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**A study of the sea and the search for paradise regained in "Typee",  
:Mardi", and "Moby-Dick"**

Mary Jane Kopperud Ramsey

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A STUDY OF THE SEA AND THE SEARCH FOR PARADISE REGAINED  
IN TYPEE, MARDI, AND MOBY-DICK

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of English

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Mary Jane Kopperud Ramsey

July, 1972

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Accepted for the faculty of The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

Graduate Committee

<i>John M. Hanna</i>	<i>English</i>
Name	Department
<i>[Signature]</i>	<i>art</i>

*Bruce Baker*  
Chairman

3276/102

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

In Typee, Mardi, and Moby-Dick by Herman Melville, the sea functions as a symbol which expresses Melville's changing world view. The most important characteristic of a symbol is that its referent is non-ostensive. That is, the symbol refers not only to an intangible concept but also to one that can not be defined completely or comprehended fully. It may be that symbols are derived from man's awareness of the absurdity of his existence. Man is not responsible for his birth, nor can he avoid his death. During his ephemeral existence he craves some kind of order, unity, reason, and meaning in this world. This desire leads to an attempt to define himself and to understand himself and his relationships with nature and with society. An irreducible something makes it impossible for him to know himself, another, or his situation fully. The symbol is also multivocal in that it means different things to different people. Hence, man creates symbols in an attempt to find his identity through an ordering of his experience. At the same time the intangible and undefinable quality of the symbol reflects the impossibility of knowing and understanding it completely. (Man continues, through symbols, to try to find a somewhere to be and a reason to be there. For Melville the sea is the symbol for that human predicament.)

(The sea symbolizes the most elemental problems of the human condition, birth and death. The duality of the sea is based on the Biblical concept that the earth was formed out of the waters, thus preceding every form and supporting every creation.) According to Mircea Eliade,

there is always the fear that the earth, with man, will return to the undifferentiated flux of the waters.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the sea is suggestive of the beginning and the end; and hence it represents the womb-grave. Moreover, the sea symbolizes the struggle of life between birth and death because the sea is unpredictable, formless, elusive, inclusive, and endlessly in motion.

Melville's Typee, Mardi, and Moby-Dick are structured by a voyage out to sea. In each novel the narrator's initial voyage is on a whaling vessel. Each voyage is undertaken voluntarily by the main characters. W. H. Auden considers a voluntary departure one of the distinctive elements of the Romantic attitude contrasted with the classical attitude in which going to sea was a penalty imposed as punishment or cure. The sea is no longer the place of purgatorial suffering. Auden goes on to identify four "distinctive new notes in the Romantic attitude :"

- 1) To leave the land and the city is the desire of every man of sensibility and honor.
- 2) The sea is the real situation and the voyage the true condition of man.
- 3) The sea is where the decisive events, the moments of eternal choice, of temptation, fall, and redemption occur. The shore life is trivial.
- 4) An abiding destination is unknown even if it may exist; a lasting relationship is not possible nor even to be desired.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to examine Typee, Mardi, and Moby-Dick using Auden's schema where it applies. Thus, the first aspect to be studied in each novel will be the sea as the setting as well as the opportunity for the voyage and for a voluntary departure. Auden's second point to be examined is the sea as the real situation and the voyage as the true condition of man. Included under this heading are the following possi-

bilities. First, the changing nature of the sea limits and thereby intensifies emotions as the sea does not allow one to hide under the facade of organized institutions as is possible on land. Second, the duality of the sea permits the discussion of the ambiguities of the human predicament on a societal level including the discrepancies between appearance and reality. Also the duality of the sea suggests the ambivalence of an individual's emotions. Third, the voyage as the true condition of man entails the quest to seek answers and to give meaning to the absurd chaos in which man finds himself. Finally, the sea mirrors indifferent nature and universal cannibalism. Auden's third area of discussion is that the sea precipitates decisive events and moments of eternal choice. Auden's last consideration is that an abiding destination is unknown even if it may exist.

The role of the sea in Melville's three novels, Typee, Mardi, and Moby-Dick shows a progression in Melville's thought. Typee, included in this study since it is Melville's first novel, advertised as a travel book, is more than a documentary. In Typee, Melville discovers the reality of life on an island in the South Seas. Mardi's failure dramatizes the unifying role of the sea in Moby-Dick. In Mardi the sea does not integrate the various searches of the different characters. Like beads on a string, Mardi is a series of essays connected in an arbitrary fashion. Mardi will be examined in light of its relationship to Moby-Dick. As Taji foreshadows Ahab and Yillah foreshadows the White Whale, Mardi is a forerunner of Moby-Dick. It is necessary to include Mardi in order to indicate how the role of the sea shows a progression in Melville's thought. Moby-Dick will be seen as the culmination of Melville's use of the sea completely integrated with the story-line and the under-



lying theme. Furthermore, the sea and its inhabitants function as antagonists, challenging the main characters.

Although this paper attempts a critical interpretation, much knowledge, understanding, and insight came from the study of many secondary sources about Melville and his works. The research on Melville criticism was necessary and invaluable. However, this paper does not pretend to evaluate all the Melville scholarship.

The emphasis of Melville scholars has varied since the publication of Melville's works. The early criticism was primarily biographical. Typee was considered simply as a travelogue. For the first time in 1917, Typee was treated seriously when Carl Van Doren discussed Melville for four pages in a chapter on "Contemporaries of Cooper" and stated that Typee was "'Melville at all but his best and must be classed with the most successful narrations of the exotic life.' Melville was recognized by the Cambridge History as at his best in Moby-Dick, and this recognition prevailed."<sup>3</sup> After 1919, when the centennial essays were published, there was a renewed interest in Melville which has persisted to this day.

A variety of approaches has been used in interpreting Melville's works, and inevitably much overlapping has occurred. A biographical approach has been taken by William Ellery Sedgwick, Stanley Geist, and Alan Lebowitz. Sedgwick treats Melville's successive works, biographically, as the dramatization of Melville's darkening vision and mind. Geist considers that Melville's increasing "indifference" to the outside world affects his writing. D. H. Lawrence and Leslie Fiedler give psychological interpretations which are primarily Freudian.

Many critics are concerned with Melville's treatment of evil. Lawrence Thompson argues that Melville hated God for introducing and allowing evil into the world. Thompson identifies Melville with Ahab as a Calvinist rebelling against God. James E. Miller believes that Melville feels the need for compromise of ideals in the real world where evil exists. John Parke discusses "Ahab's inability to locate and objectify evil in himself, or to accept it and deal with it prudently as part of the entire created world, and so to grow despite it and because of it."<sup>4</sup> Merlin Bowen dramatizes the single individual against the evil in the universe and differentiates among the "defiant, the submissive," and those who take a stance of "armed neutrality" in Melville's novels.<sup>5</sup>

Symbolism is a concern of many critics. James R. Baird, Charles Feidelson, Newton Arvin, and William Ellery Sedgwick deal with Melville's symbolism. Sedgwick states that the effectiveness of a symbol depends on the "preservation of its objective reality."<sup>6</sup> Sedgwick also talks about the "endless capacity of Melville's symbols."<sup>7</sup> An interesting analysis of waters and water symbolism and of its presence in all religions and all cultures is found in Mircea Eliade's works.

Other critics to be mentioned include Milton R. Stern, W. H. Auden, and Tyrus Hillway. Stern emphasizes what he calls Melville's naturalistic perception in The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville. Auden analyzes the romantic iconography of the sea in The Enchafed Flood: The Romantic Iconography of the Sea. Hillway believes that understanding Melville requires an analytical age such as the twentieth century.

It is the purpose of this paper to discuss the role of the sea in relationship to the search for paradise regained in Typee, Mardi, and Moby-Dick as such a study shows the progression in Melville's thought. This analysis is drawn from an examination of the novels themselves.

## Chapter II

Typee

The first novel of Melville's which will be examined has a relatively simple, often exciting plot. Typee is the story of a young man who goes on a whaling expedition for money and adventure. His dissatisfaction with the crew as well as his yearning to explore and taste the wonders of the South Sea Islands, as he conceives them, induce him to desert the whaling ship when at the port of Nukuheva even though this is an island where all the inhabitants are cannibals. In order to escape from the other members of the crew, he and a friend, Toby, make a terrifying hike up to a ridge of the mountain and finally down to the valley of the Typees. The natives give the narrator whom they call Tommo and Toby food and a place to sleep, but the lack of communication underlies Tommo's recurring feeling of apprehension as no one speaks any language but the native dialect. Toby leaves to find medical aid for Tommo's leg which does not heal, but he never returns. Eventually, Tommo discovers he is not allowed to wander beyond certain prescribed boundaries. Although Tommo had first seen the island as a kind of primitive paradise, he becomes disenchanted. His need to escape intensifies as he realizes that life on the island is stifling in that it does not allow him to satisfy his intellectual needs. Eventually, he succeeds in escaping to the sea which represents freedom for his further development.

( From its first passages, Typee seems appropriate to Auden's contention that the sea is the opportunity for the voyage and for a voluntary departure. Typee opens when the first person narrator has already been

"six months at sea!" He exclaims "Yes, reader, as I live, six months out of sight of land; cruising after the sperm-whale beneath the scorching sun of the Line, and tossed on the billows of the wide-rolling Pacific--the sky above, the sea around, and nothing else!"<sup>8</sup> It can be assumed that the departure was voluntary for the narrator as he originally goes to earn a living. Toby, the sailor who will desert the whaling ship, the Dolly, with the narrator, is "one of that class of rovers you sometimes meet at sea, who never reveal their origin, never allude to home, and go rambling over the world as if pursued by some mysterious fate they cannot possibly elude" (ch. 5). Toby anticipates the allegorical Bulkington in Moby-Dick.

The sea serves as both the setting and the opportunity for the voyage. On one level, the voyage is for the purpose of earning a living. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes evident that the narrator's motives are more complex. His impatience with the voyage for money is reflected by his attitude aboard the Dolly. He becomes restless with the crew and critical of the Captain whom he sees as the "author of abuses; it was in vain to think that he would either remedy them, or alter his conduct, which was arbitrary and violent in the extreme. His prompt reply to all complaints and remonstrances was--the butt-end of a handspike" (ch. 4).

The narrator's desertion of the ship to live on an island can be seen as a thirst for adventure. He raves on about the "strange and barbarous" South Sea Islands.

What strange visions of outlandish things does the very name spirit up! Lovely houris--cannibal banquets--and bamboo temples; sunny valleys planted with bread-fruit trees--carved canoes dancing on the flashing blue waters--savage woodlands guarded by horrible idols--Heathenish rites and human sacrifices.

Such were the strangely jumbled anticipations that haunted me during our passage from the cruising ground. I felt an irresistible curiosity to see those islands which the olden voyagers had so glowingly described! (ch. 1)

However, from the perspective of the total narrative which includes his escape from the island, the voyage can be viewed from a third level. His determination to leave under difficult circumstances convinces one that he is searching for some ultimate answers to life. Then, for the narrator, his desertion of the Dolly represents his hope of finding a primitive paradise on an island. W. H. Auden asserts that "the primary idea with which the garden-island is associated is . . . neither justice nor chastity but innocence; it is the earthly paradise where there is no conflict between natural desire and moral duty."<sup>9</sup> In this sense Tommo's quest is for the idyllic island. Early in his enforced stay in the Marquesas, Tommo says, "Thrice happy are they who, inhabiting some yet undiscovered island in the midst of the ocean, have never been brought into contaminating contact with the white man" (ch. 17). The hero of this story is looking for some garden-island in the sea where all problems will disappear just as Irina in Chekhov's Three Sisters is always hoping to go to Moscow. The hope in Typee is that man can reintegrate himself in the physical and emotional satisfactions of human life through life in the simple, primitive society.

Next, according to Auden, the sea is the real situation and the voyage is the true condition of man. Under this classification, the sea can be considered as an intensifying agent in Typee. The island, sur-

rounded by the sea, becomes a prison when Tommo realizes it is not paradise. The only escape route is the sea. With such limitations imposed by the sea, Tommo's fear and apprehension are intensified. The deception and duality of the sea permit consideration of the contradictions and comparisons in Typee.

The sea intensifies emotions and limits choices in Typee. Because the narrator is at sea in the beginning of the novel, his alternatives are limited to staying aboard the Dolly or to deserting to the island where the natives are reputed to be cannibals. Although the sea is not an organic part of the whole of Typee as it is in Moby-Dick, it does enhance the story and increase Tommo's dilemma.

Before the narrator ever reaches the island, he recalls the "eighteen or twenty days" when they were sailing towards the island. "What a delightful, lazy, languid time we had whilst we were thus gliding along! There was nothing to be done; . . . We abandoned the fore-peak altogether, and spreading an awning over the fore-castle, slept, ate, and lounged under it the live-long day" (ch. 2). The sea here is calm and indicates Tommo's longing for quiet and peace. He is enjoying the sleepiness and mindlessness caused by the warm, benign weather and the monotony of the calm sea.

However, the calm aspect of the sea also has another implication which lies in the death image of the "dirge-like swell of the Pacific."

Everyone seemed to be under the influence of some narcotic. Even the officers aft, . . . Reading was out of the question; take a book in your hand, and you were asleep in an instant.

Although I could not avoid yielding in a great measure to the general languor, still at times I contrived to shake off the spell, and to appreciate the beauty of the scene around me. . . . The long, measured, dirge-like swell of the Pacific came rolling along. (ch. 2)

This mood is a foreshadowing of the effect of the island on the narrator. Even the exaggeration of the description where Melville says that "everyone seemed under the influence of some narcotic" turns out to be forewarning. When Tommo does make his escape, he is fleeing from this feeling of being doped, of using only part of himself, of being only half alive. The "dirge-like swell of the Pacific rolling along" represents the threat to Tommo of the death of his intellectual capacities if he succumbs to life on the island.

In Typee the sea is limited in what it represents; still, as indicated above, the symbolism is there, if only in embryo. The deception of the sea and the duality of the sea will be developed to an almost excruciating degree in Moby-Dick. In Typee, the benign, lulling, dulling, narcotic quality of the sea is the reader's introduction to the island. Implicitly, this kind of a calm sea and the island itself as an enclosed place of safety are a kind of deception which leads to the duality between an idyllic appearance of calm and the reality of the death dirge. This duality represents the real situation and condition of man and is an underlying theme in Typee. However, Melville does not explicitly connect the dualities in Typee with the womb-grave dualities of the sea as he does in Moby-Dick.

Yet the deception and duality of the sea are expressed in many ways in Typee. The sea confines and also liberates. Melville deals with the deception and duality mostly on a societal level in Typee. Through this novel, Melville dramatically points to the contradiction of appearance and reality as seen from varying points of view. This contradiction includes not only the contrast between Western civilization and



primitive society but also the contradictions within each culture. The contradiction within primitive society is seen through the eyes of Tommo as a representative of western man who can not accept the limitations imposed by primitive society. Tommo's physical problem symbolizes his inability to be content within himself in this setting. Moreover, Melville shows the discrepancy between the reputation and the reality of the Typee and Happar tribes; this discrepancy emphasizes that experience does not fit stereotypes.

In Melville's time, Western civilization was the most industrialized society and therefore, many westerners believed, offered the best opportunity for happiness. Tommo states "I was fain to confess that, despite the disadvantage of his condition, the Polynesian savage, . . . enjoyed an infinitely happier, though certainly less intellectual existence, than the self-complacent European" (ch. 17). Melville thus compares the appearance of western civilization's technological advancement with the reality of the happiness possible in a primitive society. Tommo describes the idyllic life on the garden-island as follows: "In this secluded abode of happiness there were no cross old women, no cruel stepdames, no withered spinsters, no love-sick maidens, no sour old bachelors, no inattentive husbands, no melancholy young men, no blubbering youngsters, and no squalling brats" (ch. 17) Certainly the situation is that of a paradise; such Utopia has never been seen. Furthermore, the reality of the everyday struggle in the western world to survive, to make ends meet, is not a problem in the tropical climate of Typee where there seems to be no worries of any kind. Tommo states: "There were no foreclosures of mortgages, no protested notes, no bills payable, no debts of

honor in Typee; . . . no destitute widows with their children starving on the cold charities of the world; no beggars; no debtors' prisons; . . . or to sum up all in one word--no Money! That 'root of all evil' was not to be found in the valley" (ch. 17).

Tommo also compares the cannibalism of the Typees with the mechanized and impersonal wars of western man. Cannibalism, from the Western paradigm, is viewed as a horrendous atrocity committed only by barbarians. Melville shows that the so-called civilized commit atrocities far worse in their mechanized and impersonal forms as can be seen in the following passage.

The fiend-like skill we display in the invention of all manner of death-dealing engines, the vindictiveness with which we carry on our wars, and the misery and desolation that follow in their train, are enough of themselves to distinguish the white civilized man as the most ferocious animal on the face of the earth.

. . . . .

But it is needless to multiply the examples of civilized barbarity; they far exceed in the amount of misery they cause the crimes which we regard with such abhorrence in our less enlightened fellow-creatures. (ch. 17)

Thus Melville points out that the seemingly advanced and civilized Western society does not give more happiness or financial security. Moreover, he views the Typees' cannibalism as less extensive and less destructive. Melville sees a humanism in their cannibalistic acts in that they are acts of revenge toward a particular enemy rather than the obliteration of masses upon the decree of a government.

Melville also deals with the contrast between appearance and reality within the western culture. He pictures the discrepancy between intention and result of the institutions of religion and government. In

Typee, Melville's examination of western civilization's duality is seen through its extension in the South Sea Islands.

Melville examines the reasons for and the outcome of the French occupation as well as the facade of such maneuvers. This can be seen through Tommo who specifically describes the excessive amount of firearms and military personnel the French use to "frighten a parcel of naked heathens into subjection." He says the destination of the Marquesas was a secret when the French sailed to occupy the islands in the spring of 1842, and he describes it in the following: "No wonder that those who contemplated such a signal infraction of the rights of humanity should have sought to veil the enormity from the eyes of the world. And yet, notwithstanding their iniquitous conduct in this and in other matters, the French have ever plumed themselves upon being the most humane and polished of nations . . . and were civilization itself to be estimated by some of its results, it would seem perhaps better for what we call the barbarous part of the world to remain unchanged" (ch. 3). Thus, Melville sees the French occupation as having destructive ramifications for the natives of the island although it is veiled and therefore perceived by many as bringing enlightenment to the ignorant.

In this same vein Melville discusses the contradiction of the religious activity on the islands. Seemingly, the missionaries are saving the inhabitants from hell and ignorance of God. Yet Tommo vividly describes the degrading and cruel interaction between the missionaries and the inhabitants in the following picture of a missionary's wife. A "robust, red-faced" missionary's wife was being drawn in a go-cart by two natives, one old and doing most of the work and the other young and

"hanging back all the time like a knowing horse" (ch. 26). The wife even hits the old grey-headed man when he cannot pull the cart and herself up the hill while the young one "shies to one side and keeps beyond range" of the "heavy handle of her huge fan." Tommo, no doubt in the role of persona, concludes, "There is something decidedly wrong in the practical operations of the Sandwich Islands Mission . . . An unwarranted confidence in the sanctity of its apostles . . . and an impatience of the least suspicion as to their rectitude as men or Christians, have ever been prevailing faults in the Church" (ch. 26). He warns that people who donate money should know where it will ultimately go. On the isolated island of Typee, Tommo sees the contradictions in Western society apparent in the French occupation and the Christian missionaries.

Stranded on the island, surrounded by the sea, enjoying the simple, innocent life of the Typees, Tommo becomes aware of the hypocrisy of American institutions. In addition, and more important to him, he realizes that he cannot find happiness on the garden-island similar to the apparent happiness of the inhabitants. Because Tommo is conditioned by his past, he cannot shed his needs which were developed during his life before he arrived at this island and are a part of him. Moreover, he does not even find physical well being.

Tommo cannot long enjoy or even endure life in the Typee valley which he has, ironically, renamed Happy Valley. In the middle of the novel, when he has temporarily given up hope for escape, he says, "'I was well disposed to think I was in the 'Happy Valley' and that beyond those heights there was nought but a world of care and anxiety'" (ch. 17). The irony involves the misery of his wounded leg and the seeming deser-

tion of his American friend, Toby. In addition, he suffers a lack of privacy and the fear of cannibalism and tattooing. The absence of intellectual companionship and the restriction to a tiny part of the island become unbearable. As prisoner of the island, forbidden access to the sea, his only means of escape, Tommo hardly feels this is Happy Valley. The virtues of the primitive society are a healthful, physical existence, and Tommo says he saw "but one invalid . . . and sickness was almost unknown" (ch. 17). Still, his own wounded leg does not heal. Living in a place of physical bliss must exacerbate his own feelings and fears concerning his swollen leg. When his apprehension regarding escaping increases, his leg becomes worse and so the physical disability operates also in a symbolic way.

The final contrast to be considered between appearance and reality deals with the two tribes on the island. The Typees have the reputation of being the most ferocious clan on the island, but experience does not prove this to be true. When Toby leaves the Typee valley to seek medical aid for his friend because Tommo's leg does not heal, the supposedly friendly Happars attack Toby fiercely and unexpectedly. Although the Happars chase Toby, he manages to run fast enough to reach the safety of the Typee valley. The word "typee" in the Marquesan dialect means a "lover of human flesh". It is odd that only this tribe should bear this name as all the inhabitants are "irreclaimable cannibals". The narrator has theorized, while still aboard ship, that the "name may, perhaps, have been given to denote the peculiar ferocity of this clan, and to convey a special stigma along with it" (ch. 4). Thus, there is a contradiction not only between the reputations of the two clans but even an

incongruity that this friendly group should bear the name and the stigma attached to the word "typee".

The last consideration under Auden's heading of the sea as the real situation of life is universal cannibalistic practices. That cannibals can be "humane, gentlemanly and amiable" (ch. 13) foreshadows the characterization of Queequeg in Moby-Dick. Melville's attitude towards cannibals is thus already evident as early as Typee; however, it is as if he were proving the validity of this concept to himself in the earlier novel. This seems plausible in light of Queequeg's important role as the friend from whom Ishmael learns about the interdependence of man in Moby-Dick. The universal cannibalism of the sea is not spelled out in Typee as it is in Moby-Dick. Yet, the Typees themselves can be considered cannibals as they neither plant for the future nor plan ahead. Stern asserts: "Like the sea self, the Typee self is also a robber, and both selves are cannibalistic because in their incompleteness they set man to devouring man. The Typee simply takes. He never plants or plans, never enters into conflict with nature in order to grasp the control that the quest figure constantly seeks."<sup>10</sup> Although the primitive society is one of cannibalism, the people are humane, considerate, and non-competitive. There seems to be less anxiety, anger, competition, and hunger. They do not work for money nor does there seem to be as much alienation resulting in human misery. When Tommo kills Mow-Mow in order to escape, this death is another example of universal cannibalism. Tommo's need to escape in order to avoid the limitation of life without any intellectual stimulation necessitates his taking the life of another man. Tommo, feeling desperate

about getting off the island, recognizes the need for violent action in order to escape. Nonetheless, Tommo's need is never cast in a monomaniac fixation as is Taji's and Ahab's in the other novels examined in this paper.

The sea is where the decisive events and the moments of eternal choice occur, according to Auden. In Typee, the search for one's self involving relationships with others will be seen under the category of decisive events as the two coincide in this novel. The narrator's quest for primitive paradise is possible only because of his momentous decision to desert the ship while it was in the harbor of Nukuheva. However, the novel deals primarily with the events leading up to his moment of eternal choice regarding staying on the island or escaping from the island. His moment of eternal choice is when he kills Mow-Mow in order to insure his own escape.

Tommo's determination to leave the island grows as his fear increases. He is afraid as he fears the Typees wish to convert him to their own religion through the tattooing which he abhors. Probably his fear is intensified because of the effect of the earlier lulling, tranquil days when he enjoyed his physical well-being. There was a period during the middle of his visit when his physical well-being was coupled with a complacent happiness. However, he resists being limited to this level of life; he does not want to give up all communication and all the intellectual stimulation available beyond this island.

The sea functions here as the only possible escape route. Hearing that a ship has landed, Tommo, "almost frenzied" (ch. 34), finally persuades Mehevi to let the natives carry him to the sea. Tommo says,

"Having been prohibited from approaching the sea during the whole of my stay in the valley, I had always associated with it the idea of escape." Getting to the sea is a challenge to Tommo because Mehevi will not allow Kory-Kory to carry him more than part way. Furthermore, Tommo is hindered from leaving because he cannot walk on his injured leg. Desperate, Tommo grabs a spear to use as a cane and limps away. At this crucial point, Marheyo pronounces "'Home'" and "'Mother'", the only two English words he has learned from Tommo to indicate his comprehension of Tommo's need to return to his former world and identity. Marheyo also commands his son, Kory-Kory, to carry Tommo again. Tommo exclaims: "'We proceeded onwards, and never shall I forget the ecstasy I felt when I first heard the roar of the surf breaking upon the beach . . . Oh glorious sight and sound of ocean! With what rapture did I hail you as familiar friends!'" (ch. 34).

Hearing his name shouted, Tommo looks toward the sea again and recognizes KaraKoe (ch. 34) who had been aboard the Dolly when she was in the harbor of Nukuheva. KaraKoe is a person tabooed in all valleys of the island and therefore able to communicate with those beyond the sea. Tommo's escape was facilitated by Marnoo, also a tabooed communicado, who had carried the message of Tommo's wish to escape to KaraKoe. Tommo could not have escaped if there had not been tabooed communicadoes on the island. Only tabooed persons could safely travel from one valley to another, could speak enough of the various dialects to communicate between tribes and with the men who come on the ships from across the sea. Both Marnoo and KaraKoe communicadoes are transition figures, not limited totally by the isolation of the island. They also represent the



need of man for other men. The beautiful but voiceless birds of the valley are symbolic of the natives themselves.

Still on the beach, Tommo takes advantage of the quarrel among the Typees regarding his attempted departure and manages to get out to the small boat where KaraKoe has been pushed by the islanders. "It was one of those chopping angry seas in which it is so difficult to row." They were chased by about thirty of

these savages (who), unlike the feeble swimmers of civilized countries, are, if anything, more formidable antagonists in the water than when on the land. It was all a trial of strength; our natives pulled till their oars bent again, and the crowd of swimmers shot through the water despite its roughness, with fearful rapidity.

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

After a few breathless moments I discerned Mow-Mow. The athletic islander, with his tomahawk between his teeth, was dashing the water before him till it foamed again . . . in another instant would have seized one of the oars. Even at the moment I felt horror at the act I was about to commit; but it was no time for pity or compunction, and with a true aim, and exerting all my strength, I dashed the boat-hook at him. (ch. 34)

Thus, Tommo escapes to the open sea, helped by the transition figures who can communicate with those beyond the island. He has rejected isolation. In addition, Tommo has taken responsibility for himself and has taken direct, violent action in order to effect his escape to the open sea. He has rejected the hope of paradise in a primitive society. Only by leaving the island and going to sea does he have the opportunity to seek again, to find his own identity, to become a quester.,

Through his dependence on the comunicados, Tommo has demonstrated the need of man for other men, and, in particular, his dependence on the

communicados. Communication with others is essential for man to develop his potential. In Typee the need to communicate is not developed into the concept of interdependence as it is in Moby-Dick. That is, Tommo's relationships in Typee are limited to those of dependence, first on the Typees, and, finally, on the comunicados. Consequently, there is little development of reciprocity in relationships in Typee.

## Chapter III

Mardi

Melville's Mardi, like Typee and Moby-Dick, is the story of a voyage out to sea which is symbolically a quest for transforming experience and knowledge. It begins as the narrator's search for adventure. The narrator and his friend, Jarl, desert from the whaling ship, the Arcturion, in a man-overboard ruse, one thousand miles from land. In the Chamois, the life boat pilfered from the Arcturion, the narrator and Jarl find Samoa and Annatoo on a sail boat at sea. They join forces until a storm swamps the sail boat and drowns Annatoo. Continuing in the Chamois, the narrator, Jarl, and Samoa find Yillah floating on a catamaran. The narrator kills the Polynesian priest, Aleema, in order to rescue the white maiden from a sacrificial death in a pagan ritual in the South Sea Islands. The narrator, Yillah, Jarl, and Samoa continue in the Chamois until they arrive at Media's island of Odo where Yillah disappears. Media, the King, chooses a trio of companions, Babbalanja, Yoomy, and Mohi to go with them to help Taji search for Yillah. During the search for Yillah, the beautiful girl, they visit all the Mardian islands.

The novel is muddled and confused as neither Taji nor Yillah is present in much of the dialogue. Moreover, Yillah, rather than being a person, becomes an ideal abstraction which varies according to the perspective of whomever is seeking her. Hence, the major part of the book is an allegorical, satirical, and philosophical discourse which is only remotely related to Taji or his search for the girl. That is, the novel is a

series of rather sterile intellectual queries for some ultimate meaning or truth about life. Although Mardi is a seemingly endless verbal voyage of insufficiently integrated searches, the group finally arrives at the island of Serenia. There Yoomy and Mohi decide to stay with Babbalanja. Serenia is where Babbalanja gives up his quest for the Ultimate and settles for doing good on the Boethian premise that it is not for man to know or comprehend the plan of the universe or man's part in it. Media goes back to his own island of Odo to rule as a reformed and enlightened leader. In spite of the fact that Taji is still pursued by Aleema's avengers, he continues his pursuit of Yillah, suicidally, beyond the outer reef of this world into the oblivion of "sunless seas" and the "realm of shades."

According to Auden's first point, it is the desire of every man of sensibility and honor to leave the land. Again, the sea is the setting and the opportunity for the narrator's initial voyage aboard a whaling ship, the Arcturion, but the Mardian islands do not serve the same purpose as the garden-island in Typee. In Mardi, the islands function allegorically as a microcosm of the world. Still, the questers need to leave the land in order to gain perspective and distance to allow them to evaluate what they observe. In this sense the sea at least provides the opportunity for the exploratory voyage in the search for the abstraction called Yillah.

As in Typee, the narrator starts out as a member of the crew on a whaling vessel and becomes irritated by the other members of the crew who can not talk philosophy but can only sing the "everlasting stanzas of 'Black-eyed Susan.'"<sup>11</sup> The narrator and his friend, Jarl, desert the

Arcturion in a man-overboard ruse one thousand miles from land. Jarl, an honest old seaman from the isle of Skye, a Viking descendant, goes voluntarily but reluctantly because of his friendship for and loyalty to the narrator. It is clear that the narrator must have some strong desire to cause him to pilfer a life boat and desert the whaling vessel in the middle of the ocean. His search for some transforming experience causes him to pursue Yillah all over the world of the Mardian Islands after her disappearance. Yillah, the maiden, becomes some unattainable and idealized abstraction for Taji, the narrator. The search for the abstraction, Yillah, is voluntary not only for Taji but also for Babbalanja, Media, Mohi, and Yoomy. Babbalanja is looking for some Ultimate Truth and, early in the voyage, he believes reason is the appropriate and adequate tool for such a quest. Yoomy, a young romantic poet, is looking for the transcending and ideal beauty which is truth. Mohi is looking for safety and a long life. Media begins the voyage defending his position as a demi-god and justifying his enjoyment of the wealth and luxury which he considers his right.

Taji, Babbalanja, Media, Mohi, and Yoomy all desire to leave the land in order to seek some deeper meanings and values concerning the significance of life. Taji says the trio of companions selected by Media to go on the voyage with him were all "anxious to take the tour of the Archipelago. In particular, Babbalanja had often expressed the most ardent desire to visit every one of the isles, in quest of some object, mysteriously hinted" (ch. 66). Even though they are going to aid Taji in his search for Yillah, they are going, voluntarily, on quests of their own. Babbalanja foreshadows Ishmael in that he goes with an

open mind, questioning everything; although he is different regarding his older age.

Auden's second point is that the sea is the real situation, and the voyage is the true condition of man. The sea permeates in Mardi less than in Moby-Dick, and the relative absence of the sea in Mardi reflects the lack of conflict and the resulting lack of continuity and coherence in this novel. In Mardi the sea operates as an intensifying agent almost exclusively in the very beginning of the novel. The ambiguities of the sea permit the reflection that the true condition of man is in many ways a searching and a struggling to find one's self and place; likewise this search deals with one's relationships with others. In Mardi, the search of specific individuals will be seen with an eye to their foreshadowing of similar protagonists in Moby-Dick. That much of their search is on land mirrors the non-experiential nature of their intellectual quest.

Even so, the open sea is the initial setting in Mardi which begins with "We are off! . . . But whence, and whither-wend ye mariners?" The narrator, aboard the Arcturion, a whaling ship, explains he is sailing from "an isle in the sea", and "Never before had the ocean appeared so monotonous: thank fate, never since" (ch. 1). The skipper had decided to sail north towards the Arctic Circle to hunt the "sullen inert" Right Whale in "chill and dismal fogs" instead of continuing to hunt for the "gentlemanly Cachalot (sperm-whale) in southern and more genial seas" (ch. 1). The limitation imposed by the sea means the narrator, like Tommo in Typee, is forced to desert ship or to stay aboard on a vessel

now going north for "horrid and indecent Right whaling" (ch. 1). The narrator feels imprisoned aboard the Arcturion; hence the sea limits his alternatives and intensifies his dilemma.

While the narrator is pondering his situation, feeling frustrated, he takes his turn standing the two-hour watch high up on the mast. The motion of the waves evokes his dreams and aspirations and provokes him to desert ship. The sea reflects his mood of longing to be elsewhere.

There I stood, high upon the mast, and away, away, illimitably rolled the ocean beneath. Where we then were was perhaps the most unfrequented and least known portion of these seas. Westward, however, lay numerous groups of islands . . . invested with all the charms of dream-land.

In the distance what visions were spread! . . . Vistas seemed leading to worlds beyond . . . as in a trance came upon me the cadence of mild billows laving a beach of shells, the waving of boughs, and the voices of maidens, and the lulled beatings of my own dissolved heart, all blended together.

. . . . .  
thenceforth my desire to quit the Arcturion became little short of a frenzy. (ch. 1)

The narrator has visions of more delightful worlds and excitement than he can find in his job as crew on the whaling vessel. The mystery of the sea rolling on, illimitably, enhances his dreams for remote, romantic islands which lure him endlessly.

Having decided to desert ship, the narrator is in a hurry to go. But the next day there is a calm, and the narrator's frustration is increased. He says a calm is

no joke. It not only revolutionizes his abdomen, but unsettles his mind; . . .

At first he is taken by surprise, never having dreamt of a state of existence where existence itself seems suspended. He shakes himself in his coat, to see whether it be empty or no. He closes his eyes, to test the reality of the glassy expanse . . . But it is a calm and he grows madly skeptical.

. . . . .  
Thoughts of eternity thicken. . .

The stillness of the calm is awful. His voice begins to grow strange and portentous. . .

But more than all else is the consciousness of his utter helplessness.

. . . . .  
He wills to go: to get away from the calm: as ashore he would avoid the plague. But he can not . . . (ch. 2)

The calm portrays the human condition as being beyond the control of the individual. Feeling "suspended" from life, he has to confront his feelings of helplessness in the face of the unpredictable absurdities of life. The utter inadequacy of the human predicament is underscored by the feeling engendered during a calm at sea. The narrator even questions his own identity and existence.

Finally a breeze stirs and Jarl and the narrator desert in a man-overboard ruse. "At sea in an open boat, and a thousand miles from land!" The narrator begins "to succumb . . . to the awful loneliness of the scene" (ch. 9). Before he had considered the "ocean as a slave" to take him wherever he chose. Now he says "What a mere toy we were to the billows" as they plunge up and down, "now buried in the watery hollows" (ch.9) and then up again. The waves cause another kind of helplessness. The indifferent sea, calm or rough, reflects not only the absurdity of life but also its inconsistencies and contradictions. The human predicament is not predictable, and ambiguities abound in life as in the sea itself. The loneliness at sea enhances his sense of peril. "All became vague and confused," the narrator admits as he sails on in the open boat for over a week, and "I fancied there could be naught but an endless sea" (ch. 12). The sea has augmented his feelings of inadequacy and inability to take control. This poignantly demonstrates how the sea intensifies emotions. However, in Mardi, the sea is rarely seen again this potent or



as representative of the inner struggles of the protagonist.

As the indifferent sea represents the real situation of life, the search for meaning represents the voyage of life and the true condition of man. The timelessness and formlessness of the sea elevate the particular satires and allegories of the Mardian islands to universal concerns. The inexhaustible nature of the quest is reflected in the endless motion of the sea. The elusive quality of the sea indicates the inevitability of inconclusive answers. However, unlike Typee, the theme in Mardi is not dramatized by the narrative, and the separate searches are not unified except superficially. The lack of dramatic conflict and coherence is represented by the inadequate role of the sea. Neither the sea nor its inhabitants provides a challenge or an antagonist; therefore, there is no adversary.

Taji's adventure evolves into a quest, and gradually he grows more and more defiant after Yillah's disappearance until the pursuit of Yillah becomes his monomania. Initially, he is captivated by her as a beautiful girl with blond hair and blue eyes. There is an air of mystery about the lovely white maiden about to be sacrificed in a Polynesian ritual. She is on a catamaran floating to her death when the narrator discovers her. He rescues her from that death, which necessitates his killing Aleema; he then loses her to the sea which makes him believe her prophecy of disappearing into a whirlpool to be self-fulfilling.

As Taji searches for Yillah, his concept of her changes. The memory of the lovely maiden girl of the idyllic honeymoon on the island of Odo, his "idol" (ch. 47) becomes a dream of the past, of youthful innocence, of an unattainable ideal; but the absolute she represents is not

clear. Yillah is not found wherever evil exists which is all the Mardian islands representing the whole world. Evil is universal, a condition of existence, "the chronic malady of the universe" (ch. 161). Therefore, Yillah can not be found; indeed she does not exist. In this sense, Yillah is an absolute which is the opposite of evil: truth, absolute knowledge, the right use of reason, or an unattainable ideal.

Yillah, on a boat, at sea, is surrounded by the "brown hemlock" priest and his sons. A white maiden hidden in a tent aboard Aleema's canoe arouses the narrator's curiosity. Yillah foreshadows the White Whale in several ways. She is white maiden among brown skinned Polynesians. Both Yillah and Moby Dick are the objects of the heroes' monomania representing an absolute to the heroes but not necessarily to others. Both are nearly silent creatures of the sea. Moreover, the color white is inappropriate in the South Sea Islands. Moby Dick's whiteness is the thing Ishmael fears most, more than the obvious considerations of the monster's reputed size and ferocity. "It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me," Ishmael says (ch. 42), but he does not attribute this feeling to anyone but himself. To Ishmael, that the terrible frightening whale should be the color traditionally associated with innocence and purity is a fact "to heighten (his) terror to the farthest bounds" (ch. 42). He goes on to ask "Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows--a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink?" (ch. 42). Yillah, being white, adds to her sense of mystery.

No one in Mardi ponders the ambiguity of whiteness as Ishmael does in Moby-Dick. Still, Melville's concept of whiteness as appalling begins in Mardi.

During Taji's search for Yillah, she is seldom mentioned. Taji himself hardly talks at all. The search for the girl changes into one revolving around the development and education of Babbalanja and Media, but even Mohi and Yoomy respond to Babbalanja, the principal speaker, more than Taji does. The major part of the book is this quest for ultimate truth. This change in the nature of the search seems the main reason Mardi is not convincing. There is a "narrative disintegration"<sup>12</sup> because there is no real conflict as the search becomes an exploratory one. Babbalanja is exploring ideas and abstractions in a conversation that continues for over three hundred pages, more than half of the book. The confusion in Mardi may represent man's confusion when searching on an intellectual level for absolutes. One does not feel that much insight is gained by the host of characters as there is no antagonist nor conflict on an emotional level in most of the novel.

The ambiguities of the sea permit the emphasis on ambivalent feelings of Taji. The duality of the sea has been seen through the narrator in Typee as it represents both freedom and enslavement to him. The sea represents the human predicament in that the sea and life are indifferent and beyond the control of the human being; thus, the individual must impart meaning rather than find it as a given. The duality of the sea is reflected on many levels. In Typee, it is seen through the contradictions of appearance and reality mostly on a societal level. In Mardi, Melville begins to develop the ambiguities and contradictions within a

person. The ambivalent feelings of the narrator will be seen below in reference to his monomania.

After Yillah's disappearance, intermittently, seven times, Taji is confronted by Aleema's avengers and Hautia's dark damsels. The reason for the avengers is obvious, and they may represent conscience and tradition. However, there is no definitive reason or interpretation of the damsels. Yoomy interprets the different kinds of flowers the women bear as various lures to Taji. It would seem that they could represent materialistic and worldly pleasures. Hautia's heralds can be seen as an extension of both Yillah and Taji in that Yillah ephemerally fulfilled and in part represented those pleasures for Taji. Taji never seems tempted by Hautia's sirens which would represent his denial of his needs for worldly pleasures.

It is important to note that the seven intermittent visits of Hautia's heralds coincide with a visit from Aleema's avengers. It would seem that this coincidence represents some connection between Taji's sexual pleasure with Yillah and his act of murdering Aleema. Yet Taji himself never ponders over the simultaneity of the visits until the end of the novel. The thought "so distracted" his soul that he says, "I knew not what it was, that I thought" (ch. 191). Taji's discomfort cannot be attributed merely to his sexual pleasure with Yillah. Rather, it appears that he cannot accept and grapple with his worldly needs and likewise his ~~mixed~~ motivation for killing Aleema to save Yillah from certain death.

Most twentieth century readers acknowledge ambivalence as an incapable fact of the human condition. Although Melville may not have accepted the concept of ambivalent feelings as absolutely universal,

through Taji he does show an individual who is plagued and driven by his guilt which results from his inability to recognize his needs. Taji would like to be the hero whose sole motivation is the altruistic one of saving the beautiful Yillah from death. He cannot acknowledge his desire for Yillah as a woman for himself, nor can he recognize the extremes to which he goes to obtain her. He feels compelled to "throttle" and "beat the thought down" of the "red hand of guilt." These feelings denied, like the ninety per cent of the iceberg hidden under the water, often drive a person to justify and defend whatever caused the original ambivalence. Tracing Taji's comments about his guilt may help to explain the development of his monomania which focused on Yillah.

In order to rescue Yillah, Taji kills Aleema, the priest. At the exact moment of the murder, Taji's description is "Ere I knew it, my cutlass made a quick lunge" (ch. 41). Taji's attitude about the murder, from the beginning, is ambivalent. He hardly admits his action. It is as if he were surprised that he did such a thing. The murder was not a conscious decision. This is in sharp contrast with Tommo's conscious decision to kill Mow-Mow in Typee because he acknowledges his need to escape in order to survive as a complete man. Taji, on the other hand, acted from impulse and from a duality of needs. He could not even recognize his reasons at the time and still, at the end of the novel, could not accept those which seemed selfish to him.

Almost immediately after the murder, before he even goes into the tent where Yillah is, Taji says, looking at Aleema's sons who curse him: "What iron mace fell on my soul; what curse rang sharp on my ear! . . . By this hand, the dead man had died. Remorse smote me hard; and like

lightning I asked myself, whether the death-deed I had done was sprung of a virtuous motive, the rescuing a captive from thrall; or whether beneath that pretense, I had engaged in this fatal affray for some other, and selfish purpose; the companionship of a beautiful maid. But throttling the thought, I swore to be gay" (ch. 42). After the act, Taji seems startled and questions his motives for a moment before he swears to repress the memory of the murder. While in the tent aboard Aleema's catamaran and before he transfers Yillah's tent to his own boat, the Chamois, the narrator says: "But though he [Aleema] had sunk in the deep, his ghost sunk not in the deep waters of my soul . . . at bottom guilt brooded. Sifted out, my motives to this enterprise justified not the mad deed, which in a moment of rage, I had done; though, these motives had been covered with a gracious pretense; concealing myself. But I beat the thought down" (ch. 44).

That night after Yillah's tent was lashed in its place aboard the Chamois and everyone else was asleep, looking down into the sea, Taji "started dismayed; in fancy, I saw the stark body of the priest drifting by. Again that phantom obtruded: again guilt laid his red hand on my soul. But I laughed. Was not Yillah my own? by my arm rescued from ill? To do her a good, I had periled myself. So down, down, Aleema" (ch. 46).

Taji's imagination intrudes and does not allow him the luxury of forgetting the murder so easily. Later, still at sea, Yillah is sad but, finally, yields her belief that "the whirlpool on the coast of Tedaidee prefigured her fate" (ch. 51). The narrator admits her dreams seemed his. "Many visions I had of the green corpse of the priest, outstretching

its arms in the water, to receive pale Yillah, as she sunk in the sea" (ch. 51). This passage is indicative of what a sad and silent creature Yillah is as well as of Taji's preoccupation with the dead priest.

During the night following their arrival in Odo, while others slept, the narrator, now called Taji, says: "'Oh stars! Oh eyes, that see me, wheresoe'er I roam; . . . Am I a murderer, stars?'" (ch. 58). Yet, Taji cannot ask himself if he is a murderer nor admit to his ambivalent reasons for the act.

Taji's monomania involves his guilt as represented by the pursuit of Aleema's avengers and Hautia's dark damsels. The avengers, Aleema's sons, are determined to kill Taji, but they kill Samoa and Jarl in their attempt. Taji glosses over the loss of his close friends. He is not deterred even temporarily from his pursuit of Yillah. This seems to be another denial of his reprehensible feelings.

Taji admits his murder of Aleema to others only after an arrow, aimed at him, hits the stern of the boat. Media asks if these murderers can be seeking Taji and if the "arrow yet remained astern." The arrow is brought to Media who exclaims, "'By Oro! Taji on the barb.'" Taji replies: "'Then it missed its aim. But I will not mine. And whatever arrows follow, still will I hunt on. Nor does the ghost, that these pale specters would avenge, at all disquiet me. The priest I slew, but to gain her, now lost; and I would slay again, to bring her back . . .'" (ch. 134). This is a drastic change in Taji's attitude. Before, Taji pretended he could throttle his memory of the guilt; now he admits it and is defiantly willing to kill again. It is like the swing of the pendulum, denial and justification. The emphasis on his sole goal to find

Yillah is excessive, to the exclusion of everything else. He does not consider the repercussions nor take responsibility for them.

Babalanja points out "an evil deed gained you your Yillah; no wonder she is lost" (ch. 134). This is a critical time, and Taji's reaction is his obsession to pursue Yillah. The pursuit of Yillah is now his monomania. He has not learned from nor allowed himself to be affected by the deaths of Samoa and Jarl. He cannot value the lives of other people just as Ahab cannot be concerned with the lives of those aboard the Pequod, even though he is captain and therefore responsible for their welfare. Neither Taji nor Ahab can look into the deep recesses of their beings and accept the duality of their feelings.

Hautia's heralds come immediately after Taji has admitted that he killed Aleema and they wait for a reply. Taji retorts "Tell your Hautia, . . . I defy her incantations; she lures in vain" (ch. 134). At the very end of the book, Taji finally goes to Hautia's bower for the "last, last hope of Yillah, though thy (Hautia) lure be death" (ch. 190). However, once there, Taji still does not find Yillah. Hautia admonishes Taji "join hands." Taji's reply is "Show me that which I seek, and I will dive with thee." Again, Hautia directs "join hands, and I will take thee, where thy past will be forgotten." But Taji answers "Better to me, oh Hautia! all the bitterness of my buried dead, than all the sweets of the life thou canst bestow" (ch. 194). So Taji rejects Hautia.

Nevertheless, as Taji says, "in some mysterious way seemed Hautia and Yillah connected." The duality is explicitly remarked. "But Yillah was all beauty, and innocence; . . . my heaven below; and Hautia, my whole heart abhorred. Yillah I sought; Hautia sought me. One, openly



beckoned me here; the other dimly allured me there. Yet now was I wildly dreaming to find them together. But so distracted my soul, I know not what it was, that I thought" (ch. 191). The connection is never spelled out, but the inescapable suggestion is some duality not comprehended by Taji. The duality may well be in Taji himself as was previously indicated in the comments about his ambivalence.

In Mardi the quest, not the sea, is the voyage of life and the true condition of man. The parallel between the Taji story and the Babbalanja-Media-Yoomy- and Mohi story is more coherent on the symbolic level than on the narrative level. The others go with Taji to help him look for Yillah, but Yillah has never been a person to anyone but Taji, and, not for long, even to him. Taji functions almost as a magnetized sleepwalker since all he can do is follow Yillah; his monomania results from his attraction to her. On the other hand, Babbalanja and Media function almost exclusively on the verbal level. Yillah is something different to each quester; nevertheless, each one is seeking a deeper truth. The definition of Yillah is the sum total of everything all the voyagers seek.

The lack of continuous presence and pervasiveness of the sea in Mardi is reflected in the variation in the narrative voice. The narrator in the beginning of the novel speaks of his guilt in having "unconsciously eluded a sailor's grave . . . and escaped the fate of my shipmates" from the Arcturion and questions whether the cause be "providential deliverance" (ch. 7). Yet, Taji, who is explicitly the narrator, commits suicide at the very end of the novel. Consequently, this precludes the realism of him as survivor to relate the journey. It is as if Ahab were

the narrator in Moby-Dick. The reader not only has to deal with this blatant inconsistency but also with the lack of the narrator's participation in the bulk of the novel. The point of view is confused because it varies from "I" to "we" to an omniscient third person.

In Moby-Dick, Melville makes the division between Ishmael, the narrator who survives, and Ahab, the monomaniac hero who dies. Mardi demonstrates the need for this division between the narrator and the defiant hero. Babbalanja foreshadows Ishmael as a survivor who could have functioned as the narrator able to report on Taji's final abdication. Also, Babbalanja foreshadows Ishmael as an articulate spokesman commenting on events.

Babbalanja, unlike Media, but like Ishmael in Moby-Dick, goes to sea with an open mind. Part of having an open mind is the acceptance of the ambivalence and unknown in one's self. Babbalanja expounds his diabolical theory, and he agrees with Bardianna whom he quotes: "All men are possessed by devils . . . Devils are divers--strong devils, and weak devils; knowing devils, and silly devils; mad devils, and mild devils; devils, merely devils; devils, themselves bedeviled; devils, doubly bedeviled" (ch. 104). Mohi wants to know what kind of devil is Babbalanja's, and the answer is that "he belongs to that class of devils who harm not other devils" (ch. 104). Babbalanja's devil is an awareness of the unconscious, unaccountable, and unpredictable part of himself. Babbalanja calls his devil Azzageddi.

Babbalanja, therefore, starts out on his search "intent upon essence --looking for the precious pearl within the shaggy oyster, . . . the inscrutable" (ch. 114). However, he recognizes the duality in nature and

in man. "The essence of all good and evil is in us, not out of us. Neither poison nor honey lodgeth in the flowers on which, side by side, bees and wasps oft alight" (ch. 137). One consistent truth mentioned throughout Mardi is that good and evil go hand in hand, and that "evil is the chronic malady of the Universe" (ch. 161). Babbalanja believes that reason is the tool and gives the method by which one can provide answers to "the mystery of mysteries." He declares there is "no impiety in right use of reason, whatever the issue" (ch. 135). He thinks man should aspire to all things, and he has the approach of Faust and of Satan in Milton's Paradise Lost in the beginning of the voyage. Babbalanja is looking for some truth that does not change, an absolute. "Yet in this pruning will I persist; I will not add, I will diminish; I will train myself down to the standard of what is unchangeably true . . . I drop off my redundancies; ere long I shall have stripped my ribs; when I die, they will but bury my spine . . . I may have come to the Penultimate, but where, sweet Yoomy, is the Ultimate?" (ch. 124).

Babbalanja, like the latter Ishmael, settles for less than he had hoped. After he decides to stay in Serenia, he admits "my voyage is ended. Not because what we sought is found; but that I now possess all which may be had of what I sought in Mardi" (ch. 189). Ishmael's final observation,<sup>13</sup> born of experience at sea, pictured by the concrete event, is far more persuasive. Babbalanja pontificates in a vacuum as the reader is not shown any experience of Babbalanja's to explain his altered opinion. Furthermore, their conclusions are different.

Media, on the other hand, does not go to sea with an open mind. He defends his position as a ruler and demi-god thereby justifying his

own right to enjoy wealth and all its luxuries regardless of the starvation of others in his kingdom. He has been the median following the path of least resistance. However, he moves from isolation dependent upon satisfying only his own pleasures and appetites to membership in the human community.

When Taji, Jarl, Samoa, and Yillah arrive on the island of Odo, Media is a generous host, serving delicacies and wine in "more glorious goblets that these for the drinking of wine, went never from hand to mouth" (ch. 59). All the misery and degradation of poverty are hidden in Odo. "Whence it came, that, to a stranger, the whole isle looked care-free and beautiful . . . To look at, and to roam about of holidays, Odo seemed a happy land" (ch. 63).

However, as a king on his throne, Media is an absolute dictator. He says to some subjects who present a petition asking that "all differences between man and man in Odo" be tried by a jury of twelve, "I am king: ye are slaves. Mine to command: yours to obey" (ch. 60). Before his voyage, Media, selfish, arbitrary, tyrannical, does not allow dissent and is oblivious to the welfare of the serfs in his country. He does not care that many are starving.

Fearing infection of some plague, born of this filth, the chiefs of Odo seldom passed that way: . . .

Toil is man's allotment; . . . But when man toils and slays himself for his masters who withhold the life he gives to them--then, then, the soul screams out, and every sinew cracks. So with these poor serfs. And few of them could choose but be the brutes they seemed.

. . . Odo, in whose lurking-places infants turned from breasts, whence flowed no nourishment.--Odo, in whose inmost haunts . . . most dismal cries, and voices cursing Media. There, men were scourged; their crime, a heresy; the heresy, that Media was no demi-god. (ch. 63)

As the indifferent sea is the real situation; so universal cannibalism is one facet of that situation. The universal cannibalism of the sea, to be so fully integrated into the fabric of Moby-Dick, is not even mentioned as such in Mardi. However, Annatoo's death in the preliminary part of the narrator's voyage, Aleema's death, and Jarl's and Samoa's deaths can be viewed as examples of that quality of the sea. Annatoo is drowned in a storm. The elemental force of the wind and the bottomless and endlessness of the trackless sea as a grave demonstrate man's inability to control the factors determining whether he lives or dies. While Yillah is in her tent, hidden from view, aboard Aleema's catamaran, Aleema is planning to sacrifice her in a religious rite. Regardless of Taji's or the reader's opinion, Aleema is functioning normally within his paradigm. Presumably safe, in familiar waters, surrounded by his own sons, Aleema is killed by a stranger, a white man from a foreign country. Aleema had done nothing to injure Taji or to incite his wrath. Taji's appearance upon the scene at that particular moment and his desire to rescue Yillah, from Aleema's point of view, are unexpected events which emphasize the absurdity of life and man's inadequacy. Thus, universal cannibalism is seen as one aspect of the human condition.

Jarl and Samoa are both surrogates for Taji as Aleema's avengers are aiming at and hoping to kill Taji both times. Their innocence in Aleema's death does not protect them from the lethal arrows. Hence, Melville's view of the human predicament is reflected in the deaths of Annatoo, Aleema, Jarl and Samoa.

According to Auden, the sea is where the decisive events, the mo-

ments of eternal choice occur. Yoomy pleads with Taji "'commit not the last, last crime!'" (ch. 195). But Taji's eternal choice is not a surprise as he pushes off through the tide, beyond the outer reef, asserting, "'Now, I am my own soul's emperor; and my first act is abdication! Hail! real of shades!'" (ch. 195). Yoomy and Mohi jump out of the boat just in time and swim back to shore. But Aleema's avengers still follow, arrows poised. "And thus, pursuers and pursued flew on, over an endless sea" (ch. 195). Taji's decision is made against the advice of Babbalanja as well as the attempted rescue by Yoomy and Mohi. To Media's plea to "'renounce the hunt,'" Taji retorts, "'I am the hunter, that never rests! the hunter without a home! She I seek still flies before; and I will follow, though she lead me beyond the reef: through sunless seas; and into night and death. Her, will I seek, through all the isles and stars; and find her, whate'er betide!'" (ch. 189). The defiance even unto death foreshadows Ahab's defiance. When Babbalanja points out to Taji "'the sin thou didst cry out, and its avengers still follow'" (ch. 189), Taji refused Babbalanja's suggestion that he stay in Serenia and replies "'But I was fixed as fate'" (ch. 189). Ahab too blames fate, explaining "'we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike'" (ch. 132).

Taji is at sea, and he goes beyond the outer reef, to oblivion. In the sea, the trackless sea, Taji "commits the last, last crime," making his eternal choice. Babbalanja, Media, Mohi, and Yoomy are on the island of Serenia when their moments of eternal choice occur. They have left the land in order to broaden their world-views. They have had no transfiguring experience at sea as they travel from island to island.

Their decisions are made on land, on the island of Serenia, rather than at sea. The name itself, Serenia, reflects Babbalanja's evasive reasons.

After a storm in the dense darkness, at dawn, in the calm, comes a "lone canoe . . . in which there sat a mild old man" who asks the group to land in Serenia to repair their canoes. The calm of the sea reflects the placid nature of Babbalanja's eternal choice to stay in Serenia. He has given up the struggle of the stormy strife of life for the mild calm of the Boethian assumption that it is not for man to know. "No mind but Oro's can know all; . . . perfect wisdom can be only Oro's . . . the last mystery . . . none but him may know" (ch. 188). Babbalanja says all his doubts are gone, "Reason no longer domineers, but still doth speak. All I have said ere this, that wars with Alma's precepts, I here recant." He kneels. This is a reversal of opinion for Babbalanja. His retreat is a disappointment in light of his previous statement that there is "no impiety in the right use of reason, whatever the issue." Babbalanja has discovered that reason alone does not give understanding. His conclusion seems to this reader a defeat, insufficiently prepared for, as there was no experience at sea, no confrontation of any sort, to account for Babbalanja's change.

Yoomy and Mohi decide to stay in Serenia too. They had no experience at sea to bring about any change. According to what the voyage taught, at least in words, experience should evaluate judgments and beliefs. They simply agree with Babbalanja and pattern their choices after his. Media, following Babbalanja's example, kneels, accepting Alma as practised in Serenia, saying "No more a demi-god, but a subject to our

common chief. No more shall dismal cries be heard from Odo's groves. Alma, I am thine'"(ch. 187). Media's choice to go back to Odo and confront the problems there, with his changed attitude, is real growth. Media has learned from the voyage that to disregard all other members of the human race is disastrous. When he returns to Odo, Aleema's avengers are there hoping to find Taji, and his return sparks an uprising.

Media had been met with yells. Sedition was in arms, and to his beard defied him. Vain all concessions then . . .

Behind the avengers, raged a stormy mob, invoking Media to renounce his rule. But one hand waving like a pennant above the smoke of some sea-flight, straight through that tumult Media sailed serene: the rioters parting from before him, as wild waves before a prow inflexible. . . for many moons, Odo will prove no home for old age, or youth. . . Reck not of me . . . The state is tossed in storms; the state is tossed and where I stand, the combing billows must break over. But among all noble souls, in tempest-time, the headmost man last flies the wreck. So, here in Odo will I abide; though every plank breaks up beneath me. And then,--great Oro! let the king die clinging to the keel! (ch. 195)

The change in Media is not sufficiently developed to be convincing. Nevertheless, his final decision is more nearly believable than Babbalanja's in light of the few events during the voyage.

Auden's last point is that an abiding destination is unknown even if it may exist. The pursuit of Yillah, the phantom, is a destination that does not exist. Taji's Yillah is unattainable as Taji does not understand the ambivalence of his own feelings. The thoughts he would throttle and beat down prevent him from comprehending the relationships among Yillah, Hautia, and Aleema's avengers. Serenia is an unknown destination and would have been unacceptable to Babbalanja in the beginning



of the novel. Yoomy and Mohi follow the example of Babbalanja, and all three stay in Serenia. Media's return to his own island of Odo is not an unknown destination. However, there are unknown and unpredicted factors in his return as he goes back with an altered, enlightened point of view and to the uprising.

In Mardi, as in Typee and Moby-Dick, the sea thus provides the setting and the opportunity for the voyage. However, in Mardi, since there is no transforming experience on the voyage, the sea does not function adequately as the real situation nor the voyage as the true condition of man. On the voyage, the characters talk as if they are sight-seers, sight-seers who comment and evaluate what they see, but not characters personally involved in any dramatic confrontation. The lack of conflict can be considered the same as the sea not functioning as an antagonist. The minimal role of the sea in Mardi corresponds with the weakness of the novel. In Typee, Tommo has an opportunity to evaluate his idea of paradise in a primitive society on the garden-island as he has the experience of living there. Contrastingly, in Mardi, Yillah remains elusive. Babbalanja and Taji have no experience to test their concept of paradise regained. Perhaps the lesser role of the sea in Mardi thus contributes significantly to the failure of the entire novel.

## Chapter IV

Moby-Dick

Moby-Dick, the classic story of an epic struggle between Ahab and the great White Whale, represents Melville's fullest exploration of the sea as symbol. According to Auden, every man of sensibility and honor desires to leave the land and city. In Moby-Dick there are many who leave the land to sail on the Pequod, but only three will be considered in this chapter. Ahab goes to sea to earn a living. More important, since the White Whale destroyed his leg, Ahab is really on a quest for revenge as the White Whale has become, to him, the personification of evil. Ahab's reasons are different from Perth's. Perth, the blacksmith, goes to sea as an acceptable alternative to death because he has "some interior compunctions against suicide."<sup>14</sup> He finds in the "all-receptive ocean . . . another life without the guilt of intermediate death . . . wonders supernatural . . . a life more oblivious than death" (ch. 112). Like Perth, Ishmael considers suicide. But unlike Perth, Ishmael is not looking for oblivion. He goes with an open mind, asking questions about everything. Ishmael says, "Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; . . . I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can" (ch. 1). For Ishmael the sea is restorative and regenerative. He goes on to say, "There is nothing surprising in this. If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or another, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me" (ch. 1). All men in all times and all places, Ishmael explains, are attracted to the magic of the sea.

Men of sensibility and honor desire to leave the land and the city because the challenge and mysteries of the sea attract them like a magnet.

Next, according to Auden, the sea is the real situation and the voyage is the true condition of man. In Moby-Dick the sea not only pervades more than in Typee and in Mardi but also is more complex. The sea and its inhabitants, especially the White Whale, operate as intensifying agents throughout the novel. The womb-grave duality of the sea underscores the rising tension as the chase for Moby Dick continues. Moreover, the sea and the White Whale function as antagonists to the main characters. Furthermore, the ambiguities of the sea reflect the varying views of the characters aboard the Pequod, and thus the sea is inclusive of all the alternative points of view. Finally, universal cannibalism is treated as a part of the sea and is a mirror of man's predicament.

Moby Dick, the White Whale, intensifies the voyage because of Ahab's insistence on chasing him. He is a serious threat to everyone aboard the Pequod. Everybody knows that the White Whale is powerful enough to destroy them. In addition, the whale's whiteness creates an eerie fear in Ishmael as discussed in the chapter on Mardi. Moby Dick is a ferociously powerful, enormous, terrifying and lethal inhabitant of the sea unlike Yillah in Mardi who is a passive abstraction. Yillah is a sad, other-worldly mysterious creature of the sea. Like the White Whale, Yillah is elusive. Taji discovers Yillah at sea, and he believes she disappears into a whirlpool at sea. Taji tells how "Strange Yillah gazed down in the sea, and would have had me plunge into it with her, to rove through its depths" (ch. 46).

Throughout the search, Yoomy sings various sections of one com-

posite song which identifies Yillah as the lone bright fish of the sea.

The following is an example:

Like the fish of the bright and twittering fin,  
                   Bright fish! diving deep as high soars the lark,  
 So, far, far, far, doth the maiden swim,  
                   Wild song, wild light, in still ocean's dark.   (ch. 88)

On the other hand, about the White Whale, Ahab says, "It was Moby Dick that dismasted me . . . that accursed Whale that razed me" (ch. 36). Ahab plans revenge against this powerful antagonist, whereas Taji pursues the phantom of Yillah futilely and endlessly. Ahab attacks Moby Dick three days in a row in a wild and frenzied chase. The contrast between Yillah and the White Whale dramatizes the different role of the sea as well as the different nature of the conflict in these two novels. Yillah is a vacuous and nebulous person or concept who offers no resistance. On the other hand, Moby Dick is not only a concept but also a main character providing a real, physical challenge.

The sea is pictured as indifferent and sometimes hostile in Moby-Dick. Ahab talks to the dead whale's black and hooded head as if it were the Sphynx's in the desert. He says:

Thou saw'st the locked lovers when leaping from their flaming ship;  
 heart to heart they sank beneath the exulting wave; true to each  
 other, when heaven seemed false to them. Thou saw'st the murdered  
 mate, when tossed by pirates from the midnight deck; for hours he  
 fell into the deeper midnight of the insatiate maw; and his murder-  
 ers still sailed on unharmed--while swift lightnings shivered the  
 neighboring ship that would have borne a righteous husband to out-  
 stretched, longing arms. O head! thou hast seen enough to split  
 the planets and make an infidel of Abraham.                           (ch. 70)

The uncaring sea is the situation of life in which man has to struggle. Ahab also calls the sea "pitiless" (ch. 132) when he tells Starbuck about making "war on the horrors of the deep" (ch. 132) for forty long

years.

As the sea reflects the indifferent situation in this novel, the voyage reflects the true condition of man. The advertised reason for the voyage is the usual one of capturing whales and selling the oil in order to make money. The real purpose of the voyage, however, is determined by Ahab's monomania to get revenge by killing the White Whale. His obsession forces him to disregard the inherent danger. He does not even consider the crew's fate or his responsibility to them as their captain. Pip, in his madness, comprehends the risk and appeals to Ahab to go home. Starbuck, the first mate, tries to dissuade him early in the voyage. There are many omens and warnings. Nothing deters Ahab. Starbuck senses the stupidity of continuing to chase the White Whale. On the second day of the chase, after the Parsee cannot be found, Starbuck says to Ahab:

Great God! But for one single instant show thyself, . . . never, never wilt thou capture him, old man--in Jesus' name no more of this, that's worse than devil's madness. Two days chased; twice stove to splinters; they very long leg once more snatched from under thee; they evil shadow gone--all good angels mobbing three with warnings:--what more wouldst thou have?--Shall we keep chasing this murderous fish till he swamps the last man? Shall we be dragged by him to the bottom of the sea? Shall we be towed by him to the infernal world? Oh, oh,--Impiety and blasphemy to hunt him more!  
(ch. 134)

This is an ominous foreshadowing. And on the third and final day of the chase when Ahab and his crew are in Ahab's small boat, lowered for the chase, alone, because the other two boats have returned to the Pequod for repairs, Moby Dick swims away. Starbuck cries, "'Oh! Ahab, not too late is it, even now, the third day, to desist. See! Moby Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekst him!'" (ch. 135).

The sea, with the White Whale swimming away, offers Ahab a chance for life. But Ahab will not listen. Starbuck is helpless because he cannot change the circumstances. He has no way out. Melville understands the helplessness and futility of man's predicament. In Melville's view, man lives in a world in which he has limited, if any, control.

Melville's sea is complex and inclusive of all the ambiguities in Moby-Dick. It is fickle, and it is a foe to men and to its own creatures. Yet it has universal appeal. To some it offers a chance for renewal, to others a chance for adventure, and to others a chance for oblivion. In its formlessness and motion it is like the human thought process. A lonely place, it is mysterious and incomprehensible.

Even when the sea is serene and beautiful, it is also treacherous and deceiving because of the changeable and unpredictable qualities. "One serene and moonlight night, when all the waves rolled by like scrolls of silver; and by their soft, suffusing seethings, made what seemed a silvery silence" (ch. 51), Fedallah spots a whale and calls out, but the whale is not seen again for some days, until, again at midnight, a whale is announced. Once more it disappears. The continual repetition of this midnight spout

seemed for ever alluring us on . . . There reigned, too, a sense of peculiar dread at this flitting apparition, as if it were treacherously beckoning us on and on, in order that the monster might turn round upon us, and rend us at last in the remotest and most savage seas.

These temporary apprehensions, so vague but so awful, derived a wondrous potency from the contrasting serenity of the weather. . . . through seas so wearily, lonesomely mild. (ch. 51)

The foreboding is intensified because sometimes the sea in its duality hides its hazards and entices the men to their doom. Later, when the

Pequod sails through the "vast meadows" of the yellow brit, Ishmael is once more aware of the contradictions of the sea. He says, "Consider the subtleness of the sea; how its most dreaded creatures glide under water, unapparent for the most part, and treacherously hidden beneath the loveliest tints of azure" (ch. 58).

The mild appearance of the sea belies the peril of the first day of the chase. "The ocean grew still more smooth; seemed drawing a carpet over its waves; seemed a noon meadow, so serenely it spread" (ch. 133). No wonder some whalemens deceived "by all this serenity, had ventured to assail it; but had fatally found the quietude but the vesture of tornadoes" (ch. 133).

Again the unpredictable ambiguity of the seas is emphasized when the ship reaches "my dear Pacific . . . that serene ocean rolled eastwards from me a thousand leagues of blue. . . . There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath; . . . And meet it is . . . the waves should rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly; for here, millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, . . . the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness" (ch. 111). Ahab thinks of the sea as "that sea in which the hated White Whale must even then be swimming" in "these almost final waters" (ch. 111). The drowned dreams may represent Ahab's surrender of the expectation of life with his young wife and son. His obsession with the White Whale leads to his death and "these almost final waters" do, in fact, become Ahab's final waters.

In the chapter titled "The Gilder" the sea's dangers are covered over by the golden calm. For a moment, Ahab is affected by this calm, but his monomania prevents him from believing in the benevolence sometimes offered by the sea. "Beholding the tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the ocean's skin, one forgets the tiger heart that pants beneath it; and would not willingly remember, that this velvet paw but conceals a remorseless fang. But if these secret golden keys did seem to open in him [Ahab] his own secret golden treasures, yet did his breath upon them prove but tarnishing" (ch. 114). Ahab never can avoid the dark part of himself that insists he exercise evil by chasing the White Whale and thereby he "tarnished the golden" alternatives available to him.

Not only is the sea changeable and deceiving, but also it is an elemental force of nature stronger than man can devise. Ishmael declares, "However baby man may brag of his science and skill, and however much, in a flattering future, that science and skill may augment; yet for ever and for ever, to the crack of doom, the sea will insult and murder him, and pulverize the stateliest, stiffest, frigate he can make" (ch. 58).

The elemental power of the sea includes universal cannibalism. Ishmael says, "But not only is the sea such a foe to man who is an alien to it, but it is also a fiend to its own offspring; . . . Consider, once more, the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began" (ch. 58). During the time the sharks are being killed by Queequeg and another mariner, one "would have almost thought the whole round sea was one huge cheese, and those sharks the maggots in it" (ch. 66). Some-



times the seamen missed their aim, and in the resulting confusion, new aspects of the extreme savagery of the sharks are visible. The sharks "viciously snapped, not only at each other's disembolements, but like flexible bows, bent round, and bit their own; till those entrails seemed swallowed over and over again by the same mouth, to be oppositely voided by the gaping wound" (ch. 66). The predatory sharks are insatiable. The theme of universal cannibalism of the sea is repeated in the chapter called "The Funeral." When the carcass of the whale is released overboard, "There's a most doleful and most mocking funeral! The sea vultures all in pious mourning . . . Oh, horrible vultureism of earth! from which not the mightiest whale is free" (ch. 69).

This fickle, enticing, murderous sea has universal appeal. Ishmael tells about the "crowds of water-gazers" in the city of Manhattan, where "thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries." He asks, "Why did the Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove?" (ch. 1). He replies, "Surely all this is not without meaning" (ch. 1). Ishmael tells of the magic in the stream and the mystical vibration a passenger feels when first told the ship is out of sight of land. The sea's magic and mystery are irresistible.

As mentioned earlier, Ishmael, Ahab, Perth, and the other men go to sea for various reasons. For each the sea has appeal. For Ishmael the sea is restorative and regenerative. For many including Ishmael and Queequeg, the sea offers adventure. To Perth the sea provides the oblivion to which he wishes to escape.

For the allegorical character, Bulkington, the sea is appealing

not only as an escape but also as a necessity, for the "land seemed scorching to his feet." Bulkington is compared to a ship which must avoid the shore during the storm. "The port would fain give succor; the port is pitiful; in the port is safety, comfort, hearthstone, supper, warm blankets, friends, all that's kind to our mortalities. But in that gale, the port, the land, is the ship's direst jeopardy; . . . her only friend her bitterest foe" (ch. 23). Bulkington cannot return to shore because the shore means conformity whereas the sea offers independence. In the chapter about Bulkington Ishmael says:

Know ye, now, Bulkington? Glimpses do ye seem to see of that mortally intolerable truth; that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore?

But as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God--so, better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety; . . . Up from the spray of thy ocean-perishing--straight up, leaps thy apotheosis! (ch. 23)

Bulkington, and presumably Melville, prefer the dangers of independent thinking as they prefer the dangers of the open sea.

As free thinking is compared to the open independence of the sea, so the formless contents of the mind before patterning are compared to the formlessness of the sea.<sup>15</sup> The perpetual motion of the sea is compared to the process of the mind's habit of making free associations. The elusiveness of the sea corresponds to man's difficulty in being articulate. Ishmael understands that "meditation and water are wedded forever" (ch. 1). He understands the effect of the sea on the absent-minded youth on the mast head.

Lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending ca-

dence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some undiscernible form seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it. (ch. 35)

In Moby-Dick the sea is a lonely place of alienation. Ahab calls his forty years at sea "the desolation of solitude" (ch. 132). Men at sea have left behind the responsibilities and pleasures of family and community life. Contrasted with the port, the sea allows them endless questioning of everything--basic assumptions, organized religion, traditional values of the society and its institutions, industrialization, and expected conformity. This questioning leads to loneliness and alienation.

The sea is mysterious and incomprehensible. As Ishmael says: "And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all" (ch. 1). Ahab is like Narcissus. He cannot understand the inner self enough to comprehend the absolute quality and therefore the risk of his monomania. And so he, too, drowns. The hardest confrontation is with the inner self, and Ahab fails.

The sea has great significance in this novel because it represents the human situation in which the characters must operate. Because of its inclusiveness it reflects the different characters. Each person

views the sea in his own way. Thus, the sea is like Ahab and also like Ishmael although they are different. The sea is where the main characters learn about themselves. They go to sea with certain attitudes and ideas, and they are tested by their experience at sea. Because Ahab goes to sea limited by the irrational conviction that the White Whale is the source of evil, he drowns without understanding that there are no absolutes. Ishmael goes with an open mind and therefore is able to learn from the sea and from Queequeg that man is interdependent. It is no accident that the friend from whom Ishmael learns the true nature of the interdependence of man is the cannibal, Queequeg. As pointed out earlier in the discussion on cannibals, Melville was developing his ability to see through stereotypes to the essence of the individual in Typee.

Just as the sea in Moby-Dick is more complex than in Mardi, Ishmael and Ahab are more fully developed than Babbalanja and Taji. Unlike Babbalanja, Ishmael begins his voyage not confident and almost arrogant but irritable and disgruntled. Ishmael finds it hard to prevent himself from "methodically knocking people's hats off" as "it is a damp drizzly November in my soul" (ch. 1). He does not share the Faustian attitude of presuming to know all things. Still, he questions everything but without the pride of expecting to find the Ultimate. Ishmael, too, acknowledges the ambiguities of life as he excludes no part of the human experience, " I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas and land on barbarous coasts. Not ignoring what is good, I am quick to perceive a horror, and could still be social with it--would they let me--since it is but well to be

on friendly terms with all the inmates of the place one lodges in" (ch. 1).

Ishmael learns through his friendship with Queequeg. Even before boarding the whaling vessel, the Pequod, Ishmael begins to change. Having signed up for the Pequod, Ishmael no longer has the attitude of conforming to the lee shore's trivial beliefs. Mentally, he is on his way to sea and therefore able to accept the strange and mysterious, even to be "social" with the "horrors." His acceptance of the cannibal, Queequeg, as a bedfellow in the crowded Spouter-Inn testifies to his change. "What's all this fuss I have been making about, thought I to myself--the man's a human being just as I am: he has as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him. Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian" (ch. 3). On the other hand, Babbalanja in Mardi does nothing but talk about such concepts. He expounds on the incompatibility of God's supposed attributes of omnipresence and moral perfection with the existence of evil and often mentions the philosophical concept of necessity and the difference between necessity and fate.<sup>16</sup>

But Ishmael, in the every day pragmatic experience of whaling, learns the meaning of necessity. One dreamy afternoon while weaving a sword-mat with Queequeg, Ishmael sees the interplay of warp and woof as an image of human life.

chance, free will, and necessity--no wise incompatible--all interweavingly working together. The straight warp of necessity, not to be swerved from its ultimate course--its every alternating vibration, indeed, only tending to that; free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads; and chance, though restrained in its play with the right lines of necessity, and sideways in its motions directed by free will, though thus prescribed to by both, chance by turn rules either, and has the last featuring blow at events. (ch. 47)

While Ishmael weaves, considering this analogy, the cry of "There she blows" sounds; he drops the ball of "free will." Immediately he gets into Starbuck's whaleboat, and the chase goes on into the night and a storm comes up. During this first lowering, Starbuck orders the whaleboat pulled up on the unseen whale's back. The whale rolls "like an earthquake" beneath them, and the boat and its occupants are all spilled into the water. The men manage to swim back to the righted boat, but by this time it is dark, and they cannot see the Pequod. All night they wait, Queequeg holding a lighted lantern aloft on a waif-pole, until dawn, when Queequeg sights the Pequod in time to prevent being run down by the big whaling ship.

Ishmael's next dramatic lesson regarding necessity is when he and Queequeg are bound together by the monkey rope. Queequeg has to work on the half-submerged and slippery skin of the dead whale. As a safety measure, a long line is passed through Queequeg's belt and fastened at the other end to Ishmael's belt. Ishmael is on deck, anchor man. If Ishmael does not stop any and all of Queequeg's slips and slides, both men could be dragged down into the water which is infested with sharks. At first Ishmael does not like the arrangement at all.

So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that while earnestly watching his motions, I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two: that my free will had received a mortal wound; and that another's mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster and death. . . I say, I saw that this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes; only, in most cases, he, one way or other, has this Siamese connection with a plurality of other mortals. (ch. '72)

However, in the end, Ishmael accepts what cannot be changed. Ahab, on the other hand, needing a new leg to be made by the carpenter, aware of

the same sense of interdependency, is humiliated. To Ishmael it is comforting and reassuring to realize that his is "the precise situation of every mortal that breathes."

Having been wedded to Queequeg on the monkey-rope helps Ishmael recognize more intensely the universal bond of human interdependence. Therefore, he can begin to shake loose from the domination of Ahab's revengeful purpose. Describing the sensation of squeezing the lumps of sperm into liquid with a circle of sailors, he says, "I forgot all about our horrible oath; in that inexpressible sperm, I washed my hands and my heart of it; . . . while bathing in that bath, I felt divinely free from all ill-will, or petulance, or malice, of any sort whatsoever" (ch. 94). All morning Ishmael squeezed until he felt himself almost melted into the sperm. Inadvertently, squeezing the other sailor's hands, mistaking their hands for the crystallized lumps of sperm, he felt "an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling." He goes on about the rapture of this experience, and then he adds the following evaluation: "Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm for ever! For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity" (ch. 94).

Ishmael moves from his initial anger and irritability to acceptance but without submitting to defeat.<sup>17</sup> Ishmael's acceptance of the absurdity of life, based on his experience at sea, is represented by a series of symbolic acts. Ishmael learns about necessity, free will, and the interdependence of man at sea. The reader learns through seeing Ishmael and Queequeg together at the Spouter-Inn; on the back of the whale, in the

water, and in the life boat all night during the first lowering; on both ends of the monkey-rope; and squeezing sperm. Although the symbolism of the bed shared by Ishmael and Queequeg is that of binding as is the monkey-rope, the peril of being bound to someone on a monkey-rope at sea is extreme. Being at one end of a monkey-rope heightens the terror of being at sea where one's life is already in jeopardy. To be bound to another is to be dependent on the other; and, obviously, the arrangement is reciprocal. The interdependence requires commitment and responsibility. Only through free will can one make the commitment which encompasses and surpasses free will. Merely being at sea aboard the Pequod is an example of the interdependence of man.

The sea in Moby-Dick with its multitude of ambiguities--of life and death, kindness and cruelty, beauty and terror, elusiveness and inclusiveness and with its timeless and formless nature--represents Melville's view of the human predicament. Melville accepts life's ambiguities and the ensuing relativity and absurdity in the human existence. Melville's acceptance of relativity and of multiple views precludes the Christian heaven and the archetype of paradise regained. Melville's tragic hero does not live in a moral universe where justice prevails. Morality is not dictated by dogma or by the easy conformity of the lee shore's belief in absolutes. Yet Melville's world is not an amoral one. The ethics come from experience in a world which is like the sea, full of incongruities. This morality is poignantly represented by the sole survivor, Ishmael. He survives and his survival symbolizes the need of men for other men. Ishmael learns his need for others from his friendship with Queequeg whose coffin serves



as his lifebuoy. "Morality is now an internal necessity for mutual love that all renegades, mariners, castaways, bastards, orphans, and slaves co-operatively share."<sup>18</sup>

Auden's third point is that the sea is where the decisive events and moments of eternal choice occur. In Moby-Dick the moments of eternal choice are controlled by Ahab. In chapter 36 Ahab orders Starbuck to send everybody aft. When the entire ship's company is assembled, Ahab tells the men, skillfully, so as to enlist their support and enthusiasm, that he is chasing the White Whale. "'I'll chase him [Moby Dick] round perdition's flames before I give him up. And this is what ye have shipped for, men! to chase that white whale . . . till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out'" (ch. 36). Starbuck questions the practicality and the advisability of a chase for vengeance, saying, "'Vengeance on a dumb brute! that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous'" (ch. 36). Ahab's reply, in part, is, "'Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me'" (ch. 36). The chapter ends with the parody of a religious ritual, and Ahab concludes, "'Ha! Starbuck! but the deed is done! Yon ratifying sun now waits to sit upon it. Drink, ye harpooners! drink and swear, ye men that man the deathful whaleboat's bow--Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death'" (ch. 36). Ahab's choice is made, against the opposition of Starbuck. The intensity of his determination is underscored by the religious parody.

Blasphemy, a dramatic ritual in Moby-Dick, is only words in Mardi. Taji says, "'I prayed not, but blasphemed'" (ch. 189) when he thinks he

sees "the corpse drifting by: and striking 'gainst our prow, as if to hinder. Then, then! my heart grew hard, like flint; and black, like night; . . . death-damps chilled my brow" (ch. 189). The idea of blasphemy exists in Mardi, but in Moby-Dick the harpooners actually drink and swear death to the White Whale.

Ishmael comments on how adroitly Ahab elicits the desired response from the crew. Ishmael cannot say what it is inside himself and the sailors aboard the Pequod that responds to the terrifying lure of the White Whale. He explains that Ahab was "intent on an audacious, immitigable, and supernatural revenge." But why the crew went along and why they took his hate as theirs, he did not know. "How to their unconscious understandings" the White Whale became their enemy he could not say. "All this to explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go. The subterranean miner that works in us all, how can one tell whether leads his shaft by the ever shifting, muffled sound of his pick? Who does not feel the irresistible arm drag?" (ch. 41). Ishmael does not attempt to explore the reasons, but he does acknowledge the inexplicable and ambivalent feelings.

The parallel between Taji and Ahab rests on their monomania. The White Whale represents evil to Ahab, and his monomania is his fixed determination to kill Moby Dick in revenge. However, the whale is also a real whale, a powerful antagonist, an inhabitant of the indifferent, pitiless sea. The whale tore off one of Ahab's legs, and Ahab is furious because he wears a "dead stump," an artificial leg made of ivory. "Moby Dick had reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field . . . ever since that almost fatal encounter, Ahab had

cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale . . . he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them" (ch. 41).

Taji in Mardi clearly foreshadows Ahab in his aspiration, in not learning from experience, and in his defiance. Taji's monomania is the result of his defiance as is Ahab's. Ahab's heroic defiance is not only the final, furious activity of self destruction but also an awareness of ultimate inadequacy. In the chapter, "The Candles," Ahab, addressing the corposants, reveals the origin of his brand as well as its meaning.

Oh! thou clear spirit of clear fire; whom on these seas I as Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee, that to this hour I bear the scar; I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance. To neither love nor reverence wilt thou be kind; and e'en for hate thou canst but kill; and all are killed. No fearless fool now fronts thee. I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here. (ch. 119)

To compare the heroic giant, Ahab, chasing the mighty White Whale with the puny, passive Taji following the phantom, Yillah, is to underscore the different function the sea serves in these two novels. Ahab seeks to destroy the White Whale whereas Taji seeks to find Yillah, and both destroy others and themselves in the process. It seems that Taji does not grasp his ultimate inadequacy with the same profundity or pride as does Ahab.

On the second day of the chase, after the Parsee is discovered missing, Starbuck again pleads with Ahab to stop the chase. Ahab

answers: "'But in this matter of the whale, be the front of the face to me as the palm of this hand--a lipless, unfeatured blank. Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders. Look thou, underling! that thou obeyest mine'" (ch. 134). Ahab's monomania prevails.

Auden's last point is that an abiding destination is unknown even if it may exist. Ahab, like Tommo, Taji, and Babbalanja, does not know his destination. Tommo did not know where he was going when he signed up to go whaling aboard the Dolly, and he did not realize he was looking for paradise regained when he deserted the ship. Exchanging the problems of civilization for those of the primitive society, Tommo does learn that an earthly paradise in a primitive society does not exist. When the novel ends, Tommo is out at sea, presumably ready to begin his quest again. Neither Taji nor Babbalanja knows his destination, nor does either one find what he is seeking. In Moby-Dick the unknown destination is the destruction of civilized, industrialized society, if the Pequod is taken as a microcosm. Ahab's monomania predicts the outcome because he cannot comprehend his obsession. Not even at the end, when he begins to get a glimmer of understanding, can Ahab change and prevent the destruction. Ahab, thinking about his wife and son, says: "'What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it, what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural loving and longings, I so keep pushing and crowding, and jamming in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that

lifts this arm? . . . we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike. And all the time, lo! that smiling sky, and this unfounded sea!" (ch. 132). But even after Ahab begins to realize the desperate nature of his madness, he refuses to take responsibility for his actions and their inevitable consequences. He blames fate. But Melville is not Ahab, and Ishmael survives. As the sea is, literally, the grave for the Pequod and all who were aboard save only Ishmael, the womb-grave duality of the sea is manifest. Ishmael's life is saved because Queequeg had suggested his coffin be sealed and hoisted as a lifebuoy. Ishmael's survival may be considered symbolic of Melville's hope and a positive, if limited, affirmation of life.

## Chapter V

### Conclusion

In Typee, Melville's sea adventure becomes a quest for paradise in a primitive society on a garden-island, but reality always has a double aspect. There is evidence in Typee of Melville's interest in the contradictions between appearance and reality, the contrast between cultures plus the duality within each one, and his quest for the complete man. The mindless, endless ritual of eating and sleeping without any intellectual communication drives Tommo to escape from the island to the open sea. The sea, including the garden-island as part of the sea, reflects Melville's vain hope of finding paradise regained in a primitive society.

The unsuccessful search for Yillah throughout the Mardian islands represents Melville's further attempt to find paradise regained. In Mardi the sea does not integrate the various searches of the different characters. The sea is no more than a setting for Babbalanja's intellectual discourse. Taji's pursuit of Yillah probes deeper into man's difficulty in comprehending his inner self. Babbalanja's and Taji's searches are not sufficiently integrated, and the novel does not organize Melville's diffuse thoughts. Because the sea has a minor role, it does not function as an antagonist; with no antagonist there is no conflict. The absence of conflict in this instance precludes integration of the various searches. The result is a lack of coherence. The hope for paradise regained underlies the concept of Yillah, and Taji is still clinging to that futile hope at the end of the novel.

In Moby-Dick, Melville is no longer searching for paradise regained; he is facing the complexity of life. Life on a whaling ship at sea is an appropriate symbol for Melville's view of the human predicament because his acceptance of the inconclusive, the contradictory, and the uncertain is based on experience at sea on a whaling vessel. The sea and its inhabitants are a powerful adversary to all the main characters in this novel. The novel is coherent and unified. Although the sea is elusive, it is inclusive of all the ambiguities of all the half-understood fears, aspirations, and ideals of man. As Ahab reveals his view of life through his monomaniac, revengeful chase of the White Whale, Melville discloses his attitude through the happenings in an exciting sea story. Melville is at his best when he lets the concrete event, at sea, speak directly. His perception, based on experience with the unpredictable sea, acknowledges the inevitability of change. The endless motion of the sea reflects his belief that there is no fixed repose and that man is condemned to constant change. The sea adventure, the events on the whaling expedition, and the philosophical implications are skillfully and inextricably woven together into the rich texture of Moby-Dick.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, Meridian Books, first Meridian printing April 1963), p. 188.

<sup>2</sup>Wysten Hugh Auden, The Enchafed Flood or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), pp. 11-13.

<sup>3</sup>Harrison Hayford, ed., Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1968), p. 300.

<sup>4</sup>John Parke, "Seven Moby-Dicks," New England Quarterly 28 (September, 1955), 319-338.

<sup>5</sup>Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter: Self and Experience in the Writings of Herman Melville (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), passim.

<sup>6</sup>William Ellery Sedgwick, Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1944), p. 12

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>8</sup>Citations in this paper from Typee hereafter will give the chapter number in the text. Herman Melville, Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1968), ch. 1.

<sup>9</sup>Auden, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>10</sup>Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957), p. 51.

<sup>11</sup>Citations in this paper from Mardi hereafter will give the chapter number in the text. Herman Melville, Mardi: and a Voyage Thither (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1970), ch. 1.

<sup>12</sup>Stern, op. cit., pp. 66-149.

<sup>13</sup>Ishmael's final observation is that "in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least, shift, his conceit of attainable felicity" (ch. 94).

<sup>14</sup>Citations in this paper from Moby-Dick hereafter will give the chapter number in the text. Herman Melville, Moby-Dick or



The Whale (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), ch. 1.

<sup>15</sup>Paul Brodtkorb, Jr., Ishmael's White World: A Phenomenological Reading of Moby-Dick (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1965), p. 24.

<sup>16</sup>Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter: Self and Experience in the Writings of Herman Melville (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 204-209.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 240-252.

<sup>18</sup>Milton R. Stern, "Melville's Tragic Imagination: The Hero without a Home," Patterns of Commitment in American Literature, ed. Marston La France (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 46.

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