself creates but a 'partial presence' because it is 'the representation of difference that is itself a process of disavowal' (1984: 127, 126). Cereno becomes 'wan' (86) and ultimately silent from the force of the shadow because it splits him from himself, as the mirror held up to his face does in the shaving scene.

But before Melville takes us to the crucial shaving scene, he presents its forerunner in the scene where Atufal appears chained, yet not chained, obeying the 'master' Cereno, yet actually mocking him by refusing to ask his pardon, and so apparently overturning the master/slave dichotomy. Mimicking the appearance of slavery the slave also mimics freedom by not actually being chained, but only putting on the show of chains. Atufal's body remains literally confined, not by chains, but by allegorical readings of the role it is meant to play, one which he has chosen to play. Mimicry, however, keeps him as chained as if he were in reality, and so Melville presents the theatre of anti-slavery to be as much chained to a mental lock as pro-slavery's thinking may be. Mimicking muteness as he does, 'the black was silent' (50), Atufal appears to bring into question the fixed readings of nationalist allegory by defeating interpretation. On the other hand, however, his muteness makes no difference to Delano: 'But this scene surprises me; what means it, pray?' (50). Delano never steps outside his own allegorical fixity. Even so, playing the game of empire against itself, Atufal and Babo merely remain chained to slavery. Their freedom is their bondage, as Frederick Douglass would have said.

But how is it with the American slave? ... He is said to be happy; happy men can speak. But ask the slave what is his condition - what his state of mind - what he thinks of enslavement? And you had as well addressed your inquiries to the *silent dead*. There comes no *voice* from the enslaved. We are left to gather his feelings by imagining what ours would be, were our souls in his soul's stead.⁴

Mimicry, Melville and Douglass seem to be suggesting, even if it is able to use the tools of empire with acuity, remains a form of voicelessness, for the slave is not to be interpreted, but his meaning only 'imagined', and in the imagining, made the province of the reader/viewer. Ironically, however, that very silence may be seen as Melville's way of undoing the allegorical mode, for if interpretation lies with the individual subject, who allegorises, then it might just as well lie with one who does not. Silence leads to fixed assumptions, but it can also disrupt all fixed assumptions.

⁴ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Ed. William Andrews. Chicago (1987): 276.

Melville's narrative dismisses the liberalist views of a Tocqueville who bewails Negro mimicry: 'Plunged into this abyss of wretchedness, the Negro hardly notices his ill-fortune; ... he admires his tyrants even more than he hates them and finds his joy and pride in a servile imitation of his oppressors' (1994: 317). Such a reading of slavery is one which never seeks to enter the slave's mind. Melville does not claim to enter the slave mind, but also refuses to read it as allegorically fixed. His narrative leaves bodies trapped in silence, at the same time that it suggests silence is the only way out of the trap. Silence may be seen here as the very means by which 'the representation of difference is a process of disavowal', as Bhabha has it, and it is no surprise that this same silence is what casts a 'resentful shadow' (50) over Cereno's face. He cannot finally interpret the meaning of the drama himself, for his 'key', which he wears around his neck, has become useless. It turns Melville's words about the value of the deposition as a 'key' to the meaning of the events into highly ironic ones. 'If the Deposition have served as the key to fit into the lock of the complications which precede it, then, as a vault whose door has been flung back, the San Dominick's hull lies open today' (100). The *San Dominick's* hull is never 'opened' in narrative. In a world where one group has no 'voice', no 'key', Melville implies, can fully open the vault of meaning, and any key claiming to have such power, as the national allegory does, is a sword of Damocles hanging, like the key from Cereno's neck, on a hair, one about to snap in 1861.

Part of Atufal's impact in the drama is his nature as a symbol of time. He appears 'every two hours' (50) like a clock, but instead of figuring linear progress, he is more a symbol of stasis. The allegorical form the encounter takes, while full of the reversal of expected stereotypes, nevertheless undermines itself by not functioning as one would expect allegory to do. The scene enacts a silent battle, one of the primary modes of allegory, as Fletcher (1964) shows, but it does not contain the 'progress' which is the other primary mode. After the battle between good and evil in the allegorical drama, comes progress towards fulfilment of the quest. Here, Melville removes any sense of linear progression, and any notion of a quest, while advertising its expectation by making Atufal the timekeeper. He is another version of the static Bartleby, showing time to be the ultimate slave-driver. Stasis is the only way to defeat such slavery. The *San Dominick* may be taut with expectation just as the narrative is, but the battle remains a silent one performed, as it were, in stasis. Empire cannot expect, Melville seems to be suggesting, to progress on the assumption of its 'right' versus the slave's 'wrong' or vice versa. The moral ambiguity of the encounter between Atufal and Cereno develops into

anti-allegory and a stasis of which Atufal's silence and Delano's incomprehension are but symbols. Cereno is trapped by his own rhetorical power over the slave, one which in turn traps the slave, since neither can escape their roles.

While the Atufal drama has shown rhetoric to be the primary tool of colonial imprisonment, the shaving scene, inserted by Melville into the original narrative, transfers the exploration of colonial power relations from rhetoric to symbolic action. The 'play of the barber' (74), is not just a play on the mimicry subtending empire, but more importantly, a 'mirror' to the rhetorical 'play' of language and action which perpetuate the colonial shadow. Melville partly follows Tocqueville (1994: 340), who in turn is following Hegel, declaring the nature of slavery to be a '*Servitude, which debases the slave, impoverishes the master*'. 'The Indians die as they have lived, in isolation; but the fate of the Negroes is in a sense linked with that of the Europeans. The two races are bound one to the other without mingling; it is equally difficult for them to separate completely or unite', says Tocqueville. The 'mirror' held up to Cereno reflects colonialism back to itself, making it 'split' and undoing the simplistic allegorical fixity by inserting the shadow. How Melville inserts that shadow into his narrative is the real point of the 'play'.

Like the 'vapors partly mantling the hull' of the *San Dominick* which 'streamed equivocally enough' (35), but which could not be interpreted by 'the singularly undistrustful good nature' (35) of Delano, the 'Barber' scene is an equivocal vapour replete with mantle not understood by the American. Unlike Delano, the reader can easily interpret the symbols of the cuddy where the shaving is done as akin to those of the torture chamber and the Spanish Inquisition. A crucifix is mounted above two cutlasses, a harpoon and some rigging 'like a heap of poor friar's girdles' (69-70). The narrator intrudes, however, with his own layer of interpretation. The settees are 'sharp-ribbed' as 'inquisitors' racks'. The barber's chair with its 'crotch' which works 'with a screw', 'seemed some grotesque engine of torment'. Pip sits on a similar screw chair in the centre of the *Pequod*, and contemplates the meaning of unscrewing one's navel, which is to have the physical and social body become dismembered and fall apart. The hammock, like Ahab's, seems to be one in which the sleeper suffered 'visitations of sad thoughts and bad dreams' (70). Delano is surprised by the use of the Spanish flag as a bib, but neither Babo, Cereno, nor the reader mistake the distinctive symbol of a colonial power and its ironic usage. Church (Inquisition) and State (Conquistadores) become fused in a twist which makes the sign of power a symbol of its opposite. Mimicry

dis-‘mantles’, as it were, the power of the sign by using its force against itself.

But there is in the story another linguistic ‘dismantling’ which renders Melville’s text and its strategies profoundly anti-colonial, as they are anti-allegorical. With the ‘play’ of mimicking actions, and the double meanings of the symbolic objects in the cuddy, goes a ‘play’ on the word ‘barber’ itself. It is one which shows power to lie even more in rhetoric and the fear induced by ideology than actual physical force. For Cereno is trapped in the chair not by Babo (he and Delano could easily overcome the small slave physically) but by his own fear and the ‘shadow’ of his guilt. One of Melville’s most pointed changes to the original deposition is to make the lead actor Babo ‘the captain of the slaves’, rather than Mure, who was the original companion to Sereno. The name carries a multitude of suggestions on which Melville seems to have played extensively. To the racist, colonizing mind like Delano’s, which thinks of blacks as an animal species like ‘Newfoundland dog’ (71) or as ‘leopardesses’ and ‘doves’(61), it might suggest ‘baboon’. Indeed, the same edition of *Putnam’s Monthly* in which Melville’s story was published contained an essay ‘About Niggers’, which magnanimously asserted that the ‘nigger is a man, not a baboon’ (60 n. 9). Melville was most likely familiar with the trope of the monkey as trickster common to Caribbean and African-American oral tradition, and he may also still have retained his chagrin at being referred to as a ‘Ciceronian baboon’ in a review by a youthful colleague.⁵

To the colonial mind the name might also suggest ‘baby’ or ‘baba’, for Babo is ‘a black of small stature’, whose ‘rude face’ is ‘like a shepherd’s dog’ turned up toward Cereno with a look of ‘sorrow and affection... equally blended’ (39). The Delano mind might interpret animal qualities as being variously obedient, affectionate and later vicious. But another mind might see the ‘sorrow’ and ‘affection’ for what they could be, just that, a filial bond not uncommon between master and slave, and natural between father and child. If the ‘father’ empire sees the slave as its ‘child’ then empire, Melville is suggesting, uses and abuses ‘normal’ human relations for its own ends. The symbols that go with those relations, and the real knowledge of the individual, is lost in the ‘disguise’ and ‘devices’ (42) which make up the ‘game’ each participant is playing.

⁵ On the monkey as trickster figure in Caribbean and African-American tradition see Henry Louis Gates (1989). On the ‘Ciceronian baboon’ see the chapter on ‘Bartleby’ above.

But perhaps the most important symbolic suggestion in Babo's name is that of 'barber', one especially pertinent given his function in the shaving scene. The traditional 'sign' of the barber is the white and red pole, symbol not only of haircutting, but in early times also of dental and medical attention. Red and white were symbols of medical operations, amounting, without anaesthetic, to something akin to torture. Melville makes the combination of colours when Babo cuts Cereno with his blade and 'stained the creamy lather under the throat' (73). To alleviate the thought of pain, masques were often performed in 'barber shops', so that 'barbershop' music becomes known as a style of a capella singing. That the black slave has both the tools of western 'medicine' in his hands, and conducts the 'play', must be taken as Melville's ironic comment on colonialist power.

The word 'barber' derives from 'barb', itself containing various and suggestive meanings. In 1618 a 'barb' is a beard. In 1693 to 'barb' is to shave or trim a beard, but it soon also comes to mean 'to clip' or to 'mow', or to 'pierce with a barb' (OED). Shaving and torture, like medicine and torture, are etymologically joined. But it is not a huge leap from 'barb' and 'barber' to 'barbar' or 'barbarian'. Traditionally a 'native of Barbary' (now Morocco) the 'barbarian' is one who, according to the OED, is 'rude, wild and uncivilized' (1613), who sports a beard, and might ride a 'dun' horse known as a 'Barbary'. Othello's 'roan Barbary' is most likely not far from Melville's mind as he writes. The 'barbarian' is any 'foreigner' who is a non-Helene, or non-Roman or later non-Christian (OED). The sign of the barbarian is meant to provide the national allegory with its foremost symbol of superiority. The unkempt hordes raiding the 'neat' cities of Rome and Constantinople, end an empire and bring about the 'dark ages'. It would be simple to see Babo in this light. The 'ghastliness' of Cereno's lathered face against the 'sootiness' of Babo's might suggest the end of the Spanish empire, where the black appears a 'headman' and the white 'a man at the block' (72). However, it is Cereno who has the beard, and Babo who shaves him, keeping it neat. If the slave is the 'barbarian', then so is the master, for the flag of Spain is both 'the castle and the lion', both symbol of the civilized and the animal. Delano may see barbarism as an easily definable quality, but Melville undercuts the simplicity of his reading.

The same undercutting is evident in the reference to the 'Barbadoes planter' Delano refers to as having warned him against mulattoes who sport 'a European face'. 'Look out for him; he is a devil' (75). Apart from the play on the idea of the European being the devil, a further hidden meaning lurks. 'Barbadoes' is yet another derivative of 'barb', named after the

'bearded' Indian fig-tree growing there. The Arawaks of Barbados were some of the first indigenous peoples to be enslaved and eventually exterminated by the invading Europeans, Spanish among them. Melville's 'planter' or 'supplanter', knows Indians only as mulattoes, just as Delano does. But the mulatto on the ship is presented in a way reminiscent of Queequeg, as 'rajah-looking', a turbaned man, with 'Madras handkerchiefs' mounted 'tier on tier' approaching with 'salaams' (75). To Delano this regal man is a 'king' like 'George of England', while he is clearly meant to be the infidel barbarian about to undo the Christian (Inquisitional) empire. However, both the reference to the 'Barbadoes' planter and the fear of the 'European' face indicate a counter-view, that the barbarian is as much the European-faced landowner as it is the black slave. That King George may be the 'devil' remains implicit. There is no 'sign' of empire, then, which can be unequivocally interpreted to mean one thing, only those interpretations which impose meanings and identities, and the 'blindnesses' of those impositions. Barbarism is in the eye of the beholder, suggests Melville, but more importantly, real barbarism might not know itself to be barbaric. Babo knows he is playing a game. He is fully in control of his own mind and understands his own social position and need to extricate himself from it. Delano has no such awareness, and remains blind to his own racist barbarisms.

The reference to 'Barbary' leaves one further allusion to unpack. Berber or Barbary pirates played a large role not only in the conflict between western and north African powers, but also in relation to American interests in the middle east. If the reference to Cereno as an image of Charles V (41) of the Holy Roman Empire suggests the Inquisition, then another Holy Roman Emperor may also lie in the background of the story. Frederick I, (Barbarossa), whose name means 'red beard', died in the Crusades in 1190. Fighting the infidel, he nevertheless gave his epithet to two others, Horuk and Khair-ed-Din, brothers who, during the time of Charles V, were Barbary pirates. Emperor, Christian, Moslem, crusader and pirate become confused in the sign of the 'barbarian' which Melville makes applicable to both sides. The only difference between them is between those who know their actions to be barbaric and those who assume them to be innocent. Thomas Jefferson, like Delano, may well be considered an example of the latter. His actions against the Berbers would have been relatively fresh in the minds of Melville's readers, and would act as a backdrop on the stage of sea mutinies and enslavements which 'Benito Cereno' depicts.⁶

⁶ Allan Moore Emery (1984: 54) points out that Delano's boat '*Rover*' is an

allusion to piracy, since 'rover' suggests 'rovers of the high seas', and was a standard euphemism for piracy in the nineteenth-century. Also, the name '*Bachelor's Delight*' was the ship used by the English Buccaneer Ambrose Cowley, who is cited as a Galapagos authority in Melville's 'The Encantadas'.

On 25th July 1785 the American schooner *Maria* (and here again the name is pertinent both to Columbus, the Inquisition and Delano's stopping at St. Maria) under Captain Stevens was taken off Cape St Vincents by an Algerian corsair. Another ship, *Dauphin*, was taken five days later off Lisbon. Similar operations, as Blackburn points out (1988: 227) were being organised by the French in other parts of the West Indies, against British, Dutch and American shipping. Jefferson's report concerning the attempt to ransom the American citizens before they themselves were sold into African slavery was tabled before Senate and the House of Representatives on 30th December 1790. The US government had secretly used the French religious order of Maturins to negotiate with the pirates, a service organized by the Spanish consul at Algiers. To redeem its own civilians from slavery the United States government was forced to pay in excess of two thousand dollars per captive. 'In 1786', says Jefferson, 'there were 2,200 captives in Algiers, which, in 1789, had been reduced by death or ransom to 655. Of ours six have died, and one has been ransomed by his friends. ... But should it be thought better to repress force by force, another expedient for their liberation may perhaps offer. Captures made on the enemy may perhaps put us into possession of some of their mariners, and exchange be substituted for ransom'. Jefferson's reasons for seeking the captives' redemption are salutary, have little to do with humanitarianism, and smack of the same pecuniary interests evident in Delano. 'The liberation of our citizens', he says, 'has an intimate connexion with the liberation of our commerce in the Mediterranean, now under the consideration of Congress'. Jefferson, hiding behind the mask of democracy, is hardly less of a pirate than his Berber counterparts.

It was an attribute of post-Jeffersonian America Frederick Douglass was quick to point out in his famous 4th of July speech of 1852 in New York, three years before Melville's story was published. 'America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future' he declares, prefiguring Delano's blindness. Douglass's rhetoric is of veils and hidden meanings. His conclusion is that the veils hide barbarism.

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him...the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy licence; your national greatness, swelling vanity;... your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence,... your sermons, ... mere bombast, fraud, deception,

impiety, and hypocrisy - a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages....Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the old world, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without rival (HC 1, 1993: 405).

To counteract both slavery and barbarism, Douglass offers a form of speech which may well have been aimed at Delano.

...I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery - the great sin and shame of America! "I will not equivocate; I will not excuse;" I will use the severest language I can command; and yet not one word shall escape me that any man, whose judgement is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slaveholder, shall not confess to be right and just (HC 1, 1993: 403-404).

Melville does not choose Douglass's route. He does not excuse, but he does equivocate, for to show the heart of empire, to reveal it in its 'skeletal' form is to use its own epistemology, not merely to counteract it. The mask is itself the sign of barbarism, whether it be deliberate, or merely one which even the masked one does not understand himself to be wearing. To write a narrative of masks, then, where even the reader cannot fully read who is barbaric and who is not, is to show the reader him or herself to be in the same position as the actors. The line between stage and audience is, as it were, broken, and the watchers become players, even as Delano must become a player in the play he thinks he is merely watching. Put differently, the rhetoric of empire assumes it is open, while in fact it wears the Hobbesian mask, and wearing the mask, it prevents any progress in the allegory beyond the stasis of an eternally repeatable battle. The result is that by showing its blindness from the inside the narrative pirates its way of seeing, making even the narrative a form of piracy. It is to appear to suggest, with Delano

that 'The whites, ..., by nature, were a shrewder race. A man with some evil design, would he not be likely to speak well of that stupidity which was blind to his depravity, and malign that intelligence from which it might not be hidden?' (63) While all the time showing them caught in their own limited assumptions, based as they are on 'decorum'(52) and deliberately 'blunt thinking American eyes' (46). Imperialism, Melville suggests, locks its subjects in its equivocal way of seeing, assuming, even to itself, the mask of innocence, while enacting treachery. It locks bodies in confining ideologies, but more importantly, it locks minds in a blindness to their own motives.

Such blindness is the most malicious and barbarous of veils, as Douglass's words imply, since it assumes itself to be 'good' and 'honest'. This is the same patronising way Ledyard thinks of Africa, and Delano thinks of the slaves, as 'naked nature' (61). 'Ah! Thought Captain Delano, these perhaps are some of the very women whom Ledyard saw in Africa, and gave such a noble account of' (61). That Delano does not see any conflict between 'naked nature' and slavery is itself damning, but even more damning is his assumption that what is 'unsophisticated' in the eyes of the west is lesser and worthy of being enslaved. Delano thinks like Mungo Park and like J.S. Mill in their assumptions of their own 'innocence', which alone can detect moral right and wrong. Pratt's description (1992: 78) of Mungo Park could well be a description of Delano. 'As a textual construct [Park's] innocence lies less in self-effacement than in submissiveness and vulnerability, or the display of self-effacement. Mungo Park writes himself as a receptor, not an initiator, as devoid of desire'. Delano presents his offer to 'ransom' the Spanish captives as one born from purely benevolent motives. It is undermined by his offer 'to encourage the sailors' of 'a thousand doubloons' (87). The same double-speak is evident in the interventionist rhetoric of Manifest Destiny, represented not just by O' Sullivan's 'empire for liberty', but also by J.S. Mill in his 1859 article 'A Few Words on Non-Intervention'. 'The sacred duties which civilized nations owe to the independence and nationality of each other are not binding towards those to whom nationality and independence are a certain evil, or, at best, a questionable good'. Delano would assume Mill's view. Melville's narrator, however, by emphasising the monetary purpose behind the action of recovery, suggests the same motive in the expansionist and colonialist projects.

Monetary concerns suggest the third 'scene' or 'play' Melville presents between Delano, Cereno and Babo: the lunch scene. Its imagery is highly suggestive of the Last

Supper, and like the Last Supper it prefigures the battle, arrest and final execution to come. The question which it begs, and to which various Melville readers have offered different answers, is which figure represents Christ and which Judas. Like the Supper, the ‘lunch was a frugal one’ (76). ‘Host and guest sat down’, the narrator says, suggesting the sacramental ‘host’ and the ‘guest’ at the Lord’s table. In the rhetoric of empire only the white can take on the figure of Christ, and the black would ‘naturally’ represent its opposite. After *Moby-Dick*, however, one could not reasonably assume Melville to be so simplistic. Cereno is pale and wan, like Christ in Gethsemane ‘miserably reminding him of his solitude in a cabin where before he had so many friends and officers around him’ (76). Babo is dun. Cereno looks, with St. Benedict ‘like one flayed alive’ (50), as if crucified. Babo appears ‘true to his master’ (76) by facing him rather than standing behind his chair, like Judas and other disciples claimed to be true. Melville, here, creates a further ‘play’ on the notion of the ‘servant’ and ‘master’.

We are led to believe Babo is Judas since the reference to Babo’s hand ‘pushing the Canary over towards him’ (77) suggests Luke 22.21 where Christ says ‘Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table’. But Christ is equivocating, veiling his meanings as much as Judas does. He awaits the proof of betrayal, and never indicates who it will be. Melville follows by leaving it to the reader to assume who the ‘betrayed’ is. Church and state would assume the black to be. But here the black is never described in any terms that could not be read as positive. He is a ‘begging friar of St Francis’, the ‘spectacle of fidelity’ (45), of ‘menial familiarity’ and ‘simple-hearted attachment’ (51). These are epithets which, like the numerous Miltonic double-negatives Melville uses, such as ‘not ungratefully eyed his master’ (54), are all open to double readings. It is hard to know where the locus of meaning is meant to lie, or in whom it lies. Church, state and Delano presume to attach specific allegorical meanings to equivocal words, blind to opposing meanings. They do what Frederick Douglass (HC 1, 1993: 408) says liberal America is doing with the Fugitive Slave Law. ‘I take this law’, he says, ‘to be one of the grossest infringements of Christian Liberty, and, if the churches and ministers of our country were not so stupidly blind, or most wickedly indifferent, they, too, would so regard it.’ Those not ‘blind’ would read Luke 22 to the end and see there that Christ deliberately overturns the distinction between master and servant.

A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them ‘The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over

them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves. (22. 24-27, RSV)

The equivocation, overriding hierarchies of all kinds, places the servant Babo in the position of the master who is betrayed. For at the Last Supper it is the master who administers the wine, symbol of his blood, soon to be spilt, and the master who is the 'host'. Like the 'San Dominick's suffering host' which 'repeatedly challenged [Delano's] eye' (42), Babo is 'host' here in pouring, and it is his flesh which will be 'crucified'. It is also no accident that the wine poured is 'Canary', since the Canary islands were then, as now, the colony of Spain, and during colonisation had virtually made extinct the indigenous people, the Berbers. The wine, then, poured by the slave symbolises the blood of slaves. What Melville calls his 'juggling play'(74) equivocates to achieve what Douglass attempts with literalism.

But he adds yet another twist. Christ may be innocent, but his followers the church, given the equivocations of the Inquisition, are not innocent either to Melville or Babo. Babo becomes both the 'barbarian' sufferer at the hands of the 'barbaric' church, and the 'barbarian'⁷ trafficker in his own slaves during the revolt, no different from his 'master' Cereno. As a type of Christ Babo renders 'innocence' no more obvious than any presumptuous Christian piety has done before. He is both innocent and trickster. As Sanborn (1998: xv) puts it, this is 'Melville's most expert evocation of the unilluminated territories behind the mask of the savage, but it is also his most chilly. ... he simply denies us the possibility of any kind of romantic identification with Babo'. While Sanborn is referring mostly to the skeleton scene, his remark is apt about Babo generally, but even then, not quite strong enough. It is the apparent Christliness of both Babo and Cereno which Melville unromanticizes. Unlike with *Bartleby*, there is no clear-cut Christ figure here, and those who pretend to be, even those who are 'masked', will become cannibals when it suits them. This suggests that for Melville

⁷ Prime Minister William Pitt in the English House of Commons refers in a speech to 'The Barbarous Traffic in Slaves' (2 April 1792), a reference probably well-known to abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic, and one marking white slave owners as 'barbarous' as their slaves are purported to be.

typology with its allegorical fixity is not to be trusted as a means to truth, even in its reversed form. Reversed, it even blurs the line between cannibal and Christian, who, after all, but eats the body and drinks the blood of Christ in the Eucharist. The skeleton scene to come will fulfill the eschatological and cannibalistic possibilities inherent in the lunch.

As in the biblical narrative, the real Judas is revealed to the reader only at the end of the scene. That the lunch shared between the empires of America and Spain and the African slave is spent determining the price of recompense for the American's efforts to 'save' his fellow, removes whatever sanctity the moment may contain and reduces the wine symbolically to the 'blood' that is about to be spilled in the name of empire. Neither empire is free of pecuniary cannibalism. The 'empire for liberty' Delano offers must then become one which is reminiscent of Judas's betrayal for thirty pieces of silver (just as silver had been used by Bartleby's lawyer to 'betray' him). Colonialist rhetoric will not only trap the bodies of the enslaved in roles neither master nor slave can escape, but will cannibalise the flesh in the name of religious and political liberty.

The Spectacle of the Scaffold

If the three set pieces Melville creates on board the *San Dominick* aim to present colonialist rhetoric and the 'game' Babo plays with it as the means to imprison the colonial body, another three set pieces are offered as versions of a much more literal control. The chains, the shave and the lunch have all retained a game-like quality, where whites and blacks appear, as they do to Delano 'chess-men' (59) in a drama which can be halted at any moment. While one is reminded of Queequeg's 'gamesomeness' and the checkerboard shapes of his tattoos, the drama here lulls the reader, as it does Delano, into assuming that no matter what the game, once the mask has been torn off, white power will return to its former status. After the battle, (white) progress and its Manifest Destiny will continue unabated. By balancing this 'play' with three other scenes of more literal yet no less equivocal barbarism, Melville denudes his story of much of its game-like quality and renders void the distinction between reality and illusion. The scenes of the stern-piece, that of the unmasked skeleton of Aranda, and finally of the gibbet, balance the 'game' and its pretence of 'decorum' (58) Delano espouses with an all too real presence of barbarism and savagery. The question of barbarism ceases to be merely rhetorical, but becomes bloodily physical, so that the question asked by the narrative shifts

from who is really being barbaric and savage, to how one may interpret the impact of savagery on its victims and its perpetrators, and how one might, if at all, know one from the other.

It is a question aptly framed by Montaigne (1983: 113) in his famous essay 'On Cannibals' (1580). Speaking of cannibalism, he says

I am not so anxious that we should note the horrible savagery of these acts as concerned that, whilst judging their faults so correctly, we should be so blind to our own. I consider it more barbarous to eat a man alive than to eat him dead; to tear by rack and torture a body still full of feeling, to roast it by degrees, and then give it to be trampled and eaten by dogs and swine ... than to roast and eat a man after he is dead.

Montaigne appears to offer a way of defining barbarism, and declaring it universal to all, not just particular to race or culture. A liberalist reading of Melville's text might see him as doing the same. However, a closer look at both suggests that each is actually concerned with the relativity of what is 'evil' and what is 'good', and it is this relativity which is the most terrifying thing of all. There is no 'progress', only eternal battle between opposing ideological forces.

This might be seen as the message of the stern-piece. Melville places this highly allegorical image at the beginning of his narrative as if it is meant to symbolise what is to come. It contains the same shadowy impenetrability contained in the picture Ishmael encounters at the Spouter Inn. Like the 'unnatural combat of the four primal elements', or the 'breaking up of the icebound stream of Time' (MD, 26), this picture represents the eternal battle between opposing forces whose identities and ideologies remain masked. The battle is 'elemental' and timeless. Having suggested that the *San Dominick* looked like 'a white-washed monastery after a thunder-storm', with a 'ship-load of monks' like 'Black Friars pacing the cloisters' (36), the narrator presents the allegory of two apparently 'good' and 'evil' figures doing battle.

But the principle relic of faded grandeur was the ample oval of the shield-like stern-piece, intricately carved with the arms of Castile and Leon, medallioned about by groups of mythological or symbolical devices; uppermost and central of which was a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked (37).

‘Castile’ and ‘Leon’ may refer to the Spanish province Castilla-Leon, but it doubtless is also intended to suggest the civilized (Castle) and the uncivilized (Lion). It is likely also intended to remind the reader that it was the union of Columbus’s benefactors Ferdinand and Isabella in 1479 which joined Castile and Aragon and decimated the Moors who lived in what became the Spanish State, a prefiguring of New World colonialism.

The allegorical meanings would be clear but for the masks Melville inserts, removing any simplistic reading. Body confines body here, as Delano will confine Babo with his foot later, re-enacting the scene. This might make Babo the sufferer and Delano the ‘Satyr’, were it not for the fact that the figure on the ground is ‘writhing’, suggestive of Satan the serpent writhing beneath the foot of Adam after being cursed. Both Satyr and serpent represent the devilish, and the masking makes it impossible to distinguish if there is any ‘good’ in either. The picture is a figure of power, which is intended by the Spanish authorities to represent its colonial force. It is, however, a ‘relic’ of ‘faded grandeur’, symbol of an empire in its sunset. If the American empire in the form of Delano is in its sunrise, and its Destiny seems so ‘manifest’ to all, then, the image of suffering Melville presents as the sign of empire suggests a faded future, where empires are replaced and where ‘progress’ is actually circular.

By making progress circular and the executioner and executed both masked, Melville plays on the traditional scenes of public execution which were witnessed on both sides of the Atlantic, from the the Inquisition with its ‘Black Friars’ and ‘white-washed’ monasteries, to the lynchings of the deep South, but another form of ‘white-washing’. Traditionally, as Foucault shows in his essay entitled ‘The Spectacle of the Scaffold’ (1991: 32-69), state power depends for its reinforcement on the show of contrition and punishment evident in the execution. The ‘progress’ to the execution block becomes one of the state’s primary allegorical narratives, and its ‘anxious repetition’, as Bhabha describes the need of all colonial power, reasserts that authority. Fixing the typology of good and evil, it publicly displays the power of the supposed former over the latter, keeping between the two the shadowy executioner. The effectiveness of the event is not in the execution itself, but in its spectacle, a theatrical moment shared by the people, aligning them with the functions of authority and reaffirming the allegory which writes them into a role as subservient to empire.

In the traditional public execution, Foucault points out, Inquisitional torture to extract confession from the ‘patient’ is followed by ‘progress’ literally through the streets of the city,

in the *amende honorable*, the cruellest of executions and one which Segal (1995:106) shows was that to which American and West Indian slaves were later often subjected. Confessional 'progress' (known at the 'auto-da-fé' during the Inquisition) is the journey from prison, through the streets, to the gibbet. It becomes the literal but also symbolic battle with the executioner during which hands may be chopped off, the body may be broken at the wheel, whippings, even quartering before death. Every 'battle' against one's own 'sin' won through confession is a progress towards eternal peace. The suffering on earth is seen as a partial payment in eternity for the debt notched up. The 'patient' should be grateful to his authority for helping him to achieve a state of favour in heaven's eyes. Such death should remove any shadow of doubt that may exist in anyone's mind about the justice of the authority, its sole right to determine truth, for it inscribes its example in the hearts of men, both literally and figuratively. Having complete power over the body, it offers its spectacle to ensure power over the mind as well.

One of the ways it did this was by retaining and displaying the head of the executed, for all to see, while burning the body to ashes. This was a common practice, especially in those instances where the offender had in some way directly revolted against the authority. Like the beheading of the king, such as Louis XVI in 1793, it symbolises the loss of intellectual and moral authority, separates the Head of State from the Body of the people, literally divides the head from the arm which is meant to carry out its purposes. The body was often burnt to ashes, for it represents the temporal and the fallen. The head, especially in the Cartesian formulation, is meant to represent that which attaches to the divine, the mechanism of the universe. Bodies can easily be overcome, ideas less easily. To display the head of the revolter is therefore to further the allegory of empire, by insisting that the *idea* residing in the offending head has been severed from the body that will give it force. The battle is won, there can be no progress along the criminal's chosen path. The 'right' path has been reaffirmed, the nation's narrative thread tightened.

In the eyes of those like Montaigne, however, such forms of punishment remain signs of barbarism, undermining the very 'civilization' they are meant to endorse. They proceed not out of morality but sheer bloodlust. In his essay 'On Cruelty' (1983: 186) he says:

I could hardly persuade myself, before I had actual evidence, that there exist any souls so unnatural as to commit murder for the mere pleasure of doing so; as to

hack and chop off men's limbs, as to sharpen their wits for the invention of unusual tortures and new forms of death,... merely for the enjoyment of the pleasing spectacle....

The scaffold Melville presents us with in the final stages of 'Benito Cereno' recalls the imperial allegory and its need for power over bodies, its display of heads as symbols of 'erroneous' ideas, 'hives' of subtlety, now conquered. But Melville offers two scaffolds, not one. And the two scaffolds are deliberately 'balanced' as it were, by the inscription under the canvas wrapping the 'beak' in the prow of the ship: ' "*Sequid vuestro jefe*" (follow your leader)' (37). The inscription is inevitably ambiguous, for 'follow your leader' does not denominate the nature of the leader, or that he leads to truth. In the physical geography of the ship (one might read ship of state here) the inscription at the prow is an answer to the allegorical confusion of the stern-piece. It suggests one must look to the bow for the leadership not found in the stern, and, like the 'patient' in the *auto-da-fé*, await the end of his journey for full enlightenment. To look to the prow of the ship of state is to seek to 'progress' along the path designated by the state. Babo places Aranda's bones there as the figure-head, turning the prow of the state into a gibbet, a 'figure-head, in a human skeleton; chalky comment on the chalked words below "*Follow your leader*" ' (86). Instead of the regal figure-head, or even the 'white statue-head' Babo is 'finishing off' in the barber scene (74), with its symbolical 'headship', we are presented with an entire body, but a fleshless one.

The slaves do not separate head from body, since they do not think like Descartes, and the harsh equality of all bodies, no matter what their colour, becomes unmasked finally in the horror of the white bones. But if the ambiguity of the comments below or the equally ambiguous whiteness of the bones themselves break any allegorical fixity, the more lasting impact of the bones is that no mere killing of the flesh can take away the force of the person. The barbarism of the slaves and their possible cannibalisation of Aranda's body is partly, as Sanborn observes (1998: 184) to keep the seamen in subjection. As the deposition later makes clear, each sailor, like Cereno, was taken up to the prow by Babo and asked '*whose skeleton that was*', and that '*each Spaniard covered his face*' (93). However, the removal of the flesh simultaneously makes death anonymous and the 'leader' equally anonymous, as it places strong emphasis on the flesh itself as what is missing from the body. Making the body anyone's and only by hearsay Aranda's (for there is no proof outside his word that it is) Babo,

the 'hive of subtlety' is framing the absent body as what is most present.

The slave body is 'absent' to Delano's eyes as anything but a slave body. Flesh has given the body its fixed allegorical meaning. To remove the flesh is to remove the possibility of any such fixity, but it is also to leave an absence which alerts to what is missing. Without the flesh and blood of the slave empire would not exist. Babo offers the skeleton as the literal image of a metaphor he requires his viewers to give flesh to themselves: the slave is the flesh and blood on the white skeleton of empire.

For this reason 'follow your leader' could mean following both the white bones of the white man, or the white bones of the black slave. Fleshless bodies offer no means of final identification and no means of rhetorical anchorage. They remove from the spectacle the ideology which would normally structure it, and so turn any notion of 'progress' into one of undefined and hence unfinishable battle. Following nameless bones is not following any leader at all, but merely becoming immersed in the static unnameable horror of suffering. That Aranda's bones stand in the place of '*the image of Christopher Colon, the discoverer of the New World*' (93) does not only, in this case, imply that New World colonialism engenders slavery and death, or cannibalism and death, as it did for Captain Cook and many others, but also that any sense of progress born of the 'discovery' has become static. The New World and its Manifest Destiny will, the image suggests, end in a meaningless, undefinable moral vacuum. That 'each Spaniard covered his face' re-enacts the veil on which the imagery is based. Real horror is faceless, an absent body or meaningless death. It even defeats the epistemological and ideological games played by the state and its victims. The Spanish sailors' veiled faces, and the blankness of Aranda's white bones, hark back to the blank wall of the white whale's forehead, and the blank wall at which Bartleby stares in the Tombs. All are impenetrable 'dead letters', and it is their blankness which kills.

In the second gibbet scene Melville will return to this image of the face, when he makes Babo's decapitated head gaze back, unabashedly, at the gaze of the whites. But first he makes one last, all important point about bones and their import for the national allegory. Aranda's dry bones remind him of Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones, which he uses to describe the *San Dominick* at the beginning of the narrative. 'Her keel seemed laid, her ribs put together, and she launched, from Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones' (37). But the imagery is of a new genesis or a new ark, Noah's and that of the Covenant. One cannot read the white skeleton without Ezekiel in mind. After breathing His spirit into the bones, as He did in Genesis with Adam

and Eve, Yahweh, informs Ezekiel that: 'Behold I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all sides, and bring them to their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms' (Ez.37. 21-22 RSV).

If the *San Dominick* is the ship of state, made of the bones of its suffering masses, then there appears to be a message of hope in the figure of the skeleton. Black and white, the 'two nations' of America, may be united under one king, a New Israel. This is the promise that lies in Aranda's bones, making 'follow your leader' a pointed comment to an America in the wake of the 1850 Compromise and about to be divided between North and South in a Civil War. The question is whether Aranda's bones can come alive and take on flesh neither white nor black, and whether a future new nation can be given a breath of life. Melville offers no image of life, only the second gibbet scene, where the gaze of the black and the white meet across the plaza. The future that is suggested, then, is of a stasis between opposing forces, and it is meant to be read, if the biblical allusions are anything to go by, with other typological references to resurrected bones in mind. With the possible promise of a New Israel comes a further warning. For if in the biblical typology the Valley of Dry bones prefigures Christ's resurrection, as do Aranda's, whose body is symbolically 'below' for three days before being brought up (93), it also prefigures the great eschatological conflagration between Gog and Israel, where, in the very next chapter, Ezekiel prophesies, 'every man's sword will be against his brother. With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgement with him; and I will rain upon him...torrential rains and hailstones, fire and brimstone' (Ez. 38. 21-22). This, in turn, prefigures the 'War in Heaven' of Revelation 11, where the numberless dead bodies rise after three and half days to be resurrected amidst earthquakes and destruction. In the biblical narrative the message may be that no resurrection is complete without suffering. Melville hints at a possible future utopian union between black and white, but refuses to assume its realization. Instead, he examines the suffering and the possible nature of the resurrection in the final gibbet scene.

The scaffold scene bears the marks of a Christian allegory, but refuses a reduction to such allegory. Babo is 'dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule' (102), suggesting Christ on his donkey, but also the allegorical journey of the *auto-da-fé*. His head, mounted on a pole in the Plaza, suggests the crucifixion. We are brought from the image of the writhing figure of

the stern-piece to the suffering head and burned body as if by some natural progression. We are invited to assume the suffering slave to be a version of the suffering Christ. However, the ambiguities of the stern-piece are continued in the final scene too, denying such a simplistic reading, and denying that the *auto-da-fé* has in fact come to a satisfactory conclusion. Babo's raised head looks towards the recovered bones of Aranda, which (significantly) 'slept' both 'then, as now' (102). Of these bones there is no resurrection, even though they also suggest something Christ-like and expectant of resurrection. Babo's head also faces Cereno gone to his monastery on Mount Agonia, reminiscent of the agonies of Gethsemane. Three potential Christ figures therefore gaze at each other. Africa, Spain and the New World gaze at each other, mutual sufferers and inflictors of suffering. New World colonialism has brought the gibbet, but not the progress that is meant to go with it. Instead, it has brought only stasis. There is no telling (as there will be 'no telling' in *Billy Budd*) who Christ is, or if any of the deaths suffered bears any hope of a resurrection. The imminent conflagration between North and South, the narrative implies, may well be equally fruitless. No new nation will necessarily arise from its bones.

The gazes across the Plaza in Lima, and the fact that the trial and execution takes place in Lima, take us back to 'The Town-Ho's Story' in *Moby-Dick*. It is in Lima where Ishmael tells his story of Steelkilt's rebellion, a story known in secret only to 'three confederate white seamen' (MD, 199) who communicate it to Tashtego with 'Romish injunctions of secrecy' (MD, 200). White tells Indian the story of rebellion and charges 'Romish' or Catholic Inquisitional secrecy, in a city whose nickname is 'corrupt as Lima' (205). Ishmael retells the story to 'a lounging circle of my Spanish friends, one saint's eve, ... upon ... the piazza of the Golden Inn' (MD, 200), almost the exact spot where Babo's execution will take place. We might guess that the 'saint's eve' may be St Dominick's. The fine 'dons' he tells his story to are 'cavaliers', an epithet that might remind us of the 'gentleman' Cereno or equally of the piratical Babo. The city itself is where the 'Roman' (symbol of conquest) arches over 'Indian rivers', where the indigenous has become replaced by 'rows of snow-white chapels, whose spires stand almost like milestones, flows one continual stream of Venetianly corrupt and often lawless life. There's your true Ashantee, gentlemen; there howl your pagans; where you ever find them, next door to you; under the long-flung shadow, and the snug patronizing lee of churches, ... so sinners gentlemen, most abound in holiest vicinities'. There is no telling, in this narrative, who is sinner and who innocent, and all live together in proximity. 'Is that a

friar passing? Said Don Pedro, looking downwards into the crowded plaza, with humorous concern', and when the same Don declares Lima corrupt, his cry to 'St Dominic' reminds us that St Dominic is the patron saint of the cathedral of Lima (MD, 205 n 9), so that Cereno and Aranda leave one version of the *San Dominick*, the New World, with its rebellion and bloodshed, only to go to another, the Old World, Dominican-controlled city, a place of death. It is a city where, Ishmael's listeners tell him without much conviction, 'Dame Isabella's Inquisition wanes in Lima' (MD, 205), and where 'there are no Auto-da-Fés in Lima now' (MD, 214).

The stasis of the gazes across the plaza between Babo's head and the bodies of Aranda and Cereno suggests the futility of moral comparisons between the different bodies, just as Ishmael dismisses any moral comparison between the inhabitants of Lima. Ashantee and Friar are viewed with the same equanimity from the Golden Inn, a name itself suggestive of the pillaged gold of the New World. But the balanced gazes also remind us of another balance between decapitated heads in *Moby-Dick*. Babo will not speak when he is executed, in contradiction of the demands of the *auto-da-fé* which insist on the contrition of the 'patient' and his acceptance of the power of the state as God's representative. 'Seeing all was over, he uttered no sound, and could not be forced to' (102).

This is reminiscent of the two whale heads mounted on either side of the *Pequod*. One (the Sperm whale) is suggestive of the phrenologically 'broad brow' of the white man, a Platonian, suggestive of the western (white) transcendentalist. The other (Right whale), with its tongue 'glued, as it were, to the floor of the mouth', a Stoic, is suggestive of the black man (MD, 266). These two deaths heads are similarly 'balanced'. As with Babo, the black is the Stoic, suffering silently, like the silence of all slaves under the master. Like the Right Whale, with its 'enormous practical resolution in facing death' (MD, 267), Babo's aspect 'seemed to say, since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words' (102). Aranda's ethereal skeleton and white bones are white rule in all its deathly brittleness. They are like the whale's skeleton in 'A Bower in the Arsacides' where the vines which overgrow, and as-it-were mask the skeleton become skeletal themselves: 'Now, amid the green, life-restless loom of that Arsacidean wood, the great, white worshipped skeleton lay lounging - a gigantic idler! Yet, as the ever-woven verdant warp and woof intermixed and hummed around him, the mighty idler seemed the cunning weaver; himself all woven over with the vines; every month assuming greener, fresher verdure; but himself a skeleton. Life folded Death; Death trellised Life;' (MD, 345).

Ishmael tells his story of Steerkilt to his 'lounging circle of Spanish friends' (MD, 200). They share white indolence, as the white skeletons of Aranda and the whale do, and like white empire builders of Manifest Destiny seek ever 'greener and fresher verdure'. But it is the white that is here the 'cunning weaver', not the black Babo.

The weaving, however, leads only to stasis, life in death and death in life. The weavings which try to cover the death's head of Manifest Destiny lead only to death. It is the black slave Pip who sees the shapes of the 'unwarped primal world' and 'sees God's foot upon the treadle of the loom', so that the 'ringed horizon began to expand around him miserably' (MD, 321). The ringed horizon of Manifest Destiny is miserable to the slave. Here it is the white skeleton, symbol of white power which weaves like God himself. Ahab mirrors that whale skeleton and mirrors Pip when both their heads bob as if decapitated in the ocean of what is to come. Pip's 'ebon head showed like a head of cloves' (MD, 321), and Ahab's white head bobs alone 'like a tossed bubble which the least chance shock might burst' (MD, 411) on the first day of the chase. Just as Pip's and Ahab's lone heads are split from their bodies but still, as-it-were, cancel each other out, black and white alone-together, so do the two whale heads, and so do Babo's and the remains of Aranda and Cereno. Heads without bodies or bodies without flesh, both the result of the Inquisition and of Manifest Destiny, as of savage cannibalism, lead not to progress but to endless static battle. The white whale's 'pleated head' (MD, 410) and body which will 'spin' its victims with coiled ropes to their own deaths, offers but 'appalling battle on every side' (MD, 416). Victim and aggressor both 'weave' but without progress.

The human heads are like the two whale heads, different yet the same, and as such cannot be measured in hierarchical terms. 'Look your last, now, on these venerable hooded heads,' says Ishmael, while yet they lie together; for one will soon sink, unrecorded, in the sea; the other will not be very long in following.' (MD, 266). The 'loomings' at the beginning of *Moby-Dick*, suggestive of weaving as it is of the future, have become the 'hive of subtlety' at the end of 'Benito Cereno'. Weaving, even the narrative weaving which Melville, Cereno, Babo and Delano indulge in, ties itself in its own knots, so contorted as to be thrown into the sea, as the sailor must throw his Gordian knot. For despite Melville's apparently careful recording of the deposition, his palimpsest, by undermining Delano's tunnel vision, removes the distinction between masters and slaves, leaders and followers. The narrative becomes like the gaze at the whale heads: 'as you come nearer this great head it begins to assume different

aspects, according to your point of view' (MD, 265). Reading, like the whale head, becomes circular, merely a way of entrenching one's own point of view, forgetting, as Cereno and Babo cannot, but Delano can, the memory of a moment ago.

It is memory and point of view the executioner attempts, by decapitation and the display of heads, to remove. 'As for the black - whose brain, not body, had schemed and led the revolt, with the plot - his slight frame inadequate to that which it held, had at once yielded to the superior muscular strength of his captor, in the boat' (102). Not only does Melville undo the hierarchizing phrenology of his time in a single sentence, brain is black, muscle white, but by presenting the decapitated head meeting 'unabashed, the gaze of the whites' (102), he satirizes a Cartesian theology which at once reveres heads, but dismisses what some of them think as unequal to others.

Like Christ, who is silent before Pontius Pilate, and unlike the noisy Delano, neither Babo nor Cereno will speak in defence of themselves in the trial, for both have learned the equivocal nature of words and the futility of their use in questions of morality. That equivocalness makes both a Christ figure and the opposite of one. 'Both/and' is the 'meaning' Melville leaves us with, not 'either/or'. The 'venerable hooded heads' (MD, 266) of the Sperm and Right whales prefigure the similarly hooded heads of the stern-piece, and the hooded heads of executioner and victim at the scaffold. Equivocation takes away moral certainty, and leaves us only with the horror of death.

But it is Babo and Cereno who have the memory and are haunted by it, and whose 'heads' haunt by refusing to go away. Delano does not understand either equivocation or memory. His allegorical fixing, like Ahab's, finds only single meanings. Hoodedness leaves indefinable memories, horror which cannot be explained away by any form of intellectual fixing or the eradication of bodies. It is, as both Cereno and Babo know, the horror of not being able to define moral value, the horror of nothing, of a national narrative that has come to nothing because its meaning is hooded in equivocation. Delano's final and unwitting equivocation, then, may be the most important of the story. He talks of the wind, but does not see that his own meaning can be variously interpreted, and cannot understand why Cereno does not take heart from his words.

'But these mild trades that now fan your cheek, do they not come with a human-like healing to you? Warm friends, steadfast friends are the trades'.

‘With their steadfastness they but waft me to my tomb, señor’, was the foreboding response (101).

Delano does not see that his reference to ‘trades’ may not only be to wind, but also to the slave trade which uses the winds to transport the slaves, just as it may be to the capitalist destiny America seeks from expansionism. Ahab, about to encounter the white whale which will lead him to his tomb, whose whiteness is mostly the horror of nothing, also speaks of the trades.

‘These warm Trade Winds, at least, that in the clear heavens blow straight on, in strong and steadfast, vigorous mildness; and veer not from their mark, however the baser currents of the sea may turn and tack, and mightiest Mississippies of the land swift and swerve about, uncertain where to go at last. And by the eternal Poles! these same Trades that so directly blow my good ship on; these Trades, or something like them - something so unchangeable, and full as strong, blow my keeled soul along! To it! Aloft there! What d’ye see?’
‘Nothing, sir’ (MD, 420).

Ahab’s words and the response of his lookout, staring as-it-were, into the future of American history, themselves become allegorical of the future. The ‘trades’ of slavery and Manifest Destiny and their ‘unchangeability’ lead to ‘nothing’. Like the artificially stiffened scabbard Cereno wears at his side, and the show of power he is forced to play, an empire ruled by the ‘trades’ will become, the imagery suggests, an impotent nothing.

The cultural construction of nationhood, the ‘imagined community’ in Benedict Anderson’s phrase, works by ‘celebrating hoariness’ rather than ‘astonishing youth’ (Bhabha, 1990: 293). That ‘hoariness’, the memory of the past entrenching a neat teleology for the future, depends on false distinctions between self and other, a narrative progressing by battle between certified opposites, but also static in its unquestioning adherence to long and blindly held assumptions. Memory can have a double edge. It can be what one chooses to remember, or what one is forced, against one’s will, to remember, or both. The former constitutes the allegorical theatre of nationhood, laden with, as Bhabha puts it, ‘atavistic apologues’. The latter, full of equivocal interpellations of meanings not easily read, denies

nationalistic teleology, and the allegorical narrative it supports, limits its progress to a static battle between equivocal forces. This is what happens in the gaze between Babo and Cereno. Babo's head is at one 'Pole' to which Ahab refers. Cereno knows his will soon be at another, and the poles ever balance the ship between them, and in both the horrifying image of death, the stern-piece at one pole and the skeleton at the other, will remain masked.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HANGING UTOPIA: *BILLY BUDD*

‘Your fathers stooped, basely stooped
“To palter with us in a double sense:
And keep the word of promise to the ear,
But break it to the heart”’

Frederick Douglass

‘But in a larger sense, we can not dedicate - we
can not consecrate - we can not hallow - this
ground’.

Abraham Lincoln, The Gettysberg Address

Billy Budd pulls together many of the strands of Melville’s earlier work. It is his last work, published long after his death, and looks back over his life and writing. Perhaps inevitably, then, it is about history, both his own literary history, the history of his family, and also wider national history. It looks back to an event of the past, set ‘in the time before steamships’ (103),¹ in the summer of 1797, after the French Revolution, before the wars of 1812, of 1848, and of 1861. And, because it is so reminiscent of the *Somers* mutiny in which Melville’s cousin Guert Gansevoort was involved and over which the nation had been divided, Melville makes the 1842 hanging at sea of three young sailors a defining moment both of personal and national history. In looking back the text examines something of the promise of what the post-revolutionary worlds of England, France and America had appeared to offer, a new version of utopia in which the *Rights of Man*, as Billy’s ship is called, after Tom Paine’s book (1791), would be protected in democracy. But in hanging Billy, the ‘innocent’, impressed sailor, Melville hangs that promise.

¹ All references to the novel are from the Norton Critical Edition, ed. Dan McCall (2002).

Postbellum America had seen a substantial change in the psychology of conquest, with Manifest Destiny replaced by the period of Reconstruction, which proved, in many instances, a period of corruption and economic and social decay. By placing the action before the turn of the century, Melville spans the century's events, and his own writing about those events. In a single, brief work he is able to re-evaluate the psychology of Manifest Destiny from beyond the civil war, re-evaluate his own literary response to it, and also re-evaluate his own history as a father.

His own literary history has been one in which the bodies of his characters have struggled against their various forms of confinement, increasingly to little or no avail. They have died either in a quest for vengeance, or for emotional or political freedom. Here the 'innocent' dies not for any quest, but merely because the post-revolutionary legal system demands it. In the most radical and bleak of all his works, Melville leaves the individual a complete slave to the system, both victim and executioner. As a symbol of the wider social body which is literally 'pressed' by the state, Billy may be read as Melville's final comment on the relation between state and society. He thus becomes, in many respects, the image of the placid and pliable social body of the future, willing to be sacrificed at the word of the state. The primary questions the novel asks and which any reader has to answer in his interpretation of Billy, are firstly, whether such sacrifice is justified and secondly, whether the author/narrator himself takes any side in the matter.

The most dominant metaphor of the body throughout Melville's work has been the struggle of the body or heart against the head. His words to Hawthorne in 1851 remain central. 'I would rather be a fool with a heart than Jupiter Olympus with his head. The reason the mass of men fear God and *at bottom dislike Him*, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch'.² In *Billy Budd* this division is once again central. Billy is sensuous, 'strong heart-feeling' (111). Vere is one whose head is paramount, who lives by 'settled convictions' and by 'lasting institutions' (118), but whose intellect is not unlike the 'hive of subtlety' Babo's head is described as being. If *Moby-Dick*, where Ahab's monomaniac head dominates, and 'Benito Cereno' where the 'head' of Delano remains confused to the end, has warned us about taking heads too seriously, then *Billy Budd* will examine some of the consequences of that obsession, and the dismissal of the heart. Babo's

² Cited in Parker and Hayford, eds., *Moby-Dick*, (2002: 540).

body has been burnt, the heart left in ashes. Aranda is merely bones. Cereno has died. Only the 'blind' and largely heartless Delano remains, symbol of American expansionism, as of the blind Oedipus still seeking his father. The lack inaugurating the castration complex, from Tommo, through Ahab, Pierre and Bartleby's lawyer, and Delano, has not yet been resolved. Vere and Billy will play out Melville's final Oedipal drama. In the process they will present an image of the morality emerged from the Civil War, and the new world it has inaugurated.

Tommo attempted to escape the largely intellectual laws of western civilization by entering a Rousseauan paradise of sensuous 'innocence', a return to Adam. Instead, he proved the serpent, who brings language, division between mind and body and eventually a version of destruction, as American settlers would prove to be in their new paradise. Billy becomes a new, postbellum version of the Adamic Tommo, looking for paradise and even, in a way, embodying it in his non-rationalist and sensuous innocence. He is 'illiterate' (110), a little like 'Adam' before the 'urbane Serpent [Claggart] wriggled himself into his company' (110). He is a version of the sensuous utopia the young Tommo wanted to find after escaping the *Dolly* but whose own western reason would not allow. Here Melville resurrects the innocent 'savage' American Adam, a 'sort of upright barbarian' (110), full of 'health, youth and a free heart' (108), and shows what the New World will do with him.

The novella harks back to *Moby-Dick* too. Ishmael may have found momentary respite from a literally and socially orphaned state in his phenomenological interaction with hands and bodies on the *Pequod*, may have been buoyed to life and new words on the coffin representing the body of a 'brother/wife', but that was the last such buoyancy Melville was able to offer. Ahab's monomania destroys the ship. The message of *Moby-Dick* was for America to beware its own monomaniac excesses, like its insistence on Manifest Destiny, on the use of slaves, on capitalist class divisions, and for its fathers to take care of and heed the cries of their children, lost like Pip in the sea of expansionism. It was a message not to disregard the value of the heart and the body. *Billy Budd*, coming after the civil war which was meant to rectify the wrongs of the past, removes any promise of a new utopia to be realised in the present and places it in an unreachable, eschatological future. *Pierre* and 'Bartleby' also foreshadow *Billy Budd*. Pierre the character, trying to rectify the actions of the 'head', his father, by using heart, falls into ambiguity, confused family relations and eventually death. One of the novel's messages is that the American fathers and their paternalist, head-oriented brand of history are not to be trusted. *Billy Budd* will return to this Oedipal question, but leave the reader questioning the

motives of the paternalist father Vere, symbol of the British who first settled America, and so symbol of America itself. Instead of the son overcoming the father and bringing a new order, as Oedipus is meant to do, the father kills the son, and re-institutes the old. 'Bartleby' turns that mistrust of the father into the literal confinement of anti-capitalist protest against the paternal(istic) law. What Bartleby rejects with silent protest, Billy will, even more damningly, accept as justice.

But it is not only the past the novel examines. The body is not only confined in this text by its history, or lack of history (for Billy, like Ishmael and Isabel, has no history and no father), or by its captivity to the head of the past. It is also confined by the fact that it may have no future outside the arbitrarily imposed laws of those who choose to shape them. Billy's literal confinement, both as an impressed sailor, taken from the revolutionary *Rights of Man* onto the conservative warship *Bellipotent* (suggestive of Bell/Baal/hell), and as the condemned man, is the result of a law over which he has no control. Melville uses the impressment as an image of what has become of the New World and its hope of utopia. The laws that are meant to maintain utopian stability have themselves become the prison condemning utopia and the bodies which serve it. Billy's body is 'written' by the law, as, to some extent, Vere believes his own body to be. It is a law, however, interpreted and imposed, as it were 'fathered' by Vere, the 'fatherly' captain. If the text is, in a sense, the prophesying 'father' of what is to come for America, it, like the 'Delphic oracle' and fatherly 'Merlin' Dansker telling Billy his likely fate, points to a future where sons will be the victims of their fathers, the future a victim of its past, and hearts the victims of heads. Nothing has changed since Ahab and his monomania.

Three important aspects of Melville's exploration will be examined in the discussion that follows. These are Melville's sense of the Oedipal force of history, and the struggle, as with *Pierre*, of the 'son' to break out of his father's mould.³ Another is the equally paternal rule of law. And the third aspect Melville explores is the fact of innocent sacrifice and its value in social transformation. He himself has been on both sides of the experience of each of these. He has felt the power of the paternal, its overbearing past, explored its confining nature in *Pierre*. He has felt the rule of law, both on the ships of his youth, and in his own personal relations with Lemuel Shaw, his father-in-law, and with the harsh 'father' of the American

³ Similar points on fathers and sons in *Billy Budd* are made by Rogin (1983), and by Ann Douglas, 'Herman Melville and the Revolt Against the Reader', in *The Feminization of American Culture*. Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1977.

reading public. And he has experienced innocence destroyed at the hands of social imperatives when he was a young man. But he has also been the father, seen his sons die as sacrifices, in a sense, to him, with Malcolm committing suicide and Stanwix leaving him and dying in San Francisco. He has been confined by his own history and his own sense of failure as father and writer. *Billy Budd* is, then, his most self-critical and most introspective work.

Confined Heads and Confining Histories

All the bodies on the *Bellipotent* are confined, but the two most important ones are Billy's and Vere's. Both are confined physically to their roles, and both allow what they believe to be a greater 'head' or law to dominate their actions. We must understand Vere to see what Melville is trying to say about fathers and about history.

Vere ends the line of Melvillean 'fathers'. His actions aboard the *Bellipotent* are symbolic of what Melville believes to be the future of postbellum America. Melville interprets Vere, who is 'old enough to have been Billy's father', as a version of father Abraham sending his son Isaac to his death, holding the man he himself has condemned to death 'even as Abraham may have caught Isaac' (157). He interprets Billy as Adam, and Claggart as the 'urbane serpent' (110) and 'envious marplot of Eden' (111). We are thus invited to read the action in more cosmic, biblical terms. Vere, Claggart and Billy are therefore presented as playing out a version of sacral history which would be a realization of the future hopes of the Pilgrim Fathers, who saw themselves living out just such a sacral history. The most recent such father for Melville was Abraham Lincoln. He too had sacrificed 'sons' to his cause. He too had used head over heart. In his Gettysburg address, he would not hallow the ground upon which so many of his sons had been sacrificed, their bodies given for their various and opposing ideals. He felt inadequate to the task, which, in his view, had already been achieved by those who died. The cause was bigger than any single man's role in it. Death was its own sanctifier. He was merely the agent of a paternal law greater than himself. Doubtless, he would have agreed with Tocqueville's (1994: 238) assessment of what makes a great nation.

When a man submits to force, that surrender debases him; but when he accepts the recognized right of a fellow mortal to give him orders, there is a sense in which he rises above the giver of the commands. No man can be great without

virtue, nor any nation great without respect for rights; one might almost say that without it there can be no society, for what is a combination of rational and intelligent beings held together by force alone?

Both Tocqueville and Lincoln accept the right of the head to control the heart and body, find virtue in the body's acceptance of such control. Vere will, to some extent, make the same assumption. 'But let not warm hearts betray heads that should be cool', he says to the members of his drumhead court.⁴ 'Private conscience', he insists, should 'yield to that imperial one formulated in the code under which alone we officially proceed'. The code he follows is the Father's. 'In feature no child can resemble his father more than that Act resembles in spirit the thing from which it derives - War' (154). The father here, like Mars interested only in brute force (163), as the narrator puts it later, should be interested not in intentions behind actions but only in their consequences: 'a martial court must needs in the present case confine its attention to the blow's consequences' (151). Similarly, such a cool headed father should put 'moral scruple' aside in favour of 'military duty' (153), for scruple is the province of 'Nature' and feeling, not the mind of the king from whom 'we have received our commissions' (153). Insisting that his court concentrates on the superficial and external empirical 'fact' of the death blow, he asserts 'War looks to the frontage, the appearance.... Budd's intent or non-intent is nothing to the purpose' (154). That he disregards the irony that he is the sole witness and so should not be the judge, suggests that the 'frontage' on which the law is based is largely a matter of opinion and dependant on one's point-of-view.

On the surface, Vere's assumption appears that of Lincoln's and Tocqueville's. They also assume the importance of duty. It appears also to be the rhetoric of the pilgrim fathers who, like John Winthrop, speak in terms of military commissions and articles of faith. In 'A Modell of Christian Charity' (HC 1, 1993: 15), Winthrop says: 'When God giues a speciall Commission he lookes to have it stricktly obserued in every Article, when hee gaue Saule a Commission to destroy Ameleck hee indented with him vpon certaine Articles and because he failed in one of the least, and that vpon a faire pretence, it lost him his kingdome,.... Thus stands the cause betweene God and vs, we are entered into Covenant with him,... wee haue taken out a Commission'. Vere may be seen as Winthrop's descendant. But if he is, Melville is

⁴ Nathaniel Floyd (1977: 44) points out that *Billy Budd* contains no less than thirty five references to the heart as 'an organ of unusual sensibility between men'.

suggesting a somewhat radical change in the line of thought from ancestor to descendant.

For the difference between Vere's reasoning and Winthrop's, Lincoln's and Tocqueville's is that they equate moral scruple with duty, Vere does not. Duty is a thing of the head for him, what the 'father' Article of War dictates. Morality is something separate. Vere no longer sees a need to defend his actions as moral. He is doing, in fact, what Frederick Douglass had warned would happen to sacred history. In his famous 1852 speech 'What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?', Douglass says: 'It was fashionable, hundreds of years ago, for the children of Jacob to boast, we have "Abraham to our father", when they had long lost Abraham's faith and spirit. That people contented themselves under Abraham's great name'. Douglass, like his fellow slaves, would not become an Isaac, but remain an Ishmael, for 'The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me' (HC 1, 1993: 402, 403).

The leap Melville takes in presenting Vere in this light is a prodigious one, for it overrides the attempt at developing a sacral history for both America and the England which had settled it. Lincoln himself, father Abraham, had become the first son sacrificed to his own ideal of a unified nation, joining his body to the countless others, when he was assassinated. A united social body, founded on sacrifice, would be rejoined to the head, the ideal, re-enacting the founding of the nation by the early Fathers three centuries before, and ensuring the sacral nature of postbellum history. Vere may have walked his ship sixty years before Lincoln's death but, suggests Melville, postbellum America has reverted to his head for its future.

If Billy's death is meant to be read as sacrifice, in relation to Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac (which, ironically, did not finally happen) and God the Father's of his son Christ, then Vere is presumably enacting a sacral history akin to Lincoln's and the early fathers'. Certainly, he suffers more than Billy, or so it appears to others. 'The condemned one suffered less than he who mainly had effected the condemnation' (157). But his choice of duty over moral 'truth' becomes a choice for the head over the heart, a refusal to maintain any pretense at a join between the two.

In a sense, this makes Vere a far more devious and subtle 'envious marplot of Eden' than Claggart. He represents the apotheosis of self-serving evil in Melville, not because he does particularly evil or even self-serving acts, but rather because he assumes the innocence of his own action while in fact *knowing* fully what he is doing.⁵ No other character in Melville acts

⁵ Most recent critics do not think Melville is condoning Vere. The arguments

so wilfully with full knowledge of the consequences. Even Ahab can be excused for his actions, given his not unjustifiable anger with the universe. The blindness of Bartleby's lawyer is congenital, and even Delano can be excused for his actions because of his ignorant, ideologically embedded blindness. Vere is neither monomaniacally wilful or angry, nor is he blind. He sees Billy for what he is, a version of innocence. And, unlike Claggart, he recognises his own desire for the boy. 'He had congratulated Lieutenant Ratcliffe upon his good fortune on lighting on such a fine specimen of the *genus homo*, who in the nude might have posed for a statue of the young Adam before the Fall' (141-2). He interprets him in holy terms. 'Struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang' (146). He understands the sacral and values it, just as he understands his own possible sexual attraction for Billy. 'But a true military officer is in one particular like a true monk', says the narrator. 'Not with more of self-abnegation will the latter keep his vows of monastic obedience than the former his vows of allegiance of martial duty' (148). Unlike Ahab, Vere does not rage against God. He places value on what he sees to be pure and innocent. He merely chooses obedience to the state over the divine.

between past readers are summed up by Hayford and Sealts in their edition of *Billy Budd*, (Chicago, 1962), and again by Karcher in *Shadow Over the Promised Land*, (1980). She notes Stanton Garner's reading of the famous 'forty years after' passage where Melville seems to 'exonerate' Vere, as largely ironic. See McCall, ed., (2002: 349 n 8).

To interpret the significance of this choice for Melville, it is important to examine the origin of Vere's name, and the history of war, conquest and search for Eden that goes with it. That origin, going back to the Renaissance, returns us to the time of the first fathers and their sacral history of settlement of the 'New Canaan' or 'New Eden' in early America, with its 'Virginia' and 'Maryland'. The utopian new Eden could not exist without sacral sanction. It supported a theocracy whose force had not quite dissipated even by the time of Melville's writing the novella. Theocracy is inaugurated in John Winthrop's 'city on a hill' speech in 1630, and re-enforced in Jonathan Edwards' theocratic rigidities of 1734, insisting in 'The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners' that 'there is no distinction between deserving punishment and justly deserving it, ensuring just infliction' (HC 1, 1993: 66). Justice is not the issue for him, only punishment. Vere would apply the same idea, without recourse to religious sanction. Jefferson continues this assumption of America having a sacral history with his assertion in 'Query XVII: Religion - 1787', that 'our rulers can have authority over such natural rights only as we have submitted to them. The rights of conscience we never submitted, we could not submit. We are answerable for them to our God' (HC 1, 1993: 171). Even Emerson's Romantic fusion of heart with mind in 'The Divinity School Address', keeps the theocracy in place: 'A more secret, sweet, and overpowering beauty appears to man when his heart and mind open to the sentiment of virtue. Then instantly he is instructed in what is above him' (HC 1, 1993: 277). George Bancroft would become the spokesperson for a version of 'evangelical democracy' in antebellum America that would continue the sacral line. Such democracy chooses heart over head. In his 'Oration Before the Adelphi Society (1835)', he says: 'The government by the people is in very truth the strongest government in the world. Discarding the implements of terror, it dares to rule by moral force, and it has its citadel in the heart.... The Barbarian who roams our western prairies has like passions and like endowments with ourselves. He bears within him the instinct of Deity; the consciousness of a spiritual nature; the love of beauty; the rule of morality. And shall we reverence the dark-skinned Caffre? Shall we respect the brutal Hottentot? You may read the right answer written on every heart' (HC 1, 1993: 240, 236). This is the same terminology of 'instinct' and 'heart' Melville will adopt when describing Billy, who is all 'heart' and 'instinct' rather than mind. But while Billy's 'heart' may offer an answer to Bancroft's question, Melville will not pretend to be able to read it as clearly as Bancroft assumes.

And finally, in the line of sacral or semi-religious thinkers in American theocracy, there

is Lincoln's own conciliatory theology. In his 'Second Inaugural Address (1865)' he declares: 'Both [North and South] read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged' (HC 1, 1993: 430). In all of these the umbilical cord between sacred and secular is never quite cut, just as the cord linking heart with head is assumed to be intact. In his action of insisting that the law is paramount even over the heart's 'instinctive' moral knowledge Vere is cutting that umbilical cord. He is dismissing even the pretense of a morality based on religious principles and, with some irony, acting more honestly than many of his forebears. It is an honesty, however, which Melville shows to be as self-interested as any previous 'religious' argument may have been, for Vere's actions and personal history are synonymous with imperialism and conquest.

The history of his name is the history of the imperial control of the Edenic garden of Nature by the head and the institution of supposedly sacral authority Vere embodies. But it is also a history whose religious morality is at best questionable. Marvell's 'Upon Appleton House' the poem from which 'Fairfax and the Starry Vere' gets his name (116, 117) eulogises the human ordering of Nature by the new military aristocracy. Mind controls the body of Nature in the garden by ensuring it remains within its carefully ruled bounds. Such control combines sacred and secular powers by assuming the sacred right to control the land won in Cromwell's battle with England's Charles I. Cromwell, the Protestant Lord Protector is the ambiguous symbol of both religious 'discipline' and political democracy. He represents a version of 'fairness' which can also be read, and generally was by Melville's time, as self-interest. In other words, he carries Vere's ambiguities. Fairfax, protestant general under Cromwell, was given Appleton House, which had once been a Catholic Cistercian priory, after victory over Charles I in 1645. He retired before the regicide, but he represents Cromwell's joining of sacral and secular histories in Cromwell's takeover of the English parliament as Protector. It is from this post-revolutionary stock that many of the Pilgrim Fathers to the American 'garden' would come. Marvell eulogises Fairfax as a man who did 'with his utmost skill,/Ambition weed, but conscience till -/Conscience, that heaven-nursed plant,/Which most our earthy gardens want' (ll. 353-356). It is hard to know if Marvell's eulogy is tongue-in-cheek. Fairfax was, after all, his patron. But there can be little doubt that Melville's use of the name is tongue-in-cheek, for Fairfax is himself an ambiguous figure who escapes to the relative

protection of the 'priory' in order to avoid the final consequences of Cromwell's political rise.

His choice of the name suggests that Vere represents an imperial ambition for which much blood was spilt, but for which, like Fairfax escaping to his stately garden, he avoided direct responsibility. Melville's Vere abdicates responsibility for his actions to a higher cause, though not one he claims to be holy. A further, important, significance of the name 'Vere' is that it is in fact that of Fairfax's wife, Vera Fairfax. In Vere male and female are conjoined. The suggestion of 'Eve' may be implicit. Melville's Vere therefore contains in himself an element of the feminine, maternal, not just the paternal. The Fairfax child, their budding flower in the garden, and for whom the institution of Appleton is kept, is named 'Mary'. Maryland is where the new pilgrim, protestant fathers and mothers would settle. Billy would represent its new Budd, and, in the biblical typology Melville adopts, become equated with the child of mother Mary, especially since his face in the moment of condemnation would offer an 'expression which was as a crucifixion to behold' (145). Billy, the 'comely young David' (129) typological predecessor of Christ, is the flower in the new garden who is to be sacrificed. The beauty of the body and its 'natural' innocence are to be destroyed by the head, influenced as it is by the devious and 'urbane serpent'. The bloody but self-ignorant protestant theocracy on which the American utopia is built, Melville suggests, will finally crucify the very symbol of the Eden to which it seeks a return. And since the biblical narrative lies so firmly behind this one, it may be remembered that the temptress in the original Eden is Eve, not only the snake. The female wiles, not unlike those Melville showed in the serpentine Isabel, operate at least to some extent in Vere.

Melville's reference to the crucifixion has further ramifications, however. The suggestion is that the New Eden, fallen at the temptation of Eve and the serpent (Claggart) would turn its 'face', symbol both of identity and that one aspect of the body where head and heart may be seen to coincide, into a vision of death. Tommo refused to have his face tattooed to retain his independent identity, separate from savagery. At the end of his career, Melville takes the face of the 'Handsome Sailor' (129) who has, in prelapsarian fashion, 'no visible blemish' (111), makes it a symbol of the innocence America could have been, which Tommo thought he was preserving, and destroys it. Moreover, Melville's grammar is instructive. For 'as a crucifixion to behold' can apply both to Billy the sufferer and to Vere and the others as judges. Head and heart are both crucified with Vere's action, for there is no telling who experiences, who feels and who only 'seems' to feel. We do not know here who is the sacred

and who is the sinful, so that any final knowledge of America's sacral history is made misty.

A second historical thread to Vere is important. The original Fairfax could not follow his leader, Cromwell, into final battle to overthrow dictatorship. The same applies to the new Fairfax, Vere, who does not follow his leader, Nelson, into final battle over the dictator Napoleon. 'Cut off too early for the Nile and Trafalgar', he 'never attained to the fullness of fame' (168). And fame, one senses from Melville's emphasis, is largely what he seeks. Cromwell pretended not to, claiming the law of God as his guide, though he still became dictator. His descendent Nelson, Melville makes clear, is more vain than sensible, for he savours of 'foolhardiness and vanity', and 'at Trafalgar it was in effect nothing less than a challenge to death, and death, came' (114). Nelson maintains the appearance of the sacral and the self-sacrificial. 'A sort of priestly motive led him to dress his person in the jewelled vouchers of his own shining deeds' (115). Vere may disregard the sacral, but he still seeks the fame. Nelson is described as 'at bottom scarce a better seaman or fighter' than Vere (118). Vere's death is a re-enactment of Nelson's, where after being shot, a 'senior lieutenant took command. Under him the enemy was finally captured' (167). Like Nelson, and perhaps like the original Fairfax of Marvell's poem, he indulges 'in the most secret of all passions, ambition' (168). Ambition is the serpent's passion, one in which Billy is singularly lacking. Imperialism, even bravery in battle, is based on ambition, Melville shows. And whether that imperialism carries the banner of sacral history, or whether it sees itself merely as duty to the governing authority of the time, the level of ambition is not really different.

A final historical strand relevant to Vere's name is evident in the presentation of Vere and his line of military fathers, one much closer to home for Melville. The English Mutiny Act under which Vere acts is the 'model' (156), as Melville's narrator puts it, for the act by which Captain Mackenzie of the *Somers* in 1842 executed three sailors, just a few days out of port, one of whom was son to the Secretary of State.⁶ Vere foreshadows that act, and Melville interprets it through him, as he does the actions of his cousin, the young lieutenant Guert Gansevoort. If ambition and hubris could be said to have 'secretly' motivated Nelson, Cromwell and Vere, then may the same not be said for Mackenzie and Guert? And could the same not be said for the ancestor General Peter Gansevoort, who had presided over the court-martial of General James

⁶ It is unlikely to be accidental to Melville's mind that one of the hanged crew on the *Somers* was Samuel Cromwell. The other two were Elisha Small (the name of the prophet Melville will use in the text) and the Secretary's son Philip Spencer.

Wilkinson at Frederickstown in 1812? And by the same token, what could be said of Lemuel Shaw's 1850 judgement, against his own instinct, but in favour of the wider 'good of the union', to return Thomas Sims to slavery? The claim to sacral status or to objective justice on the part of the American fathers becomes tainted by the secret of ambition and self-service. The claim of the head to be father of the heart is therefore also open to question.

Melville's own family history, as symbol of America's revolutionary past, is open to question. Interpreting that past, like interpreting the 'head' from which the body of the family has come, may, like interpreting Vere's rationale in hanging Billy, be full of 'obscuring smoke' (156). But Melville's laconic tone in the 'excuse' suggests that we are not meant to believe too much in this 'smoke', but more in our own instincts. And these tell us that hubris plays a greater role in the affairs of state than those like Vere would like to pretend, even to themselves. Guert Gansevoort eventually did obey his instinct, and had to leave his naval service a broken man. That those like Lemuel Shaw, and perhaps even 'father' Abraham Lincoln himself could watch their 'children', in the form of Sims and the countless civil war dead, suffer, may suggest a hubris which ultimately undermines both the value of the 'head' as a tool of morality and whatever sacral status may be sought for its actions. As a foil for these hubristic intellects, Melville brings Billy Budd, the 'heart' of the new Eden, the 'garden' in which 'Eve/Vere' is to 'play'.

The Heart of Billy Budd

Vere attempts to escape the responsibility of conscience that his namesake carefully nurtured in his renaissance garden by claiming the authority of impersonal Articles of War, not unlike Lemuel Shaw does with Thomas Sims. He replaces the evangelical democracy of someone like George Bancroft with a version of social engineering through institutions. As a man of 'institutions' (118) and 'forms, measured forms' (166) he embodies more the thinking of someone like Lester Frank Ward than Bancroft. Ward, writing 'Mind as a Social Factor' in 1884, as Melville composed *Billy Budd*, sees the institution as the superior 'father', a head to protect the weak body. Invention is the paramount means of control. 'All practical art is merely the product of successful invention, ... all human institutions [are] only modified forms of arts, and true products of intellectual, or inventive, faculty. ... An entirely new dispensation has been given to the world' (HC 2, 1993: 44).

While Vere represents confinement to the institution and the 'measured form' of the Article, Melville makes Billy Budd into its very opposite, much more the child of Bancroft than any other of his characters. One way of determining what Melville's intention is in contrasting Budd with Vere is to examine the imagery used about Billy and his actions. Such an examination suggests that Billy is meant to be read in terms very similar to those of previous Melville characters who have been the outsiders and the sufferers at the hands of a society obsessed with heads, and with killing bodies. The Idealism of the head, be it the Pilgrim Fathers' theocracy or Emerson's Transcendentalism, or even Lincoln's 'fatherhood' of a new nation united under one head, is examined in the light of what happens to innocent bodies in the achievement of such ideals.

Billy's body is everything that Vere's mind is not. He is 'free-heart' and instinctive Nature to Vere's institution of reason and obedience. Having no history since he is a 'foundling' and a 'by-blow' (110) he cannot have been invented, and being a child or 'Baby Budd' (124) of Nature, he is the 'bud' of a New Eden,⁷ or an archetypal image of the original one. He is Nature unconfined and embodies, in large measure, Ishmael's experience of repose in the midst of 'the tornadoed Atlantic of my being', during 'The Grand Armada'. Melville's definition of Billy deliberately evokes Rousseauian ideals of noble savagery and Adamic perfection. It presents a timeless, indefinable lineage reaching back to the first Man. He becomes the Imaginary to Vere's Symbolic, a version of the pre-thetic which, like Queequeg, speaks with its body, not from any social history or out of obedience to social forms. He is 'like a statue of young Adam before the Fall' (142), a 'Hercules' who carries 'something suggestive of a mother eminently favored by Love and Graces' (109). Though he may be a 'by-blow', his knowledge of his father is but 'God knows', an ambiguity suggesting both lack of family history but also the possibility that he is the child of God. As an 'upright barbarian' of 'noble descent', he suggests the 'innocence' of a Queequeg or of a Typeean, but also of a less subtle Babo. He offers no mask, and no distinction between heart and head, for he has a heart whose bonfire 'made luminous the rose-tan in his cheek' (129). And if the rose-tan suggests Red

⁷ The description of Billy matches both that of Fayaway and Marnoo, the two ideal 'savage' figures from *Typee*. Fayaway's 'complexion was a rich and mantling olive, ... beneath the transparent medium there lurked the blushes of a faint vermilion' (67). Marnoo, a figure of 'matchless symmetry' is a 'Polynesian Apollo' whose 'every feature reminded me of an antique bust' and whose 'cheek was of a feminine softness'. 'The hair of Marnoo was a rich and curling brown, and twined about his temples in little close curling ringlets' (110).

Indian as much as tanned sailor, then another suggestion about his person has been made before he is even encountered.

The first, archetypal, 'Handsome Sailor' Melville shows us is not white but black, found by the narrator in Liverpool 'half a century ago' near a wall 'on Prince's Dock', a common sailor 'so intensely black that he must needs have been a native African of the unadulterate blood of Ham' (103). If the 'sons of Ham' who were traditionally interpreted as blacks and slaves, of whom Ishmael would be the descendant, then Melville frames Billy not just as innocent boy, but also as social outcast, another Ishmael. He is like Frederick Douglass's slave who suffers at the hands of Abraham. But while he is a social misfit, he is essentially pure. As the barbarian, the savage, and most importantly, a version of Adamic Everyman, he is the embodiment of the question mark about the value of lineage as a way of determining moral value. Billy's features carry 'a questionable smack as of a compounded wine' (111), but placed in the context of the Liverpool negro, he is pure. Like the Liverpool ⁸ Negro 'Prince' at the beginning of the story, he is 'unadulterated'. He is as racially pure as his African counterpart, 'cast in a mold peculiar to the finest physical examples of those Englishmen in whom the Saxon strain would seem not at all to partake of any Norman or other admixture' (109). He is also the question mark over the institution based on 'reason' and intellect as a means to achieve moral certainty. Just as 'true places' are on no map, when it comes to Queequeg, the 'true' Billy Budd cannot be captured by reason or by knowing his lineage. Like the whale, it is by the character of his backbone that one will know him, not in his outer form. In this novel Melville transfers backbone to the heart.

⁸ The Liverpool reference is telling because the port was prominent in the slave trade, even having a street called 'Negro Row'. See Segal (1995: 264).

While Billy's 'heart' is what distinguishes him it is also the very thing that undoes him. He has 'no visible blemish', but the 'strong heart-feeling' which he may have evokes his 'occasional liability to vocal defect' which disrupts the 'harmony within' and creates in its place an 'organic hesitancy' (111). In the face of the institution of 'measured forms' the organic must become hesitant and even fall into a 'stutter'. Billy stutters when he does not sing like the nightingale (symbol, as it is, of temporal beauty), a 'defect' equalled only by his illiteracy. Placing heart beside head and examining which is worthy of being given the power of influence, Melville presents his characteristic ambiguities. If the head is, like Babo's a 'hive of subtlety' then the heart might not always be without defect either, for when Billy becomes angry his emotions are uncontrollable, and the head is defeated by the heart.

There are two ways of interpreting this 'stammering'. One is to read it as evidence of an emotional defect. Another is to see it as symbolic of a larger 'silence' Melville has engaged with throughout his life. As stammering body Billy concludes the other line of history Melville has traced through all his works, that of liminal outcasts who remain fatherless and in so doing are silenced by social constraints. All of them speak with their bodies and hearts rather than with mouths, and all of them embody silence, either illiteracy or the refusal to write, and all of them die in the conflict with western Law. All can be seen as products of an Imaginary, originary world in conflict with the Symbolic paternal Law. Such is the case of the Typees, the whale itself, Queequeg, and perhaps Ishmael, Isabel, Bartleby and Babo.

Few of these silenced characters equivocate or 'palter in a double sense', as Douglass accuses the American fathers of doing. When, like Babo, they do, it is largely because they have learned it is the only way to deal with the western, imperialist mind, which mostly says one thing and does another. The Typees and Queequeg put their writing on their bodies, just as the whale's body is its own meaning. These bodies are their own signs. Isabel and Bartleby, like Billy, have no history to speak of, and are silent in the face of the master narratives which define them. Like Billy, Isabel sings or is sung to by her guitar. If Melville presents none of these as absolutely innocent, always himself questioning the value of an organicist reading of Nature, in *Billy Budd* he comes closest to accepting the possibility of an unequivocal and unequivocating innocence. Billy's actions are from the heart, the heart may not always be prudent, but it carries no 'sinister dexterity' (108). It may be foolhardy, but it is the foolhardiness of the innocent. It is not an innocence, however, which can finally exist in the real world.

Billy cannot interpret Claggart's actions because they are a mask built on a 'double sense'. He 'equivocates' and acts 'with counterfeited glee' (125). He masks a probable homosexual desire for the 'beautiful' Budd, suggested by Melville's pointed use of 'ejaculate' (125) and Claggart's reference to Billy as a 'mantrap under the ruddy-tipped daisies'(141). It is not, Melville's narrator insists, the same kind of envy which Saul felt for 'the comely young David', deliberately begging the question. It is rather that Claggart resents Billy's apparently never having 'willed malice or experienced the reactionary bite of that serpent' (129). Claggart becomes, inevitably, a version of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, a grown version of Tommo reacting to the Adamic Typees. 'With no power to annul the elemental evil in him, though readily enough he could hide it; apprehending the good, but powerless to be it;... what recourse is left to it but to recoil upon itself and, like the scorpion for which the Creator alone is responsible, act out to the end the part allotted to it' (130). Claggart is the serpent. Like the shark in *Moby-Dick* he cannibalises himself, and like Ahab, he projects his own 'monomaniac' (138) sense of lack onto an innocent other.

He comes from a history that hides its heart, but hates the fact of that hiding, so that it coils back on itself, pretending holiness and love, but having none, like Saul hiding his jealousy. There is an ambiguity at the heart of sacral history, which sacrifices its own for its cause, Melville suggests. Jealousy, not just a sense of justice or morality, may lie within. The history of the west is, for Melville, one of being confined to its own struggle against repressed desire, caused by allowing head to rule the heart, or 'uncommon prudence' (131), as he defines Claggart, to hold sway over deeper instinct. Western history is confined, as it were, by its own equivocations. Pacifying the 'native sense' (155) of its heart, as the narrator describes Billy, it allows the head to rule, but at the cost of repression. Ahab projected that repression onto the object of the whale, tried literal confinement as an antidote for psychological prison. He cannot, finally, strike through the mask of his own 'double sense' because he has allowed it to define him. Claggart literalises his own repression in Billy, just as Ahab does with the whale.

Billy's 'heart-felt' stutter, his slave-like silence, becomes a symbol of his position as the equivalent of the 'subaltern' Queequeg. Like Queequeg, he must speak with his body. Like Queequeg he has 'the spirit of the gamecock' (106), a 'Billy-be-Dam', a boxer in whom 'comeliness and power' exist side-by side (104), 'dandified' and 'manly' together, but he also has no power outside his own body. His 'gamecock' nature is one of his ways of dealing with oppressive forces. Another way is his silence. A third, and final one, is instinctive force.

Each of these may be interpreted as evident among those oppressed groups in the society as Melville writes, so that Billy can be read as symbol of the oppressed 'coloured', Negro or Indian who, having tried 'gaming' with the white government, turns instead to silence, and finally resorts to brute force out of sheer frustration.

One may understand this aspect of Billy better by outlining some of the events taking place just prior to and during the time of Melville's writing. The novella is written in postbellum, post-slavery America, during the time of the Reconstruction. It was a time when the 'native' Indian with his 'ruddy tan' had been displaced from his land, when the freed slave was being treated in the South particularly as a 'barbarian' and 'savage', and when gross negligence and corruption were the order of the day in the Southern States. The two most obvious sufferers were the Indian and Negro freed slave.⁹ The 'savage', 'barbarian', 'foundling' and 'by-blow' epithets applied to Billy place him on a par with the countless freed slaves who were lynched in the Reconstruction and after, as they do the displaced and 'foundling' Indian, no longer native in his own land. They remain the most silenced, illiterate and 'stuttering' peoples of the continent. 'The ex-slave was not a free man; he was only a free Negro' as Trelease puts it. Carl Schurz pointed out in 1865 that 'The pecuniary value which the individual negro formerly represented having disappeared, the maiming and killing of colored men seems to be looked upon by many as one of those venial offenses which must be forgiven to the outraged feelings of a wronged and robbed people'.¹⁰ The feeling of being robbed of their power led southern whites like those of the Ku Klux Klan, in just one example, to lynch 153 blacks in a single Florida county in the year of 1871. Over three hundred were lynched in the same year outside New Orleans parishes (Segal, 1995: 245).

⁹ Robert K. Martin reminds us that Redburn sees 'four naked figures in chains' beneath the statue of Nelson, which he would never look at 'without being involuntarily reminded of four African slaves in the market-place'. Martin, 'Is Vere a Hero?', in McCall, ed., (2002: 365).

¹⁰ Allen W. Trelease, 'Introduction' to *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction*, 1971. Cited in Grob and Billias, eds., (1987: 448).

When Billy is falsely accused of mutiny by Claggart, whose hand is ‘too small and shapely to have been accustomed to hard toil’ (119), suggestive of an antebellum southern slave-owner, the ‘rose-tan’ of Billy’s cheek ‘looked struck by a white leprosy’ (144). Claggart’s jealousy of Billy is not dissimilar from the ‘outraged feelings of a wronged and robbed people’. Billy faces the ‘white leprosy’ of racism and repressed feelings. The general response of Negroes to white accusations was very much like Billy’s to Claggart’s. ‘When Negroes did strike back or defy the master race’, says Trelease, ‘it was more often the product of impetuosity and extreme aggravation that (sic) forethought and planning. Whites commonly ascribed Negro violence ... as the product of a congenitally passionate nature. The blacks were like children, it was said, who flared up without thought of consequences and then almost as quickly subsided’.¹¹ The Indian, for all his warlikeness, and ‘congenitally passionate nature’ was not that different. The story of ‘The Trial of Mamachtaga’ in Westmoreland in 1784, narrated by Hugh Henry Brackenridge (Silverman, 1971: 402-409), shows, with the narrator’s puzzled amusement at strange innocence, the very kind of open-heartedness Billy presents. Having been condemned to the gallows, the Indian nevertheless is set free for a day to find roots from the woods to help cure the child of the jailor. No one doubts his return to prison. ‘The jailor taking off his irons which he had on his feet, took his word that he would not make his escape’. After the child is cured, the Indian is taken to the gibbet. ‘The rope being fastened, when he was swung off it broke, and the Indian fell, and having swooned a little, he rose with a smile, and went up again. ... two [ropes were] put about his neck together, so that his weight was supported, and he underwent the sentence of the law’. In the shape of Billy, Melville makes what is assumed to be a congenitally passionate nature into a maskless heart, not yet succumbed to ‘the apple of knowledge’ (110), responding to evil equivocation.

The leprosy of whiteness turns out to be the equivocal speech wherein lies the satanic power of white America, making its false accusations against the innocent and illiterate, nor ever fulfilling its, apparently fatherly, promises of care. Melville reverses the definitions of congenital good and evil. Claggart, the educated ‘southerner’ is the ‘snake’ (145) while Billy the ‘Adam’. If sacred history demands that the descendants of Adam and Eve ‘bruise’ the snake’s head (Gen. 3. 15), and Christ becomes, typologically, the final bruiser (as Billy is a

¹¹ Trelease, in Grob and Billias, eds., (1987: 450).

'bruiser' of sorts), then Billy's punch against Claggart's head fulfills its typological role, its 'fate' (145) as Vere puts it. Heart hits head in Billy's action. In him body speaks where tongue cannot. In Vere and Claggart, tongue speaks where desiring body cannot.

One of Melville's more forceful, if less noticed, points in *Billy Budd* is that we never really know what Billy is *thinking*, a standard trope of the west's response to primitive 'savagery'. But we hardly doubt what he is feeling, any more than Brackenridge doubts the feelings of his condemned Indian. But we never quite know what Vere and Claggart are *feeling*, any more than we do Brackenridge himself. Vere and Claggart both hide hearts while manipulating heads, repudiating maternal feeling for a more paternal, legal mind, but one which is itself secretive, consistent with the actions of a 'rat', suggested by the phallic 'rattan' (125) with which Claggart taps Billy from 'behind'. In doing so they emulate the workings of a racist America, whose actions, apotheosised in the Ku Klux Klan, self-appointed secret chiefs of police, (as the master-at-arms is designated to be) are motivated by fear of 'mutiny', not only the losing of lives to blacks, but perhaps more importantly, of jobs. Melville's rhetoric of primitive innocence becomes deliberately contradictory of the rhetoric of the time. If the Ku Klux Klan would insist on its lynchings being the acts of divine vengeance,¹² Melville's story ensures that any claim to such divinity is turned on its head by Vere's words: 'It is the divine judgement of Ananias!' Ananias (Acts 5. 3-5) is the archetypal equivocator, who would keep for himself what belongs to the community. But Vere, acting out the role common to the Ku Klux Klan, and lynching Billy, is even more harshly judged by Melville than the Klan may be. He sees the divinity and innocence of Billy, marks Claggart for what he is, but proceeds with the lynching. Fear of a loss of strength in the face of social expectation, not unlike the fear that might have propelled Lemuel Shaw to send Thomas Sims back to slavery, drives Vere. The 'institution' with its code of the Law, thinking it acts out of reason, actually, Melville implies, acts from fear.

Vere's Code

¹² The *Fayetteville Observer*, condoning the lynching of an alleged Negro rapist in 1868, declared: 'The community said amen to the act - it was just and right. We know not who did it, whether Ku Klux or the immediate neighbours, but we feel that they were only the instruments of Divine vengeance in carrying out His holy and immutable decrees'. Cited in Grob and Billias, eds., (1987: 452).

If the one who 'bruises the snake's head' is meant to inaugurate a new version of history, a 'reconstruction' based on knowledge of and adherence to moral virtue, then Billy's hanging represents a silencing of that new history. Like the other 'bruiser of the snake's head' in biblical typology, Christ, he is silent before his judge. Christ's silence before Pontius Pilate is one of knowledge. Knowing his innocence he cannot defend himself before a judge who represents untruth. Billy's silence is not based on knowledge, but, in a sense much more Christlike, on trust in the judge's good will and truthfulness. 'Budd, if you have ought further to say for yourself, say it now', the first lieutenant invites Billy, having until now suffered Vere's 'overruling' of his 'assumed primacy' in the proceedings. But before Billy can speak equivocation overrules him. 'Upon this the young sailor turned another quick glance toward Captain Vere; then, as taking a hint from that aspect, a hint confirming his own instinct that silence was now best, replied to the lieutenant, "I have said all, sir"' (152). Billy's instinct for silence and trust is manipulated by the authority, like the master manipulates the dog, for Billy's 'dumb expressiveness was not unlike that which a dog of generous breed might turn upon his master' (151). Pontius Pilate wanted to release Christ. Instead he listened to the demands of the people to crucify him, and accepted a mob lynching. Vere does the opposite. He chooses 'to demonstrate certain principles that were axioms to himself' (152) over the democratic will.

Those 'principles' silence the voices of protest. They are the principles of the disavowal of responsibility for personal action, claiming, like the KKK, external sanction, but not questioning its own motives. 'In receiving our commissions we in the most important regards ceased to be natural free agents', Vere says to his court. 'For suppose condemnation to follow these present proceedings. Would it be so much we ourselves that would condemn as it would be martial law operating through us?' (153). Recognizing that 'in the Last Assizes' Billy would be acquitted, Vere nevertheless dismisses sacred law, or its other version 'natural justice' (153), and whatever history attempted to live by them, in favour of imperial code. 'Private conscience' must yield 'to that imperial one formulated in the code under which alone we officially proceed' (154). Melville's great heroes and anti-heroes have all fought against the 'masterly codes' which confined them, mentally and eventually physically. Even the 'code' of ambiguity has been one from which to attempt an escape, as Tommo does escaping his utopian island become prison, as Pierre does escaping his utopian Saddle Meadows, eventually falling into the prison of ambiguity and dying in it. Ahab rails against the ambiguity inherent in the universe. He even rails against the ambiguity at the heart of sacral

history, which uses God as an excuse for atrocity. Bartleby and Babo die confined to masterly codes, in deaths which seem the last version of protest available to them. But Vere, unlike all of these, neither rails against ambiguity nor masterly codes. He is not burdened by the demands or inconsistencies of sacral history or divine injunction. Instead, he revels in the ambiguity inherent in it and in the masterly codes under which he acts. The ambiguity inherent in his position as father/judge, witness/juror, comforter/executioner makes him an embodiment of Douglass's 'double sense'.

He uses that double sense to 'palter' with the members of his court and with Billy, and in the process chooses to confine meaning to his own interpretation of externals. Claiming to 'confine' (151) the court to consequences rather than causes, claiming empirical methodology as a form of judicial certitude, Vere thinks with the racist rhetoric of primitivism. Using the language of the heart, he twists its meaning into that of the head. 'But I beseech you, my friends, do not take me amiss. I feel as you do for this unfortunate boy. But did he know our hearts, I take him to be of that generous nature that he would feel even for us on whom in this military necessity so heavy a compulsion is laid' (155). Having dismissed the value of feelings, he uses the argument of feelings to sway the court. He appeals to his men's 'instinct as sea officers', placing them on par with Billy as children of instinct. But in syllogistic contradiction of his own precepts, he warns of the 'native sense' of the people on deck. 'The people (meaning the ship's company) have native sense.... Even could you explain to them ... they, long molded by arbitrary discipline, have not that kind of intelligent responsiveness that might qualify them to comprehend and discriminate' (155). He presumes to speak for the people. Their past experience of discipline under him would prevent them from being able to understand any other, so the will of the (ignorant) people ought to be obeyed. Yet he never cares to enquire what that will may be. 'Your clement sentence they would account pusillanimous', he declares unilaterally. He is, in fact, much less of a democrat than Pontius Pilate.

It is this very native sense, or 'nativity' if one cares to pun, that is destroyed in the postbellum utopian garden, to be replaced with the show of institutions, and, like those after the Fall, with fear, as the foundations of both law and religion. These define according to social status and apparent worldly necessity. But they are like the chaplain whose stipend is from Mars and who serves 'brute Force' (162), who has 'no consolation to proffer' (160), and harnesses religion for state purposes. They reduce the eternal to the 'cannon' (162) - and

Melville's pun is deliberate, of the temporal law of the gun, not the canon of eternal law. Vere/Eve have already fallen. The Edenic garden is tainted by their equivocations, persuading Adam to take the apple of knowledge and become the sacrifice. The only question *Billy Budd* still has to answer is whether Adam's acceptance of that 'apple' will be a 'fortunate Fall' inaugurating an act of redemption and returning secular history to something sacred, or whether it is the final, ironic offering of a writer who no longer believes in the possibility of anything sacred.

To attempt to find the answer is to attempt an interpretation of what Melville means in his famous apparent exoneration of Vere. Doubtless he is referring also to the French Revolution as he is to the American 1848 and 1861. 'Forty years after a battle it is easy for a noncombatant to reason about how it ought to have been fought. It is another thing personally and under fire to have to direct the fighting while involved in the obscuring smoke of it' (156). But in answering the question, one cannot forget that Vere does not see himself to be in obscuring smoke. He presumes himself to have the 'cool head' he demands of his fellow officers. Yet Melville undermines this very cool headedness by making the most 'smoky' figure in the text also the most perceptive. This is the Delphically oracular Dansker, the 'old Merlin' from Nelson's ship the *Agamemnon*. His nickname is 'Board-Her-in-the-Smoke' (123), but he is also referred to as the 'Chiron', who in mythology is alone of all his siblings not swallowed by his father Chronos (125). He survives his father's sacrifice of his children, and can interpret for Billy what he sees. If he can see clearly even in 'smoke', then 'smoke' may be no excuse for spiritual and moral blindness, Melville suggests, just as war may be no excuse for the sacrifice of innocence. The '*Agamemnon* man' can see what no others can, that Billy will be a sacrifice to the father, for he comes from a ship whose paternal captain sacrificed his 'sons' for his own glory. It was Agamemnon who sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia to the gods of war. Having won the war he was murdered by his own wife later. The *Agamemnon* is as ambiguous a name as Nelson himself, winner of wars but at the cost of his children, to satisfy his pride. Sacrifice, then, has ambiguous value, for Melville, and the 'smoke' of war is something of which to beware, which Vere is decidedly not, just as Mackenzie was not. Agamemnon's sacrifice is in the line which contains Abraham's intended one, God the Father's of Christ, and ultimately, Melville's own of his own two sons. If sacrifice is meant to cement secular history as something sacred, then the question which remains to be answered, and to which Melville devotes a large portion of the narrative, is whether Billy's death may be read as sacramental. If

it can, American sacral history may have a chance of being revived.

But There is No Telling the Sacrament

When he reports what may have privately taken place between Vere and Billy when the young boy is told his fate, suggesting the Abraham-Isaac story as a possible analogy, Melville's narrator says: 'But there is no telling the sacrament, seldom if in any case revealed to the gadding world, whenever under circumstances at all akin to those here attempted to be set forth two of great Nature's nobler order embrace. There is privacy at the time, inviolable to the survivor; and holy oblivion, the sequel to each diviner magnanimity, providentially covers all at last' (157). What is inviolable privacy to the one (Vere) becomes holy oblivion to the other (Billy). And oblivion, the sequel to any divine magnanimity, is ultimately what covers all.

In the reference to the sacraments Melville returns us to the question of whether secular and sacred histories can be joined. Looking through the smoke of it all, he may well be claiming to see with the perceptive eyes of the Dansker, whose 'leading characteristic' is, after all, a 'pithy guarded cynicism' (125). What he sees is 'holy oblivion'. The oxymoron represents what may be seen as the novel's final and foremost version of confinement and conquest. It captures the ambiguity at the heart of the narrative, for it can be read in two ways. Either oblivion is holy, or the holy is a form of oblivion. To choose a sacral narrative for one's past is to be deliberately oblivious to those elements which may not be so. To choose no narrative but that of expedience is to choose a version of oblivion. The holy, then, Melville suggests, is what you make it. We do not know what is holy and what is not, only what we take to be so. If the memory of the past is 'providentially' covered by such holy oblivion, then that past must be as smoky or as clear as the mind that retains it.

In the final depiction of Billy before and during execution, the imagery can be interpreted sacramentally, or not. That Billy's death is unjust is difficult to dismiss. That it is in any way either redemptive, or a symbol of divine presence is impossible to tell. His 'agony' between the cannons during the night is suggestive of Gethsemane. The loss of that agony is attributed to 'something healing in the closeted interview with Captain Vere' (160). The 'healing' may be Billy's acceptance of fatherly love and the value of sacrifice to a higher cause. But it may also be that his innocent and illiterate mind has been duped into accepting a role he hardly understands. And it may also be, if we take the homosexual hints seriously, the 'hearth

glow' and 'serene happy light' of a 'closeted' sexual embrace, in which case Vere's 'natural depravity' would far exceed Claggart's.

Between the 'regular spacing' of the military guns (159) Billy, the epitome of untrammelled nature, lies in his 'white jumper and white duck trousers', which glimmer, 'like a patch of snow in early April lingering at some upland cave's black mouth' (159). This too carries deliberate ambiguity. Usually the symbol of holiness, *White Jacket* turns that whiteness into a symbol of military confinement. *Moby-Dick* turns it into the indefinable. *Billy Budd* has already made it 'leprosy', the disease of racism and the military. Now it places whiteness before the 'black mouth'. Certainly the passage suggests that innocence is to die in the face of darkness. But it also suggests that white America has become 'discolored snow' in its early April, its 'spring' (159) of a new utopian future, that it is the white authority which has the 'black mouth'. The white power which lingers before the black mouth of the cannon will soon melt away, for 'black mouth' also implies the increasing vocality of black protest. If whites are afraid in the Reconstruction of that 'black mouth', both its words damning racism as Douglass and others do, and its cry for racial justice, and see the mouth as death, Billy shows no such fear. For him, as a symbol of the black, to go back into the black mouth is, in a sense, to go home. The 'chariot' that 'swings low' for him, like Elijah's, will 'carry me home', as the Negro spiritual has it. He could be Christ going home to the real Father, or the suffering black falling into oblivion. As the 'barbarian' and 'savage' he comes from the 'cave'. Only 'highly civilized communities' are afraid of death, says the narrator (161). Those of 'unadulterated Nature' are not, since they are close to it, just as lynched slaves and ex-slaves, and displaced Indians were. And if it is these very 'barbarians', in their English version, whom the Roman pope had long ago called 'Angles' when captured by the Roman legions, and 'Angles' could become 'Angel' as the narrator suggests (161), then Billy at his death becomes the symbol of the first Englishmen held in captivity to the Romans, whose descendants would populate America. What began as a history of 'Angels' has come full circle, the 'Angel' is in captivity to his own people. Civilization, which 'folds itself in the mantle of respectability' (128), has forgotten its less respectable origins.

Sacral history is the history of captivity. Israel's captivity in Egypt and in Babylon is one of the defining tropes of western culture. Israel exists only because it was once enslaved and escaped slavery. America, the New Israel, as it was commonly interpreted by the Pilgrim fathers, began as slaves too, Melville shows, because the English were first enslaved. Being

masters now, the pattern is repeated. The new Israel is enslaving others, and becoming Egypt. Israel too, was once the outcast, with no history of its own, just as Billy is. For the New Israel to ignore the outcast within its midst, is no different from ignoring its own earlier self, its childhood. America may see itself as having taken over the mantle of Israel and become the people of God, but it is the nature of that mantle Melville wishes to examine in the close of *Billy Budd*, and the close of his writing life.

His complex biblical symbolism is difficult to unravel, but its object is clearly to interpret postbellum America through the narrative of Old Testament Israel, free from the Egyptian captivity (for which one may read 'slavery'), and attempting to start anew. His narrative reinterprets the divine origin of both Israel and America, as one which has not been obedient to its own prophets, or carried their mantle. On the morning of Billy's death the 'luminous night' hands its mantle over to the dawn, like the 'prophet in the chariot disappearing in heaven and dropping his mantle on Elisha'. The mantle becomes a 'fleece of white furrowed vapour'(162), like 'the fleece of the Lamb of God' (163). Israel has been ruled by the avaricious King Ahab during his prophet Elijah's life. But it is now ruled by a succession of embattled kings. But it has a prophet in Elisha, who takes up Elijah's mantle just as the older 'father' figure is taken off in his chariot to heaven (2 Kings 2. 9-15). It is Elisha who heals the enemy of Israel, the Syrian king Naaman, of his leprosy, and it is he who will sting his own servants with Naaman's leprosy as punishment for their avarice (2 Kings 5. 19-27). What Melville seems to be implying by the analogy is that when America is waiting to be healed of its own leprosy, it kills the very prophet who is able to do so. If America were like Naaman, it would allow the healing. But it is more like the avaricious servants, and so is stung with the 'white' disease. In hanging the prophet, Vere/America is choosing avarice over healing. It chooses a whiteness that is unholy, which leaves the 'holy' only 'oblivion' as its last resting place.

Typologically, Elisha will be followed by Christ, the Lamb of God, curing lepers. White can symbolize innocence, or it can symbolize disease, depending on which reading one chooses. Melville's Ahab attacked the white whale as the symbol of disease and the castration to which he felt himself subject. Throughout Melville's work, white has attacked black because it has seen black as its own shadow. Yet he has shown white to be as shadowy as any black. Moreover, in the forms of the whale and possibly Billy, white has attacked white because it has seen an image of itself it could not abide. Ahab cannot abide the blankness of the white whale,

and Vere (not unlike Claggart) cannot abide the apparent innocence of the white-ducked boy before him. Vere attacks the symbol of innocence and instinctive Nature in the form of one who suffers at the hands of the white disease. He kills it. In the process Vere retains his mantle of 'respectability', common to the 'civilized'. By implication, it is an unholy mantle, but one which, Melville has already told us, hides a fear of death, for only the 'highly civilized' fear death, the oblivion which is holy. Any redemptive or holy possibilities in Billy's death will later reside only in the memories of sailors who feel 'instinctively' (169) that the yardarm is sacred, and collect pieces like bits of the Cross. Whether there is any holiness, however, can never be finally known, it exists only in the state of oblivion, and only in the instinct of the sailors. Leaving the value of 'instinct' as ambiguous as that of the apparently rational mind of Vere, Melville leaves us with nothing but a version of oblivion, to which the narrative and the reader, and by implication, America's future, is confined.

Before Billy dies the 'withdrawing night' has 'transferred its pale robe to the breaking day' (162). The clothing of the new day dawning for America will be 'pale'. Its innocent will continue to lie entrapped in their metaphorical white suits, as Billy does between the guns. When Billy dies, he takes the 'full rose of the dawn' with him (163). In the context of the novel 'rose' has already come to carry the standard connotations of flower, innocence and beauty, as well as the less usual ones of rose-tan, suggesting Indian or slave. Now it suggests blood, and with it heart. And if blood, then, in the context of the sacramentalism suggested by the 'Lamb of God', wine too. Billy's death may appear to be the joining of the human and the divine, and the sailors instinctively think it so later, but the narrator refuses such fixity. The rose, with its suggestion of the Rosicrucian, has been taken away. And with its ascension has come oblivion.

The 'no telling' of whether the death is or is not sacramental is evident from the response to it on deck. The signal offered by Vere for the execution is 'a preconcerted dumb one', accompanied by the 'vocal shock electric'¹³ of the crew mechanically repeating the

¹³ H. Bruce Franklin (1997) has interestingly shown how *Billy Budd* may be read as a commentary on the 'modern' method of execution by the electric chair, which had just come into prominence as Melville was writing. He does not point out that his namesake, Benjamin Franklin's discovery becomes used prophetically in Melville, from Ahab's burn marks, through God's finger being laid on the 'shrouds' in 'The Candles', echoing Daniel's word of warning to Nebuchadnezer, through to Billy's ascending into the fire of dawn. The mark of a capitalism seeking control over nature for its own ends, becomes the mark of its own destruction.

words of the slain, while Vere himself experiences ‘momentary paralysis, induced by emotional shock’ (163). Dumbness comes to replace speech in the final scene, except for one utterance. When Billy says ‘God Bless Captain Vere!’ (163) Melville, with these words, is not only reminding us of the *Somers* mutiny, where Elisha Small, the prophet’s namesake, declared ‘God Bless that Flag’, but by equating Billy with the two Elishas, prophet and *Somers* accused, he is possibly fashioning the novel’s deepest ambiguity. The declaration may or may not be spoken from the heart. Or if from the heart, it may be by one who does not fully grasp what has happened. Either way the result is the crew’s instinctive repetition of the words, as in a catechism. This may suggest an assumption of the death as holy. Or it may be a massive irony, in which Melville is suggesting that the ‘vocal shock’ is the final silencing of the individual person by the state’s dictates. It was common, as many have shown, for the executed man or woman to bless the executioner before death.¹⁴ It is the one thing Babo in ‘Benito Cereno’ does not do, suggesting that silence is the only appropriate response to an oppressive system. But with *Billy Budd* Melville allows the traditional cry, only in order to show its ambiguity, and so making the cry a louder silence than silence itself may have been. The point of the ambiguity, it seems, is that Melville wishes us not to know if there is any version of sacramental redemption in Billy’s death. If he is silenced in life, by his own stuttering and illiteracy, and by the power of authority, then the strongest words he speaks, in death, still silence him by being ambiguous.

¹⁴ See McCall (2002: 163 n 6) who outlines some of the previous scholarship. See also Foucault (1991) who explains its function in the *amende honorable*.

‘Conversation’, says Jonathan Edwards, in ‘On the Medium of Moral Government’, ‘between God and mankind in this world, is maintained by God’s *word* on his part, and by *prayer* on ours. By the former, he speaks and expresses his mind to us; by the latter, we speak and express our minds to him’ (Silverman, 1971: 199). Edwards is one of the American fathers’ foremost theologians and definers of sacred history, and the same authority Bartleby’s lawyer sought in order to explain his employee’s lack of a sense of duty or ‘will’. By the end of *Billy Budd* we have no way of knowing what the word of God is, for silence and ambiguity, as with Bartleby, have made prayer pointless and conversation with God impossible. Bartleby’s lawyer could not go to Trinity Church on Sunday morning because some instinct forced him from it. Vere, by contrast, performs all the duties of the self-aggrandizing, head-controlled father, never allowing himself to question his own moral position. He is a functionary of the state in a more unswerving way than even the lawyer was, and needs no reference to an outside authority like an Edwards to support his views. The result is that there is none of Edwards’ ‘conversation’ in *Billy Budd*, much less any prayer. On the one hand Edwards’ Puritan reasoning has been superseded by later experience, but on the other hand, it has been shown never to have been realized. If sacral history is a conversation between God and his people, his body, then the silence here speaks for itself. Head and body have become as separated as Babo’s have been on their stake. Or one might suggest Melville has taken the next step, and implies in the hanging and ascending of Billy’s body that the body itself, head and all, has gone, leaving those behind with nothing.

The American Dream’, says Myra Jehlen (1986: 15), ‘whose rhetoric most often invokes family and home, is a dream of the Pilgrim’s homecoming - a vision, finally, not of voyages and breached frontiers, but of safe arrivals’. Billy, the flower of utopia, arriving at the yardarm, as if wearing ‘the fleece of the Lamb of God’ (163), having taken the dawn with him, has arrived home to silence. He is a pinioned and motionless figure, ejaculating neither words nor semen, as the Purser thinks he should. In *Moby-Dick* semen represented, for Ishmael at least, something sacramental, the possibility of social renewal in a mystical, circular, blending of hands. Here Melville removes such life-giving possibilities and replaces them with motionlessness and silence. Ahab’s straight line of conquest has become a straight line upwards towards the yardarm, the gibbet and a godless heaven. The white duck-suited body is the symbol of the final capture of the white whale. And with it there has come only silence and meaninglessness. Billy is a (white or black) lamb without a word, whose death, though by the

military, empiricist institution governing him, cannot be explained empirically by doctor or purser. But the doctor's words become the final epithet on the life. 'It was phenomenal, Mr Purser', says the doctor, explaining the lack of motion and ejaculation, 'in the sense that it was an appearance the cause of which is not immediately to be assigned' (164). In a world where judgement has been passed based on appearance alone, and causes disregarded, the death leaves a gaping question, defeating empiricism. But the question does not answer itself, and give the reader any clue whence that defeat comes. Billy's wordlessness remains the final word.

Not so an earlier Fleece of whom Melville wrote. When the black cook Fleece in *Moby-Dick* preaches to, 'converses' with, the sharks ravenously tearing at the whale body, Stubb asks him where he expects to go after death. '...when dis old brack man dies', Fleece replies, 'he hisself won't go nowhere; but some bressed angel will come and fetch him'. 'Fetch him? How? In a coach and four, as they fetched Elijah? And fetch him where?' 'Up dere', said Fleece.... 'So, then, you expect to go up into our main-top, do you, cook, when you are dead? But don't you know the higher you climb, the colder it gets?' And then at the end of the 'conversation' with this arch-shark Stubb, himself the eater of whales, the cook ejaculates: 'Wish, by god! Whale eat him, 'stead of him eat whale. I'm bressed if he ain't more of shark dan Massa Shark hisself',” muttered the old man, limping away; with which sage ejaculation he went to his hammock' (MD, 239, 240). Like Ahab, Fleece limps, but unlike Ahab, and Vere after him, he is neither castrated (literally or psychologically) nor monomaniac. He can preach, foretell and ejaculate as well as the next man. '...but to govern dat wicked natur, dat is de pint. You is sharks, sartin; but if you govern de shark in you, why den you be angel; for all angel is not'ing more dan de shark well governed Don't be tearin' de blubber out your neighbour's mout, I say' (238). Tearing the blubber out of its neighbour's mouth, becoming ultimately self-consuming sharks, is what *Billy Budd* suggests is the future of America. In the death of the 'fleece' Billy, Melville shows the ultimate end of the earlier 'Fleece'. While in antebellum America there may still have been some hope of the sharks conversion, Vere has become Stubb's replacement, and a more chilling Ahab than Ahab himself. In postbellum America, where there may no longer be any need of guilt about slavery or racism, since the war is seen by many to have eradicated such need, the act of 'governing' (where 'gob' might suggest 'mouth' and cannibalism) is shown by Melville to have resulted not in 'angels' but in the death of angels. This 'new dawn' becomes one where the 'fleece' is taken away, for there is no place for such innocence. And it is a dawn in which there is 'no telling' if the victim's

words of blessing can be read ironically or not, for irony does not exist when the tongue has been overruled by a 'government', cannibalising its lambs, and 'fleecing' the innocent of their lives.

Melville does not end the story with Billy. He ends it instead with Vere, and with himself as the narrator of this 'history', the last prophet in the line before him, shortly to go the way of his predecessors. If Billy's body has been confined by the institution of military law which does not even attempt to claim sacral virtue, but uses equivocal words to do its dirty work, then the last 'no telling' has to do with the function of narrative itself. 'Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges;' the narrator tells us, 'hence the conclusion of such a narration is apt to be less finished than an architectural finial' (167). Like the 'draft of a draft' Ishmael declares *Moby-Dick* to be, *Billy Budd's* final word is not prepared to claim either empirical or sacral sanction. It tells of the old being superseded by the new, but not in any way which suggests progress. Names, like those of ships, are changed, even governments are changed, and events are re-interpreted. What the truth is may lie only in what we 'instinctively' feel, like the sailors taking bits of the yardarm for a version of the cross. The new era brings 'a general rechristening under the Directory' (167) of ship names. Directorate, like Napoleon's and Cromwell's and now the new America's too, replaces monarchy. It brings, however, the '*Athee*, (the *Atheist*)', the French ship from which Vere, prefiguring Nelson, is shot. Vere is taken to Gibraltar, the place Nelson had blockaded and controlled. Unlike Nelson and Cromwell, or Lincoln, he dies with the 'most secret of all passions, ambition, never attained to ... fulness' (168). Melville too, will die with his ambition for fame unfulfilled. His comments on Vere must therefore be interpreted as much as self-analysis as any others he has written.

The *Athee* was once named the *St. Louis*, after the King. Once Catholic, monarchist France has been overtaken by atheism. Billy, who was like 'a Catholic priest striking peace in an Irish shindy' (106), is overtaken by the 'measured forms' of martial Law. The sacral, and peacemaking, has become atheist, and warmongering. When the city of St Louis in the South refuses black enfranchisement in the Dred Scott case (1856-7), it becomes a site of one of the causes of civil war. After Dred Scott, the analogy suggests, only atheism will be left to 'tell' the future of America. Lincoln, as Rogin (1983: 216) points out, would interpret the Dred Scott case in relation to keys. The keys that would free the slave from 'his prison house' would be 'scattered to a hundred different places'. The keys may be those of the kingdom of heaven, born

anew on earth, as Lincoln saw it. Or they may be the same 'keys' referred to in 'Benito Cereno', where the 'deposition' is meant to serve as a 'key into the lock of the complications which precede it' (BC, 100). 'Key', in this sense, is the interpretation of a narrative meaning, one which, literally and figuratively, as with Atufal's chains, keeps bodies in 'prison'. Key may be seen as the 'head' controlling the 'body', like Vere controlling Billy, just as narrative controls the interpretation of what happens to bodies. Lincoln, like Vere, will choose his own 'key' and live by it, while others die in consequence. At the end of the narrative, the head/key has regained dominance over the heart/body, and only the 'instinct' of the sailors is left as a possible, but not empirically provable, alternative. If this is the case, the keys cannot be those of the kingdom of heaven, as Lincoln saw it, but only those which continue to lock and chain. The cause of war, slavery and injustice, may have been eradicated, but it is only temporary, and has been superseded by a more pervasive dismissal of the divine in favour of the atheist, one which continues to confine and hang the innocent.

So the text's final commentary on confinement is aimed at narrative itself. Melville does not undermine his own narrative when he introduces his piece quoting the 'News from the Mediterranean' (168), but he does show that words cannot be trusted. It depicts the character of Billy and Claggart in exactly opposite terms to those Melville has employed, introduces 'plots' and 'knives' when there were none in the narrator's version, and bases its interpretation on a class bias which sees the higher class Claggart as inherently superior to the lower class Billy. It allows social form to override human essence, which is what Melville's narrator has been working against all along. In effect, it returns us to antebellum status, where just such class, religious and racist distinctions applied. More importantly, it is a narrative which is 'all that hitherto has stood in human record to attest what manner of men respectively were John Claggart and Billy Budd' (169).

This last piece of 'news' makes Melville's own narrative, then, intentionally a recuperative one. Even so, however, it will become just one more version of an event whose truth will never actually be known. We are never outside the prison of interpretation. Those who act on instinct will turn to worshipping the yardarm as sacred. Those who act by apparent empirical reason will act by their interpretation of the Law. Both will assume that their interpretation is correct. If the midpoint between these two extremes has been the place of the moderate, it has been shown to be no place at all, but just another, equivocal interpretation, in which the real body is not fully discernable and in which the actual motivation for action cannot

be pinpointed.

Sacred history is, in this reading, merely another story to be told, and as such a narrative whose verity cannot be assessed. There is no way of determining the moral value of the nation's history, or the value of the sacrifices it demands of its children, any more than there is any way of making a moral judgement on the difference between 'instinct' and 'reason'. Neither religion nor atheism, but another form of religion, has, like the chaplain before Billy, any 'consolation to proffer which could result in a peace transcending that which he beheld' (160). There is no way of telling why Billy is at peace, just as there is no way of knowing if his sense of peace bears with it a sacramental weight. The final position Melville adopts, then, both on the value of human sacrifice and on the demand for sacral sanction of such sacrifice is that one who accepts it will be at peace. There may be no telling why such a peace will be possible, and it may be impossible to agree with the victim that he ought to be at peace, or even if the peace is not an acceptance rather than an escape into death. But with 'no telling' the last word, both the sacrifice and the peace remain open to question, as does any nation's future which is built on such sacrifice.

EPILOGUE

In one of his letters to Nathaniel Hawthorne, 17 November 1851, Melville suggests there are bigger fish than white whales.

Lord, when shall we be done growing? As long as we have anything more to do we have done nothing. So, now, let us add Moby Dick to our blessing, and step from that. Leviathan is not the biggest fish; - I have heard of Krakens. ... When shall we be done changing? Ah! it's a long stage, and no inn in sight, and night coming and the body cold. But with you for a passenger, I am content and can be happy.¹

After the gargantuan attempt to define the white whale in all its complexity, and showing it to be still as 'loose' as ever, Melville concludes that yet greater more mythical 'fish' exist. We must grow into this fish, seems to be the gist of what he is saying. The writing, experiencing self, and the object of writing, knowing and defining Krakens, are inseparably linked to the journey through growth. The end of that journey is unsighted, and the body, without an inn, as at Bethlehem, is left alienated and cold. Only fraternal companionship can alleviate the journey's loneliness.

¹ Cited in Parker and Hayford, eds. (2002: 546).

The short passage sums up much of Melville's work, and much of the argument of this thesis. Melville does not presume to be able to define bodies or their value. They are a part of an existence which is itself a journey, so that no body is ever finally static, even in death, where it still awaits definition. Body, definition, and the psychology of the interpreting self on its journey are inextricably linked. The journey, however, is a 'stage' on which both bodies and their definers are trapped. Neither bodies nor definition are ultimately to be fixed or made 'fast'. 'Looseness', however, as 'Fast Fish and Loose Fish' showed, allows the abuse of bodies in conquest, and their confinement to particular physical or ideological 'waif-poles'. Any attempt to describe bodies is, willy nilly, to inscribe versions of confinement on them. That very 'waifing' itself drives the urge to conquer, to undo the sense of being 'waifed' or inscribed by acquiring still other bodies. It is an endless quest, Melville suggests, with no Inn in sight.

For a brief time in Melville's earlier career, and particularly in *Moby-Dick*, he still believes he can be 'content and happy' if he has the right companion on his stage. The fraternal ethos he presents to Hawthorne in the letter is mirrored in the fraternity of the intermingling hands in sperm on board the *Pequod*, as it is in the 'marriage bed' shared by the 'waif' Ishmael and Queequeg in the 'Inn'. In *Moby-Dick* that fraternity is figured, in an attempt to combine knowledge and Being, between whale and human and between humans themselves, in a phenomenological version of 'intersubjectivity'. Melville seems to believe that kindred spirits, like he and Hawthorne, could, if together, in some way overcome the ultimate cold and dark of the inn at the end of the journey. The meeting of minds and bodies might alleviate the confinement to the prison of meaninglessness which looms, and make the indecipherable myth of the Kraken not an object of apprehension and anxiety to be conquered, but rather one to be valued.

But *Pierre* would become that 'Kraken', a novel which changed in mid-stream from being a positive reading of family utopias, and the possibility of an American one, to a novel of anguish and dejection after *Moby-Dick* was dismissed by the critics and Hawthorne had largely gone from Melville's life. The 'waif' Ishmael at the end of *Moby-Dick* becomes in *Pierre* the self-made orphan, without fraternity, whose only object of conquest is his own body, and the family which nurtured it. In the last forty years of Melville's writing life the hope of 'intersubjective' fraternity is replaced by the individual body warring against itself, head and body divided, or by the social body divided from itself, its 'head' attempting to control its 'body'.

For Melville, the end of the journey in the Inn is a dark and cold one where the conflict within the self remains circular, with no vision of a future release from the psychomachic torment. If the Inn suggests the place from which the unborn Christ was turned away, then the night that has come suggests both the end of the journey and its origin. There is no place in the Inn for humankind, and the one he finds for himself keeps the 'father-child' of the self in an eternal round of conflict. 'Bartleby' figures that conflict as a return to Egypt, like the exile of both Christ and his nation Israel, but also as a place representing the origin of civilization. Civilization and the self both die in exile from themselves, without any experience of fraternity. The bodies of those enslaved, both physically and to confining ideologies, die where they are (figuratively) born, near the 'seed' found in the tombs of Egypt, the 'parent' civilization. There has been no progress.

Without any hope of fraternity, Melville's later works deliver a message in which conquest, both of land and of bodies, is interpreted as leading to confinement, not the expected freedom. The lack that drives the desire for conquest keeps the body alien to itself. It also alienates the self from the 'other' in the social body, keeping it 'dismembered'. That 'dismemberment' is figured in the later works as particularly applicable to the familial relation between father/mother and son, both in terms of the nuclear family and as figures of the old versus the new. The Oedipal need of the child to overcome the parent, both in the literal family and in the context of wider political history, is shown by Melville to be a drive which ends in destruction at the hand of the parent. Oedipus is unresolved in the American psyche, as Melville reads it.

Pierre dies confined to his parental history even as he attempts to escape it. He is quite literally poisoned by the sins of the father and mother. Bartleby dies rejected and misunderstood by the 'father' lawyer, symbol of capitalist America. The fraternity Melville may have desired with Hawthorne, that other man of letters, is dead, so the younger 'son' Bartleby dies in the face of the 'dead' letter embodied by his 'father' the capitalist lawyer. In its drive to conquer its own anxieties, America confines and even kills its own children, 'Bartleby' suggests. 'Benito Cereno' merely amplifies this message of schism between members of the social body, turning from social class to race. Babo dies confined to his history in the same way Pierre does, and just as Bartleby does. The 'fathers' are all largely the same one, the sense of lack at the heart of the American drive for conquest which demands it be fulfilled by, like Chronos in *Billy Budd*, eating its own children. In psychoanalytic terms,

father is the 'blank wall' in Melville's novels. The son attempts to inscribe his name on this wall, like an Ahab using his harpoon, a Pierre and a Bartleby (and a Melville) using their pens, a Babo using his razor, a Billy using his singing voice. But the wall remains blank, a stern father whose children die beneath his granite.

There is, after *Moby-Dick*, little or no sense of growth in Melville's novels towards the utopian unity his early work hoped for. His later works answer his question to Hawthorne by suggesting that the question is itself the wrong one. To talk of growth is to assume movement forward towards something better. He has already in *Moby-Dick* made Ahab's linear quest a destructive one. From henceforth he makes the journey circular and cannibalistically self-consuming. The body 'eaten', as it were, by its own father is like the child history swallowed by its own past. Perhaps the only way to free the body and its history from such confinement and annihilation is to fall into silence. This Melville does for a long time while he works in the New York Custom House, writing mostly poetry distributed only to close friends. He even does it in *Billy Budd*, where the stuttering Billy figures the nearest thing Melville will ever produce to genuine innocence. He does it too, however, on the last wall he is to inscribe, his own tombstone.

The tombstone, as Judy Logan ² has pointed out, contains a scroll which has been left blank. The scroll is a common motif of the time, but its blankness is unusual. One must speculate, as Logan and others have, why it has been left blank. Was it Melville's wish or his family's or merely an oversight? But given the emphasis on silence which dominates his later work, one might suggest that this silence is to be read as akin to the great wall of silence under which Bartleby dies, or Babo's refusal to speak in his own defence, and Billy's final static silence at the end of the yardarm. But if none of these readings really satisfy, one might go further back in Melville's career, when he first began to think that silence might be an important form of speech in itself. In *Pierre* he links silence and ambiguity, and finds, or does not find God in both, depending on which way one reads him. In a typical Melvillean joke, all meaning is turned back on to the interpreter. 'Silence is the only Voice of our God' (204), says Pierre. Melville might add: 'Read it, if you can!' A positive reading might suggest that after silence, after the end of confining inscription by pen or harpoon, by the author/father, there may still be a Voice which is God's. But then, that would be up to the reader.

² See 'Melville's Last, Grave Joke?' in *Melville Society Extracts*, 122 (Feb, 2002): 7-11).

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