ABSTRACT

Melville's Unfolding Selves:
Identity Formation in *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre*

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Mardi, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre* share striking parallels in form and content: each is narrated by an introspective yet adventurous narrator who encounters various triggers for his development, including authorities, mysterious people and phenomena, and evidence of the social contracts binding society together. All three novels juxtapose conflicting ideologies and culminate in an ambiguous integration of the narrator-protagonist into the larger world. Throughout the narration process, the narrator gradually progresses toward knowledge of self and world by learning from mistakes and altering behavior. These narrative characteristics are not drawn wholly from Melville's imagination and experience, but rather typify a European genre, the Bildungsroman, that Melville read closely around 1850. Before now, scholars have assumed or argued that Bildungsromane did not exist in America as early as the mid-nineteenth century, with some scholars even denying that Bildungsromane can be written in an American context. However, this study shows that Melville wrote three novels

that draw upon the conventions of that genre while revising them to depict a uniquely American process of identity formation, one in which no stable authority figure defined the path to maturity. Like America herself, the American Bildungsroman protagonist had to develop a means of self-invention.

Melville's major revision to the Bildungsroman is in his modification of the "portrait self" motif. In the European Bildungsromane Melville read, the portrait self is a text or image presented to the protagonist by an authority figure with the intent of showing the protagonist either who he is or who he should strive to be. The portrait self crystallizes the pedagogy designed by the protagonist's father or guardian and is intended to motivate and focus the young man's efforts toward positive change. In Melville's American Bildungsromane, the narrator-protagonist constructs his own portrait self: in *Mardi,* he constructs a dream self (Taji); in *Moby-Dick,* a remembered self (young Ishmael on the *Pequod*); and in *Pierre,* a fictional self (the character Pierre). As each narrator imagines and describes his portrait self's formation, he himself is formed. The protagonists strive increasingly toward independent self-invention but find themselves still entangled in their cultural inheritance. Melville's conception of identity formation challenges the still-current view that humans are capable of absolute self-invention; paradoxically, it also enables today's readers to see that, however environmental, social, or political factors may work against one's cultivation, resources for constructing one's own pedagogy are always available.

Melville's Unfolding Selves: Identity Formation in *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre*

by

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DEDICATION

To the parents who shaped and the siblings who shared,

and to Seth and Abe, who are the unambiguously happy ending of my *Bildung*

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all," writes Herman Melville to Nathaniel Hawthorne around June 1, 1851, adding that he dates his life from his twenty-fifth year. "Three weeks have scarcely passed, at any time between then and now, that I have not unfolded within myself" (*Correspondence* 193). Twenty-five had indeed been a significant age for Melville; it was then, in 1844, that he had left behind the life of a common sailor and begun shaping his experiences at sea into fantastic tales for his family and friends. If ships were a "Yale College and [a] Harvard" for Melville as they were for his most famous protagonist, Ishmael, then it was not until Melville graduated from college and began narratizing his college experiences, and reading books that helped him to make sense of those experiences, that his development really began. Writing this letter at age thirty-two, he could recognize that turn to narration as the fulcrum of his life, the impetus of his development. He understands that development in the Romantic terms of an unfolding plant, a metaphor that also appealed to the Transcendentalists.

Still, amidst the sense of flourishing in Melville's letter lurks an intuition of coming decay. Despite, or because of, his rapid development over the previous six years, Melville realized that this process was doomed to end soon.

He writes, "But I feel that I am now come to the inmost leaf of the bulb, and that shortly the flower must fall to the mould" (193). He compares himself to "one of those seeds taken out of the Egyptian Pyramids, which, after being three thousand years a seed and nothing but a seed, being planted in English soil, it developed itself, grew to greenness, and then fell to mould."[1] At the heart of Melville's assertions lie profound questions about human development: how do we define and measure human growth, and how does growth differ from stagnation or regression? How long can inevitable decay be staved off, and by what means? A deeper reflection upon the specific conditions that prompted Melville's sense of growth raises still another question: To what extent is human growth influenced or regulated by the self's encounters with the external world, and to what extent is growth an unfolding of already present qualities? At this point in his writing career, as Melville reflects upon his own continual internal "unfold[ing]" (193), he also works out answers to these questions in his writings. Retrospective reflection upon one's past life and process of development is a key motif in the three major novels Melville wrote within five years of this letter to Hawthorne: *Mardi* (1849), *Moby-Dick* (1851), and *Pierre* (1852). Each of these three

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[1] If Melville senses at this moment in 1851 that he will not long be in full bloom, he also senses that he is still, if fleetingly, in full intellectual flower. He tells Hawthorne that he can think of Fame as he never could one year ago, and he can re-read Solomon and now see "deeper and deeper and unspeakable meanings in him." As Higgins and Parker point out, this mood of impending doom did not last long; he began work on *Pierre* soon after completing *Moby-Dick*. For context on this letter, see Higgins and Parker's introduction to *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Pierre*.

novels was, for Melville, a bid for literary greatness, and all three chronicle his own growth as well as that of his narrators.

In *Moby-Dick*, for example, Ishmael's motivation for writing his narrative is a need for retrospective self-reflection that is similar to the need that Melville displays in his letter to Hawthorne. For Ishmael, the very act of constructing his remembered experiences into a narrative becomes a means of growing toward knowledge of himself and his place in the world. Ishmael writes in the first chapter that when he sits down to write the narrative that will become *Moby-Dick*, he does not yet know why he ever took it "into [his] head to go on a whaling voyage." The only one who can answer that question is "the invisible police officer of the Fates, who has the constant surveillance of me, and secretly dogs me, and influences me in some unaccountable way" (7). Yet Ishmael already senses, even this early in his storytelling exercise, that the act of telling his story will enable him not only to remember what has happened but also to situate it within a cosmic context: "I think I can see a little into the springs and motives which being cunningly presented to me under various disguises, induced me to set about performing the part I did," he muses, as he first begins his recollections of that part he performed. He adds that these "springs and motives" also "cajol[ed] me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased freewill and discriminating judgment" (7). Yet, at key points in his narrative, Ishmael will recognize the role that his own agency played in shaping his life. One of Ishmael's purposes in writing about his adventure on

the *Pequod* is to come to an understanding of how his own experiences fit into the plan of a sovereign God, or into the inevitable workings of a great cosmic machine, and to understand how his own will matters even in the midst of powerful determinative forces.

Both the form and the content of Ishmael's reflection quoted above echo several of the European Bildungsromane, or novels of formation, that Melville read around the time he wrote *Moby-Dick.* The comic-philosophical language recalls the efforts of Tristram Shandy to puzzle out the mysterious causes of his misfortunes in Laurence Sterne's 1760s Bildungsroman *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*. The image of a man retrospectively realizing that he has only imagined he was acting upon his own agency recalls the scene late in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 1796 Bildungsroman *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* when Wilhelm learns that he has been watched over by the paternalistic members of the Tower Society during what he had thought were his independent youthful adventures. When Wilhelm reads the scroll in which the Tower Society members have recorded Wilhelm's various mistakes and misadventures, he recognizes that he is beholding a "portrait self" painted for him by older, more experienced men, and he will adjust his growth according to the self-realizations made possible by his beholding of the portrait self. Ishmael's ironic distance from the experiences of his younger self even echoes the tone of the fictional, anonymous editor in Thomas Carlyle's 1833-34 work *Sartor Resartus,* who recounts the life of philosopher Diogenes Teufelsdröckh. As will be shown,

when Melville wrote *Moby-Dick* in 1850-51, he had read not only Sterne's, Goethe's, and Carlyle's Bildungsromane, but also at least two others, François Rabelais's mid-sixteenth-century *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and Charles Dickens's 1849-50 *David Copperfield*. These Bildungsromane would enter the "intellectual chowder" of Melville's imagination, to borrow Evert Duyckinck's phrase for *Moby-Dick*, and influence Melville's writing of *Moby-Dick* and of the philosophical novels he wrote before and after it, *Mardi* and *Pierre.* In writing *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre,* Melville constructed formation narratives that both draw upon and revise the conventions of the European Bildungsroman.[2]

In the five years from 1848 to 1852 during which he was rapidly composing his three major philosophical novels, Melville read at least five novels that scholars of the European Bildungsroman have identified as exemplars of this tradition. Around 1848, as he worked on *Mardi,* he read Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* novels, of which the second volume is considered by Bakhtin to be a major early Bildungsroman because it traces the development of the giant Pantagruel from birth to his ascent to the throne of the Dipsodes. As Melville finished writing *Mardi*, he read various works by Carlyle, perhaps *Sartor*

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[2] I do not argue that these five authors' novels fully represent "the" European Bildungsroman, especially given their historical and national differences. However, for the sake of this study, these novels will be taken as the European Bildungsroman as it existed to Melville. Also, I am not excluding the possibility that earlier American formation narratives are Bildungsromane, and so will not argue throughout that Melville "invented" the American Bildungsroman. Although scholars have long disagreed on what exactly constitutes a Bildungsroman, they do agree that a Bildungsroman depicts three things: human subjectivity, human emergence, and the tension between individual and group identity.

Resartus, which he certainly read in 1850.[3] In 1849, while in London, Melville read Sterne's *Tristram Shandy.*[4] In 1850, as he worked on *Moby-Dick,* Melville read two more Bildungsromane, Goethe's *Meister Wilhelm's Apprenticeship* and its sequel *Meister Wilhelm's Travels.* He borrowed copies of Carlyle's translations of both novels from Evert Duyckinck's library.[5] Also in 1850, Melville definitely read or re-read Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. He probably heard Dickens's *David Copperfield* read aloud with his family in early 1851, as he worked on *Moby-Dick,* after his wife Lizzie bought a copy.[6] Evidence external to Melville's texts thus demonstrates that, as he worked on *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre,* he read these five Bildungsromane by Rabelais, Sterne, Goethe, Carlyle, and Dickens. According to scholars of the Bildungsroman, each of these five Bildungsroman

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[3] The evidence for this fact is that, before leaving on a trip for Europe in 1849, Melville asked his father-in-law Lemuel Shaw to get him a letter of introduction from Emerson to Carlyle so that he, Melville, could meet Carlyle while he was in England. Melville was not able to meet him. (Emerson was responsible for Melville's first introduction to the work of Carlyle because he brought *Sartor Resartus* to American publication in 1836 and wrote the Preface.) According to Alexander Walsh, Melville borrowed *Sartor Resartus* from Evert Duyckinck in 1850. Melville in 1850 also read a volume of Carlyle's German Romances, which he borrowed from Evert Duyckinck on two separate occasions (*Melville Log* 376).

[4] Melville's copy of *Tristram Shandy* was either owned or borrowed, and though the book itself has been lost, we know that Melville read it because he says so in his London diary.

[5] Goethe's two Bildungsromane will here be treated as a single novel for the sake of simplicity.

[6] Augusta wrote in a January 16 letter from Arrowhead that the family had just begun reading the novel aloud together. See the "Historical Note" to the 1998 edition of *Moby-Dick,* Edited by Harrison Hayford, Thomas Tanselle, and Hershel Parker. The editors note that Melville may have been unsociable and not listened in on the reading (627). Still, the novel was too widely read and discussed to be ignored. It had been published in installments from May 1849 to November 1850, and read eagerly by the Duyckinck brothers, among others of Melville's friends; the brothers wrote enthusiastically about this novel in January 1850 as Melville traveled back from England (Parker 704).

authors is linked to the ones before him by a chain of influence that extends from Rabelais, to Sterne, to Goethe, to Carlyle, to Dickens. Each author was influenced by the authors who preceded him, and in most cases mentions his predecessors by name in his own Bildungsroman. One cannot help but speculate that Melville, a close reader of these authors, noticed and studied this chain of influence as he worked out his conception of the genre. One must recognize, however, that although Melville must have had a conception of the genre now called the Bildungsroman, he probably never would have heard the term since it was not popularized until 1906. (Rabelais, Sterne, and Goethe never heard the term either, and Carlyle and Dickens may not have.)[7] While Melville was familiar with other kinds of formation narratives—including Biblical stories, spiritual autobiographies, and American exemplary autobiographies by the likes of Benjamin Franklin—the profound influence of the European Bildungsroman tradition on Melville has never been properly recognized. It is this tradition that can reveal the striking parallels among Melville's three philosophical novels and show how Melville drew on European tradition as he constructed self-consciously American formation narratives.

Of course, Melville was no slave to genre, and he adapted the conventions of the Bildungsroman to American needs and concerns. As this study will show,

[7] During the genre's first flowering, from the late eighteenth through mid-nineteenth centuries, readers of the many American literary journals would be hard-pressed to find a single use of the term "Bildungsroman." A search of major periodicals such as the *Literary World, American Review,* and *Democratic Review,* as well as American Periodicals Series, yields no articles or reviews that use the term.

Melville revised the Bildungsroman genre by adapting a key motif from the European Bildungsroman—what I call the "portrait self" motif—to a nation of readers that tended to conceive of human development as a process of self-invention. Although no scholar of the Bildungsroman has studied the portrait self motif specifically in the terms used here, the motif is clearly central to all the Bildungsromane that Melville read. Essentially, the portrait self is a text or physical image of or for the protagonist that is "painted" by an authority figure for the purpose of giving the protagonist a sense of what he "looks" like—or should look like—and therefore, a sense of how to mature. The portrait self enables the protagonist to see himself with some objectivity so that he can focus his efforts at self-cultivation and maturation. In the European Bildungsromane Melville read, the portrait self is a component of an educational scheme developed by the protagonist's father, mentor, or guide. I derive the term from the passage in *Wilhelm Meister* in which Wilhelm reads his life story in the Tower Society's scroll. This scroll shows Wilhelm an image of himself from outside himself, an image that he recognizes as different from the "second self" one sees in a mirror. The scroll shows Wilhelm "another self," as in a portrait. It is not an exact reflection of the self, but rather a depiction of the self by an observer (387). What is notable here is the distance between the subject and his portrait self: the scroll was written by virtual strangers without Wilhelm's knowledge, just as the novel about Wilhelm is narrated by one who is unknown to Wilhelm. Wilhelm has mixed feelings about gazing at his portrait self because recognizing one's

flaws is painful to one's pride, even as the existence of the portrait self affirms that one has value to the authorities who have bothered to paint the portrait. The narrator reflects that, when we are looking at ourselves in a portrait, "[W]e do not admit to all the traits, it is true, but we are pleased that a thoughtful mind and a great talent should have wished to portray us in this way, and that a picture of what we were still remains and that it can last longer than we ourselves" (387). Wilhelm recognizes that he must study his portrait self in order to grow; similarly, in each of the other European Bildungsromane that Melville read, the portrait self is a key element in the protagonist's growth. In *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* the giant king Gargantua writes a long letter of instruction to his son Pantagruel, offering himself as a portrait self that models the sort of king Pantagruel should become. In *Tristram Shandy,* Tristram's father Walter labors over the *Tristrapoedia,* a volume that details how Tristram should be educated, as well as over the decision of whom to hire as young Tristram's tutor because this tutor will be the portrait self upon whose demeanor and morality young Tristram will model his own. In *Sartor Resartus,* young Diogenes Teufelsdröckh does not know his birth-father, for he has been left by a mysterious stranger with the Futterals, a couple in a small village. However, his name—derived from the scrap of silk in which he has been wrapped—operates much like the portrait self in the other Bildungsromane. The name "Diogenes Teufelsdröckh" means "God-born devil's dung." The Editor quotes Teufelsdröckh as saying that a name is the "earliest garment you wrap round the Earth-visiting Me; to which it thenceforth

cleaves, more tenaciously (for there are Names that have lasted nigh thirty centuries) than the very skin." Once the name is applied to the baby, it sends "mystic influences … inwards, even to the centre; especially in those plastic first-times, when the whole soul is yet infantine, soft, and the invisible seed-grain will grow to be an all overshadowing tree!" Just as the old proverb says "Call one a thief and he will steal," so too, "Call one Diogenes Teufelsdröckh and he will open the Philosophy of Clothes" (67-8).[8] In *David Copperfield,* the young orphan David has never met his father, whose namesake he is, but he is nevertheless profoundly shaped by the library his father has left behind as though on purpose to educate him, to provide fictional protagonists who can serve as models of whom young David should become.[9]

In Melville's Bildungsromane, unlike in the European Bildungsromane he read, the protagonists "paint" their own portrait selves, and they do so by constructing the narratives that the reader holds in his or her hands. In *Mardi,* the narrator's portrait self is a dream self, whom he calls Taji; in *Moby-Dick,* his portrait self is a past self, the young Ishmael who voyaged on the *Pequod*; and in *Pierre*, that portrait self is the character Pierre, a fictional self whom the narrator

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[8] Each of the European Bildungsroman heroes is given a highly significant name, in start contrast to Taji's and Ishmael's assertive self-naming.

[9]The founder of physiognomy, John Caspar Lavater, believed that a portrait of a face was as good or better a surface in which to read truth as the face itself (Dillingham 151). This fact, which Melville must have known, resonates with Melville's decision to have his narrators construct "portrait selves" to make possible their learning. They each discover truth by intently studying their portrait selves. Goethe's concept of the portrait self may very well have had to do with physiognomy; Goethe knew Lavater well and wrote ambivalently about the theologian in his autobiography (Dillingham 152-54).

constructs in an imaginary story-world. The narrator of each of these novels constructs and describes the formation of his portrait self and in so doing he himself is formed. As Melville shifts the role of portrait self-painting to the protagonist himself, he omits the protagonist's earthly father or human authority figure whose responsibility it is, in the European Bildungsroman, to construct the hero's educational scheme, or put another way, to paint the portrait self that gives the protagonist a painful image of what to correct in himself. An obvious problem emerges: if the protagonist paints his own portrait self, how can he move toward an objective view of himself? For Melville, there is no simple answer to this question. However, as this study will show, each of Melville's protagonists constructs his portrait self by drawing upon materials from outside himself. He encounters three categories of development-triggers: he has input from various authority figures, is checked by encounters with various human and non-human unknowns, and is bound by a social contract. Melville's trio of American Bildungsromane work toward a conception of how identity formation can happen in a nation of people who have cast off the past but who remain more shaped by it than they often realize. Melville revises the conventions of the Bildungsroman, a European genre, to create American Bildungsromane that can inspire and guide the development of the "orphaned" nation of Americans.

The American writer whom Melville admired most deeply at this point in his life, Nathaniel Hawthorne, also characterized human development as a process that was catalyzed by one's observation of a self-constructed portrait self.

In the sketch "Foot-prints on the Sea-shore," Hawthorne's speaker describes a day's ramble on a beach during which he experienced moral development and learned something about his place among humanity by making, and then retracing, tracks along the sea-shore.[10] After half a day's pacing in one direction, he finds it pleasant and profitable to retrace his footsteps and "recall the whole mood and occupation of the mind during the former passage." His track of footprints guides him "with an observing consciousness through every unconscious wandering of thought and fancy" (563). He sees the different places where he had trailed a long sea-weed behind him, found a horse-shoe, dug up pebbles, and examined a jelly-fish. He explains the moral to his reader: "Thus, by tracking our footprints in the sand, we track our own nature in its wayward course, and steal a glance upon it, when it never dreams of being so observed. Such glances always make us wiser" (563). He concludes keeping company with the sea, the wind, and the creatures there "works an effect upon a man's character, as if he had been admitted to the society of creatures that are not mortal" (569). He is able to experience growth not merely because he has walked along the sea-shore, but also because he has re-traced his steps and observed in his imagination as his portrait-self kept company with the sea-shore—much like

[10] This sketch was printed in 1842 in the second volume of *Twice-Told Tales.* The first volume appeared in 1837. Melville wrote of this collection to Every Duyckinck that "Their deeper meanings are worthy of a Brahmin. Still there is something lacking—a good deal lacking to the plump sphericity of the man. What is that?—He does'nt [sic] patronise the butcher—he needs roast-beef, done rare." Hawthorne himself had read Goethe by the time he wrote *Twice-Told Tales.* His last novel, *The Marble Faun* (1860), has been compared to *Wilhelm Meister.* For more on the influence of *TTT* on Melville, see Rosemary Franklin.

Melville's narrators, metaphorically re-tracing their footsteps as they construct narratives about their portrait selves. As in the Bildungsroman, the change wrought in him is both moral and socially oriented: "And when, at noontide, I tread the crowded streets, the influence of this day will still be felt; so that I shall walk among men kindly and as a brother, with affection and sympathy, but yet shall not melt into the indistinguishable mass of humankind. I shall think my own thoughts, and feel my own emotions, and possess my individuality unviolated" (570). As Hawthorne's essay shows, Melville was not alone among American writers in conceiving of human development as aided by one's own construction of a portrait self, and indeed, Hawthorne is the American writer whom Melville admired most deeply at this point in his life. In 1850, after reading *Mosses from an Old Manse,* Melville famously wrote a review in which he praises Hawthorne's "fruits of self-knowledge and self-mastery" (Dillingham 402). Melville saw in Hawthorne his ideal man, a man who had "the characteristics of a seeker into self who had explored the vast and beautiful terrain and unleashed some of the resources to be found there" (Dillingham 405). Both Hawthorne and Melville regarded encounters with nature, with the physical world outside the self, as being conducive to growth and development.[11]

[11] Other nature sketches by Hawthorne show similar learning experiences in nature. For example, in "My Kinsman Major Molyneux," the protagonist's memories of his past self contribute to his development in the present.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, unquestionably a key American predecessor to Hawthorne and Melville, similarly viewed nature as a sort of portrait self with which a person can have enlightening encounters. In his 1836 essay *Nature*, Emerson expressed many of the central tenets of Transcendentalism that would animate Melville and Hawthorne's New England for decades. He wrote that, "[T]he whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind. The laws of nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass" (137). He saw Nature as "a remoter and inferior incarnation of God, a projection of God in the unconscious." Because Nature is not subject to the human will, as the human body is, it can serve as "the present expositor of the divine mind" to human beings; it is "a fixed point whereby we may measure our departure." Although humans are, in their degenerate state, "strangers in nature" just as they are "aliens from God," they can regain their former proportions by communing with nature (152). Put in terms of *Bildung,* people's encounters with the "portrait self" that is Nature gives them crucial information about who they are and who they should be; this information is necessary for the development of their potential in the cosmic scheme of things.

The motif of the portrait self—which in the European Bildungsroman can take the form of literal portraits, letters, mirrors, or other documents—is so important to the Bildungsroman because of the metaphysics beneath the concept of *Bildung* that the European Bildungsroman embodied. Jerrold E. Seigel explains that the characteristically German view of life as an organic process of

Bildung, or formation, is based on the premise that the self and the world are isomorphic. The formation of the self depends upon activity and engagement in society because this activity and engagement "help[s] bring the self to cognizance of its own needs and powers because the persons and conditions it encounter[s] there help[s] to reveal the inner structure of its own being" (333). Seigel compares the individual's enlightening encounters with the larger world to a mirroring effect. We come to know who we are by seeing parts of ourselves reflected back to us: "Coming upon these mirrors in the world alters the self: hitherto it could find itself only by way of impulsive, instinctual, spontaneous action, now it can know itself by reflection on its own being. The conscious self-awareness that had so far been an impediment to *Bildung* becomes the vehicle of its further growth" (359).[12] Seigel's view is similar to Emerson's view of the self in nature, but for Emerson, Nature was a means to knowledge of God, not just of self.

Considering Seigel's explanation of the metaphysics upon which the secular concept of *Bildung* was based, as well as the etymology of the term *Bildung* as originally meaning "picture" or "image," it becomes clear why the portrait self is such a central motif in any narrative that describes a process of *Bildung*. Whether the portrait self is painted by another, older character, as it is

[12] Seigel's 2005 study of the evolution of the concept of the self in Western thought examines important figures' differing views of the self's potential to "achieve coherence and consistency in the face of inner tensions and external pressures." In his analysis of *Wilhelm Meister,* Seigel identifies two universalizable phases of development: first he is in a state of "pre-reflective existence," and then, by means of "the self's activity," he becomes a "reflective being" (359). Melville's protagonists can be said to progress through these two stages as well.

for the protagonists of Rabelais, Sterne, Goethe, Carlyle, and Dickens, or whether the portrait self is painted by oneself, as it is for each of Melville's protagonists, the fact remains that in order for the self to develop, it must have the opportunity to observe images of itself or of its ideal self in the world outside its immediate subjective experience. Although Melville's protagonists paint their own portrait selves, they are still not doomed to absolute subjectivity because the portrait self is inherently the work of an observer—even if that observer is the self. The protagonist constructs his portrait self by using materials from outside himself, including authorities, unknowns, and social contracts. All three categories of encounter draw him from subjective to objectively valid experience.

That a literary writer in antebellum America should try to develop a uniquely American version of a European genre is hardly surprising. Scholars have fully established the fact that Melville's generation of writers was consciously attempting to construct an American body of literature that was worthy of and suitable to the new nation. Melville himself expressed a plea for such literature in his review "Hawthorne and his Mosses," no doubt after having read newspaper essays calling for a new, democratic literature free of European influence (Parker 155). Moreover, the novel genre would have been the obvious choice for a would-be literary star eager to contribute to the new American literature. In Nina Baym's study of the antebellum America reading public, conducted through exhaustive research into book reviews of the period, she found that the American reading public was far from hostile to fiction, as is

commonly assumed; that the preeminent question readers would ask of a long work of fiction was whether it was a novel; and that the key criterion that readers would use for determining whether a text was a novel was "the presence or absence of a unifying plot" (270).[13] Melville's letters show how concerned he was that his books be popular and the extent to which he agonized over how to calculate them for popularity. So, even though the antebellum American reading public rejected *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre*, and much of Melville's later work, he had hoped that these novels would have the wide popularity of Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper.[14]

Mardi, Moby-Dick, *and* Pierre *as a Triptych*

The profound interrelationships among Melville's three Bildungsromane will become clearer as this study proceeds, but their superficial similarities in form and content are obvious almost at first glance. All three novels focus on a protagonist's outer adventures and inner reflections, and all are narrated

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[13] Baym explains that any long fiction without such a plot—without this means of grabbing and retaining the reader's interest—was seen by antebellum American readers as being of mixed genre and therefore artistically inferior. The works of Melville and Hawthorne were, by the antebellum American definition, not novels at all. Thus the unpopularity these authors suffered resulted not from a public distaste for fiction, but rather from the fact that these authors did not write what the public saw as novels.

[14] This study will refer to Melville's works as "novels" throughout, to emphasize their status as Bildungsromane (since this is a sub-genre of the novel.) However, some debate exists as to whether the term "romance" is a more appropriate label for Melville's fictions.

retrospectively by the protagonist himself.[15] All three novels take the protagonist through physical space, introducing to him puzzling new people, places, and events who contribute to the protagonist's understanding of the wider world. All three novels culminate in a clash of ideals or philosophical systems, and all three conclude ambiguously. Besides these broad parallels, the texts are also united by shared images: a whale-ship and a terrifying white shark in *Mardi* presage the *Pequod* and the white whale in *Moby-Dick;* a meditation on the mysterious Kraken in *Moby-Dick* presages Melville's "kraken book," *Pierre*; a description of a "profounder emanation" in *Pierre*—a mysterious and un-systematized text that is the opposite of a "common" novel—fits not only *Pierre* but also *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick.* All three novels mention by name various ancient and modern philosophers, from Plato to Kant; all three alternate between descriptions of the material world and philosophical contemplations inspired by it; and all three question the sufficiency of empiricism, demonstrate the dangers of idealism, and settle on a form of epistemological and ethical skepticism. Each of the three first-person narrators draws attention to the enormous physical strain of crafting his text, a text that amounts to an account of, and an exercise in, his own formation. In essence, all three narrators repeatedly make clear to the reader that they are struggling with how to communicate the incommunicable

[15] The protagonist of *Pierre* might seem to be the character Pierre, but Chapter Five will argue that the novel's dynamic central character is in fact the intrusive, albeit elusive, narrator, who constructs Pierre's story for his own enlightenment.

fact of their own growth.[16] Each of these three narrators is self-conscious about his act of narration—about its effect on himself, and about its potential for enabling him to get at truth. In addition to these rather obvious parallels among *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre*, other, more nuanced similarities and differences will emerge in the individual discussions of each novel in the second, third, and fourth chapters of this study.

Melville's composition of the Bildungsroman triptych marked an epoch in his life. During the crucial five-year period from 1848 to 1852, Melville struggled both physically and philosophically. He was torn between a desire for literary popularity and prosperity on the one hand, and on the other hand, a desire to

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[16] In *Mardi,* the protagonist presents himself as a flame-tongued prophet, a Promethean figure who has been called to record these shocking truths he is witnessing: "My cheek blanches white while I write; I start at the scratch of my pen; my own mad brood of eagles devours me; fain would I unsay this audacity; but an iron-mailed hand clenches mine in a vice, and prints down every letter in my spite" (367-8). (Pierre also sees himself as a Prometheus as he is attempting to write his mature work [305]). For more on Taji's Promethean status, see Dillingham's *An Artist in the Rigging.* In *Moby-Dick,* Ishmael interrupts a description of the fossil whale to cry, "Friends, hold my arms! For in the mere act of penning my thoughts of this Leviathan, they weary me, and make me faint with their out-reaching comprehensiveness of sweep." He feels the necessity "to include the whole circle of the sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and mastodons, past, present, and to come, with all the revolving panoramas of empire on earth, and throughout the whole universe, not excluding its suburbs." He is "magnif[ied]" by his "large and liberal theme" (456). In the chapter "The Fountain," he interprets his treatise on the whale's misty spout—a sign of the whale's profundity—to point out that he has seen in the mirror a mist over his own head during his composition process. Once, while he was "composing a little treatise on Eternity," he placed a mirror before himself out of curiosity, "and ere long saw reflected there, a curious involved worming and undulation in the atmosphere over my head. The invariable moisture of my hair, while plunged in deep thought, after six cups of hot tea in my thin shingled attic, of an August noon; this seems an additional argument for the above supposition" (374). The image recalls Wilhelm Meister's gazing at his portrait self in the Tower Society's scroll. In *Pierre,* the narrator offers frequent disclaimers about how limited his ability is to divine Pierre's thoughts, emotions, and motivations; for example, he pauses in the midst of an attempted account of Pierre's explanation of his mother's hatred for one of his father's portraits to remark that he, the narrator, would only have some hope of "hold[ing] and defin[ing] the least shadowy of those reasons" if "when the mind roams up and down in the ever-elastic regions of evanescent invention, any definite form or feature can be assigned to the multitudinous shapes it creates out of the incessant dissolvings of its own prior creations" (82).

realize his artistic principles regardless of poverty and obscurity. Scholars have only recently discovered the depth of Melville's poverty from the early 1850s on, poverty that worsened steadily during the composition of these three novels—as did his torturous relationship with the reading public whose tastes be both did and did not want to satisfy. Melville was struggling toward intellectual development in these years as well. Excluded from the young gentleman's educational rites of passage—a college education and a Grand Tour of Europe—Melville found his own substitutes in the New York Public Library, in volumes borrowed from his father-in-law and others more affluent than himself, in conversations with literary friends, and of course in his memories of world travel as a common sailor before the mast. In 1849, he began reading deeply in Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, whence came most of Melville's exposure to non-Anglo philosophy and theology, particularly helping him to think through various solutions to the problem of evil and exposing him to criticism of the Bible.[17] By reading Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* and essays by Emerson, he learned about German philosophers like Kant, Schelling, and Hegel. All of these unconventional educational experiences between 1848 and 1852

[17] The dictionary, written by a French Calvinist in late seventeenth century Holland, was enormously influential on Enlightenment thinkers such as Diderot, Berkeley, and Hume. In it, Bayle includes an enormous variety of entries written from a skeptical, enigmatic, tolerant point of view. Melville bought the four volumes of Bayle's work in late March or early April of 1849, as reported in a letter to Evert Duyckinck on April 5. Melville wrote, playfully, that he intended "to lay the great folios side by side & go to sleep on them" (Sealts 39). Sealts identified, and Millicent Bell began to unpack the significance of, this biographical dictionary for Melville.

would influence how Melville depicted his young Bildungsroman heroes' formation processes.[18]

Beyond the texts' internal parallels, they can also be linked by their author's own attitude toward them, as distinct from his feelings about his other works. Scholars can reconstruct Melville's composition of and commentary on *Mardi, Moby Dick,* and *Pierre* from the few surviving letters and other documents from that five-year period, 1848 to 1852. Between *Mardi* and *Moby Dick* he quickly wrote two more straightforward works, *Redburn* and *White-Jacket,* for the money, as the negative reviews of *Mardi* piled up and the bills for his growing family did too. The two shorter works are a departure from the main trajectory of his writing career, which will be discussed shortly. Melville's comments on *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre* in his correspondence bear up the claim that he saw the texts as a group distinct from his other works. His descriptions of *Mardi* upon its completion in early 1848 show that he saw his third book as a profound departure from his second. Whereas he had called *Omoo* a "fitting successor" to *Typee,* his letters as he completed *Mardi* show his awareness that this is a very different book.[19] In a letter to publisher John Murray dated March 25, 1848,

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[18] Other scholars have also discussed this crucial five-year period. Nina Baym notes that Melville underwent two key transformations in his literary career, one while writing *Mardi* ("from entertainer to truth-teller") and the other during *Pierre* ("from truth-teller to truth-denier") (909). However, her frame for his trajectory assumes that Melville's later work evinces a skepticism, then a hatred, of fiction. Brian Yothers's interpretation of Melville's development in this period is that with *Mardi,* he lost most of his audience, and with *Pierre,* he retreated behind a series of "beards" that would hide him for the rest of his career (3).

[19] Melville wrote these letters in response to readers' widespread suspicion that *Typee* and *Omoo* were not, as he claimed, factual. In *Mardi,* Melville wished to show the reading public

Melville informs his publisher of "a change in my determinations" since writing his earlier books, explaining that he had decided to show his readership what "a *real* romance of mine" would be. It would not be another *Typee* or *Omoo*, but rather would be "made of different stuff altogether" (*Correspondence* 106). At the time, the term "romance" would have connoted a fictional narrative that was more fanciful than a novel was expected to be, marked by exotic settings, implausible plot twists, and characters who embody ideas rather than being psychologically realistic. Melville was saying, then, that *Mardi* would be much more ambitious and imaginative than either *Typee* or *Omoo*. When Melville sent the completed sheets of *Mardi* to Murray, he inserted a letter requesting that *Mardi*'s title page not list Melville as the author of *Typee* and *Omoo* "[u]nless you should find it *very* desirable," because "I wish to separate '*Mardi*' as much as possible from those books" (114-5). Similarly, Melville appears to have wished to separate his next two books, *Redburn* and *White-Jacket,* from his more ambitious projects. Melville churned out these two shorter works because he needed money for his new family. Critics have been right not to dismiss these texts as Melville himself did; however, the two novels are undeniably a distinct project apart from the triptych. In a letter to Richard Bentley dated June 5, 1849, Melville indicates what he thinks of *Redburn.* After suggesting reasons why *Mardi* had failed to find a widely appreciative audience, he asserts, "I have now in

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what he could come up with when his imagination was unfettered from fact. Erin Suzuki interprets Melville's letters about *Mardi* to indicate that he intended *Omoo* as a picaresque (364). Sten also reads *Omoo* as a picaresque.

preparation a thing of a widely different cast from "Mardi,"—a plain, straightforward, amusing narrative of personal experience […] no metaphysics, no conic-sections, nothing but cakes & ale." He would complete this "cakes & ale" novel the next summer; in September, he would finish *White-Jacket* and describe it in similarly dismissive language. What is at stake here is not the literary merit of *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* but rather the author's sense that these two works represent a cul-de-sac in his overall development as a writer. Melville's view of these works as a departure from his artistic trajectory is borne out by the fact that neither one is a Bildungsroman according to most of the criteria used in this study. Melville's ambition in this five-year period was to construct a Bildungsroman—or three—for the new American nation, and any other project was a distraction and a disruption. His own perception of *Mardi*'s and *Pierre*'s place in his oeuvre was far from the common assumption that these works are relatively unimportant. To him *Mardi* was not merely preparation for his next novel, but rather a soaring philosophical romance all its own; and *Pierre* was not a failure but a great "Kraken book" more mysterious and profound than his sperm whale book.

In letters to publishers and friends, Melville further linked his three Bildungsromane by comparing each of them to a liquid—dishwater, salt water, and milk, respectively—because he associated liquidity with dynamism, potential, and truth. Of *Mardi,* he wrote to publisher John Murray assuring him that the new romance "is no dish water nor its model borrowed from the

Circulating Library" (March 25, 1848). Melville means that the novel is wholly original, not the soapy runoff from someone else's used dishes. On January 8, 1852, after completing *Moby-Dick*, Melville wrote to Sophia Hawthorne expressing surprise and delight that she had enjoyed his book about the sea. He promises that the next book will not be a "bowl of salt water," but rather "a rural bowl of milk" (*Correspondence* 219). Calling *Moby-Dick* a "bowl of salt-water" is synecdochic understatement, and calling *Pierre* a "rural bowl of milk" would sound like an evasion if the novel had already been written. Regardless of how Melville's metaphors are interpreted, what is noteworthy here is the fact that, in the works of this period that made Melville the proudest, the quality he defines them by is their fluidity. Beneath his homely metaphors is a confidence in the loftiness of his artistic purposes in these three works. A letter to Richard Henry Dana dated May 1, 1850, that the editor of Melville's *Correspondence* calls "the first surviving mention of the composition of *Moby-Dick*," is illustrative here. Melville wrote this letter early in the novel's composition, before he had realized the scale his new romance would take. He writes that he is afraid the novel will "be a strange sort of a book," and then develops a strange sort of image to describe the process of writing it: "[B]lubber is blubber you know; tho' you may get oil out of it, the poetry runs as hard as sap from a frozen maple tree;--& to cook the thing up, one must needs throw in a little fancy, which from the nature of the thing, must be ungainly as the gambols of the whales themselves." He adds that, in spite of this, "I mean to give the truth of the thing" (162). In this

passage, Melville likens poetry—the commodity he wants to extract from his material—to two different liquids, oil and maple syrup. Both commodities are, like poetry, difficult to extract from solid matter, but he must succeed in this extraction if his novel is to communicate "the truth of the thing." One imagines that Melville, in calling his philosophical novels "no dish water," a "bowl of salt water," and a "rural bowl of milk," is suggesting a commonality among the three novels' aims, form, and content. In his triptych, Melville aimed to describe in three similar but distinct ways nothing less than truth itself, in particular the truth about the fluid process of human formation.

Critical Interventions

While recent years have brought greater attention to Melville's writings beyond *Moby-Dick,* no extended study of Melville's three philosophical novels has yet been published—perhaps because so many critics are still tempted to dismiss *Mardi* as mere practice for *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre* as an artistic failure. Still, critics have long recognized the shared uniqueness among Melville's three philosophical novels, and some have even labeled the novels a philosophical trilogy. Contemporary readers noted what Evert Duyckinck called the texts' "German" qualities; in a review of *Moby-Dick,* Duyckinck criticized the novel as being "too serious, melodramatic, and absorbed in the problems of the universe" (qtd. in Hayford 99-100). Harrison Hayford noted that the three novels are the ones that Melville felt "most moved to write," in Melville's words, but which

were doomed to be rejected by the public. William Dillingham wrote in 1986 that the texts' status as a trilogy was a long-held critical assumption (147). Other critics who have referred to the novels as a trilogy include Carol L. Bagley, Jennifer DeLalla Toner (241), and Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker (*Critical Essays on Pierre*). Henry F. Pochmann reads *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre* as Melville's "anatomy of despair" inspired by Kant; Merlin Bowen calls the character Pierre "the last of Melville's three tragic heroes," after Taji and Ahab (70); and most recently, Michael Broek argued that the three novels all three share the same narrator, Ishmael.

Despite these and other critics' recognition of the close relationship among *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre*, no study has yet established the depth and significance of the three novels' interrelationships satisfactorily, largely because *Mardi* and *Pierre* are still vastly underestimated. Most readers of *Mardi* have done little more than dissect its sources and its autobiographical clues, and many readers of *Pierre* have tried to delineate the reasons for its alleged failure as a novel. My argument begins with the contrary assumption that *Mardi* and *Pierre* are important literary accomplishments that deserve no less attention and esteem than *Moby-Dick,* and in fact, these three novels together constitute a triptych—three works of art so closely related that they ought to be read together. *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre* tell the same story in three strikingly different ways. Melville wrote other novels that depict human development, but none that draw upon the Bildungsroman tradition as closely as these three novels do. To read

Melville's novels as Bildungsromane challenges three critical assumptions: first, that the Bildungsroman did not exist in antebellum America[20]--; second, that the people in Melville's novels are merely self-consciously fictional constructs that need not be considered as human characters; and third, that Melville felt apathy or distaste for fiction genres, an assumption that the work of Sten and others has begun to correct.

Chapter-by-chapter Overview

This study will suggest that the complex relationship among *Mardi, Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre* can be illuminated by understanding these three texts as Melville's attempts to theorize a new, American form of the Bildungsroman. Chapter Two will establish a history of the Bildungsroman and synthesize a Melville-specific definition of the genre (even if he and his contemporaries never heard the term "Bildungsroman") based not only upon the European Bildungsromane he read, but also upon the particular understanding of human development that arose from his experiences and varied reading. After constructing a hypothetical definition of the Bildungsroman from Melville's perspective in Chapter Two, the proceeding three chapters will use this definition as a framework through which to interpret, separately, *Mardi, Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre*. These individual discussions will be informed by scholars'

[20] Critics like Franco Moretti and Bettina Friedl explicitly exclude American literature from this tradition, and Anniken Telnes Iversen denies the possibility of an American Bildungsroman before the Civil War.

assessments of Melville's use of genre, his treatment of selfhood and subjectivity, and the religious-philosophical dimensions of his work. Finally, Chapter Six will survey Melville's treatment of human development in works he wrote before, during, and after composing his Bildungsroman triptych. Ultimately, this study will show not only the striking parallels among *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre,* but also how these parallels originate in Melville's reading and re-imagining of European Bildungsromane.

Each of Melville's three Bildungsromane develops its own account of how the human is formed and educated, showing that Melville's views of human identity and maturation evolve during the five years in which he read Bildungsromane and wrote *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre*. To clarify, the phrase "formed and educated" is here used to denote a process by which a human being, over time, learns from mistakes—that is, decisions with more negative than positive consequences—and alters behavior and thought patterns to prevent future mistakes. The end result of the developmental process is that the person achieves some sort of stable, integrated identity and becomes able to make moral choices toward his own and society's flourishing. Each of Melville's Bildungsromane is narrated by a character who, like all human beings, longs to grow; he knows that the only way to escape depression and stultification is to encounter mysterious or authoritative Others who can draw him out of himself, helping him to discover his own potential and his unique place in the larger world. However, because each text's conception of identity is unique, its

depiction of identity formation is also distinct. In all three texts, identities are shaped by the materials that the subject inherits, as well as through the subject's own exercise in invention. In *Mardi*, the formation of identity is depicted as an integration of heteroglossia: identity is conceived as heteroglossic, comprised of widely varying "voices" that echo from one's past, and the protagonist finds in his internal heteroglossia the materials from which to build a mature self. He integrates his identity by determining which voices to ignore and which to act upon. Thus his learning occurs through conversation, although most of the conversation in the novel takes place within the dreaming subconscious of the hero. In *Moby-Dick*, the formation of identity is depicted as a process of synthesizing a system with which to organize the world: identity is continually constructed and re-constructed through one's own process of experimentation. Ishmael finds in his synthesizing abilities the power to educate himself by analyzing data and experimenting with different interpretations of it. Thus his learning occurs through experimentation, a trying out of first one hypothesis and then another in an effort to make sense of the world and one's place within it. In *Pierre*, the formation of identity is depicted as an imaginative process of giving concrete narrative form to one's innermost thoughts and drives so that one's inner life can be examined. Education is a creative process in which the protagonist learns about reality by constructing and then observing an artificial world and a surrogate self within it. The protagonist finds in his imagination the capacity to reinvent the materials he has inherited, and he learns through an act

of storytelling as he self-consciously constructs the story of Pierre in an attempt to discover truth about his own experience in the world. All three novels appear to be about autodidacts; and yet, each hero's encounters with others—with books, strangers, prophets, advisors, and enigmas—are also catalysts for his development. Although Melville himself is considered an autodidact, these novels suggest that no one can ever really be self-taught. Learning and identity formation depend upon the inheritance of raw materials as well as on the capacity to shape those materials into something new.

Just as Melville did not construct his own identity autonomously even though his father was deceased and his formal education was incomplete, so too Melville's three Bildungsromane draw from a European genre. Melville adapts the European genre to America by enabling his protagonists to construct their own portrait selves. He revises the genre to suit an American people that needed a New World way of understanding how the self is formed in the absence of its earthly progenitor-authority (the cast-off Old World) and in the presence, however ambiguous, of a transcendent progenitor-authority (the Judeo-Christian God). The narrator-heroes of *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre* emerge with and within America itself. Ironically, Melville's depictions of American emergence draw heavily from the conventions of a distinctly European genre about human emergence, underscoring the fact that nothing "new" is wholly independent of inheritance. Contemporary novelist Jonathan Safran Foer recognizes a similar tension between inheritance and self-invention in his own Jewish-American

identity construction and in his raising of his young son. Reflecting recently on his task of raising his son in a generation of Jewish-Americans who are largely disconnected from their religious and cultural traditions, Foer considered what lessons were to be passed down through the ancient stories of the Old Testament and the Haggadah. Foer concludes that, ultimately, "[T]here is no more significant lesson than the one that is never learned but always studied, the noblest collective project of all, borrowed from one generation and lent to the next: how to seek oneself" (par. 18). Melville, much like Foer, studied ancient stories, modern advances in philosophy and fiction, and his recent family history in order not only to construct his own identity, but also to depict in his novels the new ways in which Americans were going about the age-old process of seeking themselves. The three distinct formation processes depicted in *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre* are suited to the heteroglossic, experimental, and creative nation that formed and fueled their author.

CHAPTER TWO

Melville's Identity Formation in Context: America and the Bildungsroman

Pierre, the tragic hero constructed by the narrator of Melville's third Bildungsroman *Pierre: or, the Ambiguities*, believes that the "most small circumstances" of his life are "indices to all immensities" (357). The phrase is absurdly grandiose as applied to Pierre's life, yet it functions as an apt description of the Bildungsroman genre. A Bildungsroman locates the finite within the infinite by intertwining a particular protagonist's story with the most universal questions of human experience and considering the emergence of a single person in the context of the whole world. Calling any novel a Bildungsroman is no simple claim, however; scholars debate almost every characteristic of the genre. What they do agree on is that a Bildungsroman focuses on a single protagonist in depicting three key themes: human subjectivity, human emergence, and the tension between individual and group identity. Beyond that, definitions of the genre differ widely, with disagreement over which variations are permissible within the bounds of the genre. How much of the protagonist's life is described in the narrative, how directly the physical setting is treated, whether the narrative is structured chronologically or digressively, how the narrator is related to the protagonist (first- or third-person), and how completely the protagonist finally ratifies the social contract (that is, sacrifices individual desires for mature

membership in society) are all up for debate. Scholars further disagree on how or which historical forces brought the genre into being and on what the ideological implications of the genre are. Ironically enough, some scholars of the Bildungsroman even debate whether this genre actually exists. Jeffrey Sammons and others wonder whether it is actually a "phantom genre" (239), and Thomas P. Saine argues that not even the prototypical Bildungsroman, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship,* is actually a Bildungsroman. Despite the controversy over what constitutes a Bildungsroman, Melville's novels *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre* qualify by any but the most narrowly Germanist definitions.

Melville almost certainly never heard the term "Bildungsroman"; few people had done so between the term's coining in 1819 and its popularization in 1906. Still, scholars and critics have categorized novels written as early as the sixteenth century within the genre. The prototypical German Bildungsromane by Goethe, Novalis, Wieland, and their contemporaries are still considered by many Germanist scholars to be the only true Bildungsromane, but these novels were in fact prefigured in France and England by Rabelais's sixteenth-century *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and by Laurence Sterne's 1760s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*. Rabelais's and Sterne's novels—both of which Melville read before 1849—have been recognized as sharing enough significant features with the German Bildungsroman to justify their inclusion in the Bildungsroman category and the expansion of the genre to allow non-German novels. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* is, of course, widely considered to be the quintessential

Bildungsroman, and the unusual philosophical novel *Sartor Resartus,* written by Goethe's admirer and translator Thomas Carlyle, is recognized as a close literary relation of *Wilhelm Meister.* Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, serialized in 1849-50, is considered, with *Jane Eyre,* to be among the first major English language Bildungsromane.[1] What can be said for Melville's knowledge of the genre is that he must have intuited a relationship among the novels he read by Rabelais, Sterne, Goethe, Carlyle, and Dickens that are now widely considered Bildungsromane. Each of these novelists—none of whom would have heard the generic term either—was explicitly influenced by those before him in how he conceptualized and depicted the process of human formation. When Melville read *Tristram Shandy*, he might have noticed Walter Shandy's warning Uncle Toby against Rabelais's bawdiness. When he read Carlyle's translation of *Wilhelm Meister*, he must have read the Translator's Preface in which Carlyle praises Goethe as "one of the only three men of genius that have ever lived" (par. 8) and the novel as a brilliant depiction of "the development of man in all his endowments and faculties, gradually proceeding … up to the unfolding of the principle of religion, and the greatest of all arts, the art of life" (par. 6). Reading Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus,* Melville perhaps contemplated the ways in which Teufelsdröckh's development from passive, confused youth to active, sharply defined adult echoes Wilhelm's development. He would have seen in *David*

[1] *Gargantua and Pantagruel* was first identified as a Bildungsroman by Mikhail Bakhtin in his famous essay on the genre. For more on *Tristram Shandy* as a Bildungsroman, see Laura Jane Ress. See the Introduction for more on Melville's probable exposure to *David Copperfield.*

Copperfield the markings of the other fictional biographies he read, particularly the focus on the young protagonist's search for his place in the world. Moreover, Melville certainly knew the concept of *Bildung* from which the term "Bildungsroman" derived, for many of the American, British, and German thinkers whose works he knew were deeply interested in this concept, including Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Johann Gottleib Fichte, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.[2]

Before one can argue that Melville conceptualized a new kind of American Bildungsroman, one must deal with the problem of how to define the genre by surveying scholars' various definitions of the Bildungsroman and then constructing a definition of the genre as Melville would have perceived it. Constructing a Melvillian definition of a term he probably never heard might seem an odd undertaking, yet it is justified by the fact that Melville certainly had a conception of the Bildungsroman even if he did not have a label for it. Such a reconstruction of the Bildungsroman through Melville's eyes provides a framework through which to read *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre* in the chapters to follow. Accordingly, this chapter will synthesize scholars' definitions of the genre, describe the concept of *Bildung* that gave rise to the Bildungsroman, and

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[2] Melville was exposed to some of these thinkers through the works of those they influenced; others he learned about through encyclopedists and other interpreters. He read Coleridge, Emerson, and Friedrich Schiller directly, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* in 1848. He knew Emerson through lectures, and through osmosis from the New England intellectual climate before first reading Emerson's essays between writing *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick.* Through Emerson he also absorbed some knowledge of Hegel, Fichte, and Kant. Melville absorbed some of Kant's ideas through *Biographia Literaria* and Pierre Bayle's encyclopedia, as well. The influence of these thinkers on Melville will be further discussed later in this chapter.

then advance the following three claims: first, that Melville's conception of the human formation process (*Bildung*) was influenced by his particular experience as an American born in 1819 as the second son of two parents from prosperous New England families; second, that Melville's careful reading of several European Bildungsromane in a short time period around 1850 reveals both his awareness of the Bildungsroman as a set of generic conventions, if not as a label, and also his specific sense of what those generic conventions were, as utilized by Rabelais, Sterne, Goethe, Carlyle, and Dickens; and third, that reading *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre* as Bildungsromane confirms that, contrary to scholarly opinion, the Bildungsroman did exist in antebellum American literature.

The scholar who coined the term "Bildungsroman," Karl Morgenstern, did not claim it belonged exclusively to late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century Germany. In his 1819 lectures on the genre, he analyzes only German novels, but he also wonders what other modern novels from Italy, Spain, France, and Britain will turn out to be "important modern examples of this type" (658).[3] Wilhelm Dilthey, who popularized Morgenstern's term, was the one responsible for narrowing its definition to German literature.[4] In his 1906 work *Poetry and*

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[3] Morgenstern's lectures mostly analyzed *Wilhelm Meister* because he saw it as "the best of its kind, from our time and for our time" (658), but he does not treat that text as a prescriptive model. According to Morgenstern, the Bildungsroman was essentially ethical and socially oriented; it encouraged the reader to find a place in society. Tobias Boes explains that Morgenstern's work "connect[s] the classical *Bildungsroman* to many of the broader intellectual currents of its time: the move toward social realism in literature and the arts, the yearning for the shared experiences of a national community, and not least the search for an adequate way to represent the dynamic forces of history" (649).

[4] Dilthey had also used the term in 1870 in his biography of Schleiermacher.

Experience, Dilthey took the now-standard position that Goethe's *Meister Wilhelm's Apprenticeship* is the prototypical Bildungsroman, but unlike Morgenstern, Dilthey saw the genre as "historically and nationally delineated," as a unique product of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century German society, because he saw its subject matter, *Bildung*, as a conception of human formation that was unique to late-Enlightenment Germany (Boes 648). Among German and Germanist literary critics, a narrow definition of the Bildungsroman persists even today. Anniken Telnes Iversen labels the two critical binaries "Germanist Purist" versus "International Pluralist" (11) and "essentialist" versus "nominalist" (31). Only scholars in the International Pluralist/nominalist vein recognize the possibility of non-German Bildungsromane.[5] Iversen, like other non-Germanists, takes the nominalist, International Pluralist position. This study is bound to do the same, obviously, because Melville is an American rather than a German. Since the early twentieth century, Germanist purist scholars notwithstanding, countless non-German novels have been categorized as Bildungsromane.[6]

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[5] Iversen explains that scholars who disagree on whether the Bildungsroman is confined to a few deacdes in German literature or is found in literatures across the globe in fact disagree, more philosophically, on the nature of words themselves: do words refer to unchanging essences, or do their significations evolve over time? Can the word "Bildungsroman" evolve to mean **something** other than what Dilthey meant in 1906? The irony is that the essentialist scholars privilege Dilthey's later definition over that of Morgenstern, who invented the term.

[6] Although a handful of theorists did use the term "Bildungsroman" before the twentieth century, it has not been used widely until the last one hundred years. Nowadays one can find the term being freely applied to texts as diverse as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Although Mikhail Bakhtin did not study Herman Melville, he paved the way for reading Melville's novels as Bildungsromane by holding the position, early in the twentieth century, that the Bildungsroman is not an exclusively German literary genre. Bakhtin did not know Morgenstern's work—it was not until 1961 that Fritz Martini showed that Morgenstern, not Dilthey, had coined the term "Bildungsroman"—but his own definition echoes Morgenstern's inclusiveness, as well as his insistence that the protagonist's emergence correspond to a historical emergence. In Bakhtin's late, undated essay "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism," of which only a fragment survives, Bakhtin analyzes the origins of the Bildungsroman more broadly than Morgenstern and other early theorists. Bakhtin traces the Bildungsroman back to classical and medieval texts such as Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and Wolfram von Eisenbach's *Parzival* (19-20), a scope that corresponds to his equally expansive genealogy, in his other works, of the novel genre as a whole. Bakhtin discusses only European authors in his essay, mostly Goethe but also Rabelais, Wieland, Fielding, and Dickens. Bakhtin says that the most important species of Bildungsroman is the kind that depicts the unfolding of its hero as part of a larger historical unfolding. As Bakhtin describes it, the "human emergence" in such a novel "is no longer man's own private affair," as it had been in earlier, less realistic and complex incarnations of the Bildungsroman. Bakhtin describes the development of this new Bildungsroman hero as an emergence that occurs "*along with the world*" and that "reflects the historical emergence of the

world itself." The protagonist is "no longer within an epoch," but is instead "on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other." In fact, the transition from one historical epoch to the next is "accomplished in him and through him" as he is "forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being." What the Bildungsroman depicts, then, is "precisely the emergence of a new man" (23). For Bakhtin, two authors' Bildungsromane exemplify this epoch-marking brand of Bildungsroman: François Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's two *Wilhelm Meister* novels, both of which Melville read and will be discussed in this study. It will be seen that Melville's Bildungsromane fit Bakhtin's criterion as well since they depict the formation of individual Americans within the formation of the American nation. In Melville's time, the United States was still seen as something of an experiment, but it was maturing into a full-fledged nation. Melville's generation of Americans was concerned less with how to define American identity than with how Americans ought to live as Americans. Melville's Bildungsromane propose that Americans ought to attend to their own education or formation, making the most of whatever resources happen to be available to them.

Because so much defining of the Bildungsroman genre took place long after Melville had died, a study of his use of the genre must refer to the apparently anachronistic definitions of scholars from the last fifty years. A few such formulations will be sketched here. First, many scholars have attempted to

delineate the Bildungsroman's archetypal plot. Jerome Buckley described that plot as follows: a sensitive and provincial youth leaves his narrow unintellectual family or community, his imagination stimulated about the wider world by his private reading and/or formal schooling; he goes to the metropolis, has a good and a bad love affair, becomes a citizen of and worker in the "industrial urban world," and finally visits back home to show his family how much he has grown. Any given Bildungsroman would not have all these elements but would not omit more than two or three. Heinrich Meyer emphasized that the Bildungsroman is less about formal schooling, social training, and willful shaping of the nascent being than it is about "the development, growth and maturing of innate, native gifts and needs" (ix). Similarly, Thomas L. Jeffers recently defined the Bildungsroman as being somewhere between the *Erziehungsroman* (novel of education, "which is explicitly and pointedly pedagogic") and the *Entwicklungsroman* (novel of personal development, "which is broadly about the evolution of a hero … from any one stage of life to another"). According to Jeffers, a Bildungsroman is "about general acculturation" that occurs during the hero's "early-childhood-to-young-adulthood stages of life" (49).[7] Melville's life

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[7] Jeffers identifies three archetypal plot elements that Buckley had overlooked, three "initiatory tests" that the hero must take, if not pass, as rites of passage on his journey: the "sexual test [in which he] moves beyond (if he or she doesn't absolutely reject) the affections of one or both parents, and finds someone else—an appropriate partner outside the family—to love" (52); second, the "vocational test," in which he must discover how to relate himself, through work, to the group and contribute to society at large; and third, he must conduct "that business of ruminating … about the *connections* between art, ethics, and metaphysics, the practical stress falling on the middle term" (53). Jeffers, along with Swales, disagrees with scholars like Morgenstern and Dilthey, who require "a *successful* coming of age" for a novel to be considered a Bildungsroman.

experiences prepared him to consider this feature of the genre to be particularly resonant, as he never went to college; none of the formation of his Bildungsroman protagonists occurs in a classroom or under the direction of a formal tutor.

Scholars have not only debated the key features of the Bildungsroman; they have also debated toward what sort of conclusion a Bildungsroman drives. In 1978, Martin Swales criticized Dilthey's influential definition of the Bildungsroman for requiring Bildungsromane to end in "fulfillment and harmony" (3). Swales argues, instead, that the "goal" of a Bildungsroman is not important, and that in fact, in all but one of the novels he examines (Stifter's *Nachsommer*), the hero does not actually achieve fulfillment and harmony. The hero's insights are temporary, and the problems caused by the tension between self and society can never be fully resolved. The Bildungsroman exists, Swales asserts, not to bring its hero to completion but rather to show the process by which an individual comes to relate to the larger world. Following Swales, Jeffrey L. Sammons stated that a Bildungsroman is any novel that focuses on the process of *Bildung*, regardless of whether the *Bildung* culminates in the hero's integration into society (41). Thomas P. Saine notes that Jeffrey Sammons "searched for the elusive German Bildungsroman and came up with only one totally satisfactory example, [*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*] itself." Saine asks whether even this novel can properly be called a Bildungsroman (119). After all, Wilhelm does not in the end have any real plans. He has proposed to Natalie but not discussed their marriage or life together, and he has several careers

suggested to him but not settled on one. Moreover, his own relative happiness is surrounded by the death and despair of many other characters. Saine suspects that the novel's "real optimism with regard to harmonious human development" is actually "put there for the most part by its interpreters" (121). He finally concludes that the novel is not a Bildungsroman, although it is a novel about *Bildung* in both its true and false forms (139). It tells the story of "people seeking to find their way, new directions, new forms of social organization in a changing world" of social crisis (140). When Goethe wrote the novel, the traditional patriarchal structure was collapsing, yet the novel has been much criticized for finally upholding patriarchalism. The scholars and critics surveyed here may have disagreed upon the nuances of the Bildungsroman genre, but they have helped to clarify the basic features of it as well, including the typical protagonist characteristics and plot elements. However, the problem of how to situate any one text in relation to this complex and pervasive genre persisted until a Norwegian scholar proposed a practical solution in 2009.

Anniken Telnes Iversen, recognizing that scholars' disagreement over what constitutes a Bildungsroman has resulted in wasted effort and studies that lack rigor, proposed that instead of making rigid either/or classifications of texts without careful study of those texts, scholars should use her tool, the Bildungsroman Index (BRI), to measure a given text's resemblance to the

classical Bildungsroman.[8] Although Iversen never mentions Melville in her study, her BRI proves a helpful tool in situating *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Mardi* in relation to texts acknowledged to belong to this sprawling genre. As Iversen sees it, a genre is a collection of "common or typical (but not obligatory) characteristics" (50) that "run in a family" of literature; all members of the genre will have many of the characteristics, but probably no text will have all the characteristics (45). The BRI is a set of ninety-six features shared by four "classical bildungsromans": *Wilhelm Meister* (which scores 139 out of 148 possible points), *Jane Eyre* (which also scores 139), *David Copperfield* (144), and *Great Expectations* (137). Iversen acknowledges that the BRI system is somewhat subjective and can never be more than approximate because some features of novels will always be open to interpretation, but "literary study can never be an exact science anyway" (67). The BRI ought to be used only "as an indicator of trends" (72). Some of the ninety-six characteristics of "classical bildungsromans" on her Index are worth two or three points because they are especially important to the genre, and the maximum score for any novel is 148 points. Iversen's study grows out of an increasing awareness among scholars of just how limited generic definitions can be when they seek to capture the "essence" of a literary genre, as though a genre is a discrete Aristotelian category not grounded in specific texts.[9]

[8] Iversen deliberately eschews the German form of the term, with its capitalization and –e pluralization in order to emphasize the genre's cosmopolitanism.

[9] Six examples of critics who limit the Bildungsroman to late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Germany are Wilhelm Dilthey, Marianne Hirsch, Francois Jost, Hardin (and

Iversen also eschews the opposite danger, which is to use a generic label so loosely that the term is diluted of meaning altogether. Notably, Melville's three Bildungsromane each score as highly on the BRI as some of the Bildungsromane Iversen examines in her study: *Mardi* scores at least 114, *Moby-Dick* scores at least 110, and *Pierre* scores at least 130. (Iversen notes that virtually all novels written in the last 150 years would earn at least fifteen to twenty points.) Thus, the BRI Iversen constructed without Melville's novels in mind serves to show how many features his texts share with acknowledged Bildungsromane. The Bildungsroman Index is still too new to have been picked up by other scholars; nevertheless, the present study puts considerable faith in it due to its empirical basis and its flexible, non-prescriptive nature.

Given that scholars are virtually unanimous in considering Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* to be the quintessential Bildungsroman, it is significant that a description of this novel can function unwittingly as a description of *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre.* Consider translator H. M. Waidson's 2011 description of Goethe's novel, which doubles as his definition of the genre. According to Waidson, the Bildungsroman pursues "the theme of an individual's personal development in relation to a broad spectrum of society, to a series of clearly and realistically portrayed milieu, and to the age in which he lives." The focalizer is

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the essays in a collection he edited), Jeffrey L. Sammons, and Michael Beddow. In 2005, the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* took a Germanist view of the genre, defining the Bildungsroman as "Arguably Germany's best-known literary genre … Traditionally, it depicts a young man abandoning provincial roots for an urban environment to explore his intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual capacities. Whether nurturing or inimical, the new environment proffers the possibility of attaining wisdom and maturity" (41).

the central character, who passes into early manhood as he recollects earlier memories. He is formed both by "inner effort and outer influence," and what he becomes is partially determined by his "natural potentialities." He progresses "from error and confusion to truth and clarity," and as the novel charts his development it "makes or implies judgments on what may be right or wrong from the point of view of the hero's development in life." The Bildungsroman is "essentially optimistic" because the protagonist will "keep on striving," with others' help, toward fulfillment. A decidedly Enlightenment faith in the possibility of learning "constructive lessons" leads the Bildungsroman toward a utopian vision of an earthly society where "the ideal of a higher form of humanity" can be realized (vii). (As mentioned earlier, others disagree over whether the Bildungsroman must end happily, and even over whether *Wilhelm Meister* does.) Although Waidson did not intend to describe *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre* in this passage, he does in fact do so, underlining fact that Melville's three novels share close relationships with the European Bildungsromane he was reading at the time of writing them.

Although Melville probably never had pointed out to him that the formation narratives of Rabelais, Sterne, Goethe, Carlyle, and Dickens could be classified within a single genre, one can still argue that he had a conception of the Bildungsroman—in part because he was aware of various theories of *Bildung,* the phenomenon depicted in the Bildungsroman. Melville only read in English and thus may never have seen the term "*Bildung,*" but he is known to have read

directly at least five thinkers who dealt with *Bildung*: Emerson, Coleridge, Schiller (in translation), Goethe (in Carlyle's translation), and Carlyle. Emerson had the most direct and profound influence on Melville's views on human development. According to him and other transcendentalists, the purpose of human existence was "culture," which, according to Peter S. Field, "resembled the German word *Bildung,* which might be translated as acculturation." Field believes that Emerson's lecture circuit was motivated by a desire to "help audiences discover their own awesome capacity for intellectual and moral development," and that Emerson's goal in his lectures was "convincing, cajoling, and otherwise enticing the people to pursue culture for themselves" (153).[10] Through Emerson, Melville was exposed to the thought of Kant, Hegel, Schiller, Goethe, and the Schlegels, along with the British empiricists. Through Coleridge, Melville was exposed to Kant, Schelling, and Schlegel. Through Carlyle, Melville was exposed to Kant and Goethe. Melville also read Pierre Bayle's encyclopedia—in which he read interpretations of Kant[11]—and had extended conversations with George Adler,

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[10] Other transcendentalists were similarly concerned with human acculturation or *Bildung.* Elizabeth Palmer Peabody observed and transcribed Bronson Alcott's unconventional work at the Temple School, and she called for more educational biographies like Carlyle's life of Schiller (Myerson 116). Margaret Fuller's idea of the *Bildung* of the human race involved a union of the two genders, with women and men completing each other rather than one dominating the other. She praised Goethe for showing the development of several woman characters in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship.*

[11] For more on Bayle's influence on Melville, see Millicent Bell. She traces how Melville learned from Bayle about Descartes, Spinoza, and Locke. Bayle, like Melville, had a Calvinist background and was deeply concerned with theodicy; Bell suggests that Melville derived his dualist theodicy (like that of the Manichees, Gnostics, and Zoroastrians) from Bayle. Bell's argument focuses exclusively on *Moby-Dick,* and primarily on how Melville's treatment of the problem of evil in the Jonah material and the hunting plot reflects Bayle's influence. The inscrutability of the whale is Melville's way of expressing the inscrutability of God, including

with whom he discussed Kant, Schlegel, Hegel, "etc."[12] In an essay first published in 2003, Harrison Hayford pointed out how little is still understood about the influence on Melville of German culture and in particular of German Romanticism. He notes, though, how obvious Melville's "German streak" was to his contemporaries: this was the very grounds on which so many of them dismissed his work, especially his most "German" works, *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre* (99). Along similar lines, Robert Milder discusses Melville's absorption and transmutation of Romantic ideology. Milder explains that by the time he wrote *Moby-Dick,* Melville was "saturated in Romantic myth" from having read and discussed works by and about German and British Romantics: "He had come to inhabit a transatlantic community of discourse modified in unique ways by New World conditions and possibilities yet sharing in the broader attitudes toward

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predestination, and the hunt for the whale is impious because it "involves the doctrinal heresy that the Governor of the world sanctions evil, or else that a separate force of evil has equal authority with Him" (644). Merton M. Sealts was the first to write on Melville and Bayle, in the 1940s.

[12] In an 1849 travel journal he kept during his trip to Europe between the writing of *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick,* Melville recorded in his journal that he spent most of the Atlantic crossing in deep conversations with a new friend, fellow passenger Adler, a professor of modern languages at New York University and had recently published a massive English and German lexicon. A native-born German deeply immersed in its philosophy and culture, Adler spent hours and hours of the long journey discussing these things with Melville. Melville writes in a characteristically skeletal journal entry that the two discussed "the German metaphysics" (Leyda 319); he later specifies that they discussed "Hegel, Schlegel, Kant, &c" (Leyda 322). The concept of *Bildung* was central to the thought of all three Germans Melville mentions. The "&c" probably refers to some or all of the other Germans typically mentioned in the same breath as these three: Schelling, Fichte, Novalis, Herder, and Humboldt. Even if much of Melville's conversations with Adler were about philosophy proper, it is probable that their conversations verged into closely related subjects such as the school of fictions that Germans were writing in order to depict *Bildung*, since this genre of fiction grew directly out of German philosophy such as Kant's and Hegel's. After the trip, Adler sent Melville a copy of his translation of Goethe's *Iphigenia in Taurus,* which Melville received on January 8, 1851. See Wenke (95) for more on Adler's influence on Melville.

nature, the self, and the epochs of history that marked the transition from Enlightenment to Romantic thought." However, Milder argues, Melville's Romanticism was formed in important ways by his experiences in the South Seas *before* he engaged in "his eclectic readings of 1848-50." Melville's "residence in Typee … acquainted him with the 'undisfigured nature' that Schiller felt civilized man could possess only in remembrance of childhood and through the literary genre of idyll" (29).[13] Hayford and Milder suggest that the profound influence of German culture on Melville is not yet fully understood.[14]

That Melville was steeped in the philosophers and literary writers who inspired and wrote Bildungsromane is certain; what is less certain is what exactly he knew of nineteenth-century European scholars' attempts to identify and describe this new genre. In 1819, when Karl Morgenstern coined the term "Bildungsroman" and developed the first definition of the genre; he was influenced by the work of Friedrich von Blanckenburg, an earlier German scholar

[13] Milder likens Melville's quest narratives (including *Mardi, Moby-Dick, Pierre*, and others) to the Romantic quest, but points out that Melville's quests "abort" the pattern of the Romantic myth: "the ascending circle in Melville's writings is never completed (save perhaps in *BB*), the more inclusive unity never achieved" (31). Milder goes on to call *Mardi* a sort of failed "Schillerian Bildungsroman" (32). I suggest, however, that the way in which Melville's novels subvert the generic conventions of the Romantic quest actually enables them to fulfill the Bildungsroman convention of complicating human development even while charting it.

[14] Any scholar who seeks to unpack the influence of Melville's reading on his writing must deal with the problem that Millicent Bell noted in 1951, namely, the question of what Melville read in original sources and what he gleaned second-hand from encyclopedias and other media (626). Bell says wryly that Melville "would have had no inhibitions [about] learning the history of thought from an encyclopedia," and, indeed, he was capable of doing so. Although Melville had little formal education, he had, says Bell, "developed an extraordinary ability to extract the essence of ideas from slight intimations, assimilating his reading with an imaginative intensity not often to be found among 'trained minds'" (626). When it came to reading philosophy, he had little choice but to resort to dictionaries; he read no French or German, and much modern philosophy did not exist in translation at the time.

who was the first to identify *Bildung* as subject matter for a novel (and in fact claimed it was the only proper subject matter for one). In von Blanckenburg's influential 1774 *Essay on the Novel*, which helped to popularize the still-new novel genre, he argued that novelists ought to examine and depict the inner lives of realistic characters rather than focusing on outward events. His understanding of *Bildung* was secular, based on human psychology. This was not, however, the original sense of *Bildung*. Members of a German Lutheran religious sect, the Pietists, were the first to use the term to describe a process of human formation, which for them was the process by which the elect person followed the sovereign God's call toward sanctification.[15] The Reformed theology of Luther's followers had raised fears that a sovereign, predestinating God might obviate individuals' sense of responsibility and incline them to passivity, yet adherents of Calvinism in both Britain (the Puritans) and Germany (the Pietists) ended up developing conceptions of the self as being not passive, but rather active, dynamic, and worthy of examination and cultivation.[16] This conception of the self would make

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[15] Jeffers traces how the German idea of *Bildung* grew out of the Reformation, with its emphasis on the individual's "*duty* to realize our individual uniqueness." Luther encouraged this duty to be exercised actively in the public sphere rather than passively in the monastery, as was the medieval custom (39). Melville's Calvinist roots have been extensively analyzed, but never in relation to the Pietist notion of *Bildung.*

[16] Damrau explains that the Pietists existed in different branches, each with its own subtle variation on Calvinist theology. The main feature of Pietist literature (which, he argues, was strongly influenced by the writings of British Puritans) was "describing experiences with God in a deeply emotional way" (37). These texts would lead to sentimental writing in the eighteenth century. Damrau's project is to trace the influence of British Puritan devotional writing on Pietist writing, which, he concludes, shows that Pietism was not merely an outgrowth of mysticism and the secularization began within Pietism as early as the seventeenth century, rather than in the eighteenth century as is commonly assumed (154). Damrau does not discuss Bildung or the fiction that grew out of the concept. Thomas P. Saine also discusses the secularization of the term, noting

possible the rise of “capitalism, rationalization, social activism, individualism, and secularization” (Damrau 5).[17] All of these “isms” would prove to be central to American conceptions of identity in the nineteenth century and beyond. Melville, having been raised by a Calvinist mother in a New England conscious of its Puritan heritage, would have been well equipped to understand the original, spiritual sense of the term *Bildung*. He must have been able to conceptualize the spiritual roots of *Bildung* even as he learned about its secular iterations from his exposure to Romantic and Transcendental philosophy.

Although the first uses of the term *Bildung* can be traced to the sixteenth-century German Pietists, scholars puzzle over the ambiguous and even mystical significations that the concept retained even after its “secularization.” Eric J. Klaus explains that the term is “notoriously difficult to render adequately in English” because its root, *Bild*, “connotes a variety of meanings, including ‘image,’ ‘form,’ and ‘shape.’” Moreover, “the suffix -ung can imply either a state or a process.” Because both root and suffix are ambiguous, many different translations of *Bildung* are possible, including “physical appearance,” “form,” “formation,” “shape,” and “education.” Klaus concludes that “*Bildung*'s etymological ambiguity and its complex genesis account for an intrinsic malleability of the term” (75). Another scholar, Thomas Pfau, explains that

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scientific and aesthetic works that used the term before Goethe, in *Wilhelm Meister*, applied it to human development (119).

[17] As early as the seventeenth century, the distinction between religious and secular views of *Bildung* and of selfhood had grown blurry. Goethe, a champion of the “secular” view of *Bildung*, was raised by a Pietist mother (Damrau).

because *Bildung* can refer to both a mode of production and a product, it captures the "epigenetic" nature of organic development. An organism develops not by mere amplification of its embryonic properties, but rather by a process of successive differentiation. An organism is always emergent and participating in other organisms' emergence. The epigenetic development is facilitated by the organism's encounter with that which is outside itself, such as other organisms—hence (142). That is, the perceiver's perception of another organism's *Bildung* is an act of image-construction that contributes to the perceiver's own *Bildung*. (This is why the portrait self is so crucial to the Bildungsroman.) Pfau explains that when a person studies "the morphology of a perfoliate rose or the skeleton of a bull," one is not simply arriving at an image of the object; rather, one is "fashion[ing] an image, a complex representation, which in turn will mirror back to the observer the particular kind of intelligence gradually realized by such activity." Thus, *Bildung* must be mediated through aesthetic objects (142, 145).[18] Another scholar who is sensitive to the mystical connotations of *Bildung* is Sandra M. Dingli. She notes that the word is derived from the Latin *formation;* yet *Bildung* is unlike other German translations of *formatio* such as *Formierung* and *Formation.* "*Bild,*" unlike "*Form,*" has a "mysterious ambiguity" because it can mean both *Nachbild* ('image,' 'copy') and *Vorbild* ('model') (134). Dingli quotes philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer as saying that the concept of *Bildung* hearkens back to "the

[18] Pfau regards Hegel and Goethe as the exemplars of this view of *Bildung* and their *Phenomonology of Spirit* and *Wilhelm Meister* as "key-texts" that "demonstrate how *Bildung* incrementally reconstitutes its subject as a teleological sequence of reflexive turning points" toward a state "of greater complexity and self-awareness"(141).

ancient mystical tradition, according to which man carries in his soul the image of God after whom he is fashioned and must cultivate it in himself'" (134). If the "secular" Bildungsroman shows the protagonist being changed by a man-made portrait self, the mystical Bildungsroman would show its protagonist being changed by the *Imago Dei*, and would regard the man-made portrait self as an idol. Notwithstanding Melville's ambiguously secular-mystical conception of *Bildung*, the concept of *Bildung* that Klaus, Pfau, and Dingli have offered shows that, difficult as the term is to define, it always refers to an organic process of formation that occurs within a larger context, whether that context is wholly physical or includes a metaphysical dimension. Even when the concept of *Bildung* was secularized it never fully lost the mysterious and mystical associations imbued by the Pietists who first developed it. Indeed, Melville would recover some of the spirituality of this concept. His American Bildungsromane are, to a much greater extent than the European Bildungsromane he read, explicit about the possibility of a spiritual authority over human beings.

Melville, as the son of a Dutch Calvinist mother, was not only familiar with the Reformed theological tradition in which the concept of *Bildung* was born; he also, as previously discussed, knew the work of the first secular thinkers to appropriate the concept of *Bildung*. When the concept of *Bildung* was appropriated by late Enlightenment German philosophers such as Kant, it came to mean a new kind of formation process for a new kind of human being: an organic process by which an individual life form could reach its potential by

following inward promptings and responding to outward stimuli. In a socio-political sense, *Bildung* was a process by which a citizen's mind was liberated from tradition and convention and enabled to realize its full potential in a fluid modern society. Franco Moretti makes this connection between *Bildung* and the emergence of modern nations; he argues that the Bildungsroman became the key novelistic genre of modernity precisely because the genre is uniquely able to show modernity's conflicting drives between individual identity and membership in the community (10).[19] In Melville's 1851 letter to Hawthorne in which he dates his life from his twenty-fifth year, the process of "unfolding within [him]self" that he describes bears striking similarity to the organic process of *Bildung* that Germans like Goethe originated. Like a flower in the sunshine, he unfolds his petals, blooming afresh every three weeks, until he reaches the "inmost leaf of the bulb," and his growth turns to decay—or so he believes at that moment. (He will go on to live and write for four more decades.) The development Melville describes is, like *Bildung*, conceived as an unfolding of already-present qualities, but made possible or hindered by the influx of nutrients and detriments from

[19] Moretti explains that two opposing forces operate within each Bildungsroman in inverse proportions: the "classification principle," which drives toward a conclusion in which the hero sacrifices freedom for happiness, usually defined by marriage or some other explicit symbol of one's place in society; and the "transformation principle," which does not drive toward a conclusion but rather places freedom over membership in society, and sees youth as a meaningful condition in itself rather than as a condition that must culminate in maturity. Moretti, by studying different national incarnations of the Bildungsroman (German, British, and French), shows the distinct national consciousnesses of each culture.

without.[20] The process is epigenetic, requiring encounters with the world outside the organism.

It was those external influences upon the unfolding organism that led late Enlightenment and Romantic philosophers in Germany to develop secular theories of *Bildung*. Philosophers desired to understand human agency amidst the forces of the material world, whose mechanics were becoming increasingly understood through modern physics. The dawn of modern science, with its dependence on empirical data, had aroused fears that humans would come to feel trapped in a mechanistic universe wholly determined by physical laws and no longer see themselves as moral agents. In this context, Kant and others were urgently concerned with understanding how *Bildung* worked because they needed a basis on which to affirm human moral agency. Modern science inspired Kant to develop a theory of how the self acquires knowledge that synthesized empiricism with rationalism. At the heart of Kant's project was a desire to

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[20] This concept of human development must have been influenced by passages in Emerson's *Nature* and other essays that were themselves inspired by Goethe's new view of *Bildung*. As previously discussed, for Emerson, the goal of human life was "culture," or acculturation, his version of *Bildung.* This process brings individuals to an awareness of nature as phenomenon rather than substance; it imbues them with idealism, which enables them to see all space and time "as one vast picture, which God paints on the instant eternity, for the contemplation of the soul"; and it establishes them in "right relation to nature" (149). Only through a right relation to nature can people know the Supreme Being, or God. Emerson conceives this entire process in organic terms. As he writes in *Nature,* "[T]he Supreme Being does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old. As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God; he is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws, at his need, inexhaustible power. Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man? Once inspire the infinite, by being admitted to behold the absolute natures of justice and truth, and we learn that man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself the creator in the finite. This view … animates me to create my own world through the purification of my soul" (151). Melville certainly shared Emerson's sense that human formation is inextricably linked to the continual emergence of nature (the physical world) and has as its *telos* an apprehension of transcendent truth.

determine the limits of what is knowable by humans, and his most provocative conclusion was not only that knowledge of God may be beyond us, but that knowledge of oneself may be as well.[21] According to Kant, the self's rationality makes possible its moral freedom even though the self depends upon the external world for knowledge and its potential for knowledge is limited.[22] Although Melville could not read Kant directly, the philosopher's theory of knowledge shaped many people's, including Melville's, sense of what humans can know and how they know it.

Melville was deeply read in the work of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a polymath of the generation after Kant who drew on the *Bildung* theories of Kant and other late Enlightenment philosophers as part of a larger, optimistic effort to see the universe and human history as progressive. This is different from Kant's goal of defending human agency amidst the mechanical forces of the material world. Goethe's contemporaries—including his close friends Johann Gottfried Herder and Friedrich Schiller, and later, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel—

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[21] Kant's epistemology departed from John Locke's empirical view that we are inscribed upon by sensations, as well as from Descartes's view that knowledge comes only through reasoning upon innate ideas. Kant, by contrast, asserted that humans use innate ideas such as space, time, and causality in order to organize and understand their sensory perceptions. Kant's ethical system followed from his epistemological one: he attributed individual beings' actions to their own internal principles rather than to the mechanics of the universe. He concluded that the world is teleological in order to "preserve the integrity of rational beings against the threat of scientific determinism" (332).

[22] Critics who have examined the relationship between Melville and Kant include Robert Zoellner, who argues that evidence of Kant's philosophical idealism can be seen in Melville's use of metaphor; Pochmann, who argues for the influence of Kant's first critique on *Moby-Dick*'s "philosophical conclusion"; and Perry Miller, who reads *Pierre* through the lens of Kant's second critique. See also Sealts's "Milton and the Platonic Tradition," Hayford's "Melville's German Streak," and Chapter Two of Nancy Fredericks's *Melville's Art of Democracy*.

theorized *Bildung* within the humanistic climate of Romantic-era Germany.[23] In this milieu the prototypical Bildungsromane, novels depicting the process of *Bildung*, were conceived and written by Germans like Goethe, Wieland, and Novalis.[24] When Melville read Goethe's Bildungsromane, he must have done so with a sense of both the secular *Bildung* theories developed by German philosophers—and filtered through English-language sources such as Emerson, Coleridge, and translations of Bayle—and of the Reformed theology that inspired the original religious concept of *Bildung*. Yet Melville's relationship with German idealism and Romanticism was not mere admiring influence. Some scholars, like Harrison Hayford, believe that Melville became disillusioned with idealism and Transcendentalism by the time he wrote *Moby-Dick*, and in *Pierre* he singles out

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[23] For Herder, a former student of Kant's at the University of Königsburg, the task of philosophy was precisely to understand *Bildung*; however, Herder departed from Kant in his focus on the development of groups of organisms rather than of individuals, hence his later pioneering the field of anthropology and the ideology of nationalism. Hegel, a creator of German idealism, was influenced by Kant, Herder, and Schelling in his view that understanding *Bildung* was a key task for the philosopher. Hegel developed a theory of learning (as opposed to a theory of knowledge like other philosophers) that he called "dialectic." Hegel's dialectic is really an analogue for Bildung, as many scholars have noted; according to Josiah Royce, Jim Good, and others, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* can actually be read as a Bildungsroman because it gives an account of the development of humanity as a whole and of the individual. Good notes that in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), as in a typical Bildungsroman, "the center of interest is the links between the main character's successive experiences and his gradual achievement of a fully rounded personality and well-tested philosophy of life" (uncc). Hegel's belief that humans are free and capable of self-determination undergirded his theory that humans can learn and bring about historical progress.

[24] Thomas P. Saine catalogues the many forms of *Bildung* that are "mentioned or talked about" in *Wilhelm Meister*: "the *Bildung* of the child and preparation for adulthood, the *Bildung* of the individual, the *Bildung* of humankind, the *Ausbildung* (development or unfolding) of innate talents, perceptions, and proclivities in the individual, *Bildung* as education and training, [and] *Bildung* as maturation and the achievement of form (for example in the biological sense conveyed in Goethe's theory of metamorphosis" (118).

Goethe for particularly harsh personal criticism.[25] Others, like John B. Williams, believe that Melville's negative reaction to Transcendentalism has been exaggerated (Yothers 83).[26] Whatever his positive or negative feelings, though, when he borrowed from the German philosophers and writers of late Enlightenment and Romantic Germany, Melville would fundamentally change the inherited materials through his powers of invention.

The rest of this chapter will develop the three claims stated at the outset of this chapter: that Melville's conception of the human formation process was influenced by his particular experience as an American born in 1819 as the second son of prosperous New Englanders, including a pious Calvinist mother; that Melville's reading of Bildungsromane by Rabelais, Sterne, Goethe, Carlyle, and Dickens enables us to clarify his sense of the Bildungsroman's generic conventions; and finally, that reading *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre* as Bildungsromane corrects scholars' misconception that no Bildungsromane were written in antebellum America.

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[25] Hayford surmises, with Murray, that Goethe is a scapegoat, a distant father figure whose inheritance has disappointed him, in contrast to Carlyle and Emerson, who were too close to home for harsh critique (107-8).

[26] Many scholars have studied Melville's engagement with the transcendentalists, but Merton M. Sealts's series of essay written from the 1940s to 1980s are essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand this relationship. In the 1940s, Sealts examined Melville's relationship to both Emerson and Plato and found that Melville is never static in his views on these thinkers' idealism; however, Sealts does believe that in the end Melville was "an idealist who mistrusted idealism" (336). In the 1980s, Sealts argued that although Melville mocked the transcendentalists and Plato in his novels of the 1850s, he would return to them later with greater acceptance. These essays are collected in the volume *Purusuing Melville.* One of the many scholars to discuss Melville's reactions against the Transcendentalists is Milton R. Stern, who argued in 1957 that Melville's resistance to the Transcendentalists' anthropocentrism and individualism represents a departure from them. He calls Melville a Naturalist disguised as a Romantic.

Melville's Family Identity and American Identity

Thomas L. Jeffers rightly reminds students of the Bildungsroman that the similarities among texts within the genre are not wholly artificial conventions, or even necessarily the result of novelists' conscious imitations of other Bildungsromane. Rather, the structure of the Bildungsroman derives in part from the structure of human development itself, "from the pre- or scarcely linguistic, largely physical, homo-erectian encounter with the world." Jeffers notes that "[l]ife comes before literature, however true it is that literature (and then more life) then comes after literature" (54). Indeed, developmental psychologists such as Erik Erikson have theorized developmental stages through which every human being passes on the way from birth to maturity—a fact that reinforces our sense that human development tends to follow a universal pattern. To a certain extent, Melville's conception and depiction of human formation must have been shaped by his universalizable experiences as a human growing to adulthood, as well as by his particular experiences as one whose growth occurred in New England in the early to mid-nineteenth century. In order to reconstruct Melville's conception of *Bildung* at the time he wrote *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre*, one must know something of his own lived experience up to that point in his life.

A dominant feeling for young Herman Melville must have been a sense of inheritance in his early youth, followed by a sense of lost inheritance in adolescence. As Hershel Parker and the other biographers tell it, Melville's early

childhood was, from one perspective, idyllic: affectionate parents, the finest Manhattan schools, and spacious family homes furnished with relics from his family's illustrious past. Such relics included ancestral portraits, infused with the glory of Melvills and Gansevoorts from generations past (29, 44-45).[27] Both his maternal and paternal grandfathers had been Revolutionary War heroes, and they and other family members became prosperous merchants and landowners. Parker imagines young Herman's walks around Boston with his grandfather, listening as they passed the Wharf where the Boston Tea Party had occurred to the old man's stories of his participation in that historic event (45). The self-image of Herman's father Allan was, according to Parker, "enlivened by his sense of who his [European] ancestors had been—the assurance that he was of royal lineage on both sides of the family" (10). Allan imported from Europe not only merchant goods, but also a reverence for high birth (13). Any young boy would feel cushioned in the physical and psychic comforts of such a prosperous and well-connected family. However, Herman Melville was suddenly jarred at age eleven by two devastating losses, his father's bankruptcy and early death. Herman lost all at once his father, his home, and the promise that his young gentleman's education would be completed with a stint at university and a Grand Tour of Europe. With Herman and his seven siblings left to the care of their mother, Maria, the rest of the boy's formal education was intermittent, with

[27] When Herman was about thirteen, his mother and his older brother Gansevoort added the final "e" to the family name; Hershel Parker surmises that this was "perhaps for no other reason than that Gansevoort thought that an extra letter added an aristocratic flourish" (67).

most of his time spent working as a clerk and at other odd jobs. He followed his older brother Gansevoort's example and read independently, working conscientiously on his self-cultivation, as was customary for young men at the time.[28] When Herman's formal schooling ended, according to Parker, he saw himself as "less equipped for self-improvement" than other young men because he had been "poorly schooled"; yet as a member of the Albany Young Men's Association, he practiced debating hot topics of the moment (97). In an 1838 letter to the Albany *Microscope* in which eighteen-year-old Herman praised the value of debating societies, he cites the authority of Edmund Burke, Henry Clay, and Benjamin Franklin for his own opinions on the possibility of educating oneself outside the confines of a school: "Franklin the philosopher and sage attributed the early development of his natural resources to the same mind stirring soul animating cause," that is, participation in debating societies (97). This letter shows that, by his late teens, Melville was deeply and consciously invested in efforts to improve his mind in an effort to compensate for the gaps in his formal education that resulted from the loss of his inheritance.

Melville's whole adolescence and early adulthood was a series of lessons in the school of life as he struggled to survive in the face of disinheritance. He first went to sea just before his twentieth birthday, he taught briefly at a school that

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[28] Parker describes Gansevoort's conscious efforts at self-improvement and the advice he gave to his younger brothers to do the same (novel-reading, recording the findings of his wide-ranging independent reading in his *Index Rerum*, and so on); he would "skim books for passages that might instill or confirm moral, political, or economic lessons a young man needed to learn … Herman gleaned after Gansevoort" (93). These young men, like other young Americans, were consciously emulating Benjamin Franklin's self-cultivation as set forth in his *Autobiography*.

never did pay him a living wage (Parker 153), he went West to Illinois to seek his fortune (Parker 167), and he conducted long and frustrating searches for temporary employment at a time of national depression when even young men who were not penniless and poorly educated had trouble finding work (Parker 166). These experiences culminated in his enlisting on the whale-ship *Acushnet*, on which he sailed the world and disembarked on the Galapagos, at Peru, and in the Marquesas. At the latter locale he spent two now-famous weeks among the cannibalistic Typee; he later immortalized this experience (during which he passed his twenty-third birthday) in his first, semi-fictional book (Parker 218). During Melville's voyages, he read sailors' narratives and books of travel and adventure. His serious reading would begin around age twenty-five, once he was back on land. Only then would he begin, as he wrote to Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1851, to "unfold" within himself and reach his bloom of maturity.[29]

Religion was a preoccupation of Melville's throughout his life, but scholars still disagree on how exactly to interpret Melville's religious trajectory. Raised in a Calvinist family and steeped in the King James Bible, Melville at some point lost his orthodox moorings and, in Hawthorne's words, set off on desert "wonderings." Hawthorne's comment, from a November 20, 1856, journal entry,

[29] In a series of four articles published from 1972 to 1996, William Dillingham presented a detailed account of Melville's intellectual development. According to Dillingham, the organic form of Melville's fiction grew out of his intellectual quest for understanding of the world. His early works, like *Mardi,* show his obsession with understanding the nature of experience and how the human mind interprets it. Melville's work contains a powerful tension "among the raw data of nature and experience, the shaping imagination of the observer, and the pressures exerted on Melville's development by his own extensive reading and consumption of visual art" (Yothers 76).

remains the most famous account of Melville's spiritual development. In the entry, Hawthorne reports that in a recent conversation Melville had begun, as he often did, "to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken." Melville had told Hawthorne that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated." Still though, writes Hawthorne, he did not "seem to rest in that anticipation," and would "never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief." Hawthorne thinks it "strange how he persists—and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before—in wondering to-and-fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting" (432). Melville could "neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief," and yet was "too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other." Hawthorne concludes that if Melville "were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential" because "he has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us" (433). The question that scholars have never been able to answer definitively is whether or not Melville's desert wonderings ever ceased in acquiescence to faith, resignation from the question of faith, or rejection of faith. The answer to that question depends upon how one reads Melville's late works on religion and faith, *Billy Budd* and *Clarel*.[30]

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[30] Arguments in all three camps proliferated in the 1940s and 1950s. The "testimony of acceptance" view, first formulated by E.L. Grant Watson in 1933, has been propounded by William Ellery Sedgwick and Ronald Mason, among others. The view that Melville ultimately resigned himself to a recognition of "reality" has been held by F. Barron Freeman and Geoffrey Stone. Variations on the view of Melville as a "Romantic rebel" or as resistant to orthodoxy until the end of his life have been advanced by Phillip Withim, William Braswell, Nathalia Wright, and Lawrance Thompson. For a survey of these arguments, see Brian Yothers (60-61). An enormous body of scholarship from the last four decades has complicated these three interpretations of

The question is beyond the scope of this study. What is important for this study is the fact that Melville conceived his inheritance as being partly constituted of the Calvinist theology of his youth, but that this inheritance never became unequivocally his. Instead, he wrestled with it and, in his own way, fashioned something new out of its fragments.[31]

The key parallel between Melville's life and the lives depicted in the European Bildungsromane he read is the profoundly significant father relationship. However, if the accounts of Melville's biography are accurate, the

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Melville's religious development considerably. To give some examples: Ursuala Brumm argued that Melville's thought was profoundly structured by Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, especially the habit of reading the world typologically as the Puritans did, seeing spiritual significance in nature (1970); T. Walter Herbert discussed how Melville both used and rebelled against Calvinist theology (1977); Lawrence Buell read *Moby-Dick* as a secular scripture, which according to Buell was an inevitable project for Melville given that he was a contemporary of the transcendentalists (1984); Stanley Goldman saw Melville as a spiritual teacher who, in *Clarel,* writes "protest theism" that is the "personal, private confrontation between divine hiddenness and the unsatisfied heart" (169) (1993); Jenny Franchot pointed out that throughout his career Melville used metaphors of travel and displacement in discussing Christianity, which Franchot interpreted as an indication that Melville did not think Christianity could be fixed into immutable doctrines (1998); Walter Donald Kring described Melville's late-in-life joining of a Unitarianism church and interpreted this as the author's final embrace of religious pluralism and openness to uncertainty (1997); Alfred Kazin linked what he called Melville's religious ambivalence to a broader tendency toward religious ambivalence in nineteenth and twentieth century literary cultures, if not in the culture at large (1997); William Potter read *Clarel* as an encyclopedia of world religions as they were understood in mid-nineteenth century America (2004); Hilton Obenzinger argued that Melville's religious ideas remained unsettled until the end of his life (2005); Michael Colacurio traced Melville's long preoccupation with the problem of evil and his attack, from *Redburn* through *Pierre,* on monotheistic resolutions of the problem, ultimately concluding that Melville's shift to irony in his short fiction enabled him to show the persistence of evil despite people's efforts to practice charity (2007); and finally, Ilana Pardes unpacked Melville's revisions, in *Moby-Dick,* of five different Biblical narratives in light of contemporary ideas (2008). This is merely a sampling of a few of the many articles to appear on this subject in recent years.

[31] Another strain of scholarship has examined Melville's integration of Eastern religion and thought into his writing. To give two examples, Milton Oswin Percival pointed out parallels between New England Calvinism and the "fatalistic elements" in Hinduism and Zoroastrianism (1967). Hemant Kulkarni argued that *Moby-Dick* does not mock, but rather embodies Hindu thought, since it reconciles and integrates opposites (1970)—a view that will be considered in Chapter 3.

key *difference* between his and the novel heroes' lives is that Melville's father relationship was far more conflicted—most significantly because the father, in dying unexpectedly and bankrupt, left the son without his rightful inheritance and failed to provide for the completion of his son's education. In order for the young Herman Melville to survive, he needed even more self-reliance than the heroes he would later read about in European Bildungsromane: unlike David Copperfield and Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, those other fatherless children, Melville had no Aunt Betsy Trotter or Andreas and Gretchen Futteral to suit him up and send him to school. Unlike Wilhelm Meister Senior, another merchant, Melville's father did not die prosperous and elderly, and Melville did not have the luxury of being torn between competing desires to share in his fathers' bourgeois comforts and to pave his own unique and creative path. Unlike the absent fathers of Pantagruel and Tristram Shandy, Allan Melville did not pass on to his son a collection of carefully cultivated educational materials. Moreover, Melville's father, unlike the fathers in the European Bildungsromane Melville read, withdraws from his son by choice, at least partially; Hershel Parker finds evidence in family letters to suggest that Herman as the middle son was overshadowed by both the oldest, Gansevoort, and by the baby, Allan's namesake. Parker interprets young Herman's first recorded words as an indication of Herman's sense of differentness from the favorite first son (27).[32]

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[32] According to a letter written by Herman's father upon the birth of baby Allen, little Herman said, "Pa now got two ittle boys." As Parker sees it, these "earliest recorded words of Herman Melville curiously indicate that the boy identified with the baby nearly four years his

During Herman's first trip abroad at age twenty, while docked at Liverpool, Herman walked all around the town "looking for his father, at times quite consciously so" (147-8), because his now-dead father had been there before him on business trips.[33] Given all these details about Melville's biography, it seems clear that his particular family experiences shaped his revisions of the Bildungsroman genre in profound ways. In Melville's fiction, one sees evidence that his upbringing in that family, under those circumstances, left him with an aching sense of disinheritance, with a darkly nostalgic vision of his family's illustrious past, with a contrarian optimism about his own future, and with a deep sense of responsibility for his own self-cultivation and for finding his own way in the world. He must have realized early on that, whatever intellectual, spiritual, or emotional wealth he had inherited from the Melvills and the Gansevoorts, it was up to him to shape these inherited materials into present sustenance of the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and financial kind.[34]

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junior rather than with Gansevoort, three and a half years his senior, whom Herman could never, at any time, rival in the esteem of his parents" (27). Parker writes that, "By the age of seven Herman had not yet attracted much attention from his father—and it was already too late for him to do so" (34).

[33] Melville's yearning for his absent father as a young man finds its way most explicitly into Melville's fourth book, *Redburn;* significantly, the site of the narrator's strongest yearning for his (human) father is the Old World.

[34] This study is not the first to discuss the Bildungsroman's depictions of complicated parental relationships and the shaping power of such inheritance. In 2011, Michael Minden Minden identifies the circular motifs of incest and inheritance as being the essence of any Bildungsroman's story and asserts that texts' varying treatments of these motifs is where their significant and interesting differences lie (3). Incest, defined as the quintessence of desire culminating in the collapse of difference, draws the Bildungsroman hero back to his mother; and inheritance draws him back to his father. Minden explains that the inheritance motif is a way for the Bildungsroman hero to form a masculine identity without having to compromise his modern

Beyond Melville's particular status as the middle son of a man who went bankrupt and died young, his more general status as an American of his generation would also inform his revisions of the Bildungsroman genre. Describing a society's views of human identity and identity formation in monolithic terms is impossible, so in the following discussion of American views of identity, we will focus on three dialectics that define American conversations on identity. As R. W. B. Lewis noted, a culture is like a conversation unfolding over generations, and so the culture can best be defined not in terms of rigid, stable descriptors but rather in terms of the contradictory concerns expressed by its various voices over time. In America, at least three dialectics of identity were in play for the three generations up to and including Melville's own: a dialectic over what constitutes the self (old, inherited ideas or new, self-created ones), over how the self is oriented (toward the self or toward the group), and over how identity develops (through an external accumulation of traits or an internal unfolding of innate potentialities). All three dialectics were and are undergirded by an all-encompassing faith, still prevalent in America today, that human beings can progress or are progressing toward perfection. I wish to highlight these dialectics without claiming that they are exclusively American.

The first dialectic that describes how Americans tend to conceive of identity, or more precisely of what content goes to construct an identity, is that of

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individualism by giving the hero a rival. The protagonists of German Bildungsromane are guaranteed their fathers' name and power because they are only children: "They inherit, spiritually or both, from fathers and father figures" (3).

"old inheritance" versus "new invention." The question of whether identity is shaped more profoundly by inheritances such as doctrines, dogmas, books, and philosophical systems, or by inventions of one's own (defined by Emerson as an "original relation to nature") has occupied Americans since the nation's earliest days. Generally, Americans have tended to emphasize the importance of invention in American identity formation and underplay the importance of inheritance. In 1955, R. W. B. Lewis argued that the archetypal American is a figure he calls the "American Adam," a "figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history" (1).[35] The tension between inheritance and invention in identity formation played out in the thought of the Puritans from whom Melville gained much of his religious inheritance, the Founders from whom his political inheritance derived, and the Transcendentalists who defined so much of his philosophical inheritance.

For the Puritans, the conflict between inheritance and invention in identity formation (for the group and for the individual) played out in their religious doctrines and their socio-political infrastructures and on every other level as well, including language. As the first group of settlers in America consciously to construct American identities out of both new and inherited ideas, the Puritans were free to decide what to take from the Old World and what to leave in

[35] Lewis, focusing on the years 1820 to 1860, identifies the terms of the American dialectic as memory (Calvinist theologians), hope (Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman), and irony (Melville and Hawthorne). The fictional narratives of Melville, Hawthorne, and others are distinctive for their "organic relationship between past experiences and the living moment," and, simultaneously, each text's "reveal[ing] its design through an original use of discredited traditional materials" (8).

constructing their society. These educated, orderly, morally rigorous families accomplished the remarkable feat of constructing a New World society out of the pieces they chose to salvage from the Old. According to Alexis de Tocqueville, they "at each instant perform[ed] an act of sovereignty" by choosing their own magistrates, conducting their own wars and making peace, setting up and enforcing laws, acting "as if they came under God alone" (37).[36] Paradoxically, for the Puritans, the existence of religious authority was seen as making liberty possible in both civil and moral realms. The new space of America even caused the colonists' language to adapt and evolve. The way Joan Richardson imagines the Puritans' experience, they landed on the shores of the New World in pursuit of what they conceived as a typological mission, the fulfillment of a Providential directive to found a "city upon a hill," and in this place their old language was inadequate. The New World was full of "so many forms of animal and vegetable life, ranges of geological scale, extremes of climate and weather," none of which had names or fit into existing categories for classification. In order for these people and their spiritual community to survive, they had to pay "acute attention to the double task of preserving in the texts they wove enough of what was familiar from the past to provide continuity with it while at the same time

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[36] Tocqueville calls Puritanism "almost as much a political theory as a religious doctrine," for as soon as the Pilgrims landed on the shores of New England their "first care" was "to organize themselves in a society" (35). One wonders whether the Pilgrims began to develop a secularized *Bildung* even before the Enlightenment philosophers did. De Tocqueville observes that the Americans learned not from authorities, but from their own experience, made necessary by the exigencies of self- government: "It is from participating in legislation that the American learns to know the laws, from governing that he instructs himself in the forms of government. The great work of society is accomplished daily before his eyes and so to speak in his hands" (291).

providing a map of the exotic physical and spiritual terrain" (x). The result was a language in which "familiar words [were] sent spinning and hissing in sentential ratios," grammatical constructions were inverted, and new varieties of paradox and oxymoron sprouted up. The speakers of this language were "stretching the inherited language to describe the new facts and to accommodate the fact of feeling in meeting them" (x). The phenomenon Richardson describes happening with language in the New World also occurred with every other aspect of life: a partial rejection of and a partial adoption of the ways from the Old World. In turn, the society the Puritans fashioned would, in turn, be the inheritance of generations to come.[37] For example, Winfried Herget argues that one of the many ways in which we still live with the Puritan inheritance is in our court system.[38]

For the generation who fought the Revolutionary War, the tension between inheritance and invention in identity formation played out similarly to how it did for the Puritans. The Founders of the American government drew upon

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[37] Richardson specifically studies those writers whose language "preserve[d] the habit of religious experience and expression while braiding into it the most accurate representations possible of the natural world" (x). The overarching goal of Richardson's study is to trace the development of the native American philosophy, Pragmatism, from the original British colonists into the twentieth century. For a Melvillian example of this phenomenon of language evolution, see Chapter 87, in which Ishmael defines the word "to gally, or gallow" as "to frighten excessively - to confound with fright." He gives the word's etymology, then notes that "some of the best and furthest-descended English words—the etymological Howards and Percys—are now democratised, nay, plebeianised—so to speak—in the New World" (384).

[38] Herget characterizes Puritan communities as having been centered on a priestly authority figure who interprets the community's foundational text, the Bible. This structure, Herget argues, shaped our legal system, which relies on Supreme Court justices to interpret the Constitution. Herget concludes that the contribution of Puritanism and colonial New England to the formation of American identity is "located in the logocentricity of a text-bound culture, based on the written word whose meaning may become contested and must be arbitrated by interpretive authority" (25).

intellectual inheritances from Europe even as they declared their independence from Europe and, indeed, from all of history. The Founders literally cast off their forefathers' authority in the audacious confidence that they were inventing a new and better society in which they would be free to make their own rules and to labor for their own families' benefit. Ironically, though, the Declaration of Independence that they wrote and the new democratic government they constructed are infused with inherited ideas such as Enlightenment humanism. The Enlightenment might be said to have begun with the work of Rene Descartes, who unintentionally paved the way for subjectivism, the emphasis on individual judgment, by shifting the central philosophical question from "What is true?" to "Of what can I be certain?" Descartes considered the senses to be inadequate and sometimes unreliable as a means of attaining knowledge and believed that understanding could come only through the reasoning powers of the mind. Because Descartes's view elevates the individual's judgment and denigrates reliance on authority, Tocqueville wrote that Americans are the best practitioners of Descartes without ever having read him. John Locke's empiricism arose as a counterpoint to Descartes's rationalism. According to Locke, identity is shaped wholly by experience. The human is born as a blank slate and is inscribed upon by sensations, which the mind then arranges into concepts. Locke's epistemology undergirded a theory of government that would prove crucial to the Founders: the idea that a government is not divinely appointed, but rather is a social contract that must be ratified by all its participants. The Declaration of

Independence is infused with the Lockean view of the individual—a philosophical inheritance that, ironically, empowered the Founders to cast off inheritance.[39]

In the New England of Melville's day, the dominant school of thought was, of course, Transcendentalism. Even for people who despised this movement, like Edgar Allen Poe, and for older generations still wedded to empiricist modes of thought, Transcendentalism came to define the terms in which American identity would be discussed for at least a generation.[40] Emerson and others of his milieu, including Thoreau, belonged to what R. W. B. Lewis termed the "party of hope" because they had absolute faith in the human race's potential for progress. Ironically, though, despite the frequent insistence of the transcendentalists—and of their interpreters—that their philosophy rested on new invention, their way of thinking in fact was deeply influenced by others who came before them, such as the Swedish theologian Emanuel Swedenborg and the German Romantic philosophers mentioned earlier. In a provocative reassessment of the phrase "American Renaissance," Joe B. Fulton argued that the transcendentalists actually

[39] Both of Melville's grandfathers were in this generation of Founders who established the new nation's experimental democratic government, and both fought prominently in the American Revolution that made that government possible. Melville's paternal grandfather Thomas Melvill had even participated in the Boston Tea Party. After the Tea Act of 1773 had levied taxes on the colonists in order to bail out a failing corporation, the East India Company, in which the king and members of Parliament had invested personal finances. Melvill and the other rebels dumped 90,000 pounds of tea into Boston Harbor. This event represented a refusal by the colonists to submit to the exploitative authority of the British king and Parliament and was emblematic of the Revolutionary generation's determination to re-shape the world through an unprecedented system of self-government.

[40] Andrews Norton, among others, famously lambasted Transcendentalism, and Scottish Commonsense philosophy maintained close adherents at Princeton and elsewhere.

saw themselves as heirs to Puritanism, drawing their rhetoric from the Renaissance and the Reformation. Work like Fulton's shows that Transcendentalists depended upon the old even as they strove toward the new. Indeed, for all Emerson's talk of building new worlds and casting off the dead forms of the past, a closer look at *how* he suggests humans are to progress reveals that really, Emerson's version of progress required looking to the past. The central tenets of his philosophy as expressed in the 1836 essay *Nature* display this tension between inheritance and invention in identity formation. In this essay, Emerson declares the godlike potential of each individual person and asserts that human development, properly managed, leads to the realization of that godlike potential. Proper development consists in seeking an "original relation to nature," but in doing so, a person is not simply inventing an original relation; he is also, or instead, returning to the human race's own former relation ("the" original relation) to nature. Likewise, in "re-fastening words to things," humans are not inventing a new language but rather are discovering their own pre-lapsarian language spoken by their distant ancestors (48). Similar to Emerson, Henry David Thoreau called in *Walden* for a sloughing away of the artificial accretions of conventions and establishments and a rebirth into a new, truer life in harmony with nature and God—again, a return to a former condition. Thoreau's reason for going to live deliberately in the woods was, in R. W. B. Lewis's words, "because human life and human expression were so burdened with unexamined habits, the voice of experience so muffled by an uninvestigated inheritance, that

only a total rejection of those habits and that inheritance and by a recovery of a childlike wonder and directness could anyone find out whether life were worth living at all" (27). Emerson called infancy "the perpetual messiah, which comes into the arms of fallen men, and pleads with them to return to paradise" (*Nature* 154). But that return to paradise is only possible precisely because it is a return: because humans once lived in paradise.

The second dialectic that describes Americans' conception of identity is self-centeredness versus other-centeredness. Although American culture is typically thought of as individualistic—and thus, one might conclude, conducive to a self-centered view of identity and human development—in fact, when one examines the generations of Puritans, Founders, and Transcendentalists, one finds a distinct strain of communal orientation and exteriority in the views of selfhood.

The Puritans, as a Protestant sect, were more individualistic than the Anglicans and Catholics from whom they broke away; they valued the individual conscience and believed that individuals could and should have an unmediated relationship with God. Protestants' way of thinking gave rise, it has been argued, to individualistic ideologies such as capitalism. However, one must remember that the Puritans still conceived of the individual self as intimately dependent upon God and closely related to the other members of the elect. Moreover, their view of the self was deeply informed by typology, meaning that they understood individuals in the context of sacred history and looked to an array of human models for behavior who were, themselves, oriented toward Christ as the

ultimate, perfect model. For example, Jonah's three days in the belly of the whale typologically prefigures Christ's three days of burial between his crucifixion and his resurrection.[41] Thus, for all Puritans' emphasis on the individual, they were very much concerned with the relationships among individuals.[42]

Like the Puritans, the Founding generation also lived in the tension between self-oriented, individualistic conceptions of identity and other-oriented, collective conceptions. The Colonists longed for independence from Britain and the freedom to govern themselves, but accomplishing this individualistic goal required solidarity with each other. Ironically, they had to band together in order to declare independence. The language of the founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, reflects this tension between individualism and collectivism. The full title of the Declaration, for example, is "The unanimous

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[41] A wealth of scholarship examines Puritans' views of the self, so only a few recent examples will be cited here. Thomas H. Luxon argues that, for the Puritans, the wife replaced the friend as the "second self" by which one defines oneself. Linda Tredennick argues that Milton and other Puritan writers were, contrary to typical assumption, at least as concerned with exteriority as interiority. Such writers' Puritan life narratives contribute precisely this to construction of modern identity: they fuse the subjective and objective in their attention to the exterior world of their experience. Finally, Sally Promey analyzes Puritan self-portraits for clues about Puritan views of the self.

[42] Sacvan Bercovich, following Tocqueville, identifies the Puritan view of the self—specifically, that it is created, Providentially called, and formed by God—as a pervasive influence on American thought and literature at least to the American Renaissance. According to Bercovich, Puritan minister and writer Cotton Mather inaugurated a genre that Bercovich terms the "auto-American-biography," which grew out of the genre of spiritual autobiography. The spiritual autobiography locates a person's meaning in his or her relationship with God and charts the person's cultivation of spirituality rather than the cultivation of earthly knowledge, skills, and wisdom. By extension, the auto-American-biography paved the way, according to Bercovich, for later American narratives of self-emergence that are exemplary or didactic in purpose, spiritual in focus, and American exceptionalist in ideology. Secular narratives like Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* owe their structure and ideology to Puritan views of selfhood. Bercovich does not discuss Melville, but he does interpret *Walden*, Thoreau's take on the Romantic autobiography popularized by Wordsworth and Coleridge, in light of American literature's Puritan heritage…

Declaration of the 13 united States of America," and the document refers over and over to Americans as "one People" in whose names the signers are writing. Individualism may have inspired and justified the document, but collectivism was necessary to its writing and its ratification. Even the bold young men who participated in the Boston Tea Party, including Melville's grandfather, did not do so primarily as themselves; they wore Indian masks to conceal their identities and to signify their membership in the group of American patriots. Thus, despite the Revolution's basis in an individualistic view of the self that gave each person the right to make his or her own judgments and throw off any authority that seemed tyrannical, the actual execution of the Colonists' vision required unanimity and cooperation among themselves. One way of understanding this paradoxical view of identity is through John Locke's theory of the proprietary self, the view that "Every man has a property in his own person." That is, the self is property owned by the self. The self is always both sovereign (the owner of the self) and subject (owned by the self)—and the nation was conceived in the same way. It was individualism that made possible this view that each person "owns" his or her own "self," but ironically, once selfhood is defined in terms of ownership, the possibility is opened for that self to be owned by another person or by the group.

For Transcendentalists, the dialectic between self-centered and other-centered identity played out in the formation of two separate, though intertwined, camps of transcendentalists. For all the overlapping beliefs and values of the two groups, they had differing emphases in their efforts to help the human race to

perfect itself. Emerson represents what once might call the "self-centered" school, with its emphasis on the individual's effort to connect with God through Nature, while Orestes Brownson, Bronson Alcott, and Margaret Fuller represented the "other-centered" school, with its emphasis on social reform in the fields of education, women's rights, abolition, and so on. The two different branches of transcendentalism had very different consequences for American society, with Emerson's individualism leading to phenomena as diverse as the market economy, Manifest Destiny, and the invention of the self-help book, whereas socially minded transcendentalism led to reforms like those mentioned, as well as new and improved social institutions.

A third dialectic that has long characterized the American conversation surrounding identity formation is an opposed set of metaphors for human development. On one hand, development can be seen as an external accumulation of traits and qualities, in line with the empiricist position that all knowledge comes through experience. This school of thought, representing the influence of British empiricism and Scottish Commonsense philosophy, was most dominant in New York. On the other hand, development can also be seen as an unfolding of innate potential, in line with the idealist position of the Puritans, Unitarians, and Transcendentalists. This German-inflected school of thought, dominant in New England, emphasized the inherent powers of the mind, which contains a priori ideas and can attain knowledge through revelation, inspiration, or intuition rather than through experience alone. Yet the division between the

two metaphors for human development is unstable and has long proven difficult for people to maintain. For example, Emerson, a thoroughgoing proponent of the "internal unfolding" position, still discusses external influences such as books (history) upon human development. As for Melville, it will be shown in the next chapter that in *Mardi,* the protagonist makes a literal and figurative escape from his unsatisfying empiricism, associated with New York, and into the world of mind associated with the New England Transcendentalists. The whale ship from which he escapes, the *Arcturion,* is named for the New York-based literary journal *Arcturus,* which was published by the Duyckinck brothers. Yet Melville himself will not hold absolutely to an idealist position, as illustrated by key passages in all three of his Bildungsromane.

A central theme in Puritan, Enlightenment, and Transcendentalist thought was a belief in human perfectibility, and this remains a cherished American belief today—and a major reason why America is so amenable to the Bildungsroman. Indeed, despite the foregoing discussion of some points of disagreement (or differing emphasis) among Americans on the subject of the nature of identity, Americans in general seem to share an optimism that individuals and the race as a whole can be perfected. The Puritans once dreamed of building a utopia, Benjamin Franklin urged the readers of his *Autobiography* to follow his lead in making a daily log to track their efforts to cultivate virtue, and Ralph Waldo Emerson exhorted his lecture audiences to build their own better worlds. Formal education has always been seen as a crucial component to the improvement of the

American people. Among the Puritans, the Founders, and the Transcendentalists, particular educational schemes were developed in order to form the next generation into the kind of people that each group valued. Back in 1840, the astute social observer Alexis de Tocqueville described the American faith in perfectibility, noting that although humans had long recognized their perfectibility to be one of the characteristics distinguishing them from animals, in America, the faith was especially strong. The American people saw that changes were constantly occurring all around them; they focused upon the people whose conditions were improving and inferred that man was endowed with the capacity to improve indefinitely. Americans' optimistic assumption inspired them to search continually, through rises and falls in circumstances, through disappointments but never discouragements, for an indistinct but promised greatness.[43] For Tocqueville, it was precisely America's equality of conditions and the newness of its society that generated the near-universal belief that human perfectibility was attainable. As he put it, even action-oriented and relatively unreflective Americans lived by this belief: "I accost an American sailor, and I inquire why the ships of his country are built so as to last but for a short time; he answers without hesitation that the art of navigation is every day making such rapid progress, that the finest vessel would become almost useless if it lasted beyond a certain number of years" (428). Tocqueville's observations apply as

[43] For evidence of Tocqueville's claim, one need not look far in the writings of Founders (such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin) or the Transcendentalists (such as Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody).

much to America today as they did in 1840. In 1999, social critic Herbert I. London described the American faith in perfectibility as an "obsession" that dominates our public discourse. London's examples of the phenomenon, albeit given a negative spin, could have been lifted from an account of the nineteenth-century version of this phenomenon: "hucksters promise what cannot be delivered to a public increasingly convinced that it can defy the limits of nature," marketers of "eternal youth and physical perfection … pretend that aging and personal idiosyncrasies are unnecessary if you buy their ointments, massages, herbal cures … enzymes, hormone additives, vitamins, weight-loss pills," and so on. Americans presume, too, that the psyche is "just as manipulable" as the body, as evidenced by magazine ads that "offer to help you improve your memory, reduce stress, increase your sexual appetite, relax, enlarge your vocabulary, [and] get a zest for life" (par. 4). Just as the earliest Americans believed in and strove for perfection in virtually every sphere of life, so Americans today hold zealously to that optimistic faith as they carry on the never-ending pursuit of happiness, of their own *Bildung*.

Melville's Reading of European Bildungsromane

Melville's understanding of the Bildungsroman's generic conventions was shaped specifically by his reading of five European Bildungsromane during the composition of *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre*. First, Melville read François Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in 1848, while he was writing *Mardi.* This set of five novels, written in sixteenth-century France, tell the fanciful story of two

royal giants, a king named Gargantua and his son Pantagruel. The second of the novels, *Pantagruel King of the Dipsodes Restored to His True Character with All His Terrible Deeds and Acts of Heroism,* will receive the most attention here because it traces Pantagruel's development from birth through his ascent to the throne of the Dipsodes.[44] Second, Melville read Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* in 1849, during the trip he took to London between writing *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*. Sterne's novel had been serialized in Britain from 1759 to 1769 and quickly distributed in translation across Europe. Third, Melville read Goethe's Bildungsroman *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre (Apprenticeship)* and its sequel *Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre (Journeyman Years)* in 1850 while he was writing *Moby-Dick.* The *Apprenticeship*—which follows Wilhelm, son of a prosperous merchant, through early adulthood—is generally considered the prototypical Bildungsroman; it is the text Karl Morgenstern had in mind when he invented the label in 1819. The two novels will be treated as a single novel for simplicity, but the *Apprenticeship* will receive more attention here because it covers the life stage typical of the Bildungsromane of Melville and others. A fourth Bildungsroman Melville read while writing his own Bildungsroman triptych was Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus,* which was composed in 1831 and first published in America in 1836 under the impetus of Emerson, whose transcendentalist ideas drew heavily from Carlyle. Melville certainly read the work in 1850, while

[44] The second novel was composed first, but because events are chronologically second, the five novels are usually published in the story's chronological order. Bakhtin focuses on this second novel in his essay on the Bildungsroman.

writing *Moby-Dick,* but he may have also read it while working on *Mardi* in 1848, when he read an unidentified work of Carlyle's.[45] Carlyle was deeply influenced by Rabelais, Sterne, and Goethe, and he was responsible for translating *Wilhelm Meister* into English. The second of the three volumes in *Sartor Resartus* is considered a Bildungsroman because it describes the formation of a fictional Philosopher of Clothes, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh.[46] *David Copperfield,* the fifth European Bildungsroman whose influence on Melville is discussed here, was read aloud in Melville's family home during his composition of *Moby-Dick.* This novel is widely considered a quintessential example of the Bildungsroman genre and is the most autobiographical of Dickens's works. David's life story, like Pantagruel's, Tristram's, Wilhelm's, and Teufelsdröckh's, bears many conventions of the Bildungsroman: it follows its hero from his birth, to his significant naming, to an early loss that disillusions him and jolts him from his boyhood passivity, through a formal education that leaves him unsatisfied, to a love affair, and finally a sense of a working philosophy and his place in the world. The parallels shared by these five European Bildungsromane become striking when one recognizes how each of the five texts' shared elements finds its way into Melville's Bildungsromane, *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre.*

[45] Matthiesen discussed Carlyle's influence on *Mardi* in *American Renaissance.*

[46] In the first book, the anonymous editor patches together fragments of Teufelsdröckh's philosophy of clothes, and in the third the editor discusses some practical implications of the philosophy. This study will focus on Book II, where Teufelsdröckh's life is described; the narrative is profoundly influenced by Carlyle's reading of *Wilhelm Meister,* which he translated into English.

All eight Bildungsromane—the five that Melville read and the three that he wrote—introduce their protagonists when in an initial state of youthful potential. Each young man is energetic, intelligent, adventurous, and well read for his age, and thus has the potential for mobility within his social world. His name has special significance in his identity formation, whether his naming occurs at birth or later. The protagonist's development process begins when he leaves home, whether by choice or force and whether with optimism or grief. He is jarred from his youthful complacency or unproductivity. Next, the hero moves through a recursive process of encounters with others (human and non-human) alternating with periods of self-reflection. The episodic or digressive structure of the narrative reflects the recursive nature of human development. The Bildungsromane downplay the role of formal, classroom education in the hero's development. Rather, the hero's journey is not directed by a single entity, although he does wonder about the roles of fate, chance, and freewill in shaping his life. All eight Bildungsromane heroes encounter three categories of development trigger: authorities, the unknown, and evidence of social contract. The hero has an intense love-relationship with a woman (or in Ishmael's case, with a tattooed harpooneer), which fails to lead to a permanent marriage. A few of these Bildungsromane end inconclusively, with the hero finally unable to resolve the question that has been nagging at him all along, the question of how fate, chance, and his own agency interact to weave the fabric of his reality. All of the Bildungsromane discussed here are explicitly concerned with what the reader

learns from the text; often this is achieved through direct addresses to the reader. Throughout the narrative, each protagonist sorts out competing truth claims and moves toward mature acceptance of his place in society, whether or not the narrative actually concludes with that acceptance. The human and non-human Others that the Bildungsroman hero encounters on his journey might be either authority figures (people or books), or the unknown (mysterious humans, natural wonders, or supernatural intimations). Periodically during his journey the hero also experiences memories of home, or more precisely his point of origin, which when they occur draw him back, in his imagination, to his point of origin. The hero ultimately achieves some sort of recognition of a social contract, whether governmental or familial.

A key difference between Melville's Bildungsromane and his European models is that the protagonists of the European Bildungsromane are defined in relationship to their earthly fathers, who give their sons highly significant names, consciously or unconsciously influence the formation of pedagogical schemes to direct their sons' formation processes, and choose "mirrors" or portrait selves after whom the sons are to model their manners and behavior. Gargantua presents himself as a mirror to Pantagruel; Walter Shandy agonizes over whom to choose as a tutor, or "mirror," for Tristram (332); Wilhelm sees his "portrait self" in the scroll written by the Tower Society as they tracked his adventures with the theater troupe; Diogenes Teufelsdröckh is profoundly shaped by his name, which is the only tangible legacy given by his mysterious birth father; and David

Copperfield pores over the books left behind by his dead father, the senior David Copperfield, and from these books learns lessons that will serve him well throughout life. Despite the fathers' careful efforts, all five protagonists are drawn away from their fathers' proscribed structures to a form of play or wandering, an apparently unproductive activity that turns out to be productive by unexpectedly preparing the protagonist for adulthood. Outside his father's guidance, each protagonist has a love relationship (or several), which helps him toward recognition of the larger world and its complicated but indispensable social contracts. In the end, the protagonist reaches a degree of self-knowledge, a more or less comfortable relationship to his father (who is usually dead by now), and a sense of his place in the world. Every step of the way, the protagonist's journey of formation is defined, sometimes invisibly, by his human father. Melville's protagonists, by contrast, never mention their fathers; instead, they seem quite alone in the world and responsible for their own development. (Pierre's father is important to him, but I will argue that the narrator, not Pierre, is the protagonist of *Pierre.*) To give the reader a sense of the varied ways in which the five European Bildungsromane under consideration depict human formation, each protagonist's development will be briefly sketched here.

In *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* Rabelais's protagonist, Pantagruel, grows into an adult able to win the throne of the Dipsodes by synthesizing his own version of adulthood from his father's educational scheme for him and his own innate nature. Pantagruel is able to develop into a good king because of his noble stock,

his physical robustness, his zest for life, and his ability to recognize the limitations of the previous generation's institutions. The didactic function of the text is made explicit in the narrator's frequent injunctions to the reader not to be rigid or moralistic but rather to live like Pantagruel, peaceful, happy, healthy, and fun-loving. The middle portion of the novel describes the young prince's stints at various universities and his disputes with scholars, legal experts, and other conventional authorities. Although king Gargantua has sent his son away in order to be formed into a capable heir to the throne, young Pantagruel spends most of his time drinking, carousing, and insulting the studious—until a letter from his father persuades him to apply himself to his studies so that he can become a "mirror" of his father, a capable king (157). Gargantua prescribes Pantagruel's Renaissance course of reading: he instructs his son to read Plutarch's history, Plato's philosophy, and various works of natural philosophy, civil law, and so on. The king writes, "In short, plumb all knowledge to the very depths, because when you are a grown man you will be obliged to leave the peace and tranquility of learning, and acquire the arts of chivalry and warfare, in order to defend my house and lands" (159). Gargantua tells Pantagruel to prepare for a public defense of his learning, which he later does by posting his arguments in various fields all around the city. In these public arguments, Pantagruel attacks all the assumptions of the received authorities in law, theology, and other fields of learning. Then he is called upon to pass judgment in a court case that has long baffled legal experts. Ironically, he solves the case by cutting out all the masses of

documents and copies of documents, all the "stupid irrationalities and ridiculous opinions" about the matter, and talking directly with the plaintiff and defendant (166). He declares that the supposed legal experts cannot understand and apply the law because they are not widely learned enough. In the end, Rabelais's Bildungsroman affirms the importance of an authority figure's prescriptions for the young person's development, even while it makes room for the young person to rebel, play, and find his own route to the prescribed end. Melville's Bildungsromane share Rabelais's irreverent humor, particularly the satirization of the learned, burlesquing of their language, and invention of fictional texts.[47]

As in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, identity formation in *Tristram Shandy* is a similar blend of parent's planning and protagonist's play, but in this case the play is unwittingly directed by Tristram's gentle uncle Toby. Walter Shandy painstakingly writes a *Tristrapoedia* to direct Tristram's education, but Tristram is formed more by the chance impressions left by his father and uncle in their casual moments than he is by the *Tristrapoedia.* Walter's educational scheme contrasts with the chance impressions Tristram receives from his kindly Uncle Toby. Walter believes the purpose of education is to train students to process the materials of perception into ideas, but his system, which he sees as an "engine" for opening children's heads (329), fails because Walter writes so much slower than Tristram lives (298). By contrast, Uncle Toby is oblivious to the impressions he makes on young Tristram. The narrator recalls watching Uncle Toby spare a

[47] Cowan and Yothers, among others, have discussed the influence of Rabelais on Melville.

fly that he caught in the house, gently freeing it through the window: "[T]he lesson of universal good will then taught and imprinted on me by my Uncle Toby, has never since been worn out of my mind" (91). It was a greater lesson than any provided by his expensive education or his study of *Literae humanitores* at university: "yet I often think that I owe one half of my philanthropy to that one accidental impression." Tristram points this out this story as a lesson for "parents and governors" in lieu of "a whole volume on the subject" (91). Tristram's narrative, like Pantagruel's, reveals the paradoxical role of play in human formation. Each major character in the book has a "hobby-horse," and this is both good and harmful: good because a hobby-horse gives one pleasure, satisfaction, and a sense of unique identity, and harmful because engaging too deeply in play with one's hobby-horse can blind one to practical realities, give one distorted lenses through which to view the world, and lead one to mistake one's *opinions* for true *knowledge.* A hobby-horse can prevent a person from thinking, communicating, and reading well. Tristram suggests that his father Walter's hobby-horse—his set of strange opinions, for which he loves to argue—are responsible for each of Tristram's misfortunes: Walter's regularity in clock-winding is a cause of the homonculus's animal spirits being scattered during conception; he has a political theory that keeps him from going to the city for Tristram's birth, leading to the baby's nose being crushed; his name theory both leads to the baby's mis-naming and makes that mis-naming seem especially egregeious. Walter's hobby-horse is to practice a distorted scientific method,

forming inflexible hypotheses and then forcing all the data to conform to the theory instead of revising the theory (120). What emerges from Tristram's wildly digressive narrative is not a detailed portrait of the protagonist's formation process, but rather a sketch of the key causes for his becoming who he did. To use Locke's terms, as Tristram himself does, he traces the earliest and most profound inscriptions made upon him when he was still a blank slate. Although these events shape Tristram profoundly, their power to shape him lies in his father's perception of them as the grossest possible misfortunes. Thus, even though "chance" events shape him more than his father's deliberately composed *Tristrapoedia* does, it is still his father and uncle who shape his development. Tristram does want readers to profit from his story and not just read it for vicarious adventure; to that end, he fills his volumes with philosophical digressions on questions like how people gain knowledge through experience and association of ideas rather than through received authority. The parallels between *Tristram Shandy* and the Bildungsromane of Melville include the sketchy approach to tracing the protagonist's development, the digressive structure, the balance of the comic and the philosophical, and the narrator-protagonist's sense of being overwhelmed by the difficulty of communicating truth. Tristram uses various unconventional devices to explore the mystery of incommunicable meaning, including a solid black page and a blank page.

In *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship,* the protagonist's maturation occurs as he travels with a theater troupe and has adventures that, unbeknownst to him, are

followed and recorded by a group of unidentified mentors who call themselves the Tower Society. Wilhelm's story begins when he is drawn away from the example set by his middle-class businessman father, whose life Wilhelm perceives as dry and merely functional, in order to try to build a creative, itinerant life as an actor. In the end, though, after his father's death, Wilhelm finds his way back to the life of a bourgeois merchant through the invisible guidance of the Tower Society. During Wilhelm's time in the theater, he plays (in both senses) at being an actor, deluding himself that he is helping to build up a national theater. He has a series of what seem to be unrelated adventures, including love affairs, a mediocre performance of *Hamlet,* meetings with noblemen and women, his "adoption" of two children in the troupe, and his listening to the spiritual formation narratives of several women: Aurelia, Theresa, and the "Beautiful Soul." These adventures culminate in Wilhelm's gradual realization that he is not actually a talented actor and his departure from the troupe to carry on his now-deceased father's business. The most dramatic moment of change is prompted by the intervention of the Tower Society, a secretive organization whose members follow certain select young men and try to cultivate their development, and delay or deflect the development of the young men whom they do not like. The project remains a secret from the subjects and is a form of play for the members (419-20). When the members of the Tower Society determine that Wilhelm is ready to graduate from his "apprenticeship," they bring him into the Tower, and there, they explain that Wilhelm is now developed enough to move from a sense of

independence to a sense of membership in and duty toward a group that has long known him; they initiate him into the Society and declare his apprenticeship over. Now, as a member of the group, he will really be able to know himself (376-7). Wilhelm's dawning self-knowledge is propelled by his reading of the scroll where the Tower Society has recorded his adventures. The scroll tells his life story "in large, sharp outlines," and as he reads it, Wilhelm sees for the first time "his own picture outside himself, admittedly not as in a mirror, a second self, but as in a portrait, another self." Looking at such a portrait self, "we do not admit to all the traits, it is true, but we are pleased that a thoughtful mind and a great talent should have wished to portray us in this way, and that a picture of what we were still remains and that it can last longer than we ourselves" (387). The portrait self functions here as it does in other Bildungsromane; as a text constructed by one's authorities, the portrait self awakens one's memory and spurs recognition of one's progress. Yet this encounter with his portrait self does not mark the end of Wilhelm's development. He continues to wander and wonder. When he later asks an old country pastor why the members of the Society had let him spend so many fruitless months with the acting troupe and make countless other mistakes, the old man explains that, "The educator's duty is not to preserve his pupil from error, but to guide him as he goes astray, indeed, to let him swallow his error in full measure." He adds that "[H]e who consumes error to the full must get to know it for what it is, unless he is mad" (378). Wilhelm recognizes the error to which the pastor is referring: that Wilhelm had, during his time with the theater,

"looked for educational development where none was to be found," and that he imagined he could "acquire a talent for which [he] did not have the slightest ability" (378). The Society members do assure Wilhelm that he will not regret any of the follies he has been allowed to commit. In the end, when all the main characters pair off and a "happy" ending seems imminent, Wilhelm's friend Lothario declares, "Now that we have come together in this amazing way, let us not lead commonplace lives … It is incredible what a cultivated man can do for himself and others if, without wishing to rule, he has a mind to be the guardian of many" (463-4). Wilhelm, who is joining the noble (in blood and nature) family of Lothario and Theresa, resists remembering his past at this moment lest it cloud his present happiness, but his friend Frederick tells him not to be ashamed of his origins (465). The novel ends with Wilhelm expressing that he does not deserve the happiness he has attained but that he would not exchange it for anything in the world (implicitly, freedom). The parallels to Melville's Bildungsromane are subtler here than in the other authors' Bildungsromane. Most importantly, the protagonist's progress is difficult or even impossible to detect until the end of the novel, and even then, the nature of his achievement is ambiguous: how much of his happiness is compromise, even self-delusion? Second, the backdrop of Wilhelm's development, like that of Melville's protagonists, is a key moment in a specific nation's cultural development. Wilhelm's story unfolds in Germany's emergent national theater at a time when Germany itself was emergent as a cohesive modern nation. *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre* exist within America's

struggle to construct a national identity amidst its rapid industrialization and commercial growth, influences from many global cultures, and the tension between its Calvinist inheritance and the new, native philosophy of Transcendentalism that appeared in the 1830s. Thus, Melville's Bildungsromane, just like the prototypical Bildungsromane, depict the emergence of a nation just as much as they trace the emergence of individual protagonists.[48]

Carlyle's protagonist in *Sartor Resartus,* Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, never knows his birth parents, but his destiny is profoundly shaped by the name that is his only, ambiguous inheritance from them; the name is ambiguous because it means "God-born devil's dung." When Teufelsdröckh is deposited as an infant at the home of a provincial couple, the Futterals, he has only a silk scarf with the name "Diogenes Teufelsdröckh" embroidered on it, so his adoptive parents decide to call him by that name. At age twelve, Diogenes discovers the truth about his adoption and enters a period of intense longing for his birth father during which he approaches noble-looking strangers hoping that one of them will be his father. He continues to go by the name "Diogenes Teufelsdröckh" even though he "hesitate[s] to believe" that it is his unknown father's name (67), in part because in all his searching he cannot find another person by that name. He wonders what misfortunes forced his father to abandon him, and ponders the

[48] Critics studying the relationship between Goethe and Melville have looked mostly at *Faust,* with some work on the *Autobiography* and *Italian Journey,* and James Duban has looked at *Wilhelm Meister* and *Pierre.* However, no one has studied the relationship between *Wilhelm Meister* and *Moby-Dick* even though Melville read the novel in 1850. A handful of Melville scholars have, however, called for further study of Goethe's influence on Melville: James Duban, Michaela Giesenkirchen, and Harrison Hayford ("Melville's German Streak").

profound influence that his father has on him even in absence through the name his father had bestowed on him. Diogenes reflects that a name is a person's "earliest garment," which fuses to a person "more tenaciously … than the very skin" and sends "mystic influences … inwards" (67-68). Like other Bildungsroman protagonists, young Diogenes has unsatisfying experiences in school, as compared to his own independent reading. In the miscellaneous stall-literature where he finds his reading material, writes the Editor, "History in authentic fragments lay mingled with Fabulous chimeras, wherein also was reality; and the whole not as dead stuff, but as tolerably nutritive for a mind as yet so peptic" (79). By contrast, in school his pedantic teachers try mechanically to ground dead languages into the students' heads because they are incapable of fostering the growth of "[m]ind, which grows, not like a vegetable (by having its roots littered with etymological compost) but like a *spirit*" (82). The nameless university that Diogenes Teufelsdröckh attends as a young man is even worse than the school; it consists only of an enclosure with doors guarded by professors, and an outdated, undeserved reputation. The university is under the spell of an Era of Unbelief, and is "hostile to Mysticism" (87). Teufelsdröckh longs for an era of Faith, where one's spirit can be fed. Teufelsdröckh again turns to independent reading, this time in the university library, where he lays a "foundation for a literary life." Through his reading, he formulates a "groundplan of Human Nature and Life," to be corrected and extended through experiments. Writes the Editor, "Thus from poverty does the strong educe nobler wealth; thus in the

destitution of the wild desert, does our young Ishmael acquire for himself the highest of all possessions, that of Self-Help" (88). Teufelsdröckh goes on to have a great love affair with a woman named Blumine, who leaves him, then aimlessly wanders the "terraqueous Globe" for years (114). The Editor finds it impossible to trace Teufelsdröckh's journeys, which spanned countries and social circles. During this period, Teufelsdröckh wrestles with doubt and prays for light, loses his faith, and regains it with the recognition that the loss of faith was a necessary phase on the way to apprehending the spirit of religion. His spiritual progression takes him through the "Centre of Indifference" to "The Everlasting Yea," where he finally has a working philosophy. Of the European Bildungsroman protagonists discussed here, his development is the most self-directed. Yet he also characterizes growth as an organic unfolding of internal potential: "To breed a fresh Soul, is it not like brooding a fresh (celestial) Egg; wherein as yet all is formless, powerless; yet by degrees organic elements and fibres shoot through the watery albumen; and out of vague Sensation, grows Thought, grows Fantasy and Force, and we have Philosophies, Dynasties, nay Poetries and Religions!" (68).[49] Parallels between *Sartor Resartus* and Melville's Bildungsromane include the narrative frame, in which an Editor compiles documents and reconstructs past events that he then comments and philosophizes upon; the use of silences in the

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[49] F. O. Matthiesen briefly discussed the influence of Carlyle on *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre* (384-5). Robert Milder sees a profound influence from *Sartor Resartus* on *Mardi,* and many critics have mentioned the influence on *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre.* Harrison Hayford sees Diogenes Teufelsdröckh as a prototype of Ahab, along with Job, Prometheus, Lear, and Milton's Satan (101).

text as key moments of realization for the protagonist; the denigration of the university as a place to be educated and prepared for adulthood; the protagonist's profoundly formative experience of reading independently in whatever miscellaneous materials come to hand; and finally, the protagonist's wandering of the globe, which, like his reading, he finds far more important to his development than his time in school.

Dickens's protagonist, David Copperfield, is a prosperous middle-aged man who now reflects on his life and writes down the story of his development from a poor and orphaned youth to the successful writer and contented husband and father that he is now. Although his father had died before David's birth, he, David Copperfield Senior, is in the background of all young David's development. For example, David's chief solace during difficult childhood hours was to read his father's novel collection and get to know the characters as real companions. More significantly, it is David's aunt Betsy Trotter who eventually takes him and arranges for David's education and career, and she does so out of love for David's father. Betsy puts David through the best school in the city, and after his graduation suggests he become a proctor (a kind of attorney) and arranges for his clerkship. She rightly counsels him against pursuing a courtship with the childish Dora, although he does not heed her advice. Betsy acts as a stand-in for David's father as she shapes his life, but David also meets others who influence his identity formation. Much of his maturation process consists in learning how to form accurate judgments of people's character so that he does not

lend money to the perpetually insolvent (the Micawbers), discount the virtues of a shabbily dressed old friend (Tommy Traddles), or marry a frivolous young girl who cannot keep house (Dora, who fortunately for David dies early in their marriage). The two peers who most influence David are Steerforth and Agnes. The reader realizes long before young David does that Steerforth is rude, dissipated, idle, and self-indulgent and that the calm, responsible, productive Agnes is far better company for him. In Chapter 25, Agnes warns David that Steerforth is his bad angel; the chapter title, "Good and Bad Angels," makes clear that she is his good angel. David's maturation is eventually defined by his choice of Agnes over Steerforth. A series of deaths at novel's end signify David's maturation as well: Steerforth's death signifies the death of David's impetuousness and frivolity, Ham's death inspires him to be selfless, and Dora's death makes him give up his youthful romanticism while making way for him to marry his true love Agnes. Parallels between *David Copperfield* and Melville's Bildungsromane include the tension between the mature narrator and the naïve younger self whose experiences the narrator describes; the characterization of secondary human characters as good and bad angels who influence the protagonist toward good or bad decisions; the positive transformation of the protagonist through painful losses and disappointments; and the narrative device in which the narrator refers to his own present moment of narration when the past events he narrates reminds him of his current experience.

The Bildungsroman in American Literature

The complicated history of the European Bildungsroman has been minutely analyzed by scholars of European literature but never fully discussed in relationship to early national and antebellum American literature. Critics like Franco Moretti and Bettina Friedl explicitly exclude American literature from this tradition, and Anniken Telnes Iversen ignores the possibility of an American Bildungsroman before the Civil War. Thomas Jeffers, although he is one of the few critics to discuss the relationship between the Bildungsroman and American literature, never mentions Melville. He implies that *Bildung* influences mid-nineteenth century American literature, but the earliest American writers Jeffers discusses are Henry James and George Santayana.[50] Reading *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre* as Bildungsromane confirms that the Bildungsroman did exist in antebellum American literature.

The four scholars mentioned here typify the broader attitude toward the Bildungsroman in antebellum America: its possible existence is either ignored or denied. In his study of the Bildungsroman, Moretti explicitly dismisses American literature in a single biting footnote on three grounds: American literature's

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[50] In Thomas Jeffers's explanation of how *Bildung* migrated to America, he says that *Bildung* was "adopted" in the nineteenth century by Emerson, Thoreau, and other transcendentalists, "all romantics or heirs of romanticism—who helped create the climate of concepts and assumptions that novelists in their day and after worked within" (35). He describes their appropriation of the concept of *Bildung* as being like a blend of the German and English versions; that is, focused both on inner development and of the social environment and national culture: "Nineteenth-century Americans could be very civically responsible, but material conditions—from the greater privacy afforded people within a still largely rural or small town population, to the cushion provided by widely shared wealth—favored a Germanic sort of profundity about the individual self" (35).

religious dimension, its emphasis on nature's "symbolic value," and its heroes' encounters with aliens such as natives or blacks, as opposed to encounters with the "unknown" (229). Moretti argues that the true Bildungsroman must be secular and urban and must bring the hero into contact with the "unknown," rather than with the "alien." Even if Moretti's definition of the Bildungsroman were sound (and recent work by Summerfield and Downward, among others, suggests that it is not), his simplistic assessment of American literature is certainly not compelling. In Bettina Friedl's study, she claimed that the first novels of development in America were late nineteenth-century fictive biographies of women and immigrants, committing an error more of omission than commission (qtd. in Iversen 84). Anniken Telnes Iversen's study makes a similar mistake. In her lengthy discussion of what she calls the "Anglo-American Bildungsroman tradition," she assumes (despite many scholars' arguments to the contrary) that *Huck Finn* is a formation narrative. When the novel turns out only to score a 53 on her BRI, Iversen does not recognize that *Huck Finn* is not in fact a Bildungsroman and then consider whether other earlier American novels might in fact have Bildungsroman characteristics. Instead, she concludes that *Huck Finn*'s low score on the BRI proves that no Bildungsroman had been written by Americans at that point, 1884. She remarks that, "Given that the bildungsroman seems to have had trouble crossing the Atlantic, it is interesting to see how Twain uses the tradition to depart from it" (149).[51] It seems never to occur to Iversen that, almost four

[51] Iversen chooses *Huck Finn* to be the earliest American text (1885) in her study because,

decades before *Huck Finn* was published, Herman Melville wrote three American Bildungsromane that all score over 100 on her Bildungsroman Index. Moreover, one might also argue that other American protagonists, such as Hope Leslie, Natty Bumppo, or Hester Prynne exhibit characteristics of the Bildungsroman protagonist.

Contrary to scholars' long-held assumption that no Bildungsromane were written in America until the late nineteenth century or later—if at all—at least three Bildungsromane were written in America as early as the years 1848 to 1852. Melville's three major philosophical novels, *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre,* are Bildungsromane written as an American response to carefully studied European Bildungsromane. They reflect a view of human development that was informed by both native and European sources. Melville was formed in early life by his specific family identity and by the intellectual atmosphere of 1830s and 1840s New England, and in early adulthood he encountered European influences such as the Bildungsromane written by Rabelais, Sterne, Goethe, Carlyle, and Dickens. Melville's revisions of the genre were shaped by his particularly American experiences and concerns, and by his own particular *Bildung* process.

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she says, it is the prototypical American formation narrative: "[T]he novel has been hailed both as archetypically American and the prime example of the bildungsroman or novel of formation in America" (149). Iversen is apparently unaware of the extensive debate among Twain scholars as to whether the novel constitutes a formation narrative; many consider the novel a picaresque, and Edwin Cady recently called the latter assumption a critical commonplace (89).

CHAPTER THREE

Education as Conversation in *Mardi*: Integrating Heteroglossia

In me, many worthies recline, and converse.

--Herman Melville, *Mardi*

Late in *Mardi*, the philosopher Babbalanja describes the process by which the ancient genius, Lombardo, had composed his masterpiece, the Koztanza. When Lombardo began writing his great work, Babbalanja explains, he did not try to determine beforehand what the finished product would be or to "build himself in with plans." Instead, "he wrote right on; and so doing, got deeper and deeper into himself; and like a resolute traveler, plunging through baffling woods, at last was rewarded for his toils" (595). For Lombardo, the process of writing the Koztanza both manifests and makes possible his process of self-discovery and maturation. Babbalanja's account of Lombardo's composition of the Koztanza is generally considered to be a disguised account of Melville's own experience in writing *Mardi*.[1] Indeed, for decades, *Mardi* has been widely taken to be a record of Melville's rapid development, during its composition, from a popular spinner of sea-yarns into a serious literary author. Yet *Mardi* is far more than that, and understanding this enables one to see that

[1] Or, as Nina Baym sees it, "These chapters … are talking not about Melville's having written a romance, but about his having failed to sustain it" (912).

the Lombardo episode is in fact not merely or necessarily a surrogate for the real-life author's experience, but rather is an integral part of the literary text that is *Mardi.* The narrator cannot be conflated with Melville himself, and in the logic of the text, it is the narrator's composition process—not Melville's—that is analogized in the description of Lombardo's writing process. The character who tells his story in *Mardi* is, just like Lombardo, discovering himself and his mature identity during and through the act of writing. As he writes, the narrator works through political and philosophical anxieties, contemplates various ways that societies and governments can go wrong, and ultimately works toward a utopian vision of a society ruled by equality and charity; this utopia could represent the culmination not only of his personal development, but of the whole human race's.

As an example of the narrator's learning-through-writing, take the chapter "Faith and Knowledge," in which the narrator has an insight into the nature of how he acquires knowledge while he is in the very act of writing. In this chapter, the narrator halts his description of the voyage through Mardi in order to rhapsodize about his close identification with the patriots of the Boston Tea Party and other people of the past. He declares, "I am the leader of the Mohawk masks, who in the Old Commonwealth's harbor, overboard threw the East India Company's Souchong." He then goes on to boast that he was not only at the Tea Party; he was also "at the taking of Tyre," was "overwhelmed in Gomorrah," and was "at the subsiding of the Deluge, and helped swab the

ground, and build the first house." He had "fainted in the wilderness" with the Israelites, and "was in court, when Solomon outdid all the judges before him" (297). He lists countless other long-dead human beings with whom he claims to share identity. His evidence for this claim is simply that he has such strong faith in what he is asserting; his faith transforms intuition into knowledge. The narrator discovers truth—such as this truth about the composite nature of his identity and about the intuitive method of acquiring knowledge—through the experience of recounting, in narrative form, the events that Taji, his dream-avatar, experiences. Yet the realization that the *Mardi* narrator has in this chapter is not an arbitrarily fanciful one, even though it was occasioned by a spectacular dream. Melville could say in a more literal sense than most people that he was one of the men who had "overboard threw the East India Company's Souchong" because his paternal grandfather, Major Thomas Melvill, was literally one of the "Mohawk Masks" who cast the East India Company's merchandise into the harbor (Parker 2-3). A man from whom Melville had gotten his surname and some of his blood had actually donned a Mohawk Mask on that fateful night and had later told the story to young Herman countless times. This fact of Melville's biography lends weight to Taji's flight of fancy by underlining the reality that, however distant in time and place another human being may be, we are all bound by ties of blood and by the stories we have passed down through the generations. In passages such as these, when the narrator breaks from recounting the experiences of his

portrait self, Taji, the reader can sense how the narrator's imagining of his portrait self's voyage through Mardi constitutes an important epoch in his own overall development.

First, a word of justification is required for reading the events of *Mardi* as a dream, and seeing Taji as the dream-avatar of the narrator. Christopher Sten was the first to argue, in 1996, that most of *Mardi* occurs within the narrator's dreaming subconscious. According to Sten, Melville wrote *Mardi* intentionally within the conventions of the imaginary voyage genre, which flourished from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century and included texts like *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Thomas More's *Utopia*, and *Gulliver's Travels.* In keeping with the genre, Sten argues, *Mardi* begins with the main character escaping his unsatisfactory waking life by slipping into a dream wherein he takes a long and fantastical voyage to a distant place, culminating in an arrival at a marvelous utopia. Reading *Mardi* as an imaginary voyage dreamed by the protagonist explains the novel's apparent formlessness; its abrupt shifts in focus; its thinly veiled allusions to current events at the time of Melville's writing in 1848, such as the revolutions in Europe, the building tension over slavery in the American South, and the beginning of the Gold Rush; and finally, it also explains the narrator's apparent suicide at the end. Sten's reading is provocative, but it does not explore in detail the development undergone by the narrator throughout the course of his dream, nor does it explore the implications of the dream for his waking life. This chapter on *Mardi* will do

just that as it reads the text not only as an imaginary, dream voyage but also as a Bildungsroman.[2] Reading *Mardi* through the lens of Melville's specific conception of the Bildungsroman enables readers to see not only the close relationship *Mardi* bears to *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*, but also how those similarities derive from Melville's close reading of European Bildungsromane during his composition process. Further, it shows Melville's conception of identity and identity formation at this point in his development.

This chapter will argue that *Mardi* is a Bildungsroman in which the narrator's formation is affected through his construction of a portrait self, Taji, his dreamed-up avatar who inhabits the dream-world of Mardi. Taji is in turn formed by listening in on the conversations of "experts" as he travels around the Mardi. That portrait self, whom the narrator calls Taji, escapes the whale-ship *Arcturion*—on which the sleeping body of the narrator remains trapped—and undergoes the educational process of voyaging around Mardi in the company of four "tutors": a king, a philosopher, a historian, and a poet.[3] The

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[2] Julie M. Johnson comes close to seeing the voyage through Mardi as the narrator's dream when she says that "Melville depicts the external quest in *Mardi* by externalizing it in the manner of allegory: the internal state of the quester is projected upon persons and objects, creating an external metaphoric structure" (221). Johnson's reading relies upon Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, according to which the dream symbols that structure our thoughts are not self-invented, but rather belong to an unconscious shared by all people.

[3] Sten does not think that the dream begins until Taji actually lands on Mardi; however, the present study takes the position that the fantastical elements begin much sooner, as soon as he leaves the *Arcturion*. For more on Melville's use of the avatar, a device he borrowed from Hindu thought, see Baird. Baird examines Melville's engagement with non-Christian religions throughout his career and discusses how Melville's use of the avatar – with its connotations of escape from the self and from linear time–shapes his understanding of divinity.

narrator's dream reflects his internal fragmentation; after all, it is he who is dreaming up the king, philosopher, historian, and poet and their sometimes-heated debates. The debates of these characters within the narrator's dream reflect his anxieties about broad epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical questions as well as about specific historical events in his waking-life world of 1848. The narrator's dream becomes a means for him to mature toward a more integrated identity, which will enable him to take on the responsibilities of participation in his waking-life reality. Thus, in the novel human formation is made possible through a process of attending to the competing "voices" within oneself and deciding which voices to ratify, each decision potentially leading to positive or negative change, toward integration or disintegration. In his dream, the protagonist meets people with disintegrated identities, such as the boy-king Valapee, who is full of the souls of his ancestors; but he also witnesses people's development of integrated identities, such as that achieved by Babbalanja on the island of Serenia. At least one scholar, Robert Milder, has considered *Mardi* in light of the Bildungsroman tradition. Milder sees *Mardi* as a sort of failed Bildungsroman in which the protagonist embarks on a voyage of discovery but never makes a discovery: "Its journey is a spiral inward into greater complexity and ambiguity, not upward into higher unity and toward 'home.'" Milder likens Taji, the "unreturning wanderer," to "Melville's other seekers-turned-wanderers," Ishmael and Pierre. However, Milder's assessment that *Mardi* fails as a Bildungsroman is only valid if Taji is not contained within another, "real"

person, the narrator who dreams him up. The present study shows that *Mardi* is a Bildungsroman for precisely this reason.

That the narrator's formation process occurs through internal conversations—that is, through the conversations held by "people" within his dreaming subconscious—is consistent with the view of human identity articulated throughout the text, specifically, that each human being is heteroglossic, with an identity continually re-constituted by the "voices" conversing within oneself. Those voices are not original inventions of the individual's imagination but rather are inherited echoes from people one has encountered in the past. John Wenke notes that the voice of Babbalanja represents a subtle synthesis of many diverse philosophical and religious sources from which Melville drew in crafting the character. Within the story-world of *Mardi,* Babbalanja's main influences include the ancients Bardianna and Lombardo, but these fictional geniuses were crafted by Melville with certain geniuses from his own world in mind. Beverly Thorne, along similar lines, conceives the voice of *Mardi* "as one in conversation with itself, as dialogic," and the novel itself as "an instance of an author self-consciously assigning his characters names as doubles for his central voice" (67). Her argument goes too far, though, because the characters are distinct from one another. Every dream-character in *Mardi* embodies in some way the heteroglossia of human identity by synthesizing, in different combinations, many different voices from the real and fictional past. The heteroglossic view

of identity that Melville articulates in *Mardi* is uniquely suited to a nation of unprecedented diversity not only in its natural environment—in landscapes, topographies, and climates—but also in its social environment, including its inhabitants' dialects, ethnicities, and religions.[4] Moreover, the mode of education that Melville depicts, conversation, is one that had been promoted by the Transcendentalists since the 1830s. Transcendentalists believed that every individual ought to pursue self-culture, and that conversation was an ideal tool in this pursuit. Less private than journal keeping and less public than lectures—the two other important Transcendentalist tools for self-culture—conversation enabled the individual to engage with others in a mutual search for the truth accessible to each of them. The fluidity, spontaneity, and interactiveness of conversation made it an ideal activity through which to clarify the ideas forming within one's own mind and to discover truths that cannot be codified. According to Robert Michael Ruehl, the Transcendentalists believed that individuals could be reformed and transformed through conversation.[5]

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[4] Durur also sees the novel's structure and narrative technique as polyphonic, but reads this quality as Fichtean "organicism, dynamism and egocentrism." Durer cites the "rich descriptions of flora and fauna, and the multiplicity of voices, contrapuntally telling stories, asserting sacred beliefs, or explaining the world away" as Fichtean characteristics (53).

[5] Two examples include Bronson Alcott, who used the Socratic method to draw out children's interpretations of Biblical passages in order to show that a child's intuition can lead to understanding of Jesus and his teachings, and Margaret Fuller, who held meetings in which women could meet as equals away from men's observation and converse about art, politics, and gender. For both, these conversations were a tool for the cultivation of the individual.

Melville locates the *Mardi* protagonist's portrait self within a dream because, within this state, the protagonist's internal heteroglossia of voices can actually be dramatized as literal conversations. The subject matter of these conversations is consistent, revolving mostly around the nature of identity, the possibility of knowledge, the nature of good and evil, and the varieties of human political and social experience. However, the interlocutors' postulations cannot readily be fixed into truth because the conversation always continues, with another interlocutor speaking up to share another view on the subject at hand. Because much of the text is dialogue, the novel's very form exemplifies Melville's view of identity as being unfixed as long as the internal conversation continues. The text's continuing conversation climaxes in a visit to a utopian society on the island of Serenia, where the dreamer concretizes his hopes for the human race to build a community of justice and peace. However, the dreamer also dreams his avatar's rejection of that utopia, thereby concretizing his fear that human hopes are based on illusion, and that a world of justice and peace can never be built.

This chapter will first demonstrate that *Mardi* is a Bildungsroman in a strict sense, based on its score on the Bildungsroman Index and the many characteristics it shares with the European Bildungsromane Melville read. Next, the misconceptions of scholars and critics about *Mardi* will be identified so that the reading of the novel as a Bildungsroman can correct these misconceptions. Finally, an examination of the *Mardi* narrator's formation

process will reveal how the text characterizes human identity as a heteroglossic construct that draws upon, but reinvents, inherited ideas. The *Mardi* narrator is the least inventive of Melville's three Bildungsroman protagonists, since his creative act is more a blending than a reimagining of the materials he invents. In *Mardi,* Melville's internal-conversation model of education relies as much upon inherited ideas as it does upon the individual's autonomy and self-invention because the content of the internal conversation cannot itself be wholly invented. No one can be entirely unmoored and orphaned, as other narrators' portrait selves (Ishmael and Pierre) sometimes fancy themselves to be, for identity depends upon inheritance. In *Mardi,* that inheritance comes from both human progenitors (philosophers, kings, poets, and historians) and from the God "Oro" who created the universe and placed each creature on particular soil.

Like *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre, Mardi* is a Bildungsroman by any but the most narrowly Germanist definitions of the genre. According to Anniken Telnes Iversen's Bildungsroman Index (BRI) described in the previous chapter, *Mardi* scores 114 out of 148 possible points on the Index. This compares to scores of 110 for *Moby-Dick* and 130 for Pierre. The categories in which *Mardi* evinces Bildungsroman characteristics most strongly are Section 1: Narrative Perspective and Mode; Section 3: Characterization: Secondary Characters and their Functions; and Section 9: Theme, Subject Matter, and Motifs. *Mardi* has all the elements that Iversen lists in Sections 1 and 2, and all but two of the

elements listed in Section 9. For example, in Section 1, all seven Bildungsroman characteristics that Iversen lists under "narrative perspective and mode" are present in *Mardi*: the focalization shifts between narrator and protagonist, either first or third person; the access given to the consciousness of the protagonist; the retrospective narration; the narrator's understanding more than the young protagonist (here, the dream-self) does; the narrator's ironic attitude toward the young protagonist; the plot's combination of both action and reflection; and finally, the novel's verisimilitude, portraying the existing world in a realistic way. Although *Mardi* may not seem realistic on the face of it, once one recognizes that the novel begins realistically, that all the fantastical elements are located within the narrator's dream, and that the dream moves steadily closer to the real world of the narrator's waking life, it becomes clear that *Mardi* evinces even this less likely Bildungsroman characteristic. In Section 3, *Mardi* also exhibits all the typical Bildungsroman characteristics involving secondary characters: the protagonist encounters other characters who enable him to change and grow; these characters are more important in their relationship to the protagonist than in themselves; the protagonist meets important educators, companions, and a lover; and these various characters are drawn from all different social classes. Finally, in Section 9, *Mardi* evinces nearly every theme, subject matter, or motif that Iversen identified as a characteristic of the Bildungsroman: the novel's main theme is the psychological and moral development of the protagonist from youth to

adulthood (here construed as probably late teens or early twenties); it shows the protagonist "striv[ing] for liberation" from the people he had depended upon in childhood, including their values and their plans for his future (represented by the *Arcturion*); the protagonist searches for "new commitments to people and ideas"; he experiences tension, conflict, or discrepancy between his inner world and the outer world; he confronts at least one philosophy or philosophical system; he learns through pain and loss (of Yillah, Jarl, and Samoa); he arguably develops from "false self-perception to self-knowledge"; he contemplates the roles of fate, chance, and freewill in the universe and is operated upon by one or more of those influences; he experiences death and grief, as well as love relationships; and finally, the novel portrays society and offers social criticism. If one accepts the validity of Iversen's exhaustively researched and meticulously constructed Bildungsroman Index, one must also accept that *Mardi* exhibits at least as many Bildungsroman characteristics as many other novels typically classified within the genre.

Moreover, *Mardi* also shares the particular features of the Bildungsromane that Melville read by Rabelais, Sterne, Goethe, Carlyle, and Dickens. Like Pantagruel, Tristram Shandy, Wilhelm Meister, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, and David Copperfield, the hero of *Mardi* begins in a state of youthful passivity, from which he is jarred into physical and intellectual motion by a loss or disillusionment. Also like these protagonists, the *Mardi* protagonist encounters various development-triggers that fall into three

categories: encounters with authorities, encounters with the natural or supernatural unknown, and dawning recognition of the social contract. Eventually, each Bildungsroman concludes with the protagonist deciding whether and how to ratify the social contract.[6] Later in this chapter we will return to the three development triggers drawn from these European Bildungsromane, and we will trace the *Mardi* protagonist's journey as a series of encounters with development triggers in all three categories.

Critical Interventions

Reading *Mardi* as a Bildungsroman corrects three long-held critical misconceptions about the text: first, that the novel is an amateurish effort that has only biographical and historical significance to readers today; second, that its genre identity is indistinct or incoherent; and third, that the protagonist, if he can be said to change, regresses toward failure or self-destruction rather than progressing toward maturation or self-knowledge. The first assumption underlies the readings of F. O. Matthiesen, Richard H. Brodhead, John Wenke, and Milton Reigelman, to give four examples. In close textual readings, Matthiesen finds *Mardi* to be stylistically inferior to *Moby-Dick.* He thinks that *Mardi* is "not very moving" because the symbols Melville uses to treat his great theme, the ambiguity resulting from the intermingling of good and evil, are

[6] F. O. Matthiesen offers the following evidence in his argument that Carlyle influenced *Mardi*: Media's critique of juries, which is a paraphrase of Carlyle; Babbalanja's conversion, which echoes Teufelsdröckh's progression from the Everlasting Nay to the Everlasting Yay; and the satirization of the Tapparians, whose obsession with clothes recalls the "clothes-philosophy" of *Sartor Resartus* (384-5).

“artificial.” Moreover, the book has not one style but several styles because Melville was going through a transition while writing it (384). Brodhead, in an influential 1994 essay, opens with the declaration that “every unkind thing that has been said about *Mardi* is more or less true,” going on to call the novel “the loosest and baggiest of prose monsters, a book that changes direction freely on its way it knows not where” (27). Although Brodhead’s essay will go on, more charitably, to analyze how and why Melville dared so ambitiously in this novel to depart completely from “any easily recognizable formal model,” the dismissive set-up for Brodhead’s argument is typical of the near-universal assumption that the novel’s value lies in what it can illuminate about the life and development of the author who would go on to write *Moby-Dick.* Along similar lines, John Wenke interprets Mardi’s “dramatization of competing voices” as a product of Melville’s nascence as a literary artist and explains that this form grew out of his “spontaneous, unintegrated impulses finding creative expression” at this relatively early point in his literary career (419). As recently as 2005, Milton Reigelman compared the novel to a “literary Pompidou Center,” a product of Melville’s apprenticeship that the young author constructed with “rough and ungainly” architecture that shows “all the inner workings … exaggerated, color coded, and stuck on the outside” (59). For Reigelman, the purpose in reading *Mardi* is to “discover what Melville was figuring out during his apprenticeship” so that one can “better appreciate what followed, where the plumbing and HVAC systems are, happily, less apparent”

(59). These biographical readings, in looking to *Mardi* only for what it reveals about Melville's development into the author of *Moby-Dick*, end up ignoring or explicitly dismissing the text's literary merits.[7]

A similar problem appears in historicist readings of *Mardi*, which locate the novel's value in what it reveals to modern readers about antebellum America. Such readings can be illuminating, but they contribute to the perception that *Mardi* does not deserve the same close textual analysis as others of Melville's works. In this category is the work of Cindy Weinstein, who reads the novel as a challenge to the cherished nineteenth-century American work ethic, and that of Wyn Kelley, who discusses Melville's representation of urban space in this and his other novels. Recently John Evelev argued that the novel can be read as a record of the antebellum American author's negotiation of professional identities. During the composition of the novel, Evelev argues, Melville shifts in his self-conception from a leisured, mock-aristocratic, reverie-enjoying Knickerbocker to a hard-working professional whose specialty is creating complicated allegories that require as much labor to read as to write. Yet Evelev does not appear interested in unpacking those dense allegories, as Weinstein and Kelley also devote little space to close textual analysis. The problem with these historicist readings is not their arguments per se but their

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[7] A related line of criticism seeks clues to Melville's private identity. For example, in a Freudian reading, Charles Haberstroh, Jr, found in *Mardi* evidence for Melville's fear of sex in the face of his recent marriage. Melville married Elizabeth Shaw in 1847.

leaping to *Mardi*'s context without first deeply appreciating *Mardi* as literary text.

A second, sometimes overlapping scholarly misconception about *Mardi* is that the novel is generically indistinct. The foundation for this error was laid in the first study of *Mardi*, published by Merrell Davis in 1952. Davis described *Mardi* as a "chartless voyage" that was best seen as not one book but three: an episodic sea adventure like *Typee* and *Omoo*, a romantic quest, and a travelogue-satire bearing the influence of political events that occurred during Melville's composition of the novel in 1848. Davis's work is invaluable as a reconstruction of Melville's composition process and source use, but its splitting of *Mardi* into three books is problematic; unfortunately, countless critics have accepted Davis's claim. Nina Baym called the book "formless … by design" with "all its false starts and dead ends," and says that it has no "total shape" (912, 913).[8] Erin Suzuki called *Mardi* an "all-but-the-kitchen-sink mélange" that is generically indeterminate (372). John Evelev's historicist reading cited above is motivated by the desire to seek in Melville's changing intentions an explanation of the text's inconsistency. Conversely, readers who examine a single image or motif in the novel have often done so in a reaction against Davis's reading of the text as dis-unified. For example, Michael C.

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[8] Her essay as a whole argues that Melville never really wrote fiction, and that he grew increasingly to despise this mode. She reads *Mardi* as evidence that Melville "conceived of truth as in the possession of a taunter," so that he was then left with 'telling' the *quest* for truth." She concludes that *Mardi* is "a narrative about the chartless search for an elusive truth" (913).

Berthold opens his essay with the critical problem of the novel's "seeming formlessness" and attempts to "negotiat[e] the novel's abundances and sprawl" by analyzing the novel's "near obsession" with forms of captivity (16). Critics remain divided today on the questions of whether or how *Mardi* constitutes a unified text and on which genre or genres can be meaningfully used to understand that unity or disunity.

A major reason why readers might see *Mardi* as disjointed is the shift in the narrator from participant to observer halfway through the narrative. As a result, even readers who consider the narrator as a character and recognize that he changes in the course of the narrative do not see him as central to the entire text. Wai Chee Dimock claimed that the *Mardi* narrator "undergoes a transformation before the book is half over" and then "turns into a minor character and remains one" (57). Still, a handful of critics through the decades have regarded the protagonist and his transformation as a focus of the novel as a whole. Many of those readings, however, have seen the protagonist's trajectory as negative rather than positive, leading to his self-destruction rather than his maturation. H. Bruce Franklin, Martin Pops, James E. Miller, A. C. Christodoulu, and Erin Suzuki have all offered such readings. Franklin characterizes Taji's quest as glorious but doomed by its counterfeit nature: he just wants to possess Yillah, and ultimately denies his own humanity. Martin Pops sees Taji as fleeing from "justice, society, and sex" (42), while James E. Miller sees Taji as finally committing himself to a greater evil "than any he has

observed in Mardi" (7, 51-52). A. C. Christodoulou reads *Mardi* as a depiction of the human mind in its incessant, vain search for meaning. He goes so far as to call Taji "the personification of self-destruction," a being that "continually destroys and reproduces itself without ever becoming complete" (24). Most recently, Erin Suzuki argues that *Mardi* is, like *Omoo,* a critique of religious hypocrisy, with Taji undertaking a quest for Yillah that he couches as a romantic quest for an abstract ideal but is in fact idolatrous and therefore doomed. Suzuki's conclusion that *Mardi* tells no constructive tale of human progress rests on three assumptions: her strong postcolonial slant, her equating of Taji with the culpable Westerner, and her failure to consider the narrator apart from the Taji who travels Mardi. All of these critics rightly see Taji's journey as central to *Mardi,* but they miss the fact that the narrator—as distinct from Taji—is on a positive trajectory of development.

This chapter will show that however biographical *Mardi* may be, however it may reflect the conditions of professional authorship in its time, and however generically heterogeneous it may appear, the novel in fact has a distinct identity as a literary text that draws many of its features from the Bildungsroman genre, the most significant feature of that genre being the positive maturation of the protagonist. The novel might seem to conclude darkly, but its protagonist really is on a trajectory toward self-discovery and integration into the larger world. My study is not the first to see the protagonist as engaged in a dynamic and progressive developmental process;

Nathalia Wright, J. Michael Sears, Julie M. Johnson, Beverly Hume Thorne, Christopher S. Durer, and Brett Zimmerman all ascribe to versions of this view. As early as 1951, Nathalia Wright recognized that Taji's quest in *Mardi* is only ostensibly about the search for a lost, ideal maiden; in fact "its true object seems to be rather an undiscovered, ideal man" (351). She sees Melville's literary career as one long search for such a man, and *Mardi* as "the earliest, longest, and most undisguised account of this search for the 'full-developed man'" as such the novel is the "single most important work by Melville for the study of one of his most important themes" (351). Taji's suicide in the end is "in one sense the supreme retreat," but is in another sense "his first unselfish positive act." Although he has been a false Prometheus, in the next life he may yet "achieve the true balance of head and heart" (362) now that he is escaping the evil sway of Hautia. Two and a half decades later, at a time when some critics were growing dissatisfied with Davis's three-book theory and were searching for the unifying element(s) of the novel, J. Michael Sears argued that the text of *Mardi* is a single coherent whole whose "major unifying component is not the narrative action … but the Neoplatonic concepts motivating and guiding that action" (411). Specifically, Sears examines the circular imagery, including the sphere and the cycle, which structure the world of Mardi and Taji's journey through it. In Neoplatonic thought, the circle is associated with the idea of progressing through various spheres of existence in a search for truth. Ultimately, Sears concludes, *Mardi* is a "religious romance" in which Melville

"uses a philosophical system to find order in the universe and perhaps to unify the major religions of the world" (418). In another (relatively) positive interpretation of the protagonist's trajectory, Julie M. Johnson reads Taji's quest as an embodiment of the archetypal quest for selfhood described by Carl Jung, in which maturation is a process of progressing through various archetypal stages, from the unconscious "Creation" stage, to the partially conscious "Hero" stage (during which one kills the Great Father and the Great Mother), to the fully conscious "transformation" stage. At this point the self is fully realized, and the person attains the Maiden or Treasure. In another reading that traces the narrator's development, Beverly Hume Thorne reads Taji's quest for Yillah as not only a search for "a lost goddess or a feminine transcendental ideal," but also, quoting Taji, for "a 'universe-old truth' that is intimately related to his eternal self" (64). For Taji, Yillah is an androgynous deity who "serves as a mirror for [his] mystical longings," and who represents the possibility of a unified consciousness (64). Thorne refers to Margaret Fuller's view that the fully conscious soul must be an androgynous one. Yillah is Taji's other half, and only by reuniting with her can he become fully conscious. Taji's apparently suicidal rejection of Mardi in the end is an extension of his quest; he dies in order to continue his quest into the Platonic realm when he becomes convinced that he will never find the ideal in the material realm. Taji's apparent defeat at the end is in fact a triumph because he "transcends the fates, even as they pursue him, and he sets sail over the 'endless sea' in order to

become the demi-god he had earlier only pretended to be" (68). In one of the most persuasive arguments that Taji's quest is not a moral or intellectual failure, Christopher S. Durer interprets Taji as a Romantic narrator "endowed with extraordinary imaginative power," who "projects himself imaginatively into the events of the story and participates emotionally in the experiences of the other characters." As "subject-narrator," he "molds the object, which lies outside of him" (45). Being a Romantic narrator, Taji "communes with the world of Mardi," "absorbs it into his own consciousness," and "recreates it" (46). At the end of his quest, Taji is reunited with Yillah "through the power of his imagination" (47) and achieves "the ideal ego" (55). Taji's moral nature is strengthened by his quest for Yillah, as he transforms from a "willful salt" into a "self-denying pilgrim."[9] Finally, in another persuasive reading of the protagonist's trajectory as positive, Brett Zimmerman reads *Mardi* as a cosmic allegory in which Taji, having lost his brief paradise on earth with Yillah,

[9] Durer regards this synthesizing narration as a concretization of the theory of identity advanced by Romantic philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, even though no evidence exists that Melville knew Fichte's work directly. According to Durer, *Mardi* shares greater affinity with German Romantic novels by the Schlegels, Novalis, Schelling, Fichte, and others, than with more contemporaneous works, since these Romantic works are full of "questing after the infinite" as well as "celebration of the subconscious, dreams[,] and idealizations" (47). Durer reads his moral progression as two-fold, from sensuality to spirituality and from self-centeredness to empathy with others. Following Fichte, Durer believes Taji's motivation to change comes entirely from within, from introspection (55). Durer identifies three stages in Melville's career as a Romantic writer: the Rousseauvian primitivism of *Typee* and *Omoo;* the "synthesizing" phase represented by *Mardi*; and the "feverish divisiveness and fragmentation of the personality in *Pierre,* which echoes both the Sturm und Drang of early Romanticism and the decadence of late Romanticism. In the synthesizing phase, when Melville's artistry involved the joining of disparate elements into a new whole, he "optimistically believed that the fundamental contradictions of human existence could be overcome, and life at its truest could be an act of continual self-reflection, with the ego ascending to ever-higher levels of thought" (47).

embarks on a quest; the quest grows increasingly galactic in scale as he seeks to ascend the Great Chain of Being, "throw off his hampering mortal body, liberate his immortal essence, and join the spirits that roam throughout space in what he imagines is an ecstatic beatitude" (428). He scours first Mardi, then the whole globe for Yillah, but he finds only more and more evidence of the hellishness of the mortal realm. His quest then takes him through other galaxies, and finally to another "higher ethereal" realm where he can hope to find the paradise he had briefly enjoyed with Yillah on earth (429). Zimmerman, like the other critics whose positions are described here, rightly recognizes not only that *Mardi* is unified around its protagonist's journey, but also that that journey is one of progress toward a greater awareness of himself and of truth outside himself.

Views of Identity and of Growth

In keeping with the heteroglossia of America itself, Melville constructs a text in which the identity of the narrator-protagonist is comprised of many different inherited "voices," which then become the materials out of which he invents his identity. Paradoxically, it is the heterogeneity of *Mardi*—its wide-ranging dialogues, its expression of various ideologies, its shifts in tone—that enables it to depict a remarkably consistent characterization of human identity as heteroglossic. The narrator communicates this view of identity through both the form and the content of the narrative, and what is more, he dreams many

explicit affirmations of this view of identity in the voice of Babbalanja, a dominant voice for much of the dream. Once Babbalanja appears on the scene, he does most of the talking, until deciding to settle in Serenia and absenting himself from the rest of the voyage through Mardi. The following section will unpack how the novel both articulates and embodies its heteroglossic view of human identity, and then describe the view of human progress that the text suggests is possible. According to *Mardi,* humans have the potential to achieve integrated, coherent identities in which morally sound actions are consistently and confidently chosen; however, the pursuit of such an identity is fraught with complications. Despite the difficulty of constructing an effectively integrated identity, the narrator of *Mardi* ultimately progresses away from his naïve and youthful dogmatic empiricism to an increasingly humble, subtle, and profound philosophical position marked by philosophical skepticism and idealism. His moments of progress occur through his encounters with authorities and with the unknown, which make possible his gradual recognition of the contract binding society together.

Both the narrative's form and its content contribute to its depiction of human identity as heteroglossic. Formally, most of the text, once the protagonist's dream-voyage through Mardi begins, is constituted of the travellers' conversations with each other and the people they meet, recorded verbatim with relatively little narration interspersed. Thus, through form, Melville dramatizes the process of human formation as being dependent on

inheritance: the developing subject attends to the competing voices within himself and decides which ones to ratify. The episodic plot is another formal quality that enables Melville to show how identity is inherited. As the travelers journey from one island to another and meet the distinct people groups inhabiting each island, they see how each Mardian is defined by the culture to which he or she belongs, and has inherited something of his or her identity. As the philosopher Babbalanja puts it when the group is visiting South Vivenza, "The soil decides the man" (534). The fact that most of the narrative constitutes one long dream from the narrator-protagonist's subconscious means that, in the narrative, he is able to concretize the internal heteroglossia that makes up—and continually remakes—human identity.

In addition to these formal characteristics, the novel's content, particularly the narrator's specific remarks to the reader, also contributes to its depiction of human identity as heteroglossic. The narrator explicitly articulates this view of identity more than once. The passage from "Faith and Knowledge" cited above is one example: in this powerful passage the narrator asserts that, through faith, he can know that he was present at the "subsiding of the Deluge," that he walked with the Israelites in the wilderness, that he participated in the Boston Tea Party, and so on. The protagonist's assertion of shared identity with various historical figures is based upon the recognition that his identity has been profoundly shaped by those predecessors whose stories he has heard. In another digressive chapter where the narrator breaks

from describing the voyage through Mardi to reflect upon the voyage's significance, he likens himself to a "frigate" that is "full with a thousand souls," each of whom takes turns rushing up from below deck, like mariners come to do the work that sets the ship's course. When he is in a state of calm reflection, he writes, all the "many, many souls" within him blend into one entity: "In my tropical calms, when my ship lies tranced on Eternity's main, speaking one at a time, then all with one voice: an orchestra of many French bugles and horns, rising, and falling, and swaying, in golden calls and responses." The many old souls echoing and singing within him, conversing and replying to one another, generate the conversation that constitutes his identity. He vividly imagines the scene within himself as being a sort of symposium: "In me, many worthies recline, and converse." He listens to various old thinkers, including Augustine, Democritus, Plato, and Zoroaster (367-68).[10] The text of *Mardi* can record the narrator-protagonist's identity in all its heteroglossia precisely because it is an account of his dream. Within the dream state, a sort of calm in which all is blended, the dreamer can both be fused with other souls and experience the differentiation of the many souls within him. Elsewhere in the journey, Media awakens from a dream after talking in his sleep. He marvels that he never would have known this if they had not told him, and Babbalanja explains, "We

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[10] This activity is explicitly located in a dream, as the context makes clear; he begins the passage by describing himself trying to spear his dreams like a hunter spears a buffalo "ere they all flee," and says that whatever dreams he does spear, recount, and reflect upon make him feel that his and the earth's identity are blended and think that "all the worlds are my kin" (366, 367).

dream not ourselves, but the thing within us" (566). This exchange further illustrates how dreams function as an escape from one's own subjective experience into a realm where others' voices are heard.

The metaphor for human identity embodied in the text—the metaphor in which a person is figured as a dreamer who echoes within himself the voices of humans whose words he has encountered in the past—might seem to privilege inheritance over invention in identity formation. The metaphor casts the human being as passive, with the content of his thoughts simply happening to him. In *Mardi*, though, the metaphor actually plays out in a way that suggests that the individual's capacity to invent something new out of these old inherited materials (the voices of other people) is absolutely crucial. Late in the narrative, the narrator suggests that inheritance without invention is dangerous to identity formation. When the travelers arrive at the island of King Abrazza, who is known for his endless pedigree, his love of his ancient ancestors, and his refusal to "talk of moderns" (591), Abrazza's appearance makes the narrator uneasy. A green and yellow glare gleams from the king's crown, and in the glow of "those beams, so sinister, all present looked cadaverous." That Abrazza's cheek beamed "hectic" suggests that he holds the travelers under a spell, as the word "hectic" has roots in "hex," or possession (589). Everything on his island, from tree trunks to waves to laughter, seems "hollow" to Taji (590). When Abrazza and the others converse in a shady grove, the king insists that "Yoomy sing old songs," "Mohi rehearse old

histories," "Babbalanja tell of old ontologies," and that everyone "drink his old, old wine" (591). Even though the narrator ultimately chooses not to conclude that Abrazza is evil, the still scene shows that being trapped in the past, unable to look beyond the raw materials one has inherited to build something new, is unhealthy. The narrator-protagonist's dream as a whole suggests that one can avoid entrapment in one's inheritance by exercising one's capacity for imagination.

Although the narrator explicitly discusses on several occasions the heterogeneity of identity and its dependence upon both inheritance and invention, he puts more reflections on this subject into the mouth of Babbalanja, the philosopher, with whom his dream-avatar travels around Mardi. For example, in the Lombardo passage cited at the beginning of this chapter, Babbalanja says that humans' inspirations come from the ancestral souls within them, as stirred up to their consciousness by adversity. Melville here anticipates Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, wherein all humans are thought to share an identical, universal psychic system, inherited at birth and only recognized by the individual through deliberate conscious effort to identify the archetypes that constitute the system. Babbalanja says that people "are full of ghosts and spirits; we are as grave-yards full of buried dead, that start to life before us." All of the "dead sires," who preceded us and are still within us, and "[e]very thought's a soul of some past poet, hero, sage." Then, in a metaphor that recalls the narrator's metaphor that he is a frigate full

of a thousand souls, Babbalanja says that each of us is "fuller than a city," and we discover the multitude of souls within us when we experience "woe" (594). When King Media asks Babbalanja how Lombardo had "made acquaintance with some of these rare worthies" who appear in the Koztanza, that is, the ancestral souls within him, Babbalanja's answer illuminates the process through which the narrator-protagonist himself has gotten in touch with the many worthies reclining within himself: he has entered a dream or trance. Babbalanja tells to Media that Lombardo had "first met them [the souls of great ancestors] in his reveries; they were walking about in him," and then they "stepped forward; and gave him their hands. After that, they were frank and friendly" (596). Babbalanja expresses the view of the narrator-protagonist himself, namely, that a person's identity is shaped by the identities of all those people of the past with whom one is familiar. Thus, Babbalanja's explanation of human creativity relies on a heteroglossic view of human identity that is affirmed in the form and content of the text as a whole.

Because Babbalanja emphasizes the role of inheritance in identity formation, he occasionally feels the anxiety of influence, the sense of danger that his deep learning in and admiration of thinkers of the past will keep him from having new thoughts of his own. Still, he does not regard this influence as unequivocally bad. One conversation Babbalanja has with the other travellers concludes with Media exasperated at Babbalanja spewing "everlasting pratings of old Bardianna," the ancient genius whose work

Babbalanja admires and quotes incessantly. Media asks the philosopher why he does not “speak [his] own thoughts,” for if he did so, his “discourse [would] possess more completeness; whereas, its warp and woof are of all sorts,— Bardianna, Alla-Malolla, Vavona, and all the writers that ever have written.” Babbalanja insists that the king is mistaken because truth is truth, no matter who speaks it or when. Inevitably a speaker of the truth will be repeating what has already been said because “the catalogue of true thoughts is but small” (397). In Media’s admonishment to Babbalanja, one can hear echoes of Emerson’s doctrine of self-reliance, but Babbalanja has a solution to the problem Emerson had stated about becoming another man’s satellite: quoting from multiple sources. Quoting and synthesizing from multiple sources and adding one’s own perspective constitute an act of invention that is as crucial to identity formation as inheritance is. Moreover, because all truth is one truth (another Emersonian doctrine), speaking the truth inevitably means quoting another person who has already spoken truth.

Such observations by Babbalanja to his fellow travelers reveal the conception of human identity that the protagonist is dreaming: a conception in which the content of a man’s consciousness, the actions to which his thoughts prompt him, and the nature of human growth are explained in terms of three dialectics, namely, sensation and imagination; angelic and demonic influence; and consistency and inconsistency. From Babbalanja’s conversations on the nature of man, the reader can infer that these three dialectics describe how

humans apprehend existence (the sensation/imagination dialectic), how inheritance shapes our moral nature (the dialectic of angelic and demonic influence), and finally, how a heteroglossic identity can be just that, an identity, despite the apparent inconsistency that results from the wide variety of inherited voices echoing within a person (the dialectic of consistency and inconsistency). This conception of human identity undergirds the text's depiction of the narrator-protagonist's identity formation and gives a distinct cast to Melville's first American Bildungsroman.

The first dialectic, sensation/imagination, describes how humans apprehend existence and, by extension, are the means by which intellectual and cultural inheritances are passed on to a new generation of human beings. Sensation makes possible the body's experience of the present moment, and imagination is the means by which the mind constructs thoughts using memory, fancy, surmises, and so on. Both sensation and imagination—empirical and rational modes of knowing—are necessary to identity, since sensation makes a person aware of his body and imagination enables him to know what he cannot sense. According to Babbalanja, the ability to sense is the most fundamental sign of life. At one point during a conversation about the devil within him, he remarks that, "though I have now been upon terms of close companionship with myself for nigh five hundred moons, I have not yet been able to decide who or what I am." Even though other people think of him as Babbalanja, "to myself, I seem not myself." The only thing he can be sure of

"is a sort of prickly sensation all over me, which they call life; and, occasionally, a headache or a queer conceit admonishes me, that there is something astir in my attic." But these sensations of life cannot, in themselves, prove his identity to him. He cannot know "that these sensations are identical with myself." If sensation is necessary but not sufficient to identity construction, the same is true of the faculty of imagination. Babbalanja's definition of imagination is a nineteenth-century one; he saw this faculty as a route to truth rather than, as today, a faculty for invention of fiction or unreality. Babbalanja calls imagination "the unical, rudimental, and all-comprehending abstracted essence of the infinite remoteness of things," without which "we were grass-hoppers" (489). Babbalanja characterizes the imagination as the means by which people can transcend their embodiment, if imperfectly, and gain knowledge of the invisible. As an example of the imagination's power, Babbalanja cites the fact that it enables a person to believe in the existence of people one has known but who are physically absent. Babbalanja muses that when he is in one place, he does not want to be spoken to about another place because a given place exists for him only when he is there. A person can only prove to him the existence of an absent place by actually carrying him to that place. Even then, all that is proven is that "to its [the place's] substantive existence, as cognizant to me, my presence is indispensable." He concludes that, "to me, all Mardi exists by virtue of my sovereign pleasure; and when I die, the universe will perish with me" (488). Babbalanja's fanciful conclusion, delivered more to show the

indispensability of imagination than because Babbalanja believes what he claims, is in fact literally true of the protagonist because all these conversations are taking place within his imagination, and everything he is currently experiencing will vanish as soon as he reawakens on the *Arcturion.*

While Babbalanja uses the sensation/imagination dialectic to explain humans' experience of life, he explains humans' complex moral nature by asserting that angelic and demonic spiritual agents influence our actions; in this way, even our moral choices are shaped by a kind of inheritance. The question of whether our dreams come from angelic or demonic influence arises when the poet Yoomy, awakening from a pleasant dream of a lovely maid, calls to her that he will revisit her every noon. His friends try to jar him back to waking life, and Babbalanja opines, "Do our dreams come from below, and not from the skies?" This impossible question about whether humans are innately good or bad, "angels or dogs," leads Babbalanja into a definition of man as a bundle of paradoxes: he calls this creature "harder to solve, than the Integral Calculus—yet plain as a primer; harder to find than the philosopher's-stone—yet ever at hand." Man's paradoxes stem from his divided yet unified nature, for he is "soul and body glued together, firm as atom to atom," yet these two dimensions of man remain "divided as by a river, spirit from flesh; growing both ways, like a tree." He gives up on understanding the paradox that is man, "twain—yet indivisible; all things—yet a poor unit at best" (433). Still, perplexingly paradoxical as man is, his dual nature, with its potential for both

good and evil, can be understood as being under the influence of both good and evil spirits from without—which, for Melville, need not have been literal angels and demons.

Indeed, one explanation that the text offers for man acting according to demonic influences despite his moral nature is the theory that, sometimes, sin is inherited. In southern Vivenza, an analogue for the antebellum American South, the travellers see slavery first-hand. The travellers can see what the South Vivenzans cannot, that the slaves have souls, are fully human, and made in the image of God. Yoomy expresses the optimistic belief that Oro will free the slaves, but Babbalanja disagrees, saying that "In all things, man's own battles, man himself must fight" (533). Thus Babbalanja leaves the responsibility for morality to the individual. However, as the group departs, Babbalanja attributes the state of things in South Vivenza not to any individual's sin, but rather to inherited circumstances. He concludes, "Whoso is free from crime, let him cross himself—but hold his cross upon his lips. That he is not bad, is not of him." Every person is made of "[p]otters' clay and wax," and is "molded by hands invisible. The soil decides the man. And, ere birth, man wills not to be born here or there" (534). Ultimately, for all Babbalanja's pondering of whether humans are good or bad, he finds the question to be ill framed. The better question is, why is the human race capable of both good and evil? And why is such variation seen from one person to another? *Mardi,* although Melville's first Bildungsroman, is already ambivalent about the

possibility of fully articulating a stable definition of a person's identity, of rigidly defining which actions are morally better than others, and of attributing a person's actions to his or her will.

Obvious complications are inherent in the text's heteroglossic conception of human identity. One question is, to what extent is a heteroglossic identity stable enough that it can be considered an identity at all? Another question is, can people whose identities are heteroglossic be said to have traits, besides heteroglossia, that characterize them? Perhaps the most important question of all is, can people undergo measurable progress, and if so, toward what do they progress, and how is progress measured? The text must answer such questions in order to fulfill the Bildungsroman's primary generic requirement that the protagonist grow and mature through the course of the narrative. A third dialectic at work in Babbalanja's speeches, the dialectic of consistency/inconsistency, turns out to be the means through which the narrator (as mediated through Babbalanja) comes to understand humans' growth or stagnation. While the precise contents of a person's thoughts and the nuances of his orientation toward the world can alter from year to year or even moment to moment, a mysterious essence remains unchanged deep within. One explanation that Babbalanja posits for his appearance of inconsistency is that a stranger dwells within him and sometimes has the upper hand in determining what his body does or says. In a meditation on man's dual nature that recalls the Apostle Paul, Babbalanja expresses frustration that

we do what we do not want to do, and do not do what we want to do: "[I]t is not so much outer temptations that prevail over us mortals; but inward instincts" (456). Having proposed the theory that he contains the devil Azzageddi, he next proposes the presence within himself of a mysterious stranger that is to blame for those past acts he cannot claim as his own. Then he reflects that even "this very day I may do some act, which at a future period may seem equally senseless; for in one lifetime we live a hundred lives. By the incomprehensible stranger in me, I say, this body of mine has been rented out scores of times" (457). His description of the stranger suggests that Babbalanja has a sort of split personality: he "talks in my sleep, revealing my secrets; and takes me to unheard of realms, beyond the skies of Mardi. In this description of a non-integrated identity, Babbalanja suggests that change is neither progression nor regression, but rather oscillation. Still, amidst this oscillation, identity has some stability because "one dark chamber in me is retained by the old mystery," and "all the time, this being is I, myself" (457). Media asks when Babbalanja feels most like himself, given that his sense of identity is so conflicted. Babbalanja replies that he seems most himself "when I sleep, and dream not" (458), because then he is not conscious. In dreams, a person dramatizes within one's subconscious the heterogeneity one experiences in waking life. Dreams throw into relief the nature of heteroglossic identity: the relationship between one's unchanging essence and the ever-shifting chorus of voices within oneself becomes clear, and the possibility emerges that growth is

simply a gradual integration of one's internal voices into a state of greater harmony.

Babbalanja, for his part, asserts an underlying consistency beneath people's heteroglossia. After positing several explanations for his inconsistency, including the "mysterious indweller" theory, Babbalanja defends his inconsistency as, in fact, a sign of his profound consistency. He declares that "to be consistent to one's self, is often to be inconsistent to Mardi." Whereas "[c]ommon consistency implies unchangeableness," the reality is that "much of the wisdom here below lives in a state of transition" (459). The line recalls Emerson's statement in "Self-Reliance" that "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do" (324). Like Emerson, Babbalanja regards consistency of character as a false ideal, and inconsistency as a sign of wisdom. The conversation ends with a discussion of how men are riddles even to themselves (459-60), which is fitting given that a heteroglossic identity is by definition not static and definable. Yet one's identity can have coherence because all truth is centered in God. When Babbalanja defends Yoomy's apparent immodesty over his poetry, he generalizes that "all mankind are egotists. The world revolves upon an I; and we upon ourselves; for we are our own worlds:--all other men as strangers, from outlandish, distant climes" (559). The narrator, like Babbalanja, locates all this heterogeneous unity within a God who is the supreme truth. In a

meditation in the chapter "Dreams" upon the many voices conversing within him, he describes the realization, as he senses "all the past and present pouring in me," that he is in fact not himself, but is "another" because "God is my Lord; and though many satellites revolve around me, I and all mine revolve round the great central Truth, sun-like, fixed and luminous forever in the foundationless firmament" (367).[11] For the narrator, the solid foundation for heteroglossic human identity is God. Melville suggests here that the existence of a transcendent creator is a necessary condition for meaningful human growth—thereby upending the European Bildungsroman's attempted secularization of human development.

Babbalanja's dialectic of consistency/inconsistency provides a framework for detecting and measuring human progress, a process that occurs through a person's careful attending to the competing voices within oneself and determining which voices to act upon. However, the text does not resolve several questions about the possibility and measurability of human progress. First, how circumscribed is people's capacity for invention by whatever materials they happen to inherit? Because the narrator invents his own portrait self, and that portrait self exists only within a dream, he is fully constrained by whatever material he has absorbed from his waking life. His invention is limited to whatever he can craft out of what he has already learned—which,

[11] Note that the narrator is free to call him God, not Oro, because he exists outside the world of Mardi.

really, is the condition of every person who undergoes development. Another question about human development that the text raises, but does not fully answer, is the question of the measurability of progress. Is it possible to know oneself well enough that one can recognize growth in oneself over time? If so, how does one distinguish mere movement (change or oscillation) from actual progress? Babbalanja is committed to movement—he says that "keep moving is my motto" (504)— but the text does not unequivocally depict that movement as steady progress toward truth and self-knowledge. When the group lands at Serenia and Babbalanja suddenly discovers the Truth he has been seeking, it is unclear whether this discovery is the end result of steady progress, or just simply happens—especially given that all along he keeps expressing the difficulty or impossibility of apprehending truth. A third major question that the text raises is whether or under what conditions our faith in progress can actually do more harm than good. At Vivenza, for example, the travellers discover that obsession with progress can lead to evils like imperialism and unthinking acceptance of possibly injurious "innovations." Babbalanja describes the pride of the present as a universal human attitude toward what has come before: "But ages back they boasted like us; and ages to come, forever and ever, they'll boast." A fourth question that the text asks is whether the individual or the human race as a whole is more able to progress. In Vivenza, Babbalanja gives a long speech in which he expresses the feeling that humans as a race never really progress in knowledge: "All we discover has been with us

since the sun began to roll; and much we discover, is not worth the discovering." People are "fools" for believing that Mardi has changes, when "the sun yet rises in its old place in the East; all things go on in the same old way." Vivenza, like every empire that has gone before, assumes that its buildings and monuments will endure forever, when in reality it will one day be overrun like every other empire.[12] Babbalanja points out that the human race keeps seeking out, discovering, and recording knowledge, and then losing it so that the process must be repeated in every succeeding generation; by this reasoning, only individuals—not the human race—are capable of progress.[13] In the end, the text of *Mardi* is not even explicit about the answer to the most basic of questions: what exactly is the goal of human development? Where does it lead? Babbalanja discovers in the vision he has on Serenia that development does not end with death. Even then, souls are not at rest because they do not have God's complete and perfect knowledge, and never will. Thus, the text of *Mardi* forces the reader to question many of the most basic assumptions about how human development occurs, how or whether it can be measured, and what the end result of maturation can or should look like. Even this early in his

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[12] In Vivenza, an anonymous scroll that is read to the people is, Taji hints, the work of Babbalanja and Media. The scroll-writer reminds the Vivenzans that succeeding generations of forests overrun "the tumuli in your western vales … deriving their substance from the past, succeeding generations overgrow it; but in time, themselves decay," so too will the successors of the Vivenzans eventually overrun them.

[13] Although the author of the scroll remains anonymous, the narrator suggests that the text is a blend of Media and Babbalanja: the ideas of Media and the bold expression of Babbalanja.

Bildungsroman enterprise, Melville is fully aware of the inevitable ambiguity in human formation—an ambiguity that also characterizes the developmental processes of the European Bildungsroman protagonists whose stories he has read.

The Protagonist's Developmental Process

In *Mardi,* "progress" is a movement of the self toward understanding of oneself and of what one has to offer the world, "regression" is defined as disintegration of the self toward incoherence, and "stagnation" is defined as simply no movement at all. The narrator-protagonist of *Mardi* (not to be confused with his dreamed avatar, Taji) does undergo such progress, thus fulfilling the primary characteristic of the Bildungsroman protagonist. By the end of his narrative, he has achieved greater knowledge of himself and his relationship to the world than he had when he first entered his dream of Mardi. Even though conversations are not inherently teleological, one can trace within *Mardi*'s dreamed conversations and the narrative surrounding them how the narrator-dreamer is gradually progressing toward a more mature, defined identity. Conversation becomes a tool for his self-culture, just as the Transcendentalists believed it could be.

The narrator's development can be tracked by attending to his changing reactions, throughout the text, to changeless states such as calms at sea, images of blended perceptions, and physical environments without movement, differentiation, and distinction of elements. The narrator's changing

perceptions of such changeless states clearly show how he is developing from a position of dogmatic empiricism to benevolent skepticism. In the empiricist epistemological model, the process of cognition in the human brain involves sorting through one's sensory perceptions and making associations amongst them in order to construct ideas and concepts, which then serve to organize future sensory perceptions. (Melville would have imbibed this understanding of empiricism through Locke, Hartley, and Wordsworth.) Throughout the narrator's dream, his dream-self (Taji) practices this association process, blending and differentiating his perceptions from waking life. The protagonist's changing reactions to states of calm demonstrate his progression from dogmatic empiricism that depends on a constant influx of new adventures and perceptions; to a dawning wonder as he begins to regard undifferentiated sensations as the raw materials for his own original act of creation; to a regression, at the beginning of his dream, to his pre-dream state, as though he needs to start the process over again in his avatar self; to a suspension of dogmatism that enables him to imagine an alternative position, wherein the calm represents the Truth at the end of all inquiry, and finally to an envisioning of paradise as a peaceful island, Serenia, where each inhabitant's willed skepticism ensures that everyone can live together in peace. Nina Baym and others have seen *Pierre* and *The Confidence Man* as evidence of

Melville's "developing philosophical skepticism" (90), but actually that development must have begun as early as *Mardi*.[14]

The first calm the narrator encounters, before his dream begins, reveals his dogmatically empiricist way of organizing his experience, one that depends on a constant influx of new adventures and perceptions. The novel opens with the narrator stuck in a weeks-long calm at sea, an experience that leaves him feeling horror and despair, even doubt of his own existence, because he is bereft of all sensations in a seascape of undifferentiated blue. He is a sailor on the whale-ship *Arcturion* in the South Pacific, which has been trapped for weeks and weeks of "lost and leaden" hours (5).[15] No events, no kindred or well-read shipmate, no ennobling conflict, no adventure, no marvels enliven his existence. The calm causes him such horror because his own sense of identity is so blurry that he is utterly dependent on new, fresh sensations to keep him from despair. Since he is a dogmatic empiricist, the lack of sensory perceptions forces skeptical idealism upon him; he can no longer be sure of his

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[14] For more on Melville's philosophical development, see Chapter One.

[15] Brett Zimmerman points out that the star from which the ship's name derives, Arcturus, "seems to revolve around the Pole Star in the nighttime sky," its eternally circular voyage paralleling that of the *Arcturion* and further explaining the narrator's boredom (418). The narrator's dream is prompted by his sense of entrapment and enslavement in waking life, not merely on the *Arcturion* but in a life devoid of enough fresh, vivid perceptions to give him a sense of identity and existence; that sense shows up in his dream as a persistent theme of captivity and slavery. The "characters" in the dream, in fact elements of the dreamer's subconscious, are often captives and slaves. Although Taji's dream is, like his empiricism, a sort of captivity, it enables Taji to work out an escape from his empiricism. In the dream, Taji can blend together and recombine his experiences from waking life, as well as blend fancy with the facts of his life, in order to work toward a view of himself as more than just a slave to his perceptions.

own existence because he has no perceptions. The tormented narrator grows "madly skeptical," and is horrified to feel doubt as to his own existence (8). Feeling lost in space and time, he wants to be certain of something again. This feeling gives him impetus to escape the ship, but when he asks the captain to put him ashore, the captain refuses, saying "you may leave her if you can" (6). What the captain means as a denial, the narrator takes as a challenge, and so begins the young hero's journey of self-discovery and maturation. He will enter a dream, or trance-like state, and invent a surrogate self to leave the *Arcturion* and head westward toward a group of islands that are "loosely laid down upon the charts, and invested with all the charms of dream-land" (7). The narrator enters his long dream of Mardi precisely because his dogmatic empiricist view of the world makes reality unbearable on the *Arcturion*.[16]

The second calm that the narrator encounters is at the point of transition into his dream; this calm shows his dawning wonder as he begins to regard undifferentiated sensations as the raw materials for his own original act of creation. As he slips into his dream, the calm transforms from a deadening and dull experience to one that is rich with possibilities, like a primordial chaos or like the formless and empty world out of which God created the universe. This calm begins soon after Taji and Jarl have deserted the *Arcturion* for the

[16] The *Arcturion* is generally understood as a reference to the *Arcutus,* the literary journal of the Duyckinck brothers; thus Taji's desertion of the ship reflects Melville's own desertion from the Young American literary circle. This passage, with its suggestion of great creation about to happen, suggests that Melville, despite the fear and uncertainty of leaving the Young Americans behind, senses whole new artistic possibilities opening up before him. If *Mardi* is taken as autobiographical, it could be seen as a Künstlerroman.

Chamois. The narrator compares the scene of this tropical calm to the face of a mirror, which being blank, "only borrow[s] character from what it reflects." With "a colorless sky overhead, the ocean, upon its surface, hardly presents a sign of existence. The deep blue is gone; and the glassy element lies tranced; almost viewless as the air." In this particular morning calm, "the two gray firmaments of sky and water seemed collapsed into a vague ellipsis. The Chamois seems to be drifting in both the atmosphere and the sea. "Every thing was fused into the calm: sky, air, water, and all. Not a fish was to be seen. The silence was that of a vacuum. No vitality lurked in the air." He concludes with a subtle comparison of this scene to the great formless and empty void that, in Genesis, God created into the universe: "And this inert blending and brooding of all things seemed gray chaos in conception" (48). Whereas the earlier calm on the *Arcturion* was horrifying, the protagonist sees this one as full of possibilities. A calm holds the promise that what is blended can be sorted out, differentiated, arranged into order. This calm is made more bearable than the first by the wonders he—or rather, his dream-self—glimpses in the sea. He sees "more wonders than the wonders rejected" (39), which affirm that he can gain some knowledge through perception of the material world. Moreover, because these perceptions are wonders, they invariably open up fancies—meaning he can no longer rest in his dogmatic empiricism. He is, to borrow Kant's phrase, aroused from his dogmatic slumbers, although, ironically, it takes a dream to awaken him.

The narrator's third calm occurs when he is fully in his dream, but still early on. He regresses to his pre-dream state of regarding calms with horror, as though he needs to start the developmental process over again in his avatar self. He describes the third calm he encounters as "airless and profound," a "hot calm" in which he and Jarl "lay fixed and frozen in like Parry at the Pole." He fears that if the calm lasts too long, he and Jarl will die. They are enormously relieved after two days when they see a cloud on the horizon (116). This episode reveals that, this early in the dream, the narrator still feels anxiety over his uneasy situation in the physical world.

The calms that Taji encounters during the voyage through Mardi are evidence of real progress in the narrator-protagonist who is dreaming. In these calms, his dogmatism is gradually suspended, and he is able to imagine an alternative perspective on the calm, namely, that it represents the Truth at the end of all inquiry. For example, as soon as Taji and his fellow-travellers sail past the "Isle of Nods," Nora-Bamma, they get an eerie sense from the place. Mohi explains that all who land on its shores fall into a lull from which they cannot escape and lie dreaming with eyes open. The isle feels like a blend of earth and heaven, with an uncanny calm that, according to Babbalanja, is "like unto Oro's everlasting serenity, and like unto man's last despair" (267). The characterization of the isle holds out the possibility that a calm on earth—far from being a foretaste of annihilation—may actually be a foretaste of the calm of eternity. Another calm, late in the voyage, suggests that a calm can hold the

power for new life through an imaginative processing of materials. The group falls into a calm by night, "deep within the deepest heart of Mardi's circle" (567). The calm prompts Media to suggest, "Let us dream out the calm" (567). His suggestion operates as a striking meta-description of what the narrator is doing in the text as a whole: his sleeping body has never left the calm on the *Arcturion*.

Near the end of the dream, Taji encounters another calm, or rather, a new way of defining states of calm: Babbalanja defines God as the ultimate calm at the end of all inquiry into truth. In a conversation on the problem of evil, Babbalanja dismisses various attempts to reconcile evil in the world with a good creator God. He calls any such surmises "vain," including the surmise that "all Mardi is but a means to an end," that life in Mardi exists only to determine who will end up in heaven, and that the evil on earth is "but permitted for a term." In truth, says Babbalanja, "Oro delegates his scepter to none; in his everlasting reign there are no interregnums; and Time is Eternity; and we live in Eternity now." The problem of evil, Babbalanja explains, can be understood as a product of humans' limited understanding. What we take to be evil is, in Oro's perfect sight, actually good. In his perfection, "He lives content; all ends are compassed in Him; He has no past, no future; He is the everlasting now; which is an everlasting calm" (620). This redefinition of the calm is striking. Previously, calms were associated with horror and with questioning of one's own existence, but here, Babbalanja characterizes Oro as

“an everlasting calm,” the embodiment of eternal peace (620). Babbalanja’s new definition of the calm will soon be concretized in the form of a utopia on the island of Serenia, where each inhabitant’s willed skepticism ensures that everyone in the community can live together in peace. When Taji rejects this calm utopia—even though it is ratified by his fellow travellers, who represent expertise in each of the major fields of human endeavor—this does not mean that the narrator-dreamer rejects the ideology of Serenia per se. Rather, Taji’s decision to charge alone into the open ocean signifies the narrator’s readiness to charge into waking life with the recognition that he has been formed and prepared for life by his dream-education. His *Bildung* process culminates in the dissolution of his portrait self, Taji.

Outcomes of the Developmental Process

The protagonist’s progress—which can, as discussed, be tracked through his changing perceptions of calms—is made possible by his encounters with and responses to three different kinds of development-triggers, the same triggers present in the European Bildungsromane that Melville read. Like Pantagruel, Tristram Shandy, Wilhelm Meister, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, and David Copperfield, the protagonist of *Mardi* encounters authorities, the unknown, and evidence of a governmental or familial social contract. The encounters with authorities occur as he narrates his dream, calling to mind texts he has read in waking life and weaving them into the fabric of his dream;

also, within the dream, his portrait self interacts with his authorities in the form of various characters whom he meets in Mardi, particularly his four travelling companions, the philosopher, historian, poet, and king, each a representative of a different field of human knowledge and each eager to debate with the others about the relative merits of their fields. Encounters with the unknown in many different forms also occur throughout his journey, as the protagonist's dream-self, Taji, encounters mysterious human, natural, and supernatural phenomena, which intimate the protagonist's waking-life preoccupations with defining the boundaries of human knowledge. Evidence of the social contracts binding human beings together also presents itself to him; he gradually realizes the nature of the ties that human beings form with one another. For the *Mardi* protagonist, encounters with authorities and with the unknown deepen his sense of the limits of human knowledge, while evidence of the social contract present him with possibilities for action that are compatible with his newfound philosophical skepticism. As in *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre,* encounters with authorities, the unknown, and evidence of social contracts trigger development in the protagonist. His identity formation occurs through (dream) conversations, however, whereas theirs occur through experimentation and storytelling, respectively.

Encounters with Authorities

The protagonist's encounters with authorities, whether texts that he has read in waking life or conversations to which the portrait self listens, aid in his development by deepening his sense of humans' epistemological finitude. Like Pantagruel, who skips school, challenges the academic and religious authorities, and cuts through their accumulated ridiculous doctrines to solve dilemmas efficiently, and like Teufelsdröckh, who critiques the university and prefers his own independent reading, the protagonist of *Mardi* develops not merely through his encounters with authorities, but through his selective rejection of them. Through his dream-self's encounters with dreamed-up authorities, he ultimately arrives at a wise skepticism, or more precisely non-dogmatism, that still acknowledges the inevitability of inheritance. In the calm that opens the novel, as the narrator recalls the authorities whose ideas have shaped his thinking, finding an increased reliance on the empiricist philosophers, a decreased reliance on geographers, and a rejection of rationalist philosophers. The narrator describes how a stranded sea-farer's attempts to cope with a calm at sea can end up confirming his faith in empiricism: he first "shakes himself in his coat, to see whether it be empty or no," then he "closes his eyes, to test the reality of the glassy expanse," and next he "fetches a deep breath, by way of experiment, and for the sake of witnessing the effect." As a way of making sense of his situation, if he is "a reader of books," he will think of "Priestley on Necessity," and will realize that he believes in that empiricist

philosopher Joseph Priestley, whose metaphysics was a fusion of theism, materialism, and determinism (8). At this moment in the narrative, the narrator suggests Priestley's work as a remedy for the person whose empiricism is endangered by an insufficiency of enough sensory data to process. Along with this confirmation of faith in the empiricists comes a loss of faith in another kind of authority, geographers. Shortly after the Priestley allusion, the narrator refers to another "real-life" person whose work the narrator has read in his waking life, the geographer and cartographer Conrad Malte-Brun, in whose work the narrator's faith "begins to fail" because, feeling lost in space and time, he can no longer believe in Malte-Brun's mapping of space, or even in the existence of land. The narrator continues that, in the man's state of mad skepticism, his fancy is "alarmed" (8-9). Clearly this passage indicates that the narrator sees empirical dogmatism as a desirable state that is threatened by skepticism and idealism.[17]

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[17] At this stage in the narrative, the narrator does not just espouse empiricism; he also mocks rationalism. He pokes fun at the contemplative Jarl for his empty reveries, saying the emptiness of his reveries makes him a riddle rather than an idealist (36). Later, in another comment on Jarl after the two have boarded the spooky brigantine, the narrator presents an explicit critique of idealism based on the understanding that even the idealist cannot live only in a world of ideas. The narrator says that despite Jarl's "superstitious misgivings about the brigantine; his imputing to her something equivalent to a purely phantom-like nature," he remained "nevertheless exceedingly downright and practical in all hints and proceedings concerning her." The narrator reflects that in this matter, Jarl resembles George Berkeley, "who, metaphysically speaking, holding all objects to be mere optical delusions, was, notwithstanding, extremely matter-of-fact in all matters touching matter itself." That is, Berkeley was "pervious to the points of pins, and possess[ed] a palate capable of appreciating plum-puddings" (63). Berkeley had advanced a theory of "immaterialism" based the claim that the senses are unreliable. The narrator not only rejects this idealist view; he also mocks the person who would dare to advance it.

As the narrator-protagonist enters the dream and travels imaginatively around Mardi, he is exposed to more authorities of differing positions, which lead him into a transitional period when he abstains from philosophizing. He resists theorizing upon the natural phenomena he reports, choosing to report rather what he experiences directly rather than surmise explanations for what he does not experience. For example, in a passage about the controversy over why a bucket of ocean water quickly grows putrid, the narrator advances no theory; he merely records other's theories and his own perceptions, then concludes that he will "build no theories" (112). Even when he surmises he has to cloak it as a report. In a chapter soon after, the narrator describes the phenomenon of the ocean glowing. He describes various theories that others have formulated, and he comments on their reliability but does not advance his own theory. Near the end of the chapter he concludes, "But these are only surmises; likely, but uncertain." Then he adds, "After science comes sentiment" (123). Thus, although he resists building his own plausible theory, he does allow himself to spin off into a poetic theory in the proceeding paragraphs.

The people whom the narrator-protagonist dreams up to populate Mardi are projections based upon the authorities he has encountered in his waking life. Having these figures interact in Mardi puts these various authorities in conversation with each other so that the protagonist can sort out what to believe in his waking life. Most of Taji's dream is spent travelling in

the company of four experts in various fields of human truth-seeking, and many of the Mardians with whom they converse on their journey are themselves considered experts on the subjects on which they speak. Babbalanja, the philosopher, is looked to as an authority, albeit an imperfect one, even by the imperious King Media: at one point the king, considering a puzzling question, "turns over Babbalanja for an encyclopedia, however unreliable" (503).[18] Mohi, the historian, is "furnished with the greatest possible variety of histories, chronicles, anecdotes, memoirs, legends, traditions, and biographies," so that there is "no end to the library he carried"; he is a sort of one-volume history of Mardi (461). Yoomy, the poet, sings old songs and invents new one in pursuit of truth through beauty. Other, minor characters are also authorities in their respective spheres. The antiquarian Oh-Oh (378), the priest of Maramma (333), the idol-maker Hevaneva (353), countless petty kings, and many other Maridans all talk to the travelers about their work and their worldviews. These representatives of different fields of knowledge debate with each other as to whose explanation of reality is most compelling. As the portrait self, Taji, listens to his companions converse, and as the narrating self, the narrator-dreamer, constructs the travellers' conversations out of his own internal fragmentation, the protagonist develops in his understanding of what is knowable by humans, what means of knowing are

[18] On the long journey, Media "divert[s] himself with the wild songs of Yoomy, the wild chronicles of Mohi, or the still wilder speculations of Babbalanja; now and then, as from pitcher to pitcher, pouring royal old wine down his soul" (Ch 51). He turns most often to the philosopher and his speculations than to the others' poetry and history.

available, and how he should live his life as a result. As the narrator's dream progresses, none of the experts is "winning" the conversation. Sometimes the philosopher has the word of wisdom; sometimes the historian has the needed explanation; sometimes the king imperiously silences a foolish line of conversation. Only in the end does Taji meet an interlocutor to whom everyone's reply is respectful affirmation, the theologian who inhabits Serenia. This old man enters the conversation only briefly, and then only to explain his position rather than to argue for it; it is he who "converts" the narrator's fellow travellers to follow Alma, Mardi's analogue for Jesus Christ.

What the protagonist learns from his encounters with authority in and through his dream is two-fold: he begins to realize (a) the limits of empiricism as an epistemology and (b) the fallibility of even the most trusted human authorities. The first realization begins early in his journey through Mardi, when the travellers meet with Donjalolo, the king living in the valley of Willamilla. According to ancient custom, the king is not allowed to leave the royal valley, so he sends out agents to all corners of Mardi "so that at last he might avail himself of the researches of others, and see with their eyes" (248). Two agents, operating independently, visited each distant location. Donjalolo assumes that two honest agents will bring identical reports from any place, but what in fact happens is that no two agents have noticed or seen the same things on their trips. Taji and his fellow travellers are present when Donjalolo receives the agents' conflicting reports. Donjalolo asks his two agents what the

isle of Rafona looks like, and they give contradictory descriptions, one saying it is red and the other white. The king exclaims that truth is hard to "come at by proxy" because it resides in "fountains" where "every one must drink for himself" (250). In an aside, Babbalanja comments that he has seen the reef, and that it is red in some places and white in others. Thus, both of the agents are right, and both are wrong—but Donjalolo does not know this. Only a widely travelled person would be able to draw this sufficiently complex conclusion about the reef. The protagonist's gradual realization of the potential unreliability of both authorities and of one's own senses is a key element of his developmental process.

In keeping with the experiences of other Bildungsroman protagonists, the *Mardi* protagonist goes on to have a series of encounters with both false and reliable authorities. These dreamed experiences teach him that authorities' soundness can never be taken for granted and also that it is dangerous to mistake real authorities for rubbish, and vice versa. For example, after the group has unwittingly met the Pontiff at his pagoda, they are perplexed by his enigmatic and unimpressive appearance (361). Babbalanja explains to Yoomy that he should not be astounded because "[t]he shadows of things are greater than themselves; and the more exaggerated the shadow, the more unlike to the substance" (362). No single visitor can see the marvels of the Pontiff, Babbalanja explains, but collectively all Mardians do (363). Through these interactions among the characters in his dream, the protagonist is learning that

his once-trusted epistemological system, empiricism, is imperfect, not least because some truth will always be beyond human senses.

Within the dream, Babbalanja acts as a sorter out of the authorities the travellers encounter. For example, when the group visits the catacombs where Oh-Oh stores the ancient manuscripts he has accumulated, the mere titles of the manuscripts in the Catacombs betray that the contents of these prized ancient manuscripts are mutually defeating metaphysical treatises. "Whatever is not, is" lies alongside "Whatever is, is not" (383). Yet, after a Rabelaisian catalogue of the library's contents, Babbalanja finds a worthwhile text: some crumbling, illegible pages written by Bardianna that seemed to be part of a lost work entitled "Thoughts, by a Thinker" (385). Babbalanja reflects upon Bardianna's great accomplishment in these pages, diving "into the deeps of things," describing "how the particles of solids were first molded in the interstices of fluids; how the thoughts of men are each a soul, as the lung-cells are each a lung; [and] how that death is but a mode of life." He mourns that these pages, the offspring of a great genius, which "once spoke out like living voices" are now mingled in catacombs with "phrasemen's words" and are becoming "dust; and would not prick a fool to action" (385). When Oh-Oh will not let Babbalanja purchase the manuscript, he takes another worm-eaten parchment by Bardianna instead, one entitled, "A Happy Life" (386). In the next chapter, Babbalanja reads and ponders the text and finds it full of great wisdom. The fact that Babbalanja finds a sound authority in a rubbish heap

shows how difficult it is to sort out the sound authority from the unsound. Even after he explains the preciousness of the text to his fellow travellers, they fail to see its value. Conversely, a false authority can retain public respect for a lifetime. Soon after the incident with the "Happy Life" scroll, Babbalanja gets to meet a philosopher, Doxodox, whom he has admired for a long time. Meeting him in person, Babbalanja realizes that Doxodox is an incomprehensible pseudo-philosopher. "Outrageous impostor!" he laments (564). The text's close juxtaposition of such incidents—encounters with both wise and impostor authorities—underlines the importance, and the difficulty, of developing discernment for oneself. In order to mature, a person must lose some of his faith in his own ability to discern truth from falsehood.

At first, the narrator-protagonist is content with just the material world and with direct sensory experiences. Gradually, he comes to recognize how limited sensory (empirical) data is. Such information, which is a kind of inheritance, is valuable, but it is not as all-important as he had once assumed. Through his long and elaborate dream, he progresses beyond his youthful dogmatism and his faith in the epistemological sufficiency of sensory perceptions; ultimately, he arrives at a wise skepticism that still acknowledges the possibility of gaining knowledge through recourse to the inheritances bequeathed by authorities. Each authority he encounters exists within a network that includes countless other authorities, with each authority shaped by the inheritance of his predecessors and the influence of his contemporaries.

For example, Babbalanja refers frequently to the writings of the ancient thinker Bardianna, as when he explains Bardianna's theory that people's evil actions are caused by little devils (316). Late in the dream, Babbalanja even quotes an entire book from the ancient writer's Ponderings (574). After Babbalanja's companions have heard him quote from Bardianna countless times, Media asserts that Babbalanja does not live his life any better for having internalized the older philosopher's teachings (578). Yet the last mention of Bardianna in the text is Babbalanja's recital of the ancient thinker's will, in which Bardianna bequeaths to all of Mardi the advice to "live as long as you can; close your own eyes when you die" (584). After the reading, Media asks Babbalanja where he thinks Bardianna is now, and Babbalanja replies that Bardianna is now in his Ponderings, which "we all inherit" because "great authors have all Mardi for an heir" (585). As Babbalanja puts it, a great thinker's heirs are all those who come after him or her. And this seems to be the appropriate role for authorities to play in the young person's (or young nation's) development: a resource resting unobtrusively in the past, to be accessed according to the young person's (or young nation's) will and inclination. Ultimately, the authorities that the protagonist dreams up to populate Mardi prove to be a mixture: some are wise and some foolish; some are proud and some self-effacing; and some seem to stand aloof from the world. All of them, though, are embedded within a network of authorities that is interconnected by chains of influence and inheritance. The protagonist comes to realize this multiplicity and thus

becomes prepared to navigate a complicated world where truth is difficult to discern.

Encounters with the Unknown

As the narrative progresses, the narrator-protagonist has dream-encounters with the second category of development-trigger, the unknown, in human, natural, and supernatural forms. These encounters contribute to his *Bildung* process by prompting him to surmise explanations for the mysterious phenomena; repeated and increasingly hard-to-explain encounters with the unknown ultimately force him to give up on the dogmatic empiricism to which he had held before his dream began. Early in the novel, the dreamer-protagonist's response to the unknown is to surmise explanations when action is necessary but to avoid surmising theories when no action is called for. For example, when his avatar Taji first boards the brigantine with Jarl, he surmises explanations for the strange state of the ship and for who might be hiding aboard. He recognizes that surmises are not facts but, when necessary, acts upon them anyway because he realizes that when one must act in the absence of certainty, surmises function as ersatz knowledge. As the dream proceeds, though, Taji will encounter more and more unknowns in human, natural, and supernatural forms, and the dreamer-protagonist will ultimately realize that humans' modes of knowing, including sensation and intuition, are forever inadequate. From his encounters with human unknowns, he learns about the

inadequacy of human language to communicate meaning; from unknowns in nature, he learns that empirical data cannot always be interpreted, although people are still always bound to try; and in his contemplation of the supernatural unknown, he realizes that the wise position is to consider without trying to unravel mysteries about God and fate.

The protagonist's encounters with the unknown in human form are marked by language barriers that teach him the inadequacy of human language. Throughout the dream, he realizes the difficulties of finding language with which to communicate with one's fellow human beings. For example, early in the dream, when he encounters the mysterious Samoa and Annatoo on the brigantine, the language barrier makes the couple's actions, especially Annatoo's, incomprehensible. After rescuing Yillah, Taji listens to her fabulous life story and tries to reinterpret it in a way that fits into the laws of the universe as he knows it. Throughout the dream, Hautia's messengers dog him with their enigmatic messages delivered in the language of flowers, and give him only the vaguest hints of who Hautia is and what she wants with him. Of course, once Taji meets the philosopher Babbalanja he hears plenty of explicit opining on the limits of human language. When the other travellers mock Babbalanja for talking over their heads, he justifies his senseless-seeming questions by saying, "I am intent upon the essence of things; the mystery that lieth beyond … I probe the circle's center; I seek to evolve the inscrutable" (352). When the others ridicule Babbalanja for his profound pronouncements, he says to himself, "I am

to blame for discoursing upon the deep world wherein I live. I am wrong in seeking to invest sublunary sounds with celestial sense. Much that is in me is incommunicable by this ether we breathe" (352-3). In another scene, after Mohi accuses Yoomy of having invented a legend, Babbalanja defends the poet by replying that "truth is in things, and not in words: truth is voiceless." As Bardianna had said, "[W]hat are vulgarly called fictions are as much realities as the gross mattock of Dididi … for things visible are but conceits of the eye: things imaginative, conceits of the fancy. If duped by one, we are equally duped by the other" (283-4). Later, in a chapter entitled, "They sail round an island without landing; and talk round a Subject without getting at it," the subject of conversation is the very island around which they sail, Verdanna (Ireland). The travelers cannot agree on the nature of its people or the causes of their struggles (493), yet they recognize here that part of their difficulty is the fact that all language depends on metaphors, which may not be accurate. In a later conversation about mysterious bodily phenomena, Media tries to give scientific explanations for these "organic functions" and "reflex actions of the nerves," but Babbalanja calls these explanations "[m]ere substitutions of sounds for inexplicable meanings" (507). This phrase turns out to be a concise definition of human language that acknowledges how difficult it is to apprehend and communicate knowledge. From the people whom the narrator-protagonist dreams up to populate Mardi, he learns that they must remain

unknown to him and to each other insofar as language is an inadequate tool for the expression of meaning.

Taji's encounters with the natural world of Mardi are another category of unknown from which he learns; these encounters teach him that not all empirical data from the natural world can be interpreted and that people must make surmises in order to make sense of this data even though these surmises can go awry. When the group visits Oh-Oh, the ancient antiquary, they learn that even this student of both the microscopic and the cosmic feels he has not been able to discover very much about reality. At first they admire his telescope and microscope, which he uses to gather data both voluminous and minute, and Babbalanja declares, "your discoveries must ere long result in something grand; since you furnish such invaluable data for theorists" (381). Yet Oh-Oh laments how limited his conclusions have really been. Moreover, he mourns that "[t]he microscope disgusts us with our Mardi; and the telescope sets us longing for some other world" (381). The more empirical data Oh-Oh gathers, the less satisfied he becomes with the world. Encounters like these cause the protagonist to realize that, even though he had previously rejected surmising as a means of gaining knowledge, surmising may in fact be a necessary activity in the pursuit of truth. This newfound epistemology is put into practice when the group encounters a mysterious relic called the Isle of Fossils, a large rock that, on its smoother surfaces, is covered in "Luxor marks, Tadmor ciphers, Palenque inscriptions"—that is, fossils of "beetles, turtles, ant-eaters, armadilloes, guanos,

serpents, [and] tongueless crocodiles" (415). Babbalanja explains that what they are looking at are "the leaves of the book of Oro," in which they can "read how worlds are made" and "read the rise and fall of Nature's kingdoms." This relic holds "unbeginning records" written long before the oldest historical records written by humans.[19] Media tells the philosopher that "[a]ll you say is very fine, but very dark. I would know something more precise." Babbalanja obliges with a different reading of the Isle of Fossils, recounting an ancient volcanic explosion that brought the island chain into being. He concludes his vivid description by saying that because of the explosion, there are today "many fossils on the hills, whose kith and kin still lurk beneath the vales. Thus Nature works, at random warring, chaos a crater, and this world a shell" (417). When Media rejects this explanation of the Isle of Fossils, Babbalanja offers another theory, involving a primal soup and a series of oozy, fossil-filled sandwiches. His theory recalls the theory of evolution then emerging in Melville's day.[20] In all, Babbalanja offers three different readings of the Isle of Fossils, not privileging any one reading over the others because he prefers to respect the

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[19] The motif of a rock engraved with ancient, indecipherable inscriptions was a resonant one in the mid-nineteenth century. The Rosetta Stone had been discovered in 1799, and its hieroglyphics deciphered by Jean-Francois Chapollion in 1822. Images of the stone circulated widely, inflaming the imaginations of philologists, Transcendentalists, and many others. Nathaniel Hawthorne included such a relic in the sketch "Foot-prints on the Sea-shore," an enormous boulder whose veins are like antediluvian hieroglyphics.

[20] Darwin's *Origin of Species* would not be published until 1859, but he had been developing his theory of evolution ever since his 1836 voyage on the *Beagle*, and others had advanced similar theories in the meantime, although the mainstream views in natural history still aligned with the Church of England and creationism. Herbert Spencer was fighting to make science a profession free of the clerics in the 1850s.

mystery of artifact and its natural inscriptions. After Babbalanja's elaborate discourse, Media reflects, "Mohi tells us, that Mardi was made in six days; but you, Babbalanja, have built it up from the bottom in less than six minutes" (418). Thus Mohi the historian is identified with the Biblical account of human history, and Babbalanja (if playfully) with a more materialist, scientific account. The relevant point here is that both views are made possible by the activity of surmising explanations for empirically observed facts. In a shift from the narrator's dismissal of surmising earlier in the text, Babbalanja re-casts surmising as a route to truth about what is beyond human experience. He tells Mohi that, far beyond Mardi, there may be "other regions … peopled with races something like us Mardians; but perhaps with more exalted faculties, and organs that we lack. They may have some better seeing sense than ours; perhaps, have fins or wings for arms." When Mohi and Media both think the idea sounds insane, Babbalanja cries, "[A]re all inductions vain? … Have we mortals naught to rest on, but what we see with eyes? Is no faith to be reposed in that inner microcosm, wherein we see the charted universe in little, as the whole horizon is mirrored in the iris of a gnat?" (420-1). Here Babbalanja expresses the limits of empiricism and defends the surmise as a route to truth, which indicates that the narrator-protagonist is learning this himself.

By the end of the dream, natural phenomena become for Taji what they will be for Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*: metaphors for spiritual truths that lie beyond immediate human experience. By learning to "read" nature, he can learn

transcendent truth. Following Emerson, who asserted that every natural fact is a sign of a spiritual fact, Melville shows his protagonist developing in his spiritual understanding as a result of observing mysterious natural phenomena, such as a host of waterspouts. When he sees this strange sight (much as the sailors on the *Pequod* do in *Moby-Dick*), he interprets it as an image of the temporary union of soul and body. The water-spouts seem to be a "boundless cave of stalactites … the cloud-born vapors downward spiraling, till they met the whirlpool-column from the sea; then, uniting, over the waters stalked, like ghosts of gods." When sundered, the watery half sank down, "sullen," while "far up into heaven, was drawn the vapory." So too it is at death, he concludes, when "we mortals part in twain; our earthy half still here abiding; but our spirits flying whence they came" (544). The protagonist's insight here not only shows his spiritual growth through his dream; it also presages the growth of his literary descendant, Ishmael.

By the end of the narrative, the narrator-protagonist is learning how to read the supernatural significance in (dreamed) natural phenomena; but throughout the dream, he has also contemplated the supernatural more directly. He wonders, for example, what supernatural forces give reality its shape. In a chapter entitled "Babbalanja discourses in the Dark," the philosopher leads the others in a discussion of fate, freewill, and necessity that recalls Ishmael's mat-making reverie in *Moby-Dick.* The conversation begins when the travelers are stuck in a calm in the dark of night. Vee-Vee gets hurt, inspiring a conversation

on why the event happened and whether it was "necessary." Babbalanja declares that if all events occur without "human necessity"—that is, if humans do not have agency—then "Woe to us all … for what direful events may be in store for us which we cannot avoid" (424). Babbalanja leads Media in a Socratic teaching moment, during which Babbalanja gets Media to establish unwittingly the doctrine of Philosophical Necessity (425). Yet the chapter title, "Babbalanja Discourses in the Dark," suggests that no absolute knowledge is gained in the discussion. The episode echoes one in Chapter Two, which described another calm at sea that led to thoughts of Necessity. In Chapter Two, the narrator had suggested that being stuck in a calm at sea makes a sailor doubt his own existence. ("Priestley on Necessity occurs to him," and "he grows madly skeptical" [9]). The narrator had only mentioned Necessity and skepticism in Chapter Two in order to identify them as dangers to be escaped. Here, though, the conversation seems to endorse the doctrine of Necessity. However, this apparent endorsement occurs during a calm—a state the narrator has warned us plays havoc with human reason—and in a chapter entitled "Babbalanja discourses in the Dark," so the reader is unable to pin down whether the conversation in this chapter represents a confirmation or a reversal of what the narrator had said in Chapter Two. The passage might seem to solve the mystery of how the fabric of reality is woven, until the reader realizes that the solution is unraveled by the larger text. This supernatural mystery remains a mystery to

the narrator; the process of maturation does not require that every question be answered and every mystery solved.

Indeed, the protagonist ultimately comes to recognize that God or the gods have knowledge that humans never can. At one point in the dream, King Media listens to his fellow travelers offering each other surmises as to the nature of various natural phenomena such as ambergris. Media laughs to himself and says, "It's pleasant to sit by, a demi-god, and hear the surmisings of mortals, upon things they know nothing about; theology, or amber, or ambergris, it's all the same. But then, did I always out with every thing I know, there would be no conversing with these comical creatures" (375). As it turns out, it is humans' lack of indisputable knowledge that makes it possible for them to have conversations with each other; correspondingly, it is also this finitude that makes conversation necessary. *Mardi*'s innovation as a Bildungsroman is to depict the process of *Bildung* occurring through one long, internal conversation within the protagonist himself.

Evidence of the Social Contract

In addition to encounters with authorities and with the unknown, the third development-trigger that the protagonist encounters in his dream is evidence of the social contracts that bind society together; these encounters lead him to a gradual recognition of his place in the larger world. The protagonist begins to make explicit connections between his dream world and the real

world of 1848, when Melville was writing *Mardi,* late in the dream, when the veil between the dream world and waking reality grows thinner. The veil begins to thin a bit more than halfway through the dream, when Babbalanja first mentions Oro and his prophet Alma, who are clearly analogues to God and Jesus. The topic comes up when Babbalanja praises the author of a certain ancient treatise called "A Happy Life" for having great wisdom even though he was "a mere man, and a heathen," who lived before Alma had come. The parallel is obvious: the author of this treatise is a "pagan" philosopher like the ancient Greeks and Romans, "lov[ing] righteousness for its own sake, and in view of annihilation," making him greater than the "pious sages" who "extol it as the means of everlasting felicity."[21] In the ensuing pages, the travelers discuss Oro (God), his prophet Alma (Jesus), and the pagan philosophers who somehow gained so much wisdom before Alma came to reveal truth about Oro (389). To underscore the transparency of the dream world, Greek and Latin names like "Logodora" and "Livella" crop into the ostensibly Polynesian Mardi (397). The thinning of the veil between dream world and real world reflects the fact that the narrator is becoming more able to face the anxiety-producing conflicts and events in his waking life. He is growing ready to re-awaken in the real world.

[21] Media orders Babbalanja to keep the treatise hidden because "Mardi's religion must seem to come direct from Oro"; the king is threatened by the possibility of the masses discovering a route to happiness and righteousness outside the officially sanctioned religion (389). This represents another parallel to the "real world," as monarchs were often guilty of such attempts to consolidate their power through a monopoly on religion.

As the veil to the protagonist's waking world continues to thin, the conflicts among the travelers become more and more resonant with the real world of 1848. For example, in a debate over the origins of Mardi, Babbalanja advances a theory reminiscent of Darwin's evolution, only to be shot down by the historian Mohi, who holds to a young-earth theory (415). The conflict among the travellers is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century controversy swirling around Darwinism and its implications. Soon after this, in one of the novel's most-examined sections, the travellers visit islands that obviously mirror actual nations: Dominora (England, ruled by the imperialistic king Bello), Propheero (Europe), Franko (France, torn apart by revolution), Ibeereea (Spain), Luzinanna, Latianna (Italy), Vatikanna (the Vatican), Hapzaboro, Tutoni (Germany), Zandinavia (Scandanavia), Jutlanda, Muzkova (Russia). Finally, the travellers alight on "that New Mardi, Vivenza"—the United States, or the New World, which has been settled by colonists from Porpheero, who displaced the natives and established their own new society. Here, the reader discovers the narrator's attitude toward the nation to which he himself belongs since we can infer that he is American and that Vivenza, the last allegorical island the group visits, is his dream-version of his own nation. Although the narrator recognizes many virtues in the new nation, including courage, nobility, and ripeness, he also criticizes Vivenza for being a "braggadocio" (472), and reminds them of all they have inherited from Dominora (473). American readers would have instantly recognized themselves being sympathetically portrayed in these

passages, and would have realized that the critiques were directed at them. Within his dream, the narrator is bringing himself face-to-face with troubling realities back home that he has not yet fully acknowledged in his waking life. The narrator is contemplating the glories and flaws of his own nation, as well as his own place within it.[22] From the narrator-protagonist's encounters with information about the social contracts binding people together, including the national and the cosmic, he realizes more and more profoundly the larger context in which he himself exists. Such a realization is a necessary feature of the Bildungsroman hero's development.

The American nation is not the only social contract in which the narrator-protagonist finds his place. He has recognized all along, on some level, that the Biblical narrative defines his relation to the larger world. In a reflection upon Jarl's descent from ancient kings, he says that "[a]ll of us have monarchs and sages for kinsmen; nay, angels and archangels for cousins," because our ancestors include the race described in Genesis Six, that was born from the sons of God and the daughters of men (12). "Thus," he says, "all generations are blended: and heaven and earth of one kin." All things in the universe "form but one whole; the universe a Judea, and God Jehovah its head" (12-13). Here, very early in his dream, the narrator recognizes that one way of reading the universe is as a single whole, with its underlying unity arising from its origin in one

[22] One group they encounter, the Tapparians, very much resemble the leisure class of the industrialized world: the girls wear a sort of hoop-skirt, while the young men wear "aiguillettes" and "hold semi-transparent leaves to their eyes" (405, 406); their aristocratic parties (409); their joylessness and self-absorption (413).

creator God. Yet this Biblically based view of the human community is complicated by events that happen late in the narrative. The end of the "Isle of Cripples" episode suggests that the narrator is troubled by the Calvinist doctrine that God saves and damns whom he will. Throughout the chapter, the existence of the Isle's peaceful society of deformed outcasts seems to imply a relativistic view that our sense of beauty is wholly conditioned. However, the last line of the chapter holds the troubling implication that the cripples have been cheated by Oro. Just before the group leaves the island, "Vee-Vee, spying a curious looking stone, turned it over, and found a snake" (573). The image alludes to Matthew 7:11, in which Jesus asks rhetorically, "If you ask for an egg, will I give you a snake?"[23] The implication is that the inhabitants of this isle have been given a snake by Oro/God. The etymology of the word "curious" supports this reading, as it has the same Latin root as "care," and in its original sense meant "creates with care." The narrator simultaneously implies that the cripples were created with intentionality and that they were deliberately not given what they needed by their creator. The Isle of Cripples is a community bound by its social contract, but, apparently, also rejected by God—a view that is even bleaker than an agnostic, materialistic relativism. Yet the events that later occur on Serenia suggest that the protagonist does not finally and absolutely reject the social contract founded in the Judeo-Christian God.

[23] Some versions of the Bible say "fish" instead of "snake."

Conclusions

The narrator's developmental process culminates in his dream of the island of Serenia, a utopian society in the midst of the many violent and troubled islands in Mardi. Serenia has no king; instead, all the people live in equality and harmony, bound by their shared love of Alma (Christ). They can live at peace with each other because none of them dogmatically claims to know more than the others. On this island, Taji's fellow travellers experience sudden conversion to a faith in Alma, marking the end of their search for Truth. Taji, however, rejects the religion practiced on Serenia and instead continues his quest for Yillah. Many critics read Taji's final, suicidal charge into the open ocean as a defiant, Ahabian act that signifies his moral disintegration. However, when *Mardi* is read as a Bildungsroman that charts the development of the narrator (as distinct from Taji), one can see that Taji's dissolution is a necessary step in the narrator's development. It enables him, the narrator, to return to waking life on the *Arcturion* and live what he has learned in the dream. As a Bildungsroman, his narrative culminates in his maturation and his readiness for adult life.

The dramatic events on Serenia are immediately preceded by several key revelations and realizations on the part of the narrator. First, the travellers reach the low point of their journey: they journey toward the Holy Land and are utterly disappointed by the fact that the Truth is not revealed to them there. As the travellers pass through the Mardi version of the Strait of Gibraltar, they see

on their left the nation of crosses (Spain), and on their right the nation of crescents (Northern Africa). Babbalanja remarks to Media, "How vain to say, that progress is the test of truth," for, "after many centuries, those crescents yet unwaning shine, and count a devotee for every worshiper of yonder crosses." Neither one of these religions' competing sets of truth claims has superseded the other, and so, concludes Babbalanja, "Truth and Merit have other symbols than success. … Side by side, Lies run with Truths, and fools with wise; but, like geometric lines, though they pierce infinity, never may they join" (554). As the travellers sail on, landing repeatedly but finding no trace of Yillah, they reach the Holy Land, which brings them no more satisfaction. The chapter concludes with a description of the travellers, like baffled hunters in a prairie, turning "once more to gain the open plain," that is, turning their keels from the inland sea back to the open ocean, with "[t]he universe again before us; our quest, as wide" (555). In this place where the questers had expected answers, they are faced with the realization that opposing truth claims are still in competition with each other. As the travellers near the end of their circuit through Mardi, they realize that Truth does not necessarily triumph in the observable realm. This realization prepares the narrator for dreaming Serenia because the peaceful harmony of that society depends upon each inhabitant's suspension of dogmatism.

A second key revelation occurs not in the journey itself but in another of the narrator's digressive chapters. He pauses amidst all the disappointments of

the voyage to declare that he is determined to keep searching the "world of mind, wherein the wanderer may gaze round, with more of wonder than Balboa's band roving through the golden Aztec glades." He thus reveals explicitly to the reader that his progress on his journey has not been through a physical space but rather through "the world of mind," a journey on which he has been guided by the same divine influence that moves the sun. He expresses the sense that he is taking a risk by charting his own path where no one else has sailed; yet, he believes that even if his "fainting trances" and toil cause him to "sink in boundless deeps," it is better to die exploring than safely on familiar shores (557). He decides, in this moment of realization, that it is better to keep searching for knowledge even if the quest turns out to have been in vain. This determination to seek knowledge is a key characteristic of the Bildungsroman hero, and in fact makes his maturation possible.

In another narrative chapter, where the narrator describes a visit to the island of King Abrazza, the narrator has a third important realization that paves the way for his dreaming of Serenia. During the visit, Taji has begun to suspect that Abrazza is evil. The narrator, however, dismisses the conclusion as it is forming in his mind, and he expresses the desire to love and accept everyone rather than struggle to differentiate between "good" people and "bad" ones. He resolves, "Though we like not something in the curve of one's brow, or distrust the tone of his voice; yet, let us away with suspicions if we may, and make a jolly comrade of him, in the name of the gods." He prays, "Give me the heart

that's huge as all Asia; and unless a man be a villain outright, account him one of the best tempered blades in the world" (609). Immediately afterwards, at the end of this chapter describing the supper with Abrazza, the narrator hints that we are now "drawing nigh to the evening end of these wanderings wild" (609). The implication is that the wandering journey and its end corresponds to the narrator-protagonist's development, as here marked by his learning to ask questions that are motivated by love rather than by pride.

In a final key event shortly before the group's arrival at Serenia, the travellers face the sudden death of one of their number when a crewmember suddenly falls from the masthead and is lost. This prompts a discussion of the fact that life itself is a gradual death. Babbalanja reflects on how we outlive our younger selves, dying little by little. As the world changes around us, we recognize it less and less, and thus feel ever less at home in this world: "Up and down we wander, like exiles transported to a planet afar:—'tis not the world *we* were born in; not the world once so lightsome and gay" (619). Mohi assents, "I have long been the tomb of my youth. And more has died out of me, already, than remains for the last death to finish" (619). The narrator's dreaming of this scene reveals that, as the end of his dream journey approaches, he is recognizing the changes in himself as a kind of death, and he is contemplating his own mortality.

These revelations and realizations—the disappointment of the Holy Land, the declaration by the narrator that this entire journey is taking place in

his own mind, the narrator’s realization that he wants to act out of love and not pride, and finally, the realization that that the changes he is undergoing are a kind of death—all build up to the climactic events on the island of Serenia. On this unusual island, as the travellers question their elderly guide about Serenia and are deeply moved by his responses, something remarkable happens: each traveller is suddenly transformed from the inside out. Babbalanja, after thinking deeply about everything the old man says, turns aside and says, half to himself, the words that indicate his conversion: “Some black cloud seems floating from me. I begin to see. I come out in light. The sharp fang tears me less. The forked flames wane. My soul sets back like ocean streams, that sudden change their flow” (629). Finally Babbalanja declares his belief in Alma and disavows his earlier “dreams.” He sinks to his knees and praises Alma as “prince divine”:

> “[I]n *thee*, at last, I find repose. Hope perches in my heart a dove;—a thousand rays illume;—all Heaven's a sun. Gone, gone! are all distracting doubts. Love and Alma now prevail. I see with other eyes:—Are these my hands? What wild, wild dreams were mine;—I have been mad. … Where have I lived till now? … Reason no longer domineers; but still doth speak. All I have said ere this, that wars with Alma's precepts, I here recant. Here I kneel, and own great Oro and his sovereign son.” (630)

This event, Babbalanja’s conversion, is the single most striking event in the dream. In it, his heteroglossic identity is suddenly integrated. Babbalanja’s moment of conversion synthesizes his own responses to all three of the development-triggers featured in the Bildungsroman: he discovers and submits

to the rightful authority, he recognizes with reverence what must always remain unknown to him, and he ratifies a social contract that is bound by love, right reason, and humility. He re-orients his life toward Alma, who will be the portrait self who guides his future development. This key moment in Babbalanja's development marks an important realization on the part of the protagonist who dreams it up.

While on Serenia, Babbalanja is shown a vision by an angelic guide as a reward for his newfound humble resolution not to further seek knowledge but rather to be content in his finite humanity. Babbalanja's vision uncovers the reality that still more mysteries lie beyond the mysteries and that human development never ends because there is always more to be known. The vision begins when an angel comes to Babbalanja in a dream and invites him to "Come, and see new things" (633). The angel then sweeps him up to Mardi's heaven, where they see the souls of Alma's followers in their afterlife. The guide explains that this state is still a "mixed" state, not absolute happiness, because only perfect knowledge can bring perfect contentment—and perfect knowledge belongs only to Oro (God). For everyone else, learning never reaches an end, and contentment is always just beyond reach. The angel explains that when "death gave these beings knowledge, it also opened other mysteries." Even though they are in the afterlife, they are still incomplete because "Oro is past finding out, and mysteries ever open into mysteries beyond." Though these beings will forever "progress in wisdom and in good;

yet, will they never gain a fixed beatitude" (634). As Babbalanja and his guide near the isle of Serenia once more, the guide's final advice to Babbalanja is to "love on!" and to remember that "heaven hath no roof." That is, the soul's progress toward knowledge, as embodied in Oro, can never be at an end. This advice to Babbalanja marks the conclusion of his developmental process, a process that will, paradoxically, continue for the rest of eternity.[24]

Babbalanja's final advice for Taji is that he should acknowledge that his hunt for Yillah is vain and stay in Serenia, the only place where he can escape the three princes who want revenge on Taji for killing their father. Babbalanja advises Taji that Yillah is "a phantom that but mocks thee," and that "[w]ithin our hearts is all we seek." Babbalanja says that the best "prompter" in this search is Alma. He encourages Taji to "rove no more," and to "[g]ain now, in flush of youth, that last wise thought, too often purchased, by a life of woe. Be wise: be wise" (637). In Babbalanja's farewell to the group, his last words are to Taji: "[B]e sure thy Yillah never will be found; or found, will not avail thee. Yet search, if so thou wilt … and when all is seen, return, and find thy Yillah here" (638). Despite Babbalanja's pleas, and despite the fact that until now Taji has listened raptly to Babbalanja, in this crucial moment he is deaf to Babbalanja's

[24] Also in the course of his vision, Babbalanja learns what the last great question is to which no one but Oro will never have an answer. When he asks his angel guide why some souls are unregenerate—why Oro would "create the germs that sin and suffer, but to perish"—the guide replies that this "is the last mystery which underlieth all the rest. Archangel may not fathom it; that makes of Oro the everlasting mystery he is; that to divulge, were to make equal to himself in knowledge all the souls that are; that mystery Oro guards; and none but him may know" (634). The question that would haunt *Moby Dick*—why is Ahab damned and Ishmael saved?—is first introduced here in *Mardi*, though left unexplored.

pleas. Given the strength of this wise character's plea to Taji, why does he reject Serenia in order to seek Yillah on Hautia's sinister island of Flozilla, and then charge suicidally into the open ocean? The answer to this question lies in the fact that Taji is not himself the Bildungsroman protagonist; he is only the portrait self imagined by the actual protagonist, the narrator, in order to aid in the narrator's development. All of Taji's errors and sins occur within the narrator's dream and help him, the narrator, to develop a deeper understanding of himself, human nature, and his place in the world. Moreover, Serenia, Oro, and Alma must always be repugnant to the narrator-protagonist because they all exist only within his own consciousness. What he needs and longs for is an escape from his own subjectivity and into objective Truth. A person cannot grow as long as he or she remains trapped in one's subjective experience. If the protagonist is ever to follow God—which in *Mardi* is the mark of maturity—he must escape from his dream of Oro.

A subtle examination of the novel's final sequence, from the arrival on Hautia's island of Flozilla to his solo charge into the open ocean, reveals that the narrator is distancing himself more and more obviously from Taji. He increasingly describes Taji as one whom he is observing, rather than as an avatar in whose body he is experiencing the world. He begins referring to Taji in the third person and describing his appearance from an observer's perspective. On Flozilla, for example, the narrator describes Taji as being like a somnambulist "with death-glazed eyes" (653). When Mohi and Yoomy

reappear to save him, Mohi asks, "Is this specter, Taji?" Taji replies that "Taji lives no more. … I am his spirit's phantom's phantom" (653). As Taji is dragged away from Flozilla by Mohi and Yoomy, it is as though he is beginning to dissolve; he hears the voice of Mohi "as in a dream" (654). The narrator notes that in the dark Lagoon, the only star shining is "red Arcturus" (654). This indicates to the reader that the narrator is gradually returning to consciousness on the ship *Arcturion* (654), for his *Bildung* process is at its conclusion.[25]

A tentative answer to the questions of where the protagonist is headed now upon his awakening, and of what his dream has taught him, lies in the calm at the beginning of the narrative. The imagery with which the narrator describes the calms at sea in the beginning of the novel suggest to the reader that out of such calms can arise great creative acts. Here is how the narrator describes a calm he and Jarl encounter after they have deserted the *Arcturion* for the Chamois, that is, at the beginning of the narrator's dream: "Now, as the face of a mirror is a blank, only borrowing character from what it reflects; so in a calm in the Tropics … And this inert blending and brooding of all things seemed gray chaos in conception" (48). Tormenting as the calm is to the narrator, his description of it evokes the Biblical creation narrative, in which the spirit of God hovered over the chaos and then arranged the blended elements

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[25] Erin Suzuki reads the increasing distance between the narrator and Taji quite differently, as Taji growing more distanced from the telling of the story (and the narrator) because he is "increasingly consumed by his own myth" (377).

into order. The act of creation consisted in differentiating the chaotic blend of elements into light and darkness, water and dry land. At the end of the narrative that is *Mardi*, the narrator must re-awaken on the *Arcturion*, his creative act having been a dream; indeed, the reader senses that in the end the narrator is still in process of formation, still hovering over the waters. Perhaps now, though, the protagonist is ready to create something in his waking life. As a Bildungsroman is wont to do, the text of *Mardi* circles back on itself, seeking its future within its own original image. The text's structure is, like human development itself, both circular and progressive. Melville shows that human formation depends not only upon looking to the future with hope, but also upon looking to the past with wisdom. Only through such circumspection can a person learn to recognize the heteroglossia of inherited voices and to choose which voices to integrate into his mature identity.

CHAPTER FOUR

Education as Experiment in *Moby-Dick*: Synthesizing a System

I try all things; I achieve what I can.

--Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

Years after his youthful whaling adventures, Ishmael still saves bits of dried-up whale skin collected on his voyages. The fragments of skin have dried thin, clear, and brittle as glass, and Ishmael now likes to read his books through these lenses. He says of the whale skin that he has "sometimes pleased [himself] with fancying it exerted a magnifying influence" (306). Both literally and metaphorically, Ishmael's experiences on the *Pequod* provided him the lenses through which he would read the texts and experiences he encountered in his subsequent life. On the *Pequod*, he met people and witnessed events that would forever change his way of seeing. Just as Ishmael's experiences are illuminated for him by his reading of them through a whale-lens, so too the text of *Moby-Dick* is illuminated for readers by being read through a particular lens: Herman Melville's conception of the Bildungsroman genre. Melville only knew the Bildungsroman as a European genre, but in *Moby-Dick* and its companion texts *Mardi* and *Pierre*, he re-worked the genre so that he could describe an American process of human formation. Melville revises the genre by having the protagonist himself construct the portrait self that is to guide his formation; that

construction corresponds to the composition of the text that the reader is reading. In *Moby-Dick*, the narrator-protagonist is a New England letter-sorter in his mid-thirties who still occasionally goes to sea, and the portrait self is a remembered self, a younger version of that same man as he exists in the memory and imagination of the narrator.[1]

Ishmael the narrator grows and develops through the process of recounting the growth and development of Ishmael the young sailor on the *Pequod*. In Chapter One, Ishmael writes that he still considers it puzzling that he ever took "it into [his] head to go on a whaling voyage," and believes that "the invisible police officer of the Fates … can better answer than anyone else" why Ishmael did so. Yet he believes that he is beginning to "see a little into the springs and motives which being cunningly presented to me under various disguises, induced me to set about performing the part I did" (7). In other words, now that Ishmael is sitting down to recall, reflect upon, and record his experience of the *Pequod* voyage, he is beginning to understand just what happened to him and what he has to learn from it. During his narration, Ishmael practices a more active form of self-cultivation than the narrator-protagonist of *Mardi*: he tries out various ideologies and philosophies in order to synthesize his own system for understanding reality. Thus, the text of *Moby-Dick* depicts identity as synthetic and actively constructed over time; it suggests

[1] Readers rarely notice Ishmael's reference to himself as a letter-sorter for the Post office, which he makes in the chapter "Cetology," as will be discussed.

that progress toward self-understanding and integration into the world are certainly possible, but also are discernible only in retrospect. Ishmael finishes writing his narrative with a greater understanding of himself and the universe than he had had when he sat down and wrote the words "Call me Ishmael."

Both the narrator Ishmael and his portrait self, the young man Ishmael, develop through a process of experimentation. For young Ishmael, the experiment began when he decided to go on a whaling voyage, in which he was motivated by a desire to pursue "the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself" (7). The narrator's experiment, an extension of the portrait self's experiment, is to construct a text that will make sense of the whaling experiment and its outcome. "[I]t is a ponderous task; no ordinary letter-sorter in the Post-office is equal to it," Ishmael declares midway through the "Cetology" chapter; "[b]ut I have swam through libraries and sailed through oceans; I have had to do with whales with these visible hands; I am in earnest, and I will try" (136). This declaration precedes his sketch of a blueprint for a cetological system that draws upon his copious reading in the volumes that stock his study or his memory, as well as on his own whaling experiences and his conversations with fellow whale-men. However, these cetological researches, like every other element of Ishmael's narrative, are only a means to a transcendent end: Ishmael's own self-understanding, achieved through a detailed analysis of his experiences on the *Pequod*. That Ishmael's method of identity formation should

be experimental is fitting given that he is a citizen of a new nation that had been established as a great experiment.

Ishmael the narrator-protagonist experiments constantly as he constructs his text. He never merely describes events; rather, he weaves in surmised explanations for every feature of whaling life, every event that befalls the *Pequod*'s crew, and every person that he meets. From the weaving of a mat, to the fatal fall of a fellow-sailor from the masthead, to the kingly magnanimity of Queeqeug, Ishmael ponders what each memory has to teach him in the present. Ishmael tries out interpretive lenses borrowed from many different sources, including Calvinist theology, Polynesian polytheism, natural history, whaling lore, British empiricism, and German idealism. He shifts premises frequently without pointing this out to the reader, a technique that results in the text's apparent inconsistencies. Indeed, early in his narration, Ishmael writes that he hopes God will indulge the creative license he will take in how he characterizes the people in his story: "If, then, to meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways, I shall hereafter ascribe high qualities, though dark," he writes, if "I weave round them tragic graces," if "I touch that workman's arm with some ethereal light" or "spread a rainbow over his disastrous set of sun," then, he hopes, God will "against all mortal critics bear me out in it" through His "just spirit of equality, which hast spread one royal mantle of humanity over all my kind!" (117). This prayer represents Ishmael's open acknowledgement, early in his narrative, of the grandiose lens through which he is interpreting his *Pequod*

shipmates. Ishmael's use of various interpretive lenses make him something like a photographer who tries a different camera filter for every picture he takes, to see which filter or filters will produce the best image of his experience. He is also something like a mathematician who tries one formula after another to see which one yields a solution that has the ring of truth, except that, unlike in mathematics, mere logic is not sufficient for determining which lens works in which instance.

This chapter will first establish that *Moby-Dick* shares many features with the European Bildungsroman, then show how reading the novel as a Bildungsroman corrects critical misunderstandings about the novel and about Melville's artistic development in general. Upon the basis of this redefinition of *Moby-Dick,* this chapter will then build an analysis of the novel itself. This analysis will explicate the text's conception of human identity, trace Ishmael the narrator's process of development, and determine the outcome of this process.

Like *Mardi* and *Pierre*, *Moby-Dick* is a Bildungsroman by any definition that does not automatically exclude all non-German novels. On Anniken Telnes Iversen's Bildungsroman Index (BRI), the novel scores at least a 110 out of 148, ranking it lowest in the triptych but comparable to other novels Iversen examines in her study of Bildungsromane.[2] *Moby-Dick*'s highest scores on the Index are in Section 1: Narrative perspective and mode, Section 3:

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[2] For comparison, Bildungsromane that Iverson finds score roughly ten points above and below *Moby-Dick* are John Fowles's *The Magus* with 106 points, and, on the other side with 123 points each, Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* and John Irving's *The Cider House Rules*.

Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions, and Section 9: Theme, subject matter and motifs. In the first category, *Moby-Dick* has focalization shifts between the narrator and the protagonist, offers access to the protagonist's consciousness, is narrated retrospectively, has a narrator who knows more than the protagonist (if one distinguishes Ishmael as sailor from Ishmael as narrator), has an ironic attitude toward its young protagonist, has a plot combining action and reflection, and portrays the existing world realistically. *Moby-Dick* may not seem to meet the latter criterion until one considers that the epic and fantastical elements are the result of Ishmael's self-conscious interpretations of events and people. In Section 3, *Moby-Dick* displays most of the typical features with which the Bildungsroman treats secondary characters: other characters are essential in making Ishmael change and grow, other characters function as important educators, companions, and lovers for Ishmael (if one considers Queeqeug as a "lover"); another character's marriage is exemplary or contrasted to Ishmael's (Ahab's and Starbuck's marriages with their wives back on land contrast with each other's and with Ishmael's "marriage" to Queequeg); and finally, the novel includes at least one important character from the lower, middle, and higher social classes. Sailors tend to be of lower class, but Queequeg is a Polynesian prince, and the ship owners and mates might be regarded as middle-class. Finally, in Section 9, *Moby-Dick* displays all but one of the typical Bildungsroman themes, subject matter, and motifs: the main theme is the psychological and moral development of the

protagonist from youth to adulthood (although, as one of the Section 7 criteria states, the novel focuses mostly on the protagonist at eighteen to twenty-three years old); the protagonist strives for liberation from the people he/she depends upon in childhood, their values, and their plans for his future; the protagonist searches for new commitments to people and ideas; the novel depicts tension, conflict, or discrepancy between inner and outer worlds; the protagonist is confronted with at least one philosophy or philosophical system; he learns through pain and loss; he develops from false self-perception to self-knowledge; he is shaped or wonders whether he is shaped by fate and chance, as well as by his own free will; he suffers death and grief; he experiences love, relationships, and marriage (or at least, experiences a loving relationship with Queequeg that he likens to a marriage); the novel portrays society and offers social criticism; and finally, by the end of the novel, family becomes a theme, in the scenes of the *Pequod*'s shipwreck and Ishmael's rescue.

Beyond *Moby-Dick*'s score on the Bildungsroman Index, the novel can also be considered a Bildungsroman because of the characteristics it shares with the specific Bildungsromane that Melville read while writing his triptych, as well as with the two other Bildungsromane that Melville wrote. As discussed in Chapter One, this study considers those parallels primarily in terms of three development-triggers also encountered by the protagonists in *Gargantua and Pantagruel, Tristram Shandy, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, Sartor Resartus,* and *David Copperfield.* Before the protagonist encounters these triggers, he is a

young man on the cusp of adulthood with the potential for mobility within his society. The young sailor Ishmael strolling along gloomily in "Loomings" is in just such a state of youthful potential; he is intelligent, well-read, and eager to see the world and to find his place within it. Likewise, the older Ishmael who narrates the story (for whom young Ishmael is the portrait self) is, himself, on the cusp of adventure and discovery, as he is beginning to understand why he went whaling and what he has to learn from recalling and analyzing the experience. That the narrator calls himself "Ishmael" suggests that he is trying out a new identity, under a new name that suggests a complicated place in the human community and in the plan of the Creator.[3] Ishmael-as-sailor encounters the three categories of development-triggers that are found in the European Bildungsromane that Melville read: authorities (including Father Mapple, whom he meets in the flesh, and philosophers like Kant, whom he encounters by learning of their philosophical systems); the unknown (including prophets like Elijah, the wise fool Pip, and the whale himself); and finally, evidence of a familial or governmental social contract that he must choose whether to ratify. All of these encounters for the young Ishmael become re-encounters for the older, narrating Ishmael, and it is in these re-encounters that the real learning

[3] The name evokes the story of Abraham's bastard first son, who had been driven into the wilderness and seemingly excluded from the promise of the Abrahamic covenant that he would become the father of a whole nation. However, the name Ishmael means "God has listened," and indeed God provided for Ishmael in the wilderness. Eventually, Ishmael settled, married, and fathered a nation. Both the Biblical and the Melvillian Ishmaels are driven into the wilderness, bereft of their inheritance and of their place in the covenant, and both of them ultimately achieve integration into a community.

happens, just as it did for Herman Melville himself, whose "unfolding" began when he returned from his sailing adventures and began to write. Other, subtler parallels to the European Bildungsromane are also woven into the text. Like Wilhelm Meister, Ishmael-as-narrator spends most of the narrative in what appears to be a state of directionless physical and intellectual wandering, only to realize in the end how far he has progressed beyond his naïve starting point.[4] Like Tristram Shandy, Ishmael-as-narrator imagines scenes and people's thoughts about which he could not have found data or heard stories, and he also draws attention to his own composition process (486, 506, 521). Moreover, like the Editor of Diogenes Teufelsdröckh's life story in *Sartor Resartus*, Ishmael sorts through the many documents in his possession in an effort to construct the truest possible narrative of past events, ever aware that the text he produces will inevitably be imperfect, a mere "draught of a draught" (145). All of these parallels reinforce the reader's sense that Melville was profoundly influenced by the European Bildungsromane he had read when he sat down to write three American Bildungsromane of his own.

Critical Interventions

Any reading of *Moby-Dick* that considers Ishmael to be a character who has a past and is embedded in the world must contend with the enormous

[4] The wandering of Melville's Ishmael is like the Israelites' roaming in the wilderness for an entire generation. What looks like aimless wandering might in fact prove to be progress toward a Promised Land.

weight of criticism from the past twenty years that sees Ishmael quite differently, as merely a "figure through whom thought moves" (Tally 2010), an "amalgamation of multiple narrative-consciousnesses" (Martin 2009), a device to whose fictionality as a narrator Melville repeatedly calls attention (Spanos 1995), or any of the other creative descriptions that postmodern, posthumanist, and geocritical readers have invented for this admittedly unusual narrator. The merit of these new approaches is that they recognize the text's remarkable heterogeneity, but their weakness is that they apply an anachronistic perspective to Melville and elide the humanity of his characters. Despite postmodern critics' assumption that only a naïve reader would take Ishmael seriously as a character, the fact is that this narrator-protagonist does tell readers a lot about himself throughout his narrative, albeit in scattered and sometimes oblique comments. He is psychologically realistic, refers to a past life, and shapes the text through his consciousness. His psychological realism lies in his continual reference to his own, often troubled mental state. He is prone to depression, although he has long managed his depression by periodically undertaking experiments, some quixotic, in order to drive off the spleen and regulate his humors. (Often that experiment involved going to sea; once it meant shipping out on a whaler simply to pursue "the idea of the great whale himself.") Moreover, Ishmael provides a back-story about his past that indicates that he had the boyhood of a gentleman-in-training. He implies that he is from an "old established family in the land, the Van Rensselaers, or Randolphs, or

Hardicanutes," and says he is nephew to a well-known sea captain named D'Wolf. Despite Ishmael's affluent childhood, he had a cruel stepmother (25-26); worse, when he was still young, his family lost their fortune and he wound up having to shift for himself. After working briefly as a country schoolteacher, he went to sea. Ishmael's voyage on the *Pequod* was not his first time at sea, but it was his first time whaling. Over the years he has been covered in tattoos, including the dimensions of a whale's skeleton on his right arm (451).[5] Since the wreck of the *Pequod*, he has gone whaling many more times, including to the South Seas. On one journey he met Steelkilt, formerly of the whale-ship *Town Ho*. He visited Lima, where he conversed with young noblemen. By now, as he writes a narrative about his adventures, he has circled back to his point of departure, and is living in or near New Bedford. There, he implies, he works as a letter-sorter for the post-office. He may mean this position literally, or it may be a coded way of saying that he sorts the letters of the alphabet into words as he writes his long draught of a draught of an account of the *Pequod*'s final voyage. That voyage had taken place anywhere from ten to fourteen years

[5] He writes as follows in "The Bower in the Arsacides," as a preface to his recital of the whale skeleton's dimensions: "The skeleton dimensions I shall now proceed to set down are copied verbatim from my right arm, where I had them tattooed; as in my wild wanderings at that period, there was no other secure way of preserving such valuable statistics." He adds that, because he was "crowded for space, and wished the other parts of my body to remain a blank page for a poem I was then composing - at least, what untattooed parts might remain - I did not trouble myself with the odd inches; nor, indeed, should inches at all enter into a congenial admeasurement of the whale" (451).

before Ishmael sat down to write his account.[6] In the meantime, he has been swimming through libraries poring over volumes of natural history and philosophy. He has met (or invented) a Sub-Sub Librarian and a Pale Consumptive Usher, who compiled the Etymology and Extracts with which he will open his narrative. These details about Ishmael are scattered throughout the text, but when they are assembled together one can see just how distorting it is to deny that Ishmael is a character—and how necessary it is to recognize that Ishmael is a human consciousness shaping the text.

Until about twenty years ago, readers took for granted Ishmael's status as a character. Back in 1851, Evert Duyckinck, widely considered to be one of Melville's most perceptive contemporary readers, saw Ishmael's narration as being infected by the "German disease" that antebellum American readers associated with Goethe and other Germans. Duyckinck complained that Ishmael's "wit may be allowed to be against everything on land, as his hand is against everything at sea." His "piratical running down of creeds and opinions

[6] Ishmael does say at the outset of his narrative that the reader should "never mind how long ago exactly" the events occurred that he describes, but one can infer that Melville imagined the *Pequod* events to have occurred roughly ten to fourteen years before Ishmael sits down to write about them. Melville wrote in a letter to Evert Duyckinck just before the publication of *Moby-Dick* that, in his mind, the *Pequod* wreck had occurred fourteen years before: upon hearing that a real sperm whale had just stove a New Bedford ship, Melville wrote, "I make no doubt that it is Moby Dick himself, for there is no account of his capture after the sad fate of the *Pequod* about fourteen years ago. I wonder if my evil art has raised this monster" (*Correspondence* 208). Melville had been a sailor ten years before writing *Moby-Dick.* However, the actual shipwreck that inspired the *Pequod*'s wreck, destroying of the whale-ship *Essex* by the sperm-whale Mocha Dick, had occurred in 1820. Philip J. Egan believes the time gap between the events and their narration grows longer as the novel goes on (346), which one need not see as an inconsistency (as Egan does) because, presumably, Ishmael takes awhile to write the book.

… concerted indifferentism of Emerson, [and] run-a-mock style of Carlyle" is "out of place and uncomfortable." In Ishmael, thought Duyckinck, Melville "exhibit[s] the painful contradictions of this self-dependent, self-torturing agency of a mind driven hither and thither as a flame in a whirlwind." Duyckinck's comments clearly show that he assumed Ishmael to be a character, indeed the focalizer, in *Moby-Dick.* More recently, Harrison Hayford quotes Duyckinck to support his own "wild surmise" that Ishmael is a sort of Mephistopheles counterpoised to Ahab's Faust (106). Many critics throughout the mid- to late-twentieth century have similarly assumed that Ishmael is a human character-focalizer. W. H. Auden read Ishmael as a modern, Romantic, and existential hero, a "complex, self-conscious, self-pitying, and self-congratulatory" character (Yothers 67). Paul Brodtkorb used the methods of phenomenology in order to examine Ishmael's perceptions of the material world, his shipmates, of his own moods, and of time. Robert Zoellner, also taking Ishmael as the text's shaping consciousness, argues that *Moby-Dick* asks readers to decide between Ahab's and Ishmael's respective philosophies of existence and knowledge; the text shows Ishmael's philosophy to be more sophisticated because it recognizes the human mind's role in shaping its perceptions of the material world. Bainard Cowan argues that, through Ishmael's thought processes, *Moby-Dick* shows the epistemological power of memory, a mental faculty that is crucial when cultural narratives are broken. Elisa New reads *Moby-Dick* as a critique of Hellenic logocentrism and an

affirmation of Hebraic textuality; she sees Ishmael as a character who is historically contingent and open-ended (Hebraic) rather than determinate (Christian). Manfred Pütz analyzes how Ishmael presents himself within his own narrative as an audience of texts that have been written by others. All of these critics, and many others, have recognized that Ishmael is a character, not merely a fictional construct or a direct surrogate for Melville himself, and each critic has rightly paid close attention to Ishmael's role in focalizing every element of the text.[7]

However, even readers who recognize that Ishmael is a character do not necessarily believe that he grows during the course of the narrative. For example, William Dillingham follows Harrison Hayford in seeing Ishmael as not undergoing any change in his "essential nature," if that essential nature is defined as "embod[ying] conflicting forces and a manifest struggle" (27). Ishmael survives, argues Dillingham, but is not essentially transformed by his survival. However, Dillingham fails to excise the language of development from his argument. For example, he characterizes Ishmael as being in pursuit of heightened consciousness and self-knowledge, figured as diving, plunging,

[7] In 1986, Dillingham traced the then-new trend of "push[ing] Melville out of the novel in favor of Ishmael" (1). Dillingham cites Alfred Kazin (who calls Ishmael "the single voice, or rather the single mind" who unwinds the story), Paul Brodtkorb (who attributes the texts inconsistencies to Ishmael-as-character rather than to Melville), and Robert Zoellner (whose starting premise for his argument is that every word of the text, including footnotes, comes from Ishmael and not Melville). Dillingham sees the distinction as artificial because the two are so much alike. However, he follows Harrison Hayford in believing "[t]hat it is possible to think of Ishmael as the narrator and to analyze him as a character but at the same time to recognize that he is essentially Melville" (2).

and uncovering secrets about the whale (13). Ishmael's goal is survival (or "sanity with dignity"), achieved by balancing his two natures of the Sub-sub Librarian and the Pale Consumptive Usher (24-28). Moreover, Dillingham refers to an aesthetic theory that Ishmael "develops in the course of the novel," a theory that causes him to regard the most realistic art as the most deeply symbolic (34). These assertions and others like them belie Dillingham's claim that Ishmael does not mature either during his voyage on the *Pequod* or during his narration process.[8]

Some readers do recognize that Ishmael matures, if not during the actual composition process, as I argue, then either during the *Pequod* voyage or in the intervening years between his sailing on the *Pequod* and his writing of the book. In such readings, the text of *Moby-Dick* is seen as portraying two different Ishmaels, the immature young sailor and the mature narrator. For example, Merlin Bowen distinguishes between "the experiencing actor and the more sophisticated narrator," between the splenetic and depressive "Ishmael-then" and the mature, mellow "Ishmael-now," and he makes the important claim that Melville's central theme is "the problem of self-discovery [and] self-realization" (240-1). Bowen sees Ishmael's progression as being from "resentment to acceptance" (248). Other critics also see Ishmael as reaching acceptance, including Howard Vincent, M. O. Percival, and John D. Seelye. Robert Zoellner

[8] In another reading, Martin Pops argues, counter-intuitively, that Ishmael grows *younger,* not more mature, through his quest (87).

argues that Ishmael learns empathy as well as acceptance; Carl F. Strauch says he is cured of his suicidal ideations; and John Halverson notes his progression from misanthropy (desiring to knock people's hats off) to a sense of blissful communion as expressed in chapters like "A Squeeze of the Hand" (440). More recently, in 2006, James Emmett Ryan argued that Ishmael's voyage on the *Pequod* is a sort of "Victorian curative program" on which he embarks in order to be cured on his hypos; the voyage is "a means of literally reconstituting body and spirit—an act of repair and convalescence necessary for the person damaged or enervated as a result of the modern condition" (20). In Ryan's reading, the "frailty and melancholy" of Ishmael's body serve as "opportunities for epistemological discovery" (18). Another critic, Philip J. Egan, offers a perceptive reading of how Ishmael incorporates the *Town Ho*'s story into the narrative; he argues that this chapter's manipulation of time makes it one of the few, or only, places in the narrative where Ishmael's midpoint between immaturity and maturity can be seen. As Egan sees it, *Moby-Dick* contains mostly the results of Ishmael's maturation—the contrast between Ishmael the "greenhorn sailor " and Ishmael the "reflective narrator"—but not its process. In "The Town Ho's Story," however, the reader has a rare glimpse into Ishmael in his partial maturity, or "bachelor phase" (345), when he has encountered the White Whale but is not yet prepared to talk about it: he nearly faints when his audience in Lima asks for more details about the whale (343). Egan argues that, even though Ishmael grows, the novel is not a Bildungsroman because the

process of growth is not depicted, and thus "[W]e do not really know the stages and methods by which Ishmael achieves his growth" (338). Allan and Barbara Lefcowitz read Ishmael's growth, or more precisely his growth as a symbolizer, in terms of five stages: imaginative prefiguration, sense impressions, passage of time, return to the facts for verification, and finally, expansion of Ishmael's view of the object or person into a symbol that is fully developed. John W. Young argues that Ishmael's development is a synthesizing process, similar to what I argue here; Young focuses on how Melville clarifies his narrative design, with its use of shifting perspective, from the very beginning of the narrative. The critics surveyed here tend to associate Ishmael's development with the fact that he alone survives the wreck; critics see the development as either the cause or the effect of his survival. Another whole category of readings sees *Moby-Dick* as a quest narrative, with the quester being Ishmael, Ahab, or both.

This study will follow the critics who see Ishmael as a character who matures, but it will depart from them in seeing that maturation as occurring primarily in and through the process of narration. This argument takes Ishmael's striking and frequent shifts in voice, perspective, even ideology throughout the text of *Moby-Dick* to be a reflection of the fact that the text represents Ishmael's own self-education. As Ishmael writes, he is educating himself through experimentation, "trying out" various explanations of reality in order to determine which truth-claims are, in fact, true. Many critics who do see Ishmael as a character have offered other explanations for the text's

heterogeneity. For example, John Becker describes Ishmael as a "weaver" of different types of knowledge (222), and Mitchell Breitweiser describes him as a "manager" rather than a controller of the text. The present study differs from Becker's and Breitweiser's in that it sees Ishmael as a character whose shifting voice and perspective is a conscious strategy that drives toward the specific goal of his own self-education; moreover, this reading finds parallels between Ishmael's development and that of several heroes of Bildungsromane in order to determine how Melville was drawing upon and revising this European novel genre.

In addition to the question of Ishmael's status as a character, a second question that this chapter seeks to address is the text's relationship to the novel genre. Many critics have examined the influence only of non-novel genres on *Moby-Dick,* such as epic poetry, the King James Bible, myths from eastern religions, works of natural history, and so on.[9] Critics who discuss genre in Melville tend to emphasize, rightly, his fusion and expansion of generic categories. For example, Nina Baym argued that because Melville aspires to truth telling in *Moby-Dick*, the work "contains much more than Ahab and Ishmael's story—[it] embeds the characters, rather, in a structure that is a

[9] The conversation about Melville's use of genre began upon his books' first publication. His contemporary readers were confused by *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre* because the readers could not figure out what kinds of books these were supposed to be. They did not fit neatly into familiar genres like nonfiction sea adventure or romance (both labels applied to *Typee* and *Omoo*). The Melville Revivalists of the 1920s, with their strongly biographical interest, tended to conflate Melville's first-person narrators with Melville himself and thus assume the texts to be more or less autobiographies. Throughout the rest of the twentieth century, as has been mentioned, critics focused on the non-fiction or non-novel genres influencing Melville.

compendium of fictional and nonfictional modes of writing" (910). Yet such studies can miss the profound influence of individual fiction genres on given works. My study, by contrast, takes up the charge leveled by Christopher Sten in 1996 to explore the influence of novel sub-genres on Melville's prose works.[10] One sub-genre in particular, the Bildungsroman, provides a critical link among the three novels that have long been referred to as Melville's philosophical trilogy.

Views of Identity and of Growth

Whereas *Mardi* depicts human identity as heteroglossic and relatively passively inherited, *Moby-Dick* conceives it as synthetic and actively constructed. By this point in his life, Melville had come to see identity as something that a person continually constructs and re-constructs through conscious, experimental effort. One's identity was formed through a process of trying out various systems for organizing reality in order to construct one's own composite system. An unsuccessful developmental process, exemplified in *Moby-Dick* by the character of Ahab, is one in which a person remains ossified in a rigid, passively received system; in this state, a person cannot absorb a variety of influences out of which to synthesize a system, and thus regresses toward self-destruction. Ishmael, by contrast, is finally successful in maturing and synthesizing a system precisely because he maintains to the end

[10] Sten's book, *The Weaver-God, He Weaves,* is in part a reaction against readings like Nina Baym's. In 1979, Baym famously argued that Melville distrusted, even despised fiction genres.

the tensions that keep a healthy organic system in balance: he allows for oscillation between faith and doubt and between interdependence and dependence, rather than pushing for a resolution into either faith or doubt, either dependence or independence.

Readers who argue that the text is not teleological often cite as evidence the late chapter "The Gilder." This chapter contains the famous passage that concludes,

> There is no steady unretracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause: - through infancy's unconscious spell, boyhood's thoughtless faith, adolescence' doubt (the common doom), then scepticism, then disbelief, resting at last in manhood's pondering repose of If. … [O]nce gone through, we trace the round again; and are infants, boys, and men, and Ifs eternally." (492)

The passage explicitly denies that humans can progress or grow. However, this line is clearly located within a soliloquy spoken by Ahab and only reported—not endorsed—by Ishmael. The scene occurs as the crew is sailing deeper into the Japanese cruising ground toward the place where they expect to meet Moby Dick. The rest of the crew feels soothed by the tranquil atmosphere, but Ahab is his usual troubled self because he is pondering how brief such "blessed calms" are in life and how "the mingled, mingling threads of life are woven by warp and woof," with storms always interrupting calms and vice versa. Ahab declaims the line above as he considers how people may wander over the globe literally or metaphorically, yet not make "steady unretracing progress" because any time a "pondering repose" is reached, the cycle of wandering begins all

over again. The reason man cannot make progress, Ahab posits, is that he has no clear sense of destination, no idea "[w]here lies the final harbor, whence we unmoor no more" (492). We are all like foundlings who are doomed never to find our fathers, for our souls are like "those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must [go] there to learn it" (492). Ahab cannot be a Bildungsroman hero because his denial that man can progress makes it impossible for him to progress. What Ahab does not know, and what Ishmael realizes as he recollects and narrates his encounter with Ahab, is that it is precisely Ahab's belief in the impossibility of progress that dooms him. Because Ahab believes that he is fixed on iron rails and unable to repent his quest to kill Moby Dick, he has no chance of heeding Starbuck's plea to relent and change his course. Thus, this passage in "The Gilder" does not disprove the claim that Ishmael progresses during the narrative; rather, it supports the reading that Ishmael develops as a counterpoint to Ahab's stasis-to-regression.

In the end, *Moby-Dick* asks a mostly unanswerable question about human development: why does one man (Ishmael) progress toward an integration of self, self-understanding, and healthy communion while another man (Ahab) regresses to the point of self-delusion, self-collapse, and utter destruction of himself and the people to whom he is tied? Why does Ishmael survive the wreck and become able to write his epic while everyone else on the *Pequod* dies through Ahab's actions? Perhaps Ishmael comes to "deserve" his salvation

retrospectively through the act of writing a narrative in which he resists the sort of ossification that Ahab chooses, to his doom. Whatever the answer to this question, the fact is clear that it is Ishmael's maturation—his journey as a Bildungsroman hero—that holds the entire text together.

The Protagonist's Developmental Process

To demonstrate that the narrator-protagonist of *Moby-Dick,* like the narrator-protagonist of *Mardi,* does make progress while writing his narrative, an approach like that in the previous chapter will be used: we will trace his experiences of states of tranquility (calms at sea and moments of silent mediation on land) in order to show that Ishmael does develop through the course of the narrative. Such moments of insight might be compared to Wordsworthian "spots of time," key moments in the history of the poet's imagination when his mind is regenerated through a particular kind of physical experience that holds sublime significance.[11] As Ishmael narrates such revelatory moments that had occurred in the midst of the *Pequod* voyage, he has crucial realizations about himself, his place in the cosmos, and the nature of reality. His first few descriptions of calms make him aware of his physical

[11] In the *Prelude*, William Wordsworth's epic account of the development of the Romantic poet, the speaker describes key moments in his development as "spots of time" that have a "renovating virtue" (210). Jonathan Bishop points out the typical components: movement, particularly repeated action; emergence of a solitary figure from a crowd; moving air, such as wind; surfaces hiding depths; spectral figures; feelings of terror; and fragments of imagery, such as crumbled buildings. William Dillingham has persuasively read the calms in *Moby-Dick*, particularly those involving concentric circle imagery, as moments when Ishmael gets in touch with his kernel self, which are variously described as Ishmael's "unchanging essence" (6) or his soul (8).

presence in the universe as well as of the transcendent realm glimmering just beyond his senses. After that, Ishmael describes calms that bring him insight into his own nature and God's. Later in the narrative, he describes calms that show him both blissful and somber images of the social contract binding human beings together. At last, in the narrative's final pages, Ishmael recalls the most profound calm of his life and writes an Epilogue in which he synthesizes all that he has learned.

Several calms early in the narrative help Ishmael to establish his sense of being physically present in the universe, a fact that enables him to clarify the narrative task ahead of him. Ishmael begins the first chapter, "Loomings," with his recollections of the meditative, melancholy moments in which he had felt drawn to the sea; this depressive "calm" was what he had been escaping when he signed up for the whaling voyage he is about to recount. This remembered calm provides context as Ishmael clarifies for himself that the task that lies ahead of him is to analyze that whaling voyage, and in so doing find out what it means. He expresses a sense of puzzlement about the voyage as a whole, and then realizes that, "now that I recall all the circumstances, I think I can see a little" into how and why this "whaling voyage by one Ishmael" had happened (7). He recognizes that in this early calm lay the seeds of his entire fate. A few chapters later, once Ishmael has described all the events leading up to the shipping-out and has introduced his shipmates to the reader, he pauses over the memory of standing watch at the masthead. His writing about this memory

helps him to consider the physical dangers involved in tasks of the mind such as the one in which he is currently engaged, such as the danger of diffusion of identity. Another chapter soon after this, "The Mat-maker," similarly begins as a memory of a calm and becomes a moment of profound realization for narrator-Ishmael. Ishmael describes a sultry, tranquil day in the South Pacific when he and Queequeg were on deck weaving a mat together; the chapter becomes a meditation on how various forces—fate, freewill, chance, and necessity—together weave the fabric of reality. In each of these calms, those described in "Loomings," "The Mast-Head," and "The Mat-maker," Ishmael achieves the first glimmerings of insight about how he and his book fit into the universe as a whole.

Later in the narrative, Ishmael describes a calm that enables him to discover his soul as an entity distinct from everything else in the universe. In the chapter "The Grand Armada," the calm he describes serves as a reminder that he has an inner soul that need not be disrupted by outer violence and "affrights" (388). In this chapter, Ishmael describes a marvelous domestic scene that he and his fellow boatmen witnessed when they were stuck in the calm center of a vast and bloody whale-hunt. Ishmael and his companions had gazed down into the charmed circle and seen a nursery of mother and baby whales. The sailors were amazed to witness the gentle nurturing of new life amidst a tumultuous war between whales and their hunters. As Ishmael recounts the memory, he says that it was in that moment that he had seen through the veil

between physical existence and the spiritual realm, so that "[s]ome of the subtlest secrets of the seas seemed divulged to us in this enchanted pond." Now, in the moment of narration, he realizes something about his own nature: even when surrounded by outer "consternations and affrights," his soul can be at peace. As the baby whales are at peace, "even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy" (389). From this memory, Ishmael realizes that the calm within a soul at peace is the profoundest calm of all.

In "The Castaway," Ishmael describes a calm that leads him to an intuition of God. Ishmael remembers how a small boy on the crew, Pip, had leapt from one of the whaleboats during a chase, been briefly lost at sea in an utter calm, and been forever altered by the experience. The terror of this calm was not so much the physical difficulty of swimming in the calm ocean, but rather "the awful lonesomeness" of experiencing "intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity" (414). Ishmael writes that, after Pip's rescue, he is permanently changed into an "idiot" because "[t]he sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul" (414). Ishmael imagines that in the sea Pip had seen "God's foot upon the treadle of the loom" (414). Ishmael ends the story of Pip with a hint that he himself will, before the voyage is over, see firsthand the wonders that he imagines Pip has

witnessed. He notes that a sailor being temporarily abandoned after falling out of a whaleboat is "common in that fishery; and in the sequel of the narrative, it will then be seen what like abandonment befell myself" (414). Here Ishmael suggests that he is able to imagine Pip's lonesome terror—the sublime calm—so vividly because he himself had experienced the same abandonment. As Ishmael tells Pip's story, he thinks ahead to the abandonment he himself would suffer later in the story, after the *Pequod* sinks and he floats alone on the ocean for an entire day and night. Ishmael understands his own abandonment anew—as an encounter with Truth—by imaginatively narrating Pip's abandonment.

Late in the text, Ishmael describes two very different calms: one, experienced while squeezing spermaceti with his shipmates, gives him an idealized glimpse of the bond of humanity, while the other, experienced as the *Pequod* arrived in the South Sea, shows him a more somber vision of the human community. In "A Squeeze of the Hand," Ishmael remembers squeezing lumps out of the spermaceti as it cooled so that it would remain fluid. He recalls sitting "under a blue tranquil sky; the ship under indolent sail, and gliding so serenely along," with his hands "bath[ing] among those soft, gentle globules of infiltrated tissues, woven almost within the hour; as they richly broke to my fingers, and discharged all their opulence, like fully ripe grapes their wine" (415-16). He recalls it as a peaceful moment of blissful communion with his fellow man, and his reflection upon it now helps him to remember that, despite periods of isolation or independence such as when he floats alone on the open

ocean, he also has periods of genuine communion with his fellow human beings. A little later, in the chapter "The Pacific," Ishmael recalls a calm at sea that brings awareness of a far less idyllic communion. Narrating the *Pequod*'s arrival at last in the sperm whale's South Sea hunting grounds, Ishmael reflects upon why he had yearned for the "dear Pacific" in his youth. He muses that the Pacific holds and unites the souls of countless people through time and space; it has a "sweet mystery" about it, with "gently awful stirrings [that] seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath; like those fabled undulations of the Ephesian sod." But the image takes a morbid turn when Ishmael imagines the Pacific to be full of the souls of the dead. He writes that it is fitting "that over these sea-pastures, wide-rolling watery prairies and Potters' Fields of all four continents, the waves should rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly," because here in these waters are "millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all that we call lives and souls … dreaming, dreaming, still." These souls are "tossing like slumberers in their beds," creating the "ever-rolling waves" with their restless movements (482). Ishmael concludes that the Pacific must be "[t]o any meditative Magian rover" who has seen it "the sea of his adoption." This site of buried souls, paradoxically both peaceful and restless, has the power to make the meditative rover feel that he is being adopted, is finally finding a home in the world. Yet the community he is joining may well be the community of souls in the afterlife.[12]

[12] This association of the Pacific with death despite its tranquillity is reinforced

Finally, in the Epilogue, Ishmael describes the most significant calm of his life, the one in which he floated alone on the ocean for a day and night after the drowning of all his *Pequod* shipmates. This final calm in the narrative is a time to weigh all the various information, mysteries, and ideologies that he has encountered on his voyage. Ishmael does not say how he passed the time for those many solitary hours, in an awful lonesomeness more terrible than the one that had driven Pip insane. He does mention that, as he floated, he clutched onto the life buoy that the ship's carpenter had fashioned out of Queequeg's unused, canoe-shaped coffin. One imagines that as Ishmael floated alone for all those hours, he studied the strange carvings that Queequeg had transcribed upon the coffin—copies of his body's tattoos representing the "complete theory of the heavens and earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth" that a prophet and seer of his island had tattooed upon him—and that Ishmael tried to decipher them (480). As Ishmael puzzled over those mystic inscriptions on the canoe-shaped coffin, he must have found it fitting that the coffin had no keel, for at that point in his life, despite all he had read and experienced, he still did not have a definite sense of destination. Like Melville himself, whose internal unfolding began only when he returned home from his maritime adventures at age twenty-five, Ishmael at that moment alone on the ocean was

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elsewhere by reminders that it, like the rest of the natural world, contains violence: in "The Gilder," Ahab reflects on how certain days of gentle sun and gentle swells on the ocean, one feels "filial" toward the sea, forgetting that its "velvet paw but conceals a remorseless fang" (491).

only on the cusp of his maturation. When Ishmael was picked up by the *Rachel*, which had been sweeping back and forth across this patch of ocean in search of the captain's missing son, he must have wondered whether his rescue had been ordained by a Providential God who has sent this ship to save him in the wide ocean, or because another creature had died to make his rescue possible. As he floated, Ishmael still did not know what to make of his experience on the *Pequod.* Only now, as he narrates the story years later, does he begin to see that wisdom lies not in settling which doctrines are true, but on finding a balance between faith and doubt and between self and other.

Outcomes of the Developmental Process

Ishmael's progression toward greater self-knowledge and a clearer view of his relationship to the larger world can be defined in terms of the same three categories of development-triggers encountered by the protagonists in the other European and Melvillian Bildungsromane discussed in this study. Each encounter with an authority, an unknown, or evidence of a social contract marks a moment of realization or development for the protagonist. Ishmael's development-triggers function in the text as follows. (a) Encounters with authorities or mentors provide Ishmael with new premises and lenses to try out in his experimental interpretations of reality and generally inspire him to resist experts' assumptions. (b) Encounters with the unknown give Ishmael the sense that he is glimpsing an elusive, ineffable truth, and during his retrospective

narration, prove to be clues as to the destination toward which he, as a sailor on the *Pequod*, had been heading. (c) Ishmael's gradual recognition of the social contract indicates his view of the world being re-structured to accommodate his development, as occasional memories of home make Ishmael realize the larger implications of the lessons he is learning. Tracing Ishmael's encounters with these three categories of development-triggers during his narration enables the reader to chart Ishmael's formation even though Ishmael himself may be unaware, in the moment of narration, that he is being formed by his writing process.

Encounters with Authorities

"Fain am I to stagger to this emprise under the weightiest words of the dictionary," writes Ishmael in "The Fossil Whale." He assures his reader that "whenever it has been convenient to consult [a dictionary] in the course of these dissertations," he has used an enormous edition of Samuel Johnson's dictionary, which seemed suitable to the enormity of his subject (455-56). The authorities whom Ishmael consults during his composition process shape his composition in important ways. Each authority represents a particular ideology and thus temporarily provides Ishmael with new premises (lenses) to try out in his experimental interpretations of reality. During both his *Pequod* adventure and his narration of that adventure, Ishmael encounters the teachings, doctrines, and arguments of authorities and mentors in books he reads, philosophical systems

he learns about, and people he meets. One imagines Ishmael to be sitting at his desk surrounded by volumes bought or borrowed and scraps of notes taken during his many visits to libraries and archives, and searching his memory for the absent texts he has stored there. In this he is like both Tristram Shandy and the fictional editor of *Sartor Resartus*; both European narrators mention explicitly their reliance on the books and documents in their studies. Unlike the *Mardi* protagonist, Ishmael does not passively listen in on experts' conversations, but rather experiments actively to test the premises he has received from authorities. He pushes to discover the limitations of each authority he encounters. Again and again in writing his draught, Ishmael weighs one text against another, against his own lived experience, and against his own intuitions.

Before narrator-Ishmael even gets to the part in the story when his younger self departs on the *Pequod,* he sets up a tension between two very different spiritual authorities: the God of Calvinist Christianity, whose worship is represented by Father Mapple, and the gods of pagan polytheism, whose worship is represented by Queequeg. Young Ishmael meets both of these devout men in New Bedford before shipping out on the *Pequod*. Queequeg is the "savage" with whom Ishmael is made to share a bed at the Spouter-Inn and who, much to Ishmael's surprise, becomes his dearest bosom friend; Father Mapple is the venerable old Calvinist minister whose sermons nearly every "moody fisherman, shortly bound for the Indian Ocean or Pacific" from New Bedford feels he must go to hear on the Sunday before his departure (34). Both

Queeqeug and Father Mapple are devoted to their respective gods—Queeqeug to his personal god Yoji and Mapple to the Calvinist version of God—and both men's identities are so entwined with their faiths that their cherished doctrines are inscribed upon them literally or figuratively. Queeqeug has his tribal priest's complete theory of the heavens and earth tattooed upon his body, and Father Mapple has the King James Bible so written on his heart that he speaks in its cadences. Ishmael worships each man's god with him in turn, and the worship scenes are so closely juxtaposed in the text (in the successive chapters "The Sermon" and "A Bosom Friend") that critics, privileging the worship of Yoji, have tended to see Ishmael as undermining or even mocking Calvinism. However, a close examination of how the sermon is inserted into the text reveals that Ishmael is actually treating Mapple and Calvinist Christianity with the same respect and reverence he pays to Queequeg and Yoji. Indeed, Queequeg does so as well: the night before Ishmael worships Yoji with Queeqeug, Queequeg attends Father Mapple's sermon.

Ishmael's love and respect for Queequeg is, of course, obvious. On their first night together, as soon as Ishmael realizes how polite and considerate Queeqeug is, his heart begins to thaw toward the "savage." The next morning, Ishmael awakens in Queequeg's embrace, and it is soon after this that Ishmael bows down to share in Queequeg's worship of Yoji. What readers often fail to notice, though, is the equal respect that Ishmael pays to Father Mapple. In fact, Ishmael treats Father Mapple with a deep reverence that implicitly invites the

reader to admire the minister as well. For two chapters before Father Mapple's sermon, Ishmael builds anticipation by mentioning that he has to brave a stormy New Bedford winter night to attend; he also puts his reader into a somberly attentive mood by describing the grief-stricken congregation, each person privately mourning for a loved one lost at sea. Then, he raises suspense about whether Father Mapple's sermon will salve the sense of human tragedy of which the congregants and Ishmael (both his sailor self and his narrator self) are highly aware at this moment. Ishmael does so by weaving an ironic lightness into his tone: he recalls that, at the time, he had grown "merry" at the thought of the stone tablets as, which suddenly seemed to him "[d]elightful inducements to embark," as they meant he would have a "fine chance for promotion … aye, a stove boat will make me an immortal by brevet" (37). Having established suspense over whether the sermon will work to assuage the grief Ishmael has evoked, he describes the dramatic entrance of Father Mapple, a robust and venerable old man who carries no umbrella against the sleet storm outside. The minister is beloved by sailors and widely respected for his "sincerity and sanctity" (39). Father Mapple's pulpit is like a ship's bow, with a carved Bible like a ship's beak, prompting Ishmael to ask rhetorically, "What could be more full of meaning? –for the pulpit is ever this earth's foremost part; all the rest comes in its rear; the pulpit leads the world" (40). After this introduction, the reader is in a state of reverent attention for the sermon, and Ishmael does not disappoint; he devotes an entire chapter to a word-for-word transcription of the

sermon. Even if one assumes that this sermon is being creatively reconstructed rather than literally transcribed from memory, the fact is obvious that young Ishmael must have listened with rapt attention to Father Mapple all those years ago. Now, years later, narrator-Ishmael can recount a powerfully convincing Calvinist sermon.

Where the ambiguity comes into Ishmael's treatment of Father Mapple is in the fact that Ishmael never comments directly on Father Mapple's sermon. Ishmael is simply left speechless by the closing words of the sermon:

> "[E]ternal delight and deliciousness will be his, who coming to lay him down, can say with his final breath—O Father!—chiefly known to me by Thy rod—mortal or immortal, here I die. I have striven to be Thine, more than to be this world's, or mine own. Yet this is nothing; I leave eternity to Thee; for what is man that he should live out the lifetime of his God?" (48)

Perhaps Ishmael is left speechless not by Father Mapple's aura of authority, but by his absolute submission to the authority of his God. The chapter concludes with Father Mapple kneeling, waving a benediction, and covering his face with his hands. He remains silently kneeling as the congregation files out, leaving the minister alone in the chapel (48). The gap in the narrative—the absence of Ishmael's reaction—leaves unresolved the tension between faith and doubt, love and terror that Ishmael had built before the sermon, and has led some readers to the facile conclusion that Ishmael favors Queeqeug's spiritual authority over Father Mapple's. In fact, these two different authorities are held in tension throughout the text, even to the Epilogue. What Ishmael learns in his

Bildungsroman has far more to do with tensions in balance than with rigid dogmas to be accepted or rejected.

In addition to spiritual authority, Ishmael also considers the question of epistemological authority in his narrative. Epistemological questions are implicit throughout his text: Upon what basis can human beings know anything? Do people attain knowledge by learning from authorities, by having direct experience of the physical world, by intuitively sensing truth, or by some combination of the above? At different points in his text, Ishmael tries each of these modes of knowing. In particular, he measures all information received from authorities (books and people) against his own direct experience and intuitions. Ishmael's elevation of his own judgment over received doctrines and dogmas is a typically Enlightenment move. In fact, he is, in a sense, acting out the philosophical crisis of the Enlightenment. He tries out both empiricism and rationalism as epistemological methods for judging the truth value of the claims made by authorities such as church and state. The Enlightenment, which arose out of new challenges to the received authority of church and state, was characterized by an epistemological crisis in which the Continent tended to follow the rationalism of Rene Descartes and Britain the empiricism of John Locke. At stake was the question of whether knowledge comes through innate ideas that enable the mind to reason toward knowledge (rationalism), or through sensations that are inscribed upon the "blank slate" self and subsequently arranged and associated into concepts (empiricism). Immanuel

Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) amounted to a synthesis of the two positions; in Kant's system, both sensations and innate ideas ("*a priori* concepts") are necessary to knowledge. The human senses the "appearances" of objects (not things in themselves, but rather those elements of things which are sensible) and is able to construct meaningful experiences out of those concepts because he possesses innate ideas such as space, time, and causality. The mode of cognition Ishmael demonstrates in *Moby-Dick* bears some relationship to Kant's account of cognition in the *Critique.*[13]

As Ishmael narrates the *Pequod*'s voyage, he often pauses to refer to various sources, including books and interviews with seasoned sailors, in order to determine the whale's physiology and behaviors as well as the history and culture of the whaling enterprise. The authorities Ishmael encounters in books and in person provide him information about whaling and often inspire him with new ways of viewing his experiences. Two examples include "The Mast-Head" (which is infused with his research into the tradition of mast-head watching, which he believes the ancient Egyptians invented) and "The Decanter" (in which Ishmael explains the high cheerfulness of English whale-ships by citing an "ancient Dutch volume" that he found during his "researches

[13] In Chapter 73, Ishmael imagines that two whale heads tied to either side of the Pequod represent the ponderous heads of Locke and Kant, the empiricist and the idealist. His description of each whale's head amounts to a brief trying out of each philosopher's lens for human experience. The section ends with a characteristically playful remark, though, when Ishmael suggests that both heads should be jettisoned so that the ship can float "light and right" (327). Ishmael is not simply rejecting Lockean and Kantian thought here; he is, more fundamentally, resisting the awful responsibility of the autodidact to oversee his own philosophical education.

in the leviathanic histories”), although the examples are boundless. However, Ishmael finds that these authorities are not totally reliable. Even though Ishmael is indebted to books for much of his education, he also recognizes that they can present distorted versions of the truth. Two examples of unreliable authority are the pseudo-sciences of phrenology and physiognomy, which Ishmael playfully uses for interpreting the face and head of the whale. By the end of the attempt, he rejects this lens as “semi-sciences” (345), only part empirically derived and thus doomed to be “passing fable[s]” (347). In these and other instances, Ishmael never passively accepts the authorities he cites; rather, he challenges them so that he can sort the sound from the unsound in their premises and assertions.

One method that Ishmael uses for determining the reliability of an authority is to weigh the authority against his own experience; he suggests that his readers do the same in weighing the truth of his own text. For example, he advises the reader not to accept unthinkingly his measurements of the whale’s skeleton even though they come from his own experience measuring a full-grown sperm whale’s skeleton on a small Polynesian island. Before telling the reader his findings, he counters any skepticism by asserting that “I am not free to utter any fancied measurement I please. Because there are skeleton authorities you can refer to, to test my accuracy” (451). By “skeleton authorities” he means actual skeletons, not humans who are experts on skeletons: a museum in England and one in New Hampshire, and the home of

an Englishman named Burton Constable who privately possesses a moderately sized Sperm Whale skeleton. In addition to encouraging his readers to seek out experiences to corroborate what he writes, Ishmael also warns against the distortions to which one falls prey when one seeks to understand without experiencing. He offers detailed critiques of the "curious imaginary portraits" of the whale, both ancient and modern, that have been presented to the public as accurate (260). Even some scientists' drawings are contradicted by Ishmael's own direct experience with whales; one drawing shows the whale with perpendicular flukes, another with gigantic eyes. Ishmael concludes that all these erroneous drawings are not so remarkable when one considers that their authors based them mostly on seeing beached whales, which is no more like the living whale than a shipwreck is like a ship. The full experience of the whale is beyond us. His meditation on the inadequacy of existing portraits of the whale leads Ishmael to realize that no one can really know "[t]he living whale, in his full majesty and significance" and "all his mighty swells and undulations" because the whale "is only to be seen at sea in unfathomable waters; and afloat the vast bulk of him is out of sight, like a launched line-of-battle ship" (263). The reader, then, "must needs conclude that the great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last" (264). A person cannot find out "precisely what the whale really looks like," and can only get "a tolerable idea of his living contour" by going whaling oneself, an enterprise that very well might end in death (264). Ishmael advises people to curb their

curiosity about the whale, for empiricism can only take people so far in their search for truth.[14]

Despite Ishmael's recognition that personal experience of a subject is necessary if one is to read the authorities with discernment, he does not unequivocally recommend that the reader elevate direct experience over the reports of authorities. He realizes the danger of mistaking one's personal experience for the entire, objective truth. In a survey of Nantucketers' arguments against the literal truth of Jonah's story, arguments that are based on their first-hand knowledge of whales' anatomy and behavior, Ishmael spins out a mock-theological argument that pits a whaleman's lifetime of experience against the academic theorizations of "learned exegetists" who have invented various creative defenses of the Jonah story.[15] By chapter's end, it is clear that Ishmael is satirizing both the exegetists who live in their books and rely on their theories, and the Nantucketer who mistakes his personal experience of whales for the entire, objective truth about whales. This passage shows the dangers of both relying too heavily on authorities and of applying one's own experiences universally.

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[14] In the next chapter, Ishmael qualifies his rejection of natural historians' pictures of whales by citing Beale and Huggins as creators of acceptable drawings of the sperm whale, and Garnery's paintings as the best pictures overall.

[15] According to Millicent Bell, this chapter on Jonah draws from Bayle's facts and his techniques in the *Dictionnaire,* citing contradictory authorities in order to deconstruct both – "the method of vulgar errors" (631-2).

Despite Ishmael's frequent reliance on his own experience and the experiences of authorities as reported in books and distilled into systems of thought, he recognizes their limitations and considers an alternative means of learning truth: idealism, as practiced through use of intuition and imagination.[16] Ishmael's description of and meditation upon the task of masthead watching, mentioned above, is an example of just such idealist pursuit of knowledge. Ishmael writes of the dreamy sway of the mast as he stood watch; the motion would lull him into a state of reverie in which the lack of sensations caused a sense of detachment from his physical body and made possible a connection to transcendent truth in a realm of pure abstraction. "There you stand, lost in the infinite series of the sea, with nothing ruffled but the waves. The tranced ship indolently rolls; the drowsy trade winds blow; everything resolves you into languor," far removed from the bustle of nineteenth-century civilization (156). Ishmael retrospectively recognizes practical problems with this exercise of idealism, however: a "sunken-eyed young Platonist" like him can keep "but sorry guard" because he could not really watch for whales with "the problem of the universe revolving in me." Moreover, this approach puts one's body in grave danger. When the sailor at the mast-head is "lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie … the blending cadence of waves with thoughts," he finally "loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet

[16] My study does not make a sharp distinction among idealism, Platonism, and Descartean rationalism; it does, however, distinguish American transcendentalism, which Melville at times associated with pantheism.

for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature" (159). What is more, "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." In this "enchanted" state of mind, the young Platonist's "spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space; like Wickliff's sprinkled Pantheistic ashes, forming at last a part of every shore the round globe over" (159). A more concrete danger also threatens the masthead reverieer. If in this trance, his foot or hand slips an inch, his "identity comes back in horror," and he hovers "[o]ver Descartian vortices" until "perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever." Ishmael exhorts the "pantheists" in his audience to "[h]eed it well" (159). So, as it turns out, even idealism has its dangers; succumbing totally to abstraction can be as dangerous to one's body and mind as trusting an unreliable authority or misinterpreting empirical data. Note that the form of idealism criticized here is, unlike transcendentalism, utterly divorced from the natural world. Emerson urged people to become "transparent eyeballs" in nature, not to utterly abstract themselves from it. Ishmael follows Emerson in believing that thoughts must have content drawn from actual experience in nature or the physical universe. Readers have long

recognized that this chapter critiques idealism, though they are mistaken when they see Emerson's idealism as the target.

Ultimately, by late in the narrative Ishmael arrives at a mode of learning that blends authority, empirical data, and intuitions. His analysis of the whale's spout in "The Fountain" exemplifies this synthesis. He begins the chapter by stating the question he will explore, namely, whether the whale's spout is merely water or actually the vapor of his breath. Ishmael notes that "no absolute certainty can as yet be arrived at on this head" (372) because no person can get close enough to the spout to tell for sure without being burned. Recognizing that he cannot "prove and establish" whether the spout is vapor or water, he settles for proposing a hypothesis based on an intuition, specifically, "the great inherent dignity and sublimity of the Sperm Whale" (373). Ishmael hypothesizes that the spout is only mist because he is "convinced that from the heads of all ponderous profound beings … there always goes up a certain semi-visible steam, while in the act of thinking deep thoughts" (374). He imagines the mighty whale "solemnly sailing through a calm tropical sea" with "his vast, mild head overhung by a canopy of vapor," mist that is "engendered by his incommunicable contemplations." The vapor is sometimes, he writes, "glorified by a rainbow, as if Heaven itself had put its seal upon his [the whale's] thoughts." He explains the significance of this fact: rainbows "only irradiate vapor." By analogy, Ishmael can conclude that his own deep thoughts are like mists of doubt irradiated by rainbows of divine intuitions: "And so, through all

the thick mists of the dim doubts in my mind, divine intuitions now and then shoot, enkindling my fog with a heavenly ray" (374). By the end of this passage, Ishmael decides that the rainbow, although a physical phenomenon, constitutes evidence for the metaphysical conclusion that a good God exists. In this way, Ishmael arrives at a conclusion that he is confident is true by using a combination of authority (the information he has gathered from both natural philosophers and theologians) and empirical data (his own close observation of the whale), as well as intuition—his inexplicable understanding that the rainbows shooting through the whale's spout signify his own intimations of the divine. In the very process of narration, Ishmael not only learns; he also learns how to learn, making his story an even more powerful aid to the reader's development than many other Bildungsromane are.

Encounters with the Unknown

If Ishmael's encounters with authorities (real and remembered) during his narration process help him to develop new perspectives on his experiences and to determine which perspectives have validity, the unknown phenomena that Ishmael encounters in the form of man-made objects, nature itself, and other people have a very different lesson to teach. These encounters give him the sense that he is glimpsing an elusive, ineffable truth and seeing into the invisible workings of the universe. From Ishmael's retrospective standpoint of narration, each of these encounters with the unknown turns out to have been a

preparation for his narration of the traumatic end of the *Pequod*'s journey, when the ship will be destroyed by the White Whale and Ishmael alone will survive. The following section will discuss Ishmael's encounters with the unknown in three forms: man-made objects (the Spouter-Inn's oil painting, the mat he weaves with Queequeg, and the doubloon Ahab nails to the mast), natural phenomena (the whale itself, as well as all the omens nature presents to the crew), and people (including Elijah, Bulkington, Gabriel, Pip, and Ahab).

Several man-made objects, some rare and some mundane, inspire Ishmael to particularly minute reflection during his narration because they prove in retrospect to have held clues to the *Pequod*'s doom. The first mysterious man-made artifact that captures Ishmael's imagination is the oil painting hanging in the ancient entryway of the Spouter-Inn, where he stays before shipping out on the *Pequod*. The painting hangs in dim cross-lights, and is "so thoroughly besmoked, and every way defaced," that "it was only by diligent study and a series of systematic visits to it, and careful inquiry of the neighbors, that you could any way arrive at an understanding of its purpose" (12). Ishmael undertakes just such a diligent study. At first the painting seems to Ishmael to depict "chaos bewitched," but he cannot stop puzzling over the image's most "confound[ing]" element, "a long, limber, portentous, black mass of something hovering in the centre of the picture over three blue, dim, perpendicular lines floating in a nameless yeast." In Ishmael's memory the picture is so "boggy, soggy, squitchy" that it threatens to drive him to

distraction, but in this very ambiguity he finds the painting's suggestiveness: "there a sort of indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity" in the painting "that fairly froze you to it, till you involuntarily took an oath with yourself to find out what that marvellous painting meant" (12). If the image were definite and unambiguous, it would hold no such suggestion of profound truth. Ishmael considers several interpretations of the painting, but finally, when he focuses on a single dark shape in the picture that he intuits to be the key to the whole picture's meaning, he suddenly realizes that the image shows a whale attacking a whale-ship in a hurricane. Whether Ishmael realizes the painting's subject as he stands in the Spouter-Inn, or only in the moment of narration, the realization foreshadows the *Pequod*'s fate—or perhaps indicates its predestined doom. Ishmael could only realize this full significance in retrospect, as he describes the painting for his reader.

Another object that, like the oil painting, inspires Ishmael with intimations of the workings of the universe and a subtle clue to the Pequod's doom appears to him once he is already at sea on the *Pequod*: a sword-mat made of yarn, which he weaves with Queequeg on a quiet, sultry afternoon on deck. As they weave, the tranquil atmosphere inspires him to reverie, so that as he sees the mat take shape before his eyes, he intuits a metaphor for the fabric of reality. The loom is the Loom of Time, his own mindless motions with the shuttle are the mechanical weavings of the Fates (which he later conflates with free will), the warp with its fixed threads represent necessity. Meanwhile, the

"impulsive, indifferent sword" of Queequeg, hitting the woof to drive home the thread after each passage of the shuttle, represents the role of chance in shaping "the final aspect of the completed fabric" according to how "slantingly, or crookedly, or strongly, or weakly" any given sword-blow is. Ishmael as narrator explains the realization he had as a young sailor that he himself was weaving his own destiny within the limits set by necessity, and subject to the "last featuring blow" of chance (215). The weaving process as a whole is an emblem of "chance, free will, and necessity—no wise incompatible—all interweavingly working together" (215). Ishmael's mat-making reverie is interrupted by Tashtego's cry from the mast-head of "there she blows." This interrupting event serves to encapsulate how chance, freewill or the fates, and necessity work together: the chance that a whale should swim nearby and be seen, the free will or the fates that led Ishmael to be on the *Pequod*, and the necessity that dictates both that the whale must surface to breathe, and that Ishmael must follow the irrevocable rules of the whale-ship and go after the whale.[17] All three factors combine to weave the fabric of Ishmael's reality, which at this moment in the narrative places Ishmael on a whaleboat chasing a terrified and terrifying animal in order to slaughter it. Ishmael's contemplation of the mat helps him to an understanding of his situation, which will later

[17] In "The Fountain," Ishmael identifies a role of necessity in determining the whale's periodic surfacing: "How obvious is it, too, that this necessity for the whale's rising [to breathe by "having his spoutings out"] exposes him to all the fatal hazards of the chase. For not by hook or by net could this vast Leviathan be caught, when sailing a thousand fathoms beneath the sunlight. Not so much thy skill, then, O hunter, as the great necessities that strike the victory to thee!" (371-72).

enable him to understand another whale chase inaugurated by a cry of "there she blows," the chase of Moby Dick that would culminate in the wreck of the *Pequod*. These same three interworking features (Chance, Necessity, and Freewill or Fate) will operate to put Ishmael on the whale-boat that chases Moby-Dick, and this mat metaphor will help Ishmael to understand why and how that happened, and perhaps even why he had survived.

A third object that inspires Ishmael with insights into the invisible workings of the universe and a clue to the *Pequod*'s end is the Ecuadorian doubloon that Ahab nails to the mainmast as a reward for whomever first spots the White Whale. This coin is doubly unknown to Ishmael because it is a foreign coin covered with occultish images, and it has been "set apart and sanctified to one awe-striking end" by Ahab. Each of the sailors "revere[s] it as the White Whale's talisman" and, for this reason, each person tries thoughtfully to read it, each man unaware that his unique reading says more about him than about the coin. In a sequence likely concocted by Ishmael's imagination in the act of narration, he recounts how Ahab, the mates, Queequeg, and others read the coin. Even though Ishmael cannot point to one reading of the coin as definitive, he affirms his fellow sailors' intuition that the coin means something. He concludes, "And some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher" (430). The reading Ishmael chooses to conclude the chapter is that of Pip, the little boy who has gone mad after being left briefly in the open ocean. Despite (or because of)

his madness, Pip provides a reading of the coin that proves most insightful of all: "Here's the ship's navel, this doubloon here, and they are all on fire to unscrew it. But, unscrew your navel, and what's the consequence? Then again, if it stays here, that is ugly, too, for when aught's nailed to the mast it's a sign that things grow desperate" (435). Pip then prophecies that the whale will "nail" Ahab and the *Pequod* will sink with this doubloon still nailed to its mast. Whereas the other readers of the coin had only seen something of themselves in the coin, Pip, as Ishmael remembers or imagines him, turns the unknown, mysterious coin into an omen of the *Pequod*'s doom. Ishmael's choice to place Pip's reading last implies that, if there is a definitive reading of the doubloon, it is Pip's reading.

Ishmael's contemplation of these three man-made objects contribute to his development by providing him glimpses into the secret workings of the universe and clues to the *Pequod*'s doom; so too do his encounters with a second category of the unknown, the unknown within nature itself, particularly with the White Whale. Both before and after sailor-Ishmael actually encounters Moby Dick in the Japanese cruising grounds, he struggles to construct in his imagination an idea of the White Whale by listening to the stories of whale-men who had seen him stove whaleboats and devour sailors alive. Now, as narrator-Ishmael tells his story, he continues to feed his imagination by referring to other sources in natural philosophy, philosophy, and whaling lore. The physical encounter with Moby Dick and the narratization of that encounter both depend

upon these preparatory imaginative acts. Just as sailor-Ishmael's imaginative construction of the White Whale both prepares him for and shapes his perception of the physical encounter with Moby Dick in the final three-day chase, so too narrator-Ishmael's imaginative re-construction of that experience prepares him for and shapes his perception of the spiritual encounter he will have with the memory of Moby Dick as he writes the end of his narrative.

Throughout Ishmael's narrative, every passage on sperm whales in general and Moby Dick in particular emphasizes the whale's mysteriousness. Ishmael describes men's various attempts to project a comprehensible identity onto this whale; some whale-men, for example, declare that the whale is "not only ubiquitous, but immortal (for immortality is but ubiquity in time)" (183). Ishmael admits that even if the whale did not have such godlike characteristics, his "peculiar snow-white wrinkled forehead [and] high, pyramidical white hump" making him sufficiently strange and terrifying "to strike the imagination with unwonted power" (183). For whale-men who had fought him, Moby Dick seemed to display an "infernal aforethought of ferocity," and for Ahab specifically, the whale represented cosmic evil and original sin. Ishmael realizes that, for himself, it is "the whiteness of the whale" that is most appalling because whiteness is "the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind."[18] Moreover, Ishmael proposes that whiteness, being indefinite,

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[18] His theory contrasts with more traditional aesthetic theory that associates the sublime with darkness, but it echoes Poe's association, in in *Arthur Gordon Pym*, of whiteness with the sublime.

"shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation" (195). As Ishmael writes, his attempts to construct in his imagination the great, unknown White Whale—as well as his attempts to remember how he had constructed that whale before having met him—provide him glimpses into the workings of the universe and enable him to see how the *Pequod*'s doom was foreshadowed all along, and was perhaps even necessary.

Although the sperm whale is the creature that, in all of nature, is the most perplexingly unknown, narrator-Ishmael is constantly preoccupied with the effort to understand this unknowable creature. Recognizing that a being's sensory organs determine its perception of the world, Ishmael devotes a series of chapters to varied reflections upon the body of the whale. He attempts to imagine how the whale experiences life by entering empathetically into its other way of perceiving. For example, Ishmael describes how the placement of the whale's eyes one on either side of his head give him two "fronts" and two "backs," so that he sees two distinct pictures of the world. Ishmael wonders at what this might mean for the whale's cognitive abilities. Perhaps his brain is "so much more comprehensive, combining, and subtle than man's," that he can examine two different prospects simultaneously, comparable to "if a man were able simultaneously to go through the demonstrations of two distinct problems in Euclid" (331). In a chapter on the sperm whale's "Battering-Ram," the massive indestructible forehead that he uses as a powerful weapon, Ishmael

rhapsodizes that the whale's enormous physical might remains under his conscious control, making him capable of extraordinary feats (336-38). In a chapter on the inexpressible power of the whale's tail, Ishmael marvels that in this organ "the confluent measureless force of the whole whale seems concentrated to a point. Could annihilation occur to matter, this were the thing to do it." He adds that, despite the tail's incredible strength, its movements are utterly graceful, the power being the source of the tail's "appalling beauty" (376). Throughout these chapters on the whale's anatomy, Ishmael is concerned with how the whale experiences the world sensibly; in this passage on the tail, for example, he postulates that the whale's sense of touch is concentrated in this organ. Ishmael also imagines what unspeakable experiences the whale must have deep in the sea. For example, in considering how the whale's skin is covered with "numberless straight marks in thick array" that are seemingly "engraved upon the body itself," Ishmael imagines the battles he fights in the deep; yet he concedes that the "hieroglyphic" engraving on the mystic-marked whale remains undecipherable.[19] Recalling the different facial expressions that a certain Right Whale and Sperm Whale had at death, Ishmael infers their respective life philosophies: the Right Whale's placid brow indicates that he was

[19] In "The Sphinx," he describes Ahab gazing at the whale's face and imagining what he has seen: "Of all divers, thou hast dived the deepest. That head upon which the upper sun now gleams, has moved amid this world's foundations" (311). Ahab imagines the "unrecorded names and navies" that the whale has seen rusting at the bottom of the sea, and shudders at the "awful water-land" of drowned men's bones that makes the whale's "most familiar home." He wonders that even though the sperm whale has "seen enough to split the planets and make an infidel of Abraham," he has not a syllable to speak (312).

a Stoic, while the Sperm Whale's expression reveals him to be "a Platonian, who might have taken up Spinoza in his latter years" (335). As he writes, Ishmael's close considerations of the whale's body and the whale's particular experience of life in that body represent his effort to fathom the unknowns that he encounters, in nature as in man-made objects, his fellow human beings, and in the supernatural. Ishmael's engagement with the mysterious whale, like his engagement with the other unknowns he encounters, becomes a means by which he glimpses truth and retrospectively discerns clues to the *Pequod*'s end. He discovers that even the unknown can yield wisdom to those who contemplate it patiently and comprehensively.

Even as Ishmael gains knowledge from the study of the whale, he also comes to recognize the limits of human knowledge, which is, itself, a form of wisdom. For example, Ishmael describes the majestic peaking of the whale's flukes as he prepares to plunge deep into the ocean. Whether the gesture strikes the viewer as a sign of adoration of or defiance of God depends, says Ishmael, upon the person's mood. The fact that the whale's tail gestures remain mysterious to even the most studious observer indicates humans' limited ability to enter the whale's point of view. Ishmael realizes that the more he ponders the whale's great tail, "the more do I deplore my inability to express it. At times there are gestures in it, which, though they would well grace the hand of man, remain wholly inexplicable." For all Ishmael's dissection of the whale, "I but go

skin deep; I know him not, and never will" (379). Ishmael's contemplation of the whale teaches him a humble recognition of human finitude.

When Ishmael contemplates the long (pre)history of the whale in contrast to the relatively short lifespan of the human race, he is awed into a sense of the enormity of his subject, which far outstrips all human proportions. In "The Fossil Whale," Ishmael examines the whale from an "archaeological, fossiliferous, and antediluvian point of view" and establishes the ancient ancestry of the whale through various prehistoric fossils, an Egyptian temple painting, and a Barbary temple made of whalebones. Yet the whale is far older than this, and as Ishmael begins to sense the enormity of his subject, he feels his own inadequacy to do justice to it. Yet, he also feels that his great subject matter is magnifying him. Ishmael's consciousness of the epic sweep of his tale—together with a consciousness of what he is looking at as he narrates—"mighty Leviathan skeletons, skulls, tusks, jaws, ribs, and vertebrae"—carries Ishmael into an imaginative vision of whales swimming the oceans before human history began. He feels that he is "by a flood, borne back to that wondrous period, ere time itself can be said to have begun; for time began with man." He feels "Saturn's grey chaos" roll over him, and he "obtain[s] dim, shuddering glimpses into those Polar eternities" when the globe was covered with ice and no land had yet appeared. Back then, "the whole world was the whale's; and, king of creation, he left his wake along the present lines of the Andes and the Himmalehs." He asks, "Who can show a pedigree like Leviathan?" He feels

"horror-struck at this antemosaic, unsourced existence of the unspeakable terrors of the whale, which, having been before all time, must needs exist after all humane ages are over" (457). Implicit in Ishmael's contemplation of the whale is the suggestion that, if the whale seems eternal, sublime, and transcendent even though it exists in the physical realm, how much more finite must humans be?

The whale is the natural phenomenon that causes Ishmael the most wonder and puzzlement, but other unknown natural phenomena also appear to him during the *Pequod*'s voyage; they function as omens through which nature warns the crew against their quest for the White Whale. Such omens crowd into the narrative as the final chase nears. In a storm, the three masts' lightening-rods catch fire in a storm, prompting Ahab to pray to "thou clear spirit of clear fire" that "thy right worship is defiance" (507); seals appear one day and turn out to presage the loss of a man off the mast-head, along with the life-buoy (523-4); and finally, Ahab's hat is snatched right off his head by a sea-hawk and dropped into the sea in the distance (539). These omens are made possible by the unity of nature. One element of nature can reveal truth about another, although the hints are not always easy to read.

In addition to his encounters with the human and natural unknown, Ishmael's third category of encounters with the unknown are with mysterious human beings, including Ahab and several secondary characters. They are distinct from the characters described earlier as authorities because they do not

represent stable ideologies. (As will be shown, even though Ahab views himself as being "fixed on iron rails," he does not represent a fixed ideology to Ishmael.) I consider them in the category of the "unknown" instead because they each have access to some secret source of knowledge that puzzles and allures Ishmael. In his retrospective narration, Ishmael tries to comprehend what each character's secret knowledge is, particularly because, in hindsight, it seems to him that each of these characters is "not unmeaningly blended with the black tragedy of the melancholy ship" (490). So Ahab says of the pitiful little boy Pip, and so Ishmael clearly believes also about the prophet Elijah, the sailor Bulkington, the Shaker con artist Gabriel, and Captain Ahab. Each of these characters had inspired Ishmael with wonder when encountered in his *Pequod* adventure, and the memory of each of them stirs up new wonder and new revelations in the older Ishmael who writes about them.

Elijah and Bulkington presage the *Pequod*'s doom before the ship even sets sail. Elijah is a shabby stranger who warns Ishmael and Queequeg about Ahab shortly before the *Pequod* ships out; he hints that the captain's loss of his leg on his last voyage was a fulfillment of a prophecy by the squaw Tistig and paints an image of Ahab, or "Old Thunder," as a stern and volatile captain. Ishmael dismisses the man's secretive warning until he learns that the man's name is Elijah, then Ishmael is filled with "vague wonderments and half-apprehensions" about the *Pequod*, Ahab, "and a hundred other shadowy things." At the end of the chapter, Ishmael the sailor dismisses Elijah as a

"humbug," although Ishmael the narrator knows the man's prophecy will prove true. When Ishmael re-encounters Elijah in his recollections, he realizes, perhaps for the first time, that the doom of the *Pequod* has been so explicitly predicted. Another prescient character whom narrator-Ishmael now remembers having met before the *Pequod* even sailed is Bulkington. Ishmael has difficulty pinning down the way in which Bulkington, a shipmate on the *Pequod,* is mysterious, for "[w]onderfullest things are ever the unmentionable" (106). Bulkington had struck sailor-Ishmael with "sympathetic awe and fearfulness" because he has just landed in midwinter from a dangerous four-year voyage and yet was immediately shipping out on another such voyage. From this puzzling fact, narrator-Ishmael draws a lesson, articulated in a metaphor. Bulkington is like a "storm-tossed ship, that miserably drives along the leeward land," unable to land in the port with its "safety, comfort, hearthstone, supper, warm blankets, friends, all that's kind to our mortalities." This is because, during a gale, the homey port is actually a ship's greatest danger, because "one touch of land, though it but graze the keel, would make her shudder through and through." Thus the ship must fight against "the very winds that fain would blow her homeward" and "for refuge's sake forlornly rush … into peril" (106). Ishmael's hint that Bulkington will die at sea proves to be an early, though subtle, hint as to the fate of the *Pequod.* Ishmael's memory of Bulkington provides him an insight into how his life-altering experiences had been foreshadowed.

On the voyage, sailor-Ishmael meets another mysterious character, the religious fanatic Gabriel. This young Shaker pseudo-prophet manages not only to hold the crew of the *Jeroboam* under his "wonderful ascendancy" but also to dupe himself about his own powers. Gabriel had fooled most of the *Jeroboam*'s crew into believing him to be the archangel Gabriel and "the deliverer of the isles of the sea and vicar-general of all Oceanica." Many of the crew invested Gabriel with "sacredness" and worshipped him like a god. The *Jeroboam* captain tells Ahab and the *Pequod*'s crew the story of how they had encountered Moby Dick. Gabriel had warned his shipmates against attacking the whale, claiming he was the Shaker God incarnated; sure enough, the mate who insisted on chasing Moby Dick was swept out of the boat and eaten, leaving all the others untouched. The event seemed to many of the crew to have been foreordained by Gabriel, and he "became a nameless terror to the ship." When Ahab tells the *Jeraboam*'s captain that he plans to hunt the White Whale, Gabriel cries, "beware the blasphemer's end!" Even though Gabriel had seemed utterly mad to the sailor Ishmael, now in retrospect the narrator Ishmael recognizes how strangely the man's predictions had been fulfilled. Thus Ishmael learns in retrospect, as he writes his narrative, that for all Gabriel's fanaticism, he was actually in touch with the truth about Ahab's quest for Moby Dick, perhaps accidentally.

Pip is another mysterious secondary character from whom Ishmael learns. The boy's experience of becoming (apparently) insane after his encounter with Truth in the open ocean forces Ishmael to consider what human

progress looks like and to realize how apt progress is to look like regression. Pip had leapt from a whaleboat during a chase and so had been temporarily abandoned all alone in the midst of the wide ocean. While a castaway, as Ishmael tells it, Pip had been "carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; and the miser-merman, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps." There, Pip glimpsed the very origins of the cosmos and saw "God's foot upon the treadle of the loom" (414). Forever afterward, Pip seems to the crew to be an idiot who speaks nonsense; to Ahab, though, Pip has the wisdom of heaven. When Ahab is troubled about the carpenter turning Queequeg's coffin into a life buoy, for instance, he goes to his cabin to talk it over with Pip, to whom he says, "I do suck most wondrous philosophies from thee! Some unknown conduits from the unknown worlds must empty into thee!" (528-29). One thinks of Emerson's definition of man as a fountainhead capable of pouring out the Universal Spirit. Ironically, what had seemed to the *Pequod*'s crew to be Pip's regression into insanity is for Ahab—and for Ishmael, at least in retrospect—actually Pip's sudden apprehension of Truth. As Ishmael puts it, "[M]an's insanity is heaven's sense; and wandering from all mortal reason, man comes at last to that celestial thought, which, to reason, is absurd and frantic" (414). The highest truth is so far above reason that it appears irrational.

The person who is the greatest unknown to Ishmael is, of course, Captain Ahab. For the most part, Ishmael cannot know Ahab; he can only observe

Ahab's remarkable appearance and behavior and, with the help of legends and rumors about him, try to reconstruct his inner life. Ishmael imagines private conversations and soliloquies that help to make sense of the appearance and behaviors that he, Ishmael, sees and the stories he hears. As discussed earlier, the text contains clues that Ahab's characterization is always constructed by Ishmael. In "Knights and Squires," Ishmael admits that he will treat each character as having "that abounding dignity which has no robed investiture." He will take "meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways," and "ascribe [to them] high qualities, though dark; weave round them tragic graces" (117). Narrator-Ishmael's passages on Ahab are infused with a sense of mystery for this reason. Sailor-Ishmael's first glimpse of Ahab sets up the captain as an unknown, unknowable character. It is a grey and gloomy morning aboard the *Pequod,* and Ahab finally comes up on deck for the crew to have their first glimpse of him. Ishmael is fascinated by his scarred and tortured face: "moody stricken Ahab stood before them with a crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some mighty woe." Ishmael notices, though, that now and then, he would "put forth the faint blossom of a look, which, in any other man, would have soon flowered out in a smile" (125). Ishmael reports the explanations for Ahab's facial scar that people have proposed—it could be a birthmark, or an injury from some "elemental strife at sea"—but he himself does not venture to endorse one theory over another. The rest of Ishmael's narrative is interspersed with surmised versions of Ahab's

private thoughts and conversations in chapters such as "The Chart," "The Affadavit," and "Surmises." Only a few scenes with Ahab could actually have been experienced by Ishmael the way he reports them, and even these scenes are highly theatrical. In "The Quarter-Deck," "Ahab and the Carpenter," and "The Deck," Ahab speaks more like a Shakespearean tragic hero than like a whaling-ship captain.

As narrator-Ishmael remembers and describes each encounter with Ahab years later, he has to draw upon every possible explanation of the universe that he has ever heard, trying out each lens in turn as he attempts to make sense of Ahab's single-minded quest and the resultant tragic destruction of himself and his crew. In the end, as Ishmael imagines him, not even Ahab himself knows why he does what he does. In "The Symphony," the last chapter before the final chase begins, Ahab wonders aloud to Starbuck,

> "What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozzening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what 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?" (545)

Ahab goes on to speculate that, since the great sun and stars cannot move themselves, but rather are revolved "by some invisible power," how much more impossible must it be for his small heart to beat itself or his small brain to think thoughts "unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does that living, and not I." He concludes, "By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this

world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike" (545). Ahab is, in fact, a mystery even to himself. In the end, what Ishmael learns from the mystery of Ahab is that it is possible for a person to go through life with an all-encompassing sense of purpose; to pursue that purpose with all of one's heart, body, and mind; and in the end, to die without knowing oneself at all. Not everyone lives out the maturation process of the Bildungsroman hero.

Evidence of Social Contract

The third category of development-trigger that Ishmael encounters is evidence of social contract, or agreements and interdependencies binding human beings together into groups. Each piece of evidence that shows Ishmael the existence and characteristics of this social contract contributes to his ultimate understanding of the structure of the world and his place within it. Moreover, near the end of the text, an increasing use of domestic metaphors suggest that Ishmael the narrator is realizing the larger implications of the lessons he has learned on the *Pequod*, or perhaps more significantly what he is learning as he narrates his *Pequod* adventure; his use of these metaphors also hints that he is realizing how his experiences on the *Pequod* illuminate his life back home. This section will first show that Ishmael learns the conventions of the fishery that bind a given crew together; he ratifies this social contract as soon as he signs on to the crew irrevocably, and he honors this social contract by consistently doing his duty while on board. Second, it will be seen that Ahab perverts that bond by

drawing his crew away from their obliged whaling voyage to help him with his own personal quest. He does so because humans, as "exiled royalties," are prone to forming flawed, or even murderous, social contracts. Ishmael eventually realizes that the whale Moby Dick can act as an agent of justice, correcting a whale-ship's abuses of the social contract; the justice-serving acts by Moby Dick that Ishmael hears about along the way foreshadow the whale's ultimate destruction of the *Pequod,* which is itself a just event, given Ahab's unrelenting and hateful quest to kill the whale. Finally, we will see how Ishmael, in the act of narration, begins to link all of these realizations to the larger world beyond whaling. He shows the danger of the social contract, broadly construed, as it can lead people into superstition and bind them to conventions that were founded on error. But he also shows the inevitability of social contract, and shows that absolute individualism is ultimately an illusion because we all cannot help but be tied to other people with life-or-death stakes. Ishmael comments on the difficulty of agreeing upon what obligations a given social contract entails; even our codes describing our obligations to each other are open to interpretation (for example, property rights as described in the chapter "Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish"). Ishmael finds that a gap will always exist between the ideal and the reality of social contract, at least on earth, although he believes that in the afterlife a perfect and pure version of social contract may exist.

First, Ishmael learns the conventions of the fishery that bind a crew together. When he signs the papers to join the *Pequod's* crew, he knows that this commitment is irrevocable. In "The Mast-Head," he further suggests the all-encompassing nature of the shipmates' obligations to each other: if the watcher at the mast-head day-dreams, none of the sailors have any whales to chase and, thus, no financial reward for their toil. In "The Monkey-Rope," he describes how the ties of obligation binding shipmates together can require a man to die with the fellow to whom he is literally tied in a "joint-stock corporation of two" (320). Later, Ishmael describes several "gams" in which the *Pequod*'s crew participates; in these meetings of two whale-ships on the open ocean, news is exchanged and companionship is shared. Ships from the same distant port encountering each other in the wildest seas are thus linked to each other and to their shared home. The outward-bound ship shares letters and news from home, while the ship longer from home shares all the whaling-intelligence. If both ships are equally long from home, they share a friendly chat about the whaling and see whether either ship has letters for the other. Even if the two ships were from different places, they would "meet with all the sympathies of sailors, [and] likewise with all the peculiar congenialities arising from a common pursuit and mutually shared privations and perils." Indeed, as long as the parties spoke the same language, no "difference of country [would] make any very essential difference" (239). Ishmael notes that whale-men are far more sociable with each other than, say, merchant ships, men-of-war, slave-ships, or

pirate-ships, perhaps because they have greatest reason to be and because they are scorned by other ships.

Ahab perverts the bond that crew members have to their captain, their ship, and each other by forcing the crew to help him pursue his personal revenge quest rather than undertake the commercial whaling voyage for which they had enlisted. In the chapter "Moby Dick," Ishmael expresses how it feels to have been drawn into a demonic parody of social contract. Just after Ahab's great speech on the quarter-deck, which Ishmael had narrated in third person as though he had not been there, he admits, "I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul." He felt a "wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling," and "Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine." He listened "with greedy ears" to hear "the history of that murderous monster against whom I and all the others had taken our oaths of violence and revenge" (179). Note in this passage how fully Ishmael has adopted Ahab's construction of the whale; rather than seeing him as majestic, mysterious, and profound, Moby Dick is a "murderous monster." Only in retrospect can Ishmael recognize how egregiously Ahab had abused his position of power.

As Ishmael writes, he speculates as to how Ahab can draw a crew of strangers into such a murderous social contract. The broader explanation that he intuits for humans' proneness to flawed social contracts is so profound that

he can only communicate it through an image. In the chapter "Moby Dick," where Ishmael tries to fathom the origins and power of Ahab's hatred for the whale who took his leg, he invites the reader to descend with him, in imagination, deep into the earth and the past, to "those vast Roman halls of Thermes; where far beneath the fantastic towers of man's upper earth, his root of grandeur, his whole awful essence sits in bearded state." That "awful essence" is embodied in the form of a mighty king who is sitting on a broken throne, held captive and mocked by the gods. The king does not give in to the weight of his condition, but rather sits patiently, "upholding on his frozen brow the piled entablatures of ages." Ishmael then suggests that the readers who have followed him down to this dungeon ought to "question that proud, sad king" as to what secret he holds. In so doing, they will look into his face and recognize their own family likeness because "he did beget ye, ye young exiled royalties; and from your grim sire only will the old State-secret come" (185-86). In this haunting passage, Ishmael makes clear two things: first, that the human condition is one of displacement and captivity, as we are condemned to live in conditions where we cannot fulfill our noble natures; and second, that we are all members of the same royal family, all made in the image of the same Parent, and all subject to the same curse. Thus, the people who sail with Ahab on the *Pequod* are tragically bound to Ahab—and to the rest of the human race—whether they had signed on for the fateful *Pequod* voyage or not.

As the voyage on the *Pequod* wears on, the crew hears more and more stories of the White Whale, and in recounting these stories to the reader, Ishmael realizes that the whale can act as an agent of justice on the ocean, correcting whale-ships' abuses of the social contract. Moby Dick's eventual destruction of the *Pequod* is foreshadowed in such stories, for example in the story of the *Town Ho.* Ishmael narrates this story to his reader as he once told it to a group of lounging Spanish Dons in Lima.[20] As Ishmael tells it, the *Town Ho*'s mate, Radney, had bitterly disliked one of the sailors, Steelkilt, because Radney sensed the man was "superior in general pride of manhood" (245). Radney picked a fight with Steelkilt, which escalated into a ship-wide battle. The captain regained control when Steelkilt's companions gradually defected from him to avoid punishment. Steelkilt was brutally flogged. Soon after, when the crew pursued Moby-Dick, the whale grabbed Radney and ate him, leaving everyone else unharmed. When the *Town-Ho* stopped at the harbor on a small island, Steelkilt and most of the other men desert and escape. In this story, Moby Dick is acting not as a dumb brute but as an apparently conscious arbiter of justice.

The anthropomorphic qualities are also emphasized elsewhere. Ishmael suggests that man's hunting of the whale is a breach in our social contract with animals in gruesome, pathos-filled death scenes such as "The Pequod meets the Virgin," where Ishmael vividly shows the whales' anthropomorphized agony as

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[20] See Philip J. Egan on what Ishmael's telling of this story reveals about him as a character.

the hunters slaughter them. In the chapter "Schools and School-masters," he describes the whales' social structure in human terms: a school of female whales is led by a large male, who mates with some of the females and keeps other males away (Ishmael jokes that he is an immoral school-master for sleeping with his students), and the schools of young males are livelier, but less loyal. Unlike in the female school, if one is injured, his fellows abandon him. Ishmael's titling of this chapter "Schools and School-masters," though certainly done for the sake of the pun, suggests that whales go through an educational process just as humans do. The suggestion may be facetious, but it is significant that that the chapter does not describe explicitly academic experiences of "school." Rather, as in the Bildungsroman, a variety of social interactions form and educate the individual.

As the narrative progresses, Ishmael begins to connect his whaling-specific realizations about the social contract to the world more broadly. For example, describing the sinking of a whale carcass leads him to realize the danger of people's social contracts leading them into erroneous conventions and superstitions. In "The Funeral," Ishmael describes watching the whale carcass, a "vast white headless phantom" floating away, its hideous flesh being devoured by sea-vultures. This is not the end of the whale's legacy, he writes, because "a vengeful ghost survives and hovers over it to scare." Soon the whale's body might be "[e]spied by some timid man-of-war or blundering discovery-vessel from afar," and from a distance mistake "the white mass floating in the sun, and

the white spray heaving high against it" for "shoals, rocks, and breakers." The sighting is recorded in the ship's log, and for years to come, "ships shun the place; leaping over it as silly sheep leap over a vacuum, because their leader originally leaped there when a stick was held." He concludes, "There's your law of precedents; there's your utility of traditions; there's the story of your obstinate survival of old beliefs never bottomed on the earth, and now not even hovering in the air! There's orthodoxy!" (309). In this passage, a specific observation from the whaling world turns into an insight about human society more broadly. Ishmael realizes the danger of unthinking assent to doctrines established and held by others in one's community.

Despite the dangers social contracts pose to the people bound by them, Ishmael does recognize that such contracts are an inevitable part of human existence, and in fact make survival possible. In "The Monkey-Rope," Ishmael explains that, as Queequeg's bowsman, he was responsible to be tied to Queequeg by a cable as the latter stood on the dead whale's back to insert the blubber-hook in the spade-hole—a "humorously perilous" job. In language recalling their first night sharing a bed in the Spouter-Inn, Ishmael likens this monkey-rope relationship to a marriage, the two of them "wedded" so sacredly that "should poor Queequeg sink to rise no more, then both usage and honor demanded, that instead of cutting the cord, it should drag me down to his wake" (320). Watching Queequeg balance on the slippery whale's back, Ishmael "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" (320). Ishmael ironically undercuts his earlier affirmation of Providence by calling this situation "a sort of interregnum in Providence," because Providence's "even-handed equity never could have sanctioned so gross an injustice" (320). Ishmael then reflects that his situation with the monkey-rope is really no different from the situation of every other mortal, for everyone "has this Siamese connexion with a plurality of other mortals," from the banker who keeps one's money to the apothecary who makes one's pills. Even though a person might, through extreme caution, escape some misfortunes, these efforts could fail at any moment. After all, no matter how carefully Ishmael would handle Queequeg's monkey-rope, "sometimes he jerked it so, that I came very near sliding overboard. Nor could I possibly forget that, do what I would I only had the management of one end of it" (320). In this chapter, Ishmael begins to see that Americans' robust belief in individualism is based on mere illusion because in reality, we cannot help but be interconnected with other people.

Even if a person chooses to abstain from the social contract, the independent condition cannot last. The temporary lightness and jollity must give way to responsibility and obligation. The contrast between two ships the *Pequod* encounters late in its voyage, the *Bachelor* and the *Rachel,* makes this point. The *Bachelor* is a Nantucket ship that has had far greater luck than most

other whale-ships. Now that it is on its journey home, its crew revels in hedonistic contentment. The captain calls the *Pequod*'s crew to come aboard and share in the merry-making, but Ahab only asks through gritted teeth, "Hast seen the White Whale?" The captain replies that he does not believe in Moby Dick. Ahab tells him, "Thou art too damned jolly," calls the man a fool, and tells him, "go thy ways, and I will mine" (495). The revelry of the *Bachelor* may seem more appealing than the foreboding mood of the *Pequod,* but Ishmael's narration in this chapter suggests that, even though the free and lucky *Bachelor* is happy at the moment, its happiness is contingent on a luck and freedom that cannot last. Moreover, the captain's denial of the White Whale's very existence reveals a naivety that cannot be unequivocally preferable to wisdom. By contrast, the *Rachel,* which they meet just before encountering Moby Dick, is bowed down by sorrow because two of the captain's sons are missing, each on a different whale-boat. The motherly ship's bond with her cherished sons is proper and natural, even though it exposes her to grief.

In a digressive chapter about the rules governing property rights in the whale fishery, Ishmael teases out the difficulty a group can have in agreeing upon what social contract binds them and even of agreeing upon how to interpret a document that spells out a mutually ratified social contract. People's codes for describing our obligations to each other are difficult both to write and to apply. In "Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish," Ishmael describes the common problem in the fishery that, sometimes, a whale will come loose from a ship and

float unattached until someone claims it. According to the rules of the fishery, a whale unattached to a boat and without a waif is a "loose-fish" and fair for the taking. The code itself is simple, and Ishmael quotes it in its entirety: "I. A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it. II. A Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it" (396). But Ishmael explains that "what plays the mischief with this masterly code is the admirable brevity of it, which necessitates a vast volume of commentaries to expound it" (396). He gives various examples of how the term "fast-fish" has been interpreted: the fish can be fast to either ship or boat by a cable, an oar, or anything else. Yet whale-men themselves must reinterpret this code constantly in new situations. Having established the all-encompassing complexity of this simple law that governs the whaling world, Ishmael expands his scope and reflects that within this brief code can "be found the fundamentals of all human jurisprudence," for "often possession is the whole of the law." From here, Ishmael spins out one example after another to illustrate the fact that, in all human societies through time, every thing is either a fast-fish or a loose-fish. Fast-fish include the souls of serfs and slaves, and Loose-fish include America in 1492, as well as other lands that have been claimed by an empire. Ishmael goes on to apply the doctrine even more broadly, calling "the Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World" Loose-Fish, along with "all men's minds and opinions," and "the principle of religious belief in them. To "ostentatious smuggling verbalists," the "thoughts of thinkers" are Loose-Fish. Even the globe itself is a Loose-Fish. He concludes, "And what are

you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?" (398). In this wide-ranging chapter, Ishmael illustrates how humans' brief laws or "doctrines" need endless commentary to determine our actual rights and our obligations to each other.[21]

Ishmael recognizes that humans' social contracts are flawed, but he also can envision an ideal version of community. In "A Squeeze of the Hand," he evokes just such a utopian vision of social contract. He recalls the experience of squeezing spermaceti with his shipmates and entering into a reverie in which he forgot all about the horrible oath that bound them. He had "washed [his] hands and [his] heart" in the spermaceti, in a sort of baptism that made him feel "divinely free from all ill-will, or petulence, or malice, of any sort whatsoever." The reverie culminates in a sort of peaceful, orgiastic at-oneness with his fellow sailors and indeed, with all humanity: "Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till … I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules." The activity engenders in him "[s]uch an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling" that he cannot conceive of how he could ever be in conflict with one of his "dear fellow beings" (416). Despite this vision, Ishmael concludes that only a specific and narrow kind of social contract, or "felicity," is realistic for humans. Man must "lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity" so that he locates it not "in the intellect or the fancy," but rather "in the

[21] Although Ishmael does not mention the United States Constitution here, he may be alluding to this founding document, which was intentionally written to be skeletal, flexible, and open to interpretation and amendation.

wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country"—all the everyday happinesses (416). Ishmael explicitly indicates that his memory of sperm-squeezing and the vision it inspires help him to develop a love for his fellow human beings and a sense of belonging to the human race.

Despite such moments of idyllic communion, the *Pequod*'s perverse social contract will, of course, finally culminate in a deadly denouement. Yet the wreck of the *Pequod* is preceded by a series of tragically failed interventions in which all of nature seems to plead with Ahab not to turn his back on his fellow human beings. From the omens in the chapters "The Candles" and "The Hat," to Starbuck's ardent pleading with Ahab to change his course, Ahab has one opportunity after another to recognize his obligations to his fellow human beings and desist from his quest. Starbuck's final plea to Ahab, in "The Symphony," is heart-rending:

> "Oh, my Captain! my Captain! noble soul! grand old heart, after all! why should any one give chase to that hated fish! Away with me! let us fly these deadly waters! let us home! Wife and child, too, are Starbuck's—wife and child of his brotherly, sisterly, play-fellow youth; even as thine, Sir, are the wife and child of thy loving, longing, paternal old age!" (544).

Ahab's reply shows that he is as puzzled by his destructive obsession as Starbuck is. He asks Starbuck in anguish who or what the "nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it" that is so "cruel" and "remorseless" as to command him to act against all his "natural lovings and longings," and to push him on to do "what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as

dare" (545). He does not know what mysterious force or being would prompt him to disobey all natural yearnings. He realizes, paradoxically, that he lacks self-knowledge, and he dimly associates this lack of self-knowledge with his doom.

The *Pequod*'s perverse social contract reaches its nadir in the final chase of the White Whale. Ishmael narrates this sequence in the third person, as if to emphasize the fact that he had not been acting on his own volition:

> They were one man, not thirty. For as the one ship that held them all; though it was put together of all contrasting things—oak, and maple, and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and hemp—yet all these ran into each other in the one concrete hull, which shot on its way, both balanced and directed by the long central keel; even so, all the individualities of the crew, this man's valor, that man's fear; guilt and guiltiness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to. (557)

The horror of what the attack on Moby Dick represents—one man's utter forsaking of, as he puts it, "natural lovings and longings"(545) for the sake of pure hate, and his drawing of his fellow human beings into his hateful act—is heightened by the language Ishmael uses to describe the scene. Ishmael uses domestic metaphors to describe the churning ocean and the splintering ship. At one point he calls the sea "a boiling maelstrom, in which … the odorous cedar chips of the [whale-boat] wrecks danced round and round, like the grated nutmeg in a swiftly stirred bowl of punch" (559). Recounting the third day of the chase, he writes that the *Pequod* "sailed hard upon the breeze as she rechurned the cream in her own white wake" (564). Later in the battle, the

waters "[c]rushed thirty feet upwards … then brokenly sank in a shower of flakes, leaving the circling surface creamed like new milk round the marble trunk of the whale" (567). These homey metaphors are striking for their presence in a narration of such an unhomelike encounter, an encounter that will, indeed, ensure that none of these men—Ishmael excepted—will ever go home again. Only he, the hero of the Bildungsroman, will survive to circle back to his origins as an older, wiser man.

Conclusions

Ishmael alone survives. The precise causes of his survival are too complex to be reduced to a simple explanation like "chance" or "predestination." Rather, in order to understand how the intricate fabric of reality is woven, one must remember the metaphor of mat-weaving that Ishmael developed in the chapter "The Mat-Maker." On the fateful third day of the chase of Moby Dick, Ishmael tells the reader, the Fates had put him on Ahab's boat to replace Fedallah when the Parsee was lost, and chance made Ishmael fall from the boat into the margin of the scene. Necessity, in the form of physical laws, caused Queequeg's coffin to pop up from the center of the vortex just as Ishmael was about to be sucked into it. And either Providence or chance brought the "devious-cruising" *Rachel* to his rescue. Doubtless the watchers on the *Rachel* had mistaken Ishmael's distant form for that of the captain's son, whom they had long been seeking—a fact that raises the question of whether

some children of God must be sacrificed in order for others to survive. Ishmael also owes something of his survival to the unwitting self-sacrifice of one of his ship-mates. Earlier in the narrative, when another young Platonist on the *Pequod* had fallen to his death from the masthead, the life buoy had been thrown to him, but had sunk. As a result, the carpenter made another, better life buoy out of Queequeg's unused coffin. It is this buoy that saves Ishmael after the wreck. If the Platonist had not drowned, there would have been no working buoy to keep Ishmael afloat after the wreck. Thus the other man's Platonism doomed him but saved Ishmael. The twist partially answers the question of why Ishmael survived (because the other Platonist was sacrificed to save him), but it also raises the question of whether the two sailors' respective worldviews contributed to the one dying and the other surviving. Was it free will, chance, or fate, that caused Ishmael's survival?

As sensitive readers of the Bildungsroman know, the narrative of formation does not have to end in tidy resolution—and in fact, it probably never can. This is certainly true of *Moby-Dick,* in which the tensions set up early in the text between faith and doubt, between isolation and belonging, and between Christian and pagan spiritual authorities are never fully resolved. The tensions oscillate throughout the text and remain in precarious balance at the end. Take for example the name of the ship that picks Ishmael up after the wreck. It is called the *Rachel*, an implication in Biblical terms that the cast-out Ishmael, bastard son of Abraham and Hagar, is finally being accepted by his father's

Judeo-Christian community. The fact that Ishmael does not *choose* to be rescued by the *Rachel* suggests a Calvinist interpretation of his redemption, except that Ishmael persists, in the last phrase of his text, in calling himself "another orphan." Moreover, one must not forget that the way Ishmael survived the wreck long enough to be picked up was by holding onto Queequeg's coffin. This coffin, which was turned into a life buoy after the sinking of the original buoy, has been inscribed by Queequeg with the complete theory of the heavens and earth that a wise man from his island had tattooed upon his body. The complicated interweaving of elements in this final scene—elements of faith and doubt, independence and interdependence, Platonism and materialism, Christianity and paganism—suggests that in the end, Ishmael's maturation cannot be narrowly defined as a move from one pole to the other or as a set of decisions about which authorities' truth-claims to ratify. Rather, the culmination of his maturation process is his arrival at a point of stability that allows for continued oscillation between poles. Passages throughout Ishmael's narrative prepare the reader for this complex conclusion. In "The Fountain," for example, Ishmael writes that he is grateful to God for the intimations he enjoys of things divine,

> [F]or all have doubts; many deny; but doubts or denials, few along with them, have intuitions. Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with an equal eye. (374)

Ishmael recognizes that doubt is the very medium that conducts faith, the very material that faith illuminates. As he had written all the way back in the beginning of the narrative, when describing his pilgrimage to Father Mapple's chapel, "Faith, like a jackal, feeds among the tombs" (37). Faith is not faith without doubt, and vice versa.

In the end, what Ishmael achieves in *Moby-Dick* is an account of his own developmental process in the form of a pieced-together explanation for his survival. In writing this document, he clarifies his identity and his place in the world, and he provides himself a guide to future action. Having survived the demonic parody of a social contract on the *Pequod*, Ishmael implicitly situates himself within a social contract that is flexible, in which a person can survive by being allowed to oscillate between interdependence (being a member of the *Pequod*'s crew) and independence (floating alone on the margin of the wreck), and then back to interdependence (being picked up by the *Rachel)*. His experimental method enables him to draw on his intellectual and spiritual inheritance but also to invent a flexible system for survival out of those materials. Halfway through the narrative, as he embarked upon a phrenological and physiognomic analysis of the whale, Ishmael had declared that "I try all things; I achieve what I can" (345). What Melville tries, and achieves, in writing *Moby-Dick* is the creation of a new kind of Bildungsroman, an American Bildungsroman in which the protagonist educates himself through a process of active experimentation in the very act of narrating his past experiences. By

locating the protagonist's portrait self within the protagonist's own memory, Melville shows the orphaned nation of America how they, too, can cultivate their own development even while drawing selectively from the past that is their complicated inheritance.

CHAPTER FIVE

Education as Storytelling in *Pierre*: Inventing an Inheritance

> I shall follow the endless, winding way.
>
> --Herman Melville, *Pierre*

When Pierre Glendinning is preparing to meet his supposed long-lost sister Isabel, he prays to some power he calls "Ye Invisibles," begging this ambiguous potentate not to forsake him lest he lose Faith, Truth, family, and a sense of belonging to God and to the human race. Pierre already anticipates that the existence of his illegitimate sister will undo his engagement to Lucy Tartan, his inheritance as scion of the Glendinning family, and his faith in God. The melodrama of the prayer is unsurprising in the context of the novel. What is surprising is what immediately follows, the narrator's own interjected prayer to an ambiguous power: "Save me from being bound to Truth, liege lord, as I am now. How shall I steal yet further into Pierre? […] But I shall follow the endless, winding way,—the flowing river in the cave of man; careless whither I be led, reckless where I land" (107). Here the narrator expresses a desire to learn something by writing Pierre's story; he longs to follow his fictional creation, Pierre, deep into an uncharted wilderness where truth might be found. The narrator invents his portrait self (the character Pierre), as well as Pierre's torturous dilemma, and then asks a higher power's aid in understanding his own invention. The narrator's prayer makes clear his sense that his own

formation process is intertwined with that of his invented protagonist. The narrator invents the story of his portrait self in an effort to discover truth about himself, his own place within America, and his relationship to a supernatural authority. As the narrator expresses in the passage above, his pursuit of truth requires him not to be too tightly bound to truth, a paradox that means his narrative will be anything but simple.

The formation processes of both the narrator and of Pierre draw heavily from the conventions of the European Bildungsroman, yet Melville revises those conventions by giving the narrator-protagonist the task of constructing his own portrait self. *Pierre* has been read as a Bildungsroman, as an anti-Bildungsroman, and as a Kunstlerroman focused on Pierre's development or disintegration, but this chapter will look beneath the highly artificial character of Pierre to his self-conscious creator, the narrator, in order to argue that *Pierre* is a Bildungsroman in which the narrator constructs a formation narrative for his own self-education. If in *Mardi* the protagonist dreams his portrait self and in *Moby-Dick* he remembers and reconstructs him, in *Pierre* the narrator is even bolder in how he invents his portrait self. One might argue that *Pierre* is in fact a meta-Bildungsroman, but according to Todd Kontje, the Bildungsroman is already a kind of metafiction, rendering the phrase "meta-Bildungsroman" redundant.

This chapter will first establish that *Pierre,* like *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick,* shares many conventions of the Bildungsroman genre. Next will be shown how

my reading corrects the work of earlier scholars, many of whom denigrate *Pierre* as an artistic and even moral failure for the very characteristics that are integral to its identity as a Bildungsroman. Once *Pierre*'s status as a Bildungsroman is established, this chapter will explicate the novel's view of human identity and identity formation and contrast it with the views presented in *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*. *Pierre*'s depiction of human formation involves the freest use of invention on the part of the protagonist, yet it also, paradoxically, shows most profoundly the ways in which every person is bound by inheritance. Whereas *Mardi* depicts human formation as a process of integrating a heteroglossia of voices and *Moby-Dick* depicts it as a process of synthesizing a system by which to organize one's experiences, *Pierre* depicts human formation as a process that occurs through a different kind of imaginative activity, that is, the construction of a narrative that dramatizes one's inner life and thereby makes clear the hidden truth about oneself and about reality more broadly. (This imaginative activity will be interpreted as the kind of imaginative activity that Emerson describes in the 1836 essay *Nature.*) Although the narrator's progress is difficult to track in *Pierre,* as in *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick,* the reader can recognize the development of the narrator by tracing his changing depictions of states of calm or silence, those moments when an absence of empirical data casts his portrait self, the character Pierre, into a state of abstraction that reveals to him the current state of his inner self, and thus reveals to the narrator-protagonist the state of his.

Following the discussion of how the narrator-protagonist develops throughout the narrative, this chapter will analyze his encounters with the three categories of development-triggers also featured in *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and the European Bildungsromane that Melville read: authority figures; the unknown in human, natural, and supernatural form; and evidences of social contract. After a discussion of the narrator-protagonist's formative encounters with development-triggers, this chapter will assess the outcome of his developmental process and connect it to this study's larger theme of American identity formation. Finally, it will be seen that, at this stage of Melville's artistic and intellectual development, he is clarifying the relationship among *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre*, his "profounder emanations." This phrase comes from a passage halfway through the novel, in which the narrator describes Pierre's realization that the novels he read as a youth have taught him "novel-lessons" that distort his perception of reality by giving him the expectation that life will be simple and happy endings will be inevitable. The narrator proposes the "profounder emanation" as a better kind of novel that does not attempt to systematize "eternally unsystemizable elements," try to unravel the "gossamer threads" of the "complex web of life," and imply that every gloomy beginning culminates in a happy ending, that every mystery is ultimately cleared up. Rather, the profounder emanation, in "illustrat[ing] all that can be humanly known of human life," does little more than recognite and delineate life's mysteries (141). As will be shown, *Pierre*'s depiction of human development is

more problematic and ambiguous than *Mardi*'s or *Pierre*'s, even though *Pierre* earns the highest BRI score of the three. Thus, one can conclude that even as Melville drew more heavily upon the conventions of the Bildungsroman genre, his conception of the process of human formation grew increasingly complicated. The more inventive one is in constructing one's own identity, the more one is entangled in what one has inherited.

If one takes Pierre to be the central character of *Pierre,* as virtually every reader has so far, then this novel scores the highest on the Bildungsroman Index of any of Melville's novels. Compared to *Mardi*'s 114 and *Moby-Dick*'s 110, *Pierre* scores 130 out of 148. The novel has all or all but one of the Bildungsroman characteristics in the following categories: Narrative perspective and mode; Characterization of Protagonist; Characterization of Secondary Characters and their Functions; Setting; Generic Signals; and Theme, subject matter, and motifs. The novel has most of the characteristics in the other categories: topical story elements affecting protagonist, topical story elements affecting secondary characters, and plot/structure. The Bildungsroman features present in *Pierre* but not *Mardi* or *Moby-Dick* include some of the protagonist characteristics (that Pierre is an only child and that a parent dies in the course of the novel), setting (the childhood scenes are set in the countryside or a provincial town, while the setting after school-leaving age is a capital or large city), and generic signals (that the book title includes the name of the protagonist, that the text alludes to other Bildungsromane, and that there are

hints from early in the text that this will be a life story.) Of course, this BRI analysis is complicated by the fact that my study treats the unnamed narrator, rather than Pierre himself, as the protagonist whose development is the text's real locus of meaning. Previous critics who read *Pierre* as a Bildungsroman, including Giles B. Gunn and Sacvan Bercovich (262), assumed Pierre to be the protagonist.

The character Pierre does very much resemble a Bildungsroman hero; he shares important similarities with Pantagruel, Tristram, Diogenes, Wilhelm, and David. Like these protagonists, Pierre has a father who plays a crucial role in his life, although for Pierre, that human father is conflated with God. Pierre's mother repeatedly holds up his dead father to him as the model for all that is virtuous and perfect, and as a result, an idealized vision of his father is enshrined in Pierre's heart (68). As in the European Bildungsromane that Melville read, the text explicitly treats Pierre's childhood through early adulthood and gives a sense of his overall life trajectory. Perhaps the most significant parallel between Pierre and the European Bildungsroman protagonists, for the purposes of this study, is that Pierre's moments of self-discovery—or what he thinks of as such, although they prove to be moments of self-delusion—are defined by his examination of portrait selves: his dead father's and grandfather's portraits, his own reflection in a mirror, a vision of the rock of Enceladus, and a portrait that Lucy paints of him as a skeleton.

For each of the European protagonists, the studying of a portrait self is relatively uncomplicated; the young man does not wonder what the portrait self means or how he is to act upon what it reveals to him.[22] For Pierre, however, the interpretation of his portrait selves is always problematic, and this is where he fails to be a Bildungsroman protagonist. In each instance, the narrator implies that even though Pierre might think he is learning about himself from the portrait self, he is in fact deceiving himself and drawing false, or at least unreliable, conclusions. For example, he separately examines two different portraits of his father, whom he only knows through these portraits and the stories his family tells. In the family home hangs one portrait showing Mr. Glendinning as a "brisk, unentangled, young bachelor, gayly ranging up and down in the world" (73), and another shows him as "a tranquil, middle-aged, married man" (72). Pierre has long been in the habit of studying these portraits, but after reading Isabel's letter he sees them in a whole new light. He imagines the youthful portrait speaking to him: "Pierre, believe not the drawing-room painting [of your father in middle age]; that is not thy father; or, at least, is not *all* of thy father." He urges Pierre to look again, claiming, "I am thy father as he more truly was." The portrait explains that as people mature, "the world overlays and varnishes us," and "the thousand proprieties and polished

[22] As discussed in Chapters One and Two, Pantagruel reads his father's letter, Tristram emulates the tutor his father chose for him to "mirror," Diogenes grows to fulfill the name his father has bestowed upon him, Wilhelm reads the scroll in which the Tower Society has written about him, and David pores over the books left behind by his dead father, David Copperfield senior.

finenesses and grimaces intervene." Gradually "we, as it were, abdicate ourselves, and take unto us another self." He concludes that, "in youth we *are*, Pierre, but in age we *seem"* (83). For the present purposes, what is significant in this scene is that Pierre forgets that he is not actually *listening* to his father speak; rather, he is *imagining* his father speak—thereby, in essence, inventing his own portrait self. Pierre gets stuck, though, on the fact that he cannot reconcile the two portraits of his father because he does not realize that every time he studies a portrait, he is unwittingly looking in a mirror, seeing only what he has projected onto the portrait.[23] Indeed, when Pierre looks in a literal mirror, he scarcely even realizes it is his own reflection. After he receives Isabel's letter but before he reads it, he already feels that he has somehow changed; when he looks in the mirror he does not recognize himself. The figure in the mirror "bore the outline of Pierre, but now strangely filled with features transformed, and unfamiliar to him; feverish eagerness, fear, and nameless forebodings of ill!" (62). Pierre's failure to recognize the nature of the change in himself that is caused by Isabel's letter, both in this moment and through the rest of the story, is the reason why the change does not spur positive development in him. Thus he does not have the essential characteristic of the Bildungsroman protagonist.

A similar dynamic is at work much later in the story, when Pierre encounters another portrait self that might have granted him self-knowledge

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[23] William Dillingham also discusses Pierre's reading of himself into the portraits (157, 170).

had he succeeded in reading it wisely. This second portrait self, his own face transposed onto the body of the demi-god Enceladus, appears to him in a vision as he lies in his grandfather's camp-bed. Enceladus appears in the form of a rocky statue half buried in the earth with his arms amputated. Upon seeing his own face on the figure, Pierre awakens from his trance in horror. The narrator interprets the dream to mean that Pierre is the son of an incestuous union between heaven and earth, and thus has a nature of "organic blended heavenliness and earthliness" that gave rise to his "mixed, uncertain, heaven-aspiring, but still not wholly earth-emancipated mood." So, explains the narrator,

> "the present mood of Pierre—that reckless sky-assaulting mood of his, was nevertheless on one side the grandson of the sky. For it is according to eternal fitness, that the precipitated Titan should still seek to regain his paternal birthright even by fierce escalade. Wherefore whoso storms the sky gives best proof he came from thither! "(347)

After the narrator provides this interpretation, though, he does not specify whether Pierre shares the interpretation. He only says that Pierre, inspired by this vision, resolves "by an entire and violent change, and by a willful act against his own most habitual inclinations, to wrestle with the strange malady of his eyes, this new death-fiend of the trance, and this Inferno of his Titanic vision" (347). From Pierre's vision of Enceladus he might seem to be learning to be more rational and profound. However, he resists the act that might turn this event into a moment of learning: looking in his mirror to compose his face. The

narrator explains that Pierre has lately been avoiding looking in his mirror because he had been "dreading some insupportably dark revealments in his glass" (347). Pierre is resisting the self-knowedge necessary to turn change into progress. In a final failed encounter with a portrait self near story's end, Pierre glimpses the portrait that Lucy is sketching of him. He sees a mere skeleton portrait that shows him his coming death and decay. Right after seeing the portrait, he says of himself to Lucy that "[t]he fool of Truth, the fool of Virtue, the fool of Fate, now quits you forever" (357). This is probably the moment in the story when Pierre sees himself accurately for the first time, but he is still powerless to steer himself out of the acts for which he calls himself a fool; he is about to go into the street and kill his cousin Glen Stanly.

The fact that Pierre consistently fails to learn from his encounters with portrait selves—or even, in the case of his mirror, deliberately avoids looking at the image that might help him learn about himself—is a key reason that Pierre is not a Bildungsroman hero. The narrator, by contrast, *does* learn from his practice of gazing steadily at his own portrait self, Pierre. Thus the narrator, not Pierre, is the protagonist of *Pierre;* it is the narrator who is the novel's dynamic central character.

Critical Interventions

Readers have long criticized *Pierre,* either contemptuously or sympathetically, for its alleged failures as a novel, especially its melodramatic

language and its implausible characters. Beyond the text's alleged artistic failures, the theme of incest and the questioning of organized religion have also brought charges, especially from Melville's contemporaries, that the novel is morally base. For admirers of Melville, the history of readers' harsh criticisms is painful to rehearse, from the infamous 1852 *New York Day Book* headline "HERMAN MELVILLE CRAZY," to the Melville Revivalists' attempts to use the novel to pry into the "tortured" author's subconscious, to more recent critics' persistence in prefacing their readings of *Pierre* with the disclaimer that they, too, recognize the novel's many egregious flaws. Through the generations, readers have not been kind to Melville's follow-up to *Moby-Dick.* In a typical contemporary review (Feb 1853), Fitz-James O'Brien wrote that in *Pierre,* "Thought staggers through each page like one poisoned. Language is drunken and reeling" (Willett 3). In Lewis Mumford's 1929 biography, he criticizes the novel's "atmosphere of unreality," charging that "the work as a whole is untrue to the imagination"—an assumption that Mumford makes the basis of his assertion that Melville was undergoing a "psychical disruption" while writing the work (Willett 5). Charles Feidelson, Jr, claimed that Melville wrote *Pierre* badly on purpose because he had contempt for literature: "If the style of *Pierre* is grotesque—by turns mawkish, pretentious, and eccentric—it is the style of an author who suspects from the beginning what his hero discovers in the end, that all literature is meretricious" (55). Some readers, sympathetically, have searched for explanations of why Melville chose to write this novel with such

distancing, abstract language and implausible characters. The most persuasive readings are the ones that distinguish among Pierre, the narrator, and Melville himself. Once the narrator is distanced from Melville himself, then suddenly the melodramatic language and artificial dialogue can be seen as conscious literary strategies that hold clues to the novel's meaning. Sacvan Bercovich and William Dillingham, whose readings will be discussed momentarily, take this approach. The present study does so as well. It starts with the assumption that the novel's apparent flaws are explained by reading the narrator, rather than Pierre, as the novel's central character, and Pierre's story as the narrator's self-consciously fictional invention. This one assumption makes the entire text take on a plausible form: it is an "emanation" from the narrator's mind, one of the "profounder emanations" that was described earlier in this chapter.

Two notable exceptions to the prevailing approach of either conflating the narrator with Melville himself or of treating the narrator as a third person narrator, rather than as a character, are the readings of Sacvan Bercovich and William Dillingham mentioned above. Bercovich describes the novel's structure as "a Chinese box of narrators: Melville writing about an author (or authors), writing about Pierre, writing about Vivia, writing about himself, the autobiographical hero-author of Pierre's would-be novel" (120). In a lengthier argument, William Dillingham argues that the narrator of *Pierre* constructs the story of Pierre as a dramatization of that character's inner life, with the surface of his life—the events that happen and the people he encounters—existing as

“outward manifestations of [Pierre’s] life’s secrets.” As Dillingham sees it, characters like Lucy and Isabel, with their “obscure or simplistic” motivations and their “insufficiently realized” human complexity, are “less interesting to Melville in their role as realistic characters than they are in their role as projections of certain sides of Pierre” (172). The novel’s physical settings, too, exist more as projections of Pierre’s inner state than as realistic locales. For example, the early depiction of Saddle Meadows as both eerie and idyllic reflects Pierre’s inner state of dangerous naivety. The three women who direct Pierre’s fate, his mother, Lucy, and Isabel, represent the “dominant aspects of his own inner being, the forces *within* that decide his fate” (177). His mother represents his pride in his ancestry and personal sense of superiority, Lucy represents his strong animal appetites, and Isabel represents his “profound hunger for God” (179). Each of these drives is at first disguised as a virtue—a strong sense of individuality, a healthy robustness, and piety, respectively—but turns out to doom Pierre because he never attains the self-knowledge required to regulate his drives. Dillingham believes that Melville was on a lifelong quest for self-knowledge and that his invention of Pierre’s story is one episode in his quest for knowledge of his own inner workings and of how to regulate them: “He created a character like himself [but lacking self-knowledge] to be destroyed in place of himself [due to his lack of self-knowledge] and whose story is to be told by himself [in order to gain self-knowledge]” (239). Unlike Bercovich, Dillingham does not resist the temptation to conflate the narrator

(whom he calls the "complex authorial 'I'") with Melville himself.[24] Still, both of these critics recognize the important fact that the narrator of *Pierre* is not merely a narrator; he is, rather, a character worthy of particular attention from the reader.

Admittedly, other scholars and critics have offered illuminating readings of the narrator. Sanford Marovitz sees the narrator as an omniscient "divine practical joker who toys knowingly with the plight of his hero," treating Pierre as the butt of his "ironic vision," which Marovitz assumes is Melville's. Beverly Hume describes Melville's "highly self conscious" narrative strategy in *Pierre* as one in which he constructs a third-person narrator who distances himself from the characters and events in order to critique both the naïve Pierre and the inadequate intellectual atmosphere in America; thus the narrator parodies both major authors of the past and American popular writers of the present (3). Michael Paul Rogin also sees the language as "self-parodying" and calling attention "to the text as construction." Karl F. Knight believes that the narrator is not Melville but suggests instead that it is this narrator who is Melville's real object of satire. Clark Davis sees a parallel between Pierre-as-author and the narrator-as-author, claiming that both writers' fictional works are "locked within a mode of self-mockery," and that both men are punishing themselves with their "desperate, destructive humor" (34). Even though Davis thinks the

[24] See also Watson, Nelson, and Feidelson.

narrator is experienced and educated, he also thinks that every page of the narrative is "charged with self-destructive energy" (35).[25]

This chapter will argue that the text of *Pierre* amounts to the narrator-protagonist's exercise in the kind of creative activity that Ralph Waldo Emerson prescribed to his audience in the 1836 essay *Nature.* In this early essay, with which Melville was deeply familiar, Emerson sets forth the central tenets of Transcendentalism, declaring that all of Nature is "emblematic" of the one, universal Truth, and that each phenomenon in nature, including words and natural laws, corresponds to a transcendent truth. Emerson believed that both individuals and the human race could return to their godlike state through recovery of an "original relation to nature." Such a recovery would enable humans to apprehend transcendent truth through their experiences of the material world. As Emerson put it, "The laws of moral nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass" (137); therefore, studying natural facts is a way to learn spiritual facts. The process of learning, and by extension of expanding humans' domain of knowledge, occurs through individuals' identifying and interpreting the transcendent truth embodied in specific objects (139). This is made possible by a person's gradual awareness, through the

[25] Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, through research into Melville's composition of the novel, discovered that Melville added all the passages on Pierre as a juvenile author weeks after the manuscript had been finished. His motive was frustration at the publishers' initial rejection of the novel. Higgins and Parker conclude that in these later additions to the manuscript, "Melville more and more perverted his manuscript into an outlet for his personal anxieties about his career" (14). They favor the earlier version of the text, which they have gone so far as to publish in a "Kraken Edition" that excises all passages referring to Pierre as juvenile author. See also E. L. Grant Watson and Tomoyuki Zettsu.

“culture” of his mind, that nature is “a phenomenon, not a substance” (144). More to the point of this argument, Emerson also describes the role that he sees art playing in the progress of the individual and of the race. He defines art as “the mixture of [man’s] will” with natural phenomena like “space, the air, the river, the leaf” (126). Man’s acts of creating and appreciating art help him to recover his original relation to nature. To be more specific, a reader of poetry or philosophy can see in the poet’s or philosopher’s work that “a spiritual life has been imparted to nature; that the solid seeming block of matter has been pervaded and dissolved by a thought; that this feeble human being has penetrated the vast masses of nature with an informing soul, and recognised itself in their harmony, that is, seized their law” (147-48). A true work of art “is an abstract or epitome of the world,” for it expresses nature “in miniature” (133). The present chapter considers the text of *Pierre* to be just such an epitome of nature: it is made up of the narrator’s innermost thoughts, clothed in the vestments of nature and words, and it serves the function of leading the reader (and the narrator himself) to an apprehension of the spiritual facts gleaming just behind the natural facts.

This strategy of reading *Pierre* as a demonstration, intentional or unintentional, of Emerson’s theory of education-through-imagination is justified by the moments in the text when the narrator emerges from behind his story and makes evident his role as the story’s shaping consciousness. This happens whenever he draws attention to his limited knowledge (162); when he

comments on Pierre's thoughts and actions, sometimes critically (69-70, 167); when he constructs highly artificial narrative moments, such as Pierre tripping over his ancestral home's threshhold as he is expelled (185) or Falsgrave's napkin slipping to reveal his serpent-and-dove brooch at the crucial moment (102); and when he gets bogged down in the process of narrating (258-59). Before even embarking on his story, the narrator half-apologizes for what he must leave unsaid (7), defends himself from anticipated critiques of his artistry (12), and bemoans the difficulty of tasks like describing "the charms of Lucy Tartan upon paper" (25). In sketching the group of "Apostles" that Pierre meets in the city, the narrator explicitly says that he learns from thinking about them. He says that he learns "the profoundest mysteries of things" from these "glorious paupers" because "their very existence in the midst of such a terrible precariousness of the commonest means of support, affords a problem on which many speculative nutcrackers have been vainly employed" (267-68). At other places in the narrative, the narrator writes specifically about his storytelling process. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, he indicates that he is pursuing truth by following Pierre down the "endless, winding way [into] the flowing river in the cave of man" in pursuit of truth (107). Elsewhere he calls attention to his writing process when he advises readers on following his back-and-forth narration: "This history goes forward and goes backward, as occasion calls. Nimble center, circumference elastic you must have" (54). The narrator's first reference to himself is an important indicator that he is not merely an

impersonal literary device, as it is about his very act of breathing. He asserts in Book I that people should not be impressed by aristocratic names because "the breath in all our lungs is hereditary, and my present breath at this moment, is further descended than the body of the present High Priest of the Jews, so far as he can assuredly trace it" (9). Another famous instance of the narrator's self-referential mode is when he declares, "I write precisely as I please" (244). By contrast, Pierre is so much an invented character on paper that even he sees his life as a text. The narrator tells the reader that Pierre as a boy thinks of his life as a "sweetly-writ manuscript" except for the omission of a sister (7). In these and other instances, the narrator continually draws the reader's attention back to himself as the consciousness who is shaping the fictional tale of Pierre.

Recognizing that the narrator is the shaping force in the text, the constructer of a self-conscious fiction, enables the reader to appreciate the novel's overwrought language and implausible characters as elements central to its purpose rather than as flaws. In Howard Faulkner's analysis of *Pierre*'s elaborate language, particularly its coining of new, more abstract words by appending multiple prefixes and suffixes to existing words ("perilousness," "impassionedments"), he explains that the language reflects Pierre's sense of "disorientation" and evokes that same sensation for the reader. The prose "destabilizes our sense of language" and "take[s] the reader to a different level of abstraction." For example, as the reader unpacks a word like "impassionedments" one syllable at a time, he or she must make a journey that

"replicates the journey Pierre makes from a simple unfortified passion to something unfamiliar, complex, temporal" (47). Faulkner's reading helps readers to see that the prose style of *Pierre* is a deliberate artistic strategy that has the effect of drawing attention to the story-world's status as a set of "natural facts" thinly veiling the spiritual facts that are the real significance of the story.[26]

This chapter does not claim that *Pierre*'s only genre identity lies in the Bildungsroman; rather, as many critics have pointed out, the novel bears traces of a wide variety of genres. Howard Faulkner lists the text's genres as "[g]othic, city-romance, domestic, journey of self-discovery, *ekphrastic* (portraits and pillars for statues are relevant symbols), epistolary (letters are sent, though often burned), philosophical, [and] autobiographical" (43). Dominic Mastroianni reads *Pierre* as a political allegory that conceptualizes how impossible it is for a revolution to found a "revolution-proof" democracy" (393). Carole Lynn Stewart reads *Pierre* as a sort of jeremiad in which Melville critiques Manifest Destiny and exposes American's conflict between having a conformist civil religion and embodying an ethos of democratic individualism. Elizabeth Dill reads *Pierre* as an American romance that is, in essence, an "anti-novel; its

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[26] Along similar lines, various critics have addressed the unreality of *Pierre*'s story-world. Michael Snediker discusses what he calls *Pierre*'s "figurative instability," that is, the text's use of unstable "figures" rather than of psychologically realistic people or characters. He argues that the narrator's use of a complex "pathetic fallacy in reverse," among other techniques, de-personifies the characters and the narrator (whom Snediker calls "author") and of the narrator himself (228). Samuel Otter interprets the narrator's treatment of the Saddle Meadows landscape as a device for showing the deforming effects of Pierre's inheritance. The novel as a whole is the anatomy of the tragic inheritance of which Pierre is a victim and a subtle indictment of the ideology that Americans used to justify their occupation of the American space: "it is an intimate, excessive portrayal of how the present is scored over and over with the lines of the past" (35).

“genre play” is “the literary expression of a nation that resists class hierarchy and stable social roles” (709). She sees its theme of incest as a sign of its “generic turbulence,” its partaking of elements drawn from more than one genre (712). Jennifer DiLalla Toner argues that *Pierre* critiques American life writing “from within the genre’s very structures and traditions” in an attempt to deconstruct the genre (255). Christopher Sten reads it as an example of an experimental new genre, the psychological novel. Anne Dalke, John Seelye, and Beverly Hume all consider the novel to be an attack on the female sentimental genre. Although each of these critics’ genre classifications has merits, none of them fully account for the narrator’s role in fictionalizing the text or for the text’s obvious artificiality.

Reading *Pierre* as a Bildungsroman draws attention to the question of what the text says about human identity and how it is formed, a question that has occupied other critics whose answers specifically involve nineteenth-century American identity. For example, Sacvan Bercovich sees the character Pierre as “an exemplary national figure,” the ideal American, with “his buoyant youthfulness, his fixation on the future, his vaunted independence, his effort simultaneously to reject and redeem the past, and above all his incredible faith in words”; yet he is “also the product of history” (123). Jeffory Clymer argues that in *Pierre,* Melville attempts to imagine identity outside the marketplace, but finds it impossible for a person to extricate him- or herself from “the turbulent world of property relations, exchange, and commodification,” even though

market relations wreak "horror" on the self (199). Wai Chee Dimock, conflating Melville, the narrator, and the character Pierre, reads *Pierre* as Melville's "narrative enactment" of his fantasy of originality, of "transcend[ing] kinship" (141). As Pierre wants to erase his genealogy and enjoy the utter individualism of orphanhood, Dimock assumes that Melville longs to do the same. Because the novel ends up being "a narrative of doom," though, it turns out that a person can victimize oneself in the very process of "making" oneself (145). She seems to assume that Pierre's story turned out tragic on accident when, in fact, the narrator clearly forecasts Pierre's doom from the beginning.[27] These critics focus their analyses of identity in *Pierre* on the fact of the novel's specific American context, which is significant but does not exhaustively explain how identity functions in the novel.

Although my study is the first to chart the development of the narrator-as-character, it is not the first to attend to the development (or disintegration) of Pierre the character. In Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker's study of *Pierre*'s composition history, they assert that in this novel Melville "analyze[d] the ways an explosive tragic revelation may impel an exceptional human being into sudden and ambiguous mental growth" (6). In a highly detailed analysis, William Dillingham interprets Pierre's development as occurring in three phases, defined by the operation of three drives within him: first, living in

[27] Dimock reads the characters in *Pierre* as "overdetermined victims": they are mere personifications of attributes (for the constitution of a self is merely the investment of attributes and narratives within a spatialized entity), and they are doomed by the narrator on the basis of the attributes they personify (154-55, 163).

Saddle Meadows, Pierre's three drives are latent so that he is internally harmonious; second, after reading Isabel's letter, he is jarred into the second, "Gnostic" phase, in which he believes he is operating with "singleness of purpose" (197); and third, after reading Plinlimmon's pamphlet, he is forced into the third phase, in which he is no longer certain that "his acts of renunciation have been divinely inspired" (208). In this third phase, Pierre "exists within a bog of deceptions" (209), and as he questions everything, his three drives "turn violently upon each other and in their chaotic warring finally create a fierce maelstrom" (198). In the end, "[i]ronically and terribly, Pierre feels these earth-shaking disturbances in his inner terrain, but he is never enough of a geologist of self to understand truly what is happening to him" (198). Although Dillingham traces Pierre's development, he does not believe Pierre ever achieves self-knowledge, and believes that is why Pierre perishes. As Dillingham puts it, Pierre's story demonstrates that self-knowledge is "the first principle of survival" (232).[28] These and other critics have considered how Pierre develops or disintegrates during the course of the novel, but no one has recognized that Pierre and his story are merely imagined by the narrator and then fully considered the implications of that fact.

[28] For more readings of Pierre's development, see G. Giovanni, Charles Moorman, H. Bruce Franklin, Warner Berthoff, Lawrance Thompson, and Milton R. Stern.

Views of Identity and of Development

Early in Book I, the narrator hints that in the pages to follow he will be tracing the development of his main character, Pierre. He suggests right away that Pierre's perception of Saddle Meadows will change as he grows: "[L]oftily, in the days of his circumscribed youth, did Pierre glance along the background of his race; little recking of that maturer and larger interior development, which should forever deprive these things of their full power of pride in his soul" (6).[29] As the story proceeds, the narrator expresses increasing faith that progress is possible for individuals and for the race as a whole, but he is also deeply aware of the complications that can delay progress, make it indetectible, or even prevent it altogether. He constructs several metaphors to describe—and thereby to understand—how the complex process of human development occurs. His use of metaphors to understand human development is significant given the fact that his story amounts to an Emersonian exercise in imagination. In Emerson's metaphysical system, natural facts are signs of spiritual or transcendent facts, and metaphors are concrete expressions of those nature-spirit correspondences.

In the narrator's first metaphor for human learning, he likens progress to an oddly static state—the state of being stationed on a border between a

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[29] The narrator explicitly says that Nature placed Pierre where it did because it intended a particular sort of development for him: "In the country then Nature planted our Pierre; because Nature intended a rare and original development in Pierre. Never mind if hereby she proved ambiguous to him in the end; nevertheless, in the beginning she did bravely" (13).

civilized and a barbaric land—and thereby suggests that progress toward truth is not a steady forward progression. He explains that a person can never get to the end of learning because "[e]ven … the most richly gifted mind" never arrives at "the Ultimate of Human Speculative Knowledge," because whenever he thinks he can rest in his current knowledge, "[s]udden onsets of new truth will assail him, and over-turn him as the Tartars did China; for there is no China Wall that man can build in his soul, which shall permanently stay the irruptions of those barbarous hordes which Truth ever nourishes in the loins of her frozen, yet teeming North." As a result, "the Empire of Human Knowledge can never be lasting in any one dynasty, since Truth still gives new Emperors to the earth" (166-7). This metaphor suggests that the individual in pursuit of truth never reaches an end point even if progress is made; more troublingly, whatever progress the individual does make is quickly overturned by the next generation.

In the narrator's second metaphor for human development, used in the context of describing Pierre's attempts to write a "mature work" while still in a state of immaturity, the narrator compares this maturing process to the excavation of a quarry. The person who wishes to be transformed from a mere stone into a temple (or put differently, to "dig … in one's soul for the fine gold of genius") must act as a quarry-miner and excavate the rubbish out of himself; then, if he ever hopes to reach the point of being fully transformed, he must go find chiseling tools and learn the art of architecture. He will have to be willing to labor for years, for "the quarry-discoverer is long before the stone-cutter; and

the stone-cutter is long before the architect; and the architect is long before the temple" (257). Persistence in the undertaking is particularly difficult because one's progress is not always evident, and even more discouraging, the actions necessary for progress may look like failure at the time. As all of one's rubbish is quarried and exposed to the world, it may seem that one can only produce rubbish. Even when the world at large receives a particular book or artwork as a treasure, the quarrier himself may very well regard it as still more rubbish. As the narrator puts it, "It is well enough known, that the best productions of the best human intellects, are generally regarded by those intellects as mere immature freshman exercises, wholly worthless in themselves, except as initiatives for entering the great University of God after death" (258). In this metaphor, the narrator shows greater hope for progress than in the first metaphor, but he also suggests that even at the end of the process, it is still difficult to know whether the person has made progress, or how much.

In his third metaphor, the narrator shows greater hope of progress than in the previous two metaphors, although he still sees the process as terrifying and painful. He characterizes the developing soul as being like a "soul-toddler" who is learning to walk alone by necessity and who falls down occasionally along the way. When the soul-toddler is first encouraged to walk, he "shrieks and implores, and will not try to stand at all, unless both father and mother uphold it; then a little more bold, it must, at least, feel one parental hand, else again the cry and the tremble; long time is it ere by degrees this child comes to

stand without any support" (296). The narrator explains that a man will come to a difficult hour "when first the help of humanity fails him, and he learns that in his obscurity and indigence humanity holds him a dog and no man." But the hardest hour of all is when he is abandoned by God as well, "when he learns that in his infinite comparative minuteness and abjectness, the gods do likewise despise him, and own him not of their clan." Now the soul-toddler, abandoned by both father (heaven) and earth (mother), will "shriek" and "wail," and will often fall (296). The narrator applies this metaphor to Pierre's experience as described thus far in the novel. As a late adolescent, when he received Isabel's letter, "Pierre had wavered and trembled in those first wretched hours" because "humanity [represented by his mother] had let go the hand of Pierre." When Pierre had become "at last inured to this," and "was seated at his book, willing that humanity should desert him, so long as he thought he felt a far higher support," then he began to feel "even the paternal gods themselves" deserting him. Now that he is living alone with Isabel in the city, struggling not only to survive but also to write a mature work amidst his immaturity, "the toddler was toddling entirely alone, and not without shrieks" (296). In this metaphor, growth is painful and scary because it requires breaking away from the comfort of authority and moving beyond one's passively received inheritance – in Pierre's case, his "circumscribed youth" (5-6).

The fourth and final metaphor through which the narrator conceptualizes how humans progress toward truth is that knowledge is gained

through a passive process of inspiration. In describing Pierre's decisive course of action in setting off for the city with Isabel and Delly in tow, sending only a brief letter to his cousin Glen by way of preparation, the narrator attributes Pierre's decisiveness to his having been given "inspiration." The narrator explains that some "naturally strong-minded men" can, in "great and sudden emergencies," have "call[ed] forth all their generous latentness," so that they are taught "as by inspiration, extraordinary maxims of conduct, whose counterpart, in other men, is only the result of a long, variously-tried and pains-taking life" (226). However, the reader must question the quality of the insight that can come through such an inspiration, for the maxim Pierre learns by "inspiration" will lead him to a foolish assumption. When he gets to the city, Glen shuts him out completely, and later conspires violence against him as a result of Pierre's breaking his engagement to Lucy. Thus, even in this fourth metaphor the narrator remains ambivalent about the consistency and steadiness with which humans can progress toward truth.

Although the narrator does repeatedly affirm his belief in the possibility of human progress, he is deeply aware of how fraught the process is with dangers and how likely it is to fail. He qualifies his belief in progress in at least four ways: he warns that there are limits to what people can learn, that no one is guaranteed to reach his full development no matter how promising his beginning, that a change is not necessarily progress, and finally, that a person can get lost while searching for truth. First, the narrator proposes that we can

only learn what we understood already. For example, in explaining why Pierre could not understand the pamphlet's central conceit, he writes that it is impossible for a man to comprehend something "wholly new" that is told to him. "[M]en are only made to comprehend things which they comprehended before (though but in the embryo, as it were)." They may later come to comprehend the thing by "inhal[ing] this new idea from the circumambient air" (209-10). In his second qualifier, the narrator suggests that no matter how promising one's origins, one is not guaranteed to become a great edifice. In Book One, already foreshadowing Pierre's doom, the narrator writes that this scion of the Glendinning family is, in his youth, "unadmonished … by that foreboding and prophetic lesson taught, not less by Palmyra's quarries, than by Palmyra's ruins." In the ruins of Palmyra lies "a crumbling, uncompleted shaft," and in the nearby quarry, "is the crumbling corresponding capital, also incomplete," and abandoned ages before. Time had spoiled the proud stones before ever they could become a pillar reaching the heavens (8). The narrator's third qualifier is a warning that a person might appear different over time not because he has grown but because he is being viewed from a different angle, like the moon in a different phase. Again comparing Pierre to a stone monument, the narrator develops a metaphor of a statue on a revolving pedestal, so that the viewer is continually shown a new perspective. "[S]o," he writes, "does the pivoted, statued soul of man, when turned by the hand of Truth." Only lies never vary; thus Pierre's aspect will vary (337). Finally, the

narrator qualifies his faith in human progress by warning that a bold seeker of truth can get lost if he or she wanders forever in a certain region of thought where "the most immemorially admitted maxims of men begin to slide and fluctuate, and finally become wholly inverted." A person must not remain in this mysterious region for too long, says the narrator; "it is not for man to follow the trail of truth too far, since by so doing he entirely loses the directing compass of his mind; for arrived at the Pole, to whose barrenness only it points, there, the needle indifferently respects all points of the horizon alike" (165). All of these qualifiers, together with the qualified nature of the metaphors discussed above, contribute to the reader's sense of how the narrator's understanding of human development is growing profounder and more complex as his story of Pierre progresses. The narrator's maturation is evident in the changing nature of his discussions of human development.

As previously discussed, the narrator pursues his own growth through the imaginative activity by which he constructs a portrait self, the fictional Pierre. He imagines a protagonist with the same goal as himself, to construct an identity of integrity wherein ideals and actions are aligned. However, he meets with greater success than Pierre does because his use of imagination is active rather than passive. The narrator uses his imagination in a way that is self-critical, reflective, aware of potential errors, and objective (meaning he has a view to understanding external reality, not just himself); by contrast, the

fictional Pierre uses imagination passively and subjectively. Therefore, Pierre is enslaved by imagination, while the narrator is empowered by his.[30]

The narrator's active and objective use of imagination during the construction of the text of *Pierre* corresponds to Emerson's view of how this faculty operates. For Emerson, as previously described, imagination is "the use which the Reason makes of the material world" (146). In short, the senses absorb information about Nature and the Reason organizes and finds meaning in that information. The imagination is the faculty responsible for, among other things, enabling a person to "read" Nature; that is, to find correspondences between the natural facts that are empirically experienced and the spiritual facts that they signify. When the imagination is used in this way, as a means of learning transcendent truth, it is powerful tool for self-education. Indeed, this is the very mode of education through which the narrator-protagonist of *Pierre* is formed. He imagines a story-world that is entirely an emanation from his subconscious mind, and in this imaginary "Nature" he can clothe half-apprehended spiritual intuitions in concrete form.

[30] The faculty of imagination has always been variously defined; definitions conflict over the question of whether the ideas and images formed in the imagination correspond to any external reality, or are simply subjective inventions of the imaginer. If the images correspond to external reality, however unavailable to the senses, then the imagination can be conceived as a route to objective truth, a means of knowing the invisible. If not, then the faculty can be very dangerous, giving the imagining mind the illusion that what it imagines constitutes actual knowledge. The Romantics considered the faculty of imagination as a crucial, even preeminent, mental faculty. For Coleridge, Imagination is superior to Fancy due to its power to fuse disparate elements into a whole new product that is more than the sum of its parts.

By contrast, the character whom the narrator invents, Pierre, uses imagination in a passive and subjective way that is ultimately destructive—and this is why his developmental process fails. Again and again the narrator uses metaphors that characterize Pierre's thought processes as passive: gliding, sliding, indulging in reverie, conducting electricity, listening, and flowing like a river. For example, the narrator describes Pierre's youth, spent learning the manners and religion suitable to an American aristocrat, as a "glid[ing] toward maturity" (6). Similarly, Pierre's thought processes leading him to his taking on his family identity consist not in analyzing and weighing information but rather of an "insensible sliding process" (7); he acquires his religious beliefs, too, through inheritance that traces back to his English ancestors (13). When the apparition of Isabel's face occurs to him, the narrator characterizes this thought as "sliding" in and out of Pierre's conscious thought. When Pierre tries to escape thoughts of her, the "foetal fancy beckoned him" down into "infernal catacombs of thought" (50-51). Pierre is also prone to reveries, particularly when he sits in front of his father's secret portrait; in these reveries, says the narrator, Pierre was "unconsciously throwing himself open to all those ineffable hints and ambiguities, and undefined half-suggestions, which now and then people the soul's atmosphere, as thickly as in a soft, steady snow-storm, the snow-flakes people the air" (84). This state of mind contrasts with the one he would later force upon himself in order to escape his reveries, namely, "consciously bidden and self-propelled thought" (84). Pierre's reveries can

engross him so completely in his abstractions that he becomes unconscious of the physical world. The narrator describes one instance as follows: "On all sides, the physical world of solid objects now slidingly displaced itself from around him, and he floated into an ether of visions" (85). Electricity is another metaphor that describes Pierre's thought processes; for instance, after reading Isabel's letter, he is merely the conduit to thoughts of woe. Sometimes Pierre, through totally receptive listening, simply takes his thoughts and conclusions directly from another person. Listening to Isabel's story, he "sit[s] passively and receive[s] its marvelous droppings into his soul, however long the pauses" (119). Finally, the thought-river is another metaphor with which the narrator describes Pierre's passive mode of thought. The narrator likens Pierre's thought processes to a stream, a "thoughtful river" flowing through his soul, but one that keeps floating to him ever more mysteriousness, and "certainty that the mysteriousness was unchangeable" (141). These metaphors contribute to the reader's impression that Pierre is in thrall to ideas. Even though he may seem to have agency (the power to do what he chooses to do) and to merely be lacking in the right idea of what to do, in fact, the very lack of ideas is what compromises his agency. As the narrator puts it at one point, Fixed Fate and Free Will argue him, rather than the other way around (182).

Pierre's passivity is attributable to the fact that his identity is utterly entwined with his inheritance; by turns, Pierre is unwittingly bound by it, assumes he is bound by it, and tries to insist upon its continuance. From the

beginning, it is clear that he feels pride in his origins. The narrator describes Pierre's "fond ideality" in hallowing the country around him, which has long been possessed by his family (8). Saddle Meadows is full of proud associations for Pierre because his grandfather and great-grandfather had both won great battles nearby (5). Moreover, Pierre uses inherited possessions, including his grandfather's phaeton, which is pulled by the descendants of his grandfather's steeds (32), as well as his grandfather's camp-bed. Little does he realize that his quixotic crusade for Isabel is rooted at least partially in his martial family inheritance (20).[31] A preeminent motive for Pierre in helping Isabel and keeping her relation to him a secret is that he wants no one to know that he sprang from a "vile" source (178). Moreover, it is precisely because he sees inheritance as a right that it seems so egregious to him that Isabel has (he thinks) been denied her inheritance (174), and so agonizing to him when Glen Stanly is given his, Pierre's, inheritance (287). Even when Pierre leaves Saddle Meadows and burns his mementoes, he does so in order to preserve them in his memory, where they cannot decay (197-98). Later, in the city, the former Church of the Apostles where he chooses to set up house is an emblem of the inevitability of inheritance. It is a church that has been converted to offices and apartments

[31] The narrator specifically links Pierre's use of the camp-bed to his martial inheritance, which is out of place in the present age. The narrator says that Pierre must feel humbled every time he goes to bed by the thought that "thy most extended length measures not the proud six feet four of thy grand John of Gaunt sire! The stature of the warrior is cut down to the dwindled glory of the fight" (271). This passage exemplifies the tension in which Pierre is caught between the inherited elements of his identity and his need to construct an authentic, original identity.

without losing its original form and its sense of sacredness. When he begins to feel himself going mad, he assumes that he is doomed to madness because it runs in his family (287). Ultimately, because Pierre is so irrevocably bound to his inheritance without even realizing it, his desire to cast off the past proves to be both absurd and dangerous. He cannot be the protagonist of an American Bildungsroman because he is not self-aware about the complexity of his relationship to his own personal, familial, and national past.

The Narrator's Developmental Process

The development of the *Pierre* narrator can, like that of the *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick* narrators, be traced through his changing depictions of states of tranquility and a lack of sensory information. Such silences, reveries, and reposes function in the terrestrial novel *Pierre* in the way that calms at sea function in *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*. The novel, like *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick,* opens in a calm, a suspension of life; but unlike in Melville's first two Bildungsromane, this calm is a state of comfortable repose, a midpoint in the progress of the universe. Though this initial repose is comfortable for the character Pierre, the narrator embeds ominous hints of the dark fate that lies ahead for the character. In the next phase of the narrator's development, he imagines Pierre experiencing silence as a space for reflection, reverie, and passive wandering of thoughts; however, he shows a lack of information keeping Pierre's contemplations from leading reliably to knowledge. Finally, at the end of

Pierre's story, the narrator associates silence with the Truth beyond human comprehension. It is figured as the voice of God and as an emblem of the void out of which God created the world. Pierre gradually comes to perceive the silence and its profundity, but never with the circumspection that the narrator has. Through these changing depictions of Pierre's experience of silence, the narrator-protagonist is learning from his protagonist's mistakes, faulty assumptions, and irrational decisions.

At the beginning of the story, when Pierre is enjoying his idyllic youth in the country of Saddle Meadows, silent calms signify a sort of comfortable repose with the promise of a great future. The first chapter opens during one of those "strange summer mornings in the country," when visitors from the city are "wonder-smitten with the trance-like aspect of the green and golden world" (3). Flowers, trees, and grass are utterly still, as though their growth is temporarily suspended, "and all Nature, as if suddenly become conscious of her own profound mystery, and feeling no refuge from it but silence, sinks into this wonderful and indescribable repose" (3). Nature's comfortable repose mirrors that of Pierre, the coddled scion of an illustrious family of the American aristocracy. As Pierre embarks on a phaeton ride with his fiancée Lucy, the narrator muses on how this calm summer morning represents the culmination of nature's progressive evolution: "The first worlds made were winter worlds; the second made, were vernal worlds; the third, and last, and perfectest, was this summer world of ours." The world also holds the hope of more progress.

He exults that, "We lived before, and shall live again; and as we hope for a fairer world than this to come; so we came from one less fine. From each successive world, the demon Principle is more and more dislodged" (32). Yet even in this peaceful moment, Pierre has an ominous feeling; when he and Lucy begin to discuss the apparition of a face that Pierre has been seeing, he admits, "I can not think, that in this most mild and dulcet air, the invisible agencies are plotting treasons against our loves" (37). Even Pierre can sense that this idyllic-seeming environment offers only the illusion of permanent, perfect happiness.

Through the middle section of the novel, the narrator imagines calms and silences functioning for Pierre as times of reflection that hold the possibility of transcendence. However, the narrator recognizes that Pierre is making cognitive errors during these times of reflection. In Book III, after Pierre receives and reads Isabel's first letter, he escapes into the silent night because "only in the infinite air" could be "found scope for that boundless expansion of his life" (66). Another instance of silence giving Pierre the space to think—this time thoughts that are more obviously misguided—is when he contemplates his father's portrait. Pierre's physiognomic errors take place in such reveries. The narrator says that Pierre would often stare at the portrait, "unconsciously throwing himself open to all those ineffable hints and ambiguities, and undefined half-suggestions, which now and then people the soul's atmosphere" (84). He thinks he is floating toward apprehension of transcendent truth, and he thinks that Isabel's letter "rip[s] open" all the "preceding ambiguities" and the

"mysteries" that had occurred to him during his reveries in front of his father's portrait (85). The narrator knows, and wants the reader to recognize, that Pierre is mistaken in his conclusions.

During this stage in the novel, Pierre's meetings with Isabel are marked by frequent silences, in which he longs to hear Truth—and sometimes, thinks he is hearing truth—but which remain silences to him. The narrator begins to associate Isabel with silence in Pierre's mind on the way to his first interview with Isabel. As the young man walks along, he pauses to gaze at the Saddle Meadows landscape and sees that "the lake lay in one sheet of blankness and of dumbness, unstirred by breeze or breath." The surface of the water reflects the "stirless sky above" and the "imaged muteness of the unfeatured heavens" (109). Pierre longs to read Truth in this landscape, as he had attempted to do in his father's portrait, but the silent scene is blank to him. It is like the undifferentiated calm at sea that drives the *Mardi* narrator "madly skeptical" (9). Each of Pierre's conversations with Isabel is punctuated by frequent silences, in which Pierre is weighed down by the perceived immensity and transcendence of Isabel's presence (127, 162). For example, in the scene where Pierre tells Isabel his plan for posing as her husband, the narrator uses silence to give one of his most obvious hints that Pierre and Isabel have an incestuous relationship. He says that after Pierre tells Isabel the plan, the two of them "entangledly stood mute" (192). For all the ambiguity of these silences, the reader cannot help but

notice that, in many of these silences, Pierre is more confident than he ought to be that he is hearing a voice of truth out of the silence.

Throughout the latter portion of the novel, from the time Pierre departs Saddle Meadows to the bloody conclusion in the city, the narrator repeatedly invokes silence as an image for the Truth that humans cannot hear. Book XIV, which describes Pierre's journey to the city, opens with a meditation in which the narrator defines silence as the only voice of God. He writes that silence both precedes and attends "[a]ll profound things, and emotions of things," and that "[s]ilence is the general consecration of the universe." It is "at once the most harmless and the most awful thing in all nature. It speaks of the Reserved Forces of Fate." The narrator says that silence is like the air in that it "permeates all things, and produces its magical power, as well during that peculiar mood which prevails at a solitary traveler's first setting forth on a journey, as at the unimaginable time when before the world was, Silence brooded on the face of the waters" (204). Here the narrator suggests that, in the silence that surrounds Pierre as he leaves Saddle Meadows, there is a Voice of Truth that Pierre cannot hear, even though he is vaguely sensible of it. His state here recalls a calm at sea: he is sitting in silence, in a coach driving through "an almost unplowed and uninhabited region," with his fellow-passengers asleep. Like Taji, Pierre feels a desperate need to escape the calm; his thoughts are "very dark and wild," and there is "rebellion and horrid anarchy and infidelity in his soul" (205). He thinks about how he feels utterly unmoored from the Church and the Devil and

the Holy Bible. It is amidst these feelings that he picks up Plotinus Plinlimmon's pamphlet and begins to read it, "more to force his mind away from the dark realities of things than from any other motive" (207). He hopes by reading to hear a voice of truth out of the silence. The narrator goes on to reflect that many "impostor philosophers" have pretended to hear the voice of God out of the silence but have been exposed as fraudulent or self-deluded. He mentions a wide range of philosophers, from British empiricists to Scottish Commonsense philosophers to German idealists, that he sees as imposters, thus leading his reader to wonder whether he is criticizing the entire enterprise of philosophy. But buried within this passage is a hint that, in fact, not all philosophers are impostors, and that through the occasional miracle, a man can hear God's voice from the silence: the narrator says that philosophers' attempts to hear the voice of God is "as absurd, as though they should say they had got water out of stone" (208). Getting water out of a stone may be impossible in ordinary circumstances, but it was not found impossible by Moses when he struck the stone in the wilderness to get water for his people. Under the doctrine of miracles, water can come out of a stone and the voice of God can come out of the silence. Whether Pierre ever hears such a voice is never made fully clear by the text, but the narrator's awareness of the voice in the silence suggests that, in some mysterious and unarticulable way, he does.

In the final, city section of the story, Pierre becomes aware of silence as the voice of God, but the realization only contributes to his perplexity because

he cannot make out what the voice is saying. Pierre's conversations with Isabel continue to be marked by silences, as they had been at Saddle Meadows, except that now silence signifies perplexity rather than a sense of awed, albeit mistaken, transcendence. Now when silence falls between Pierre and Isabel, it is because Pierre is pondering a question that he knows he cannot answer unless there comes a miraculous Voice out of the silence like water out of a stone. In one particularly intense conversation between Pierre and Isabel, where the narrator comes the closest to telling the reader that Pierre and Isabel have an incestuous relationship, Pierre bemoans the difficulty of knowing what is right or wrong. He says that the gods are "dumb" on the point of what Virtue is, and for that reason, perhaps Virtue and Vice are the same thing—two shadows cast by the same substance. Because of the two characters' obvious erotic passion for each other, the conversation seems to be about the specific moral question of why incest is seen as wrong. Is its repugnance inherent and dictated by the gods, or is people's disgust at it socially conditioned? In other words, what exactly is constraining Pierre from giving Isabel the erotic love he wants to give her, God or his fellow man? Before this question can be answered—or rather, because it cannot—the conversation devolves into silence: "And so, on the third night, when the twilight was gone, and no lamp was lit, within the lofty window of that beggarly room, sat Pierre and Isabel hushed" (274). Silence has become Pierre's response to the irresolvable mysteries pervading his life.

Yet Pierre is also struggling to speak. He will take on the project of "gospeliz[ing] the world anew, and show[ing] them [his fellow human beings] deeper secrets than the Apocalypse!" (273), and he will do so in a silent room. Pierre conceives the project during the conversation with Isabel just described, when he tells her that he "catch[es] glimpses, and seem[s] to half-see, somehow, that the uttermost ideal of moral perfection in man is wide of the mark." This is when he determines to write what the narrator will later call his "mature work" (282). The narrator describes Pierre's hours and hours of tedious labor in a cold room, his scratching pen the only sound punctuating the silence. The narrator does not say explicitly whether Pierre ever hears God's voice out of the silence, but he does tell us that Pierre grows more profound through the writing of his book.[32] As in *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick,* silence provides space where a person can enter the abstracted state where creation is possible. In *Mardi,* this sort of creation-in-silence held out to the protagonist a promise of a whole new world in the making. In *Moby-Dick,* Ishmael's memories of silence on the *Pequod* mark his key moments of insight into the very structure of reality. In *Pierre,* silences

[32]In the pages preceding Pierre's embarking on his writing, the narrator establishes several layers of silence around his work. First, when he arrives in the silent city by night, he explains to Lucy why the city is so unnaturally silent, more silent than the forests back home: "Because brick and mortar have deeper secrets than wood or fell" (231). Next, the place where Pierre chooses to settle, the "Apostles'," is "at all times a rather secluded and silent place." Walking through it on a Sunday "was like walking through an avenue of sphinxes" (269). Then, while he works, he does not allow Isabel or Delly to speak to or disturb him: "Sometimes the intent ear of Isabel in the next room, overhears the alternate silence, and then the long lonely scratch of his pen," which reminders her of "the busy claw of some midnight mole in the ground." The narrator comments, "Here surely is a wonderful stillness of eight hours and a half, repeated day after day. In the heart of such silence, surely something is at work. Is it creation, or destruction? Builds Pierre the noble world of a new book? or does the Pale Haggardness unbuild the lungs and the life in him?—Unutterable, that a man should be thus!" (304).

have a less consistent and defined function. But whether or not the character Pierre is truly transforming himself into a temple in this silence—rather than just digging up more and more waste—the narrator-protagonist himself is being transformed by imagining Pierre's experience in the silence.

As Pierre begins to realize the true irrevocability of what he has done and the deadly encounter with Glen Stanly approaches, he sinks into a silence that signifies his mental and spiritual upheaval. In silence Pierre stands at the picture gallery where he, Lucy, and Isabel see the European portrait that looks to Isabel like her father and to Pierre like his father's portrait, and in silence he walks along the street after they leave the gallery. The narrator writes that Pierre's mind revolved with "wild thoughts" about the possibility that Isabel is not his sister, "the most tremendous displacing and revolutionizing thoughts" (353). Pierre remains in his silent reverie for much of the short remainder of his life; it is that night that he kills Glen Stanly in the street, is put in prison, and commits suicide. Even though, by the end of his life, Pierre begins to apprehend the profound potential of silence for revealing God's voice or making possible new creation, he does not finally realize any of these possibilities in the silences he experiences. He murders his cousin and himself, rather than completing the composition of his new gospel. Creation is left to his creator, the narrator, because it is the narrator who is the hero of this Bildungsroman.

Outcomes of the Developmental Process

The narrator-protagonist of *Pierre*, like the protagonists who narrate *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*, is developing before the reader's eyes in the very process of his narration. The key moments of development for Melville's three protagonists are associated with the three categories of development-trigger discussed at length in previous chapters: encounters with authorities, encounters with the unknown, and evidence of the social contract(s) binding together groups of human beings. These are the same kinds of development-triggers that shape the protagonists of the European Bildungsromane by Rabelais, Sterne, Goethe, Carlyle, and Dickens that Melville read. Pierre encounters each of these development-triggers without necessarily growing from the experience, but, significantly, Pierre's direct but non-formative encounters are the vicarious but formative encounters for the narrator-protagonist. The narrator who invents Pierre to aid in his own development learns about himself and the world through his vicarious encounters with authorities, the unknown, and evidence of social contracts.

Encounters with Authorities

The narrator's encounters with authorities occur as he imagines his portrait self, Pierre, encountering authorities in the fictional story-world that he, the narrator, has created. Because these encounters are entirely mediated by his imagination, even in the encounters with "real" authorities like Kant and

Goethe, he has control of how each authority is represented. This fact raises the question of how much the narrator-protagonist is really encountering authorities during the course of his formation process. I argue that the narrator is changed by these mediated encounters with authorities precisely because Pierre encounters authorities in the same mediated way and meets with disastrous results. The narrator is thus forced to recognize the limitations of his approach. Through the narrator's invention of Pierre's story, he learns the dangers of being stuck in one's own subjectivity without realizing it.

At the beginning of his story, Pierre is under the authority of his family, as represented most immediately in his mother. His father is long dead but remains a presence in his life, a model to be emulated. Pierre is highly conscious of his status as the scion of the Glendinning family and, as a "docile" youth (to use his mother's word), he is untroubled by the fact that his identity is defined by his family and by the need to meet the expectations of his elders. The Glendinning legacy represents the whole of the influences shaping Pierre; his mother realizes approvingly that he is docile because he has never been to college (19). However, Pierre's view of authority is suddenly overturned by the contents of Isabel's letter. As a result of reading this document, which suggests that his father had had an illegitimate child, Pierre rejects the authority of both of his parents and sets off on an uneven path toward what he believes is his own maturation. Losing both of his governors, his father's memory and his mother, Pierre suddenly feels like an orphan. He compares himself to an "infant

Ishmael with “no maternal Hagar to accompany and comfort him” (89). He feels that “deep in him lurked a divine unidentifiableness, that owned no earthly kith or kin” (89). He says that his tears, “could I weep them,—must now be wept in the desolate places; now to me is it, as though both father and mother had gone on distant voyages, and, returning, died in unknown seas” (90). Another authority, Mr. Falsgrave, is a dubious scholar whose financial dependence on people like Mrs. Glendinning compromises his ability to read situations truly and interpret Biblical passages wisely and charitably. Throughout the rest of the story, Pierre encounters a series of potential authorities—the Memnon Stone, Dante, and philosophers such as Plotinus Plinlimmon—but none of these ultimately fills the authority-void left by the loss of his parents. This is not so much because the authorities are flawed as it is because Pierre fails to get outside himself and really hear what each authority has to teach him. The narrator does not affirm the conclusions that Pierre draws about his parents (his father may not have had the affair, and his mother if given all the information may not have reacted as Pierre assumes she will), nor does the narrator affirm Pierre’s readings of the authorities he encounters later (the Memnon Stone, Dante, and Plinlimmon). Because Pierre has conflated each of his parents with a transcendent entity—his father with God and his mother with the natural world—his loss is particularly devastating. Pierre is an orphaned soul-toddler because in losing his father and mother as reliable

authorities, he loses all hope of finding a reliable authority. He is the inverse of a Bildungsroman protagonist for this reason.

After Pierre's rejection of his parents, which is the irrevocable turning point in his relationship to all authority, the first authority he encounters—and mis-reads—is the Memnon Stone. This enormous boulder, deep in the woods of Saddle Meadows, balances precariously and mysteriously on an unseen ridge below so that the whole enormous rock touches the "the wide terraqueous world" at only "one obscure and minute point of contact" (132). Pierre often thought deep thoughts on his visits to the Memnon Stone, and thought about crawling into the vacancy beneath it, though he never actually dared to. However, after speaking with Isabel, Pierre goes to visit the stone, advances purposefully toward it and slides himself "straight into the horrible interspace [between the earth and the bottom of the rock], and lay there as dead" (134). He finally makes a pronouncement in which he believes himself to be offering the Stone the chance to be the authority over him, asking the Memnon Stone to crush him if there is no just Power ruling all.

> [I]f to vow myself all Virtue's and all Truth's, be but to make a trembling, distrusted slave of me; if Life is to prove a burden I can not bear without ignominious cringings; if indeed our actions are all fore-ordained, and we are Russian serfs to Fate; if invisible devils do titter at us when we most nobly strive; if Life be a cheating dream, and virtue as unmeaning and unsequeled with any blessing as the midnight mirth of wine; if by sacrificing myself for Duty's sake, my own mother re-sacrifices me; if Duty's self be but a bugbear, and all things are allowable and unpunishable to man;—then do thou, Mute Massiveness, fall on me!" (134)

When the stone does not respond, Pierre feels victorious, as though he has proven to himself that he is his own sole authority. Pierre's challenge to the Memnon Stone is irrational, though. For one thing, the Memnon Stone's silent response could just as easily mean that Pierre has no authority over anyone or anything. For another thing, Pierre's attribution of authority to the Memnon Stone is logically inconsistent. If all the conditions that Pierre has listed are true—the "invisible devils," empty duties, and all—then everything is meaningless, and the stone would topple only by chance, not to prove a point to him. It is as though Pierre said, "If there is no God, he should strike me down right now." Yet Pierre is proud of his action, which he perceives as bold and courageous, and after he crawls out from under the stone, he "stood haughtily upon his feet, as he owed thanks to none, and went his moody way" (135). This episode encapsulates Pierre's attitude toward authority at this point in his development. He is so blinded by his sense of soul-orphanhood—which is largely in his own mind—that he is predisposed to set every authority up to fail him and thereby leave him free to do as he wishes.

A second authority whom Pierre mis-reads and rejects is Dante. When Pierre first read Dante early in life, the narrator informs us, Pierre had a "rash," "untutored," and "ignorant burst" of "young impatience" toward the poet because he had "not seen so far and deep as Dante, and therefore was entirely incompetent to meet the grim bard fairly on his peculiar ground." Pierre's impatience arose in part "from that half contemptuous dislike, and sometimes

selfish loathing, with which, either naturally feeble or undeveloped minds, regard those dark ravings of the loftier poets, which are in eternal opposition to their own fine-spun, shallow dreams of rapturous or prudential Youth" (54). Here the narrator draws attention to the characteristics of Pierre's youthful, uneducated attitudes—to what he has not yet learned. Pierre initially rejects Dante out of his own ignorance, but ironically, when he picks up Dante after reading Isabel's letter and is powerfully affected by the book (made "fierce"), he is still misreading Dante.[33] The narrator explains the nature of Pierre's mis-reading by using the metaphor of an explorer in a mountainous landscape. Such an explorer can only see both the depths and the heights of the landscape if he is himself either in the depths or the heights. If he is standing midway in the gulf, he will be able to see neither the heights nor the depths: "[W]hen only midway down the gulf, its crags wholly conceal the upper vaults, and the wanderer thinks it all one gulf of downward dark" (169-70). The narrator explains why reading Dante (as well as *Hamlet*) makes Pierre even more miserable by saying that "Dante had made him fierce, and Hamlet had insinuated that there was none to strike" (170). Pierre thinks that he

[33] Pierre commits a similar mis-reading of *Hamlet*. From reading this play alongside Dante, Pierre concludes that "all meditation is worthless, unless it prompt to action […] in the earliest instant of conviction, the roused man must strike, and, if possible, with the precision and the force of the lightening-bolt" (169). In reading, Pierre loses his sense of Hamlet's fictionality. "He knew not—at least, felt not—then, that Hamlet, though a thing of life, was, after all, but a thing of breath, evoked by the wanton magic of a creative hand, and as wantonly dismissed at last into endless halls of hell and night" (169).

understands what he is reading and that he is applying it soundly to his own situation, but the narrator recognizes Pierre's errors.

A third authority whom Pierre encounters, and endorses precisely because he helps to justify Pierre's rejection of authority, is the philosopher Plotinus Plinlimmon. Pierre finds by chance Plinlimmon's pamphlet "Chronometricals and Horologicals" on the coach ride from Saddle Meadows to the city, and he reads it to pass the time on the journey. In the lecture, Plinlimmon distinguishes between two different types of people, the "Chronometers" who are in tune with heaven, and the "Horologues" who are in tune with themselves, or with earth. Christ was an example of the first, and most humans are examples of the second—hence, the widespread rejection of Christ's teachings, because they conflict with horologes. Plinlimmon proceeds to a surprising conclusion: that humans should not try to be chronometers in tune with heaven, but rather should be content to be terrestrial horologes. Plinlimmon charges that not just anyone is worthy to try to live out the loftiest ideals. He who has a "chronometrical soul," and thus tries "to force that heavenly time upon the earth" is doomed never to have "an absolute and essential success." He will only turn others against him "and thereby work himself woe and death." Christ's life is evidence of this—and Christ, unlike any "inferior being," was able to keep heavenly time while remaining "entirely without folly or sin." Other people who try "to live in this world according to the strict letter of the chronometricals" are prone to "strange, *unique* follies and

sins, unimagined before." Plinlimmon clarifies that this view does not justify wickedness, but it does establish that "for the mass of men, the highest abstract heavenly righteousness is not only impossible, but would be entirely out of place, and positively wrong in a world like this" (213).[34]

The reader cannot help but suspect that Pierre is drawn to Plinlimmon as an authority merely because the philosopher's views can be used to justify a resistance to authority and a renouncing of other people's claims upon him. Plinlimmon seems "to have no family or blood ties of any sort," was never "known to work with his hands," including writing, and was never "known to open a book" (290). Plinlimmon reinforces others' distance from himself by refusing to respond to them. The narrator implies that Plinlimmon's independent self-containedness is a matter of deliberate choice and a rejection of the idea that he could have any obligations to his fellow human beings. Moreover, Plinlimmon's followers, the Apostles, are committed to overthrowing the church and the state. As the narrator describes this group of ambiguous

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[34] The ambiguity of the pamphlet—and of Melville's and/or the narrator's stance toward it—has been a source of controversy among critics. Those who see Melville/the narrator as endorsing Plinlimmon's philosophy believe the pamphlet describes a wisely pragmatic approach to life, while those who believe that Melville/the narrator satirically undermines the pamphlet think that Plinlimmon is he one of those "impostor" philosophers who claims to hear the voice of God out of the Silence. When the narrator inserts the text of the pamphlet into his narrative, he prefaces it with an opaque disclaimer. He comments that the lecture "seems to me a very fanciful and mystical, rather than philosophical Lecture, from which, I confess, that I myself can derive no conclusion which permanently satisfies those peculiar motions in my soul, to which that Lecture seems more particularly addressed." He says that, for him, the pamphlet is "more the excellently illustrated re-statement of a problem, than the solution of the problem itself. But as such mere illustrations are almost universally taken for solutions (and perhaps they are the only possible human solutions), therefore it may help to the temporary quiet of some inquiring mind; and so not be wholly without use. At the worst, each person can now skip, or read and rail for himself" (210).

revolutionaries, they are a group of young men who live in the former Church of the Apostles, "mostly artists of various sorts; painters, or sculptors, or indigent students, or teachers of languages, or poets, or fugitive French politicians, or German philosophers." They are transcendental in orientation, with "mental tendencies" that are "fine and spiritual," yet they are "secretly suspected to have some mysterious ulterior object, vaguely connected with the absolute overturning of Church and State, and the hasty and premature advance of some unknown great political and religious Millennium" (269). Given Pierre's situation, it makes sense that he is drawn to a philosopher whose ideas help him to justify to himself his anti-authoritarian actions.

The narrator of *Pierre* depicts his main character as being caught in the tension between inheritance and invention as he struggles to construct his identity; he longs to wholly invent his identity even as he is bound to inheritance far more deeply than he realizes. Pierre's ambivalence toward authorities and his irrational responses to them signify his inability to work out the proper balance between inheritance and invention in his identity formation. In his eagerness to invent his identity absolutely, he tries to cast off the authorities of his past. In doing so, however, he only constrains his own identity and contributes to his own collapse. In a Bildungsroman, the hero can only progress by acknowledging, understanding, and accepting the past that formed him.

Encounters with the Unknown

Because the entire text of *Pierre* is the product of the narrator-protagonist's imagination, his encounters with the unknown occur when he reaches the limits of his imagination, when he is unable to invent an aspect of the story-world and so leaves it ambiguous. Ultimately, he discovers the limits of human knowledge to be at the limits of human imagination. The greatest unknown that the narrator encounters in his project is the subject at the forefront of his attention, Pierre himself. Throughout the novel, the narrator struggles to describe Pierre's convoluted and erroneous cognitive processes in an attempt to anatomize destructive thought patterns and thereby understand his portrait self's actions. For example, the narrator notices over and over Pierre's irrational habit of mistaking an emotional reaction for empirical evidence (67). He often pauses during his narration to reflect upon how difficult it is to fathom the "subtle causations" within any person's thoughts, feelings, and motives (67). Even though the narrator has himself invented the character of Pierre—and done so in order to better understand bad thinking in general and tragic idealism in particular—even he cannot fully understand what Pierre thinks and feels, and why. Moreover, he struggles with his own dueling impulses; he wants simultaneously to protect Pierre by concealing some unflattering truth about him (for example, the hint that Pierre would not be so eager to save Isabel if she were ugly), and to reveal all Pierre's inner depths. He writes at one point, "Be naught concealed in this book of sacred truth" (107).

The human mind, particularly how its trains of thought lead to actions, is a mystery he longs to disentangle.

The narrator comes to suspect, though, that a man's identity might be so complex as to be untraceable. He wonders whether self-knowledge is no more than a recognition that our thoughts and acts do not originate in a cohesive, unified core self. In Book X, he points out that people's final thoughts and acts stem from such varied influences that "surely no mere mortal who has ever gone down into himself will ever pretend that his slightest thought or act solely originates in his own defined identity" (176-7). Later, he suggests that going deep into the heart of a man is like descending on a spiral staircase into a dark shaft (288-89). Yet the narrator is continually drawn into the darkness of Pierre because he longs to understand how people become who they become and what the difference is between the virtuous and the evil person or action.

Pierre is drawn to Isabel for the same reason that the narrator is drawn to Pierre: each one hopes that this unknown human being will enable him to solve the mystery of his own self. Isabel is consistently characterized as a great mystery to Pierre, the apparition of whose face, which appears to him for several weeks before their first meeting, seems to transcend human experience. It is "[i]n natural guise, but lit by supernatural light; palpable to the senses, but inscrutable to the soul" (49). The real face of Isabel, once they have met, so draws Pierre that he sees it as "bewilderingly alluring" (107). She causes him "nameless wonderings" (118), and her guitar playing remains a marvel to him

throughout, with its "wondrous suggestiveness" inspiring him as he tries to write his mature work (282).[35] To Pierre, Isabel is the "[a]pex of all wonders" (49). But it is not her face per se that elicits this reaction from him; it is rather the thoughts and intuitions that the face inspires in him. The narrator explains that Pierre's fascination is not so much "embodied" in the girl herself, as it is evoked "by some radiations from her, embodied in the vague conceits which agitated his own soul" (51-2). Pierre's obsession with the face—his readiness to invest it with transcendental significance and his willingness to pursue the solution to the mystery at great personal cost—is evidence, according to the narrator, of Pierre's godlike nature. As the narrator sees it, humans' longing for transcendence, longing toward the mysteries they sense are far beyond their comprehension, derive their power from the greatness of the human soul. The narrator imagines that the human soul fits perfectly into the arched vault of the sky: "[O]ur soul's arches underfit into its; and so, prevent the upper arch from falling on us with unsustainable inscrutableness" (51-2). Pierre's sense of wonder at Isabel is evidence of the wondrousness of his own nature. Perhaps he is so drawn to Isabel, then, because he learns from her about his own godlike nature. And perhaps the narrator is drawn to Pierre for this same reason.

Pierre's encounter with the mysterious Isabel and his hearing of her story reorganizes his view of the world. As Pierre tries to make sense of the face and

[35] Perhaps Lucy loses Pierre's interest because she is not mysterious enough. When Pierre brags that he has not looked into her drawing portfolio, she replies that she has no secrets from him: "Read me through and through. I am entirely thine!" (40).

its mysterious hold on him, he senses that his ideology is shifting. The narrator says that Pierre "felt that what he had always before considered the solid land of veritable reality, was now being audaciously encroached upon by bannered armies of hooded phantoms, disembarking in his soul" (49). For a long time after his interview with Isabel, as he struggles to process what he has just seen and heard, all he knows right away is that his entire conception of the world has altered. The visible world around him, which heretofore "had seemed but too common and prosaic to him; and but too intelligible," now seems "steeped a million fathoms in a mysteriousness wholly hopeless of solution" (128). He feels that Isabel has "slidingly emerged" from a "wonder-world" (129). Her emergence into his life makes him conscious of what the narrator calls "that all-controlling and all-permeating wonderfulness, which, when imperfectly and isolatedly recognized by the generality, is so significantly denominated The Finger of God" (139). Pierre really feels that the mystery of Isabel's parentage is irresolvable, even with their two sets of knowledge combined (137), yet, says the narrator, Pierre considers it "intuitively certain, however literally unproven" that Isabel is his sister (139). When Pierre determines to leave the "sacred problem" of Isabel a mystery and not to try to "pry into" it, he still is left troubled by the question of which kind of love to give her, sisterly or erotic. He decides that, instead of either of these, he will give her transcendent love (142). Given that Pierre's life is being narrated in a "profounder emanation" rather

than in a popular novel, it is fitting that Pierre prefers to revel in, rather than solve, the mystery of Isabel.

Isabel is a mystery even to herself. Both Isabel and the narrator characterize her cognitions as bewildered and bewildering (113, 115, 121, 123). She cannot distinguish between dreams and actualities; she says that "[a]lways in me, the solidest things melt into dreams, and dreams into solidities" (117). Lacking a coherent self-consciousness, she longs only for absorption into a sort of pantheistic spirit. She says that she hopes "one day to feel myself drank up into the pervading spirit animating all things" (119). When she tries to explain to Pierre the connection between her thoughts and her speech, she says that her speech arises spontaneously from her thoughts and that these thoughts "well up" in her independent of any reasoning process (123). When she tells Pierre about her guitar, she explains that she knows without proof that it used to belong to her mother because she simply feels this to be true (149). When Pierre interrupts Isabel to ask her the practical question of how the guitar ended up at Saddle Meadows, Isabel seems offended by the question, believing mysteries to be "a million times, and far sweeter than surmises" because a mystery contains fullness while a surmise is "but shallow and unmeaning emptiness" (153). He pushes further for a plausible explanation, but she is content with the mystery; she says that she prefers not to know.

For Pierre, the unknown is embodied in Isabel, both in the presentiment of her face and in the reality of her being. In a sense, she is to him what Pierre is

to the narrator; she is an emanation of Pierre, just as Pierre is an emanation of the narrator. She inspires him to write a mature work, just as Pierre inspires the narrator to write the text that is *Pierre: Or, the Ambiguities.* This emanation-within-an-emanation structure suggests the endlessly mysterious hall of mirrors in which humans live. The narrator's invention of Pierre, an ambiguous character with ambiguous motivations and feelings who commits ambiguous actions, enables the narrator to encounter the greatest unknown of all, the inner life of a human being. From this encounter with the unknown, the narrator-protagonist is able, like other Bildungsroman protagonists, to gain knowledge of his own nature—a necessary component of maturation.

Evidence of Social Contract

In addition to bringing him into illuminating encounters with authorities and unknowns, the narrator's invention of Pierre's story also enables him to make several discoveries about the nature of the social contracts that bind human beings together. Most importantly, he comes to see that both quixotism and genuine moral progress isolate a person from the rest of the race. When Pierre renounces his tie to Lucy—resulting in his loss of his father's good memory, as well as of his inheritance and his relationships with his mother and his cousin Glen—in order to honor a perceived tie to Isabel, the narrator leaves ambiguous whether Pierre is making moral progress, or is merely quixotic. Perhaps this ambiguity results from the fact that, either way, Pierre is doomed

to being permanently cut off from his fellow human beings. In the end, the narrator imagines the story-world growing more and more out of order as Pierre grows increasingly isolated; he has no place in the social, cultural, or economic life of America, and he is oblivious of his obligations to his fellow human beings. Finally, although the narrator has been pursuing Truth just as Pierre has, he saves himself from the utter isolation Pierre suffers by writing the text's Preface, whereby he gives his text a place in the community.

From the moment Pierre receives Isabel's letter, his pursuit of truth isolates him from everyone around him. Soon after learning the news of Isabel, Pierre walks through the woods pondering her story, feeling that both the outer world and his own inner world are intolerable. As for the outer world, "He could not bring himself to confront any face or house; a plowed field, any sign of tillage, the rotted stump of a long-felled pine, the slightest passing trace of man was uncongenial and repelling to him." As for his inner world, "all remembrances and imaginings that had to do with the common and general humanity had become, for the time, in the most singular manner distasteful to him." He feels a "loathing" for "all that was common in the two different worlds—that without, and that within," and "even in the most withdrawn and subtlest region of his own essential spirit, Pierre could not now find one single agreeable twig of thought whereon to perch his weary soul" (136). His thoughts drive him away from others, and then his isolation generates still more isolating thoughts. The narrator discovers through Pierre's increasing misanthropy that,

whenever one person progresses in the pursuit of truth, leaving the rest of the human race behind, he may turn around in aggression upon the people he has left behind. This leads the narrator to question whether "what is so enthusiastically applauded as the march of mind,—meaning the inroads of Truth into Error" is really the noblest and most important human pursuit, as people have long assumed. He suspects that people's assumption is mistaken because the advance toward truth can only be accomplished "here and there" by discrete individuals, who, "by advancing, leave the rest behind; cutting themselves forever adrift from their sympathy, and making themselves always liable to be regarded with distrust, dislike, and often, downright … fear and hate" (165-6). The narrator implicitly questions whether the individual's gain in truth is worth the cost in companionship and the harm he feels impelled to inflict on others.

Pierre is very aware of the isolation he is bringing upon himself through the course of action he is taking. Before even leaving Saddle Meadows, he realizes that his mother will disown him, and he knows that this means disinheritance because he will not be of legal inheriting age for two more years. Another form of isolation he anticipates is the impossibility of having a real marriage. The false marriage to Isabel will "forever bar the blessed boon of marriageable love from [him], and eternally entangle him in a fictitious alliance, which, though in reality but a web of air, yet in effect would prove a wall of iron" (175). Moreover, Pierre also understands that he is making himself a

social pariah. To the world, "all his heroicness, standing equally unexplained and unsuspected," would be cause to

> denounce him as infamously false to his betrothed; reckless of the most binding human vows; a secret wooer and wedder of an unknown and enigmatic girl; a spurner of all a loving mother's wisest counselings; a bringer down of lasting reproach upon an honorable name; a besotted self-exile from a most prosperous house and bounteous fortune; and lastly, that now his whole life would, in the eyes of the wide humanity, be covered with an all-pervading haze of incurable sinisterness, possibly not to be removed even in the concluding hour of death. (176)

The narrator laments that all of these "perils and miseries" are the inevitable punishment for anyone who "even in a virtuous cause … steppest aside from those arbitrary lines of conduct, by which the common world, however base and dastardly, surrounds thee for thy worldly good" (176). Again, the narrator questions the degree to which ties to one's fellow human beings should be sacrificed for the sake of an idealistic mission.

The narrator attributes Pierre's self-exiling actions to his intense desire for a transcendental object. Some human hearts, the narrator explains, contain "a dark, mad mystery" that can drive a person, when in the right mood, "to be all eagerness to cast off the most intense beloved bond, as a hindrance to the attainment of whatever transcendental object that usurper mood so tyrannically suggests." In such moments, "endearments we spurn; kisses are blisters to us; and forsaking the palpitating forms of mortal love, we emptily embrace the boundless and the unbodied air" (180). Pierre is able to cast off human ties for a transcendental object because of his capacity for extreme abstraction. As he

makes his plan to run away with Isabel, he thinks of Lucy only as a variable in an equation; because he is not sure of her actual value, or is "fearful of ascertaining it," he inserts her into the equation of his thoughts as an "x" (181). Still, he cannot sustain this abstract view, and suddenly in the midst of his abstractions, "the living and breathing form of Lucy" slid into his heart. Now he sees looming in front of him the "all-including query—Lucy or God?" The narrator has shown Pierre replacing Lucy with an abstraction, then involuntarily becoming aware again of her reality, but finally does not settle how Pierre sees her: he draws a veil over the scene, so that as the narrative proceeds, "the ambiguous procession of events [can] reveal their own ambiguousness" (181). It is a characteristic evasion in this self-consciously ambiguous text.

Even though Pierre's move to the city brings him into closer proximity to far more people than had been at Saddle Meadows, Pierre's sense of isolation only increases upon his arrival. He has no place socially, economically, or culturally. Socially, his actions have cut him off from his family, including his cousin Glen Stanly in whose house he had counted on lodging. Moreover, his relationship with Isabel is so undefined as to provide no replacement for his lost family ties. When Isabel calls him "brother," he reacts violently, telling her, "Call me brother no more! How knowest thou I am thy brother?" He insists that the two of them are brother and sister only "in the common humanity,—no more." Another reason for Pierre's social isolation is that he lacks a sense of

what is appropriate to expect of other people and of what he owes them. He presumes upon Glen's hospitality by assuming that his cousin will welcome him just as warmly with the outcast Isabel as his wife as Glen had offered to do when Pierre was going to marry the aristocratic Lucy (223-5), and he expects the police to drop everything and watch Isabel and Lucy while he goes to find a coach (241). The narrator also notes the selectivity of Pierre's sense of obligation to his fellow human beings; he is oddly indifferent to "all common conventional regardings:--his hereditary duty to his mother [and] his pledged worldly faith and honor" to Lucy (106). In each of these instances, Pierre's behavior shows his lack of understanding of the unwritten social codes that govern the various relationships that make up a society.

Just as Pierre is socially displaced, he is also economically displaced. He arrives in the city having been disinherited by his aristocratic family and having no trade due to his "social position and noble patrimony." Being raised as an aristocrat meant never learning a way "to earn the least farthing of his own in the world, whether by hand or by brain." He settles on the plan of trying to earn his living by his pen since he has already had success as a juvenile author; the narrator refers to Pierre's "presumed literary capabilities" to imply that Pierre is not as talented as he believes (260), and satirizes Pierre's pride by noting that Pierre might have been "[g]lad now perhaps … if Fate had made him a blacksmith, and not a gentleman, a Glendinning, and a genius" (260).

Pierre realizes only gradually how completely excluded he is from the city's economy; he proves to be totally unable to earn a living by his pen.

The narrator paints Pierre's cultural displacement in the context of a world that is out of order, so that the topsy-turvy literary and cultural world mirrors Pierre's internal disorder and provides him no sense of redemptive community. In a series of chapters added to the novel after Melville had completed it and failed to get it published, the narrator gives the back-story on Pierre's juvenile intellectual efforts and the ridiculous affirmation that had been poured on him. In his teens, Pierre had published love sonnets, which readers and editors alike had praised for their taste, euphony, and morality. No one had offered a single criticism. The narrator satirizes the reading public who mistakes this immature, inexperienced youth for an admirable writer. One pair of editors offers to put out a library edition of his works before he has enough to fill a duodecimo. The Urquhartian Club for the Immediate Extension of the Limits of all Knowledge, both Human and Divine, invites Pierre to give a lecture on any subject he should choose, as do other even more venerable Societies. In this bizarre cultural world, the mediocre are praised while the great are neglected, and the aged act deferential to the immature "life-amateur" (263). Pierre can hardly be expected to mature and find a stable place in this world if the world itself is so irrational and unstable.

A second way in which the narrator shows the story-world to be out of order is in the character of Charlie Millthorpe. This buffoonish character, a

follower of Plinlimmon, tries to advise Pierre on his obligation to practice philosophy. Millthorpe himself is, he says, "thinking of throwing off the Apostolic disguise and coming boldly out … stumping the State, and preaching our philosophy to the masses" (280). He complains that his business copying legal documents overwhelms him and keeps him from his true mission of helping "the sublime cause of the general humanity"; he declares that he must "displace some of my briefs for my metaphysical treatises. I can not waste all my oil over bonds and mortgages" (281). Charlie senses dimly that Pierre needs money and suggests that Pierre do as he himself does, "stump the state on the Kantian philosophy! A dollar a head." According to Charlie, "society demands an Avatar … to leap into the fiery gulf, and by perishing himself, save the whole empire of men!" (281). The ridiculousness of Millthorpe as a character, and particularly of his materialistic way of speaking about idealist philosophy, again emphasizes the impossibility of Pierre achieving a tenable position in the culture in which he lives.

Late in the novel, when Pierre sets out to write his mature work, he does so out of a desire to contribute to the lives of his fellow men, to "gospelize the world anew" and give people a better truth by which to live their lives (273). However, Pierre's attempt to write the Truth for the human race ends up cutting him off further from the world. He progressively seeks deeper and deeper solitude, avoiding his city-acquaintances (who also avoid him), never going to the post-office, and frequenting only secluded tap-rooms, until eventually

"nothing but the utter night-desolation of the obscurest warehousing lanes would content him, or be at all sufferable to him" (341). When he has a fit of vertigo in one such street, he foreswears even these streets for the future. Pierre has two dependents in the form of Lucy and Isabel, but still the narrator describes his isolation as absolute. He is "clung to" by two girls who would sacrifice everything for him, yet "in his deepest, highest part, [he is] utterly without sympathy from any thing divine, human, brute, or vegetable." Although he lives "in a city of hundreds of thousands of human beings," he is "solitary as at the Pole" (338). Pierre had always perceived his quest as being motivated by an altruistic desire to help his fellow man, yet it ends up costing him every tie he has to other human beings. He unwittingly unravels the social contracts that had bound him, and he finds himself totally alone. He cannot, then, be a Bildungsroman protagonist, for such a protagonist discovers by the end of his story how he fits into the larger world. However, Pierre's displacement and isolation do lead their inventor, the narrator, to discover his own place in the world. The text of *Pierre* opens with a Preface in which the narrator, having written Pierre's story, addresses the narrative to a noble patron, Mount Greylock, and thereby find a place for his book (and himself) in the larger world.

Conclusions

Pierre's attempt to write a mature literary work despite the fact that he is still in a state of immaturity is the culmination of his tragedy. He is driven to an impossible task that contributes to his implosion even as it pushes him toward maturity. In the end, whatever modest amount of self-knowledge he gains is tragically outweighed by his sense of utter damnation. Nevertheless, his story serves the important function that its inventor, the narrator-protagonist, intends: it makes possible his, the narrator-protagonist's, own development.

Pierre's writing task, as he perceives it, is to communicate to the world some profound truth that has never been discovered before or has long been forgotten. As the narrator explains it, Pierre "renounce[s] all his foregone self" in order to plunge into the composition of a "comprehensive compacted work," urged on by two motives: "the burning desire to deliver what he thought to be new, or at least miserably neglected Truth to the world," and the desperate need for money to live on. The narrator describes Pierre's inspiration by saying that he was "[s]wayed to universality of thought by the widely-explosive mental tendencies of the profound events which had lately befallen him, and the unprecedented situation in which he now found himself." Pierre determined to compose a work that "digestively include[d] the whole range of all that can be known or dreamed," and "which the world should hail with surprise and delight" (283). Pierre's was an ambitious project, and it would require him to

attain far more knowledge of himself and the world than he had when he first sat down to write.

As Pierre writes, he displays his immaturity by drawing heavily upon his literary inheritance, the books he has read, without realizing that he has not yet reached the point of actually inventing what he is writing. The narrator says that in Pierre's literary endeavors, he draws upon the many books he has read in his "varied scope of reading," which was "randomly acquired by [his] random but lynx-eyed mind" (283). The narrator describes Pierre's self-directed reading as "the course of the multifarious, incidental, bibliographic encounterings of almost any civilized young inquirer after Truth" (283). However, as Pierre "congratulated himself upon all his cursory acquisitions of this sort," writes the narrator, he failed to realize that, in fact, all of his reading was more of "an obstacle hard to overcome" than "an accelerator helpingly pushing him along" (283). This is because, if a person wishes to produce a true work of art, he or she must be able to invent something new, not simply recapitulate the inherited materials. Ironically, for all of Pierre's rejection of the past throughout the story, when he sits down to write his mature work, he is captive to his literary inheritance without even realizing it. Pierre believes himself to be more developed than he actually is; he thinks he has been "entirely transplanted into a new and wonderful element of Beauty and Power" where real invention takes place, when in reality he is only "in one of the stages of the transition"(283). It is not until Pierre gets to that new and wonderful element

that he will he really be inventing what he writes: "That ultimate element once fairly gained, then books no more are needed for buoys to our souls" (283). The narrator makes clear that people's development is not complete until they have moved beyond their inheritance, represented by the books others have written, and begun to invent something new.[36] The proper role of books, for the fully matured artist, is to exhilarate, provoke, energize, and inspire, rather than to actually provide material, and the proportion of inherited to invented material should be a mite to an infinity. Pierre does not live and write long enough to learn this, though.

In narrating Pierre's efforts to achieve the self-knowledge necessary to write his mature work, the narrator suggests that progress toward self-knowledge can only be gradual and can never be complete. The narrator illustrates this point with the metaphor of a traveller in the Alps. Just as that traveller can never see the mountains' "full awfulness of amplitude" in a single glance, so too the person seeking self-knowledge can only see a small part of his interior view: "[S]o hath heaven wisely ordained, that on first entering into the Switzerland of his soul, man shall not at once perceive its tremendous immensity; lest illy prepared for such an encounter, his spirit should sink and

[36] Here is how the narrator describes what Pierre has not yet learned. "He did not see that there is no such thing as a standard for the creative spirit; that no one great book must ever be separately regarded, and permitted to domineer with its own uniqueness upon the creative mind; but that all existing great works must be federated in the fancy; and so regarded as a miscellaneous and Pantheistic whole; and then,—without at all dictating to his own mind, or unduly biasing it any way,—thus combined, they would prove simply an exhilarative and provocative to him" (283-84).

perish in the lowermost snows" (284). Instead, God ordains for self-knowledge to come a little at a time, "by judicious degrees," and even when a man reaches "his Mont Blanc and take[s] an overtopping view of these Alps," he sees not a "tithe" of himself, and far beyond the Alps, there are the Rocky Mountains and the Andes the he has not even dreamt of (284). One recalls the moment in Wordsworth's *Prelude* when the poet realizes with disappointment that he has already crossed Mont Blanc. Even at the end of the developmental process, self-knowledge is still only partial. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say, as in *Mardi,* that the process of human development never reaches an end. Rather, the incremental attainment of knowledge continues eternally even after death, with no creature ever approaching the perfect knowledge of the Creator.

The narrator discusses how little Pierre has really explored his own past, and how little he still knows of himself: "Not yet had he dropped his angle into the well of his childhood, to find what fish might be there; for who dreams to find fish in a well? … Ten million things were as yet uncovered to Pierre. The old mummy lies buried in cloth on cloth; it takes time to unwrap this Egyptian king" (285). Pierre has begun to lose some of his delusions, but he is still a long way from self-knowledge. He does not yet realize that the depths he is beginning to glimpse beneath "the first superficiality of the world" are not "the unlayered substance" but are rather "surface stratified on surface" (285). Another metaphor that the narrator develops to describe the pursuit of self-knowledge compares this activity to a sort of mining into oneself that ends in

disappointment because there is a void inside. Deep within a pyramid, in the central room, the explorer finds only an empty sarcophagus: "appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of a man!" (285). The narrator does not explain whether the sarcophagus has been raided or the corpse decomposed, or whether perhaps there is something in the sarcophagus that we are simply unable to perceive. What is clear, though, is that at the end of the pursuit of self-knowledge, one discovers that the self is beyond one's comprehension—that only a tenth of the internal landscape can be viewed from even the highest peak within the mountain range of the self. This is what Pierre will gradually come to realize through his attempt to write a mature work.

Despite the narrator's critiques of Pierre, he does suggest that Pierre is gaining some sort of self-knowledge through writing his mature work, even though he is powerless to put any of his self-knowledge into action. The narrator summarizes his conclusions about Pierre's state based on the fragments he quotes from Pierre's mature work. He says that Pierre has become "quite conscious of much that is so anomalously hard and bitter in his lot, of much that is so black and terrific in his soul." However, this self-knowledge "does not one whit enable him to change or better his condition." This is "[c]onclusive proof that he has no power over his condition" because "in tremendous extremities human souls are like drowning men," who even though they know their peril and its causes are powerless to save themselves (303). The narrator explains that Pierre's writing is sucking his life even as it teaches him how to live:

> [T]hat which now absorbs the time and the life of Pierre, is not the book, but the primitive elementalizing of the strange stuff, which in the act of attempting that book, have upheaved and upgushed in his soul. Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that the bungled one. The larger book, and the infinitely better, is for Pierre's own private shelf. That it is, whose unfathomable cravings drink his blood; the other only demands his ink. But circumstances have so decreed, that the one can not be composed on the paper, but only as the other is writ down in his soul. And the one of the soul is elephantinely sluggish, and will not budge at a breath. Thus Pierre is fastened on by two leeches;—how then can the life of Pierre last? Lo! he is fitting himself for the highest life, by thinning his blood and collapsing his heart. He is learning how to live, by rehearsing the part of death. (304-05)

Pierre is finally making real progress toward self-knowledge, but the strain of it is sapping the life out of him. The more his work demands of him, the less he has to bring to it. Ironically, he is goaded to write this mature work when he is yet still immature, and to complete this laborious, non-lucrative task just when he is penniless (338). Also, his invention is becoming increasingly circumscribed. His, Lucy's, and Isabel's desperate need to pay rent and buy bread forces Pierre to send the first pages to the printer before the entire work is complete. This limits what he can write in the chapters to follow (338). Thus, he has to commit his life's work to imperfection before he has even finished writing it.

Despite all the agonies to which Pierre is subject during this period of his life, he does grow more profound in one very specific way: he begins to understand the elusiveness of truth. The narrator writes with particular sympathy, even admiration, that Pierre, despite having "the soul of an Atheist,"

still “wrote down the godliest things,” and with “the feeling of misery and death in him, he created forms of gladness and life.” As Pierre writes these godly and life-giving things, he himself is made far more profound than even he himself could have imagined. The more that Pierre writes, says the narrator, “and the deeper and the deeper that he dived,” the more Pierre sees of “the everlasting elusiveness of Truth; the universal lurking insincerity of even the greatest and purest written thoughts.” As a result, he comes to spurn “his own aspirations” and to abhor “the loftiest part of himself” (339). Pierre is doing his work best when he is most aware of its hopelessness. The narrator also suggests that Pierre is growing more rational. When he, Lucy, and Isabel go to the gallery and see the portrait that looks like his father, Pierre begins to realize how shaky the evidence is for Isabel being his sister: the only pieces of evidence are two “blurredly conjoining narrations” of Aunt Dorothea’s “nebulous legend” and Isabel’s “still more nebulous story,” combined with his own suspicion that his father had had a daughter (353). Ironically, the narrator’s characterizations of Pierre as growing more profound and rational come right before Pierre’s most egregious act, his murdering of the cousin who had been his dearest boyhood friend.

In the end, Pierre, facing death, feels that the end of his life is coming too soon and that he has much more left to learn. He calls his death “the untimely, timely end;—Life's last chapter well stitched into the middle!” (360). For whatever Pierre has learned, he is left with even deeper questions than he had at

the beginning. As he languishes in the dungeon after killing Glen, he resembles the captive king in the "exiled royalties" passage in *Moby-Dick*. The full weight of the stone ceiling "almost rested on his brow," and it seemed as though "the long tiers of massive cell-galleries above [were] partly piled on him" (360). Like Ahab, Pierre carries on his shoulders the weight of man's sense of disinheritance and his tragically constrained efforts at heroism. He muses that if he had been "heartless" and "disowned, and spurningly portioned off the girl at Saddle Meadows," then he would have gone on to live a long and happy life on earth, and maybe even spent eternity in heaven. As his fate turned out, though, "'tis merely hell in both worlds." He resigns himself to this double hell and expires with an Ahabian declaration: "Well, be it hell. I will mold a trumpet of the flames, and, with my breath of flame, breathe back my defiance!" (360). In the end, Pierre does achieve some genuine learning, but it looks nothing like what he had expected to learn. His life is agonizing, lonely, unsatisfying, and unacknowledged, and the truth he has learned is inexpressible.

With an ending like this, the question of how or whether Pierre develops or progresses toward knowledge of himself and the world seems beside the point. What does anything else matter, if a person ends up with a life of hell and eternal damnation afterwards? And yet readers must remember that Pierre is always an invention, the emanation of the narrator's own mind, imagined for the purpose of the narrator's self-education. To return to what the narrator wrote in his description of Pierre's vision of Enceladus, Nature provides the

"cunning alphabet" that man can use in making sense of the ineffable, intangible truths swirling around within his soul: Nature is the "supplier of that cunning alphabet, whereby selecting and combining as he pleases, each man reads his own peculiar lesson according to his own peculiar mind and mood" (342). The text of *Pierre* is the narrator-protagonist's own exercise in arranging the alphabet of Nature into a representation of the confusions and tribulations within his own soul so that those difficulties can be analyzed and understood. To whatever extent self-knowledge is possible, it can be achieved through just this sort of exercise.

A more triumphant ending would not be suitable to a "profounder emanation." The text of *Pierre,* like *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick,* fulfills all the criteria of that genre as delineated by the *Pierre* narrator: it synthesizes without simplifying, asserts without dogmatizing, and progresses without finally concluding. *Pierre*, like Melville's other profounder emanations, *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick,* also circles back to its own beginning. In the Preface to *Pierre*, which the narrator must have written after having completed the novel, he dedicates his work to the noble mountain that he can see through his window in the Berkshires, Mount Greylock. By having his narrator address his profound emanation to this American version of a noble patron, Melville underlines once again his ambition of adopting and revising European forms to craft a better, truer literature especially for the new American people. The American Bildungsroman, as developed by Melville in *Pierre* and its companion works,

Mardi and *Moby-Dick,* revises the European Bildungsroman by shifting the task of constructing the portrait self to the protagonist himself. In this way, it is uniquely suited to a nation of that is full of people like Pierre, orphans, self-exiles, and soul-toddlers.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This study has sought to show the profound influence of the European Bildungsroman tradition on Herman Melville as well as his sophisticated way of reinventing the genre for an American context. Reading *Mardi, Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre* as a triptych, a trio of linked works sharing important similarities, reveals the influence of the European Bildungsroman on these novels' form and content, thereby showing that the Bildungsroman existed in America far earlier than previously recognized. By reconstructing the Bildungsroman genre as Melville would have perceived it from his reading and experience, one can see not only that Melville wrote three Bildungsromane, but also that he depicted identity formation differently in each of them: *Mardi* depicts identity formation as a passive process of listening in on experts' conversations; *Moby-Dick* shows human formation as an active, experimental process of analyzing and synthesizing data in an effort to interpret it; and *Pierre* depicts human formation as a creative process in which the student learns about reality by imagining a surrogate self within an artificial world. Melville's American Bildungsromane revise the conventions of the European genre by giving the protagonist the task of constructing his own portrait self rather than having that model or pedagogy be provided by the human father or mentor. The narrator is formed in the very act of imagining and studying his portrait self. In *Mardi,* the narrator-

protagonist's portrait self exists only in his dreams; in *Moby-Dick*, only in his past; and in *Pierre*, only in a fictional world that he self-consciously creates.

Identity Formation in Melville's Other Works

Even though the present study of identity formation in the works of Melville focuses only on those novels most profoundly influenced by the European Bildungsroman tradition, Melville wrote many works besides *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre* in which he considers questions of human identity, of how it is formed and how it can be threatened with erasure. In his pre-*Mardi* works, *Typee* and *Omoo,* Melville's narrators are deeply concerned with how their identities are being affected during their adventures in the South Seas by their long absence from their homes in Western civilization. *Typee* is the semi-autobiographical story of a man held captive on a South Pacific island who fears that he will lose his Western identity by being absorbed into the culture of the Typee; in the end, he escapes back to his home culture without the dreaded facial tattooing that would have forever barred him from his former Western identity. G. R. Thompson has called *Typee* a "deliberately inconclusive romantic Bildungsroman" (30); indeed, despite Tommo's terrifying brush with the possibility of losing his identity, the account of his adventure and subsequent escape are not framed as a formation narrative. The case is similar in *Omoo,* Melville's second work. Here the narrator is a literate *flaneur* roving the South Pacific and longing for home, the faraway New England place where his

identity is rooted. He wanders continually without ever finding a place in the South Seas where he is physically and culturally comfortable, and consequently his identity formation is arrested. Thus in this second work, Melville toys again with the question of how identity is formed and what sort of threats identity can face; however, he does not yet try to depict the actual process of identity formation. That effort would come in his third work, *Mardi,* as well as in *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre.*

Whether or how Melville thought about identity formation in his work immediately proceeding *Pierre,* a novel entitled *The Isle of the Cross,* can probably never be known because the only manuscript of that never-published novel has long since been lost. However, in the stories Melville wrote for periodicals in the mid-1850s, he was certainly still considering the theme of identity formation, even though he no longer did so by drawing upon the conventions of the Bildungsroman. For example, the 1853 story "Bartleby the Scrivener" has a "rather elderly" narrator (3) who sets out to write the story of a remarkable young scrivener whom he had once employed; in the process of narration, he communicates an important lesson that Bartleby has taught him about himself and his bonds with his fellow man. The narrator describes how Bartleby had at first been an efficient, productive copyist until one day he began refusing his employer's requests for the simple reason that he preferred not to. The narrator describes becoming reconciled to Bartleby and coming to see the value in the man's stillness and steadiness. Bartleby is always the first in the office in the

morning and the last to leave at night. However, when the narrator discovers that Bartleby has in fact been living in these chambers, the narrator experiences the first pangs of "overpowering stinging melancholy" that he has ever felt. He feels the "bond of common humanity" compelling him to a state of gloom (17). Eventually his pity turns to fear, then revulsion, as he worries about his reputation among other professional men in the city. Ultimately, unable to get rid of Bartleby, the narrator has to move offices. The last time he sees Bartleby, the man is imprisoned as a vagrant in the Tombs and is refusing to eat. What exactly the narrator learns from his encounter with Bartleby and his witnessing of Bartleby's gradual death has been debated by critics, but it does seem clear that the narrator learns something. In the end, he admits that he has always thought that the easiest way of life is the best; he has been unambitious and prudent. But his encounter with Bartleby makes further complacency impossible. He cannot shake the feeling, as he retrospectively narrates Bartleby's story, that even though he had done his reasonable best for Bartleby, he has still failed. His unsatisfactory role in the whole affair haunts him with the knowledge that a comfortable, unambitious virtue gives as little internal peace as an utter succumbing to vice. Although the narrator does gain knowledge of himself and the world in this story, Melville departs from the Bildungsroman conventions in two important ways: he reverses the Bildungsroman's typical age hierarchy by depicting the young man as teacher to the old, and he reduces the level of detail so that the tale has a short story's

singleness of effect rather than being a digressive, one-step-forward-two-steps-back narrative of formation.

Although identity formation was clearly a concern of Melville's throughout his writing life, his final prose work represents a striking departure from this Bildungsroman theme. *Billy Budd,* Melville's late novella published posthumously in 1924, might seem at first like a Bildungsroman. The narrator introduces the eponymous young hero at a key moment in his life, when he is about to be impressed from a merchant ship to a British war-ship. It is 1797, during a period of tension between England and Revolutionary France, when such impressments were common. Billy has, like a Bildungsroman hero, a sense that what lies ahead of him is an enormous adventure that will impart knowledge to him. As the narrator puts it, Billy is thrilled to be entering what he considers the "more knowing world of a great war-ship" (109). Yet, as the narrative proceeds, it becomes clear just how little this character has in common with the Bildungsroman hero. The first clue that Billy is not a Bildungsroman hero is that he has no sense of his origins. He is a foundling with no curiosity about who his parents are or why he was abandoned. More importantly, he cannot be a Bildungsroman hero because he is static. The narrator makes clear that Billy is morally perfect, possessed of a pre-lapsarian innocence that makes him incapable both of doing wrong and of recognizing evil in others.[1]

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[1] The narrator also attributes Billy's goodness to his identity as a sailor. In the narrator's explanation of Billy's naïve refusal to believe that Claggart is speaking ill of him, he describes sailors as "a juvenile race" because every sailor "is accustomed to obey orders without

Paradoxically, given his moral perfection, Billy is also incapable of maturing; he has a permanent simple-mindedness and is a "bud" that will never open. It is significant that Billy is unable to read. Just as he cannot read books, he cannot read others' natures to detect their evil intentions. The narrator implies that Billy's death is an inevitable result of his permanent innocence, for it is his innocence that incites Claggart's hatred and leaves him unwary of Claggart's schemes. Billy remains childlike even at the end of the story. When Billy lies awaiting his execution, the narrator describes his trance-like state, in which his face has taken on "something akin to the look of a slumbering child in the cradle when the warm hearth-glow of the still chamber at night plays on the dimples that at whiles mysteriously form in the cheek" (160). When the ship's Chaplain goes to help reconcile Billy to his death, he finds the young man already at peace. As the narrator puts it, Billy refers to death "as a thing close at hand," much like a child who "among [his] other sports will play a funeral with hearse and mourners." Billy can be so familiar with death because he lacks the "irrational fear of it" that is so common "in highly civilized communities." Billy is like a member of one of those "so-called barbarous" nations that is closer to nature than the civilized man is. Thus, Billy is not so much an individual trapped in infancy as a representative of the infancy of the human race.

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debating them; his life afloat is externally ruled for him; he is not brought into that promiscuous commerce with mankind where unobstructed free agency on equal terms--equal superficially, at least--soon teaches one that unless upon occasion he exercise a distrust keen in proportion to the fairness of the appearance, some foul turn may be served him" (136).

Other key differences between Billy Budd and the Bildungsroman hero are apparent to anyone familiar with the conventions of the Bildungsroman. Two important departures from the conventions of the Bildungsroman include, first, the fact that the action arises not out of an interweaving of freewill, fate, and necessity but rather follows inevitably from the characters' static natures; and second, the fact that the "father" figure, Captain Vere, sacrifices his "son" Billy for a higher ideal rather than guiding his son's development. The action of the novel is not driven by the characters' choices because their identities are fixed and static. Billy is good and innocent; Vere is good and totally bound by the law that he regards as the embodiment of good; Claggart is evil even though he generally appears decent and sane. The narrator characterizes the unfolding action as inevitable: Claggart's antagonism toward Billy, Billy's innocent but agitated reaction to Claggart, Vere's insistence on justice even though he wants to show mercy. In *Billy Budd,* the virtuous action (performed by Vere) is to put oneself in the service of the law and thereby maintain order. Unlike in the Bildungsroman, the individual's will is de-emphasized in shaping the fabric of reality. In addition to the static nature of the characters, another key departure from the Bildungsroman is in the relationship between the "father" and "son," Vere and Billy. In the scene where Vere goes to tell Billy his fate, the narrator compares him to Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac (157). Even though the narrator characterizes Vere as a fatherly figure to Billy, Vere is unlike the

Bildungsroman father in that he must sacrifice his son for a higher ideal, rather than guide his development.

Melville was deeply concerned throughout his writing life with the question of how human beings are formed. However, only in *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre* does he explore this theme through close attention to the conventions of the Bildungsroman: the long, digressive narrative interwoven with philosophical reflection; the protagonist's formative encounters with authorities, the unknown, and evidence of social contract; and the all-important portrait self who focuses the protagonist's development. The fact that Melville's narratives of formation draw upon and yet revise the generic conventions of the European narrative of formation is particularly fitting given that America is a nation built upon both inheritance and invention. Melville's reinvention of a European genre for an American context is, really, a most American undertaking. His triptych of American Bildungsromane helps the reader to conceptualize American identity formation in a way that is perfectly suited to a people who draw upon tradition and learn from the past, but who also believe in the individual's power to find and use resources independently. Melville's conception of human formation challenges the view, still current in America today, that humans are capable of absolute self-invention; paradoxically, it also enables today's readers to see that, however environmental, political, financial, or social factors may work against against one's personal cultivation, resources for constructing one's own pedagogy are always available. Although the

Bildungsroman was originally a European genre centered on the young protagonist's relationship with his father and other inherited authorities, Melville reimagined the formation narrative for a new nation with no past and no king, with only fragments and borrowed memories as materials to construct their own new national identity.

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