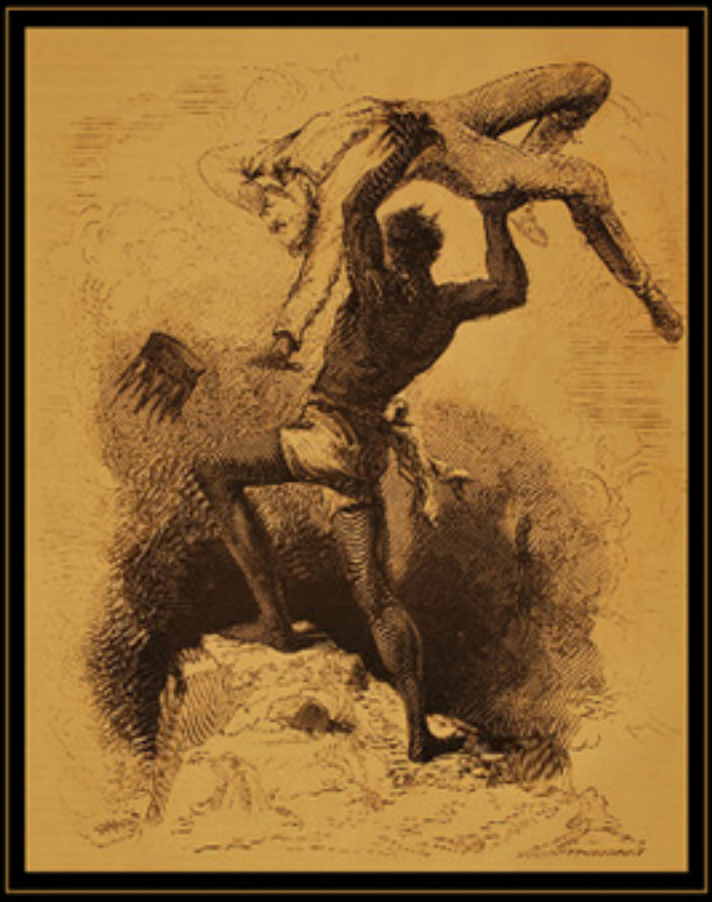
Melville and the Idea of Blackness

Race and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century America



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MELVILLE AND THE IDEA OF BLACKNESS

By examining the unique problems that "blackness" signifies in *Moby-Dick*, *Pierre*, "Benito Cereno," and "The Encantadas," Christopher Freeburg analyzes how Herman Melville grapples with the social realities of racial difference in nineteenth-century America. Where Melville's critics typically read blackness as a metaphor for the haunting power of slavery or an allegory of moral evil, Freeburg asserts that blackness functions as the site where Melville correlates the sociopolitical challenges of transatlantic slavery and U.S. colonial expansion with philosophical concerns about mastery. By focusing on Melville's iconic interracial encounters, Freeburg reveals the important role blackness plays in Melville's portrayal of characters' arduous attempts to seize their own destinies, amass scientific knowledge, and perfect themselves. A valuable resource for scholars and graduate students in American literature, this text will also appeal to those working in American, African American, and postcolonial studies.

Christopher Freeburg is an assistant professor of English at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and his master's degree from Stanford. His work has appeared in journals such as *American Literature* and *Modern Fiction Studies*.

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To Joseph Brown S.J.
and Trish Loughran

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Darkening the Past

> Voyage through death
> to life upon these shores.
>
> Robert Hayden, "Middle Passage"

This book concerns Melville's idea of blackness and racial conflict in the Americas. Throughout *Melville and the Idea of Blackness*, I discuss how Melville's blackness signals the agonizing and volatile challenges of fully mastering one's self or other people. Melville captures this difficult and often traumatizing struggle through fictional episodes drawn from the history of slavery and colonialism. While the former ideas characterize this book's specific focus on racial contests and Melville's blackness, this preface forecasts something broader in scope. Here, I use the term *blackness* to ask fundamental questions about the way critics think about history and what they mean when they say they are thinking historically. Melville's blackness, in my view, helps critics to query further what it is to be historical or to use history as an instrument for revisiting various narratives of sociopolitical progress, which defines much of literary and cultural inquiry in Americanist fields.

I argue throughout this book that blackness signifies the violence of subjects' experience of existential limits and the destruction of subjects' social viability. Melville presents these traumatic experiences through characters involved in racial conflicts – conflicts that result in characters' failed attempts to control themselves, others, nature, and the course of history. Melville's characters Benito Cereno and Babo, Ahab and Pip, Ishmael and Queequeg, Hunilla and the modern voyager all take action in circumstances they want to master or believe they can ensure control over, and this sense of authority is ripped from underneath them. In Melville's fiction, interracial encounters and conflict show how subjects get lost in the illusion of being certain that there are no limits for the self at the very moment they experience the harsh realities of existential

limitation. Melville uses these characters' limit cases to critique racism while still looking at racial conflict through the prism of blackness, amplifying how the power of race contains images of whites' taking control of totality, but also, more important, how everyone in the Americas is equally *subject to* the contingent forces of history that unexpectedly erupt in everyday life.

If we fully credit this sense of being subject to history, what impact can it have on the way we think about the uses of history in literary and cultural study? Fredric Jameson's maxim, "always historicize," is currently well-accepted dogma and I will not attempt to dispute this proclamation, yet I do think that Melville's blackness can expand and deepen what it means to historicize or to be historical for contemporary critics.[1] To this end, I briefly look at Clarel's portrait of Abdon the Black Jew in *Clarel* (1876) and the poem "The Coming Storm" from *Battle-Pieces* (1866) in order to show how they capture the sense of distress and immobility that blackness signifies. My purpose in visiting blackness in these postbellum texts of Melville is not to point out suppressed racial confrontations, but rather to demonstrate that these poetic moments provide a segue to directly address Melville's blackness and the critical task of facing the real conditions of history.

Most critics' sense of being historical reflects a fundamental assumption: History is an instrument of knowledge that if used properly (historicizing) will lead to some version of truth or the real; truth is guaranteed. With this idea in mind, it is worth looking at Walter Benjamin's portrayal of "shock" that he finds crucial to historicism. Benjamin's shock is not identical to Melville's blackness, but they share striking similarities, and even though Benjamin would largely agree with Jameson about critical practice, Benjamin offers a slightly different account of critics' relationship to their archives and evidence that I read as closely in line with the violence and unpredictability Melville's blackness captures. Discussing Benjamin's notion of shock with Melville's blackness in mind can help us rethink blackness's relevance to critical praxis – not in order to revisit what a radical or progressive criticism looks like but rather to recognize that empowering discoveries and unconquerable enigmas both define the way critics study social life.

In 1865, Melville saw the painting *A Coming Storm on Lake George* (1863) by R. S. Gifford in the National Gallery. He wrote a poem about the painting that he included in his collection of Civil War poetry, *Battle-Pieces* (1866). "The Coming Storm" begins by telling the reader that the source of the poem is the speaker's relationship to a painting at the

national exhibition. The poem's speaker addresses "him/Who felt this picture," which could be the painter, the buyer, and/or the imagined persona viewing the scene (123).[2] Either way, the effect is the same: "presage dim – Dim inklings from the shadowy sphere" that "fixed him and fascinated here" (123). The language bears remarkable closeness to Melville's own famous lines about Hawthorne's blackness where Melville says it is "that blackness in Hawthorne … that so fixes and fascinates me."[3] Both depict a subject enamored by the artist's sense of darkness; in the case of the painting it is the "demon-cloud" that has "Burst on a spirit" (123). The crucial difference between them lies in Melville's explicit conception of the poem out of the social conflict of the Civil War. It is more than the prospect of a horrible thunderstorm that makes this cloud's abrupt appearance disruptive. The cloud symbolizes the real dangers of an oncoming storm and visceral sense of violation; it suddenly appears and transforms a tranquil day on Lake George. Yet the viewer's psychological intensity doubles because the "demon-cloud" withholds the destructive capacities of the Civil War. Even more frightening, the viewer is "fixed" and "fascinated." He embodies a tormenting sense of pause, realizing an abrupt sense of danger he is powerless to change.

"The Coming Storm" communicates an impasse where time and history become self-conscious and realized in the aesthetic vision, but this vision does not contain any feelings of freedom, only unforeseeable constraint.

William Dean Howells writes in *The Atlantic Monthly* that because of the "phantasms" and "vagaries" in Melville's war poetry, the verse fails to capture the reality of the human experience. *Battle-Pieces*, Howells writes, bears no semblance to any "life you have known."[4] As far as Melville's style is concerned, there was probably nothing Melville could have done that would have allowed him to live up to Howells's standards of human life. The very phantasms and vagaries that mask the human for Howells revealed and defined the human in Melville's eyes. The premonitions of the viewer in "The Coming Storm" sit at the heart of "Man's final lore" (123). The substance of this "lore" is vast – which "we seek and shun" (123). The poem's language and subject matter conceal explicit sociality and details of personal representations, as Howells explains, yet Melville clearly embraces this kind of poetic abstraction; he revels in frightening intimations of obscurity.

In this vein, an anonymous reviewer of Melville's war verse was equally convinced of Melville's elusiveness and imagined a visceral response to it; he calls the verse "epileptic,"[5] associating it with sudden and recurrent

sensory disturbances, slips in and out of consciousness, and violent convulsions – as if precisely describing what blackness represents to Benito Cereno. Epileptic movement is bereft of identifiable progress, and if one seeks a version of this resolution, it can result in just what Howells and the viewer point to; readers can unwittingly become one of Melville's thought divers, destined to come away with "blood shot eyes."[6] Neither the speaker in Melville's "The Coming Storm" nor Melville's reviewers escape the spell of impasse, of unresolved inner dissonance that can take shape in real and imagined oncoming threats that also reveal different senses of history.

Melville's Clarel endures feelings of oncoming events that he realizes with an intensity he cannot control. The poem begins when Clarel leaves home on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Clarel finds grave difficulty fending off phantoms and the violence of inevitable death. Early in the poem, Clarel encounters Abdon, "the Black Jew."[7] Abdon is a member of the tribe of Cochin Jews from southern India and he travels to the Holy Land to die. Abdon and other people appear to Clarel like ancient and timeless relics "unmixed into time's swamping sea."[8] After he leaves the black Jew, he finds himself in dark reverie. His eyes fall on a paper tray where briefly comprised on one poor sheet are the words "The World Accosts."[9] "The World Accosts" magnifies the sense in "The Coming Storm," which seems only to be a true realization because the subjects who see it believe the opposite. That is, if subjects ignored or repressed or swept under the rug the reality of what subjects can do little or nothing about, while championing one's agential possibility and grasp of truth(s), then a realization of "the world accosts" can create a profound sense of contradiction in subjects' idea of themselves and what changes and transformation are possible in their milieu. The parts of Melville's poetry that I have highlighted reiterate how the hard facts of history unveil the forces we cannot change, and they firmly impress upon subjects what Hayden White has recently argued: "[H]istory is not something one understands, it is something one endures – if one is lucky."[10]

But what do the rude and abrupt realizations of history and world that Melville captures in the "demon-cloud" from "The Coming Storm" and Clarel's reactions to "the Black Jew" have to do with critical notions of doing historical work or being historical? Most current notions of doing historical work rely on material archives as instruments for discerning the real, the concrete in a social reality of ideology and abstraction. What is more, when it comes to quotable mantras from pages of theoretical work on historicism there are many in Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of

History" (1940) that reappear in various ways in books and articles on modern literature and culture. Kenneth Warren jokingly remarks that "if we were each to receive a dollar for every time Benjamin's theses were quoted or used as a guiding principle," we may not be rich but we would certainly be able to buy some nice things.[11] Whether or not Americanists are sufficiently Benjaminian is not my point, but it is worth noting that his work on the philosophy of history has captured the scholarly imagination in cursory and substantive ways. Even more important, if one takes Benjamin's idea of shock and danger seriously, it shows critics the unforeseen and disturbing challenges that can both liberate and shackle, clarify and obscure, the pursuit of illumination through any methodology.

Hence, what I found most striking about Melville's showcasing of protagonists' experiences of blackness in his fiction, *Clarel*, or "The Coming Storm," is that, in a limited way, it resembles Benjamin's ideas about danger and shock in the archives of history. In the second thesis, Benjamin mentions the "secret index" of the past that refers the historical materialist to the previously hidden messianic power in the present.[12] This talk of secrets and messianic power for the "historian schooled in Marx" is not supposed to direct critics from an emphasis on class struggle but rather to focus them on the "fight for crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist."[13] Benjamin continues:

> But these latter things, which are present in class struggle are not present as a vision of spoils that fall to the victor. *They are alive* in this struggle as confidence, courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude, and have effects that reach far back into the past. They call into question every victory, past, and present, of the rulers. … This the historical materialist must be aware of.[14]

One especially important thing about this thesis is how Benjamin emphasizes the historical materialist's role of casting light on the "avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the down trodden," "the struggling, oppressed class itself."[15] Benjamin also posits a particular relationship between the past, "now-time," and the future.[16] He contends that the injustice committed by the ruling classes cannot be undone, but perhaps can be "reconciled through remembering," which "ties up the present with the communicated context of a universal solidarity."[17] Jurgen Habermas summarizes it as follows: through the past, these future generations claim the "messianic power of the present."[18]

Benjamin describes the experiential relation of the person delving into various archives to excavate "historical knowledge."[19] I quoted the earlier passage at length because Benjamin emphasizes "spiritual things." He

does not retreat from history, but instead he points to something "alive" in the archive that must be somehow captured to witness against the ruling classes' account of history. The mysticism of Benjamin's spirit is no secret. By this, I do not mean to say that he was not suspicious of the strictures of power and knowledge that frame theocracies, religious institutions, and pedestals of speculative philosophy, which also bear the name of spirit or spiritual things. However, one cannot doubt that Benjamin was unapologetically possessed by the hidden powers of historical consciousness that he believed lay dormant in materiality. The sense of spirit found in the social actions and thoughts of the people is not "effective historical consciousness," in Habermas's words, but something that animates it that the historical materialist sees.[20]

More significant, Benjamin says that the redeemable past appears in a "moment of danger."[21] This "danger," he emphasizes, "threatens both the content and the tradition."[22] From this moment of "danger," one ultimately gets to universal history, and the historical thinker can approach this history "where thinking comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions."[23] It "gives that constellation a shock" where the thinker "recognizes a sign of a messianic arrest of happening, or (to put it differently) a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past."[24]

While one cannot deny that Benjamin insists the historical materialist upends naturalized historical norms to reveal the true subject of historical knowledge, the "oppressed class," one cannot say beyond that specifically how. Brushing against the grain in anticipation of dialectical images and flash points is a general idea that leaves much room for interpretation. Benjamin's poetic and sermonic language makes no apologies for the fact that what he says seldom gets translated by critics into how to follow his lead from imaginative prose to deliberate practice. Of what specific use, then, are flashes, unpredictable moments of danger?

Benjamin's fragments escape the rigidities and pitfalls of orthodox Marxism. Yet, if we are to think about assessing shock and what Benjamin meant by it, one cannot help but think that what was shocking and alarming to Benjamin may not be shocking now. Benjamin composed his influential fragments on history in a literal state of emergency. Without being disingenuous, what is our scholarly equivalent to the fight against fascism in Germany's war years, or any *ism* that would define the historicist as a threat that should be crushed or silenced? Such a struggle would not permit us to live or see the present the same way we do now.[25] Almost no one descending into any archive to study oppressed groups today would find their experiences full of epistemic shocks of this

degree, yet Benjamin still insists on the imperative of experiential danger and shock. However, I am not clear on how one achieves this with deliberate and calculated purpose. How would we recognize the moment of danger and shock if its power lies in the fact that we cannot initially recognize it?

Susan Buck-Morss claims that "in the Theses, Benjamin speaks of shock; rather than awakening, but they are different words for the same experience."[26] In Benjamin's eyes, "history appears as a catastrophe, a hellish, cyclical repetition of barbarism and oppression," and Buck-Morss wants readers to see this idea as an opportunity for awakening.[27] Awakening, however, is broad and can mean anything that someone perceives as being alerting. Still, Buck-Morss's reading begs the question of why Benjamin deploys "hellish" and "catastrophe." Surely shock implies danger and violence, literally, epistemically, and socially, more so than what Buck-Morss calls "awakening." Buck-Morss's substitution, in my view, undermines the gravity of Benjamin's use of catastrophe and hellish, which not only makes the critic vulnerable but depicts vulnerability as potentially jolting and violent.

Habermas also suggests a relationship between awakening and shock. For him, shock causes awakening which then makes "profane illumination" or a "renewal of consciousness" available.[28] But in his rephrasing, he advances something Benjamin does not suggest strongly enough. Benjamin makes no guarantees for the historically minded critic beyond shock, danger, terror, and flashes, only the projection of a necessary hope. Benjamin suggests that the critic is subject to the archive materials as the materials. If this is true, then when the critic "shatters the continuum of history," it is a moment of recognition and comprehension. The continuum is a historical construction that various groups and individuals have an interest in or psychological attachment to. What is the critic's relation to what is conveyed in the shattering? How does the critic shield himself or herself from the violence of that shattering? Shattering, in my view, indicates the critic's relation to the history as well. If this experience discloses the "breaks within history," it also reflects something that breaks or becomes broken within the subject.[29]

Benjamin, in my view, reveals a mutual relation of disruption that cannot routinely offer a golden parachute to historical clarity and/or truth that can be a radical instrument. From this reading, Benjamin factored in "awakening" and "shock" in such a way that the aftermath might not turn out to be the liberation or truth the critic seeks, and in fact, it does not guarantee that the critic may be struck by another form of

mystification, concealment, or various codes of naturalization. That is, the critic doing the rigorous work of historicism must be willing to feel and endure a sense of impasse, one possessed by disruption and intimations of dangerous enigmas, which I have called blackness. This is not the same sense of brutal psychic and physical torment that Melville's blackness signifies, but I think Benjamin's shock is our critical equivalent, or at least akin to it.

Fredric Jameson also uses the language of shock to discuss approaches to literature and culture. Unlike Benjamin, Jameson is more direct about his expectations for the use value of his approach to objects of analysis. In Jameson's eyes, "genuine" dialectical thinking "forces upon us an *abrupt* self-consciousness with respect to our own critical instruments and literary categories … an *epistemological shock* that will identify its presence" [my emphasis] (375). This is definitive "and inseparable from dialectical thinking, as the ark of an abrupt shift to a higher level of consciousness to a larger context of being" (375). Jameson's descriptions of abrupt, upward movements of consciousness resulting from true dialectical thinking guarantee the practitioner results that Benjamin does not. Jameson sees this dialectical consciousness "as an assault on our conventionalized life patterns, a whole battery of shocks administered to our routine vision of things, an implicit critique and restructuration of our habitual consciousness" (374).

However, as Jameson unveils his ideas of what would "oblige us to practice," he does not ask the question that is crucially relevant: What happens when attacking conventions is no longer the outlier position, but instead the outlier itself becomes *the* convention? Jameson's ideas are now approaching decades of dominance in the field of literary and cultural study – are Marxist historicism or other versions of progressive materialist scholarship still outliers? Marxism is an inner "permanent revolution," but it cannot truly be a revolution in praxis, in my view, if one is looking for what one knows is already there (362). My point here is that if shock and danger are to be crucial parts of our critical reality, how can one guarantee "higher consciousness" or historical consciousness or consciousness at all? This type of authority over the future is the equivalent of planning your own surprise party. If revolution and reform are to be permanent and radical, then they must also be able to turn against and away from themselves.

If critics avail themselves of shock and danger in their professional practice, then it will not always be an experiment with all the right kinds of results, repressions, admissions, and triumphs. My argument here is

that practitioners of various methods must be prepared to see the end of their own ideas if they claim to be willing to harness radicalizing energies. As I have quoted them here, neither Jameson nor Benjamin demonstrates this, but the key difference is Benjamin does not use the armor of dialectical thinking as a shield to fend off the vulnerability of abstractions that by definition involve uncertainty, enigmas, and epistemic risks. If we are all happily affirming Jameson's maxim to "always historicize," what does a radical criticism look like?[30] I want to argue that according to Melville and Benjamin's versions of blackness, we will know it as we confront the overwhelming weight of constraint against power, including various modes of power and dominance in institutions that govern our social and professional communities.

Benjamin's re-mystifications erupt as further illusions, philosophical questions, new historical obfuscations, and insights, meaning that whatever may be called the concrete is interlaced by a myriad of "spiritual things." A critic, as analyst and listener, should take on the challenge of being subject to the whims and violations of history's ungraspable phantoms. Pursuing versions of messianic revelation also means being completely subject to enigmatic silence, awe, and the violent tremors of frustration. If one is truly willing to leave home or feels forced out in pursuing radical thoughts "against the grain," to use Benjamin's words, then one cannot brush with the grain of established conventions and methods of scholarship while championing the banner of epistemic and political revolt.[31] If Melville's blackness, as I render it here and throughout this book, can leave its impression in this contemporary critical moment, it is in the idea that critics must be prepared to realize the experiential "shock" of blackness in their homes of methodological identity; in blackness, these homes may be destroyed or radically altered to the degree that the only clear thing is that one "cannot go home again."[32]

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Introduction
Resurrecting Blackness

Deep calls unto deep.
Ralph W. Emerson, *Nature*

Just before the slave insurrection is unveiled in Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno" (1855), naïve American captain Delano attempts to return to his ship. At that point, Don Benito, the Spanish captain, makes a final attempt to alert the imperceptive American, "but his vital energy" fails.[1] To prevent communication between the captains, Babo, the insurrection's leader, sandwiches himself between them and poses as Don Benito's "supportive crutch" (97). Here Melville describes an exemplary image: "Don Benito would not let go of the hand of Captain Delano, but retained it in his, across the black's body" (97). As a result of Babo's ominous presence, both captains stand nearly paralyzed. This spectacle of two white men's sustained grasp across a slave's black body symbolizes Babo's power to obscure the truth of revolt from Delano and to exemplify its deadly force for Don Benito. Babo's effect on the two captains prompts the question: Does Babo manifest the same "power of blackness" Melville explores in his famous essay "Hawthorne and his Mosses" (1850), in which Melville correlates "blackness," the "deeply thinking mind," and tormenting feelings of existential limit (243)? While Babo's compelling influence over the two captains manifests his sense of power and/or evil, the "power of blackness" – as Melville describes it in his essay – makes no direct reference to racially marked bodies, slavery, or colonial power. This scene evokes the fundamental question at the center of my study: What constitutes the relationship between dark characters like Babo, whom Melville creates from the social fabric of colonialism and slavery, and Melville's prevailing associations with blackness?

Babo's character captures a constellation of interrelated ideas. He operates as a gatekeeper of truth, the mastermind of the slaves' plot, and a symbol of the transatlantic crisis over slavery and its aftermath in the

antebellum Americas. The import of slavery, epitomized by Melville's Babo, is not unique in antebellum fiction. As Toni Morrison observes, "there is no romance free of what Herman Melville called 'the power of blackness,' especially not in a country in which there was a resident population, already black, upon which the imagination could play."[2] Morrison's insight is a challenging one because it describes the relationship between American romance and slavery in the elusive terms of imagination and play. Significant, while Morrison's notion of "playing in the dark" links the American novel to the constitution of blackness, it also encourages readers to think about what critics overlook if they collapse blackness onto the presence of enslaved Africans or nonwhites marked as dark. In my view, to understand fully Melville's "power of blackness" and its connection to slave revolts, Indian genocide, and colonial subjugation in the antebellum Americas, one must disturb the ready-made link between blackness and the lived conditions of black people.[3] Part of this book's task is to show that in order to deepen our understanding of racial conflict in the Americas through Melville's fiction, it is important to see that the connection of blackness to racial difference is far more multifaceted than a singular correlation between dark-skinned people or people of African descent. Richard White reminds us that there are two crucial aspects to the discourse of blackness, hue and actual skin color; and more specifically, "each of these discourses of color is itself unstable, and is the relation between them."[4] In order to tarry in the instabilities White mentions, I maintain throughout this book that for Melville blackness is not always racial but rather a figurative blackness to which racial difference is explicitly significant.

Stifling the ready-made connection between dark racial groups and blackness helps bring into focus other theoretical concerns that inform Melville's blackness. Harry Levin labored intensely over the impact of blackness on Melville's aesthetics, claiming that it reflects Melville's deepest psychological, spiritual, and political wisdom. In Levin's eyes, Melville's idea of blackness corresponds to unwelcome truths about death, the failures of democracy, and psychic terror that Melville imagined his audience shied away from.[5] Focusing more on aesthetic depth, John Wenke reveals Melville's fascination with ideas about "human essence" and the "nature of being," which involves placing his characters in conditions where they face the haunting traps of time, history, and the cosmos.[6] Robert Milder finds blackness central to the very abstract concepts Wenke emphasizes; blackness, Milder asserts, enables Melville to "beg the question of ultimate reality."[7] Whether critics discuss blackness as a problem of moral evil

in an unjust cosmos, a profound skepticism of Christian idealism, or a tragic sense of life, it is understood to be at some level both philosophical and sociohistorical, corresponding to the various ways Melville contemplated the links between "mind and world."[8]

Other critics, such as Carolyn Karcher, Michael Rogin, Sterling Stuckey, Eric Sundquist, and Samuel Otter, rigorously focus on bringing out the importance of racial conflict and imperial ideologies that shaped Melville's fictional engagement with blackness. With a keen focus on the politics of U.S. slavery and empire, critics have demonstrated how profoundly Melville's fiction is politically concrete as well as richly philosophical.[9] Maurice Lee's work captures his own version of this political and philosophical mutuality when he contends "antebellum writers," like Melville, "interrogated the relationship between slavery and philosophy" (6).[10] From Lee's perspective, racial politics, blackness, and philosophy are inextricably linked.[11]

Melville is as important a figure as there is in debates about race, literature, and philosophical concerns in America. Writers like Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne deploy various forms of blackness throughout their fiction, but only Melville correlates blackness, interracial encounters, and epistemic disruptions across his major writings.[12] Even more important, my work on interracial conflict in Melville's fiction participates in this critical conversation on blackness by probing deeper into the inextricable and even irreconcilable connection between racial difference and abstract concerns. I broaden the geographical periphery of previous critics by pursing blackness in transnational imperialisms along with slavery. My focus in this book stems from the notion that powerful whites throughout the Americas used racial difference as a means through which to wield power and knowledge over enslaved Africans, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders. Yet what Melville repeatedly emphasizes throughout his depictions of encounters between the races is how subjects' notions of white imperial supremacy is defined by broader notions of what is possible for human beings to discover, know, and conquer. Richard Slotkin presents this similarly when he claims that interracial conflicts under colonialism are significant moments when whites confirm their cultural and political sense of themselves.[13] This book, however, studies how Melville strikes his white protagonists, who most desire knowledge, confirmation, and power, with psychic and physical disruptions that turn into prolonged and sustained feelings of paralysis and suffering – a sense of impasse so forceful there is often no way to recover. In these traumatic moments Melville captures what D. H. Lawrence famously referred to as "Doom!

Doom! Doom!"[14] There are neither new epistemologies nor new cogent philosophies of self or history, because the profundity of Melville's racial contests, I submit, precisely lies in the stories' asking readers to see what it feels like to not have any recourse. What is it like, then, to agonize over enigmas one wants most desperately to solve? Why does Melville showcase these troubling experiences through interracial conflicts?

Thus, while other critics argue that Melville's portrayals of racial conflict restore the possibilities of political speech; expose vexed, uneasy strivings for racial empathy; and unveil flashes of black rebellion and freedom, my book brings out what criticism overlooks: Through social encounters marked by racial difference, Melville imbues the concrete life of transatlantic slavery and colonialism with a sense of existential suffering and irreconcilable confusion, which, I contend, tempers the sociopolitical payoff that many critics seek.[15] Whether they focus on blackness and race politically, philosophically, or both, critics insufficiently attend to how subjects relate to ontological problems like the inevitable fact of death, the unpredictable violence of nature, or one's unavoidable susceptibility to the whims of others. Blackness, I submit, signifies horrific and unexpected disruptions that induce prolonged moments of existential angst and suffering. Through this psychic violence, Melville correlates the social reality of racial difference with philosophical concerns about mastery: seizing one's destiny, amassing scientific or spiritual knowledge, and perfecting the self.

Perhaps nowhere in Melville's career does the conflation of ideas about mastership and racial difference occur more clearly than in his seminal fiction of the 1850s, including *Moby-Dick* (1851) and *Pierre* (1852) as well as "Benito Cereno" and "The Encantadas" from the *Piazza Tales* (1856). I have chose these texts because the racial contests they feature do not merely disturb or confuse characters; these characters feel their own annihilation with acute intensity that cannot be fully quelled.

Throughout my study of these texts, I establish that blackness cannot be unpacked by means of a single hermetic strategy. By keeping the entanglement of abstract philosophical concerns and concrete social history in view, my aim is to restore blackness to a sign that, in Houston Baker's words, makes "the establishment" unhappy and unsettled.[16] Blackness must be analyzed at the intersection of the philosophical and the social in order to show how interracial encounters challenge philosophical ideals of self-mastery or mastery over others, as well as how Melville's broader meditations on knowledge and power are irreconcilably wed to racial difference. Examining blackness in this way reveals that interracial encounters

uncover how subjects experience a profound powerlessness that upends all modes of thinking, whether normative, conservative, or progressive. I call the sense of powerlessness that Melville's blackness represents the *illusion of mastery*, paying special attention to moments when interracial encounters and epistemological torment are conflated in the texts. How subjects fail to cope with their powerlessness reveals, in addition to the social effects of racial hierarchy, a profound *existential vulnerability* in the racial conflict of the antebellum period. Hence, putting blackness at the center of our conversations about Melville's antebellum Americas shows how we can think materially and historically at the same time we think existentially about race, with a sustained rigor, without ultimately reducing it to sociopolitics or metaphysical idealism. By refusing to reduce blackness solely to abstract or concrete concerns, this book demonstrates that irreconcilable contradiction and its unsettling affects shape critics' notions of what it means to think historically about racialized social conflict in ways critics often overlook.

Melville and the Idea of Blackness shows that fully knowing or trying to master the truth or the real is a kind of violence unto itself. No matter a person's philosophical worldview or political position, and regardless of one's views for or against social transformations, symbolic life can potentially disappear in the confusion of dark and inescapable disturbances. In Morrison's reflections, the construction of blackness by antebellum writers like Melville satisfied a collective need to allay internal fears about slavery and rationalize external exploitation.[17] Here I contend the reverse: Blackness corresponds to vexed images of one's own limitations and death as well as the end of any sense of a secure mastery over one's self and others. In this vein, Melville's portrayals of blackness do not merely counter U.S. colonial supremacy or the absolute power of slave regimes; they also subtly ask subjects to imagine themselves in hellish ambiguity where all sociopolitical avenues vanish – a realization of the end to all things – where subjects experience unsolvable enigmas, utter boundary loss, and self-sacrifice.

I use the remaining pages of this introduction to clarify how blackness relates to racial conflict and exchange in the Americas as I approach it in this book. First, I discuss Melville's meditations on blackness in his famous review essay, "Hawthorne and his Mosses," to reveal more specifically how blackness works as well as the connection between blackness and subjects' failures to achieve or maintain mastery. Equally important is that Melville's fiction takes place within a vibrant historical context; one fraught with sociopolitical and epistemological challenges,

which shape even his most abstract and elusive formulations of blackness. Second, I discuss the historical field that Melville's fiction reflects and that I believe is crucial to the way Melville portrays blackness. To this point, Melville draws upon a plethora of black images and dark predicaments that feature black or racial groups distinguished somehow as dark (socially, theologically, physically). These episodes take place in what Mary Louise Pratt calls "contact zones," or "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths."[18] While Pratt emphasizes aspects of colonial history that display European subjects' assertions of hegemony, I disclose how Melville's version of contact zones draws upon moments when whites *fail* to actualize their physical and ideological power over "figures in black."[19] Along with physical deprivations, explorers, missionaries, and traders shared the possibility of traumatic ideological challenges, a sociohistorical reality Melville's fiction reflects. Third, I briefly treat blackness in Melville's first major work, *Typee* (1846). Locating blackness in *Typee* allows me to relay its beginnings in Melville's writing and, in turn, to establish how it abruptly intensifies through interracial encounters in his later fiction of the 1850s. What begins as *Typee*'s adventures amidst indigenous people in the Pacific wilderness lays the foundation for a more ruthless blackness that Melville unveils in his later fiction.

"Mosses," Blackness, and the Illusion of Mastery

Outside of his early fiction, Melville first discussed blackness in depth when he published a review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story collection, *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), called "Hawthorne and His Mosses" in *The Literary World*. If one follows Melville's writing on blackness in the "Mosses" essay, one cannot help but notice how blackness "fixes and fascinates" him, yet he never defines it in any conventional sense (244). Instead, Melville emphasizes how blackness works, how it makes him feel, and what it makes him think about, rather than explicitly defining what it is. Thus, in tracking how it works rather than what it is, I contend that despite a variety of nominal faces (blackness, darkness, blackness of darkness, etc.), blackness represents a particular existential problem defined by two key aspects. The first is subjects' failure to achieve or maintain self-mastery or mastery over others; this failure discloses subjects' vulnerability to irreparable psychic violence and social

alienation. The second aspect involves Melville's depiction of actual characters, images, and conditions that are literally and/or symbolically black. How I read blackness in "Mosses" corresponds directly to how I read blackness in Melville's fiction. Blackness is both singular and varied because it corresponds to disparate dark signs at the same time it signifies a particular type of existential crisis.

When Melville recalls his feelings and thoughts on Hawthorne's "wide landscape beyond," he describes them by contrasting light and dark (242). Yet, after recognizing the light that other readers see and even celebrate, Melville abandons the "ever-moving dawn" to focus solely on the obscure and buried blackness. Even more significant, as Melville focuses on blackness, he does not make any clear distinction between blackness and darkness, black and dark, or the blackness of darkness. With few exceptions, these phrases and words function as equivalents in the "Mosses" essay and in Melville's fiction. When Melville refers to "that blackness in Hawthorne," he uses a myriad of phrases: "the dark half of the physical sphere," "black conceit," "darkness," "ten-times black," "black," and "dark" (242–4). Yet, along with the diverse catalog of names, the "Mosses" essay contains moments when Melville's language is more precise. In these moments, Melville mentions King Lear's fits of madness, the Calvinist concept of original sin, and Young Goodman Brown's losing battle with "agony and desperation" (251). The blackness in the "Mosses" essay is thus dualistic: On the one hand, it corresponds to numerous names for darkness, yet on the other, Melville uses it to point to something very specific when he suggests that starkly different figures like King Lear and Young Goodman Brown can be read similarly.

Notably, one aspect of blackness that appears concrete in the "Mosses" essay is the source of its force. "Certain it is," Melville writes, "this great power of blackness in him derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin" (243). Melville's invocation of "Original Sin" calls attention to the unavoidable reality of moral evil. Milder extends the meaning of Melville's reference even farther, arguing that the Puritan source for blackness captures the "fundamental wrongness at the heart of life" that is best illustrated by the "spectacle of Job on his ash-heap or Lear on the heath 'tormented into desperation' and delivering himself in rage and grief on the blackness of life."[20] In a similar vein, Leslie Fiedler contends that what makes blackness evil is its connection to the notion that "the world is at once real and a mask through which we can dimly perceive more ultimate forces at work … it is impossible to know fully either God or ourselves."[21]

While there is much in Milder and Fiedler with which I generally agree, neither answers a very important question: When Melville portrays the "blackness of life," do actual dark objects always need to be present?[22] The short answer is no, but this does not mean that Melville does not strategically use various black objects and dark conditions to call attention to "the blackness of life" throughout his fiction in the 1850s.[23] Equally if not more important is that the "Mosses" essay points to two different texts that use literal blackness to signify dark existential conflicts. Briefly discussing Shakespeare's *King Lear* and looking at Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," which Melville says is a "direct and unqualified manifestation" of blackness, will demonstrate that dark objects correlate with existential blackness; looking at this aspect of Lear and Brown, then, will show more specifically how Melville's blackness works (251–2).

In what amounts to a few significant sentences, Melville singles out Shakespeare's *King Lear* as an example of blackness. One major tension in Shakespeare's tragedy emerges when Lear's daughters betray him. He is blindsided by his certainty; their betrayal is an unexpected and traumatic reversal. After this event he is confused and the confusion leads to a madness that disturbs his entire conception of the world surrounding him. Most important, people, places, social intimacies, and practices familiar to the king eventually become totally foreign and estranged. At the height of his emotional torment, Lear revolts against the elements in a night storm. The poignant Fool, whom Lear takes for a "philosopher," tells the other characters that that "cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen" (3.4.84–5).[24] The king is lost within his inability to find the answers to his questions about the world and its objects; an additional consequence of this madness is that he can relate fully neither to people nor to the institutions that define him. Thus, it is not enough to identify blackness as an extreme feeling of life's betrayal or an undeniable evil or a gap between "human need and fact";[25] blackness specifically reflects a relationship between self and other that involves profound torment as a result of a subject's loss of mastery. What is more, Lear presents us with two more features that "Mosses" does not make explicit but which are very important to Melville's portraits of blackness: The first is the presence of literal dark phenomena and objects like Lear's night thunderstorm (the time of day and the intolerable weather are not incidental); the second is the antisocial effects that either temporarily or permanently stifle viable social relationships.

The dynamics I just described in *King Lear* are also apparent in the short story Melville calls a "strong positive illustration" of blackness,

Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" (251). The story begins when, after ignoring the warnings of his wife, Faith, Brown descends into the abysmal wilderness with the devil. The devil guides Brown down a path where all of the members of his community, whom he firmly believes to be moral and upstanding, turn out to be immoral. Along the way, Brown becomes "maddened with despair," overcome with "grief, rage and terror."[26] Overwhelmed by the devil's torments, Brown sees all the saints of the community as evil sinners. Brown then expresses with absolute confidence that "Evil is the nature of mankind," and this becomes Brown's truth.[27] He moves from a normal social life with family, friends, and community to an escalating sense of alienation. He shrinks away from Faith, tormenting her, and though he never physically retreats from his community, he dies completely isolated from every dimension of his social world. Brown's access to what he believes is the hidden truth of his social world drives him crazy and siphons off his connection to his religious leaders, church, family, wife, and the entire Puritan community.

I want to stress that depicting what they share is central to figuring what blackness signifies and how it operates. Brown and Lear are both certain in themselves and in their mastery of the social knowledge and relations that define their communities. They both experience violent reversals and are sent reeling from their comfortable and confident knowledge and normative connections to social alienation. I also want to emphasize that the presence of dark images constitutes the scenes of violent reversals – night storms, night wilderness, literal and figurative evil. Without the deep-seated alienation and dark imagery one does not have what Melville calls blackness. Moreover, critics have recognized that Melville's "power of blackness" involves sin and alienation, but closer attention to Melville's use of Lear and Young Goodman Brown shows how crucial blackness is to existential threats that also include race. In the section following, I bring out the aspects of colonialism and racial difference that I think attracted Melville precisely because they contain the challenges of mastery and intense feelings of vulnerability which blackness captures.

VULNERABILITY IN CONTACT ZONES

The U.S.'s aggressive expansions into the western frontier, Southern politicians' dreams of slave empires, and the numerous Protestant missions and social reform movements to save dark peoples from backwardness are all important historical pillars of the mid-nineteenth century. Within this history lies local and intimate dialogue between individuals

of different races, which Melville fictionally reimagines in various sites of social engagement in different geographies, turning the shores of the Marquesas in *Typee* and the deck of the *Pequod* in *Moby-Dick* into zones of contact. These zones include various types of cultural exchanges, collaborations, and social frictions between whites and indigenous people, slaves, and other nonwhites.

Within the encounters Melville displays lies a fictional view of the "metaphysical aspects of historical exchange."[28] These philosophical tenets often come from Melville's own adventures around the globe. From his own laborious travels, Melville compiled a tapestry of sources from contact zones that reflected his interests in interracial encounters.[29] Whether in the South Seas or off the coast of Ecuador, when various colonizers and traders engaged native inhabitants they were forced into learning new languages, cultural meanings, and social codes; in doing so, they also provoked questions, confusions, and affirmations that concerned their group and individual identities. For instance, Winthrop Jordan captures what was eventually at stake in English merchants' initial engagements with Africans. He explains that when these merchants traveled to Africa in search of slave labor, they reported back on the Africans' savagery and overall sinful ways. In writings about their travels, English merchants and missionaries also confronted more abstract questions of social control and moral values, questions mirroring drastic changes in their own local societies. These actual experiences with people from foreign shores made their way easily into intellectual discussions about race in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Jordan's eyes, the dilemmas Englishmen underwent prompted further efforts to establish or reaffirm the social inequality of non-Europeans, as well as to sustain beliefs in whites' own social categories, normative standards, and moral values.[30] Hence, social disturbances provoked abstract enigmas and confusions about categories, standards, beliefs, and values which were not easily settled by the English and other Europeans. Despite these provocations, modern thinkers, especially racial theorists, sought the "disenchantment of the world."[31] For them, Thomas Holt explains, "race made sense of worlds" in the midst of anxious changes in societies; race provided social, political, and epistemological affirmations in an "unpredictable" and "inchoate" world now calling attention to its rapid changes as examples of modern newness.[32]

More important, explorers, traders, and missionaries who sustained contacts with dark peoples in the Americas and Africa and who needed to learn languages and to grow very familiar with various groups' cultures and rituals could not deny the possibility of moments of nightmarish

uncertainty. The more European outsiders had to become insiders, the more the likelihood of disturbing and unexpected feelings of boundary loss. For example, William Ellis's *Polynesian Researches* (1831), which Melville often consulted, shows the close proximity missionaries sustained for long periods of time with people they firmly believed were of "dark moral character."[33] Ellis's numerous writings suggest that he could remain with the Tahitians, Marquesans, and Hawaiians and always remain self-concealed within his white Christian identity with little need to defend against the impact of people doomed to "satanic infatuation."[34]

Christopher Herbert demonstrates that this self-affirmation in the face of psychological challenges, spiritual warfare, and real violence is less likely than figures like Daniel Defoe's Crusoe or Ellis concede. Herbert claims that a missionary must "divest himself by a kind of deliberate psychic violence of his own conventional ideas and feelings in order to gain access to the ideas of another people."[35] He points to this undeniable "psychic violence" because it is difficult to claim that queering the basis of normative conventions such as language, culture, family, and social life did not involve a range of challenges.[36] Herbert's observations about missionary ethnographers also relate to the explorers, traders, colonizers, and social reformists Melville depicts, insofar as their work stemmed from a necessity to know, inspire, coerce, and ultimately convert alien races. As Herbert emphasizes, the psychic violence and destabilizing uncertainty that the colonial encounter produced in the European explorers and missionaries threaten the certainty that underscores the knowledge production of race that Holt discusses. Blackness in Melville's fiction, however, discloses problems to which Holt's characterization of race insufficiently attends. Melville depicts white subjects who meet dark others and cannot avoid epistemic disturbances as they attempt to understand and reform them. Melville's representations of blackness demonstrate that race always promised, but always failed to "make sense of worlds."[37] And the disorderly crisis of the subject that results from this failed promise is represented by the profound difficulties of mastering one's self, other people, and ideas.

We tend to think of the history of imperialism in social and political terms, but scholars have insisted that the history also entails rich sources to examine how subjects deal with existential and philosophical questions. Whether it was the prospect of missionaries overhauling the South Seas or pioneers killing Indians on the U.S. frontier, travel writers, scientific explorers, imperial filibusters, and social reformists saw darker races as objects in need of drastic social transformation or even elimination.

These cultural conversions or looming threats of eradication had everything to do with domination or indoctrination of nonwhites into Western modes of capital, political structures, and other strictures that define normative social life. Melville's 1850s and the decades prior were consumed with ideologies of conquest and the ideas of providence and absolute truth that confirmed them. The United States, in the words of one writer in the *Democratic Review*, "has bristled so ceaselessly at every step with the movements of the electric machinery of Divine Providence."[38] While Melville certainly could not escape the reality of Manifest Destiny, his interracial encounters forcefully undermine the metaphysical certainty and inherited sense of providence and privilege that U.S. thinkers of all stripes celebrated. These social encounters, which I read as sites of blackness, call attention to situations in which both liberators and oppressors, in spite or because of their need for knowledge, agency, and control, are thrown into a grave sense of crisis or powerlessness at precisely the moment when they want to secure mastery – suspending or negating any guarantee of the political and spiritual fulfillment that so many ardent writers believed was rightfully theirs to inherit.

"UTTER DARKNESS" IN *TYPEE*

Both the ideas politicians and writers used to justify colonial expansion or slavery and the characters' experiences that undermine these efforts are central to Melville's "power of blackness." And there is little doubt, as I show throughout this book, Melville demonstrates his greatest sophistication with blackness after *Moby-Dick*, wherein he encodes the failures of characters seeking mastery over nonwhites in dark imagery. However, *Typee* (1846) foreshadows "the deeper shadows to come" – the kind of blackness that I examine later in the bonds of Ahab and Pip as well as Babo and Benito Cereno (46). Tommo, *Typee*'s protagonist, remains "baffled and dismayed" by "obstacle after obstacle" throughout his experiences with the Typees.[39] In many cases the Typees are not physically dark but Melville explicitly marks them as dark through various references to their paganism and cannibalism. But Melville's depiction of the Typees' devilry alone does not fully capture blackness. Melville portrays blackness when he couples the Typees' darkness with Tommo's unyielding angst and uncertainty.

What is more, these problems of perceptive accuracy paradoxically occur against a historical backdrop of U.S. imperialism that relies on

whites' beliefs in their own accuracy and overall knowledge, progress, and truth. Melville writes:

> Among the islands of Polynesia, no sooner are the images overturned, the temples demolished, and the idolaters converted into nominal Christians, than disease, vice, and premature death make their appearance. The depopulated land is then recruited from the rapacious hordes of enlightened individuals who settle themselves within its borders, and clamorously announce the progress of the Truth.[40]

Even though Tommo is not directly part of any "rapacious horde," Melville portrays him as unknowingly sharing racist beliefs about the savages of the Polynesian islands. Questions about accuracy and certainty unite the imperial villains and Tommo. But Melville stages his antiracist and anti-imperial critique by questioning anyone's ability to be accurate or certain. In humorous, ironic, and serious ways, Melville deploys various dark images (darkness, black, gloom, dark shadows) to show what Tommo sees and how he feels during moments of ignorance and alienation. *Typee* allows us to see in early Melville precisely how interracial encounters (shaped by religion) reveal the white subjects' worldviews; their naturalized ideas of social, political, and spiritual praxis rapidly unravel just as they more firmly assert them. *Typee*'s blackness, which brings together racial difference, darkness, and subjects' experiences of the limits of what they can know, control, and do, also points us toward how these limits cause subjects remarkable angst in the texts discussed throughout this book.

The story related in *Typee* comes from Melville's experiences on the *Acushnet* whaler. After six months at sea, Melville and a friend deserted while in Nukeva harbor in the Marquesas.[41] The narrative begins as Tommo and his friend Toby, bored and frustrated with conditions aboard the whaling vessel, abandon the ship for a stint in paradise amidst lush tropical forests and savages. From the beginning, Melville jocularly plays on stereotypes of the Marquesans by describing them as "fiends incarnate" (95). One does not get the sense that Tommo and Toby are in more than sensationalized danger, but the importance of their perceptions of devilry are not to be taken lightly. Faced with the alien world of nonwhite and non-Christian savages, Tommo becomes vulnerable to never-ending possibilities of disruption, and racial conflict epitomizes what it means to be culturally uncertain and socially alienated. No matter how nice or eloquent, the "fiends" may spring into a cannibalistic frenzy and bring about "utter darkness" (93). The demonic language of devilry, fiends, and

diabolical savages distracts the reader from the obfuscating work the savages accomplish. In nearly all of Tommo's experiences with the Typees, he never feels reassured or knowledgeable about them or their language and culture. The confusion and misrecognition Tommo undergoes during his encounters with the "fiends incarnate" exemplify blackness. In portraying Tommo's interactions with natives in this way, Melville critiques Captain Cook, Daniel Defoe, Mungo Park, and missionaries like Ellis and John Williams who sit at home in their knowledge of all things as well as their racist cultural assumptions of the superiority of Western civilization. Therefore, if Melville critiques the prototypes of colonial mastership by showing that the white colonial masters cannot conquer nonwhites or fully discern their interiors, the consequence of this failure to master is that they are even more epistemologically uncertain, emotionally disheveled, and socially stagnant. Melville portrays subjects' limitations where they desire immeasurable power and insight. Interracial exchanges in *Typee* signal blackness as the destabilization of the subject's view of observable objects, where upheaval and distress define the subject's relationship to himself and others.

Near the end of *Typee*, Melville limns dark imagery when the Typees' honorable treatment of Tommo actually further alienates him and challenges his social identity. The scene begins when Tommo spots Karky, the esteemed Typee tattoo artist, "tapping away" on a "venerable savage" (218). Karky seizes Tommo and examines his face and body. Tommo knows that after being tattooed he will appear like a Typee, or even worse, he will be one. He would no longer be white, Protestant, or American (219). The tattoo would define him like Pacific Islanders: non-Christian, nonwhite, cannibals; creatures of evil; people of darkness. Realizing this in-depth racial and religious overhaul of his identity, the pain and violence of being tapped on intersects with the "new danger" of forced transformation. The dualistic layer of physical violence and an intense interior disturbance at the hands of the Typees reflect the experiential condition blackness signifies.

Also communicating blackness is the fact that Tommo sees himself as virtually incapable of stopping Karky. He sees himself as powerless and imagines those that whites rule now ruling him, inside and out, destroying him and remaking him anew. He detests both the excruciating pain of being "rendered hideous for life" by Karky and the thought that he is giving Karky the thrill of "distinguishing himself" by tattooing a white man, thus giving up or being forced to relinquish the power of conversion as an individual and a white male (219). The entire episode brings Tommo

into a profound sense of social undoing that, in the horror of the moment, he cannot avoid – it threatens his racial and religious identity, but more generally the episode challenges the abstract idea of who he is, claims to be, and wants to be, as well as his own ability to keep intact the ideologies, beliefs, and knowledge that define his religious and racial identity.

In the tattoo scene, then, Melville evokes whites' racist fears about pagan rituals to show that when one unsettles racial and cultural identity it also means destabilizing one's relationship to all objects. Tattooing, as Melville represents it, is integral to the "all-controlling power" of the island (221). Consequently this scene is not just about how Tommo relates to himself and others; it also manifests Tommo's connection to every level of perception, meaning, and experience, which is totality from the viewpoint of an American on the island. This thwarting sensibility that Tommo endures at the hands of the dark other demonstrates the capacity of interracial encounters to represent blackness. In my view, the experiential horror of confronting totality turns into an experience that from the subject's point of view is utterly hellish, since actively it makes one's ideas of self/other utterly fearful and disturbing.

Samuel Otter contends that the tattoo scene culminates in the horror of what interracial conflict can create, where identity itself "becomes more vulnerable."[42] Here, white subjects' inability to be certain about cultural knowledge as well as knowledge in general marks disturbances in subjects' relation to their milieu. For Melville, the friction between Tommo and Karky exposes profound ontological disturbances that all people, albeit in different ways, are subject to experience. Blackness conveys positions one cannot move beyond, a stalled dialectic or sense of impasse of knowledge and experience, which truly articulates what Sophia Hawthorne read in Melville's romance as "dark refrain."[43] The refrain, defined by interracial engagements, is doubly dark; it provides a narrative of the subject (Tommo) that moves in place under the illusion of revelation and progress while actually revealing unsettling repetition.

PORTENTS

Melville and the Idea of Blackness tells a fundamental story about how interracial encounters such as that between Tommo and Karky reveal indices of blackness in various sites of social conflict in the 1850s. I am certainly not saying that every dark image, every night sky, or every dark-colored insect can be equated in any context with what I have identified as blackness. The chapters of this book analyze a specific dynamic that

Melville expresses in different guises across his fiction: He relentlessly correlates dark imagery, interracial encounters, and his protagonists' feelings of existential vulnerability.

My first chapter, "Knowing the Bottomless Deep," unveils how Melville's critiques of politicians' and writers' justifications of Indian genocide contain Melville's skepticism about subjects' acquiring any form of absolute sovereignty. One salient example of the power Melville believes no one has is the power to know true Indian character and to decide whether or not they live or die. This concern lies at the heart of his review of Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail* (1847) and it shapes my reading of blackness in *Moby-Dick*: On the one hand Melville criticizes pioneers' and other frontier statesmen's authority to execute Indians, but on the other hand, he embraces Parkman's focus on the death-dealing reality of the frontier, which Parkman depicts in ominous black imagery. For Melville, the historian's frontier justifies slaughtering Indians like buffalo and simultaneously highlights the inability for anyone to shield himself or herself from death's ambush. While rebuking Parkman, Melville portrays his own version of an Indian-Hater in *The Confidence Man* (1857), and in the famous chapter on "The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating" one sees the Indian-Hater, a monomaniacal Indian killer, drowning in a tempest of shadow and vapor. The real and imagined contests between whites and Indians on the frontier symbolize expansionists' and pioneers' incessant desire for absolute authority over Indians, nature, and knowledge and their internal violence while failing to grasp them.

Moby-Dick's two protagonists pursue versions of ideal mastership that reflect the pursuit of power/knowledge on the imperial frontier, and characters are plagued by shadows, vapors, and even more explicit images of blackness that, like Moredock, deepen their sense of uncertainty, obfuscation, and violence. Melville uses Ishmael and Ahab's racialized deliberations with Queequeg and Pip to address the white protagonists' focus on acquiring self-mastery and mastery over others, which in their minds will alleviate the forceful disturbances that blackness represents. In this chapter, I demonstrate that the interracial bonding between Ahab and Pip constitutes an embodied blackness where Pip's touch makes available a temporary escape from the desire for knowledge and power that exceeds the limitations of life. This chapter shows that neither the challenges of vexed racial positions nor alternative epistemologies remain tenable amidst Melville's protagonists' confrontation with their existential limits. That is, the power of blackness in *Moby-Dick* hones in on the force

of interracial encounters to probe the disturbing powers of being a finite person in an infinite oceanic deep – intimations of oblivion that challenge the reader to contemplate social impossibility when faced with the novel's final scene of ruin.

Chapter 2, "Living 'Within the Maelstrom,'" argues that Melville magnifies the pursuit of self-mastery in *Pierre* by highlighting Pierre's fetishistic attachment to his impoverished, racially coded illegitimate sister. Isabel, *Pierre*'s dark heroine, provokes chaotic reveries in her brother when he contemplates the impact of an illegitimate sibling on his prideful mother; these gloomy and intimate reveries register a blackness that revolves around Pierre's obsessive love for his half sister, Isabel, as well as his intense self-reflections. *Pierre*'s dark sense of affect is defined by Pierre's experience of an insufferable gulf between his heroic deeds and the reality of making those idealizations manifest. By analyzing Pierre's attempt to redeem his father's abandonment of his sister, I show how Melville's portrayal of Pierre's dark narcissistic suffering critiques the moral perfectionism that underwrote the aspirations of social reformists in the mid-nineteenth century.

This claim relies upon examining the transcendentalist contest over being Christlike as a definitive model of praxis of the social good to illustrate how Melville imbricates problems of racialized social identity and the agony of failing to actualize moral perfection. The importance of blackness and idealized love in *Pierre* stems from an analysis that reveals that many antebellum reformists are not merely racist hypocrites who actually marginalize the groups they set out to save (in some cases), but are also unwilling to conceptualize the visceral horrors of psychic fragmentation, which, according to Melville, perforate all visions of perfection or holiness.

The brutal violence of a slave revolt unleashes havoc on two close friends and business partners in "Benito Cereno." In Chapter 3, "Thwarting the 'Regulated Mind,'" I argue that while slaves are represented by antebellum writings on slavery as legal and social extensions of their masters' will, they can unpredictably overturn their masters' will and the broader ideological strategies and social customs that masters epitomize. In this vein, my third chapter looks at the contradiction in the legal slave codes to show how writings such as William Goodell's *American Slave Code* (1853) and Thomas Cobbs's *Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery* (1858), which present institutional oppression of slaves, actually suggest that efforts to control slaves show the impossibility of masters' absolute power. Slave narratives also serve as crucial interlocutors that produce persuasive renditions of slaves' displacement of their masters' authority, individually in

texts like Harriet Jacobs's narrative, or collectively in various antebellum presentations of Nat Turner's revolt.

"Benito Cereno" further challenges notions of the hegemonic and physical power of masters by showing that the slaves, in keeping an American captain from seeing truth and in keeping a Spaniard from recovering from the violence of it, produce an unceasing paralysis in the text; they obfuscate answers to practical and philosophical questions concerning social order. "Benito Cereno," I submit, reveals not only political and intellectual conflict, but also a blackness that points to how the social problems of slavery force subjects to experience moments when a confrontation with a specific truth destabilizes one's connection to all realities. This experience of deep negativity that the slaves embody does not point to a latent freedom or promise of a better political reality; it does not convey anything beyond its own symbolic power. This, I advance, is Melville's most effective point. "Benito Cereno," then, asks that readers relinquish the concrete and decidable politics they most desire to recover, while only reiterating physical and psychic violence. The slave revolt and subsequent behavior of the slaves, which make blackness available in "Benito Cereno," guarantees nothing but the cruel ontological reality of certain vulnerabilities and existential traumas of social life. Readers must endure this ruthlessness, this ultimate sense of negativity and self-risk, in order to approach a subsequent concept of social life.

My final chapter, "Embodying the 'Assaults of Time,'" focuses on Melville's "The Encantadas" and the idea of a New World. Through this collection of sketches, which portray aboriginal Americans, Melville subverts calls for U.S. colonial expansion by undermining the optimism of advocates for imperial growth. This chapter puts these Galapagos sketches in conversation with the rhetoric of U.S. progress in magazines and newspapers like the *Democratic Review* and *Putnam's Monthly* and with narratives like William Walker's *War in Nicaragua* (1860) that press the inevitability of U.S. conquest in places like Cuba, Mexico, and Nicaragua. I argue that these urgent calls for absolute U.S. dominion in the Americas rely upon an equally powerful angst about the larger forces of time and progress that expansionist advocates cannot control. These sentiments of the reality of human frailty are often masked in social fears concerning Indian and African unruliness that will halt the grand narrative of civilization's progress. This connection between time and colonialism is not just the notion of unequal types of time, Western racism against supposedly ahistorical dark races, or the fear of losing political control, but rather marks an irreconcilable link between colonized dark races and

violent visions of what colonizers cannot control – a visceral sense of violence that leads to the end of civilization and knowable temporality such as in post-revolution Haiti. Thus, timelessness and racial difference, real and imagined experience, which critics usually read as the masking of imperial power and capitalism, also display how subjects encounter and undergo simulations of interior chaos, physical frailty, and death.

In Melville's "The Encantadas," this claim about temporality and racial conflict in colonial fantasies reappears in characters' various confrontations with a virtually dead, stagnant island group, which is literally black and known for its utter resistance to social and temporal progress. The literal and symbolic black objects in the colonial sphere define blackness in these sketches. Characters like Hunilla, the Dog-King, the voyager-narrator, and Oberlus participate in racialized social conflict that, I claim, cannot be separated from the black island's overwhelming resistance to change and growth. What these racialized social interactions reveal undermines any fantasies of dictating individual and collective growth and progress, fantasies that underscore various writers' and politicians' calls for colonial domination. Therefore, blackness in "The Encantadas" does not merely deploy episodes of racial difference to counter U.S.-Anglo colonial supremacy; it implicitly uses these episodes to ask subjects to contemplate a torturous ambiguity where all sociopolitical avenues disappear in the throes of intractability – a dramatization of apocalyptic violence.

CHAPTER 1

Knowing the "Bottomless Deep"
Moby-Dick

> It is over, my skiff is afloat. In a minute I shall be there where my soul longs to be … where … there is a stillness like the deep silence of the Pacific Ocean … where each moment one is staking one's life, each moment losing it and finding it again.
>
> Soren Kierkegaard, *Repetition*

"Though America be discovered," Melville warns, "the Cathays of the deep are unknown."[1] Despite unaccountable depths below, he suggests that sailors still feel quite safe aboard a ship's upper deck. While these sailors may feel a "fancied security," Melville insists that such self-assurance is foolhardy.[2] In Melville's eyes, the sailors do not get a full sense of the ocean's reality, its annihilative power, aboard a ship's deck; they feel it when they chase whales on open boats. In an open boat, Melville writes, all security "wholly deserts you."[3] Face to face with the water's edge, one cannot avoid the weighty impression of the unforgiving abyss – endless depths without a trace of light – a literal scene of blackness where one cannot help but agonize in blindness, smallness, and powerlessness.

Melville depicts a whaler unexpectedly confronted by oceanic darkness in a famous scene from *Moby-Dick* (1851). The action begins in an open boat. While chasing whales, Officer Stubb and the crew excoriate the black castaway Pip for jumping overboard. Stubb says to Pip, "A whale would sell for thirty times what you would Pip, in Alabama."[4] Stubb's statement, which invokes slavery and questions of Pip's value, implies the choice that faces the crew while pursing whales with the nervous Pip. The once joyful Pip finds himself in the middle of the "panic-striking business" of whaling, where the "money-making animal" in man dictates the social interaction to the degree that it challenges Pip's value by recalling slavery (413). Melville foregrounds Pip's social estrangement as well as Pip's unwillingness to participate in the *Pequod*'s mode of production (seeking, capturing, killing, and producing the whale as a commodity). Pip is overwhelmed; he jumps again. This time the hard facts of the ocean's physical

and traumatic violence set in, and the prospect of the dark depths forever defines "Black Little Pip" (121).

Pip cannot swim. While drowning, a preeminent brightness in the otherwise dark water calls to Pip's soul. In it, he "saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters, heaved colossal orbs. He saw God's foot on the treadle of the loom and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad" (412). Pip absorbs what he sees and embodies a series of oppositions: life and death; heaven and earth; body and soul; the crew's racially tinged exclusion and spiritual fulfillment in God's totality. An ardent sublimity possesses Pip; it recalls Emerson's lucid fantasy of the "transparent eyeball" through which the subject loses himself in the dynamism of "universal being" and "infinite space."[5] Melville depicts his own version of this transcendence in Pip, yet in the aftermath, Pip pays a hefty price. Stubb and crew eventually return for Pip but at this point "the poor little negro" realizes all the oppositions without reconciling any. The experience does not allow Pip to intuit divine truths of nature; what Pip experiences shatters his relationship to himself and any kind of truth altogether. Coexisting realities hail Pip and he cannot respond entirely to either.[6]

From this moment forward the crew "called him mad" but "Black Little Pip" magnetizes "black terrific Ahab" (152). In addition to references to darkness, Melville describes what made Ahab similar to Pip. Like Pip, Ahab's "torn body and gashed soul bled into one another," and this "interfusing … made him mad" (185). From this comparison it is not a total surprise that Pip compels Ahab. What is surprising is the fact that Pip is the only character to actually divert Ahab away from what Ahab finds "too currying" to his monomaniacal malady (414, 534). Ahab, whom Melville repeatedly describes as consumed by blackness within, is awestruck by a maddened black boy – a "negro" animated by both racialized social exclusion and metaphysical contradiction (414). What is more, toward the end of the novel Melville solidifies their mutual fascination and labels their temporary linking a "man-rope," "the black one with the white" (522). Enamored by Pip, Ahab says, "I feel prouder leading thee by thy black hand, than though I grasped an Emperor's" (522). Through this interracial bond, I submit that blackness, which both characters embody in different ways, is an index where Melville interlaces Ahab's metaphysical musing about absolute mastery with ideas about racialized social inequality.

This dynamic is more famously figured in Ishmael and Queequeg's relationship. Because of his "Pagan ways" and his apparent racial difference,

Queequeg is the first character in the novel to be called a "son of darkness" (89). While Melville associates Pip with cowardice and Queequeg with noble courage, he also unites these opposing figures through their important social attachments to the novel's leading white men, Ishmael and Ahab. Another striking similarity is that they both undergo near death experiences. In Queequeg's case, he nearly dies of fever. He is so close to death that Pip, who possesses "heaven's sense," offers to beat his tambourine for Queequeg's "dying march" (479). Hence, Queequeg grasps his "negro idol" Yojo and submits to his end. Here, like Pip, Queequeg embodies overlapping realities. Ishmael finds himself mournfully drawn to the transition in progress, especially as he observes in Queequeg an "awe that cannot be named," "strange things," and a rounding in his eyes like the "rings of Eternity" (477). Ishmael sees death's code but cannot decipher it. When death imprints the "last revelation," Ishmael confronts his interpretive and existential limits since, as Melville explains, "Only an author from the dead could adequately" understand what death begins to reveal to Queequeg (477). Ishmael, despite his accumulation of scientific knowledge throughout, confronts an unavoidable condition that he cannot change or recalibrate to produce a different outcome for the man he loves. Ahab, also fascinated by Queequeg's physical body, finds inscrutable messages in Queequeg's tattoos; these tattoos frustrate Ahab because he sees them as a connection to truth without a real way to "attain truth" (481). Ishmael mourns his powerlessness to reverse Queequeg's destiny while "devilish tantalization" describes Ahab's pursuit of truth in the tattoos (481). Queequeg ultimately survives, but in the event itself Melville brings together references to Queequeg's black pagan idol, tribal tattoos, and savage essence – all of which signify racial difference – with subtle and overt reiterations of the limits of Ahab's and Ishmael's desires to know and understand the feelings and enigmas that confront them. This moment does not contain the overt sense of torment that blackness reflects throughout *Moby-Dick*, but it is crucial to see dark characters at the threshold of worlds, of life and death. Melville deploys interracial bonds to depict blackness – forceful, psychically violent, and melancholic realizations of existential limits where events like death reinforce the impossibility of control and insight.

In this chapter, I advance that Melville deploys the interracial encounters between Ishmael and Queequeg, as well as between Pip and Ahab, to call attention to how white characters experience what *blackness* signifies – the violent disruptions that occur as they pursue knowledge of others' interiors or seek to master the absolute. Blackness, as Melville imagines

it, has no tractable counterexperience or reformative praxis to eradicate it; characters neither vanquish nor traverse it. But even though dark visions constitute Ahab and repeatedly revisit Ishmael, the novel's episodes of interracial bonding contain an embodied blackness in Pip and Queequeg that presents opportunities for both pairs of characters to change how they respond to traumatic challenges. These interracial bonds, exemplified by Melville through the images of "the man-rope" and "bridegroom clasp," mediate and muffle – put at bay even – the disturbances that haunt the protagonists' pursuits (26). Melville best expresses this temporary reprieve when Ishmael says Queequeg "redeemed me" or when Ahab implies that Pip can cure his malady (414, 534). This does not mean, however, that any character can avoid the upheaval blackness represents; in fact, it is only subjects' realization of blackness's destructiveness and the futility of transcending it that points to the possibilities that a racially embodied blackness contains. While *Moby-Dick*'s scenes of blackness do not present solutions to racialized social inequality in the United States or answers to questions like whether one can know truth, they confront readers with a compelling question: What must one sacrifice or be willing to give up for the prospect of social equality and truly compassionate exchange between the races?

In their examinations of interracial encounters in *Moby-Dick*, critics routinely take up important questions about racial difference and social inequality. Robert K. Martin and Leslie Fiedler see the possibility of social equality and democratic idealism in Melville's interracial encounters.[7] Responding to Martin and Fiedler, Robyn Wiegman cautions against overidealizing the capacity for stories of interracial friendship to produce racial equality.[8] In a different vein, Michael Rogin and Samuel Otter's work on Melville and race focuses on how Melville engages legal and epistemological (scientific) concerns of the 1850s. Rogin, for example, claims that Melville's interracial bonds undercut arguments for slavery generally and court rulings of racial separation more specifically.[9] Equally significant, Otter argues that Melville's depictions of Queequeg and Ishmael undermine the scientific racism of Samuel Morton and George Gliddon, supplying an "epistemology of the body" founded in "the contact between individuals, the caress and the squeeze that take place *in the dark*" [my emphasis].[10] Otter and Rogin both highlight Melville's progressive antiracism, yet they overlook the relationship between Melville's interracial bonds and "the power of blackness" that, in my view, comingle in the trials of Melville's white protagonists. I draw special attention to Otter's use of Melville's phrase "in the dark" to show how characters

reflect blackness: "[T]he dark" is not only a place where subjects cannot see or where they meet the challenges of inhabiting other racial positions; it is a place without social connections. With interracial connections in mind, Geoffrey Sanborn is right to emphasize the "profoundly unsettling events" that occur between characters.[11] Yet Sanborn does not fully attend to why and how Melville uses interracial encounters to reveal what subjects undergo when they are repeatedly and unexpectedly unsettled. I claim here that the boundary loss and assaults on social identity and personal histories, which occur "in the dark," totally unravel subjects, making them powerless to recoup or create new epistemologies or concepts of social reform.

Reconsidering blackness in this way means that undercutting racist laws or science also means undercutting the fundamental strictures of knowledge and social life on which they are built. Through blackness, Melville uses race to challenge and unsettle subjects' claims to power, authority, and insight, making all truth positions precarious enough that none may survive. Thus Melville does critique racialized social inequality, as many critics affirm; yet in "the power of blackness," as I see it, lies Melville's use of interracial bonds to undermine one's certainty about acquiring truth and attaining progress. This forceful sense of pause paradoxically shows that Melville's subjects are fascinated and obsessed with visions of progress, attaining truth, and deciphering new objects. These characters symbolize the United States' confidence in its inherent right to imperial rule in the hemisphere – the innate right to define the terms under which blacks, Indians, and Pacific Islanders live, including who lives and who dies. Analyzing blackness and interracial encounters allows us to rethink the importance of Melville's portrayal of the experience of subjects trapped in unforeseen circumstances where all efforts to keep their social bearings intact, as well as calculated measures to ensure conquest, fail, and where their cherished truths, progressive or conservative, vanish in the throes of tumultuous violence.

Protagonists' pursuit of knowledge, power, and control of themselves and other people in *Moby-Dick* reflects the United States' calls for imperial expansion of the western frontier.[12] Melville foregrounds Tashtego and the other "pagan harpooners" not only for their bravery, but also because they represent people whose lives are shaped by white imperial domination (423). Tashtego (and Daggoo) does not receive as much attention as Pip and Queequeg in the text, yet this does not mean that the white–indigenous conflict on the frontier was not central to Melville's writing

and thinking about power/knowledge and racial difference while he composed *Moby-Dick*.

Moreover, expansionists, who Melville often criticized, viewed Indians as uncivilized obstacles to U.S. civilization, objects that needed to be controlled through elimination, acculturation, or containment. But behind specific removal policies and regional wars, ideological and military, exists political and theological belief in the nation's right to expand and dominate the land as well as to decide whether its Indian inhabitants should live or die. Who, if anyone, should have this authority? Who defines the terms, and based on what knowledge of Indians? The underlying questions about determining human beings' value, whether or not their race should be considered equal or worthy, are contained in the figurative importance of *Moby-Dick*'s interracial bonds.

To further establish this link between whites' power over whether Indians live or die on the stage of U.S. imperial expansion and Ahab and Ishmael's quests for mastery in the novel, I first look at Melville's reviews of Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail* (1849) and "The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating" from Melville's *The Confidence Man* (1857), where I reveal that Melville depicts a traumatic sense of blackness. Melville makes the idea of Indian killing on the frontier a dark site of catastrophic loss and ignorance, precisely at the point where Indian killers desire to assert social superiority and epistemological preeminence. Subsequently, I examine how the "Try-Works" chapter in *Moby-Dick*, like Melville's review of Parkman, is associated with notions of power over dark others as part of the inevitable progress of imperial power. I wish to demonstrate that while Melville certainly reproduces aspects of imperial conquest and capitalistic development, he also reaffirms his white protagonists' limitations by showing their powerlessness in the "blackness of darkness" – a sense of horrific restriction that undermines all of these notions of modern progress built on racialized social hierarchies.

More important, if we understand Ahab and Ishmael as irreparably disrupted, the final section shows how *Moby-Dick*'s portrayals of interracial companionship reveal intimations of repair and consolation through Ishmael and Ahab's relationships with Pip and Queequeg. These scenes of racially embodied blackness, defined by bodily touch, bring our attention to how subjects, after feeling totally unraveled, must confront this destructive unmaking with a full sense of risk that may or may not allow for better social exchanges or necessary recalibrations of self and world, or that, worse yet, may prove to be another elusive ideal that only discloses further trepidation.

"MEMENTO MORI" ON PARKMAN'S *THE OREGON TRAIL*

Melville indirectly addresses whites' commonly held racist assumptions about Indians in a review of Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail* (1849). Several years later, Melville brings greater depth to the costs of these racist beliefs in the "Metaphysics of Indian-Hating" chapter of *The Confidence Man* (1857). Melville raises questions about killing Indians through his reading of Parkman's pioneer and his character Colonel Moredock from *The Confidence Man*. Melville probes notions of who has the right to kill and for what reason by creating representations of racial conflict on the U.S. frontier. Ideas of knowledge, authority, and power over life and death that define these conflicts reemerge in *Moby-Dick* in similarly provocative ways. In conflicts between white pioneers and Indians, real and imagined, Melville sees "the power of blackness" at its most vibrant in moments when whites attempt to control nature, like the wild buffalo, or to annihilate indigenous populations. In addition to whites' exercise of relentless brute force, these moments capture blackness because Melville uses dark imagery to relay a sense of interior conflict when whites suppress their powerlessness against nature, Indians, and their own immediate or eventual death.

The *Literary World* published Melville's review "Mr. Parkman's Tour" in 1847 after its original serialization in the *New York Knickerbocker*, and it is not surprising that Parkman's frontier narrative parallels Melville's own thirst for "wild rovings" into "the wilderness," where one camps "out by night" and stands "guard against prowling Indians and wolves."[13] Melville claims that while Parkman criticizes the portrayal of Indians in poets' and novelists' "mere creations of fancy," Parkman's own portrayals revert to romantic and racist Indian fantasies.[14] Melville is suspicious of Parkman's insights about Indians because they show that Indians are nothing like James Fennimore Cooper's Uncas from *The Last of the Mohicans* (1827) or Christopher E. Lefroy's Outalissa from *Outalissa* (1826). These fictional savages maintain inflated senses of nobility in many respects, but Parkman counters not only this exaggerated nobility, but any admirable quality associated with Indians. Parkman calls them hollow, reckless, and inherently vicious. Melville, conversely, does not try to dispute Parker's notion that the Indians of poetry reflect "mere creations of fancy" (3). Instead, he ponders how Parkman determines character itself when he asks how Parkman could live among the Indians and still condemn them as not "much better than brutes." In *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847), Melville also immerses

himself in the cultures of Pacific Islanders, and to him they are neither Rousseau's noble savages nor expendable.

In Parkman's eyes, Indians are no better than brutes because they are neither mysterious nor complex; in them, there is nothing "unintelligible."[15] Parkman is certain about their inferiority and worthlessness. By transforming man into brute, Parkman reinforces an ideology that has dire consequences for the lives of Indians.[16] In Melville's words, to those who sympathize with Parkman slaughtering Indians is morally equivalent "to the slaughter of buffalo" (231).

It is not that Parkman attributes to Indians a lower position on the human ladder, but rather that he justifies killing another human being without conscience as one might an animal. This racist willingness to murder Indians ushers in a subsequent fantasy of empty plains waiting to be populated and developed. As Melville's review reflects, this indefensible thinking and behavior occurred in New England and the South and throughout the emergent West. From the plains of the Midwest and the intermountain areas on the way to the coast, various Indians groups battled over resources with fur trappers and other armed American traders entering the plains and mountains.[17] Melville's review calls them "traders and trappers" (232). But the traders and trappers were also part of skirmishes with Indians that contributed to imperial expansion by reinforcing the idea that Indians were in the way of progress. During the mid-nineteenth century, the nature of "everyday life was transformed as violence swept over the land."[18] Hubert Bancroft recounts events of 1855 when the governor of Oregon authorized "a war of extermination," one that ironically exacerbated whites' desire to "exterminate the savages" because of their inability to obliterate the Indians quickly.[19] The emergent problem when Andrew Jackson became president was not that Indians were not vanishing, but rather that the vanishing Indian was not disappearing fast enough and in places that were geographically advantageous to the expansion of the United States.[20] This fantastical notion of U.S. progress fulfills what Frederick Jackson Turner calls "the first ideal of the pioneer": conquest.[21] During conquests, whites murdered great numbers of Indians. In many parts of the West, killing an Indian was scarcely considered a crime. Thus, like Giorgio Agamben's example of Jews in Nazi Germany, the United States defined the Indians as without sovereignty and thus expendable. Agamben writes they "can be killed without committing a homicide."[22] The living-dead status of Indians permits their extermination "as lice" or, as Melville describes it, their slaughter as "buffalo."[23] The Indians are the expendable objects of white imperial sovereignty.

But even within this brutal historical reality, Melville declares, there are "grounds for commiseration" between whites and Indians (231). One can divulge these grounds by looking into what Melville sees in Luke's parable of "The Publican and the Pharisee" (231). Through it, Melville specifically addresses the problem of "Indian character" as well as how whites naturalized their savagery and inferiority to justify violence on the frontier (231). The parable reads as follows:

> Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men [are], extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as [his] eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified [rather] than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 18:10–14)[24]

Religious thinkers interpreting this passage across denominations, from the *Evangelical Magazine* to the *Universalist Quarterly*, emphasize the same thing: The Pharisee "represented the Deity as acting just" as the Pharisee "would have done," as if the Pharisee himself possessed "infinite power" and insight.[25] The Pharisee's inflated "self-righteousness" makes him think that he knows the "*true character*" of humankind [my emphasis]. His remark that "I am not as other men [are]" strongly implies this inflated sensibility. The point is not only whether or not he is the same as other men, that is, with or without sin, but that to arrive at his conclusion he takes God's place as evaluator and judge. Thus, "we are rebuked" by the parable, as Melville contends, as it challenges one's self-righteousness, one's entitled sense of interpretation and judgment. Anyone can be the Pharisee, and in the case of the Indian–buffalo comparison, politicians and imperialists on the frontier who reduce human beings to expendable objects need to be "rebuked." Melville challenges not only the individual would-be Indian killer but also the idea of who can determine "Indian character" or the inner character of any person or thing.

In reminding readers of Luke's parable, Melville reaffirms God's sovereign authority, yet he emphasizes the position humans occupy in relation to what they perceive as God's knowledge and judgment. This position is not specific to personalities or historical circumstances; it is the *not-God* designation. Melville does not wish to delve into theological niceties but rather into what he feels he is certain of: Humankind occupies the not-God, which Melville equates here with not being omnipotent and thus

not knowing the essence of any object. Paradoxically, the not-God negation actually offers a positive assertion of social equality – all people are equally human in their incapability to be and know as God does. Lacking the position to judge and discern fully unites Melville's "we" and begs the question of why the Indian does not count as human.

Melville emphatically states in the review, "For if we reject this brotherhood now, we shall be forced to join in the hereafter" (232). Melville undermines the disunity of humankind and the ideas of authors like Cooper who reinforced racial difference with notions of separate heavens for Indians and whites. This invocation of death reinforces the not-God that permeates the review. The existential fact of death unites man and concomitantly rejects whites' authority to define and murder Indians or to construct races generally. The reviews affirm physical and epistemological finitude. Melville insists that there is interracial brotherhood and one either accepts it or rejects it.

Even more important, death is not just an undeniable human fact but also a crucial part of the conditions of possibility that arise on the frontier. Melville, then, chooses the very passages from *The Oregon Trail* that exemplify the pioneer of conquest or the trader being exposed to brute forces of the frontier. The buffalo hunt scene, to which Melville draws the reader's attention, captures crucial features of Melville's idea of blackness. Having much of Parkman's volume to choose from, and given his targeted criticism, it is ironic that the very passages he chooses to align with his praises of Parkman actually reinforce Melville's critique of his racism. The buffalo hunt passage gives readers a peek into how Melville imagines the challenges of racialized social conflict when people are subject to being mastered in moments when they want or need to be masters over themselves, others, or the surrounding conditions.

Parkman's buffalo hunt begins with an "imposing spectacle," a great mass of buffalo forming "a surface of *uniform blackness*" [my emphasis] (641). Parker uses this language to inspire sublime awe. The passage provokes naturalistic and gothic affects when readers witness the spectacular yet immense, dumb, and irrational "blackness." Ratcheting up the stakes of the frontiersman's fear, Parkman writes that the pioneer can see nothing amidst the dust. Despite this paralyzing doom, this particular hunter eventually gets his kill. Still, afterward, as if the blackness cannot ever be fully demystified or the residual possibility of death in the hunt always lingers, Parkman returns to blackness, but now he spatializes it further. The "*dark mass*" resembles "endless unbroken columns" (642).

One could remark that Parkman valorizes pioneer conquests because he interweaves them into a broader narrative of the United States' fortune and providence. Yet in Parkman's portrait of the wildness, annihilation is always one misstep away. Parkman's historical narrative, limned with dark images, points to the stark reality of violent and immediate death. The pioneer's expertise, as its own object of experience and knowledge, does not guarantee success or survival. Melville points to a moment in Parkman's romantic descriptions when the hunter who can kill both Indians and buffalo comes face to face with his own gruesome end. This confrontation within, but also against, the forces of nature unites Indians and pioneers in the context of their brutal social inequities, yet it does not go far enough for Melville, who seems determined to creatively depict the psychic and social costs of murdering Indians just like buffalo.

Another pertinent instance when Melville presses his critique of racism against Indians and against imperialist authority occurs in *The Confidence Man* (1857). The Indian-Hater, John Moredock, like Parkman's hunter, finds himself amidst racial conflict interlaced with images of blackness that reflect the peril of his condition. Moredock comes nearly six years after *Moby-Dick*, but his misanthropic Indian hating helps me to deepen connections between racial conflict and blackness in Melville's works of the 1850s. What makes Moredock's metaphysical force an example of blackness is not just the inextricable linking of existential vulnerability and racist contests, but Moredock's intense suffering that explicitly darkens Parkman's volatile wilderness. Ronald Takaki claims that Moredock's character reaffirms the "moral assurance" of whites in power, yet I posit that looking at Moredock through his failed mastership shows that he undermines political assumptions of white imperial supremacy.[26]

Colonel Moredock's *modus operandi* is Indian extermination. Melville lifts Moredock from the second volume of Judge James Hall's *Sketches, Life, and Manners in the West* (1835).[27] Unlike Hall's *Sketches*, in Melville's version, Moredock becomes far more consumed by his objects of conquest. Moredock's mode of possession and discernment, on behalf of himself and state builders who need Indians removed or killed, is incessant warfare and murder. This pathology is his unbreakable truth: Indians "must be executed."[28] But like Ahab's pursuit of the white whale, Moredock's epitaph is "Terror," and in seeking an impossible goal he abandons all social relationships, all "temporal concerns," tortured inside his own "lonesome vengeance" that compels him to fulfill an impossible goal (150, 149).

While foreclosing ideas of Indian acculturation or other ideas of survival, Moredock's incessant desire to kill Indians is not merely a thirst to

murder savages. To Moredock, Indians are a race "whose name is upon the frontier a *memento mori*; painted to him in every evil light" (146). *Memento mori* is a sober reminder of one's mortality, and in the context of this conversation, an affirmation of an impossible immortality on the earth. The other side of the coin suggests that memento mori is a sign of blackness because it reflects the power over Moredock. The signs of death and the heathen Indians call attention to Moredock's obsession, his interior restlessness that bears only the illusion of being quenched in the death of every single Indian. This goal is impossible and one is left with a constellation of ideas: Moredock's battle with the Indian as memento mori; nature's ungovernable hostilities; the real and imagined threat of being killed by Indians; and the immediate or future prospect of death, all of which constitute Moredock's embattlement with what he cannot control or defend against. His pursuits further reinforce his vulnerability to them. He is deeply entangled by the existential reality of being subject to violent death and the normative racist ideologies of the Indian.

Yet what makes Moredock's metaphysical force an example of blackness is not just the former entanglement of ontological vulnerability, made manifest through a racist contest, but Moredock's unraveling and suffering as a result of the paradoxical condition he embodies. That is, he seeks to reconcile, negotiate, or end his life in the racialized sign of the infinite mortal end, death, which is, secular or religious, the demarcation of that which is beyond one's life. He seeks to break free of the not-God that reminds all subjects of their inability to transcend bodily limits.

For as much as Melville has gone to great lengths to contextualize Moredock's normative social relations (communal history, family ties, individual stature), the horrific results of being an Indian-Hater are fundamentally antisocial. Moredock is nominated for the position of governor of Illinois; he rejects it. Melville reiterates, "in the settlements he won't be seen again," and his companions "won't look for him nor call; they know he will not come" (150). His antisocial reality, despite his confrontations with Indians, becomes his own oblivion. Moredock drowns within "straggling *vapors that droop in from all sides*.… An intenser Hannibal, he makes a vow, the *hate of which is a vortex* from whose suction scare the remotest chip of the guilty race may reasonably feel secure. Next, he declares himself and settles his temporal affairs … takes leave of his kin" (149) [my emphasis]. In Moredock's fixation, blackness consumes him to the degree that he can no longer fully relate to normative social life. He is overrun by vapors and a vortex, the very description of the "black bubble" that Ishmael survives in *Moby-Dick* (573).

Moredock is Melville's final answer to what Parkman's murderous disdain for Indians represents. Melville's critique turns on the idea of whites being forced into a position of powerlessness, facing memento mori, an experience that makes one's sense of finitude overwhelming. Moredock is fixed in a dark reverie of antisocial reality; the racial conflict in the wilderness removes nearly every sense of sociality from his consciousness. Melville's description of Moredock's final moments fully exposes the effects of his relentless Indian hating. Melville paints this moment in dark terms: Moredock is "alone, at the dead of night," besieged "by fusillades of thunder" (158). Under assault in total darkness, he feels naked to the elements.

Melville turns Moredock's story into a scene of blackness made manifest by irreparable destruction rooted in his obsession with Indians and the inherited right of conquest. Killing Indians brings him to the dramatic realization of the very limitation he seeks to move beyond – an unforeseen but apparent reality, identified as blackness. The racial conflict that produces blackness removes Moredock from all his social attachments and historical consciousness.

Turner also depicts the wilderness as "stripping off the garments of civilization," a breaking down that leads to the inevitable: "[T]he wilderness masters the colonialist."[29] The colonist has been disciplined and transformed into the pioneer and, however discomfiting, this change reinforces Turner's view of imperialist resilience. Parkman's whites are victorious, but the contingency of the natural field makes them subject to chaos, injury, and death. Parkman's Indians, as extensions of nature or ethnic groups with specific political and economic interests, contain the threat of the undoing and remaking of white settlers that cannot necessarily be reversed or avoided.

This idea of whites' limitations fascinates Melville. Melville's view of these racial conflicts is not the inevitable fulfillment of progress toward modernity. He captures these conflicts that concern Indian extermination in images of blackness that critique notions of unbridled U.S. imperial development.[30] That is, at the center of what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call the greatest "racial formation project" and "the conquest" – a consolidated "exploitation, appropriation, and dominance" to exert power over men – Melville's writing discloses a redoubling sense of powerlessness that blackness calls attention to.[31] This dark sensibility, which Melville fictionalizes, can be seen most clearly in individual and collective struggles against various guises of nature. These contests reveal an existential vulnerability that can never be fully ordered or made responsive to subjects' command.[32]

I draw from the larger historical import of Moredock's nightmares of racial conflict to capture Ahab and Ishmael's feelings of vulnerability and undoing in *Moby-Dick*. Ahab's *Pequod*, like Moredock, ends in destruction. If the willingness and presumed necessity to kill or conquer or comprehend the object of monomania (the white whale or the Indian) also has the compulsive narrative of progress embedded in it, then by implication no political revelation or rational choices can stop it. The monomaniac can only make progress toward the end of possessing or destroying the object, and whether that object is the whale for Ahab, the Indian for Moredock, or imperial progress for the United States, there is no countersite of social revolution or reform.

In this deterministic vein, Melville invokes the prospect of utter devastation. Within this larger apocalyptic occasion, I submit, sits opportunities and choices and decisions that clarify the nature of seductive compulsions for power and control, and more specifically, precisely why the treatment of dark racial bodies exemplifies this power struggle in *Moby-Dick*. To be even more exact, the loneliness and torment of Moredock's blackness, his being out of touch and antisocial with both whites and Indians, encourages us to pay greater attention to the physical touch and social intimacy of interracial bonding. But in order to examine how Pip and Queequeg's intimate pairings with Ishmael and Ahab express blackness in *Moby-Dick*, one also must address how the novel commingles the existential and social crises with characterizations of U.S. imperial conquest. In my view, Melville importantly interweaves existential crises with the *Pequod*'s mission and its mode of production, as well as the trajectory of U.S. empire, in "The Try-Works." Understanding how Melville depicts blackness in his protagonists (through whiteness), when they appear vulnerable to their unpredictable social peers and the chaotic ocean's elements when they most desire to control them, brings the necessity for compassionate bonding with Queequeg and Pip into focus.

LABORING INTO OBLIVION

Violent conflict with Indians, surveying land for white populations, and debates about laws that organized the new territories saturated public discourse in the mid-nineteenth century. Writers and politicians painted the frontier wilderness as part of the United States' romantic growth. But the seeming inevitability of such progress presented the idea of its future completion, the end to the frontier's mystical aura of infinite and uncharted lands. Melville introduces the frontier wilderness from the

outset of *Moby-Dick*. While thinking about human beings' affinity for looking out onto oceans, Ishmael asks, "Are all the green fields gone?" (4). This question not only speaks to land development and to the romantic imperial dreams of the United States, but laments the appearance of a self-evident future. What romantic poets and historians and politicians know of the "green fields" will be gone. The inevitable scene of production the green fields represent communicates the difference between the frontier and ocean in Ishmael's mind. Ishmael knows that the whaling ship on the ocean is a factory unto itself, what Leo Marx calls a *Machine in the Garden* (1964), yet Ishmael insists on the ocean's ability to capture something particular that green fields no longer can. This is why he asks why men crowd the ocean shores to gaze into its watery endlessness. The answer to this question, I believe, clarifies Ishmael and Ahab's interior relationship to blackness, and more specifically, what blackness signals in their relationship to whiteness. White and black coding is crucial to deciphering how Melville unsettles his protagonists' ideas of mastery and imperial fantasy that I identify in "The Try-Works."

The necessity of making money is one problem Ishmael says plagues the "water-gazers," yet if attaining money were the most significant problem for them, then water gazing would not be the solution (4). Ishmael also gives every impression that the labor conditions under which people earn money actually push them to the salt water's edge. Melville portrays the group as a socially dead collective sculpted in the image of "Bartleby the Scrivener" (1853), a disenchanted and "ruined temple."[33] These landsmen are "pent up," "tied to," "nailed to," "clinched to" their positions, and these circumstances determine much of their viewpoints on life (4). The land laborer especially needs the sea; Ishmael shows why the water attracts him and the labors he is willing to submit to in order to view ocean beauty close up and to breathe fresh mists of pure air (5).

In pursuing labor on the ocean, Ishmael reveals not only an immediate need for money, but a psychic and spiritual need to see himself ("ourselves" in the plural) (4). But why do men need to see themselves and what can seeing "ourselves" in rivers and oceans accomplish? (5). Melville writes that there is "magic in it," but he does not say that the magic solves the alienation, objectification, or abuses experienced in various kinds of land laboring (4). The "extremist limit" of land is somehow titillating. Ishmael finishes the chapter by describing himself as "tormented by things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts" (7). With this image, Ishmael implies that these forbidden journeys repel

his meditations on death and the ailments of land – they are an adventurous escape into nature that is specifically not land.

Hence, the oceanic necessity is both practical and spiritual; it is about immediate financial concerns and his consciousness. Even though the ocean is posited as a solution, it reinforces the problems of Ishmael's inner discord that individual labor, and working with others willing to "rub each others' shoulder-blades" (6), is meant to sooth; the abuses of land labor and inner torment that push him beyond the "extremist limit of land" to the reparations of the ocean's "magic" requires realizing a previous misrecognition – that the self is in fact still there and not lost – and Ishmael is disturbed by inescapable intimations of disrepair, of fracture. Ishmael calls upon the sea for magical restoration, but the sea's remote endlessness, as much as it inspires sublime awe, forcefully reiterates his difference from it, and this in turn makes him feel even more alienated and disjointed. By casting images of doom and shadow over Ishmael, Melville never lets the reader forget that Ishmael cannot ever fully rid himself of these dark episodes.

Interestingly enough, some advocates for imperial expansion in the Americas see all men as, like Ishmael, disconnected from themselves and therefore disconnected from the potentialities of spiritual and rational wholeness. Their ameliorative solutions for men to find themselves in their superior, free, whole, and rational selves are based on what can be achieved in laboring and economically developing the frontier. To this point, Arnold Guyot was a Swiss scientist, a friend of Louis Agassiz, who addressed the significance of laboring on the frontier in a famous lecture series titled *The Earth and Man* (1849). Guyot does not claim that Americans have achieved the political, economic, or intellectual perfection that underscores the sovereign powers of Manifest Destiny. An avid supporter of a U.S. global empire, Guyot sees North Americans as Caucasians clothed in nature's "bondage" which they must transcend by conquering it through imperial expansion and industrialization.[34] What is striking about Guyot's insights is that they rely on a notion that man's will is fundamentally perverted and that new geographical locations are key in overcoming this "perverted will" through the use of "divine gifts" or "higher faculties."[35] Still Guyot insists that through the exercise of "all his faculties" man will close the gap between the "low instincts of" his "animal nature" and the "higher faculties."[36] Guyot's argument relies on a belief in the warring factions in the subject, between animal and higher spiritual capacities, a resolvable dialectic, but one that is certainly not yet achieved and only achievable by Caucasians in a particular geographical

region (he excludes Europeans, particularly the British). This state of dichotomy that will make way for true self-mastery also emerges in Walt Whitman's words when he proclaims, "The true son of God [the poet] shall come singing his songs.… All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and hook'd and link'd together.… Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more, The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them."[37]

Ishmael's talk of laboring in the infinite sea parallels the endless wealth and resources that Guyot claims lie in the material and immaterial aspects of the frontier. Yet because of this, not in spite of it, Melville brings out the ameliorative power that seduces Ishmael in the vast space of the ocean. In privileging the ocean and choosing to be a whaler, Ishmael's character challenges this landlocked improvement completely (despite professing an affinity for rivers) in favor of the ocean's deeper magic. One could not say that laboring on the frontier loses its enigmatic character and erases real laborers on the ground, yet there is an imaginative quality to the ocean communicated by its utter intractability and seemingly infinite mythical and historical scope. This allure of oceanic vastness and "things remote" relays the import of history's overlooked dimensions through Melville's depiction of Ishmael's burdened soul. Melville illuminates this in three ways: Ishmael's contrast between the frontier and ocean as a place of labor and gazing; Ishmael's "inmost soul's" magnetic attraction to ocean reverie and "things remote," both of which I have discussed (6); and Melville's use of the ocean as a place where the modern and the archaic become harmoniously entrapped in a vastness that absorbs all contradiction, where self-contained but competing modes of history invariably mesh.

Using Charles Olson's *Call Me Ishmael* (1947) as a point of departure, Michael Taussig discusses how fantasies of the beach disclose two modes of history. He argues that in modern uses of the beach, such as yachting and other class-specific activities, one can recognize a "new magnificence" for what is a natural prehistory in Melville's life of sailors.[38] For Taussig, the archaic ruptures modernity where a reader or observer realizes two dimensions, history and the present, recognizing both through the contemplation of their opposition.[39] Melville too ponders two things about what the ocean has the historical capacity to symbolize: its attractiveness to workers in modern industries in urban areas, notably Ishmael, and its representations in history and myth. He writes: "Why did all the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and make him the brother of Jove? Surely this is not without meaning" (5). In referencing the immediate present and icons of civilizations past,

Melville locates two conflicting modes of history, the modern and the archaic. This fraught simultaneity makes seeing ourselves in it, on the one hand, a reaffirmation of self-consciousness, and on the other hand, a rejection of any recognizable self altogether. The immediate present and the distant past capture all of history, but the problem for Ishmael is that the vastness he sees opens up the ungraspable phantom of his own interiority – and in the connection that the oceanic sublime enables, the boundaries between the exterior and interior blur and they merge as a mutually complicit "wonder-world" (7). Where, then, does Ishmael's self stand in relation to the ocean's immensities and the overburdening sense of history it captures?

Within the spatial immensity of the ocean that Melville imbricates with conflated histories swims Moby Dick. In "The Whiteness of the Whale" chapter, the whale's (endless) possibilities of signification as well as the denial of any subject to penetrate them captures Ishmael's deepest angst. It is as if all the romantic innocence or sublime intensities of the ocean that Ishmael brings up in "Loomings" reappear under a different guise in the whale; they appear in his reflections on the whale's whiteness as perverted, sinister, and disturbing when he explains:

> But not yet have we solved the incantation of this whiteness, and learned why it appeals with such power to the soul; and more strange and far more portentous – why, as we have seen, it is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's Deity; and yet should be as it is, intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind. (195)

Whiteness is a "veil," "a shroud" that makes evident a certain margin between the subject and those hidden truths of all objects; there is a "ruthless" equality in all subjects in the face of what whiteness represents (195). It is not just a nameless moral evil or reality's "neutral face" as Henry Nash Smith and Richard Slotkin suggest, but its undeniable allure and the force of its effects create a haunting obsession that can become anyone's personal devil.[40] Thus, everyone is an infidel gazing at whiteness; its truth simply is that it is, and to attempt to decipher beyond this brings overwhelming and "appalling" inner turmoil.[41] Melville's whiteness cannot be historicized, not because it is the real that is not real, but rather because whiteness is – throughout all of history.[42]

My emphasis here is less that whiteness contains and is contained by all of history, but more important, I focus on what whiteness produces as subjects experience its effects. Previous critics emphasize hermeneutic limits, material or idealistic racist symbolism, which absolute whiteness

implies, but they insufficiently attend to the stalled dialectic that it awakens within subjects and what it is like to be held by this opposition seemingly against one's will.[43] Thus the discourse of whiteness is not about exchanging the ocean's magic as the source of self-renewal for the horrors of gazing into the whale's blankness, but rather, whiteness reveals a deepening of the problem that Ishmael undergoes; the whiteness of the whale illustrates the ultimate limit as well as the thwarting and violent limitation that awakens from within once Ishmael faces it.

I advance, then, that it is in fact through the whiteness that Melville depicts blackness. The ocean itself gives birth to the incarnated ubiquity in the white whale and those like Ishmael who imagine its appalling "dumb blankness" and "all that most maddens and torments" as the subjects' experience of "all evil" (195, 184). Ahab's drive to kill the whale reflects this precisely. For Ahab the whale is "what must be grand in thee, it must needs be plucked from the skies, and dived for in the deep, and featured in the unbodied air" (148). Melville puts Ishmael on this path and Ishmael does not realize it because he is trapped between the task of labor and the sublime "all" that intoxicates him with bouts of torment. Melville puts both Ahab and Ishmael between the extreme limits of the earth, and as they stretch up into the limitless sky or contemplate the "bottomless deep" they persist in the violence of a lived impasse. Ahab embodies this in the extreme. After the white whale takes his leg, he dwells on the whale's force so much that his "torn body" and "gashed soul" bleed into one another (185). Melville describes Ahab as fundamentally the result of a fully realized impasse, a lifelong "interfusing, that made him mad" (185).

Blackness in *Moby-Dick* reflects subjects' condition of feeling inescapably tormented and dogged by time, history, and existence; it shapes one's looking within and without. Thus, the ocean's endless seascape and the whiteness of the whale actually make occurrences of blackness visible – blackness defines one's relation to the foreboding white "all" that these entities produce in Ahab and Ishmael. One of the best examples of Ishmael's embodiment of blackness is when Ishmael stares into a painting by the Spouter-Inn. He sees "such unaccountable masses of shades and shadows, that at first you almost thought some ambitious young artists … endeavored to delineate chaos bewitched" (12).

The painting Melville describes resembles James M. Turner's *Snow Storm – Steamboat* (1842), which Melville may have seen in the National Gallery in London in 1849.[44] What is striking about the picture is the overbearing dark imagery and the effect of this "unimaginable sublimity"

on Ishmael (12); it "froze" him to it (12). This position of pausing, gazing into the deepest blackness, reflects his interior. Unlike Ahab, however, Ishmael's dark impasse is episodic not permanent; it reveals the "subterranean miner in us all" (187). The subterranean miner remains so compressed within himself that he loses a sense of all other objects. Whiteness is not the snow, but the eternal possibility of ungovernable chaos itself that reveals Ishmael's ontological position, his powerlessness against it. He can neither change course nor regain tractability or mobility by his own agency, and this frustration is realized in the painting's dark imagery. Ishmael's impasse, then, is constituted in the face of the ever-presence of *unlimited* chaos and *unaccountable* masses, the infinite whiteness that produces blackness in the subject – blackness causing overwhelming ineffability and powerlessness, which results from confronting whiteness.

Blackness strikes Ishmael in "The Try-Works," but this famous chapter's black episode manifests the mortal consequences of what is only frightfully symbolic in Ishmael's previous premonitions. Melville begins with a depiction of the try-works itself and then brings the scene alive with Ishmael's nightmare of hell, the chants of pagan harpooners, and the manufacturing of objects. These depictions constitute *Moby-Dick*'s most expansive reference to an emergent imperial modernity as the connection between "the blackness of darkness" and the challenges of self-mastery and mastery over others.

The try-works "outwardly distinguish" American whalers and, for Melville, this part of the ship constitutes "a complete ship" (421). From the outset, then, the chapter posits structural completeness and national identification as objects of thought Melville wants the reader to be aware of. As Ishmael further elaborates on its structure and function, he mentions that it is a place of "profound mathematical meditation" (422). From this description, I take Melville to mean precise thinking. Additionally, Melville encourages the reader to identify strongly with the material composition of the try-works, what materials are utilized and transformed there, and what they look like. When the furnace burns the blubber it smells like an unspeakable "Hindoo odor" and looks like "the left wing of the day of judgment" (422). It "is an argument for the pit" (422). This materiality captures labor and a mode of production aboard the ship. The try-works is a key part of the technological apparatus of the *Pequod*; even though it maintains an archaic flare (brick and mortar), it cannot be separated from modern American manufacturing. It is the laboring praxis, material structure, and the importance of what they produce that makes the try-works inherently significant.

The major transition in the "Try-Works" chapter occurs when the complete ship, in "full operation," becomes Ishmael's vision of a "burning ship." Melville sets the scene of imminent destruction in images of "midnight" and "darkness" lit up by flames of hell's pit (422). In the night Ishmael records the imminent materiality of the scene; his relations to all objects come under assault. Still, what remains intact is the American distinction and the try-works as central to the function of the ship. While neither the try-works itself nor the laborious cooperation that makes its product changes, Ishmael's relationship to the very object he so detailed inverts into blackness.

Ishmael moves from scientific examiner to a figure complicit in the scene, but he is not alone. What gives Ishmael the picturesque danger is that he sees the dark and racially marked pagan harpooners as fulfilling Ahab's plans for them. Ahab chose them because they are "morally enfeebled" (186), because, according to imperialists, pagan harpooners make the best objects of power. From Frederic Jameson one might infer that, in this glimpse of the coerced laborers of imperialism, the pagans are not "feared because they are evil," but evil because they are not Christians and not white.[45] He is certainly right as it relates to popular imagery of travel writing and missionary ethnography. This demystifying move explains the readymade grouping of pagan harpooners not as particular noble squires, but as instruments of imperial conquest that dignify Ahab's designs for absolute mastery – a desire that mirrors U.S. attempts to make its destiny manifest in the Americas. Melville draws upon fantasies of unlimited economic and technological development (the railroad is the best example) that Leo Marx labels "unbridled capitalism."[46] Thus, in hyperbolic symbolism of imperial development and emergent capitalism, the moral integrity, spiritual intelligence, bravery, and propensity for companionship that Daggoo, Queequeg, and Tashtego repeatedly communicate throughout the novel. These positive attributes, also reflected in "Knights and Squires," blurs into the ideological outlook of racist champions of U.S. empire. Whites' justifications for expansion rely on abstracting these particularities in order to justify the violent indoctrination of nonwhite pagans into Western democratic life and capitalistic free enterprise. This moment is when Ishmael sees the symbolic magnitude of Ahab's plan, the primacy of his authority and manipulation in full swing; Ahab's mastery, interlaced by racial and religious differences, reflects the racist imperial ideologies of U.S. expansion.

At the same time, the chapter directly rejects the very notion of human progress, domination, and agency on the *Pequod* – not against imperial

conquest specifically, but against self-mastery in Ishmael and total power in Ahab, which are arguably at the heart of political demands to control resources and land. This is most evident in the climax of "The Try-Works." Inside this nightmarish reverie, Ishmael realizes his connections to Ahab, the crew, and the ship's future. This is no future at all but the realization of a violent individual and collective death; it is the end of self, community, social life, and life itself – which would include the imperial ideologies of conquest that inform Ahab's thinking about the depraved harpooners. In Ishmael's words, "A stark, bewildering feeling, as of death, came over me" (424). "Nothing seemed before me but a jet gloom" (424). Ishmael is caught here, transfixed as he was by the oil painting in the Spouter-Inn, but with dramatically more tragic consequences. Melville renders Ishmael's ideas, consciousness, and experience null and useless. He reaches for concrete instruments – the American "tiller," the mathematical profundity the chapter opened with – but he cannot use them. The tractable social and material mechanisms that he recognizes vanish before his eyes, and all that is actionable is put off into an unknown future. Ishmael is powerless to stop what he experiences; the paralysis of oppositions stifles him. Despite his efforts of control he says, "I could see no compass before me to steer by" (424). Thus, when the blackness of darkness consumes Ishmael, the darkness represents not only his vision of horror but also his feelings of intransigent layers of powerlessness. Ishmael's own episode of being dominated reveals Ahab's attempt to fully assert his power and authority. This reading makes perfect sense until one also thinks that it is not just Ishmael and the crew, but the destruction of the *Pequod* entirely. The black future rejects Ahab's quest for ultimate mastery and his power to use the pagan harpooners as instruments. This does not undo the abstracting of the dark races' individual identities and Ahab's beliefs in their lack of moral capacity. Racial and religious prejudices survive, yet Ahab's authority to master them for his ultimate conquest does not.

If we understand the appeal of mastering "new lands, new thoughts" as well as Guyot's calls to tame the infinite wilderness for U.S. expansion, it becomes clearer why Melville continues to labor in this vein in "The Try-Works."[47] U.S. geographers, poets, and politicians, willing to kill Indians and Mexicans and/or enslave Africans for economic profit and political power, did so in the language of mastering the uncharted, blank, endless wilderness. Hence, this is also the imagery through which Melville's anti-imperial progress arrives. He truly symbolizes the powerlessness of his protagonists inside depictions of geography and space. The ocean

is the "dark side of earth" (528). Melville uses the "Wild oceanic darkness," "blackness of darkness," "blackness of the sea of night," and the ocean as the "dark side of the earth" to consume Ishmael's vision (423–4). Throughout *Moby-Dick*, the labors of the crew under Ahab's influence are depicted as without agential recourse in this space, and thus, this reality offers only transfixing and paralytic terror.

If we see the sea, as critics have, as part of the "universal factory" of capitalism, one must still address the physical reality, the unthinkable and uncharted ocean depths, a darkness of infinite space, and one's belief in the spiritual reality of hell – all imagined as places of death.[48] Guyot sees empty space precisely as space ready for the labor, production, and advancement of U.S. capitalism. Henri Lefebvre asserts that these types of abstractions are not empty space, but in seeing them as such, critics actually overlook the spaces where the power/knowledge of history is itself created.[49] What we assume are abstract spaces, Lefebvre continues, are actually the products of violence and war.[50] Melville's work integrates the two: the reality of social conflict and the experiential horror of feeling one's smallness in a vastness that one cannot comprehend or fully control. To Lefebvre's point, social interaction, individualistic views of nature that project conquering of it for resources, or being conquered by natural elements themselves, are all indeed historical at some level. But more important, Lefebvre and other geographers often occlude space's other realities in their attention to the social aspects of space. The frontier wilderness and the ocean have concrete risks that put human beings in real mortal danger; subjects are killed or imagine themselves as being removed from living history. This position of paralyzing fear or death undermines access to power and is the salient oceanic force that Melville emphasizes throughout *Moby-Dick*.

What Ishmael undergoes in "The Try-Works" is an aspect of oceanic wilderness that even Parkman's thirst for scenes of annihilation does not express and that Guyot ignores. They either do not emphasize enough or repress nature's untamable and destructive forces. Through Ishmael and Ahab's encounters with blackness, Melville gives the reader a view of the "infinite obscure" that he mentions in "the Mosses" essay.[51] The infinite obscure is not just empty or abstract space – it is a crucial part of the existential and experiential *real* of the infinite space above and uncharted depths of the ocean below. Feeling this space closing in, subjects temporarily or permanently lose their grip on social norms and life itself. Edmund Burke details this encounter in *On the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), which Melville read.[52] Burke writes that: When we contemplate

so vast an object and are invested on every side with omnipresence "we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature" and are in a manner annihilated.[53] Burke brings out this equality of what people are subject to as subjects in the social life of history. In promulgating his characters' exposure to other men and the elements, Melville challenges their desires for complete mastery over men or their own interiors, their quest to vanquish or make objects of others.

Ishmael finds himself where we find Ahab's black present and Moredock's dark end. Melville's review of Parkman, *The Confidence Man*'s Indian-Hater, and "The Try-Works" repeat instances that diagnose blackness in one's thirst for what whiteness represents as well as in the physical intimacies of hotel rooms and cabins to which Melville's interracial bonds call attention. In this localization of blackness found in interracial companionship, *Moby-Dick* does not repudiate blackness, but implants subjects more firmly "in the dark." Blackness marks the unmaking of all social strictures and truth claims. Yet if blackness points to one's feelings of being destroyed by one's limitations, blackness also allows us to explore the local confines of undoing through images of racial embodiment. The next section seeks the remnant of blackness. Still, as much as Melville demands his readers witness the violence of undoing showcased in the physical touching of interracial encounters, he also asks readers to invest in a totalizing sense of risk with no guarantee of any viable or useful remnant at all.

"TURNING IDOLATER"

When Ishmael spends a magical night with the savage Queequeg, he claims that the savage "redeemed" him (51). From this language one would think that this redemption was permanent, but his redemption actually opens the shaky ground of spiritual and psychic deliverance instead of ensuring it. After this moment, Melville still portrays Ishmael as tormented, so how can he be both redeemed and under siege? This section addresses the experience of the deep, Moby Dick's home, and the subject of Father Mapple's sermon on Jonah. The former ideas reposition Ishmael and Ahab and make available the importance of blackness to *Moby-Dick*'s interracial bonds, racialized embodiment, and bodily touching. Blackness here does not reveal the difficulties of inhabiting racial positions, a romantic triumph of egalitarianism, nihilistic nothingness, or the impossibility of the former; it opens the door for Melville's antiracism yet it is simultaneously antisocial; it stifles *all* subject positions, making

way for a profound sense of unmaking and unfolding, fully realizing the distress of incompleteness.

Critics often fail to mention that while Queequeg eases Ishmael's troubled feelings of loneliness and alienation on the one hand, on the other hand their bond reveals intransigence and violent peril. Melville portrays this compounding symbolic array in the oil painting in the Spouter-Inn that presents a "Black Sea in a midnight gale" to Ishmael. What follows Ishmael's absorption in the painting are details about a "heathenish array of monstrous clubs and spears" (13). Ishmael asks, what sort of monstrous cannibal and savage could use these objects? The question plays to the cannibal type from the writings of travel writers, missionaries, and other cultivators of the romantic imagination such as Captain Cook, Robinson Crusoe, William Ellis, and even Melville himself. Ishmael, after walking by "a negro church" and "blocks of blackness" while ruminating on fantasies of oceanic torment and explosive calamities, comes to a particular manifestation of the death-dealing human – which, in the romantic imagination, points to yet another traumatic end (10, 9). The cluster of black imagery, epitomized by an image of a pagan "son of darkness," crystallizes the historical abstractions inside Ishmael's perceptions (89). The certainty of the physical violence, in conjunction with the prospect of Queequeg's tomahawk or the imagined harvester of death, carries the certainty of physical violence into the bed – and these multiple senses of Ishmael's own violence also collide there and immobilize him in fear.

While in the room with Queequeg, Ishmael fears a "lighted tomahawk flourishing about me in the dark. His head would appear on the mantle in the Spouter-Inn" (23). The decapitation never occurs, but the fear of the cannibal takes on new life, less spectrally and more intensely, in moments of psychic violence. Queequeg actually makes gestures of charity and welcomes Ishmael into bed. The chapter ends with Ishmael recounting, "I turned in, and never slept better in my life" (24). It turns out that Queequeg was no devil or bloodthirsty headhunter but filled with dignity, royal blood, a cannibalistically developed George Washington full of Socratic wisdom (50). As Queequeg's arms and legs intimately embrace Ishmael, he absorbs this holistic wisdom as a kind of peace (25, 53). Their embrace offers Ishmael moments of reflection but these ponderings with the "son of darkness" (89), as Captain Bildad calls him, provoke another layer of psychic disturbances that Ishmael explicitly recalls as ominous, so much so that he cannot tell whether the episode is a dream or reality. He calls it a nightmare, replete with "awful fear" (26). A memory of a

putative event exposes Ishmael's stressful disconnection to his own memory and personal history.

As a child, Ishmael climbed into the chimney and his punitively inclined stepmother sent him off to bed in the middle of the afternoon. He physically ached and soon in the agony of a child being in bed for an "unendurable length of time," he fell into a "nightmare of a doze" (26). When he opens his eyes he finds himself "wrapped in outer darkness," and instantly he "felt a shock running through all my frame" from a phantom (26). He lay there "frozen with the most awful fears." He remains puzzled. The event reenacts puzzlement and the illusiveness of personal artifacts of knowledge and history.

Indecipherability strikes Ishmael with fear. What makes this a lighter version of the blackness of darkness or horrible phantoms is the consciousness that allows the pondering moment yet denies its coherent relation to history and memory. Fear comes from the fact that Ishmael cannot recover the scenes, and thus unrecoverability unites with mental and physical suffering. From the reader's perspective, more important, Queequeg cannot be removed from his racial marks because this moment still asks us to see him as draped in the clothes of religious and racial difference. So, while at the moment it may appear that the significance of Queequeg's identity diminishes, his identity imbues the "bridegroom clasp" (26). Queequeg alone, "the son of darkness," prevents Ishmael from becoming completely lost in "outer darkness" (26). Here the necessity of the savage embrace keeps one from being consumed by memory and the fascination with digging insatiably into the origins of the enigmas that can unexpectedly erupt into one's life. Ishmael knows neither how the vision comes nor how it leaves but notes the fact of the dark and racially other pagan who saves him from it. The racial darkness, the spatial darkness, and historical blankness never leave. The touching that occurs between them sustains them as both part of the darkness and that which allows their survival from it.

Yet it is in the savage's arms that Ishmael falls into the deep and tragic memory of fear, body, and spiritual disturbances. Queequeg is both instigator and sedative for the violence Ishmael faces. More specifically, Queequeg is there to show an unconditional embrace, a bodily reciprocity that permits Ishmael to face the shards of history that cannot be recovered and the enigmatic powerlessness it relays to him. Melville narrates Ishmael and Queequeg as a process that allows Ishmael to recalibrate the blackness that he acknowledges haunts him. It is purposely ironic that Ishmael revisits his memory through the violent "son of darkness" – not

to apprehend him or mystery itself, but to discover new collaborations that might allow him to stand it.

Ishmael and Queequeg together alleviate Ishmael, allowing him to recover his unrecoverable self and restore light, hope, and security. Melville continues to test the bond, which culminates in Queequeg's coffin and ends with Ishmael's resurrection at the very end of *Moby-Dick*. Here, *in medias res*, Father Mapple's sermon on Jonah seems like a distracting aberration, but it is crucial to figuring what necessitates the imperative for physical closeness in the dark ethos of *Moby-Dick*. After the initial moments of closeness between Ishmael and Queequeg, the two go walking in New Bedford. While walking, Ishmael arrives at a chapel where he and others read the "frigid inscriptions" of the dead on the wall (36). The chapel itself is a place where the dead get no resurrection. Melville returns to the violence of interior disturbances with greater emphasis in "The Sermon." In Father Mapple's sermon, he preaches on Jonah's journey into the deep in the stomach of a great whale. Running from his God-given call, Jonah ends up in a deadly void. Melville calls it the "*blackness* of the sea" (47). Jonah's descent into "the bottomless deep" put him in the position to be both ruined and restored in the face of God's supremacy. To do so, he must be willing to tell the truth, but the truth in this biblical story has already been told. What is relevant for readers is the predicament itself that makes the "blackness of the sea" a figuration of ominous natural power as well as spiritual and social alienation. Jonah is bereft of agency beyond God's will. What is more, Jonah's perilous and futile descent into the blackness and physical entrapment of the whale actually makes his resurrection possible.

What is alarming about understanding the portraits of blackness surrounding Queequeg and Ishmael is that both Ishmael and Queequeg end up deeply troubled after Father Mapple's sermon. The sermon deepens their sense of need for each other. Melville mentions that Queequeg leaves Father Mapple's sermon early, after Jonah's descent, before God rescues him. Afterward, Ishmael explains: "I found Queequeg there *quite alone*.... He was sitting on a bench before the fire, with his feet on the stove, and in one hand was holding close up to his face that little *negro idol* of his; peering hard into its face" [my emphasis] (49). Ishmael and Queequeg separate from their wedding bond. Melville codes their predicament in blackness; the sermon drives them apart. "Peering hard" evidences Queequeg's absorption by his "negro idol" Yojo and the "fire." He appears like Nathaniel Hawthorne's Ethan Brand, alone and staring into the fire for answers

that call to him but refuse to reveal themselves, ones that are not there at all; they worry him. Despite this moment, Queequeg is no Ethan Brand but more like Ishmael in "The Try-Works," because Brand and Ahab are disposed of their social desires, attachments, and inclinations beyond the object that transfixes them.

Ishmael leaves the sermon confounded and contemplating Jonah in the "blackness of the sea," and he finds Queequeg alone absorbed by fire and clutching his "negro idol." Melville returns them to a different place of time and history with the same mutual longing and anguish that instigated, especially for Ishmael, agonizing estrangement; it is a repetition. The practical side of this is that Queequeg did not hear Father Mapple's words about Jonah's restoration. Only Ishmael did, and this makes their return, their sharing, more necessary to alleviate their temporary drift away from one another. In "the dark," I advance, is where Melville makes manifest a version of Jonah's position of utter vulnerability that best positions Ishmael and Queequeg not for cohesiveness and wholeness but, rather, further unprecedented unmaking. Jonah's story, then, separates them and, most important, undoes them both; it renders them in equal positions in "the deep" that, as it drives them apart, magnifies the import and benefit of what they had together and the costs of abandoning it (or being without it).

They move to exchange further details in a mutual embrace, yet this space is certainly not free; it is shaped through references to various masks of white imperial power. The most profound evidence of this is when Ishmael enthusiastically claims at the end of "The Bosom Friend" that he "was a good Christian" (52). There is clear irony about what this means in belief and social practice. The will of God, in Ishmael's view, signifies back to Jonah and operates as a denial of the religious institution that socialized him and, more important, of his own rejection of the desire to remake Queequeg in his own image. Ishmael must deny the infallibility of the Presbyterian Church. The infallible church, broadly speaking, seeks to transform heathens into Christians based on religious authority and the pursuit of Christ's perfection. This authority resonates in the writings of missionaries John Williams and William Ellis that Melville consulted while writing *Typee*.[54] Missionaries all over the South Seas and other parts of the globe claim the heathen must fully convert. Denying his institutional and imperial relationship to missionary power, Ishmael submits, "I must turn idolater" (52). This submission to the object missionaries and Christian imperialists seek to convert or destroy has far-reaching implications.

Ishmael rejects Christian missionary acts and the rhetoric that justifies the grand Protestant narrative of imperial progress. "Turning idolater," then, bears incredible magnitude for American civilization as the beacon of history's light. In this vein, I do not believe Melville's sentiments have changed much in the few years since *Typee*, in which he claims:

> The Anglo-Saxons have extirpated Paganism from the greater part of the North American continent; but with it they have likewise extirpated the greater portion of the Red Race. Civilization is gradually sweeping from the earth the lingering vestiges of Paganism, and the same time the shrinking forms of its unhappy worshippers. Among the islands of Polynesia, no sooner are the images overturned, the temples demolished, and the idolaters converted into nominal Christians, than disease, vice, and premature death make their appearance. The depopulated land is then recruited from the rapacious hordes of enlightened individuals who settle themselves within its borders, and clamorously announce the progress of the Truth.[55]

The passage is about the future as much as it is about the mid-nineteenth century present. Melville suggests that because of racial and religious difference, the people that will not be useful as slaves will be eliminated. This passage pictures the future ruin of Polynesians and Indians, justified and actualized repeatedly under the banners of progress and "Truth." Truth's significance is multivalent. It reflects the idea that Melville never ceases to be skeptical of its existence in humanly digestible forms, which he also mentions in *Typee*. In this version, the truth captures metaphysical violence only as far as it is catastrophically real for the Pacific Islanders, Indians, and Mexicans – the idolaters of the pagan world of dark peoples.

Thus, for Ishmael to "turn idolater" signifies his relationship to Queequeg and a connection to the metaphysical and literal violence of history under whites seeking mastery over "Truth." Ishmael cannot become an idolater, so his soft gestures to Yojo are not real spiritual or ethnic conversion. Taking on Queequeg's Yojo is not about taking on a set of cultural practices but about sacrificing his identity and privilege, championed in the name of truth and progress. One does not dance into this destruction voluntarily – this destruction at the bottom of the sea, like Jonah's episode, comes by surprise and despite the subject's resistance. The intimacies of the interracial bond throughout demonstrate this is not a nifty political choice; it involves the distress of challenging circumstances, limited choices, profound feelings of powerlessness, and a weak and nearly impossible glimpse at agency.

Ishmael, in "turning idolater," is neither a good Christian nor an idolater, but he shares a commitment to Queequeg's willingness to turn. Ishmael never fully realizes any tangible conversion. "Turning" here is a transition of meaning, reality, identity that is actually a void of the unknown, akin to a crevice, which upon stepping into it becomes a gulf. The turning becomes a gulf when one realizes that when Ishmael turns to Yojo he embraces the act of turning in which Yojo vanishes and becomes the necessity of turning itself. Ishmael embodies transition. The transition is ambiguous, coming into the reality that is present all along – only enabled by a willingness to give up not whiteness specifically, but the emblematic ideas of the idolater as well as the interlocking discourses of expansion, trade, and the ideologies that reinforce them.

This "turning" must also be, as much as possible, visited from Queequeg's perspective. Melville composes Queequeg's biography as a catalog of facts, but these facts point to a crucial aspect of his personal story that speak directly to his connection to Ishmael. Queequeg tells Ishmael that after a Sag Harbor ship visited his father's bay, he set out to see Christian lands, to enlighten his untutored countrymen. It is not clear what the problem was that Queequeg was trying to solve because, as Melville puts it, he wanted to make a happy people happier. After he searches among Christians in the Americas, Queequeg concludes, "It's a wicked world in all meridians" (56). He never finds what he is looking for, and since Melville does not suggest that Queequeg is out to strike it rich, given his royal background, one might think he is still looking for something that completes what is missing within him and that aligns him with Ishmael. Despite their differences, their declarative statements unify the characters: "Presbyterians and Pagans alike – for we are all somehow dreadfully cracked about the head, and sadly need of mending" (81). But one does not stop trying to mend the competing essences of body and soul – they cry out to be resolved but are irresolvable.

"Queequeg, was in a transition state," Melville writes, " … neither caterpillar nor butterfly.… His education was not yet completed" (27–8). Thus, the crucial link in their bodies and interiority lies in turning idolater – Queequeg not finding Christ or civilization and Ishmael putting himself at risk by giving up both brings them into *mutual becoming*. That is, their desires to remake and heal themselves bring them into a togetherness that allows them to endure or temporarily quell the inexorability of the self. Mutual becoming, defined by interracial embraces, is an intersubjectivity that is also an impasse, one that is in flux, temporary – a

realized intimacy of soothing touch that does not dismiss the violence of disruptions blackness signifies. Mutual becoming thus illustrates an unevenness that acknowledges never reaching the desired object or willingness to give it up; in this connectivity one feels the challenges of existential and social vulnerability sustained by moments of moral empowerment along the way.

The touch of brown tattooed legs in the "Queequeg in his Coffin" chapter materializes this *mutual becoming* (27–8). Mutual becoming allows death to be different. Queequeg, with his negro idol, collects himself in the coffin and *submits himself* to death. This marks a clear metaphysical boundary of worlds – ultimate otherness that "levels all" men and contains a revelation to which "only an author from the dead can adequately tell" (477). Melville depicts Queequeg's submission and paradoxically this capitulation allows Queequeg's triumph over death. But even though this immediate victory cannot help him in the novel's end, the coffin becomes Ishmael's life buoy in which he rises from the "black bubble" in the vortex (I discuss this further in the final section.) (573). Despite the absence of an image of Ishmael and Queequeg sailing into a romantic horizon, their interracial bond of forced sacrifice only compares to another bond where Melville emphasizes both racial difference and bodily touch. Ahab and Pip are given a similar set of playing cards, and how they play them differently reaffirms the centrality of blackness in figuring the protagonists' tortuous quest for mastery, as well as how the impossibility of absolute mastery itself cannot be understood outside of the lens of racialized concepts of imperial power/knowledge.

"BLACKNESS HAS ITS BRILLIANCY"

Pip's degraded condition and assumed insignificance link him to the superior Ahab. Through their link Melville reverses Pip from "the most insignificant" character to an integral one (411). In Pip and Ahab's "man-rope," Melville presents their connectedness, which Ahab ultimately resists, as constituted by racial hierarchy, labor, and determinations of human value. Yet this relationship is equally characterized by Ahab's unruly desire for total authority. Given Ahab's single-minded goal, on what terms can any reciprocal social relationship with Pip be established and solidified? If Pip soothes Ahab's inner desperation and makes him feel a substantive connection with him, what repels Ahab from their "man-rope"? Pip embodies a dualistic sense of blackness defined by life and death, clarity of expression and maddening incoherency, slavery and

freedom – a series of oppositions that uniquely lures Ahab into the intimate space of his own cabin with Pip while they both remain embattled by profound feelings of existential angst and social alienation. This section shows how blackness defines their "man-rope" and what ultimately prevents the bond from recovering its members and the *Pequod*.

Melville begins the "Castaway" chapter by detailing Pip's background and the racialized essence of his character. Melville finds it very important to racialize Pip's joyful and musical character. Pip shared the "jolly brightness peculiar to his tribe," "a tribe, which ever enjoy all holidays and festivities with finer, freer relish than any other race" (412). Melville continues with stereotypical jest, writing, "the year's calendar should show naught but three hundred and sixty-five fourth of Julys and New Year's Days" (412). Discussing Guinean cheerfulness, Olaudah Equiano's description of his homeland in *The Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789) contains similar language. He writes: "We are almost an entire nation of dancers, musicians, and poets. Every great event such as a triumphant return from battle, or any other cause of public rejoicing, is celebrated in public dances, which are accompanied with songs and music suited for the occasion."[56] From Frederick Douglass's autobiographies to Thomas Higginson's *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (1882), there is no shortage of references to free blacks' and enslaved blacks' performances and songs.[57] Sterling Stuckey notes that in Melville's everyday life he was exposed to people of African descent in New York City and Albany, "a black culture in the North."[58] Melville writes about Pip that "this little black was brilliant, for even blackness has its brilliancy," and this claim is clearly expressed in Pip's joyful demeanor and performances (412). He "enlivened many fiddler's frolic on the green" (412). The point of the "Castaway" chapter, however, is to present Pip's brightness only to show how a singular event transforms it into a shadowy violence, yet it is this change that magnifies Pip to Ahab.

When Melville discusses Pip he pleads for readers' sympathies using the phrase "poor little negro" (414). Not surprisingly, this reference follows the crew's rejection of him. This rejection is never more eminent than when Stubb warns Pip: "We can't afford to lose whales by the likes of you; a whale would sell for thirty times what you would, Pip, in Alabama" (413). Stubb can make the point about time, energy, value, and morals, but all of this is lost because it falls on Pip as an insult. In this textual snapshot, Stubb renders Pip utter flesh. The crew and Stubb treat him in this way. Being crudely reduced to one's instrumental value, or to no value at all, by someone of official standing like Stubb brings us back

to Parkman's buffalo or Indian analogy. In invoking the slave market and Pip's value there, the issue of his meekness and powerless is realized as his own condition but also the conditions of slaves in that market. This reference substantiates Pip's broader black exemplarity by designating him as from Alabama even though he hails from Connecticut. Moreover, this utter dehumanization and powerlessness directed at Pip parallels Walter Johnson's descriptions of "turning people into products" on the slave market where slave bodies were stripped, ordered, decorated – treated as dead objects that had to be fashioned for sale.[59] Despite critics' accounts of the slaves' abilities to manipulate their values and prices, there fundamentally remains an undeniable brute subjection that flashes precisely in the Pip/Stubb moment. The effect of this readymade interruption is a radical and abrupt distancing of Pip from the crew. Stubb hints that the money-making animal in man gets in the way of his benevolence (413). Pip may recognize this instinct as a symptom of the modern economic climate or a rudimentary notion of human greed, but as far as Melville depicts him, he cannot identify with it and it further solidifies his estrangement.

Pip's inadvertent actions and the actions of the others exclude Pip totally. This low point for Pip and the crew strikes one of the most significant scenes in the novel. Despite Stubb's warning and lecture, Melville construes the next moment as one of divine fate, writing "But we are all in the hands of the Gods; and Pip jumped again" (413). Stubb stays true to his words and leaves him like a "traveler's trunk" (413). Pip cannot swim and he begins to drown. One would think at this moment, with the reader knowing the danger and Stubb's warnings of stern abandonment and Pip's inability to swim, that Melville would describe Pip's impending death and violence of suffering in the scene. As Pip drowns, it appears as the opposite, a picturesque moment of "spangled sea calm" (413). But watching little black Pip there in the "heartless immensity" strikes the reader's imagination with a dramatic sense of scope and fear. The immensity is naturally heartless and even more so when one considers that his crew will leave him to drown (414).

The violence of drowning also shows Pip losing his life in the endlessness; it presents Pip feeling alone because of the crew "intent upon" their capital, their fish (414):

> The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though. Rather 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 ships; and among the joyous, heartless, ever-ever juvenile eternities, Pip saw the

multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it. (414)

Pip's soul descends into wondrous depths. Here, his infinite soul escapes or loses its body. Pip almost dies, but the miraculous distracts readers from melancholy. Pip sees the wondrous depths of an unwarped primal world. It must be another reality to Pip because his earthly body is not welcome and his soul is called and encouraged. He is passively carried, joyous and heartless, into the "ever-ever juvenile eternities." There is no dissension or need for reconciliation. Pip, having the only face-to-face encounter with the highest presence, makes himself special in a way no one but the reader can actually recognize. Melville makes Pip glow, not as the figure of jovial song but as a light in "heartless immensity" of nature and man in money-driven culture. The latter imbricates the physical and metaphysical worlds inseparably and this congealment possesses Pip. What this congealment produces in Pip and Ahab constitutes Pip's blackness.

Pip's blackness is defined by a failure of mastery not over others but over the self. Blackness, for him, marks the impasse of the finite and infinite interlocked. After Pip's soul drowns in life but thrives in heaven, Pip the individual is lost. But the racial framing of the black body stays, the historical referent of his social exclusion as well as his status as an object are trapped in his phenotype. Pip the individual can no longer be spoken; he is socially incoherent and almost entirely given over to the eternities that circulate through him. Ahab sees him as containing philosophical secrets like Queequeg's body of tattoos.

Moby Dick's ubiquity is the source of the dread that possesses Ahab and vice versa. The dream of revenge not withstanding, Pip attracts Ahab for nearly the same reasons. With a fragile and weak soul, Pip gazes at Ahab's hand. Pip, feeling Ahab's shark-like skin, recalls Ishmael and Queequeg's and even Peleg and Bildad's clinch. Instead of Ahab being clinched in vengeance and thirst to kill Moby Dick, Pip puzzles him and disarms his urgent violence. They forge a "man-rope" that Pip claims "he will not let go" (522). Ahab returns the claim: "boy, nor will I thee" (522). Ahab invites Pip to his cabin. There is a cosmic and simple touch and Pip says that had he found it earlier, perhaps his soul would never have been lost. Thus, the immortal wisdom and leathery touch conjoin here in the bond.

As they converse, Melville interweaves the language of racialized social hierarchy that comes out of both Ahab and Pip's descriptions of their connection. In addition to his stalwart claim to keep the man-rope, Pip calls it a bond between "black and white" (522). Discussing this racialized and

deeply cosmic man-rope, Ahab declares, "I feel prouder leading thy black hand, than though I grasped an Emperor's" (522). The duality of social rank and racial hierarchy interlaces racial identity; Ahab, obsessed with power, here becomes open to himself through his interaction with the least of these, Pip, who paradoxically harbors the remnants of a dynamic near death experience. Ahab is curious about Pip's enigmas and Pip cannot answer his questions. This gesture of unfolding interlaced metaphysical confusion and racialized social hierarchy reveals blackness, and yet it introduces the prospect of mutual becoming that Ishmael and Queequeg defined previously.

However, Ahab's impatience and certainty shape his engagement with Pip. Ahab does find reasons to pause in Pip's magnetism, yet this does not displace his will. An important moment to assess this occurs when Ahab finishes castigating the carpenter for transforming Queequeg's coffin into a life buoy. In this scene the idea of a life buoy outstrips Ahab's immediate cognitive capacity and he curses the gods for such enigmas. The carpenter, in response to Ahab's questions about the coffin says, "Faith sir, I've," and as if not understanding the figure of speech, Ahab cuts him off: "Faith, what's that?" (528). The carpenter says faith is like an expression of "that's all" (528). Here it appears that the carpenter replies to Ahab's use of faith, but his response suggests he answers his question in a way that confuses Ahab but speaks to the reader. Faith prefaces Ishmael's miraculous survival. What is also important here is Ahab's clear impatience. He also shows up under the theme of resurrection that Ishmael will embody when the crew of the *Delight* passes the *Pequod*. The *Delight*'s parting words to him are "may the resurrection and life," and before they finish the blessed farewell, Ahab interrupts them with "Brace forward" (541). To move forward with greater determination moves Ahab by the language that calls attention to Ishmael's figurative resurrection from the depths. As Ahab thinks to himself, he turns to Pip:

> Can it be in some spiritual sense the coffin is, after all, but an immortality preserver! I'll think on that. But not. So far gone I am on the *dark side of the earth*, the theoretic bright one seems but uncertain twilight to me … now then, Pip, we'll talk this over. I do suck most wondrous philosophies from thee! Some unknown conduits from the unknown worlds must empty into thee. (528–9)

The articles of Christian faith stand in for what Ahab cannot do intellectually but seems able to experience with Pip. In this passage he mutters to himself of his own full absorption of "the dark side" that constitutes his interiority and dwarfs any entertaining of a "theoretic bright one." The

dark side is the concrete lens of all that he sees, but Melville questions and then solidifies its ever-presence in him by introducing Pip. In pondering faith, the resurrection, the brightness of the life buoy, he finds abstractions unbearable, but in the smallness of Pip he beckons "wondrous philosophies" from "unknown worlds" in the immortal watery firmament. Pip allows Ahab to handle his feeling of being stricken down the middle like the earth and its equator (528).

This brings us to one of the most significant lines in the entire novel: Ahab's line in "The Cabin," "there is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health" (534). The first part of this line demonstrates the potential Pip offers as friend and collaborator in a combination of physical touch, a racially marked blackness, and an interest in unearthly cosmic powers. Yet the second part, Ahab's initial breaking of the man-rope, affirms the kind of possibility Pip offers as a friend and comrade to calm Ahab's intense desire to violently kill Moby Dick, to quell his own blackness of darkness within – that vortex of interiority that powerfully calls him. This event is in one sense the final word on mastery, because instead of showing his intent to master, Ahab shows that he is a slave to his own desire to acquire mastery – to the hunt in the black depths to capture the ancient secret that killing the whale will reveal.

So why doesn't the man-rope work like Queequeg and Ishmael's bridegroom clasp? Ahab has a sense that Pip is growing saner and says that Pip may cure his malady. That is, the reader is not privy to the close quarters of the cabin, the talking, and the touching. I think that Melville's withholding of what occurs is telling. One sees that Ahab cannot stand the brunt of the "bright," and with the white whale approaching, he appears at a crossroads. Ahab begins to realize his ailment with greater accuracy by Pip's ability to cure it; thus, the process begins too late, and what has time to take effect between the raptures of Queequeg and Ishmael cannot occur between Pip and Ahab. Queequeg and Ishmael both face phantoms of the dark, but Ishmael opens up and unfolds in a way that suggests a posture of humility and sacrifice that Ahab never even approaches. Pip, who unlike Queequeg loses his person, cannot offer his personal history to Ahab. Pip and Ahab are too mired in the impossibility of self-containment, but it is paradoxically only through their somatic connection that one realizes the strength of their individualism. So they are equally self-contained and infallibly bound in the man-rope.

But it is not exactly accurate to read them as totally sealed off individuals. It is only through the man-rope and its definitive language of racial

difference, abstract and concrete blackness, that one realizes the immobility and social death in their impasse. Melville schematically disrupts the unfolding that defines the mutual becoming between Queequeg and Ishmael as a way to suggest that even for these self-encapsulated figures it was not impossible, but their opportunity comes too close to the proximity of the great white prize. With great individual and collective stakes, this lost opportunity, the consequences of which the reader still awaits, prepares the reader for final questions in the aftermath of the *Pequod*'s destruction. More important, Ahab's renege on the man-rope completes the significance of Queequeg and Ishmael's relationship. This relationship does not resolve its foreboding sense of impasse but the crucial difference between the two bonds is Queequeg and Ishmael's openness and willingness to give themselves up to one another, a form of death that gives us Ishmael's triumph and clarifies Pip's ultimate significance. Pip is elevated to the most significant site of the novel, as Melville implies, but his elevation cannot be separated from the stubbornness of Ahab's refusals. Melville expresses the social reality of both interracial bonds in the highest abstractions, with an indelible sense of impasse. That is, in Melville's depictions of social encounters marked by racial difference, one must either reconcile not knowing or stop trying to acquire power/knowledge, which Ishmael tries and Ahab cannot. As I discuss in my conclusion, only Queequeg's death permits Ishmael to recognize and perhaps grow from the lost possibilities.

REPETITION IN THE RUIN

Before the novel's epilogue begins, readers must assume that everyone aboard the *Pequod* is now dead. There are no masters but Moby Dick and the "all" that the white whale symbolizes. The novel reveals Ishmael's exposure to nature, his fellow crew, and especially as evidenced at the end, Ahab's monomania. In the destruction, all of the experiences and conversations that address politics and the social life of racial hierarchy, the destabilizations of knowledge, and the critiques of ultimate mastery, in the end, are thrashed into oblivion – the "blackness of darkness" Ishmael envisions in the "Try-Works." This blackness is a scene where subjects undergo total failure and social alienation, a tormented failure of all mastery; no one's courage, philosophical acumen, technological or scientific prowess, or affective identifications could fend off the destruction of the *Pequod*. One may view this dark ending as a kind of political narrative that encourages readers to cower before nihilism or abandon strivings to

end the U.S. racial project. The better question to ask is what can one gain by a deep patience for the utter destruction Melville projects – by a coming to grips with the sense of disruptive futility blackness conveys? Stanley Cavell addresses this when he submits, "recovery from loss is … is a finding of the world, a returning of it, to it," but where we find Ishmael at the novel's end is sitting for days amidst disaster.[60] In such an aftermath, how does one find the strength to finger through the remnants, to pilfer the shards and wreckage instead of throwing up one's hands in impotent defeat? Eyal Peretz argues that *Moby-Dick*'s disaster ultimately encourages the reader to do and to discover something as a result of bearing witness to the catastrophic event.[61] While I agree with Peretz that witnessing catastrophe is crucial for Ishmael and the reader, reading the *Pequod*'s disaster as the culmination of the novel's racialized blackness forecloses any discovery and doing beyond the stagnant yet unsettling affect of oblivion.

In this vein, the beloved and hated and noble creatures aboard the ship all come to their collective end. Before Melville lets the reader know of Ishmael's survival, we must concede his death. The word "all" appears as both an abstraction of what is and an agent – as if all, by its own agency or guided by the hand of fate, collapsed in on everything the novel staked its life upon. By harkening back to a time during which one imagines no men sailed the waters in question, Melville signals a return with what was left in the mind of the reader. "All" that was lost is remembered in the aftermath and returned to the nostalgic sublime emptiness that came before it – two conflicting modes of history, the immediate and the archaic, appearing to unify in the arrival of oblivion.

But this is not the case; Ishmael miraculously survives and his final witnessing begins with the words of Job's servant: "And I only am escaped alone to tell thee" (573). His position reveals two important elements of the closing narrative: If Ishmael tells the story and he died, then so should the story; the other reminds the reader of his or her role of witness – a dual witness who identifies with Ishmael and contemplates his final moments in the *Pequod*'s wreckage. There he sits for almost two days floating on a "soft and dirge-like main" (573). Who knows what Ishmael thinks about in that extended period, beyond the shock that the sharks and birds uncharacteristically leave him alone? But what is more important is the fact that the last images in *Moby-Dick* are stated but not fully described. One might say this is withheld because it is not important, or because doing so invites an even more invigorated subjective imagination of the reader that dramatizes its significance. Ishmael's

loneliness is not discussed, a severe irony when it is so much the subject of the book. His loss of Queequeg and other friendships remains absent. He clings to floating objects, and the interweaving of social life of his labors, his intimate friendship, scientific explorations of whale anatomy, metaphysical philosophies – all tracking after intuitive, affective, and epistemic versions of truth – fail to survive the *Pequod*'s catastrophe. He is stripped, and his life amidst the ruins is the only immediate restoration: Perhaps that is precisely the point of his chosen fate. Is the *Rachel* cruising nearby on the second day and his miraculous survival by itself enough to trump Solomon's assertion that "all is vanity" (424)? Why establish and undergo the challenges of unfolding in the interracial bond for naught, for nothingness?

Ishmael, the student, teacher, ever-curious investigator of whale anatomy, sitting amidst the ruins of all his avenues of knowledge and experience, resembles a painting of Democritus by Salvator Rosa, whose work Melville knew and admired. Democritus is also famous for his great learning. He rigorously studied medicine, philosophy, and the supernatural; Democritus epitomizes the modern intellect. In *Democritus in Meditation* (1650) skeletons and debris symbolize death. He has no companions and it appears that Democritus is somber and in disbelief and melancholy. Rosa's painting asks the reader to deal with vanity's incessant relationship to objects of knowledge and the futility of them from staving off imminent disasters. This painting does not warn of death in the utter destruction of dealing with the brutal realities of objects of knowledge; it demands that one's relationship to self, social life, and world be addressed. Democritus's mastery yields in this forceful image of existential vulnerability, one inscribed by his very being itself. What this does for him and Ishmael, I believe, is the same for the imagined reader. The value in peering over the edge of oblivion necessitates change in one's relation to the same objects; it is a choice that forces a reinvention of the same – a repetition.

I mention repetition as way to return to the first line of the epilogue, the first inclination that in fact, even all collapsed; the remnant of destruction was to be Melville's gift. Melville places the Old Testament book of Job at the beginning of Ishmael's epilogue. Job experiences a series of catastrophic events that destroy his sons, daughters, and assets, and each time his servants retell the event, they each say, "I alone have escaped to tell you." The servants speak of utter destruction that in *Moby-Dick*'s epilogue occurs in one line. But any reader of the story knows that these words report ultimate loss and that the question posited, then, is what is

gained by such violent calamity? Job is especially significant, not because Melville mentions him throughout *Moby-Dick* to establish the insurmountable gulf between man and the absolute, but because Job embodies an exemplary repetition. One of the central moments in Kierkegaard's *Repetition* (1843) stems from a belief that only a thunderstorm from God, mightiest of absolute destruction, can replenish the soul "when every human certainty and probability were impossible."[62] At the end of Job, "they come to him and eat bread with him and console him; his brothers and his sisters, each of them, give him a farthing and a gold ring – Job is blessed and received everything *double* – This is called a *repetition*."[63]

In the epilogue, Melville returns to the black image of a "closing vortex" he uses later with Colonel Moredock, the Indian-Hater (573). Moredock drowns in the gray vapors of a vortex closing in all sides, but Ishmael catapults from the center of the black bubble's "upward burst" (573). Ishmael's resurrection allows his survival but does not grant everything back double, as in Job's case. Ishmael's bursting through blackness, "that vital centre," into a new life is enough for him to appear fulfilled through the event of survival (573). But the point Kierkegaard makes about Job – and what is fundamental to Melville's point here – is that in the force of the *Pequod*'s catastrophe one has to lose (one is always an orphan and should accept that) by force. What puts race in the center of my claim is the necessity of Queequeg's death. If Queequeg did not die, then the reader would not know the devastation of Ishmael's loss. Ishmael and Queequeg's mutual becoming is a willing act of self-sacrifice, a kind of death of old selves with no guarantee of newer selves except in the reader. But what these sacrifices do promise is the certainty of a different self/world relation – a formal guarantee that is made only better here, when one considers the underappreciated possibilities that are lost. The luxury of interracial circumstance could become the necessity of interracial repair.

As evidenced by Queequeg's coffin and what Melville deploys the coffin to stand for, Ishmael's life buoy, one witnesses a submission that disentangles the stranglehold of pursuing Moby Dick. Ahab could never submit to anything or give himself over to any other than to the fulfillment of his quest for absolute mastery. Those who seek to conquer the "all" see that the pursuit only destroys without recourse to what was lost (referencing Ahab's wife is not enough) in the story Melville tells. But it is the reader who submits to the violence Ahab causes because the novel shows the reader that without regard to one's specific personal or sociopolitical interests, one must witness the death of the self and immediate objects of desire and possession and process the real pain of doing without them. In

this capacity alone, at the edge of a precipice that blackness calls attention to, subjects return with the possibilities of new talk of social equality in a reality of rigid racialized social hierarchies.

Critics interested in racial difference in this novel too often limit Melville's disquieting critique to various idolaters of white supremacy. What I submit about the pitfalls of mastery is not relevant only for advocates of imperialism and slavery; it also suggests that all advocates for antiracist progressivism and abolitionism should come to grips with their own human frailty, weakness, selfishness, and potential to be consumed by the Truth they espouse, which no political or social paradigm has yet been able to traverse.

CHAPTER 2

Living "Within the Maelstrom"
Pierre

> Blackness advances …
>
> Melville, *Pierre*

> And now, my brothers, you will ask, what in these desponding days can be done by us?
>
> Ralph W. Emerson, "An Address"

At *Moby-Dick*'s end the reader sees Ishmael with only his mind and memory intact. His scene of blackness is not really of his own making – it is a result of Ahab's unrelenting pursuit for the absolute and his refusal of black Pip's intimacy, which ultimately crushes the social world of the *Pequod*. In Melville's subsequent novel *Pierre*, he abandons the wide world of sailing for the wide world of a domestic love plot concerning a young American aristocrat named Pierre. Like Ahab, *Pierre*'s protagonist, Pierre, suffers from his inability to discern and master truth and Melville portrays the violence of this failure in blackness. While *Pierre* too ends in a scene of ruin, nature's annihilative power does not epitomize blackness in the novel. Pierre becomes violently undone through his affective relationship to his half sister. As a result of Pierre's obsession with redeeming his half sister and disavowing society, he dies totally isolated from his family and still fundamentally disconnected from his half sister.

Pierre's final scene, which Melville uses to illustrate the demise of his maddened protagonist, registers darkness in several indices. Pierre dies at night on the "granite hell" of a "low dungeon of a city prison" almost completely bereft of light.[1] In this physical darkness, only the reader can see Pierre and Isabel's situation as one of great "deluge," a "wreck" (362). The most telling moment of this ending occurs when Isabel, after taking poison, "sloped sideways, and she fell upon Pierre's heart, and her *long hair* ran over him, and arbored him in *ebon vines*" (362). Throughout the novel (especially when Isabel recounts her history), the density and color of Isabel's black hair mesmerizes Pierre. In the finale her black

tresses run over him; a literal blackness that symbolically calls attention to his entire tragic predicament. While Isabel is not racially black, the "Nubian power" of her hair and eyes, as well as the utter absence of a recognizable family history, make her appear racially ambiguous, a dark heroine of mysterious blood who opposes Pierre's carefully delineated white racial inheritance (145). Blackness in *Pierre* corresponds to an important constellation of ideas: the physical attributes that reflect Isabel's racial uncertainty; Pierre's tortured quest to live the truth; and their unstable intimate relationship, which ends in their demise during the final moments of the novel.

My emphasis in this chapter is not to merely reiterate that Melville points out gaps between reformers' words and deeds. Instead, I demonstrate how Isabel and Pierre's blackness reveals the extreme suffering and disarray that can occur when idealist reformers realize the horrific challenges of trying to practice a Christlike moral perfection; through this ongoing but sometimes latent failure Melville exposes how even the most ambitious subjects experience the destabilizing and arresting force that blackness reflects: While championing an idyllic social reform for the dark and downtrodden, Pierre painfully exemplifies the selfishness that makes it nearly impossible. Pierre, as Andrew Delbanco observes, "will not emerge wiser and stronger. In fact, he will not emerge at all."[2]

Pierre begins as a story of a young man from a rich and powerful white family who finds out he has an estranged half sister. He sets out to rescue her, destroying his family ties and his inheritance, and in the end, he fails. Pierre designates himself the savior of his destitute half sister, but in his quest to redeem and honor her, he finds himself not just querying "Fates," but feeling his entire mission lapse into "impenetrable blackness," a "black gulf" that repeatedly produces anguish and futility about the future (61, 271).

In light of the discovery that his deceased father, whom Pierre admired, had an illegitimate daughter, Pierre ponders an important question that also preoccupies Ralph W. Emerson in his famous address to the Harvard Divinity School (1838): "What can be done by us?" Pierre, ever impatient, jumps past the Emersonian "can" and asks himself, "What *must* I do?" (87). Feeling sympathetic to his estranged, poor half sister, Pierre immediately rejects his past and his family in order to reclaim a new life and save the outcast Isabel. This is Pierre's redemptive and "glorious cause" (180). But this moral imperative turns into an incestuous love affair that indicates how noble intentions centered on the discovery and use of divine intuition can go horribly wrong in the hands of an overconfident and

self-deluded idealist. What is more, Melville emphasizes that one's confidence in one's ability to actualize knowledge can itself become agonizing delusions. Ultimately, the power Pierre seeks through his "glorious cause" becomes an unattainable object, and the encounter with Isabel constitutes the volatility and chaotic experience of an earthly person aspiring for divine mastery. Isabel herself and Pierre's premonitions of her usher in an onslaught of black references that reflect the profound distress of Pierre's experiences.

While they do not explicitly take up the question of blackness, critics such as William Spanos and Sianne Ngai address Pierre's challenge of acquiring the knowledge and power he seeks through the rejection of his symbolic familial legacy. By calling attention to the "Chronometricals and Horologicals" section at the center of the book, Spanos argues that Pierre is an irreverent dissident within his powerful family who must be suppressed. Since Pierre rejects his family's aristocratic patriarchy, a symbol of U.S. imperial domination, Pierre must be killed. Pierre's dissidence from patriarchy, Spanos contends, prompts the American world to kill him and Isabel.[3] Sianne Ngai reads *Pierre* in direct contrast to Spanos, arguing that Pierre does not reject patriarchal ideologies of imperial, racial, and gendered domination but recoups and restores them.[4] In Ngai's eyes, Pierre does so by surrendering to powerful objects in the novel, which allows him to project himself onto them so he can regain "some situatedness in the world" and avoid "directionless oscillation."[5]

Spanos rightly singles out the importance of "Chronometricals and Horologicals," a crucial moment in the novel, but he overlooks the centrality of Melville's deployment of Christ's divinity and what it allows Jesus to accomplish. This oversight, furthermore, overshadows two important historical dimensions that relate to one another in different registers: the significance of transcendentalists' theological debates about the individual's relationship to God's divine communication and the practical use value of spiritual transformation to resolve whites' growing discomfort with racialized groups.[6] The relation between the theological contest over one's capacity to be like Jesus did not spring forth from problems of racialized social conflict specifically but came about as transcendentalist reformers addressed the practical capacity of living deeds while confronting what to do about issues that explicitly concerned racial difference: abolition, poverty, and other social inequalities. Ngai shows how Pierre accomplishes his own patriarchal agency, but without keeping "Chronometricals and Horologicals" closely in mind, she insufficiently attends to the existential bind Pierre faces as he tries to stretch into what

he perceives as divine intuitions. In Pierre's attempts to save Isabel, what does his sense of agency accomplish? Pierre disowns his mortal parents and in him a "Christ is born," and as a heavenly begotten "Enthusiast to Duty," he dies with his half sister, underneath her "ebon vines," without accomplishing anything (106, 362). If he captures the truth of his power, which enables him to begin his own narrative of reformist activism, how do objects of blackness like Isabel's "ebon vines" symbolize the impossibility of recovering it and using it in the ways he wants to?

Isabel accumulates a range of objects that mark how Pierre experiences blackness with her, from "impenetrable blackness" upon their initial interactions to Melville's repeated references to her physical body (black eyes, black locks, and racial and religious ambiguity) (61). Isabel and Pierre's encounters are the locus of what blackness signifies in *Pierre*. More precisely, blackness shows Pierre's existential limits, and the result of his not being able to do as he feels or wants produces a sense of torment that Melville displays in an array of black codes – markings that signal his estrangement from naturalized social attachments (self, family, community, and the state). Their twisted love relationship materializes blackness in the text, where Isabel actually destroys rather than edifies, enslaves rather than liberates, clouds rather than illuminates whatever truth Pierre is determined to know and practice.

Additionally, I argue that this love attachment to Isabel, which is a personal, obsessive, and incestuous relation masquerading as a divine truth, is the affective connection through which Melville creates an affective register of blackness in *Pierre*. In *Pierre* the moral import of love with all its ideological and physical trappings takes center stage. The different types of love – divine and human, emotional and physical – bleed into one another, and Pierre's belief that he can wield a power without boundaries in a bound human frame, as Jesus did, actually causes psychic, physical, and spiritual violence, which blackness signifies. Blackness in *Pierre*, in light of "Chronometricals and Horologicals," does not merely indicate a challenge to any notion that human beings can make actionable Godlike or idealistic love (and truth); it also shows the effects of failing while overconfident.

Thus, in light of what I am arguing about being Christlike, blackness, and *Pierre*, we can return to the theological and social question Emerson raises for his audience: "What can be done by us?" Unlike Melville's famous ridicule of Ishmael's pantheistic vision in "The Mast-Head" chapter of *Moby-Dick* or portrayals of Emerson's rainbow in *The Confidence Man*, Pierre's quest to do living deeds reflects transcendentalists' debates

over the necessity of saving the racialized social outcasts, those whom Theodore Parker calls the "dangerous classes."[7] Isabel connects us with the hidden truth of interracial relatedness. Robert Levine calls this sociohistorical reality "racial entanglement."[8] In *Pierre*, Isabel symbolizes Melville's version of the excluded, marginalized, and downtrodden. She captures an unreadable racial mix, which also reflects the groupings of "all colors and classes" that reformers said needed to be saved.[9] Isabel's presence introduces a racial difference that makes blackness dualistic in the novel, functioning on the one hand as the frightful experience of revealing one's ontological limits when one wants to transcend them and on the other as people of color and others that need to be reformed; both function together and symbolize Pierre's feelings of being kept from achieving his "high deeds" (171). Pierre and Isabel's love connection forces Pierre to realize his volatile interior, the weakness and frailties that unveil the pitfalls of seeking perfection and total mastery over one's self and others. Through Pierre's social encounters marked by racial difference, Melville also problematizes the transcendentalists' rhetoric of social reform, calling attention to the reality of human imperfection – sin, pain, chaos, bodily weakness, and selfishness that transcendentalists were confident did not exist or could be immediately or eventually overcome.

In my view, in order to analyze the import of Pierre's failure to redeem himself and Isabel, it is insufficient to focus on Melville's validation or refutation of transcendentalists' concepts or on his position within the culture of sentimentality generally.[10] Pierre's problems, while pertinent to general discourses of feeling, are more specific to transcendentalist ideas of social reform that professed the means to address social conflict through their abilities to intuit and actualize divine truth. In this vein, this chapter begins by studying transcendentalists' discussions of what it means to be like Christ in spiritual understanding and social practice in order to emphasize how Melville counters this in *Pierre*'s "Chronometricals and Horologicals." I use Theodore Parker's "The Dangerous Classes" sermon, in conversation with "Chronometricals and Horologicals," to illuminate Melville's challenges on practicing Christ's love as well as why racialized social conflict is inextricable from the theological understandings of Christian social reform in the 1840s and 1850s. Subsequently, I show that in rescuing Isabel, Pierre believes so strongly in his radical ability to embody Christ's divine love that he cannot see that he suffers in the blackness Isabel reveals in his life, and this experience intensifies as he reproduces the same will to truth and power he initially sets out to reject. Following this, I look at Pierre's daydreams about Dante in order to show

how they convey Pierre's feelings of contradiction through his affective and bodily attachment to Isabel. Even though Pierre's dark reveries are replete with metaphysical flourishes, I analyze them as ideas about history and the future that cannot be removed from an undeniable sense of bodily materiality, which Dante helps Melville create. The coda of this chapter returns to Emerson, whose nightmares over what people should do in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Law (1850) appear to vindicate Melville's characterization of how subjects suffer in the gap between reform rhetoric and praxis in *Pierre*.

EVERYBODY'S CHRIST AND THE "DANGEROUS CLASSES"

Melville does not have a reputation for being shy about other people's hypocrisy. In one of the more famous parts of his *Correspondence*, he claims that those who profess political equality "accept the intellectual estates."[11] Despite their political declarations, in Melville's mind, this imagined collective actually displays a "torpedo-fish thrill at the slightest contact with a social plebian."[12] This statement refers to any intellectual who is not willing to take part in what for Melville may be the equivalent of a whaling voyage with downtrodden "mariners, renegades, and castaways."[13] One group who has deep intellectual roots in and gears itself toward helping sinners, enslaved Africans, abused free blacks, and pagans, and toward addressing the conditions in prisons and schools, is the transcendentalist social reformers.

Melville's skepticism of transcendentalists is well noted by critics.[14] After charting Melville's exposure to Ralph Emerson and Plato, Merton Sealts discusses the varied exchanges and exposures with transcendentalist ideals that shaped Melville.[15] Despite the significance of what Sealts exposes, Melville imagines that people can tragically rely on idealist philosophy as a means of praxis. This does not mean their experiential limits have no bearing on transcendentalist concepts at all. Rather, I read Melville not as dismantling a group of thinkers in *Pierre*, but highlighting the gap between beliefs and practices, particularly those that insufficiently deal with the impact of human frailty.

Many famous transcendentalists stressed people's individual ability to reflect Christ's relationship to God in their interactions with other people. While they claimed to be fervent givers to the poor, rescuers of the weak, and heroes to the oppressed, Melville gives them little if any credit for these actions in *Pierre*. Transcendentalists, he explains, are merely "theoretic and inactive" and therefore harmless (262). While this fictional

expression certainly overstates the case, Theodore Parker, Emerson, and Brownson were involved in a decade-long (arguably century-long) battle about absorbing moral imperatives and the best way to make them manifest for society's benefit. For them, Jesus Christ became a significant point of departure when thinkers addressed individual and collective social dynamics, and hence, one's ability to think and do in light of innate divine possibility.

When Emerson gave his famous "Address" to the Harvard Divinity School, Jesus Christ's supernatural power seemed tangential or downgraded if not completely removed from Emerson's theological, spiritual, and social intervention. Through Jesus, Emerson writes, people can learn "that his being is without bound; that to the good, to the perfect, he is born, low as he now lies in weakness" (64).[16] Emerson continues, "Evil is so much death or nonentity. Benevolence is absolute and real" (65). The former ideas culminate in Emerson's view of how they can be actualized. If people realize that they were never shackled by boundaries or evil and commit to benevolence, then God's universe will present a new relationship, which is *true reality*.

More specifically, Emerson elevates man and counters what he perceives as a "noxious exaggeration about the person of Jesus" and his miracles in the churches that remain loyal to the messages of "Historical Christianity" (68). The problem that theologians and preachers too often claim is that Christ's "virtue and truth foreclosed and monopolized" divine revelation and that a dynamic relationship with God is over (68). Emerson asserts that divine revelation is ongoing, not part of the past, but past, present, and future. Every person has the capacity to achieve it and realize it within himself or herself. Additionally, this individual capacity could not be restricted by other people's interpretations of biblical passages or theological dogma. To be like Christ, one cannot worship at the temple of others' interpretations of God. Forms of interpretation and dogmas lead people to fraud, falsity, faithlessness, and death (71). Christ is not the sum of miracles or rigid teachings but he is made up of "beautiful sentiments" (75).

Emerson brings his ideas into fruition in a passage about a preacher in a snowstorm. The passage dramatizes and makes concrete what Emerson imagines as living like Christ in the truest sense – living in "real history." It is worthwhile to quote this passage in full:

> I once heard a preacher who tempted me to say I would go to church no more. … A snowstorm was falling around us. The snowstorm was real, the

preacher merely spectral, and the eye felt the said contrast in looking at him, and then out of the wisdom behind him into the beautiful meteor of the snow. He had lived in vain. He had no one word intimating that he had laughed or wept, was married or in love, had been commended, or cheated, or chagrined. If he had ever lived and acted, we were none the wiser for it. The capital secret of his profession, namely, to convert life into truth, he had not learned. Not one fact in all his experience had he imported into his doctrine. This man had ploughed and planted and bought and sold; he had read books. He had eaten and drunken; his head aches, his heart throbs, he smiles and *suffers*; yet was there not a surmise, a hint, in all the discourse, that he had ever lived at all. Not a line did he draw out of *real history*. The true preacher can be known by this, that he deals out to the people in his life – life passed through the *fire of thought* [my emphasis]. (72)

The striking thing about this passage is that it points out what not to do. Even though very few readers of Emerson can transform his abstractions into a clear plan for spiritual and social transformation, Emerson certainly has a clear emphasis on the subject's accepting and embracing the forms of beauty communicated in the divine revelation of God. Here, one finds a pastor in the dead zone – someone possessed by a sense of oblivion, a lifeless past. But for Emerson, there is an alternative to performative relics of historical Christianity; there is "real history." Not seeing the wisdom of the snowstorm, the preacher, Emerson says, has lived in vain, in a false relation to history.

While Henry Ware and Andrew Norton criticized Emerson's theological acumen and interpretive license, sympathizers like George Ripley saw potential in the popularizing effects of all people having direct spiritual insight. Ripley, going much further than Emerson was willing to, reiterates the need for writers and thinkers to support the welfare of their brethren rather than the luxury of their books; figures like Norton should use their influence for the correction of abuses and aid those suffering and in need.[17] It is in the *how* that Melville's drumbeat in *Pierre* begins. How to make these lofty truisms manifest in social acts? Despite the coaxing by Ripley and others, Emerson was distant from directly intervening in the lives of the impoverished and downtrodden. In "Self-Reliance," he infamously chides the foolish philanthropists when he asks, "Are they my poor?"[18]

Lawrence Buell sees this in the same vein of transcendentalists refiguring the true and most urgent meaning of Christ and this had everything do with one's relationship to self and others in the social fabric of history.[19] A couple of years after Emerson's famous "Address," Orestes Brownson wrote in the *Boston Quarterly* that advocates for spiritual transformation

did not go far enough; what Emerson proclaimed was only the first step.[20] Brownson elaborates on the problem by focusing on what he considers to be the reformists' lopsided emphasis on spiritual change solely by realizing their true essence.[21] His calls for more direct action are not cynical of spiritual transformation but rather question the effect of these radical conversions by insisting that they are incomplete without direct social organizing against social ills, against "all evil." He explicitly says the "evil we speak of is inherent in all our social arrangements."[22] He concludes with the assertion that "Could we convert all men to Christianity in both theory and practice … the evils of the state would remain untouched."[23] It is self-evident here that practice is not a simple problem but a dilemma that strikes at the heart of transcendentalism's present and future.

As if responding to Brownson or likeminded sympathizers, in a lecture on "New England Reformers" Emerson remains faithful to the language of individualism: "[T]he criticism and attack on institutions, which we have witnessed, has made one thing plain, that society gains nothing whilst a man, not himself renovated, attempts to renovate things around him … hypocrisy and vanity are often the disgusting result."[24] Despite their agreement on the necessity of individual transformations, these changes as such do not outstrip the urgency that Brownson writes about. Emerson appears possessed by the gradualism that irks thinkers like Brownson. Beyond this, Emerson, while understanding spiritual and intellectual renovation as a life-long project, also suggests it is an objective readily achieved. Brownson, while also hopeful, believes that because of the urgency of current problems, one cannot bank on how fast or how completely spiritual transformations will change social conditions.

Martin J. Burke explains that overall the "radical discontinuity between the preaching of Jesus and the practices of his American followers still needed to be resolved."[25] In one sense, the arguments were futile: How could one tell if Emerson or Brownson was right? Any success or failure could be attributed to insufficient spiritual changes or overzealous action without necessary spiritual fulfillment. However, what to do remained an enigma, since the slave and the poor were associated with sin. Thus, reformers persist in a confident sense of transformative necessity because they had to do their best to turn people from sin and evil, and it was not a matter of whether it could be done, but a matter of when and how.

The social identities of the groups they were helping compound the importance of action. Emergent communities of poor people and immigrants of different races exacerbated ideologies of racial and class conflict. As with missionaries who were inspired to rapidly convert dark-skinned

pagans abroad, domestic reformers feared the spread of cultural contamination from immigrants, the poor, slaves, and former slaves. Reformers, along with other champions of social causes, bought into the idea of the dissolution of Anglo-Saxon culture and the politics of social difference as a reason for the urgency of redeeming racial aliens.

Theodore Parker, another prominent transcendentalist, claimed that despite rigid lines of racial difference and antipathy, a brotherhood across these lines could be accomplished.[26] Parker's and many others' vision of reform reflects the idealistic and often racist visions of white benefactors helping poor blacks and others. Brownson and Parker's words, Richard Slotkin emphasizes, cannot be abstracted from the reality of racialized social conflict.[27] Being like Christ and the "dangerous classes" make the social texture and the theological dilemma of Unitarians intimately connected. Brownson sees the necessity of the close proximity of the social groups, metaphorized as the "kingdom of darkness," as a new mandate for realizing religious ideals beyond the old church.[28] That is, the spiritual and racialized kingdom of darkness combines with social fear and religious angst that can and must be overcome in order to bring about wide-scale fulfillment.

While an advocate for rescuing non-Anglo-Saxon sinners from spiritual oblivion, Parker points more specifically to actualizing Christ. In depicting Jesus' character, Parker goes to great lengths to focus on his aid to the poor, enslaved, and wretched of the earth, his sympathy with "the oppressed and trodden down" (64). Parker's "The Dangerous Classes" sermon deals explicitly with the challenges of saving and reforming. Criminals, pirates, and inferior races are often in positions that breed sin and corruptions of spirit and law and they need help (64, 66). "Negroes, Indians, Mexicans, and Irish" are among the downtrodden that Parker discusses (64). Reforming the dark races becomes a solution to a crisis for whites in power.[29]

The question that recurs and makes the "dangerous classes" pertinent is what Christians can do to successfully reform society. Parker says their job is "to convince, reform, encourage, and bless" (88). In this vein, Parker encourages readers to imagine the vibrant social society as a manageable domestic scene. For instance, sometimes parents have a weak child but "the affection of father and mother centers on this sickly child" and through this intimacy "the deformed" is transformed into a person of strength and activity (68). One might want to give up on the child because he was like "a barbarian, a savage, yes, almost a beast among men," but you never give up in the face of the "world's reproach" (69).

Racialized primitives and the backward child or man represent sin, people who need to be transformed by persistence, faith, undying love, and routine sacrifice.

But seeing the possibility of a universal good, Parker suggests, also comes with seeing opposition in the object, the wicked in the weakness. From the imagined viewpoint of the parents the dark child figure is defined by their view and the world's reproach. The saviors see both, and Parker suggests that this is the part of the struggle that one might work the hardest to overcome. He says, "You saw, felt as others felt" (69). In viewing the sinner "you saw some good mixed with his evil" (69). The vision of redemptive outcome notwithstanding, the process of seeing and feeling and interpreting is certainly vexed. This vexed site of affect and transformation in Parker is a moment of social and spiritual renewal, yet the anecdote calls attention to what needs to be done. In Parker's eyes, in the crux of new possibilities lies self-sacrifice: "I may give up my life to save a thousand lives, or one, if I will" (69). However, the speech is silent on what this feels like. Parker's portrayal belies the physical acts and exchanges, the push and pull, the intensities of resistance involved in the complexities and contingencies of human experience generally or racialized conflict specifically. The act of giving up self and world is as much about faith in one's beliefs and choices as it is about trying to overcome the objects that can obstruct or corrupt one's attempt to make sacrifices: Greed, power, and selfishness can inadvertently get mixed up in the affirmations of who can and will be changed in the first place. In "The Dangerous Classes," Parker fails to disclose that our desire to achieve goals for others can be twisted by personal interests without anyone knowing until it is too late. My point here is that the rhetoric of transformation can obscure the difficulties that make one think that a crippling task is still a doable task even though the task is really an impossible one.

In Pierre's fight to honor and restore his half sister, to save the oppressed, he finds himself embattled and dogged by the truth he is inspired by. The more he thinks he is carrying out truth the more deeply he plunges into the black gulf. In the case of divine inspiration, this provokes a pertinent question: If transcendentalists fundamentally believe that people have the ability to realize the power and message that God communicates, is there anything that people experience in their thirst to embody the truth in reform that makes people feel that God and nature keep troubling secrets? In Emerson's snowstorm passage, he calls on the preacher to realize that he is an extension of nature's hand and to intuit "real history"; however, the preacher cannot, and as a result he can neither see his true

self nor help others in the realm of "real history." Emerson's version of nature shares its secrets with the subjects who are open to intuit them. Pierre Hadot unveils an equally powerful yet opposing sense of romantic imagination: nature withholds; it keeps secrets or it withholds at the same time that it expresses itself.[30] This withholding produces phantasmagoria in the subject that "seduces and fascinates souls" in the challenges of figuring the function and truth of each object or thing.[31]

Emerson addresses the snowstorm's relations to the vicissitudes of life's affects – joy and pain, physical touch and work, the full dimensions of what it means to live. In the same passage, the unevenness of life is not so splendidly revealed. In mentioning all life's forms and how the subject relates to them as constitutive of beauty, he omits the effects of other aspects of life that may move against subjects' intimations of interior harmony. Emerson criticizes the pastor for not disclosing full aspects of what "he had eaten and drunken" as well as how "his head aches, his heart throbs, he smiles and suffers." Emerson proposes that the vicissitudes of daily life, whether concerning love, suffering, or both, are rejuvenated in one's realization of one's divinity. He suggests in *Nature* (1836) that the new delight upon which he focuses alleviates "real sorrows."[32] Christ came to heal man's separation from God, but this separation, which produces sin, pain, and anguish, is itself a spiritual illusion; man and God were never separated in the first place. There is suffering and weighty emotional difficulty in Emerson's world, but once one's divinity is fully realized, transformative thinking about delight can outweigh it. This delight can be renewed again and again. Individuals, ontologically and spiritually, possess Christ's victory, remade into ours. Thus, for Emerson, the human must realize this as the window into "real history" and change his or her spiritual practices to reflect it.

Eduardo Cadava emphasizes real history as a "movement of life as it passes through" what Emerson calls "the fire of thought"; this history resides more in nature than in a particular spiritual guide.[33] But in Cadava's reading, he purchases Emerson's figurative language without demanding something more practical. If the preacher, as Cadava claims, finds a way to capture "either nature or real history," then one cannot simply delight in intuition, but must acknowledge the nightmares of obscurity that can repeatedly torment the subject.[34] What is more, can the "fire of thought" be blown in different directions, out of control in the force of divinity and the chaos of nature? When the subject suffers and is confused after seeking to connect with truth, isn't that how nature establishes a limit case for the subject? "Real history," in Emerson's eyes, can only be viewed

in terms of agential transformations over subjects' limitation and gives no credence to experiences in which one is absolutely confused, bewildered, and even tortured by nature (in various social guises) beyond recovery – to being banged and bruised and brushed up against what the subject desires (understanding, reciprocal love, security, reconciliation).

The crucial question concerning Christ is not whether he dealt with adversity, but how he dealt with what Melville calls in *Pierre* "folly or sin" (213). It is the how of one's experience under the most extreme and subconscious temptations and conditions that plagues Pierre. Melville intervenes in this discussion specifically in Plinlimmon's pamphlet "Chronometricals and Horologicals," valorizing on the one hand the debate about the heroic action of saving Parker's dangerous classes, but on the other hand rendering their differences irrelevant. Melville saddles the fourteenth chapter of *Pierre*, the chapter that contains Plinlimmon's pamphlet, with questions about Christ that make one rethink Parker's domestic scenes for shaping "the dangerous classes." Melville positions the chapter in the center of the novel when Pierre experiences confusions about his duty to help Isabel and Delly. In this chapter, Pierre seeks affirmation about his decision to rescue his alienated brethren. He feels heroic when he remembers the letter in which Isabel revealed her plight and thinks of his noble response. This great deed, divinely communicated into his soul, also causes him to defy his mother and leave his fiancée, actions which produce dread and agony. He wonders whether his actions, which leave "corpses" wherever he goes, are for the better good. If they leave corpses, he asks, "How then can my conduct be right?" (206). At bottom, this ethical dilemma is a spiritual and ontological one because it is here that Pierre feels most prominently that he cannot reconcile the falsity of the world with the nobility of soul. He believes Plinlimmon's words in the pamphlet might help.

Several pages before he actually reveals the pamphlet, Melville writes, "Silence is the only voice of our God" (204). In this moment, Pierre is stricken with confusion, not intuitive clarity. Melville describes Pierre's disturbing silence: "[I]n this mood, silence accompanied him" (206). Pierre finds himself in his own "dark realities," the people who made up his normative social world, and his inability to fully rationalize the good in his cause (207). He "plunges himself into an insufferably metaphysical pamphlet" (207).

Pierre here is under the impression that abstraction opens the door to reprieve from his immediate condition of "dark realities," his *blackness*, but Plotinus Plinlimmon's "Chronometricals and Horologicals," while perhaps clarifying to the reader, does nothing to release Pierre from his

"dark realities." The principal idea in the pamphlet is that it is easy to give alms to the poor in heaven because there is no poor to give to. In this case, the poor point to the question of whether people have the capacity for "unconditional sacrifice" to the higher "maxims of Christ" (214–15). This sacrifice, Melville suggests, requires a kind of masterful selflessness that is impossible to live out. Melville writes:

> That in things terrestrial (homological) a man must not be governed by ideas celestial (chronometrical); that certain minor self renunciations in this life his own mere instinct for his own every-day general well-being will teach him to make, but he must by no means make a complete unconditional sacrifice of himself in behalf of any other being (like Christ), or any cause, or any conceit. (214)

This statement, while not doubting the connection of God and man, says that one cannot govern his life by celestial life.[35] This idea is different from claiming, as Hershel Parker does, that Melville demonstrates why living like Christ sounds alluring but is impractical. Parker's assessment, however, overlooks why living morally like Christ is impractical. Christ has a different relationship to divinity than ordinary human beings and this difference is the subject of much theological debate, debates that have significant implications about subjects' ability to transform their social world. The central thrust of Pierre's tragedy lies in his inability to realize that the human frame cannot know, intuit, and wield God's divine power and insight like Christ did. In a broader scope, this idea speaks to anyone, especially transcendentalists and radical Unitarians, who claims to live in the world with Christ's relationship to knowledge, sin, folly, and mishap.

Melville also critiques anyone who advocates saving oneself or the other through divine communication like Christ with the following: Christ encountered woe in precept and in practice, yet he "did remain without folly and sin." With "inferior beings" folly and sin are certain (212). While transcendentalists doubt what Melville calls "inferior" here, Melville believes history and the present to be on his side. This is not about one's immoral acts alone, but how one's personal desires for noble sacrifice on behalf of the good can become so intense that the good becomes secondary to the desire itself – to the degree that one commits immoral acts or fantasies to rationalize whatever is necessary to make the heroic good manifest. Additionally, when one acts on behalf of realizing the good, the actions somehow unknowingly cascade into a series of unethical ones.

Yet Melville's purpose in *Pierre* focuses on the rich aristocratic intellectual Pierre and his dark vagabond half sister. In their case, one cannot

regulate earthly conduct by a heavenly soul even if something like an "infallible instinct" tells us that it cannot be wrong (213). Melville writes, however, that this inability to perfectly live in the divine character does not prove man's separation from God but, in fact, defines the necessity of humans' relationship to the Divine Creator.

As much as *Pierre* is about the challenges of working through theological and philosophical ideas, the transcendentalist reformers the novel critiques believed that they could do good and that they could demonstrate heaven's action on earth in theory and "daily practice" (215). Melville's response to transcendentalist versions of real history and social reformist activities can be seen in the contradiction Pierre embodies: "[T]hough charged with all the fires of divineness, his containing thing was made of clay" (107). Melville's allusion to fire here is not accidental; it captures the danger and unpredictability that the body cannot harness, which contradicts Emerson's use of it as a metaphor for invigorating and ascertainable intuition. Melville situates irreconcilable contradiction rather than conciliatory harmony as the locus of one's relation to "real history," one's agential prowess on behalf of others.

Parker's mission to save the "dangerous classes" becomes insufferable "dark realities" in *Pierre*. Melville emphasizes that the savior of the "kingdom of darkness" becomes darkness himself in the impossibility of fulfilling his mission. Pierre is symbolic of the many idealists who would like to carry out the *Redeemer Nation* motif, the call to save alien races from themselves and despots, but he finds himself in the basket of sin, weakness, and vulnerability he wants to rescue.[36]

In taking in Isabel, Pierre internalizes the nonwhite and uncivilized social groups that reformers called the "kingdom of darkness" (23). The internalization of this abstracted group or taxonomy of needy sinners defines the violence in his thought throughout – not because they are not white but because these nonwhite groups challenge his effort to master divine truth in concept and practice. Blackness, in Melville's view, awaits those blind to the "risks of feeling" that saving the downtrodden entails.[37] The agony that Pierre experiences in his exploits with the dangerous classes signals his confrontation with what he cannot do, an impasse communicated through imagined social encounters marked by racial difference. The volatile experience throughout *Pierre* stems from the belief that one can routinely be like Christ, which transforms the heroic bodily intensities of love for the dark others into the violence of failure, confusion, and madness, which Melville depicts as blackness.

PIERRE'S HIGH DEEDS AND ISABEL'S NUBIAN POWER

In this section, I flesh out Pierre's affective and historical relation to blackness through which Melville represents his twisted love plot with Isabel. This plot establishes Pierre's masculine agency and his reproduction of his patriarchal inheritance under the guise of a new truth and new domestic life. *Pierre* discloses how affective attachments become strangling entanglements that show Pierre's attempt to rescue "the poor castaway girl" and become the "Kingly style Christian" to be a nightmare of blackness (7).

Moreover, if Isabel's blackness obfuscates Pierre's normative social relationships, what defines them? We know that money, Anglo-Saxon whiteness, military heroism, and overall historical prestige define the Glendinning family and securely anchor it in the idyllic promise of U.S. domination. Pierre's appropriation of this promise brings about his dramatic unwinding, which occurs as a result of his efforts to save Isabel; it annihilates the Glendinning futurity. In Sacvan Bercovitch's words, it is Isabel who brings "a catastrophic view of history" into focus.[38] These profound disturbances, personal and historical, which Pierre and Isabel's dark encounters signify, do not yield a progressive counterargument or ungovernable nihilism but the experience of something more disturbing: the horrific limitations that occur when the white reformer embodies divine boundlessness and truth.

Pierre's desire for mastery begins in his understanding of his family's unblemished past. Melville depicts Pierre's Anglo-Saxon legacy and the Saddle Meadows estate in terms of war, conquest, and social privilege – a history of war heroes, gentle slave masters, and righteous Indian killers. Melville writes:

> [A]nd all this was done by the most mildest hearted, and most blue-eyed gentleman in the world, who, according to the patriarchal fashion of those days, was a gentle, white-haired worshiper of all the household gods; the gentlest husband, and the gentlest father; the kindest masters to his slaves … charitable Christian; in fine, a pure blue-eyed, divine old man, in whose meek majestic soul, the lion and the lamb embraced – fit image of his God. (30)

Through the Glendinning patriarchs, Melville parodies a free nation, with "buckets of negro slaves" and soaked in the blood of annihilated Indians, that still conceives of itself as gentle and kind with an unblemished Christian soul (29). Melville pushes this further as Pierre's memories refer to his family history to cast light upon the backdrop of the mother

country: "Our America will make out a good general case with England in this short little matter of large estates, and long pedigrees – pedigrees I mean, wherein is no flaw" (11). Aristocratic New England, as symbolized through Glendinning memories, despite its egalitarian rhetoric, replicates England's emphasis on royal bloodlines and wealthy estates. Even more important, the emphasis on flawless pedigrees in the context of enslaving blacks and killing Indians instantiates racial whiteness as a constitutive feature of Pierre's idyllic history. Melville establishes the history of domination as a normative privilege for aristocratic whites that is removed from murder and violent bloodshed. The emergence of white supremacy crystallizes Pierre's present, revealing a cohesive narrative with identifiable bloodlines of aristocratic power and racial purity.

In a broader historical context, the rhetoric of racial purity and domestic perfection satirized in *Pierre* permeates major American writings about U.S. national identity. Before the United States Congress in 1848, John Calhoun proclaimed: "[W]e have never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race – the free white race. … Ours, sir, is the Government of the White Race."[39] In *The Pennsylvania Freeman*, James Lowell points out the irony of these American discourses that laud racial superiority based on their Norman and Anglo-Saxon lineage:

> The Norman Barons (a race of savages, strong chiefly in their intense and selfish acquisitiveness, to whom our Southern brethren are fond of comparing themselves) looked upon their Saxon serfs as mere cattle … these serfs were part and parcel of that famous Anglo-Saxon race we have seen so much clap trap in the newspapers for a few years past. …[40]

Lowell's essential reversal, however, in calling the prized lineage of Anglo-Saxon civilization savage, is in response to not only "the clap trap in the newspapers" announcing the innate gifts of the Anglo-Saxon race, but also the popular histories of William Prescott and Francis Parkman, the religious discourse of Parker, and the lauded phrenology of Samuel Morton, which in both overt and subtle ways participated in the same racialist celebration.

Pierre and his family are icons of Anglo-Saxonism as well as the rationale for slavery, imperialism, and mastery over other subjects. This mastery further manifests itself in cohesive narratives of Christian, white, wealthy men who wield weapons for valor and the fantastical greater good.[41] Pierre embodies the fraternity of white men that Dana Nelson calls "national manhood," which also registers affectively through Pierre's sense that his ability to rescue Isabel has no limits.[42]

Blackness between Isabel and Pierre emerges most vibrantly when the novel communicates the experience of embodying boundlessness. The definitive moment in the novel when feelings of divine limitlessness and moral purpose overwhelm Pierre occurs when he receives a letter. Its pages tear a hole in his perfect vision of the past, his family's righteousness, and his understanding of the present. The dark, mysterious face that had been visiting his consciousness turns out to be his illegitimate sister. Pierre's fantasies of what he would do function negatively in two ways: He imagines who he could "love, protect," and "fight for" (7); and what he has yet to do in light of his family's achievements (however morally flawed and imperfect). When he gets a letter from an alleged half sister, the empty space of Pierre's purpose begins to present itself. Can he become a worthy member of the Glendinning patriarchy by redeeming its sin?

Melville inserts Isabel's letter at an integral part of the making, or rather the unmaking, of Pierre's understanding of his identity. Pierre's experience of reading it induces a collapse of meaning and experience. He commands, "Unhand me all fears, and unlock me all spells"; from this moment on he "will know nothing but Truth." He "*will know what is*." The order of things, from the inside out, begins to invert in Pierre's mind. Though he feels a purpose in Isabel's letter, Isabel, as a link to "Truth," moves him from the "gay gardens to a gulf" (65). And this gulf, like the ocean's abyss in *Moby-Dick*, is one of blackness without light, without the tools of empowerment, yet he will, in his mind, establish his own version of love and moral reconciliation.

The blackness of this gulf around the letter seems to be a temporary bout, yet like Ishmael and Ahab, Melville never lets Pierre escape it; it intensifies while Isabel informs him of more "hidden things" about her origins. She "never knew a mortal mother"(114). In her earliest memories of home "no name; no scrawled or written thing; no book, was in the house. It was dumb as death," without a trace of "past history" (115). Melville describes Isabel with even further layers of incoherency; she is full of "uncertainty and confusion" (115). The sheer negativity she embodies defies itself by operating in concrete flesh. She incarnates blackness and this is why she has no recourse to normative social relations and history. Isabel's social identity shapes her fictional persona of blackness that later brings out Pierre's disruptive and anarchic blackness.

Melville's description of Isabel's character has a wider context of literary corollaries. Melville constructs her in the traditional iconography of romance made available in Ann Radcliffe, Sir Walter Scott, Charles Brockden Brown, James Fennimore Cooper, and Gustave Flaubert.[43]

Often set against a blonde-haired, blue-eyed ideal like Pierre's fiancée Lucy, dark heroines of myth and fiction come dressed in black locks, Oriental eyes, and olive, tawny, or semi-dusky complexions. These non-white/non-Western idyllic features accentuate the effects of evil, a sense of sin that produces echoes of ungovernable primal urges in a modern society of discipline and restraint. Like *Pierre*, gothic romances as well as other literary texts and genres rely on the dark heroine to animate symbolic oppositions such as ideal/real, good/evil, and other alternative desires and sublimations. Edward Said discusses Flaubert's dark women in this vein:

> Why the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies, is something on which we could speculate: it is not the province of my analysis, alas, despite its frequently noted appearance. Nevertheless one must acknowledge its importance as something eliciting complex responses, sometimes even a frightening self-discovery, in the Orientalist. . . .[44]

Isabel's aura falls in line with Said's descriptions, particularly as Melville imbues her with "deep generative energies" (188). These abstract feelings accompany references to racial otherness. Melville's Isabel, like other dark heroines, comes equipped with dark mystical eyes, black locks, and other "Nubian" accentuations. (145). While aesthetic opposition appears as mostly physical, the force is one of ideological form and metaphysical representation (good/evil, knowing/unknowing). Blackness doubles in Isabel as dark Orientalist or mysterious racial amalgamation, much like Cooper's Cora, but unlike Cora, Isabel is a racial unknown. This unknown quality exacerbates the jarring effects she has on Pierre.

Isabel's history of racial absence repeatedly calls attention to its unrecoverable ambiguity and its inability to cling solidly to the historical forces that define social intelligibility. This comes across most forcefully when Isabel tells Pierre that an important part of her social formation came through the "loud babbling" of madmen: the "dumb moping people" and" sluggish persons crouching in the corners," some of whom were "always talking about Hell, Eternity, and God" (121). Melville focuses on the babblings of madmen which reference myth and the metaphysics of a Christian universe. Isabel absorbs these babblings and the maddening circularity that allows them to "argue it all over again." Isabel is the figure of blackness, and racial difference generates the energy of deregistering, an antihistorical (in the normative sense) undoing of Pierre's social relationships and his way of maintaining the cultural and intellectual knowledge that brings them together.

This unmaking of Pierre reassures us of Priscilla Wald's insight that Isabel "dwells on, and so illuminates" margins of discourse.[45] Wald is right to use "incoherence" as a cause that "disturbs" Pierre.[46] One could say that the explicit and implicit racial dualism between Anglo-Saxon purity and indecipherable racial mixture resembles white writers' ideas about threats of racial difference. That is, incorporating blacks, Indians, and immigrants destroys the Anglo-Saxon social fabric that the young United States sees as its greatest asset. The conservative racial fears suggest more than the racial threat that many social and political factions debated in the mid-nineteenth century, but they also stem from the fact that no one, including Isabel herself, really knows who Isabel is. There is no record in a society that determines social and historical meanings through records and other forms of verifiable discourses. Isabel's epistemic obscurity and indecipherability undermine the U.S. racial project, yet they also affirm it because the racial uncertainty is also a threat. This contradiction, interestingly enough, still undermines American racial ideology but not through a progressive antiracist counterargument. If one recasts the unbridgeable categories between groups that justify U.S. hierarchical social relations, slavery, and imperialism, through Isabel's dark affects, like all other discernable categories and structures, they cannot remain intact.[47]

What is more, the fact that one cannot know or find truth undermines certainties about what can be known, explained, and used as an instrument of progress. This more radical view can service no one; its sociological aspects of race are profoundly metaphysical because it begs the compelling question that Pierre never can answer: What truths about social history and racial identity can be known? Pierre's mother despises Isabel as the "Unknown – thing" that rattles the readable and known foundations of the Glendinning estate – shaking its patriarchal pillars, moral certainty, and sure footing in the idyllic U.S. narrative of power/knowledge (193). Isabel suggests the demolition of all recognizable totality – an awakening of a sense of blackness – made manifest in objects of flesh, an ultimate contradiction that realizes Melville's version of Emerson's "real history."

The question for Pierre is how he can socially redeem a person who fundamentally rejects all sociality. He can't. His failures to do so conjoin metaphorical black gulfs with Isabel's literal blackness; they mutually constitute one another. Unquestionably, Isabel also becomes Pierre's object of sentiment – good that Pierre intuitively feels is right as he embarks on adventure underwritten by divine love. "*Infallibly he knows* that his

own voluntary steps are taking him forever from the brilliant chandeliers of the mansion of Saddle Meadows, to join company with the wretched rush-lights of poverty and woe." Melville emphasizes Pierre's "sublime intuitiveness," which refreshes his vision of a "god-like truth and virtue" rooted in his general care for love in the universe (111). His mission for the world is to be Christlike, to be the "world's great redeemer and reformer," and this mission turns out to be rife with his own suffering and sin (34). While readers may see this redeemer rhetoric as yet another episode of Pierre's foolishness, in my view it shows the limits Melville thinks everyone is *subject to*.

In Melville's version of the reformer ideal, Pierre takes on Isabel's blackness and suffers. Chris Castiglia contends, "White reformers took on blackness, not on the surface of skin but as suffering interior, 'a civic' depth."[48] "With an inner experience of black suffering," Castiglia continues, "white reformers claimed a public authority that differentiated them from other whites, even while it maintained an affective difference from persecuted blacks."[49] Pierre, like the reformer, believes in the possibility of redeeming and restoring Isabel with Christ's capacity, but Melville does not valorize this aspiration; he undermines public and private authority for anyone who professes to master "affective difference," showing how this belief can lead to one's own destruction. Thus, Melville helps readers see that antebellum reformers did not reproduce only racist ideologies and Anglo-Saxon cultural angst, but also a real grandeur of divinity that masks itself in certain professions of being Christlike. In Melville's version of taking on blackness, inner experience does not lead to better justifications or usurpations of political and religious authority but rather to the impossibility of authority based on divine intuitions to either redeem or abuse the oppressed. Melville sees an ontological question of the subject's relationship to divine truth at the center of social reality. Both questions about racial difference ask us to reconsider what individuals are capable of sacrificing and doing, as well as how the challenges of fulfillment reveal an impasse that subjects cannot move beyond. Pierre cannot outstrip Plinlimmon's pamphlet, and racial difference constitutes Melville's narrative of it.

As this section on blackness explores social dissolution and the failure to maintain racist ideologies of mastership, the following section shows how blackness mediates Pierre and Isabel's affective attachments. Melville emphasizes physical intimacy that links bodily desire with the shackles of Pierre's lofty moral ambitions.

DANTE AND "REAL HISTORY" IN THE FLESH

One can think of Christ in Plinlimmon's pamphlet as a meditation on the limits of the flesh and, in a sense, all bodily action (thinking included). Additionally, it is difficult to imagine any concept of sacrifice for others without considering what individuals consider fundamental to their normative needs. What happens when these needs overwhelm any attempt to overcome them? Pierre claims to renounce his family and himself, but his own propensity for "folly or sin" does not allow him to move beyond his own bodily desires. Despite his ruminations on truth and glory and the transcendence of paradigms, Pierre cannot rationalize the fact that he commits incest with his sister. Melville is not judging them for the sin, but rather showing how Pierre insists that whatever he wants to do is actually working on behalf of this dark outcast sister. Melville deploys their physical relationship to show that metaphysical dilemmas possess the most concrete situations. Hard facts can turn into unrecognizable enigmas. Melville makes the physical body a place where Pierre experiences the violence of "impenetrable blackness." Pierre tries to assemble his new truth on this experience and then compose a book, but in the end all of these pathways lead to his demise. Isabel's blackness, physical and metaphysical, defines how Pierre experiences what it means to experience the limits of trying to know, live, and even compose divine truths.

Despite immaterial phantoms that visit Pierre and cloud his vision, Melville uses dark physical things to embolden Pierre's sense of obscurity, not rid him of them. The text repeatedly mentions her "dark locks" and the "Nubian power" in her eyes (53, 145). Her beauty and her black body parts mesmerize Pierre. Pierre cannot take his eyes from her "immense soft tresses of the jettiest hair … fallen over her" (118). Even more fascinating, in some moments of silence, "Pierre still sat waiting her resuming, his eyes fixed upon the girl's wonderfully beautiful ear, which chancing to peep forth from among her abundant tresses, nestled in that blackness like a transparent sea-shell of pearl" (119). Melville repeatedly refers to Isabel's parts, her ears, and her black tresses. When Isabel finishes the first part of her story, Melville describes how Pierre "motionlessly listened to this abundant haired and large-eyed girl of mystery"(126). The emphasis on her deep black locks and other physical parts, which cover Pierre even in his death, convey a moment in which Pierre's godly desires to rescue her and his intense physical attraction to her cross never to be untangled.

Pierre cannot contain his carnal attraction for her. He is mesmerized by her mysterious beauty. This attraction blinds him and makes him

unable to prevent any true sacrifice on her behalf and to retain mastery of himself. Melville posits love as a vehicle through which Pierre's messianic tasks take place. It is love, Melville writes, which "is this world's great redeemer and reformer" (34). Emotional risk, brought on by this love, recasts this power as also showing potential for unraveling whatever and whomever it brings together. Physicality is the locus of the obstacle to Pierre's goal; it is where the power of Christ's love becomes his own lust, and Pierre is oblivious to the difference. This blurring of lines occurs in Pierre's early revelations of Isabel.

Melville depicts Isabel as part of a larger social group from the "dark" and "the dirty unwashed face" of the town (13). The dark and dirty urban landscape that Pierre's paradise borders resembles Raymond Williams's descriptions of a rapidly industrializing East London in the first half of the nineteenth century. Conditions in the East End, Williams explains, were being described as "unknown' and unexplored" and it was later referred to as "the Darkest London."[50] The novel blends the poor downtrodden faces, dirt, and crude materiality. When they first arrive in the city, Melville brings together sin and poverty. The wanton women are distinguished by racial otherness: Pierre notices the "handkerchiefs of negresses" and "red gowns of yellow girls" (240). These images reemphasize the dangerous and immoral lifestyle that Pierre saves Isabel from; he protects her from "all things unseemly," the "base congregation" of incurables from the "*infernos* of hell" [my emphasis] (240). These incurables exemplify what Parker calls the dangerous classes. No race is distinguished as superior or inferior, yet superior folk do not go to these places where races mix under the veil of "sin and death" (240). The *Inferno* reference is not to be taken lightly. The "naked bosoms" suggest sin, and Isabel, Delly, and Pierre blur into the revelry (240).

The "inferno's" social bodies marked by race and class ask readers to return to when Dante first appears in the language of flesh. That is, the aforementioned passage builds upon an earlier reference to Dante that says Isabel and Pierre are the locus of sin and suggest that what they observe with judgment is actually in their practice. This earlier moment begins with Pierre's intense desire to learn more about Isabel, which Melville phrases in terms of different body parts. Melville accelerates Pierre's desire to know what is behind the veil, claiming not that he wants to or should, but "must see it face to face" (41). He wants the immediacy and tangibility of truth. One does not want to overestimate Melville's phrasing. "Face to face" also can be two people facing each other from a reasonable distance or it can be up close. Here it is an imagined approach from faraway falsity to close truth.

Dante portrays this closeness as sin and a forbidden future overshadowing the present. Pierre and Isabel's incestuous love is "sweet and awful passiveness." Isabel inspires an "inexpressible strangeness of an intense love," and then Pierre imparts burning kisses upon his half sister and "would not let go" (192). Then "they changed and coiled together, and entangledly stood mute" (192). At this exact same moment they reach up for the "glorious ideal" (192). Physical sensations reinforce physical affirmation. The interaction of bodies is where Pierre fully takes in Isabel, and her coming to him repeatedly completes his desire to see her to "face to face," which unfolds into bodies "coiled together."

Through a reference to John Flaxman's Dante, Melville allows Pierre to believe he can circumvent the true effect of Dante and embrace his innocent curiosity without drifting perils of incest. Flaxman sketched Homer's and Dante's classics. Pierre recalls them while he feels absolved from "dark similitude" (42). When Pierre turns to these images, he proceeds to move laterally from object to object, beginning with "Flemish prints" and "Flaxman's Homer." He is attracted to Flaxman's clear-cut outlines and the nobility of Homer's heroes. Flaxman's illustrations, deceptively simple, look like cartoon sketches without the full color and detail that many aesthetic masterpieces called their truth. W. B. Yeats put them into the dustbin of art history as failures of great men.[51]

By invoking Flaxman's sketches, Pierre returns to what he thinks is pleasant – a reinforcement of the hero he wants to be and the nobility he seeks. This move of retreat by an ostensibly brave Pierre questions whether he is ready for truth or only for the truth he is willing to hear. Melville does not let Pierre off that easy; Pierre imagines avoiding the depths of Dante but finds himself in hell's flames.

Pierre's listing of the work of Flaxman comes quickly to his sketches of the *Inferno*. Flaxman's outlines of the *Inferno*, while called a failure by Yeats, aimed to do what Pierre thinks they do not. He sees clarity, but the simplicity of appearances in Flaxman is misleading. Sarah Symmons contends that Flaxman contains a "lexicon of unique shapes which permuted, rearranged, inverted, might cause some new system of pictorial design to emerge."[52] Symmons refers here to Flaxman's influence on Goya and Blake's art, but her point remains pertinent to Pierre's superficial understanding of Flaxman's depth.

This is precisely how Pierre's inner taxonomy evolves. Once Pierre mentions Flaxman's noble outlines of Homer, he says "then Flaxman's Dante; Dante Night's and Hell's poet he. No, we will not open Dante" (42). This is Pierre avoiding night and hell's poet, but finding himself confronted

not by Dante, but by the things of blackness, unannounced experiences of rearrangements, inversions, and distortions that Flaxman's outlines inspire. As if Pierre realizes this, he warns the reader, "we will not open Flaxman's Dante" (42). Pierre, somewhat deluded and seeing everything at once, thinks that Flaxman's bewitching power actually "wholly" shows "Francesca's mournful face" (42). He continues, "Damned be the hour I read in Dante! More damned that wherein Paolo and Francesca read in fatal Lancelot" (42).

Dante's Francesca and Paolo are famous examples of carnal sin and human desire. Francesca and Paolo were murdered because of an adulterous love affair. They were buried in the same tomb. What probably struck Melville was less the adulterous love plot than how Dante's *Inferno* characterizes their transition from an innocent love enthralled by passion, desire, and self-indulgence to inseparable bodies in death and inseparable sufferings in hell. Dante also depicts their dwelling as part of a smaller part of the hemisphere of darkness, one with "no light inside it" (IV, 136).[53] Dante also mentions oppressive "black air" and "wind tossed" souls. But in blackness it is not lust and bodily passion that are the villains – it is love, one that began in unsuspecting leisure: "gentle hearts is quickly born, seized him in my fair body," and love, Francesca continues, "made my heart burn with Joy so strong that it cleaves still to him, here. Love gave us both one death" (V, 89–95). The lovers' instability of desire and their fulfillment in raptures of themselves, instead of God's grace, land them in hell.[54]

Blackness evolves from the literal hell, with its ubiquitous and strangling "black air," to its unfulfilled possibility and the prospect of endless torment. Pierre aspires for a completion with Isabel that he cannot have. Yet the loss of control defines this moment as well. The souls, as if possessed by the will to love, are driven helplessly by the wind. Love overcomes them in their fantasy that they could control its meaning and truth for themselves and others. Pierre reflects, "Love is this world's great redeemer and reformer"; concentric spells and circling incantations are represented in its vehicles, "beautiful women" (34). Thus, love's "emissaries" (attractive women) bring life to abstract love in the historical action of Pierre's youth, and this mention of the enchanting effects brings pleasures of a sublimely sensual mysticism (34). But as Pierre further contemplates the mystic and mysterious face, he cannot sense that the Emersonian concentric spells and circles further remove him from realizing the possibility of the future ill effects of his heroic goals.

Their togetherness is not mutual; it is for Pierre, not Isabel. Pierre, under the illusion of perfectly intuiting God, more perfectly intuits

himself. The narrative interweaves the illusion of mastery as hard action of the flesh; it demonstrates love's possibility while simultaneously denying it. This mutual necessity defines the black gulf of affect Pierre wants to escape. Flaxman's Dante, the work of outlines, brings the reader into the fullness of blackness – Pierre's "clogged terrestrial life" (299). The ungainliness of this image contrasts with romantic flights out of time and space, and not only firmly grounds the Neo-Platonist to the earth, but to the most corrupting violations of incest – both constituting Pierre's attempt at Christian rescue and redemption. Pierre's clogged body exemplifies a static existential position. He is neither pure vessel for God nor nature's divine message. Pierre's impasse reveals the ultimate irony of the novel: No matter where he goes across geography, space, and history, his clogged terrestrial life defines his relation to the social life in which he participates.

Pierre's *modus operandi*, which Flaxman's Dante points us to, is at the core of what is possible existentially, and what is possible existentially limits one's capacity to make social reform. Once the inspirational power of God and/or nature enters into Pierre's naïve body and mind which, like the transcendentalists, he believes he can make a perfect vehicle for it, he can take on his selfish desire in the name of its original divine source. Emerson warns against this vanity and selfishness, yet it is not clear if his warnings can be understood the same way by those who do not heed them. That is, whether one believes one can think and/or act on behalf of divine spirit, one believes in its perfect reception like Christ. Isabel, in my view, can be read as racially marked (through unknown racial history) as a symbol of the poor and nonwhite, which tests the theological creed professed in the name of the self-sacrificing brotherhood. Melville, as the last chapter shows, is always suspicious of acquiring and acting on behalf of one's relationship to a mastered absolute and racialized social conflict; thus, this is also an important part of his characterization of it. Isabel's seductive power, realized as the energetic source of Pierre's divine mission, is actually the gateway to the pitfalls of a selfish empowerment that results from a plight to rescue the racially other neighbor. Pierre's blindness of his own efforts makes him the most dangerous part of the "dangerous classes."

When gazing the most profoundly at Isabel, as a person, an object of history, through which his glorious cause is revealed, Pierre is mesmerized by an "impenetrable yet *blackly significant* nebulousness" (178) [my emphasis]. The "united suffering" he figures as part of all of those he invites into his dance with "the great god of Sin – Satan" (177). Again, the

blackness of their united suffering elevates Pierre's sense of cause, yet it prolongs his turmoil; it does not reflect a nadir from which his grand telos will be resurrected but yet another reality, the real history of the book. Equally important is that, if we think of Parker's domestic scenario or the close quarters in which individuals help other individuals, the intimacy lived on the pages of *Pierre* captures details, feelings, and sensations, which cause sympathy but also overwhelm and betray the sympathetic. Pierre's "united suffering" is comparable to the preacher's emotions and experiences in the snowstorm sermon from Emerson's "Address." Yet in *Pierre*, the implicit and explicit racial encounter tests the limits of religious and democratic language of brotherhood and social equality in such a way that it does not dismiss ideological professions; alternatively, it shows the presence of necessary disruptions in the way they must be carried out. The failures of social encounters marked by racial difference, fully uncovered in the esoteric thoughts and sensations of the body, produce suffering Pierre can never escape because he is seduced by his own overconfidence and imperviousness to error; he embodies truth in a false world. Melville makes this true by torturing him in contradiction, which to Melville somehow constitutes all subjects in history.

Pierre's pursuit of restoring Isabel does not stop until he dies. Pierre repeatedly casts himself against giant objects like Memnon's Stone and Enceladus the Titan, only to move from various modes of ideal and real horror and grief. Pierre and Isabel repeatedly find themselves in more and more desperate situations. Pierre chooses to rescue the entire endeavor of rescuing by writing his own book. It is in the writing of his book, his assemblage of his philosophical reflections and concrete social interactions, where Pierre attempts to bring the entirety of his experiences into a material object of letters. The idea of the book is the culmination of Pierre's interiority and relationship to his mission as well as the social world he scorns and feels scorned by.

He mentions two modes of history that in his mind conflict: one a set of "circumstances, facts, and events, set down contemporaneously" and the other set down in a "general stream in the narrative cut." The most famous line about how Pierre proceeds to compose, however, is no method at all really: "I write precisely as I please" (244). Critics equate this with Melville's rebelling from the pressures of young America and the literary marketplace, as well as with a claim of authority through which he affirms his ultimate individualism. But these readings do not speak to the fundamental problem of what "I please" could look like from Pierre as opposed to an autobiographical Melville. It is crucial to take account of

what "I please" is for Pierre as transmitted through or from his consciousness. While writing his book, he feels hemmed in by ambiguities, revisiting the edge of a "black, bottomless gulf" (337). But what effect will this enfeebling condition have on his thinking and writing of history? He is fully in tune with that Emersonian fire that rejects institutional pressures and constraints and allows him to write "this history," which he admits early on in the novel will be one that "goes forward and backward, as occasion calls" (54).

Pierre elects "neither" method of writing history, and this choice is an investment in Pierre's poetic inner feelings of "unrecompensed agonies" (244). This is a model that reflects perception, of how "circumstances, events, facts" are always subject to those who interpret, relay, and produce them (244). This claim of formlessness, or history without frames and limitations, looks like an assertion of autonomy, but it is also one alive with a sense of wild irregularities and contradictions and the challenging task of revealing them coherently. The wayward movement is less a dialectical trajectory of progress and more a series of scattered stops and starts, fissures, and gulfs; the key to this embrace of all things is the uncertainty about what is real in the real and the challenges of meaning that one seeks to make out of one's experience of historical objects.

When Pierre swears "himself Isabel's" and to do what his "deepest angel dictates," he commits himself to sublime fury and anguish that dictates its own unknowable truths, anguish so powerful he cannot recommit or reject it – he is too far over the edge (65). This means that there will be no reform beyond his "deepest angel," which also has him coiling with physical submission to his endeavors and which eventually kills Isabel and him in the end. This defines the love plot as a rhapsodic historical narrative in which Pierre stars. Real history for him, if he could compose it, begins in and is mediated through the coiling flesh, the event that assures readers that Pierre's saving efforts cannot contradict the existential limitations Plinlimmon's pamphlet expresses.

I wonder if it is possible, then, for Pierre to write his book the way he wants to – however he pleases. What he pleases is himself, which is also Isabel enfolded in him, revealing a tortuous and vibrant splitting within. Isabel is an ultimate sense of the present that enfolds the long patriarchal Glendinning past that rejected her and her presence in Pierre's life exemplifies an "accumulation of time."[55] In Giovanni Arrighi's history of modern capitalism, he contends, like Pierre, that the critic should give an account that "moves backwards and forwards as occasion calls" to fully explore how economic systems and the people who built them were

"moving 'forward' and 'backward' at the same time."[56] The presence of the past gives testament to unconventional narrative structures of history that reveal the forceful dynamics of events, peoples, and facts. The question asked in *Pierre* is how to arrest the endless dynamics, or make them appear arrested, in order to render them coherent and digestible.

Arrighi's study offers much by the way of showing the presence of economic modes of transaction and practice thought once dead now alive in the present, but it has inspired critics like Ian Baucom to think of doing history unconventionally, to do justice to the experiences of enslaved Africans. Baucom claims that this historical method and living nonsynchronously helps us confront our current relationship to voices and experiences of oppressed classes and to grasp the phantoms of Atlantic slavery still with us, which turn historical method into something more explicitly political. Kenneth Warren contends that Baucom's radical intervention is shackled with, as far as racial politics goes, a conventional idea: that racism, thought to be gone, is here with us.[57] Thus, the move Baucom ultimately makes, to redress a static past with a dynamic "now time," is one that cannot be fully realized without acknowledging that it contains a sense of contradiction that inhibits radical intervention.[58] Warren's critique of Baucom is that the past is in fact the past, yet what I want to point out in his exchange with Baucom is precisely the challenge Pierre faces. Baucom contends we should think and live nonsynchronously, but if the modern world is rigidly structured in multiple overlapping correspondences to linear time, how can one even fully contemplate, let alone live, in a "now time?"[59]

More specifically, Pierre wants to harness and inhabit the infinite as the forever present, breaking through boundaries of race, class, gender, and other codes of identity only to have them reappear without his knowing, shaping his every thought and action. Yet now he believes that he has escaped the constraints of his familial past, and this illusion of mastery destroys him and everyone else close by. I use this description of historians embracing all of time as now-time to ask: How much can one think outside of normative attachments to time and space without clinging to objects that make them coherent and readable? Pierre's opposition to various modes of normativity does not automatically remove him from them. Pierre tries to live in and compose a work of history "non-synchronously," and he is equipped by his mature "all stretchable philosophy" (339). The blackness of space, frequently appearing in *Moby-Dick*'s abyss, reappears in Pierre's wanderings. The deeper he dives into this infinite fluidity of the present the more all truths seem to "mock and torment him" (339).

Melville, again, makes this depth of blackness explicit to recall Pierre's social mission of embodying Christ's love for saving the poor and outcast – Pierre's doing justice to the sins of his family's past. While writing, his scholastic urgings make him feel like Ahab, like he alone conquered the "storm admiral"; this brings him once again to "eye the varied faces of the social castaways" (341). Social outcasts, epitomized in his adventure with the dark heroine Isabel, define Pierre's "*utter-night* desolation" – his experience of blackness [my emphasis] (341); the presence of the social castaways puts him more and more in tune with the failures of his "bitterest midnights" (341). His divine sacrifice hides in the incestuous love that he thinks of as an effort by a loyal "spirited brother," filled with confidence and optimism, to defend his "sister's honor" (336).

"A change of heart, a sensorial shift, intersubjectivity, or transference with a promising object," argues Lauren Berlant, "cannot generate on its own the better good life."[60] Berlant's interest in normative optimism that turns out to be, in fact, "cruel," is more aptly applied here because it can turn back on itself for those claiming to revolt against normativity in the name of supplanting social inequality. Whether in the guise of Pierre's history or progressive critics, they cannot escape the "the risks of attachments" that define anyone's past.[61] The point here is not that one should do nothing and write nothing for the voiceless or that one should not provide a way for them to speak and enhance the volume of their voices. On the contrary, Melville insists that one cannot ever be aware of the form of invention or mode of inquiry taking preeminence over the end itself. Pierre cannot come to grips with the fact that what he wants to do never gets done; he never acknowledges it even though it does not redeem, save, or restore in the ways he insists it will. The failure is not the problem; the problem is willful blindness and denial. For someone to insist that subjects "always" act or live or think in specific ways to help other people, without realizing that every method is equally subject to "folly or sin" (desire, power, physical and mental abuses, violence), can inadvertently substitute subjects' dedication to the method for the people or issue at stake.[62]

Melville cannot separate subjects from "folly or sin" and the various ways they can appear and reappear in people's lives. Pierre, despite his rejections, cannot let go of the messianic idealism of Saddle Meadows. This social impasse reveals another ontological one. Through blackness, Melville shows there is never a moment when the ambitious hero or spiritual leader can reform someone, or a moment when one should not equally be aware of sin and corruptive self-interest. If one claims explicitly

or implicitly to outstrip and traverse ideological mechanisms of the past, one also can fall into newer and less recognized entanglements. When Pierre moves to save the dark other he further entraps all parties into his fantasy of heroism; his dream to save the dark other manifests the ever-present sense of limitations that torments him throughout. In Melville's real history of blackness, the impossibility of fulfilling Christlike love and the risks of racialized social attachment are not something to be transcended but a fully realized ontological reality for all subjects.

CODA: SLAVERY AND RALPH EMERSON'S PENDING RESURRECTION

When reading Emerson's words in his essays "Fate" and "Experience," one knows his work is not only composed of dreamy rainbows. While he certainly did not ignore the tumultuous struggles of life and nature's chaos, he steadfastly promoted the idea that the right kind of thinking can transform one's relationship to life's horrible and unexpected disruptions. Emerson, moreover, refused to include Melville's social plebian or Parker's "dangerous classes" as integral parts of his early revolt from historical Christianity to spiritual ascendency. This does not mean that Emerson did not care about social reform and political equality. Emerson emphasizes, in Len Gougeon's words, "moral suasion and comprehensive reform of individuals" instead of focusing on one moral issue, which puts him at odds with most abolitionists.[63] Despite his principled unwillingness to tie himself to a single moral cause, Emerson found himself deeply troubled by the Fugitive Slave Law and the United States' regional stalemate that shaped the minds, movement, and consciousness of the 1850s.[64] The much-debated law created a cultural spectacle across black and white communities in Boston.[65] Thus, in addition to national and international challenges over the future of U.S. slavery, as matter of local politics, the impending crisis over the fugitive law distressed Emerson. Not "since 1844 had he been moved to such emotional heights by a social cause."[66]

Emerson's certainty and optimism, which underscore much of his early writings, disavow "the malign evil in man" (35). His final prognostication in the "American Scholar" reflects this. "A nation of men," Emerson proclaims, "will for the first time exist because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men."[67] In a broad sense, his prophecy comes true; each subject interprets the divine soul, but one person's truth is another's nightmare, and slavery seemed to demonstrate the

defeat of Emerson's optimism of nature in this regard. Thus blackness, "struggles, convulsions, and despairs, the wringing of hands, and the gnashing of teeth," which Pierre tragically embodies and which Emerson claims people had to go out of their way to find, literally sat on Emerson's doorstep in his nightmares.[68]

The "deplorable question of Slavery" haunts Emerson as he writes in his journal, "I waked at night, and bemoaned myself," of the issue and then recovered in the coming "hours of sanity."[69] The immorality and irrationality over the question of slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law force upon him questions like "what makes the essence of rational beings?" He thought that when men retreat into the recesses of thought only "angels receive" them, but approaching the Civil War, he questions whether men actually listen to them or if any angels await at all in the recesses of thought. The specter of political history inhabits Emerson's rhetoric and pervades his frustration over the moral crisis, which to him also raises questions about human epistemological capacity and humans' capacity to exercise it socially and politically. He agonizes over humankind's failure to transmute the divine laws of nature into juridical practice. Insanity consumes the hours of his sleep.

Emerson's trajectory from the optimism of his "Address" and "American Scholar" to frustration, anger, confusion, and restlessness over the Fugitive Slave Law can be read as the shift from spiritual rhetoric to nightmarish perils of praxis that Melville discloses in Pierre's faux heroism. The answers, if any, to Emerson's questions about the subject's propensity for living the Platonic good do not come by in-depth metaphysical probing alone, but inside of the nightmare of the challenges that come from trying to put the good into action. This moral and political impasse in the 1850s captures this sense of political and metaphysical challenge. And the impasse itself, as in this case, can be a lesson about difficulties of praxis, one that might be learned by readers observing someone else's failure to see truth beyond their own, such as the obstinate fool in "Benito Cereno," American Delano, who could never realize anything himself except when he was "forced to" (101).

CHAPTER 3

Thwarting the "Regulated Mind"
"Benito Cereno"

> It's to be something you're merely to suffer?
>
> Well, say to wait for – to have to meet, to face, to see suddenly break out in my life; possibly destroying all further consciousness, possibly annihilating me; possibly, on the other hand, only altering everything, striking at the root of all my world and leaving me to the consequences, however they shape themselves.
>
> Henry James, "The Beast in the Jungle"

Whereas in *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*, blackness alerts us to protagonists clamoring for mastery and failing to grasp it and act it out, in "Benito Cereno," black slaves strip their overconfident white masters of all power and knowledge. Unbeknownst to the reader, "Benito Cereno" begins in the calamitous scene of ruin in which *Pierre* and *Moby-Dick* end. Neither bottomless depths nor dark heroines express blackness for Melville's protagonists in "Benito Cereno." Instead, revolting black slaves manifest the power of blackness by nearly destroying the Spanish captain's viable connections to the very social reality and cultural knowledge that constitutes his mastership. The slave leader Babo tortures the Spanish captain Don Benito Cereno out of his wits, talents, and virtually every normative social desire.

Even more important, at "Benito Cereno's" very end, it is clear that the slave insurrection is long over. Captain Cereno appears completely safe. Amasa Delano, the American captain credited with leading the rescue of the *San Dominick*, pays Cereno a visit. During most of the story, whenever Captain Cereno is close to the revolt's leader, Babo, Cereno feels profound distress. Interestingly enough, at the story's close, neither Babo nor the other enslaved Africans are present, yet Cereno is still overwhelmed with anguish. Somewhat sympathetic, Delano tries to reassure Cereno, "You are saved" (116). Still curious and a bit confused, Delano asks Cereno, "What has cast such a shadow upon you?" Cereno replies, "The negro" (116). These are the last words spoken in the story.

When Delano addresses Cereno he is obviously certain that the slave revolt and the problems it created are over. Cereno's serene predicament, in Delano's eyes, restores order overall, and Cereno should have "forgotten it all" by now (116). But Delano is wrong. Cereno dies quickly and quite young. But what pushes him into the grave before his thirtieth birthday? The negro? If so, why then does "the negro," whom Delano sees merely as "living freight," cause long-standing damage to Cereno (54)? Why doesn't time, companionship, transcendental meditation, or peaceful isolation restore him?

I argue in this chapter that Melville uses "the negro's" calamitous effects on Cereno to invoke abstract questions about social life (ideology, customs, identity, and daily routines), social hierarchies based on race, and one's defenselessness against unforeseen events. For instance, under Babo's command slaves murder their master Aranda, who is also Cereno's close friend. Aranda's murder challenges whites' racist beliefs about blacks' natural contentment with being slaves. Disputing racist beliefs not only undermines ideas about blacks' alleged contentment with being slaves, but also questions the degree to which human beings can maintain authority over one another.

In light of antebellum racial scientists such as Samuel Morton and Louis Agassiz, who confidently claimed to know blacks' intellectual and social capacities, "Benito Cereno" asks: How well do racist thinkers know blacks; how well do masters know their slaves? To what degree can people know, control, and predict others' ideas and behaviors? "Benito Cereno" does not answer these questions, but through symbolic figurations of "the negro," Melville brings out how a Spanish trader's entire social capacity is rooted in being certain about the answers to these questions. The reality of "the negro" in "Benito Cereno," then, is not only a tragic event for Cereno and Aranda (and their certitude); "the negro" also mediates the very idea of New World slavery and social totality itself – which encompasses everything from racist opinions that can be changed to unalterable facts of contingency that forever haunt the social field of human interaction and conflict. This manifold import of "the negro" shows why the effects of slave insurrection on whites are literally and symbolically catastrophic.

"Benito Cereno" allows Melville to capture the broadest sense of destruction from the everyday minutiae of whites' encounters with "the negro." The seemingly benign setting of master–slave relations masks the insurrection's violence and the sense of social oblivion that Aranda and Cereno experience. Delano, on the other hand, almost never finds out about the

slaves' insurrection, although in the end, like Cereno and Aranda, he is "forced to it" by events beyond his control (115). All in all, Cereno loses everything and Delano never finds the truth that he wants. This hovering sense of impasse sustains the text from start to finish. The slaves, more importantly, mediate this entire sense of paralysis, keeping Delano ignorant and Cereno inside horrific reenactments of Babo's insurrection, which destroys Cereno to the degree that there is no temporal, social, or epistemological reality that he can express, use, or make sense of.

Critics point to the overbearing tensions between what Delano sees and what Cereno experiences. They read Delano and Cereno's encounters, negotiated by the slaves, as symbolic dilemmas between truth and falsehood as well as good and evil which, once conveyed historically and politically, point to regional tensions over the future of slavery and the slave trade in the Americas, or in a different vein, the U.S. empire's blindness to the failures of Spain's political ineptitude.[1] Whether the sense of opposition is historical and narratological, as Eric Sundquist argues, or philosophical and political, as Maurice Lee contends, many critics, despite acknowledging the thoroughgoing irresolvable conflict that the slaves and the white captains produce, immediately try to extrapolate democratic hope, glimpses of freedom, and anti-ideological interventions.[2] Lee claims that "Benito Cereno" helps "us to talk about how we talk about politics"; Sundquist concludes that Babo's "utter[ing] no sound" at the novel's end is a silence "enough to count as freedom."[3] But if the silences, the disturbing suffering, the memories, and the actual experiences of murderous violence relay layers of contradiction that only yield paralysis and opposition, how can they also yield freedom and democratic hope?

"The negro," epitomized by Babo, does not gesture toward the possibility of black freedom, social equality, or any other useful vessel of political consolation for racial difference in the United States or the Americas. I am not arguing that Melville unknowingly reinforces narratives about U.S. white supremacy. I actually contend that Melville narrativizes masters' power to make objects of their slaves only to show that in the slaves' revolt and performance of their own subjection, this work of objectification is not complete: Masters cannot fully transform humans into objects. "Benito Cereno" allows readers to see the slaves' performance as *a ruse of objectification* that renders all narratives of absolute power incoherent; thus, "the negro" as Melville represents it does not expose a revolutionary ideal in enslaved Africans, but rather the failures of absolute mastership. By critiquing subjects' ability and desire to have total authority over others, Melville's "Benito Cereno" challenges the foundation upon which

slavery protects its interests and thrives, its ideology of absolute legal and social power over the slaves. By destabilizing absolute mastery, Melville reveals the slave revolt's ultimate symbolic force as blackness.

Aranda's death, Cereno's devastation, and the end of their prosperous business, mediated through "the negro," constitute blackness in "Benito Cereno." Blackness captures the totalizing capacity of "the negro" to destabilize everything from how masters treat their slaves and think about them to the utter collapse of any coherent relations with social reality and knowledge. The overwhelming sense of dislocation that blackness signifies thwarts the subject's connections to beliefs established by law, social custom, and mercantile knowledge. "Benito Cereno" reveals how racialized social conflict forces the subject to experience a place where different forms of truth – epistemological, sociological, or political – can neither be recovered nor avoided: White characters are forced to confront a crude ontological reality of psychic violence that establishes a complete sense of un-freedom. Hence, intimations of freedom, triumphant political and social equality, or political speech are not the business of "Benito Cereno," and if there is any gleaning of such by critics, they miss what lies between the repetitions of ruin and any inclination toward what might be sociopolitically useful. *Blackness*, through the symbolic power of "the negro" in "Benito Cereno," asks us to imagine the formidable dissonance of not having – relinquishing or taking away the very thing we most desire – to solve the enigma and remove its power over us, to strategize and contemplate through the violence and instability that inherently threaten social reality and its fundamental concepts. For Melville, the more one seeks the existential closure that life never provides, the more physical and psychic violence reassert one's vulnerability to it.

My argument about blackness in "Benito Cereno" starts from the premise that Aranda, Cereno, and Delano all believed in the possibility of absolute power of masters over slaves. This concept of absolute power defines contemporary readings of slaves' conditions that Orlando Patterson calls "social death."[4] My first section shows that the laws and customs used as evidence for social death actually contain the possibility of its opposite – the sense of social contingency that challenges any notion of masters' absolute power over slaves. More important, looking at a critique of social death through antebellum legal discourses provides insight into the ideology and practices in which Cereno, Aranda, and Delano placed their entire order of things. Following this line of thought, in the second part of this chapter I analyze how, through the depiction of routine objectification, slave narratives contain their own version of

the slave's masquerade that blinds the white captains in "Benito Cereno." My aim in using slave narratives as an intertext for "Benito Cereno" is not to reiterate ideas of slaves' everyday resistance or a concept of social death that disavows all resistance, but rather to demonstrate how even the most thoroughgoing scenes of human objectification contain a myriad of social possibilities that can never be fixed or eradicated. My final section analyzes how the social possibility unforeseen by whites in power in "Benito Cereno" does not make the slaves more free in the political sense, but rather intensifies and deepens the slaves' objectification by casting them as "silent signs" (63). Yet these black significations shatter conventional limits of what slaves do symbolically since they disrupt all ideas of mastery for people along any sociopolitical spectrum who desire or feel entitled to total authority.

SOCIAL DEATH?

Before it was published alongside Melville's other short works, such as "Bartleby the Scrivener," in *The Piazza Tales* (1856), "Benito Cereno" (1855) was printed in installments in *Putnam's Monthly*. Because of political contests over the Fugitive Slave Law (1850) and the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), U.S. politicians and writers frequently discussed slavery and racial difference in magazines like *Putnam's*. *Putnam's* writers participated in the wider public discourse concerning the nature of enslaved Africans' intelligence, whether or not they were better suited for slavery, and their potential for political equality and patriotism. William Nell sought to recuperate contributions of African Americans from the founding of America by telling the story of black fighters in the American Revolution.[5] Nell's *Colored Patriots* (1855), with its introductory comments by Wendell Phillips and Harriet Beecher Stowe, pushed for social and political equality for enslaved Africans, but other voices provided stark contrast. Harvard natural historian Louis Agassiz, along with other scientists interested in race, concluded that blacks maintained an internal disposition toward subservience.[6] Agassiz, in the company of other race scientists, writes famously about the weak mental capacity of blacks and the necessity of maintaining all laws and customs that restrict them from social and political participation.[7] Abolitionists often wrote about Africans' propensity to be obedient in the Christian spirit, but this capacity also signaled enslaved Africans' innate propensity for obedience overall. In other words, what makes slaves good slaves can be supplanted to make them good Christians, decent and docile citizens.[8]

"Benito Cereno" imbues the American captain Amasa Delano with these ideas; despite professing a fondness for blacks (as petlike servants), he is certainly no friend to abolition. He believes wholeheartedly that blacks are cheerful and loyal slaves. Blacks, according to Delano, make the most pleasing of servants. Captain Delano's ideas about slaves stem from fundamental assumptions: Blacks' inferiority inherently suits them for slavery, and slaves have a "blind attachment" to their masters (84). His idea of slaves' blind attachment defines the master's absolute power over the slave. Delano's racism and his understanding of the relationship between masters and slaves cement his thinking; he relies on sociological "facts" that constitute the pillars of his racist beliefs.

No text in recent decades has more thoroughly discussed the features of masters' absolute authority over slaves than Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death* (1982) (19). Patterson's master work of comparative sociology, however, does not suggest that blacks' or any other racial groups' powerlessness can be attributed to their race. The condition of powerlessness is that of all slaves. But the features of social death, which describes the life of slaves according to Patterson, shed light on Delano's thinking as a "master," racialized as white in Melville's portrayal of his character. After all, relishing Babo's intimate attachment to Cereno, Delano asks to purchase Babo (70). Readers do not know if Delano already owns slaves, but he certainly sees himself as part of the white master group with its racist assumptions and beliefs about controlling blacks and their obsequious relationship to masters. Patterson's exploration of what types of thinking and practices make total authority over living objects possible illuminates the ideologies Delano reinforces – the rights, privileges, and practices that slavery authorizes. Delano, Cereno, and Aranda, in different ways, exemplify the strictures that make the thinking of total mastery possible.

Interestingly enough, even with the abundance of scholarly arguments affirming slaves' agency, Patterson's social death model still thrives under various guises as a viable sociological, theoretical, and historical concept. Influential critics such as Colin Dayan and Saidiya Hartman, reaffirming Patterson, demonstrate that the ideological and cultural pressures that sustained absolute power over slaves' lives undoubtedly dispossessed them physically and psychologically.[9] Some critics deploy social death as a metaphor to indicate a particular slave's intense feelings of subjection; other critics view it as constitutive of the condition of all slaves and ex-slaves. Vincent Brown, for example, has written an elaborate critique of social death's limitations. Yet in his critique Brown depicts "social death

in its broadest sense as the absence of meaningful links to the past."[10] By emphasizing social death as slaves' lack of recourse to a viable ancestral linkage, Brown overlooks what actually authorizes the denial of ancestral links in the first place – absolute power. Without absolute power there is no social death. Natal alienation, the denial of kinship ties, slaves' absence of any interiority outside of the master, dominant cultural symbols, and other effects are what social death produces and are only possible, in the way Patterson depicts them, if there is such a thing as masters' absolute dominion.

Patterson's notions of slave masters' "total" power over slaves are rooted in the legal truth that the slaves were their masters' property. Scholars discuss how despite designating slaves as property, in order to ensure masters' interests slaves also had to be recognized as people.[11] Interestingly enough, this "double character" does not produce two separate stable categories of "human" and "property," both under the master's total control. In my view, once the law acknowledges the "human" in the slave in order to protect the masters' economic, social, and political interests, the enslaved "property" is marked as someone who cannot be rendered effectively under another's total control; the law contains an antagonism that undermines the very notion of the power it authorizes. To challenge social death, one cannot merely claim that slaves resisted; one must show that the law and its cultural effects, through which scholars prove social death, are equally defined by contingencies and possibilities and variances that trouble any notion of a totalizing social condition.

The following section does not focus on the connection between antebellum laws, legal theorists, and literature or on whether actual laws, used to keep slaves in bondage, can help liberate them.[12] Instead, a brief segue through the legal and cultural relations between masters and slaves in antebellum writings like William Goodell's *The American Slave Code* (1853), which, like recent theorists of social death, defines blacks as powerless objects, identifies precisely how masters' absolute power harbors the everyday intractability of slaves that undoes it. This intractability of suppressed slaves becomes the nightmarish reality that slave masters fear because it verges upon an untenable unreality to which "Benito Cereno" calls attention.

Slave masters, Patterson argues, hold "absolute power" over their slaves (31). Most important, it is not only legal authority over a thing but psychological authority over the "inner power over a thing" (31). This incessant power, physical and psychological, fundamentally defines what Patterson popularizes as the life of a human made into a thing, "social

death." Social death, Patterson explains, is not a temporary condition – an attitude, a phase, a momentary situation; this condition of the slave is wrapped up in law, culture, and ideology. Within it, "the master had power over all aspects of his slave's life" (26). Furthermore, Patterson is aware of different legal practices and his emphasis is not on listing the particulars of how a slave is actually treated under the law, but examining a slave's powerlessness against being "the subject of dominion" (32). The law of property renders the slave a "thing." "Benito Cereno" confronts readers with the normative order of the slave as thing. It comes across most obviously in the customary practice of leaving slaves unfettered on deck, which Aranda and Cereno follow. To do this, they must believe, as Delano also does when he sees the slaves, that they were merely "living freight" (54).

Abolitionists and their supporters found the view that slaves were inhuman objects, used solely as instruments of their masters' will, offensive and immoral. William Goodell's *The American Slave Code* (1853), for instance, exposes and criticizes the laws and social practices designed to restrict slaves and reproduce slavery's culture of objectification. Goodell accounts for laws and the execution of the laws that reflect a matrix of the slave culture – the institutional and social pressures that make slaves things. The slave laws are not, Goodell repeatedly emphasizes, as those sympathetic to slavery call them: "dead letters."[13] Goodell argues that the slaveholding states strictly enforce the statutes that restrain and ensure the thorough dehumanization of slaves (15). In Goodell's argument throughout *The American Slave Code*, he leaves no gap between theory and practice. The "legal relation" defines the relationship between persons and property as actors and objects in the law (19). The legal relation, Goodell emphasizes, "is no mere logical influence. It is no metaphysical subtlety. It is no empty abstraction. It is no obsolete or inoperative fiction of the law. It is veritable matter-of-fact reality" (42). Goodell implies, as Melville's Delano witnesses, how this resolute and routine degradation of slaves makes them into what Delano sees them as, nearly indistinguishable from the other freight: "doubtless, as little troublesome as crates and bales" (54).

John C. Hurd's *The Law of Freedom and Bondage* (1858) takes exception to the idea that juridical discourse and the cultural work imbricated with it constructs what Goodell calls "matter-of-fact reality" (321). Hurd's extensive treatment of freedom and bondage clarifies the relationship between private rights and public law in the tumultuous wake of the *Dred Scott* decision in 1857. The *Dred Scott* case, according to Hurd, provokes

questions concerning how citizens understand their obligations to obey the law "independently of juridical decision" (xiii). Hurd asks, "Who is the actual possessor of sovereign power?" (xiii). Hurd states that law, "as a rule of action," is "prescribed by a superior to an inferior; in the idea of which the possibility of action contrary to the rule is implied" (1). The superior imposes law on the inferior to guard against actions, actions that inspired the laws in the first place. Thus, according to Hurd, laws do not only legislate actions, but they also anticipate the possibilities of actions by a slave or anyone else. Through Hurd's initial assertion, one can see the expansive scope of law, not merely its power to restrict and punish. Laws of slavery, then, are as much about what slaves did to challenge and shape "sovereign power" as they are about what slaves could not do. This suggests further that the cultural production of slaves as objects under the absolute power of their masters, which makes them absolute objects, contains evidence of slaves' repeated attempts to work against their masters' interests, which challenges the social death concept.

Jacob Wheeler's *A Practical Treatise on the Law of Slavery* (1837) gives many examples to explore how law, literally and as a proxy for ideas about slaves, recognizes slaves' actions, which clearly oppose systemic and individual notions of the master's absolute power over the slave. In one of the largest compilations of court cases regarding slaves, Wheeler depicts conditions of practice in relation to the enforcement of law. Throughout the cases Wheeler pulls together, the laws favor the master and strip the human rights of the slave. There are important cases where the courts, as Eugene Genovese suggests in *Roll Jordan Roll* (1972), implicitly or explicitly take slaves' humanity as a given (especially if they wanted to hold the slaves accountable apart from the masters).[14] When courts recognized the slaves' humanity, they implicitly accepted the capriciousness and unpredictability of slaves despite the coercive conditions of slavery. For example, in the *Clark v. McDonald* case, a ship captain was charged for losing a slave and her child when the ship capsized. The Louisiana court held that unlike "a bale of goods," the "slave was a human being, and the carrier *could not control* the operations of *her mind*, or *her physical action*. She *might* will her own destruction or *might* escape" [my emphasis].[15] The word "might" and the contingency of a slave's choice function synonymously here, and this language is certainly not difficult to find in other court cases. In *State v. Thompson,* for instance, "slaves differ from all other property: they have *reason and volition*" [my emphasis].[16] It is clear that slaves could make decisions, and the larger culture knew that these decisions could not only be in support of, but also against, masters' economic profit and vital security.

Wheeler's representations and descriptions of the laws of slavery show that the slave's choices about his or her interest, in favor of or against the law and wishes of the master, are ultimately contingent and particular to different cases. And it appears that the law, and the culture that manufactured it, was capable of dealing with a full range of possibilities. Although slave masters demarcated stringent limits for slaves, they also delineated breaches of those limits. In this vein, Thomas Cobb explains that even during higher levels of productivity on plantations, the slave was not necessarily employed in his master's service.[17] In *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery* (1858), Cobb continues:

> The long hours of the night, the Sabbath day, and the various holidays, are times when, by permission of the master, slaves enjoy a *quasi* personal liberty and at such times it cannot be expected that the watchful eye of the master can follow. Frequent and large collections of them would necessarily occur, and having no business to occupy their thoughts and conversation, mischief and evil would be the consequences of their assemblage.[18]

First and foremost, Cobb reminds readers that being a slave severely limits one's "personal liberty." Yet, beyond the master's "watchful eye," in their so-called free time, the slaves sit outside the overt constraints of slavery. Hartman argues that this time of worship, amusement, and rest can in no way be seen as outside the realm of the plantation's oppressive designs and disciplinary techniques.[19] Hartman, like Patterson, claims that most if not all of what slaves did in these moments reiterated masters' sway over them. But this "double-edged" gathering, which in Hartman's eyes reiterated the damage of enslavement, actually posed real threats to the masters' interest and control.[20] Cobb emphasizes that because of the "mischief and evil" that could harm the master, states created additional legal statutes with the aim of restricting the "liberty and movements of the slave."[21] Cobb explains further: "It has been found expedient and necessary in all the slaveholding states, to organize, in every district, a body of men, who for a limited time, exercise certain police powers, conferred by statute, for the better government of the slave, and the protection of the master."[22] That is, governing the slave and protecting the master ensure against the loss of property and profit to uphold the socioeconomic order. The fear of slaves itself was institutionalized. The "reason and volition" of slaves, however inferior in the eyes of masters, gave reason enough for lawmakers to erect institutional protections.

Yet what I think is more fundamental to the viability of social death is realizing Patterson's narrow notions of the ideological life of the "social

being." Karl Marx famously argues in the "Preface" to *Critique of Political Economy* (1859), "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, on the contrary, it is their social being that determines their consciousness."[23] Terry Eagleton brings out a salient and often overlooked part of Marx's assertion in the famous "Preface" when he claims that Marx's belief about consciousness and social beings "is an ontological, not just historical, claim."[24] It reveals the roots of Marx's belief about "the way the human animal is constituted, and would be true of all men and women in all historical epochs."[25] The human social animal, then, reserves a kernel of mystery, and beyond the facts of birth and death, what lies in the concrete social life between is always subject to caprice, contingency, and circumstance.

Thus, if the three whites aboard the *San Dominick* see no real difference between slaves and crates as it concerns their own safety, they rob the social being of slaves by effacing crucial aspects of human social existence. Whether they believe this absence was the result of being a slave or being a member of the black race or some combination of both, they believe it to the degree that their perception blinds them to the slaves' ability to disrupt the voyage. What is crucial to Melville's story, as both an antiracist statement about blacks, and an assertion about a fundamental rejection of slave masters' absolute power, is that he shares Frederick Douglass's view that slavery does not "entirely kill the *elastic spirit* of the bondman."[26] The bondman's elastic spirit is another way of figuring Marx's "social being" – the ontological condition of possibility to think and act as an agent of one's interest and historical consciousness.

My emphasis here, however, is not only to expose social death as a way to view the sociality of enslaved Africans as fundamentally narrow and problematic, but to show the symbolic power tied to the idea of masters' ideological force. Upon the firm belief that blacks are absolutely loyal freight rests the security of whites; their economic profits; their future prosperity; their entire social, economic, and providential reality (especially for Delano); and reality itself.

What is at stake in simply abiding by the custom of leaving slaves unchained cannot be disentangled from the magnitude of the revolt aboard the *San Dominick* that it enables. The momentousness of the event emerges precisely out of the apparent slightness of what was not anyone's immediate fault, but rather the order of things. In the normative social order, which manifests social death as Cereno and Patterson show, the master has no need to fear the socially dead slaves and thus maintains a naturalized inability to perceive the possibility of insurrection,

and likewise, to do anything about the traumatic violence it produces. Melville binds the egregious violence of this calamity to the unthinkability of the completeness of black slaves' social being. This manifold figuring of "the negro" and white relations gives new meaning to what Melville calls the "colossal form of the negro" in "Benito Cereno" (62).

The "colossal form of the Negro" depicts the large slave Atufal. He, along with Babo, organizes and leads the revolt and makes plans to return to Senegal. Figuratively speaking, Atufal embodies the size that strikes fear in readers' imaginations, especially if they contemplate him unchained. But the chains, despite Cereno's claims to ownership and control, are actually there by Atufal's choosing, so his awe-inspiring presence, in a more obvious way than Babo, calls attention to a destructive capacity that the chains restrict. Atufal is quiet and obedient, an exemplar of social death in Delano's eyes. Though he says differently to maintain the slaves' masquerade, Cereno sees Atufal's deadly capacity to change the social relations aboard the *San Dominick* and the course of history as Cereno and Aranda envision it. In relation to blackness, slavery, and "Benito Cereno," Atufal's "colossal form" calls attention to three challenges to the concept of slave owners' absolute mastership: actual social instability on the historical stage of New World slavery; an ontological claim that confirms inherent human social possibility in slaves and masters even in conditions where it is not apparent; and one's defenselessness against the violence of everyday social forces beyond one's control.[27]

RESURRECTING THE SLAVE'S NARRATIVE

Under slavery, slaves certainly had influence on their masters and on the cultures of slavery overall. Still, slaves had no official voice. Reporting on "The Nature of Slavery," Douglass calls slaves' official disenfranchisement the reality of the "silent dead."[28] Similarly, one striking feature of Melville's description of the slaves in "Benito Cereno" is their "unquailing muteness" (61). One way to read this muteness lies in the fact that slaves were excluded from democratic social equality and "dead in law."[29] The voicelessness of the slave is not literal, but it suggests slaves' incapacity to influence the social and political reality of those who denied them equal recognition under the law. So when the tribunal proceedings in "Benito Cereno" reveal that the slaves strategize and collaborate to acquire freedom and return to Senegal, Melville conveys the mutual and dialectical reality that defines the relationship between masters and slaves. Melville calls the enslaved Africans "silent signs," but despite being virtually silent

in the text, they embody an immediate sense of power contained in the hidden history of the *San Dominick* (66). This hidden history of slaves risking their lives against their masters' interests undermines any viable notion of social death.

The narratives of ex-slaves shatter the overbearing social limitations and ideological rigidity that underscores the concept of social death, yet they are fully committed to showing the deep psychological wounds of slavery. Slave narratives also focus on how enslaved Africans become free – how, in the eyes of their owners, they move from tractable slaves to intractable phantoms. The blackness that defines "Benito Cereno" finds a compelling intertext with the literary voices of ex-slaves, which from individual contests of escape to startling reminders of Nat Turner's revolt demonstrate that slaves feign a total submission to their status as property while plotting to outwit, disrupt, or even destroy their masters. The scene of subjection, in many slave narratives, becomes the *ruse of objectification*.[30] The ruse I am identifying here brings together a tumultuous sense of objectification with the reality that this horrid condition can never be permanently fixed; it can always be unfixed by new circumstances, information, and events.

Equally significant, a socially dead slave will not revolt against the master because the slave is content or accepts slavery, but slave narratives are defined by the very thing social death claims to stamp out – slaves' willingness to risk death against their masters' interests. Willing to risk one's life for freedom defines the social being of the slave in slave narratives, but this does not mean that this risk sheds objectification as its principal vehicle. The reason total objectification and absolute power must be a ruse is because absolute power is fixed – hence the "death" part of social death. Thus, if the death part (the absolute and fixed condition that Patterson reiterates throughout) is true as Patterson describes it, then there is no way out in life. From this initial position, the slave narrative must prove social death false by the author's unfixing of it – by his or her rendering a master's total power over the slave an utter fiction.

Once slaves embody "risk" in this way, the master's authority suffers because the slave's fear of death can no longer be wielded over the slave as a weapon. The personal literary narrative of ex-slaves implicitly rejects objectification as a weapon of process that the master exclusively can use. Instead, I argue that in slave narratives lies the precondition for the risk of one's death that challenges the effects of masters' definitions, authority, and mental as well as physical control. Slave narratives present how the scenes of objectification, in which masters place their business practices,

physical safety, and visions of upward mobility, turn into the textual space where ideas are put at risk. Here the master's powerlessness over the very thing he legally, socially, and psychologically should have control over actually becomes material loss, psychic frustration, and a confrontation with his limits of power and understanding. By consulting the narratives of Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Henry Box Brown, we can see how they orchestrate utter subjection as a ruse through representations of rebellious slaves.

Douglass's autobiographical writings unabashedly portray his acceptance of slavery's modes of objectification. Under the overseer Covey, the ambitious and curious slave completely submits. Douglass explains that when he arrived at Mr. Covey's he was "unmanageable," but eventually "Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking [him]. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit … and behold a man transformed into a brute!"[31] This breaking of Douglass is where the degraded condition of the violence he witnessed against himself and other slaves, his nothingness as a civic person, culminates in a seemingly final state of ruin. He assumes the form of the physically and psychologically inferior "thing" from Patterson's social death. He is a spoke in the magnificent machinery of the plantation. Subsequently, Douglass becomes inexplicably willing to face Mr. Covey, the icon of slavery's brutal power over him. He fights Mr. Covey and wins. He feels he has nothing to lose and this actually works on his behalf; he is willing to face death and risk his life.

What often remains lost in readings of Douglass's win over Covey is what is at stake for Covey. During and before their fight, Covey believes he has total power over Douglass. His confidence in his position as overseer and his particular relation to Douglass are the same. Douglass writes, "Mr. Covey *believed* he had me, and *could do what he pleased*, but at this moment – from whence came the spirit I don't know – I resolved to fight" (64). The odds are so against Douglass, ideologically at least, that he cannot even pinpoint the origin of his own powers of insurrection. Yet he can point to Mr. Covey's certainty about his own authority, which did not come from a special relationship with Douglass but from Covey's naturalized position. But Douglass destabilizes Covey's position as master (or extension of the master) when Douglass risks the full human life that he insists, psychologically and spiritually, he does not have. This moment is not the end of Covey's mastery, but it illustrates that his authority was never absolute.

Douglass eloquently expresses this transition when he writes, while a "slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact"

(65). The "slave in form" manifests a new idealized self, dangerous and willing to risk death, always plotting for freedom. Douglass' postslavery form life also indicates that his fundamental "social being" could have never assumed an incontrovertible state. Thus, the new self, full of contingency, human even while a slave, presents a tractable object breathing intractability – embodying a sense of unpredictability that cannot be fully accounted for.

Dr. Flint's obsessive stalking of Harriet Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) is certainly different than the iconic battle between Covey and Douglass. There are few moments in *Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl* that directly communicate Dr. Flint's own notion of his power over Jacobs. In one of them, he says to Linda (Jacobs), "you desire freedom for you and your children, and you can obtain it only through me."[32] Dr. Flint wants to keep the power he has over her and amplify it by controlling Jacobs's intimate relationships (66). Jacobs depicts Flint as monomaniacal and obsessed, and in the end, while she does not destroy him, she does expose the falsity of absolute power in which Flint devotedly believes.

It is clear from Jacobs's narrative that Dr. Flint exemplifies some of the most evil aspects of slavery: sexual violence and familial disruption. The deepest irony in *Incidents* stems from the fact that Jacobs's victory over her tormentor necessitates that she put herself in a small prison for seven years. She does not physically fight her individual tormentor like Douglass, but her narrative relies on a determined sense of cunning that allows her to nearly sacrifice herself in order to combat slavery. Her plot against Flint's attempts to subdue her forge the site of her most rigid and literal objectification, as well as the site of Flint's confrontation with the limits of his authority over her.

Jacobs's place of enclosure, symbolically replicating slavery, also disavows it, since she chooses it and, in doing so, chooses to risk her life, her value to her master, and an election for freedom. Still, while in slavery's enclosure, Jacobs metaphorizes it as total darkness (92). Complete blackness reflects risk, uncertainty, and literal darkness. She has no idea or certainty if she will succeed or survive the physical pressures of the cramped enclosure. She spends so much time in it that her limbs become numb and stiff. The structure clearly debilitated her, and she reminds the reader frequently of her pain and numbness (104). Jacobs worries that she may never recover from the toll the enclosure takes on her body. She expresses her personal willingness to die – her choice to lie with rats, mice, and the lowest creatures on the earth (101, 92). The dismal hole points to the

place slavery subjected her all along. She experiences a microcosmic hell on earth – much like a coffin that opposes the idea of a free subject.

What is more, when Jacobs matches her cunning against Flint's cunning, she strategizes against Dr. Flint, but Dr. Flint also represents the authority of masters generally. Jacobs's emphasis on her cunning marks a key shift in the text. This change stems from an original focus on Flint's cunning in the narrative. She strategically moves against his resources and relentless desire to control her. But, as a representative of slaves, of female slaves in particular, she plans to refute and overcome the cultural apparatus that aids Dr. Flint and circumscribes her position as a slave. Therefore, when Jacobs resolves to match her "cunning against his cunning," she substantiates her subjectivity by railing against the rational power attributed to Flint as a powerful white man; the laws that support his interests, like the Fugitive Slave Law, and the tentacles of his social connections in the North that he uses to try to keep Jacobs from escaping. Therefore, defeating Flint means defeating the matrix of physical and ideological forces against her. She proves his mastership false, and in turn, he suffers in his inability to master the object he desires.

She does not conquer social death. She was never socially dead. This does not, however, mean that she was never an object or, rather a, participant in the process of her own objectification. Objectification is the ruse that disputes the master's total power over the slave. *Incidents* places Dr. Flint in his own state of impasse, with his slave object out of reach – his beliefs disputed, he has a glimpse of the larger threat to his way of life through Jacobs.

Jacobs and Douglass both, in the words of Ishmael, become ungraspable phantoms to their masters. Yet what is all the more taxing on the masters is the semblance of the slave object, like a dog or crate, subject only to their manipulations, abuses, and orders. But, as "Benito Cereno" displays, what was presumed to be no more troublesome than freight can unexpectedly become the darkest trouble imaginable.

When it comes to a slave merging indiscriminately with an inanimate object, no one literalizes this more than Henry Box Brown. Brown's *Narrative of the Life* (1851) relays his story of how he conspired with abolitionists to be sent to freedom in a small crate supposedly filled with dry goods. The most striking feature of Brown's suffering is not the graphic scenes of physical abuse by his master, but how the master's power separates slave families.[33] His master's ability to sell, reorganize, and purchase other slaves with whatever flexibility his purse strings allow captures Brown's idea of his master's formidable capacities. Brown interpreted

this economic and social ability symbolically, characterizing his master as "Almighty God" (18). Additionally, according to Brown, the auction blocks where slaves are evaluated make the master's incredible influence visible.[34] For Brown, the auction block represents his most vile sense of abjection (20). Contemplating it, he feels the reality of being property. Despite how good some masters may be, he tells readers, the fact that slaves are always subject to being stripped from all normative familial relations reveals the true evil of slavery.[35]

To escape slavery, Brown procures a box to pretend to be a "dry good" to ship himself to freedom. He turns himself into a dead version of what he already is, someone's property in a commodified form. Yet because his choice goes against his master's economic and social interests, Brown positions his trajectory as that from an object of power to a subject of it. Similar to Jacobs and Douglass, before Brown becomes free in Philadelphia he must, as Henry Louis Gates Jr. writes, enter a steep "descent."[36] Thus, he imprisons himself with water and the belief in his natural rights and a God who would deliver him. Brown, moreover, understands his step into the box as facing death; he would either "conquer or die" (60). Unlike other narratives, which emphasize suffering, Brown's narrative focuses on his choice to risk his life and escape to freedom. As with Douglass and Jacobs, once a slave becomes willing to die, to kill himself in order to reinvent himself, this becomes the death of the master's power over him. Brown's entering the box illustrates his liminal space and his vexed condition. His master, we imagine, is equally vexed.

Interestingly enough, one can also see how inadvertently abolitionists' cartoons mask the risk of death that Henry Box Brown's narrative highlights. In Samuel Rowse's famous lithograph, *The Resurrection of Henry Box Brown at Philadelphia*, Brown's escape reflects factual reality. He did escape into the open hands of abolitionists from the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee. But as Dana Nelson warns about these celebrated sites of abolitionist success and benevolence, such moments also reinforce the ideological interests of liberal white gratification at the expense of the tumultuous trials of Brown.[37] He spent twenty-six hours in the box and later became, as Trish Loughran calls it, "a speaking commodity" in abolitionist print culture.[38] The picture, unlike Brown's written narrative, obfuscates Brown's own willingness to put his life at risk, the treacherousness of his experience in total darkness, and the real possibility of death or recapture.

Brown's attitude, to conquer enslavement or die, describes his prebox sentiment. He must descend into the box without knowing he would

survive it. The picture celebrates the apparent organizers of Brown's success, but it is like celebrating Christ's resurrection without mentioning the suffering, alienation, loneliness, and utter abasement before the resurrection.[39] This is not to say that Brown's bravery was pushed aside solely for abolitionist self gratification, but the picture points its audience toward the crucial thing slave narratives demonstrated and also what Melville wants readers to see in the enslaved Africans in "Benito Cereno."

Brown thinks, moreover, that the obscure language of the law, which even abolitionists draw upon to depict the horrid conditions of slavery, fails to give a satisfactory account of the scope of what slaves can and will do. In the appendix to his narrative he argues, "the most perfect abstract laws which regulate the duties of slaves and slave-owners, must doubtless fail to convey any proper idea of the actual state of the slave" (70). Brown's escape epitomizes human beings as a part of a mass exchange of commodities in the United States, yet it also shows Brown's elusiveness from his status as a commodified object. He fights and succeeds against the very thing slave masters attempted to secure and protect. In inserting himself into the box, becoming the thing, he highlights how the master's interests are subject to the unpredictable actions of the enslaved. One of the most important features of slave narratives is how they portray the master's desire to control the slave, fully dignify this possessive reality, and then deny its totalizing capacity. The strivings for mobility, voice, social choices, and political possibility make the idea of an absolute and unalterable scene of objectification hollow.

Bill Brown argues that "things" challenge the conventional subject–object relations as they "stop working for us."[40] When the slave, then, stops working as the slave, as merely an extension of his master's wishes, and rejects this condition only to perform it as an act, the slave shifts from a thing of property, in Patterson's view, to a thing of contingency to the master. Being a thing here is less the object itself, but in Brown's words, "a particular subject–object relation."[41] In the case of slave narratives, Douglass, Brown, and Jacobs all become figures of contingency and instability that impinge upon the masters' authority and certainty about slaves' literal and psychological connection to their masters. In this event, the becoming of the object turns both the master and slave into fearful enigmas of one another. Covey and Dr. Flint, even in defeat, possess the full capacity for mystery that the idea of social death denies slaves, and slaves, through their escape, reclaim it. In this thing relation, where both relations are defined, slaves become enigmatic in such a way that the possibility of their thinking and actions cannot be reduced to

laws, statutes, and established practices. Thus, using objectification as a ruse forces readers to consider that within "things we will discover the human."[42] The human thing realizes its own power to be cunning and enigmatic, always mysterious, so that no sociological certainty can be fully guaranteed.

The individual narratives of Jacobs, Douglass, and Brown all refer to a violent collective version of their own enigmatic possibility. More explicitly than the references made in "Benito Cereno" to the Haitian Revolution, all three narratives discuss Nat Turner's rebellion. Turner's rebellion, like the revolts in Haiti, sparked nightmarish and apocalyptic visions of civilization's end conceivably starting in the agitation of a single slave. Turner's rebellion, at its mythic best, represents what slave masters feared most: slave conspiracy, insurrection, the end of modern slavery, and their own violent deaths.

Douglass explains that shortly after powerful whites discovered Turner's insurrection plot and quelled it, their "alarm and terror had not subsided."[43] In addition to cholera beginning to spread in the South, Douglass depicts Turner's plot as the armed death of the Almighty, which whites feared.[44] Furthermore, John Stauffer shows that radical abolitionists, like John Brown and even Douglass for a time, believed the Lord's righteous violence could carry the world into a tranquil millennium of racial and social equality.[45] Henry Box Brown mentions how Turner's rebellion similarly spread the rumor of revolt among whites. Because of these rumors, whites attempted to enforce laws that forbade slaves from gathering in groups (30–1).

Herbert Aptheker explains that insurrection fears produced more legislation and the specter of cultural chaos and social oblivion.[46] For instance, this famous illustration of the revolt preys upon the fearful imagination of powerful whites. To have the black majority, the vessels of the Southern economy and way of life, participate in a violent uprising provokes visions of a murderous and unexpected end of the current social order.

Slave narratives invoke Turner's prerevolt plot as the ultimate figure of slave performance. With Turner in mind, Jacobs writes that it was strange that white slave-owners should believe their property so "contented and happy" (53). Turner's revolt forecasts the opposite. Local slaves' discontent turns into a culture of widespread fear among slaveholders generally because the apparatus designed to protect whites proved open to explosive violence and bloody chaos.

Thomas Higginson expressed Turner's apocalyptic vision symbolically. As if inhabiting Turner's religious visions, Thomas Higginson writes in

the *Atlantic Monthly*: "He saw white spirits and black spirits contending in the skies; the sun was darkened, the thunder rolled."[47] The metaphysical underpinnings unveil the largest cost of rebellion. The emotional and physical pain of loss imbues the visions of social and religious blackness. When ex-slave authors invoke Turner, readers can imagine masters and what they represent completely disarmed of their real and ideological weapons, vulnerable to death at the hands of their slaves.

Images and stories of slave rebellion and escape, famously articulated through Brown's narrative and panoramas, became transatlantic messages for abolition.[48] But even the friends of abolition, like William Goodell and, in some cases, Douglass, bought into the rhetoric of the living death of slaves. In looking at slave narratives as a crucial intertext with "Benito Cereno," we can see that risking one's life to be free of the individual master, who symbolizes the regime of slavery, shows a symbolic violence against ideological and legal strategies constructed to keep slaves under control and the institution of slavery firmly intact. Disruptive slaves blur into larger fantasies of millennial flames. Slave narratives manifest the ghosts of sociological reality that loom in the collaborations of slaves that masters fearfully intuit but cannot know or predict. These premonitions, which escaped slaves and violent contests disclose, make mischief in masters' minds because of the possible real threats to their culture, ideology, and way of life, such as in the cases of Nat Turner's rebellion and the Haitian Revolution.[49] This inordinate historical, aesthetic, and philosophical possibility of "the negro" represents the blackness in Melville's "Benito Cereno."

"THE NEGRO" AND THE "REGULATED MIND"

Escaping slaves, slaves' disruptions of plantation production, as well as outright revolts portrayed in slaves' narratives, indicate the types of historical events no slave master desires – events that demonstrate masters do not have absolute power over slaves. In "Benito Cereno," Melville portrays Cereno and Aranda as overconfident in their knowledge about a particular group of slaves – as if they had no idea that the slaves could act outside of their status as property.[50] When Delano boards the *San Dominick* after the revolt, he sees the slaves the exact same way Aranda and Cereno did before the insurrection – as inferior, docile, and loyal commodities. Delano's racist beliefs about slaves delineate broader social concepts that interpellate him and constitute his "regulated mind" (85). "Benito Cereno" is not only about challenging Delano's "regulated mind"

but, more precisely, about how revolting slaves make manifest an event unthinkable to Delano and Cereno, a turbulent reality masked in everyday possibilities, which can unravel all of one's connections – to self, others, professional life, community, and nation. Making Delano and Cereno (and Aranda) overconfident in reference to their slaves' behavior does not reflect a total ignorance of the possibility of all slave insurrections writ large but rather their and other whites' belief that they can always be certain about the difference between slaves that will revolt and ones that will not. To a significant extent, masters must stake their slave economies on their ability to be all knowing, or at least all knowing enough about the character of their slaves, and it is through this necessary confidence and knowledge that Melville destabilizes the long-term viability of the peculiar institution.

Just as Jacobs's outwitting of slavery's tentacles frustrates and confuses Dr. Flint and as Douglass converts Mr. Covey's certainty and belief into disbelief and uncertainty, in "Benito Cereno" the slaves not only overturn Aranda and Cereno's assumptions about slaves, they destroy Cereno's entire relationship to social reality. Cereno's social world, his friendships, his business, his thinking about the world as made manifest through slavery, are all irreparably disrupted. These conditions, which "the negro" creates and which Delano cannot see and Cereno internalizes, establish blackness. This section unveils Melville's blackness by analyzing abstract and concrete aspects of the social, a social constituted by the relationship between the remote area in which "Benito Cereno" takes place and the symbolic import of the white captains' objectification of the slaves. Blackness in "Benito Cereno" unfolds in scenes where the social facts of slavery, the ideas and practices through which masters intensely realize power/knowledge and reveal experiences, and all attempts to attain or reinforce power fall short.

When Melville first uses the phrase "regulated mind," he refers to Delano's vision of Babo cutting the head off of Cereno while Babo shaves him. Delano quickly admonishes the image. In this instance, the "regulated mind" appears as the rational and normal and does not entertain ridiculous phantoms outside Cereno's mastership and Babo's harmless docility. This is a more specific reaffirmation rooted in Delano's ideas about normal relations between masters and slaves. But what Delano dismisses as a ghost actually points to the truth he seeks. The disconnection, more importantly, between what he intuits as false and what he sees as truth is present throughout "Benito Cereno." Delano's "quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception" is the center of Melville's plot from

the beginning (47). Before Melville portrays these more explicit examples of slavery and racial difference, he implants the early passages with contradictions between what an interpellated subject like Delano would know and a geographical location that resists the categorizations and distinctions that constitute subjects. Delano's mind reenacts ideologies and hierarchies of social order, racial hierarchy, and other givens, even though the harbor where he rests is a place where these realities become blurred and unraveled by fogs and fantastic premonitions.

Interestingly enough, it is being far removed from the normative social world that attracts Delano to the remote area in the first place. Yet unbeknownst to him, the price of escape is utter estrangement. Hence, in the foundation of "Benito Cereno" lies a fundamental misrecognition embedded in Melville's initial staging. As much as Delano imagines himself as an enlightened subject, someone "not afraid of phantoms," as Kant writes, Melville makes Delano little "more than a machine."[51] He is stubbornly reducible to the governing ideologies of slavery and mercantile culture in which he habitually participates while sitting in a space where phantoms cannot be distinguished from reality – a place where slavery's unreal is reality.[52]

Melville sets "Benito Cereno" in the harbor of St. Maria off the coast of Chile. Where Delano's *Bachelor's Delight* and Cereno's *San Dominick* cross paths, according to the novel, is a place of lawlessness. The broader historical tenor of the southern Americas, as discussed in the previous chapter, also sheds light on Melville's vague gestures toward a historical setting. The *San Dominick* references Haiti's revolutionary moments, but the zeitgeist of the southern Americas equals it in some ways. Benedict Anderson explains that the political and ownership classes in many parts of South America remained in fear of Indian and slave uprisings and the potential instabilities these disturbances could cause.[53] In addition, many Spanish colonies, led by figures like Jose San Martín and Simon Bolivar, sought independence at the turn of the eighteenth century.[54] Neither Delano nor anyone else was a particular enemy or champion of revolt for independent nations in the "South-American States," but the *Bachelor's Delight* sits in a harbor just off the land that many U.S. writers described as possessed by sociopolitical upheaval, moral depravity, and violence.[55] The southern Americas, in the eyes of U.S. writers and politicians, were bereft of real government, democratic social conditions, and the economic infrastructure necessary for modern civilization. "Delano's narrative," Hershel Parker comments, "did not end with the restoration of as much order as could be established."[56] Restoring order, however, is challenged at

every level in the text, since Melville, by setting the ships' crossings in a zone of lawlessness off shores known for sociopolitical turbulence, makes the very idea of order a looming enigma instead of a certainty.

Still, while Melville construes this hovering uncertainty plaguing Delano's entire outlook in the novel's early passages, he also familiarizes the reader with more historical texture: "In the Year 1799, Captain Amasa Delano, of Duxbury, in Massachusetts, commanding a large sealer and general trader, lay at anchor with a valuable cargo, in the harbor of St. Maria … Chile" (46). Delano and his crew procure valuable cargo, and the harbor is a place of repose away from sealing and procuring other objects of value. Delano and crew are seemingly content. They are not looking for more capital or confrontation with other people.

Delano's desire for repose with his things of value, which sustain his way of life and peace of mind, suggests that he is not prepared for much else. Accordingly, he maintains an "undistrustful good nature" which cannot recognize the "malign evil in man" (47). For Emerson, this particular brand of myopia might provide a greater opportunity for an "insight of the perfection of the laws of the soul," which in turn contains man's potential triumph over the "evil and weakness" in which he lies.[57] The malign evil in man, however, is not up for dispute or possible transcendence in "Benito Cereno." Malign evil is a fact of opposition that demarcates the limits of Delano's perceptive abilities.

Moreover, in most of Melville's texts evil is never just about moral choices and challenges of the soul, but about people and events that can bring pain, suffering, and confusion. In Melville's "The Paradise of Bachelors," the bachelors see "the thing pain" and "bugbear style trouble" as preposterous to their imaginations.[58] Delano epitomizes this festive and blind contentment that also suggests material comforts and the blessings of social leisure, especially as it compares with Melville's companion piece "The Tartarus of Maids," in which female factory workers are subject to degrading and monotonous labor.

Melville appears to contradict this description of the American captain, however, when he brings up Delano's awareness of the infamous social evil, pirates. Writers from Cotton Mather to Daniel Defoe have portrayed pirates as spiritual, political, and economic evils for a trader like Delano.[59] The mild alertness Delano has for the presence of pirates, more important, suggests that Melville's "evil" for Delano is more like the evil he does not prescriptively or intuitively know. That is, perceiving evil requires a different propensity for the discovery of the unknown that brings revolting fear, which Delano is not willing to make himself

vulnerable to. Delano is familiar with pirates, so the fact that they may be around does not mean he cannot foresee how to protect himself and his cargo against them.

Melville's remarks about pirates in "The Encantadas" point to a different way to view the allusions to Delano's knowledge of them.[60] The pirates of Cowley Isle in Melville's Galapagos sketches are known for rampaging along the Spanish coastlines. "Benito Cereno" calls attention to what the harbor's lawlessness means – the potential to be taken advantage of by the commodity thieves who wreak social, political, and economic mayhem on the normal workings of society. The pirates' war on the daily routines of social life in the coastal Spanish colonies coheres with the larger lawlessness of St. Maria harbor. In St. Maria harbor, being without laws bears upon the social oblivion that challenges or thwarts "the regulated mind," defined by normative schemes of political governance, maritime enforcement, and other social strictures that make up the culture of the everyday.

Melville goes further to establish what the language of "lawlessness and loneliness" means by attributing a greater sense of negativity to it (47). The harbor is a place of "endless deep gray" (46). "Everything was mute and calm; everything gray." This type of blankness, "pale dread and spiritual wonderment," horrifies Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*.[61] For Ishmael, who seems to have no problem intuiting various forms of evil, blankness (depicted by Melville in white or gray) that presumes the formlessness of infinity inspires "panic in his soul."[62] Delano innately denies the proclivities to which Melville makes Ishmael open. While not unbothered altogether, St. Maria harbor vaguely disturbs Delano. The blankness and endless gray reiterate Delano's limited vision. They mark the ubiquitous presence of what cannot be distinguished, the unmarked or endlessly marked, all of which communicate negativity. In this light, it is not surprising that the *San Dominick* proceeds without a discernable direction. Delano ponders that it was hard to see if she wanted "to come in or no" (47). Delano wants to board her and "pilot her in," and his challenge will be to decipher, solve, and take control of the ship in a geographical locale where meaning and understanding is perverse and slippery (47).

Melville makes Delano impervious to the dissention and misrecognition that shape his present outlook. Melville distinguishes this dislocation, of which Delano is only vaguely aware, by bringing black images to the forefront. This seems even more apparent as Melville introduces readers to the

people with whom Delano must consort to decipher and rescue the ship. Upon the possibility of retrieving information about the Spanish ship that may be helpful to him, Delano faces darkness that connotes more confusion. Even though Delano remains perplexed about the *San Dominick*'s history and identity, ominous foreboding or evil possibilities connoted by black images go unnoticed by him. That is, enslaved Africans and other shadowy objects and backdrops present themselves to Delano without him discerning their meaning and purpose. Blackness confronts him as he engages the ship, but Melville withholds the violence of the enslaved Africans' revolt and the slave revolt's force of epistemic and ideological inversion from Delano as he faces it. Cereno, facing Delano, is completely consumed by the blackness that Melville withholds from Delano.

More exactly, blackness unfolds as Melville cloaks the social setting of the *San Dominick* in black images. As the ship reveals itself, Melville limns further darkness: "dark cowls" and "dark moving figures" are compared to "Black Friars pacing" (48). They could be intimations of morally depraved Spaniards who were routinely described as black and evil in political and fictional discourse in the antebellum era.[63] With every object Delano recognizes, Melville neatly imbricates his discoveries with confusion and vapors that suppress what he wants to see. The "living spectacle" of "Benito Cereno" yields precisely the opposite of what Delano expects (50). As Delano confronts the ship's interior, its reality confronts him – "enchantment" itself, which veils his every look (50). The actual preponderance of blackness calls attention to the disconnection with social reality, or the real, which Delano experiences throughout.

Subsequently, when Delano sees the various groups of slaves, the hatchet polishers, and the oakum pickers, he sees them only in terms of the sounds they make. They communicate a "monotonous chant" and "barbarous din" (50). Melville means at some level to make the "stoically content" and hatchet polishing blacks alarming, but Delano sees the sounds as the African slaves' ability to "unite industry with pastime" (50). The text harmoniously blends indiscernible confusion and chant as coterminous features of the already apparent endless gray. The enslaved Africans' black bodies signal obscurity; they deepen the influence of the setting by allowing humans to stand in where only vapors, fogs, and gray did previously.

Melville makes his strokes of blackness more explicit; he imbricates the text with black objects, inanimate and animate. The black friars and slaves move across the deck to temporarily make way for other "symbol-

ical devices," in particular, a shieldlike piece featuring a "dark satyr in a mask" (49):

> [T]he principal relic of faded grandeur was ample over a shield-like stern-piece, intricately carved with the arms of Castile and Leon, medallioned about by groups of mythological and symbolical devices uppermost and central of which was a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked. (48–9)

Melville centralizes the dark satyr. But what is "uppermost and central" to the complete social and historical identification of the ship actually conceals the identity of the actors, and this concealment, without communication of its meaning from people aboard the ship, makes the ship overall identical to its wayward and confusing movements. Whatever truth it has, historical or epistemological, it can never tell it without concomitantly negating or hiding it.

The dark images on the shield also illustrate violence. They show one person who has subdued another by physical force. Delano may see the emblem as a symbol of Spanish vehemence, incivility, and thirst for undemocratic domination.[64] This reading begins in vapors, drifts into elaborate description, and finally returns to an enigmatic emblem, suggesting formal circularity. This unrequited ambiguity means that social particulars and objects are subject to be cloaked again or proven unreliable. Melville creates the opening moments in both historicity and epistemological uncertainty, but neither wins out. This opposition solidifies the underlying epistemic violence of "Benito Cereno" that Delano never realizes even though it imposes upon him. Jonathan Edwards expresses this idea theologically when he claims humans are always helplessly and often unknowingly "held over the pit of hell."[65] For Melville, blackness signifies the social gateway into a thriving sense of irresolvable misrecognition, epitomized in Captain Cereno, which might easily be called hell.

Melville indicates his own version of this unknowing relation to social and epistemological disruption as Delano's "regulated mind" engages Captain Cereno, his ship, and his slaves. The *San Dominick*'s history is metaphorized as a hell of its own, the unmarked and unrecordable "deep." "The ship," in Delano's eyes, "seems unreal; these strange costumes, gestures, and faces, but a shadowy tableau just *emerged from the deep*, which directly must *receive back* what it gave" (50). The deep, which delivers the ship into Delano's reality, can only be understood in terms of blackness; it literally has no light. The deep has no place or time or geographical coordinates; it is history's void. To subjects like the white

captains of "Benito Cereno," who cannot fathom slave revolt, the violent, enslaved Africans also have no place, time, or other coordinates of a recognizable reality. The hidden history of the ship, then, is not only socially disruptive, intuitively or practically, but like the dark satyr mask, it gestures toward a future of obscurity. This futurism does not necessarily show what will occur, but the act of looking into the face of unknowing itself, for Delano, produces a paralysis that withholds all the cues, pieces, and other discernable objects from his grasp. This impasse between the social life aboard the ship and the deathlike sphere prefigures Delano's encounters with all living objects.

Sundquist characterizes the uncertainty and paralysis which make it difficult for Delano to know objects in "Benito Cereno" as both historical and narratological.[66] He shows how the agonistic pause of "Benito Cereno's" narrative mirrors the stalemate between abolitionists and proslavery advocates between the end of the Spanish Empire and the dawn of U.S. political ascendancy.[67] But Sundquist does not say that without a failing Spanish empire or the dialectical tussle over slavery subjects cannot find themselves confronted by extreme challenges of unthinkable events. In my view, Sundquist insufficiently attends to the existential aspects of history, the ungovernable aspects that subjects often exclude and cannot see due to their ideological and epistemological limitations. The historical sluggishness that Sundquist says reveals the narrative style of "Benito Cereno" is significant, but it also calls attention to the inherent blankness of everyone's future and to the agonizing confusion and disruption when subjects like Cereno unexpectedly experience new possibilities for the first time. Within the realm of an abstract future, subject to human unpredictability and nature's whims, everyone is blind, and this blindness, as Melville characterizes it, reiterates subjects' ontological limits in history.[68]

Hence, Delano cannot pilot the ship in when "the deep" is determined to "receive back" what it gave (50). The deep is not literal, but it represents a negativity visualized as an absolutely dark place that drowns all recognizable reality – sociohistorical, ontological, or otherwise. The language of the deep giving and receiving makes it an active natural agent that withholds all that it can, whatever fragments one may maintain from it – true, false, or in between. This is an irresolvable condition that Delano unknowingly faces and, more important, one that Cereno and Aranda cannot escape after the insurrection.

If Delano finds himself on a fact finding mission in order to pilot the ship in, at some level he must discern, process, and emplot the story, at least to himself, to make sense of it.[69] This idea of "sense-making" based

on his interpellated existence, his "regulated mind," reaches its limits throughout the story when Delano's ability to analyze facts betrays him. With blankness in the field of inquiry, and "the deep" as the source of the black object he analyzes, Melville stages the ultimate conjunction of abstract and concrete, history and myth, social and antisocial conflations. The intersections cast the problem of order in its broadest sense, and they inform Delano's future encounters with Cereno and the enslaved Africans. The masquerade, which Cereno and the Africans participate in, brings the former convergences into the practical necessities of plot and narration, yet this does not mean that the social fabric of racial difference and slavery lose the almost mythic cognitive dissonance with which Melville inscribes them. Next, I look at how Melville submerges the multivalent force the slaves represent as extensions of the black deep within the comforts of what Delano and Cereno perceive as accepted social norms of slaves' objectification.

Delano and Cereno's steadfast ways, their investment in the social norms they know to be true, makes the slaves' challenge to them, in Cereno's case, all the more catastrophic. Cereno and Aranda's demise stems from a simple, but ultimately tragic, misconception about slaves. The colossal impositions that occur within "Benito Cereno" stem from the ghostly and disturbing foundations analyzed in the previous section, which breathe uncanny life into the slaves. When the slave insurrection unmakes the social for Cereno and Aranda (their friendship, slaves' identities, business, and historical outlook), like the destabilizing powers of the deep and St. Maria harbor it indicates how slaves' objectification harbors the violent and unexpected unraveling of social coherence. Knowing the slaves as objects and/or commodities for sale and exchange, naturalized and fully understood, becomes a way for Melville to posit mystery and unpredictable haunting that, in a place where they should be undoubtedly absent, can be not only surprising but also costly and deadly. The dogged and unavoidable experience of knowledge and certainty surprisingly and violently overturned, in this case through human commodities, defines blackness in "Benito Cereno." The valuable bodies of enslaved Africans, as Delano sees them, stake out what is thinkable and unthinkable concerning the past, present, and future of the ship. Economic, social, legal, and humanistic concerns converge in "Benito Cereno's" negro, and together they unveil Melville's proxy for abstract ideas about antebellum social life under slavery and "the social" itself.

The ability of the enslaved Africans to generate disruptive social possibility of which Aranda and Cereno were unaware points to the Spanish

captains' conceptual limitations. Pierre Bourdieu defines the socially unthinkable precisely this way, as occurrences for which subjects have no instruments to conceptualize.[70] Thus, the *San Dominick*'s revolt mirrors the lore of the Haitian Revolution. Commenting on the Haitian Revolution, Michel Trouillot writes that it was "unthinkable for its time: it challenged the very frame within which proponents and opponents had examined race, colonialism, and slavery in the Americas."[71] Melville takes this further by making "the negro" the catalyst for "unthinkable" events that amplify Delano's blindness and Cereno's near utter absence of coherent thought.

Melville calls attention to the unthinkability of the slave revolt early in the text. To highlight Delano's impatience, confidence, and certainty, Melville directs Delano right past the Africans he sees when he comes aboard the ship while searching for who is in charge. After his "comprehensive glance" at the people aboard the ship, Delano, looking past the enslaved Africans, must now look for "whomsoever might be in command of the ship" (51). As the text progresses, the reader sees why Delano does not even think of the possibility of insurrection or that the blacks may be in charge. Delano has an inkling of something awry aboard the ship, but his confidence in the reality he knows will not allow him to see it.

Melville defines Delano's confident reality through his stubbornly racist character. Much racist literature, scientific and aesthetic, circulated the ideas that Delano reproduces almost wholesale. George Sawyer's *Southern Institutes* (1859) claims that blacks maintain the gracious impulse that many "canine species" share.[72] Likewise, Delano believes blacks make perfect loyal and docile servants. They are morally and intellectually inferior to whites. Moreover, each one of Delano's rehearsals of black inferiority, including comparing blacks to loyal dogs, works to further exclude slaves from any possible leadership role in what happened to the ship (84). George Frederickson explains that blacks' docility was a crucial part of thinking in the North. Even abolitionists like Harriet Beecher Stowe argued blacks' natural docility and affection made them more amenable to Christian teaching.[73] This did not mean that people did not attribute a natural condition of savagery to enslaved Africans, but rather, they believed as Delano wrongly does, that blacks' capacity for violence was somehow contained and nonthreatening. Delano compares the slaves to leopards and dogs, yet he does not fear them like he would a real leopard or wild dog.

Delano adjusts his thinking to resolve contradictions. If blacks are like leopards or animalistic in other ways, why aren't they at least unpredictable

and probably dangerous? Delano is so certain about black inferiority and docility that through him Melville makes a point about the rigidity of ideology. But even though his beliefs about slaves are cemented, the fact that potentially dangerous characteristics of wild animals can be reconciled shows movement and adjustment. It attests to the power of ideology and its ability to reconcile contradictions, but it also shows Delano as impatient, willful, and intellectually shallow, which one cannot limit to racist false consciousness. Melville certainly calls attention to something mechanically primal in Delano that relies on a particular picture for personal self-interest, protection, and egoistic satisfaction. The individual, social, and existential inextricably connect here in a way that suggests Delano could be rebooted with antiracism and antislavery ideologies and still be willful, shortsighted, and overconfident. This is indeed a knot that interlaces the abstract concepts of what is real and what is possible and underscores Delano's worldview with the degradation, objectification, and commodification of "the negro."

Delano, moreover, is a marine merchant and never forgets the slaves are valuable cargo, "living freight" (4). He offers to purchase Babo. Babo appeals to his affectionate sense of mastership; his perfect mixture of melancholy and joy resembles a "shepherd's dog" (51). He sees the rest of them as little more trouble than "crates and bales" (54). This idea is not of Delano's own making. Spanish officials recovered Aranda's ledger and sought to attain more documents to supplement the descriptions of the slave cargo. The ledger discusses the slaves' background, skills, and names, which masters use to document the slaves' value on the market or possibly for insurance purposes.[74]

Furthermore, as Delano articulates his favorable views of black servitude, he fantasizes about how he can possess them. At the end of the story, when the action of the plot reveals that the slaves have taken over the ship, Delano wants to recover the *San Dominick*'s slaves. The slaves and other objects combined, Melville writes, are worth over a thousand doubloons. The American Delano has no intent "to kill or maim the negroes" (101). They are to "take them, with the ship" that was the object (101). To retain the negroes without injury affirms Delano's intent to keep them healthy, not for punishment, but for sale. Stephanie Smallwood explains that procedures of transport in the middle passage tried to account for the transition from selling slaves in the slave market.[75] Key to this was making sure slaves appeared as healthy and saleable "human machinery."[76]

Delano's inability throughout "Benito Cereno" to see the truth of the ship shows that racist ideology reduces blacks to commodities that

maintain enough interiority to reinforce their master's wishes. The commodity status of slaves masks their humanity, and their orchestration of this status also hides the fact that they have taken over the *San Dominick*. The "historical life-process," as Marx calls it, to which Delano's outlook is wedded, causes Delano to see "men and their relations upside-down."[77] Delano exemplifies the personification of Marx's "camera obscura" not only because at no point does he see mystery in the negro, as a commodity, or as a human, but because he sees virtually nothing outside the realm of the possibilities he can foresee.[78] Does it ever occur to him that things are not the way they appear or beyond predictable answers? He never realizes the slaves have taken over, but since he knows about pirates and evil Spaniards, he does think Cereno could be one of them. To Delano, the slaves are slaves and thus must be docile and loyal extensions of their master's will. Instead of bringing out the demystified truth of the ship, the slaves obscure social relations aboard the ship, just as they masked their own relations to Aranda and Cereno before the revolt. Marx warns readers about the deceptive simplicity of commodities, writing, "A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties."[79] With this in mind, as long as Delano holds his beliefs he will not see the slaves as socially active producers in the scene, just the receptacles or vessels of masters' modes of production.[80]

This is a major claim, from abolitionists like Douglass to Orlando Patterson, that the success of slavery defaces the difference between men and things, persons and property. Slaves exemplify what Hortense Spillers calls "total objectification," meaning they are a sum of their usable parts and how those parts are of use to their masters.[81] Slavery robs them of enigmatic interiority – the mystery that makes humans unpredictable – as Melville writes in "The Encantadas," like the caprice of wind.[82]

Yet despite appearing to endow Delano with eyes and ears that only understand slaves as commodified objects, Melville allows Delano to have revelations to the contrary, in which the violent reality of "living freight," which doubles as historical and epistemic truth, appears to him. For instance, when Babo famously shaves Cereno, Delano sees "in the black, a headsman, and in the white, and man on the block" (85). From this antic conceit, "the best regulated mind is not wholly free" (85). The "regulated mind," the interpellated subject, clings to the apparent and believed reality.[83] The flash of "the negro" as violence manifests a mystical phantom, a spontaneous intuition, which puts the subject in a defensive

position against images he or she cannot control. The violent negro in total control is not only abnormal, it challenges the idea that organizes Delano's social plane. And in this imaginative plane, he is powerless to stop it; he is violently robbed of mastery.

The flash tells him that the objectification in which he believes is a lie, but Delano faces his own existential limits, his powerless to prevent the premonition, or other ones, which erupt violently into the comfortable reality he tries to preserve. This glimpse of nightmarish fantasy cannot take away everything from him, as in the case of Cereno and Aranda. Moreover, when Delano represses it and tries to reestablish the present self–world relations that he knows, it confirms what is at stake in the slaves' commodification, protecting oneself from the potential disarray that blackness conveys. The shaving scene exemplifies the psychic violence and cognitive dissonance that Cereno experiences and that confronts Delano in their encounters with "the negro."[84]

When Delano rids himself of the horror of Babo's razor, he unknowingly attempts to rid himself of the blackness Cereno and Aranda undergo. The symbolic force of blackness in "Benito Cereno" stems from the disruptive acts and revolts of human commodities in the Americas. Babo's razor moment aboard the *San Dominick* cues the reader to a crucial signpost I've already mentioned for slave masters and supporters of slavery's inability to see it coming, the Haitian Revolution. Melville names Captain Cereno's ship the *San Dominick* after the island of Haiti where the most famous insurrections in Western modernity occurred. These events, along with revolts in Jamaica and Nat Turner's revolt, sent shock waves through the slaveholding states in the Americas. The revolts, especially those in Haiti, were not only a practical lesson of the failures of masters to control slaves, but also revealed how this failure of mastery contained a glimpse of widespread pandemonium in the Atlantic world, a flash of white civilization's apocalypse. The insurrection's "imagery of great upheaval," David Brion Davis writes, "hovered over [like] … a bloodstained ghost."[85]

Thus, when Delano escapes from Babo's razor at Cereno's neck, he runs from an image that contains the implications of not just violently overturning a particular slave owner, but of overturning the social order of the New World. In a practical sense, this premonition begins at the end of "Benito Cereno," when the reader finds out how the entire upheaval began. Delano's denial of the black henchman in the famous shaving scene points the reader back to a possible exchange between Cereno and Aranda that Melville only implies took place. The logic of the text says that Aranda's assurance to Cereno that the slaves were tractable may have

been prompted by a question: Are the slaves tractable? Cereno knew that intractability, or degrees of it, was something to consider when transporting slaves. Additionally, as far as this discussion is concerned, this question implies a question of greater detail: Are the slaves controllable objects of property with no will other than their owner's? "Benito Cereno" makes no mention of this question in either version, but it does say that Aranda assured Cereno that the slaves were indeed easily controlled. They were objects, like Delano assumed later, the same amount of trouble as a crate. In accordance with the customs of the social order that regulated Aranda and Cereno's minds, there was no need to chain them while they slept on deck. Perhaps Cereno, like Delano, saw the insurrection coming in a ghostly premonition but maintained his own way that objectification constituted the slaves' permanent and unalterable reality.

Aranda implies the slaves will not rebel, and thus it is suitable for none of them to "wear fetters" (104). From what Aranda knows of his slaves, they are solely dedicated to his will, and thus their own will is driven by the sole desire to be better slaves, turning down opportunities for freedom even if they become available.[86] Thus, a journey like the one aboard the *San Dominick* requires no chains for the slaves. Delano says about the slaves: They are little more trouble than cargo. Obviously, their human service manifests a greater worth than lifeless possessions. To totally equate slaves with these inanimate objects would be disingenuous to understanding the interaction between slaves and masters. The emphasis here is on the word "trouble" – the slaves contain the same propensity for trouble or rebelliousness as cargo: none. The inanimate and harmless withhold catastrophic violence in "Benito Cereno," and Melville never relinquishes this emphasis on objectification. The exemplarity of slaves' objectification occurs through Melville's reference to them as "silent signs" (63). It begins in the fact that Delano equates slaves with crates, which are inanimate and cannot speak. The idea of slaves as mere "living freight" contains within it the implication that they cannot cause physical or actual violence to the captains.

Melville quite effectively accentuates the violence through the objectified emblems that do not speak, exemplifying voiceless slaves on the one hand, and the performance of social rebellion on the other. Melville depicts the slaves as literally quiet, as if they are merely people who appear as "living freight" to Delano's regulated mind. The Africans make noises with hatchets; they also communicate verbally and through other physical actions. Examining the noise that silent signs make, critics claim that the enslaved Africans communicate in explicit and implicit ways throughout

the novel. If the physical sounds they make mimic African drumming or other cultural codes that missionaries and traders recorded after their trips to West Africa, Delano is ignorant of them.[87] The anthropological, political, and historical context, as far as African culture is concerned, leaves out the kind of dark trauma that Melville indicates silent signs can cause.

Reflecting on the idea of silence in "Bartleby the Scrivener," Dan McCall warns that critics like Michael Rogin should not "attempt to politicize the story by turning Bartleby into Thoreau."[88] While McCall narrows the idea of the political to overt resistance, I take his point to be that it is important to – at least at first – recognize the intensity of Bartleby's silent suffering and its effects. One can say something similar about "Benito Cereno's" silent signs – not that they eschew the political but, rather, that any analysis that includes them will be more fully enriched by the literary and ontological aspects that also mutually define them. Undoubtedly, then, the silences in "Benito Cereno" do communicate, or else silence would not be an effective device for Melville; yet silence is not an "inundation of discourse," but rather a confrontation with that which renders all meaningful articulations useless.[89] The Africans are not actually the silence, but as emblems of blackness they signify a conflict with what this ultimate silence conveys – its powers of epistemological oblivion and the social dissolution that Delano stands on the edge of and Cereno embodies.

Silence is another form of blankness, and blankness has its purpose in relation to the myriad of discourses Melville mediates throughout. One cannot produce political, linguistic, or historical affirmations and clarity without consulting what the "silent signs," which Melville foregrounds, actually did to the reality of the Spaniards who owned them. To the reader and Delano, Cereno "appeared unstrung, if not still more seriously affected … like some hypochondriac … and now with nervous suffering was almost worn to a skeleton" (40). Melville designs Cereno to be unresponsive, a hypochondriac, stricken by "cadaverous sullenness" (94). He borders on incoherence and he seems deeply traumatized by the psychic violence of the revolt and the memory of bloodshed physically emaciates him. But the cause of this alleged mistreatment and ill manners stems from not only the revolt, but also the tragic loss of his dear friend and the rehearsals of torture committed by the slaves. The actions of the slaves, their vibrant strivings for freedom, and the epitome of that social life cause Cereno's antisocial disposition. Cereno's experience of the silent signs reenacts the profound disturbance of slave insurrection until he dies.

Given Cereno and Aranda's experience, which constitutes the historical present of the *San Dominick*, Melville's meditation on silence in *Pierre* (1852) encourages a reading altogether different from relying on political speech or African culture to make sense out of silence. In *Pierre*, Melville writes the following about silence:

> All profound things and emotions of things are preceded by Silence. What a silence is that with which the pale bride precedes the responsive I will, to the priest's solemn question, Wilt thou have this man for thy husband? In silence, too, the wedded hands are clasped. Yea, in silence the child Christ was born into the world. Silence is the general consecration of the universe. Silence is the invisible laying on the Divine Pontiff's hands upon the world. Silence is at once the most harmless and the most awful thing in all nature. It speaks of the reserved forces of Fate. Silence is the Voice of our God.[90]

Upon reading this passage, there can be no mistake that silence bespeaks a plethora of profundities to Melville. To play upon the political silence ordered by antebellum sedition acts, which Lee emphasizes, or the disenfranchised voicelessness of actual slaves that Douglass lectures about, is telling historically and sociologically for slaves. These historical lamplights, however, do not attend to the impact of violence and alienation in the totalizing sense that *Pierre* refers to.[91] It is certainly not an accident that black Africans who operate as "silent signs" share in these profundities. The question is how? Within this passage, Melville posits silence as the pretext of earthly phenomena. It is the nothingness of humans that is the original somethingness posited as God. Melville characterizes humankind's relation to this silence as birthing existence and the movement of fate that can be both harmless and tragic. And this certainly speaks to different types of experiences, from wonderful bonds between people to the horrible reality of disturbing or unforeseen events in history.

Yet there is another dimension that sheds light upon the foregoing reading of "Benito Cereno." Realizing silence in this way is to confront the manifestation of an ultimate totality, pictured as endless gray, a blankness neither infinitely living or dead, but "the all" itself that inspires dread in whoever faces it. This inspired dread, the result of the confrontation with the void emerges in whites' encounters with signs of blackness. The enslaved Africans are not the void itself, but their blackness signifies what it is like to be forced to face it – the place where mastery unravels as one experiences the contradictory fields of knowable social conventions and the unknowable "all." Cereno and Aranda's loss is all the most devastating for its symbolic valence. Silence dramatizes the stakes of the blackness the slaves signify. The slave insurrection doubles as a result of whatever

cannot be figured, rationalized, or conquered, and when this "all" confronts subjects it can only come crashing in on them. The slaves embody this blackness in the history of the *San Dominick*.

What is more, at the novel's end, Melville returns to the language of silence. "There was no more conversation for that day," is the lone sentence after Cereno tells Delano "the negro" is the shadow he cannot shake (116). This marks the end of all dialogue. Then the novel's narration closes on the object that epitomizes Melville's "silent signs," the insurrection leader Babo. Melville writes that until the end, "he uttered no sound, and could not be forced to" (116). Babo's aspect seemed to say, "Since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words" (116). "The black met his voiceless end" and the objectification attributed by Cereno and then by Delano becomes an indubitable fact (116). The Spanish tribunal makes this fact clear through criminal case against the "negroes of the San Dominick" in which they had no rights to a fair trial (103).

Melville portrays the final solidification of the enormity of the state as something subject to its own phantoms that always breathes in the contingencies of the social. Hence, as a result of the tribunal, Babo was executed and his "body was burned to ashes" (116). The final image of Babo is of his "head, that hive of subtlety" which now readers see as meeting "unabashed, the gaze of whites" (116). Vincent Brown shows that slaves in the Caribbean orchestrated scenes like this to conscript the dead and enlist them for social and political service.[92] Melville likewise imagines a social polity in Babo's end. Whites look at Babo while he appears to stare back at them; this imagined dialectic lures the white audience into paralysis as they stare at the dead present, the violent past, and the unforeseeable future of slaveholding republics. Melville deploys Babo to reinvigorate death by integrating it into whites' historical consciousness – and death, in this sense, appears material and tractable. While Melville's final object of blackness seems to absorb the fear and mystery of a white polity concerned about its economic and social security, Babo's head offers a warning, not just of one or more revolting slaves, but also of an unknowable and unpreventable future that cannot be mastered. Katherine Verdery explains that dead bodies "evoke awe, uncertainty, associated with cosmic concerns, such as the meaning of life and death."[93] In this way, Babo's spectacle reverberates in the extinguished bond between Aranda and Cereno and the violent inversion of social hierarchy aboard the ships of the slaveholding world. Melville reminds readers of a black object that was killed, one that possesses readers' historical consciousness while not being able to be fully possessed.[94] Melville portrays a vanquished state of

violence that only reminds readers of their future vulnerability to violence in the most unexpected place – the daily exchange of objects and commodities.

Whatever social designs whites contrive, one can never eliminate the possibility of another Nat Turner, Toussaint Overture, Frederick Douglass, or Harriet Jacobs. This is not because slavery is wrong or because people inherently desire freedom, but because humans cannot permanently master social life. What could keep Frederick Douglass from "striking the blow?"[95] Normative social relations mask a whirlwind of social life that makes Cereno a zombie, leaves the juridical record in the tribunal forever incomplete, and renders the exposure of the ship's hull forever indiscernible – never telling the whole story of "Benito Cereno" (52). All of the artifacts in "Benito Cereno" have a pliable immortality, culminating in the metaphorical force of Babo's head – the awe-inspiring remnant of Melville's blackness.

HEGEL'S MASTER, MELVILLE'S SLAVE

Along with popular slave narratives like Douglass's *Narrative of the Life* or Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Nell wrote *Colored Patriots* to give voice to a noble and patriotic history of Africans in the United States. Melville's "Benito Cereno" is an intertext for these progressive writings. Melville's depiction of the subject of slavery and freedom and the intellect and consciousness of enslaved Africans, while sympathetic to the conditions of slaves, emphatically resists any coherent and verifiable position on slavery. In this way, "Benito Cereno," while progressive in its portrayal of enslaved Africans, shows its aesthetic qualities while eschewing politics in the ways proslavery advocates and abolitionists did. The social and ontological claims that Melville presents, however different from the overt claims of abolitionists, nonetheless engage in deliberate critiques which fail politically in the ways mentioned but succeed in others.

The progressive success I identify with Melville lies ironically in both what the slaves accomplish as well as, in a more grave sense, what the slaves fail to do. The Spanish tribunal's account of the "true history" of the *San Dominick* reveals the slaves' plot (103). Babo and Atufal's strategy to return to Senegal and freedom unmistakably fails (106). Since the blacks perform silence, from the planning of the revolt, to the revolt itself, to the discourse of its aftermath, the slaves' counterideology is one of deeds and not words. Melville's consistency is brutal because even the glimpse of a revolutionary ideology of deeds falls under the sovereignty

of the Spanish tribunal. In the same way that Aranda and Cereno planned to safely travel with their slaves, crates, and bales, so Babo and Atufal planned to become masters of their fate. But their ultimate failure to master their conditions points to Melville's overall aesthetic design in "Benito Cereno," which appears less sympathetic and more ruthlessly equal than his modern admirers may be comfortable with. Yet having the slaves face death and risk it, for the slaves, for Douglass, and perhaps for Melville, makes them the most admirably human. For Melville, risking death challenges one's entire self and every possible social object and idea attached to it.

G. W. F. Hegel writes about the value of facing down death in the allegorical struggle between master and slave. In the struggle, both master and slave risk their life for self-consciousness, recognition, and eventually absolute knowledge. More exactly, there is one prevalent aspect of Hegel's famous life–death battle that forges master and slave that is telling. To achieve true self-consciousness, according to Hegel, one must experience the fear of death. As if anticipating a story of someone like Cereno or Henry Box Brown, Hegel emphasizes that in "that experience … everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations."[96] Without this true unraveling experience, Hegel claims, the subject only confirms a self-centered attitude and not the necessary absolute negativity.[97]

The role of the fear of death and facing death is equally important, yet vitally different, in Melville's episodes of slavery in "Benito Cereno." The slaves literally strip Aranda down to his skeletal foundations; with Cereno, they strip his mind and his body follows. For Hegel, the moment of absolute negativity has a positive future – a risk of self that affirms the humanity and consciousness of the subject. Yet for Melville, absolute negativity, made manifest in the world or in consciousness, makes no guarantees that one could recover from it.

To predict that a thunderous descent will yield an ultimate victory for a subject misses Melville's blackness in "Benito Cereno" entirely. Missing this ultimate sense of risk in the slaves reneges on the affective force of blackness. For the violent interiority that Babo and Cereno embody and witness in different ways in "Benito Cereno" to be true, failure and destruction, philosophically and/or socially construed, must be imminent, and the possibility of success can only be a narrow glimpse of grace, for which Melville does not make room. This makes the risk of death for the slave and the master possible, and mutually recognizable, to the degree that no one is socially dead or permanently robbed of their social being.

"Benito Cereno" reveals that the slaves' blackness is not a just a deeply contemplated fantasy of the real but an experience of the subject that is both metaphysical and social, abstract and concrete, certain in its existence and, like the enslaved Africans, mysterious and radically unpredictable. This is a reality which Melville says we all must realize together by force or choice. One reader who published a review in the *Knickerbocker* appeared to absorb the dark aura of the risk Melville conveys through scenes of slavery. As if being pulled by Melville's puppet strings, the reviewer discloses that after the "painfully interesting" story of the *San Dominick*, he is left feeling "nervously anxious."[98]

CHAPTER 4

Embodying the "Assaults of Time"
"The Encantadas"

> Then all collapsed …
>
> Melville, *Moby-Dick*

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> and to make an end is to make a beginning.
>
> T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

In "Benito Cereno" the negro generates the catastrophic effects blackness symbolizes. In "The Encantadas," black land, not black people, creates powerful conditions that destabilize normative modes of time and social and political life. Melville bases his series of sketches on the Galapagos Islands. The islands' landscape is unmistakably black. "Immense deluges of black lava" dominate its rocky coasts.[1] While gazing upon these uninviting shores, Charles Darwin observes huge dark tortoises and "great black lizards" amidst the vitrified lava.[2] Beyond the grandiose black land and creatures, Darwin goes on to survey much of the islands' varied biology and geology in *Voyage of the Beagle* (1860). Curiously enough, when Melville introduces readers to his Galapagos in "The Encantadas," it is as if all he remembered from reading Darwin, or from his own brief view of the islands from aboard the *Acushnet* whaler, was striking black images. The "general aspect of the Encantadas," he writes, appears like "heaps of cinders … some of them magnified into mountains," a "darker world" of black and burnt objects: burnt clinkers, deep gray ashes, and dark vitrified masses.[3] Melville transforms Darwin's lush diverse life into a homogenous zone of dark imagery, a region of blackness. This chapter, in part, tracks the relationship between this rigorous black coding and the scope of social action in "The Encantadas" – that is, what characters can and cannot do and how they relate to themselves, each other, and the enchanted environment Melville constructs for them.

In creating his "Tartarus," Melville focuses upon the remarkable tortoise (128). This tortoise, Melville writes, is not like "your schoolboy

mud-turtles"; this immense reptile is "black as widower's weeds" (131). People who encounter it, however, focus on its bright underbelly. Melville's voice interrupts, asserting that these individuals should "be honest"; "don't deny the black" (130). The tortoise symbolizes much more here than an interesting and rare animal in the Galapagos. Yet, while Melville suggests his readers pay attention to the import of the reptile's emblematic coloring, he conveys very little to specify what the tortoise's blackness represents. This ambiguity prompts the following questions: What does it mean to "deny the black" in favor of the bright? What is the relationship between this dishonest denial, the dark "general aspect" of the land, and the social interactions that occur upon it? Answering these questions, I believe, lies in moving past merely treating the islands' blackness as decorative gloom or a popular gothic landscape. Nearly all the people who encounter this enchanted dark world become disturbed and challenged by the objects of knowledge or power they seek. Their inability to attain their goals, ensure the vitality of their future, or master the objects in their path unifies the outcome of their actions in a fictional field of phantoms and ominous clinkers. Thus, when Melville describes this burnt geography, he does so in a heavy handed effort to reveal aspects of human existence that he thinks people deny, ignore, or repress – the black side.

Moreover, when he chose the Galapagos Islands as a venue to showcase "the black," Melville not only picked a place renowned for its ubiquitous black geography, but he chose a place that many travel writers identified as a site of unrealized colonial possibility. David Porter's *A Voyage in the South Seas* (1823) and John Coulter's *Adventures in the Pacific* (1845), which Melville consulted for his sketches, discuss the aspirations of Europeans to set up colonies upon the islands' famous black beaches.[4] Denise Tanyol contends that Darwin's *Voyage*, with the collection of other travel narratives that Melville also read closely, serve, "if only imaginatively, to set the stage for a colonial project."[5]

Melville's interest in depicting a powerfully dark natural landscape and a place associated with colonialism finds much company in the wider public discourse of the 1850s. When Melville composed the sketches and published them in *Putnam's Monthly*, the U.S. public discourses (including *Putnam's*) vigorously discussed U.S. expansion into the Caribbean and Central and South America. Melville's sketches, likewise, contain various figures, like Oberlus and the Dog-King, who implicitly or explicitly reflect this growing appetite for expansion. But while U.S. politicians and intellectuals obsessed over the United States' imperial potential in the

Americas, Melville's fictional region of blackness shows that in trying to master one's self, the darker races, nature, and animals, one also can be seized by a cruel sense of anxious, even violent, limitation.

Hence, I agree with Tanyol and Carolyn Karcher in reading "The Encantadas" as a representation of New World colonial projects, but it is crucial to consider the relationship between the notions of time and blackness that define the colonial aspects of Melville's island sketches.[6] In this chapter, I argue that Melville deploys blackness through "The Encantadas" to critique calls for U.S. colonial expansion in the Americas. Yet equally significant in these Galapagos sketches is Melville's depiction of subjects' existential vulnerability to psychic and physical destruction as a result of the intransigence of the islands; colonies cannot be built, and one cannot make progress or accumulate meaningful knowledge. This sometimes fatal exposure is often situated amidst the natural and quasi-supernatural forces of the islands, which give the effect of being outside of time (e.g., seasons and tides do not change or vary). One might be suspicious of portraying the Galapagos as out of time, as is Rodrigo Lazo, who reiterates that capitalist production and imperial expansion in the Americas are defined by modern notions of time.[7] But following Lazo's contention too closely, seeing the effect of timelessness solely as muddying historical waters, actually overlooks how Melville makes a profound anticolonial critique through the colonialist subject's attempt to master temporality itself. More specifically, characters like Hunilla, the Dog-King, the voyager-narrator, and Oberlus take on the overwhelming vulnerability of the islands' temporal crisis that the sign of blackness illuminates. Their experiences undermine any fantasies of self-mastery or mastery over others that might authorize fantasies of colonial domination. What is more, the experiences of these characters are important examples of racialized social conflict that Melville inscribes with the figurative dimensions of blackness. In this chapter, I will show how "The Encantadas" elaborates the symbolic force of black conditions through encounters that feature the darker races and conditions of timelessness. This sociopolitical and existential overlapping forges a blackness defined by the disruptions that being without time produces and by the effects of constructing colonial projects. Blackness does not merely illuminate the "dark side of America's colonization"; it makes colonial mastery, rooted in the telos of temporal progress, an utter fiction.[8]

The first section of this chapter analyzes the nightmarish anxiety embedded in U.S. expansionist discourses that profess the "bright side" of time and history while denying "the black." I locate the blackness that

Melville renders in "The Encantadas" in magazines and other discourses in which imperial advocates profess their confidence in mastering people and events in the Americas. In subsequent chapter sections, I identify how in removing this illusion of total social control Melville disrupts colonial power by presenting "The Encantadas" as a place that gives the impression of timelessness, and therefore, of being without a true sense of historical progress. Additionally, by studying different nations' contest over the islands, pirates, and how explorers relate to the black-shelled tortoise, the middle sections of this chapter demonstrate that the Encantadas can neither function as a modern state (a collective) nor as a place where the colonialist individual can control his or her own economic, political, and spiritual destiny. Most saliently, the final section showcases that any attempt at constructing a colony culminates in various images of racialized social conflict, which also reveals inescapable psychic violence for anyone seeking ultimate authority over subjects.

THE OMEN IN PRINT

"The Encantadas" tells the story of a group of islands off the coast of Peru and Ecuador that alienates most people and comforts hideous reptiles and awful insects. Melville's narrator reports his personal experiences of the island group along with the history of different people who have attempted to inhabit the islands. Originally published in *Putnam's Monthly* in 1853, when "The Encantadas" was published as a part of *The Piazza Tales* (1856), it was celebrated by many New York reviewers as Melville's return to his ingenious nautical travels such as *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847).[9] Reviewers broadened their comparisons further by putting these Galapagos sketches in the company of authors like Daniel Defoe, Edgar Allan Poe, Washington Irving, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Most reviews at least mentioned the "wild and ghostly power" of Melville's Galapagos sketches while they assured readers of the pleasures of leisure.[10]

While supportive reviewers assured readers of their enjoyment, the "ghostly power" of the sketches points to the phantasmic elusiveness of acquiring new lands and new subjects in the Americas. Like the "new lands" and "new thoughts" Ralph W. Emerson believes ultimately will energize the New World in *Nature* (1836), Melville's islands turn the reader's attention to one's "original relation to the universe," one's relation to totality, but this relation turns out to be, as Melville calls it, a "wild nightmare" (132).[11] Melville assigns the island's tortoise with the task of illustrating the ominous power that confronting "cadaverous death"

invokes in people (128). Yet from the outset, the narrator says the tortoise has a bright and a black side, and while it appears, as the aforementioned reviewers note, that most of the sketches conjure "the black," Melville leaves much to the imagination of what constitutes the bright.

Discussing the tortoise's bright side, Melville presents an interesting scenario. The narrator explains that people see tortoises and turn them over to "thereby expose their bright sides" (130). But this act puts the tortoises in a powerless position where they lack "the possibility of their recovering themselves," which also excludes the view of the black shell (130). This scenario implies that because it is self-evident that the tortoises cannot turn themselves right side up, subjects willfully narrow their vision to what they see as the bright, the idealistic good. In the bright, they see the good, the possible, and the limitlessness of the self; they deny the bad, impossibility, and unchangeable limits. Nathaniel Hawthorne's protagonist Young Goodman Brown exemplifies a version of this confident clarity and optimism. When challenged by the devil to acknowledge the immoral practices of his Puritan ancestors, Goodman Brown responds: "We are people of prayer, and good works, to boot, and abide by no such wickedness."[12] The story of Young Goodman Brown begins with Brown's unshakeable confidence in himself and community. But in the end he dies mad and alone. What befalls Goodman Brown Melville calls the "strongest positive illustration" of blackness, but Brown's story begins by calling attention to "the bright."[13] Throughout "The Encantadas," confident navigators end up crushed upon rocks or whirling uncontrollably in erratic currents; whalers deplete what they thought was an endless supply of whales; ghostly rogue ships elude American naval patrols intent on capturing them; and ideal colonies of cunning tyrants fail through insurrection or due to the challenges of unforeseen circumstances. Melville depicts many of the major and minor figures in the sketches as people who, for whatever reason, believe fate and/or science is on their side – that they can outwit, discover, acquire, and conquer according to their wishes.

What is more, the Galapagos sketches that involve direct social interaction, such as Hunilla's, Oberlus's, and the Dog-King's, specifically capture fictionalized colonial moments. On the face of it, it is not enough to explain "the bright side" by reverting to, for example, George Bancroft's claim in the *Boston Post* that "Democracy has given to conscience *absolute liberty*," or Walt Whitman's reflections in the *Brooklyn Eagle* that views the destructiveness of U.S. political organization through its "good and grand" possibilities [my emphasis].[14] The bright side, given the sketches' colonialist

representations, engages the context of U.S. public discourse on expansion in the 1850s – a growing national consciousness that exclusively looks to controlling the Americas in the invulnerable and heroic role of "the Redeemer Nation."[15] William Walker's defense of filibustering in *The War in Nicaragua* (1860) fits these expansionist shoes perfectly. Confronting critics of the invasion of Central America, Walker claims, "Filibusterism is not offspring of hasty passion or ill-regulated desire; it is the fruit of the *sure*, *unerring instincts* which act in accordance with laws as old as the creation" (429–30) [my emphasis].[16] Walker's bright side contains within it not only the view that humans can discern and act on their instincts but, more important, that in following them expansionists invaders will always reproduce the perfection that initially inspires the actions.

Shelley Streeby explains that the broader context that produced imperialists like Walker took visible shape in the main currents of public discourse during and after 1848 and continued well into the 1850s.[17] Despite President Taylor's scaling back on the United States' imperial prowess during his tenure (1849–53), the Polk administration that preceded him and the Pierce administration that came after him created a wave of activity and discussions about U.S. expansion into places like Mexico, Nicaragua, and Cuba. Even in the midst of regional tensions between the North and South over the future of the West, intellectuals and politicians vigorously debated U.S. hemispheric prowess. In the North, politicians and merchants alike dreamed of a fully conquered Mexico, just as Southern politicians like John Calhoun fantasized about an empire of slavery in an annexed Cuba and Dominican Republic.[18] Although the U.S. government was not aggressively annexing its neighbors, as domestic tensions between the North and South grew in the 1850s, readers of various magazines and newspapers witnessed claims that expansionism could resolve the United States' escalating domestic malaise.[19]

Most important when considering Melville's "The Encantadas" is the belief that various forms of expansion, from violent annexation to so-called peaceful coercion were conceived by their perpetrators as obeying the laws of natural growth: "[N]ature implanted in the healthy nation an instinct, which independently of reason, made territorial expansion as normal a destiny for the young nation as is growth for the young organism."[20] In *The Democratic Review* a writer ponders "The Growth of States" and reinforces the idea that, according to nature, states must always be on the increase.[21] Whether arguing for colonial expansion into the geography of the Atlantic or the Pacific, Albert Weinberg contends, expansionist advocates claimed that they were not guided by personal or

collective wisdom but by being especially in tune with the impressions of moral good that nature inspires.[22] These natural laws, which discouraged inaction and encouraged aggressive and "peaceful" expansion, were the manifest laws of heaven and earth. Yet some writers think more of heaven than earth, more of the supernatural than natural, when confronted with an obvious question about natural growth. Weinberg puts it this way: "What was the biological expansionist's belief in regard to the awesome contingency of national death?"[23] One writer in *The Democratic Review* asserts that unlike the fallen Persian Empire, America would live on "*Esto Perpetua*."[24] Thus, many expansionists not only profess openly or subtly the immediate sense that "Annexation … is an inevitable fact," but they also repress the reality of its death or end despite an adherence to the laws of natural growth.[25]

How would the United States or its supporters be successful in social transformations where other nations failed? Advocates for U.S. rule were under the impression that if expansionists established a U.S.-led democracy across the Americas, then slavery and other examples of oppression would eventually vanish. Supporters of Manifest Destiny in the Americas writing for *Putnam's* and other magazines adamantly believed that specific chinks in the armor of democracy would disappear as "the moral influence of civilization" induced peaceful transformations.[26] That is, despite not having clairvoyance about what precisely the future would bring, those things that were specifically bad in the present would certainly dissolve. Hegel calls this "the cunning of reason," where "the ill found in the world may be comprehended" and "the thinking Spirit reconciled with the fact of the existence of evil."[27] George Bancroft, one of the preeminent U.S. historians of the nineteenth century who studied under Hegel, relies on this concept of reconciling the "ill found in the world." Balancing "opposing forces" into harmony, according to Bancroft, is an integral part of narrating incontrovertible progress.[28]

In a review of Bancroft's fifth volume of *The History of the United States* (1852) in *Putnam's*, the reviewer heralds the historian's ability to see the grand telos of progress in terms of moving from dependence to freedom. "Trained in schools of transcendental philosophy," the reviewer writes, Bancroft "seeks the pervading energizing idea, which underlies and inspires the progress of American institutions."[29] Bancroft, in the reviewer's eyes, "detects in the inborn aspiration of the human soul for freedom, its consciousness of a spiritual destiny and its desire for the realization of universal unity." This philosophical and historical unity disavows the

destructive potential of unforeseen calamities that may obstruct increases "in wealth, civilization, industry and power."[30]

Writers who champion the reconciling power of universal history while not certain of specific outcomes assume that the reading public's understanding of it will reinforce a collective national identity rooted in this sense of "mastery over events."[31] For those writers interested in positing collective futures, more specifically – using the histories of other civilizations to reveal the causal structures behind sociopolitical unrest in the past – once the report makes these "causal structures that operate in history" available, as Dipesh Chakrabarty contends, "one may also gain a certain mastery of them."[32] *Putnam's Monthly* and other publications' articles on the southern Americas, the Caribbean, and Pacific Islands, despite many moments of supposed ethnographic innocence and social concern, overtly position readers as advocates for the United States to outstrip any political problems that may inhibit its ascendancy.[33]

Scholars of U.S. Manifest Destiny and imperialism, from Weinberg to Shelley Streeby, have thoroughly documented the naturalization of expansion southward and westward. But what seems less attended to, and is especially relevant to Melville's "The Encantadas," is what politicians thought would happen if they did not obey nature's call to colonize and annex their southern neighbors. Expansionist advocates, Weinberg elucidates, actually felt they were in danger from their neighbors in Cuba and Mexico, and thus, in their eyes, taking these countries over was a matter of national security.[34] If the action of expansion were not pursued, a *New York Herald* writer contends, America people "will sink into oblivion."[35] Another writer in *The Democratic Review* argues that failing to promptly annex Cuba would violate nature's laws of stately increase, and this violation would ensure a future of ominous danger.[36] Generally speaking then, proclamations that the United States must either grow or perish by people like Algernon Sidney, which stretch back to early in the nineteenth century, appeared more fully realized than ever in arguments for the absolute necessity of expansion.[37]

Politically minded intellectuals amplified these calls to infinitely extend the United States by reminding their readers that the Spanish government, their African slaves, Mexicans, or Indians fundamentally opposed the social development and progress expansionists sought. These reminders were not to warn the U.S. citizenry of why they should not colonize or annex others – these reminders increased the ideological drumbeat that justified U.S. dominion in the Americas. Yet these representations also point to nightmarish fears about what could happen to the United States

if it did not vigorously expand. For instance, in the months surrounding the publication of Melville's sketches in *Putnam's Monthly,* a travel writer also wrote in the magazine that Haiti's cycles of bloodshed were actually the result of civilized nations' failures to effectively intervene. Currently ruled by blacks, "Haiti has returned to the oblivion of a savage world" filled with chaos and violence – outside of practical and viable social relations.[38] If slaves were to revolt with the help of Spain, explained a *Putnam's* writer on "Cuba," then the island would become "African."[39] Africa, in this sense, would be the sociopolitical equivalent of an abandoned military battery, bereft of social life and useless. This picture of irredeemable African rule before European intervention shares the same historical perspective as depictions of the Indians in the Americas before the arrival of Europeans. Consequently, in another *Putnam's* article pushing for the United States to annex Africa, Indians are commonly referred to as a stationary, uncivilized, "savage and untraceable race."[40]

Trouillot affirms this idea when he insists that historical narratives of linear progress, such as U.S. Manifest Destiny, see non-Westerners "as fundamentally non-historical."[41] Manifest Destiny discourses portray "non-historical" as indolent and remote – people on the periphery of progress, technology, and modern sociopolitical life. "We must be the master of our own destinies," writes *Putnam's* on Cuban annexation, "and not mere ciphers in the world, like the savage tribes of our western wilderness, or the remote, feeble, degraded islanders of the Pacific."[42] To be "mere ciphers of the world" suggests a lack of self-consciousness, the inaction that is the counterforce posed by the presence of black and brown peoples.[43] Thus, to sink into oblivion, symbolically at least, invokes an ever-present state of timelessness. To lose temporality, as signifier of modern civilization, creates ideas of social catastrophe.

When discussing people of African descent or Indians in the Americas, expansionist advocates often shared Hegel's descriptions in *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1837): Indigenous "American nations are like unenlightened children" whose "nation has vanished," and as for Africa, "history is out of the question."[44] For Hegel, to be Native Americans unenlightened and "living one day to the next" or African consumed only by "contingency and surprises" removes one "from the light of self-conscious history."[45] As in Hegel's musings on world history, the very idea of progressivist histories of New World republics as expressed by champions of U.S. empire also relies on the idea of savages or primitive groups as timeless – relics who occupy and signify unrecorded and/or insignificant history. Their historical bodies symbolize a time *when there was no*

time; thus, buried beneath their immediate temporality as representations of the past lies a sense of infinitely unknowable history. The "primitive families in the wilderness" or "stationary tribes" conjure timelessness, a negativity that can only be marked by its opposition to modern ideas of progress and recorded history.[46] Rather than view representations of savage and stationary dark races as antimodern, we should read them as a marker of modernity's limits, a ready made periphery, recognized as timeless yet clearly necessary to demarcate historical time.

But even more profound, there is an ominous anxiety of being without time at all; it suggests incoherency, negativity, and death. Wai Chee Dimock corroborates this idea, contending that when the distinguishing marks of time vanish, the conditions expose subjects to endless cycles of disruption.[47] When this endless sense of unruliness appears as the result of blacks and Indians violently "taking time" away, losing it appears even more menacing.[48] U.S. expansionists, then, disclose the promissory note of violent undoing. By undoing, I mean that the possible return of savage barbarism would, at least symbolically, bring about a place where time is not kept – where "stationary tribes" proliferate darkness and apocalyptic unruliness, which corrupt any idea of cohesive modern social organization.

To think of the powerful disturbance to which the absence of time or its temporal distinctions gives rise recalls the infamous moment in "Benito Cereno" when the American captain Amasa Delano glimpses the truth of slave revolt aboard the *San Dominick* and "past, present, future" seem one.[49] Delano's brief revelation of historical truth is the explosive disclosure inscribed in blacks in revolt, a flash of timelessness racially embodied in time which, realized as such, conjures a violent nightmare. If one thinks about this temporal paradox, implicitly available in the tumult of expansionists' fears of dark races revolting, one is also less apt to underestimate its symbolic force. Kant argues that time "is a necessary representation that grounds all intuitions … in it alone is all actuality of appearances possible."[50] Kant's epistemological formulation of subjects' cognitive relationship to time can also be said to underscore what Goran Therborn describes as the fundamental features of ideology: Through time, subjects intuit, see, and know "the meaning of life, suffering, death, the cosmos, and the natural order," as well as their identity as "conscious members of historical social worlds."[51] In other words, time functions as a fundamental organizing feature that permeates every aspect of all social worlds in the West. Thus, the threat of social destabilization that suggests a possible return of the New World to an era resembling historical nothingness,

eternity, the infinite, or timelessness characterizes the crux of a fundamental disturbance to cognition and interpellation – a crisis of identity embedded in the foregoing representations of colonial expansionism.

If it is important for critics to "stretch temporal and national dimensions," as Kristin Silva Gruez maintains, to better see how "what happened outside U.S. borders" shapes the nation, "The Encantadas" offers a moment to analyze how the very call to "stretch national dimensions" in imperialist writings contains a sutured political and temporal crisis that Gruez overlooks.[52] Melville's description of the enchanted isles represents the field of colonial expansion as both sociopolitical and temporal, realized concomitantly as an irresolvable colonial contradiction – one defined by expansionists' powerful desire for various social transformations in a fictional plane where "change never comes" (126). *Putnam's* reminders of Haiti's violent bloodshed allude to European nations' failed attempts to change the course for Western colonial interests: "[T]hree powerful nations," as one writer puts it, "have intervened in vain to secure for this ill-starred island the blessings of peace."[53] Haiti's "insurrections and revolutions," which have desolated the island and prevented it from being saved, remain significant to U.S. intellectuals' ideas about the future of expansionist projects.[54] Melville constructs his parade of islands with a similar impermeability. Thus, even though the New World symbolizes the seizure of ultimate power to secure new transformations, "The Encantadas" fundamentally rejects change. For Melville, the fractious tension between the demand for change and the impossibility of it, between finite linear progress and timelessness, constitutes the frame of colonial contradiction and the paralysis inherent in imperial fantasies of mastery over self and others in the New World.

STATE OF IMPASSE: "THE ENCANTADAS"

The lengthy descriptions of natural landscape that introduce "The Encantadas" appear to disengage from bold calls for the United States' New World supremacy. But as Melville details this scene of a fallen picturesque, the images disclose a ubiquitous blackness that encompasses the entire field of action. That is, "The Encantadas" is in a state of blackness – which makes state building impossible. Melville's narrator reports his personal experiences of the island group along with the history of different people who have inhabited the islands. Both the life forms, which cannot be known, and military dominance, which cannot be established,

undo the New World promise of an endless linear progress of natural, political, and social growth.

H. Bruce Franklin contends that "The Encantadas" sketches unveil "man's relationship to the natural world."[55] Nowhere is Franklin's contention more clear than in the narrator's interactions and reflections concerning the black tortoise. Thinking of this emblematic reptile, it is also useful to rewrite Franklin's statement. The sketches unveil man's relationship to the natural world, and this world, in Melville's version, inspires a particular self–world relation that the black tortoise and black land symbolize. More specifically, this figurative chance encounter between the narrator and the tortoise immediately reflects the notion of humanity as a part of nature; additionally, the text makes readers very aware of the narrator's exposure to the harsh environment of the enchanted islands. When Melville fabricates his voyager-narrator's encounter with the tortoise, he explicitly emphasizes the naturalness of human temporality in an obscure, dark, atemporal field. The tortoise's black shell reveals to the narrator the sober warning of the certainty of death (*memento mori*). Some cheerleaders for colonial U.S. expansion analogized the potential growth with the "marked physical transition in the human frame."[56] Personifying the state and comparing its growth to human growth helps readers to envision the naturalness of change, annexation, and improvement. However, while expansionist advocates alert their readers to the thriving prospects of U.S. colonial growth, Melville responds to this imperial rhetoric with just the opposite through the tortoise–voyager encounter. The tortoise's effect on the narrator, in various ways, crystallizes bodily limitation, the fact of eminent death, and the impossibility of physical development and social engagement. The tortoise–narrator interaction makes concrete what the black side of the tortoise represents and how this representation underscores Melville's anticolonial critique.

Before addressing the temporal aspects of the tortoise, it is equally important to revisit exactly how the narrator experiences the region of blackness upon which the gigantic reptile lives. The black tortoise lives upon the nearly ubiquitous "black, dismal-looking heaps of broken lava" that immediately strike the eyes of people like Charles Darwin, Robert Fitz-Roy (Darwin's captain), and David Porter as they observe the Galapagos.[57] Melville magnifies the isles' blackness by privileging actual black objects or by coding strange reptiles and ugly insects as extensions of the volcanic geography. The sense of blackness is nearly all-consuming – "dark vitrified masses" below, volcanic haze above, grounds scattered with black reptiles and birds, "immense spiders," and snakes (127).

Melville deepens the import of these dark figures, which make black figurations of the enchanted isles, by linking them to an overall condition of death and ruin. Between "dark clefts and caves" and other animate and inanimate objects, the narrative establishes a sense of deathly ruin – likened to "the Dead Sea" or Lazarus before Jesus returned life to him (127). One should be sure here not to equate death with a temporal endpoint. It stands for the islands' existential state; the islands are "immemorial solitude"; and, like the permanence that defines death, they are irreversibly stagnant, a location where "change never comes" (139, 126). "Emphatic uninhabitableness" characterizes them (126). There is no change of seasons (126).

The formidable vision Melville fabricates unfolds in two mutually constitutive parts: The first can be seen in the taxonomy of the islands' inhabitants as well as David Porter and William Cowley's divergent encounters with the island; Melville's dramatization of the voyager-narrator's interaction with the Galapagos tortoise shows the second. Porter and Cowley's relations represent the elusive nature of imperial control, and the narrator's interactions with the tortoise exposes the challenges of self-mastery. Both dimensions function together as the collective and individual elaborations of blackness; both maintain their own version of the social disruption and paralysis that blackness signifies.

"The Encantadas"' foreclosure of the possibility of social renewal and political progress in the New World originates in the very idea of its setting location, the Galapagos Islands. The Galapagos Islands provoke many questions and assertions about the distant past of natural history and the ways life on earth began. From descriptions in eyewitness accounts and other types of published reports, it appears that the Galapagos Islands inspire different viewpoints of time. For instance, Charles Darwin's portrayal of New World discovery in *Voyage of the Beagle*, which Melville consulted, describes the Galapagos as a place where the natural historian stands nearest "to that great fact – that mystery of mysteries, the first appearance of new beings on this earth."[58] From the viewpoint of sacred history, a writer in *The American Eclectic* also acknowledges the profundity of the Galapagos by claiming it is the best place to test "the doctrine of Creation."[59] Both sacred and scientific notions of creation invoke the beginning of time, yet they paradoxically invoke a sense of eternity and timelessness in which time originates.

The lack of change or succession is also the evacuation of how one traditionally conceives of time. Nonetheless, there cannot be a real narration of the timeless in the voyager-narrator's voice, and hence, the presentation

of eternal or unchanging objects actually marks time. Looking into these "immemorial solitudes" alerts the narrator and the reader to the narrative temporality and the eternity of the islands, sustaining both at once (139). Paul Ricoeur makes clear that the narrator's implicit invitation to the reader into the conditions of timelessness allows the "sharing of temporal experiences by the reader and narrator."[60] More exactly, the figurative import of this sharing brings to light the unavoidable misrecognition that the geography of timelessness provokes in subjects – subjects who need to see reality in terms of time (and space) in order to make sense of it. Melville makes this misrecognition immediately apparent when the "modern voyager" narrator reveals his initial contact with the island group as one characterized by "spell-bound desertness" (128). This voyager-narrator's revelation reinforces the cognitive dislocation the islands generate. The black signs of the enchanted group, then, call the reader's attention to a thriving dislocation as a feature of Melville's narrative that underscores the sketch's symbolic force; this blackness, which unfolds in references to demons, Tartarus, death, and fallenness, calls attention to itself as the mark of temporal misrecognition as the narrator (and readers), inscribed within the temporality of history, peers into an eternal state "of cadaverous death" (128).

The islands Melville renders as death, as opposed to Darwin's revelation of life, also represent one other important location of the iconic origins of American colonial fantasy. Melville's story suggests that the appearance of the Galapagos as an idyllic symbol of colonial building is also integral to the blackness. John Coulter's *Adventures in the Pacific* (1845), for instance, refers to the Galapagos as the location of Daniel Defoe's real-life Crusoe, Alexander Selkirk. Coulter explains that on some islands one can witness the colonial project at work – various "Crusoes … in their last stage of development, with subjects who they rule over with despotic sway."[61] Whether or not one thinks of Crusoe's legacy as narrating the origins of political and economic modernization in the Americas or reinforcing Old World despotism, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) certainly manifests colonial self-mastery and mastery over nonwhite peoples in the Americas. The very idea of the Galapagos, then, contains at least two narratives: on the one hand, temporal misrecognition, and on the other, the beginnings of ideal mastership over the self and the world in the Americas.

Moreover, after Melville's initial descriptions of the fallen world, the narrative of colonial discovery and imperial control further unfolds. Unlike the narrator's initial descriptions of burnt earth and hideous beasts, when the narrator tells of "the original discovery of our Encantadas," he

discusses specific dates, names of explorers, new commodities, charts of animals, as well as other "statistics" and "reliable estimates" (140). The middle sketches, more exactly, recount the island's natural and supernatural beings; a short-lived tale of a quickly depleted whaling industry; and Juan Fernandez's victory of navigation that allowed him to actually set foot on the islands. This change in emphasis, which appears like a fluid progression, actually makes temporal contradiction more explicit. Even as the narrator depicts steps of modernization, he never lets the reader forget the black geography and its monstrosities: the "demons of fire" above and the violent waters below (140).

In the "black jaws of Albemarle," for example, Melville shows the reader a chart of its inhabitants that seems perfectly reliable until one sees that amidst real animals there are shadows (140): "man-haters" and "devils" (140). The taxonomic table of the islands' creatures posits a definitive marker of natural history and how its architects see themselves as making new knowledge, making modernity. The naturalization of objects within taxonomies places the Encantadas within what Fabian calls a "stream of Time … " which makes them appear a part of civilization, evolution, development, acculturation, and modernization.[62] This demystification, however, cannot be completed in Melville's sketches. "Man-haters" and "devils" sit amidst a chart of reliable estimates of "the population" (140). The phantasmic demons alongside the real animals produce irresolvable uncertainty among the appearance of "reliable" facts. Furthermore, the list forecasts unpredictable action because the living objects that constitute interactions on the island cannot be coherently read; one cannot ensure what or whom the demons will affect. Because of the ungraspable phantoms in the list, the narrator imagines his lived relation to natural historical facts as destabilization instead of stability. The demon in the machinery of modern knowledge poses no moral challenge; it denies mastery over the objects and reinforces the island's haunting existential premise. These reoccurring epistemic enigmas have implications for perception and social order that the final sketches deal with more explicitly, worlds under Spanish Catholic sway but awaiting "Protestant conquest and reform."[63] The pursuit of natural history, Susan Scott Parrish contends, " … required sending out Europeans … and subduing pagan populations … in the progress of those realms of science."[64] The scientific objects and the knowledge gained or lost while encountering reflected social interaction and these sketches projected a spirited and irreverent sense of disarray that for Melville lies in the conquest of land that the colonial project involves.[65]

Melville further enriches the historical texture by enlisting two nonfictional accounts: American captain David Porter's *A Voyage in the South Seas* (1813) and William Cowley's *Voyages Around the Globe* (1699). Not only did Porter's *Voyage* provide Melville with information about the Galapagos, but it invokes the historical problem of imperial control over the islands' terrain. Porter patrolled the Encantadas' geography during America's war with England in 1812. Lawrence Buell points to how Melville's postcolonial representations trouble the distinctions between the "republican virtue" of the United States and the "imperial decadence" of Europe.[66] Likewise, Melville shows that the attempts by these nations to gain imperial power, and potentially colonial rule, in the enchanted islands equates their supposedly divergent interests.

Porter's "cruise of the Essex during the war of 1812," according to Melville's narrator, tells the "strangest and most stirring" tale in American naval history.[67] The United States' growing interest in the other Americas became readily apparent as political leaders attempted to influence the new leadership and industry in the Latin Americas.[68] The Galapagos Islands reflect this developing political and economic reality. They are subject to patrols by the United States and England, both eager to maintain and/or extend their political authority and military prowess. Melville tells the story of Porter, who patrols the haunted islands for enemy ships to ensure U.S. military dominance in the area. The sketch reveals a particular ship, "the enigmatic craft – American in the morning, and English in the evening," a vessel the sailors insist on calling "enchanted" (143). Through Porter's chasing of enigmatic national symbols, Melville's text brings together the national and/or imperial collective and the cruel and indifferent play of the fogs, currents, and winds that constitute the isles. The confusing enigmas make victory against the enemy impossible.

Hence, what strikes me about Porter's pursuit and maintenance of imperial control is the subsequent sketches' references to pirates, who represent the enemy of legitimate mercantile traffic and the social cohesion of colonial coasts. The pirates' blatant disregard for established laws made them quintessential revolutionaries, but not necessarily with a praiseworthy cause. Melville appears most interested in showing the agreement between this intractable revolutionary spirit and the volatile island enigmas that haunt Porter's imperial patrols. When Melville initially introduces the Buccaneers, the text asks readers to imagine them as arriving from traveling the world over, but most recently from ravaging the Pacific colonies of Spain (144). From this simple opening, Melville positions them as uncontrolled, free from fears and little troubles as if

these were things they would have to deal with as members of the societies they pillage. This contrast of social environments reveals an ontological analogy between Cowley and the enchanted group. This analogy becomes clearer as the sketches reveal the pirates' oneness with the hellish isles. For example, when Cowley and his fellow pirates return from the "toils of piratic war," they return to "Buccaneer Isle" to "enjoy the tranquility which they denied to every civilized harbor" (144). Cowley appears to defy the island's "emphatic uninhabitableness" (126). Why? For Melville's narrator the haunted islands become a recurring nightmare; for Porter they are endless enigmas, but for Cowley, the islands offer a place of rest. The story explains this by showing that Cowley sees himself in "ocular deceptions" and mirages of the "self-transforming and bemocking isle" (142). His interiority mirrors the isle itself. For Melville, then, there is a significant connection between the occurrences of eternity and temporality that Cowley reconciles and his relation to his victims on the Spanish colonies' coasts.

Even though individuals with different social memberships comprise colonial states, by discussing pirates as outcasts and enemies of the Spanish coastal colonies and "Christian society" more generally, Melville focuses on the fact that they embody that which can neither be expunged nor absorbed by social, political, and economic authority (145). Pirates, like so many others of Melville's figurative ornaments, exemplify the "Devil incarnate" or "Children of the Wicked One."[69] Melville's dark mode expands in its symbolic import through the pirates' exemplification of immorality and social and economic disorder.

"The pirate's image," Marcus Rediker shows, "was closely related to the space he occupied – the sea, a distant place full of dangers, a site of frequent disaster, a potential path of invasion to England and the colonies and finally a natural space that was difficult if not impossible to control."[70] Their riotous unsavory morays, repeatedly criticized by religious and political authorities like Cotton Mather, directly oppose the "organizing institutions of modern life: church, family, and labor."[71] Pirates trouble and harass the pillars of socialization. They, like the savage and stationary tribes depicted in *Putnam's*, represent obstructions to the power of any state or social order, including perfected democratic modernity in the Americas.[72]

However, one can also gather from Melville's depiction that Cowley embodies a social anarchy from which colonial power can never separate itself. I emphasize *never* here because it points to why Melville links

Cowley to islands that cannot change. Melville connects Cowley's interiority to the isle as if to allegorize the idea that as long as society seeks perfection, mastery, and control in the New World there will also be groups, for good or for evil, that refuse to be absorbed by it or even seek to destroy it altogether. Uncontrolled destruction pushes the civilized social world to the precipice of history in the world of the Encantadas, where history is only narrated a dark temporal paralysis that can only be read at its end. Thus, in this collective social sense, the pirates symbolize blackness, and powerful nations, like the United States, England, or Spain, that seek to quell the infinite terror they produce are just chasing ever-elusive phantoms and demons. The implications are such that these figurations of blackness permanently obfuscate idealistic narratives of social and political cohesion through imperial domination.

Through the demons in the chart, Porter, and Cowley, Melville depicts modernization: Modernity "cannot assert itself without being at once swallowed up and reintegrated into a regressive historical process," both, as Paul de Man argues, "linked together in a self-destroying union."[73] Blackness in "The Encantadas" rejects any sense of social and historical future. It fundamentally alters prevalent understandings of the natural laws of progress, since nature in Melville's Galapagos thwarts social laws and organization instead of cultivating them. John Locke imagines a state of nature where man invests himself in the knowledge and control of its properties, land, and labor.[74] This use of nature, by humans, according to Locke, grounds their freedom. Emerson, while clearly not an empiricist, shares Locke's fundamental belief that nature makes its use value available to humans. Emerson claims "nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material, but also the process and the result."[75] Locke and Emerson portray nature as both the inspiration and the instrument of human agency, freedom, and revelation. In one sense, Melville is not much different from Locke's empiricism and Emerson's transcendentalism, because he fundamentally sees nature as minister to man. The difference for Melville lies in the message. Melville produces an opposing view of nature and man stuck in an impasse without any possible progress.

The pirate, the demon, and the enigmas that Porter chases reveal a sense of blackness in the New World that strips temporality from its very making; it supplants expansionism for what I think is Melville's version of a *cunning of history* that entangles the pursuit of domination with feelings of being dominated, knowledge with uncertainty, making with unmaking. It posits this suturing as the symbolic force of the Encantadas.

THE SPECTRE-TORTOISE

Whereas the former reading of blackness emphasizes the challenges of state making in the colonial sphere, the following analysis of the spectre-tortoise focuses exclusively on what the narrator undergoes when he confronts the tortoise, as well as his inability to control the memory of it. The specter of the tortoise not only moves this reading of blackness from the collective to the individual, but it also brings out how the temporal problem of blackness represents intense feelings of human vulnerability. Revelations of one's feebleness define the wild nightmare the tortoise inspires, which also undergirds Melville's anticolonial critique.

The problem of awareness of temporality and eternity, distinguished by the "fleetingness and unreality" of the islands, does not become fully realized until Melville introduces the narrator to the Galapagos's most famous occupant, the tortoise (128). The Galapagos tortoises are essentially benign at the time of the narrator's initial report, but as I suggested previously, Melville transforms this pacifying spirit into an emblem of profound terror. Tortoises, as the early sketches depict them, are not ferocious. Visitors to the islands can easily kill them for food and precious oil. But the easy consumption or commodification of the tortoise shifts as Melville foregrounds the dramatic effect they have upon the narrator's self-conception. The tortoise is "dateless, indefinite," and the embodiment of endurance. This aspect of the tortoise, more importantly inspires "great feeling" in voyagers (131). In addition to their air of sublime immortality, "impregnable armor" protects their soft interiors, and they also can endure long periods without food (131). While certainly not in immediate physical danger, the narrator becomes most aware of his own human fragility, and as he realizes the tortoises' profound otherness, they disturb and confuse him. "These mystic creatures," the narrator reflects, "suddenly translated by night from unutterable solitudes to our peopled deck, affected me in a manner not easy to unfold. They seem newly crawled from beneath the foundations of the world" (131). Their almost godlike indifference and fluid traversals between the earth's "foundations" and the earth's surface provoke the narrator's growing uneasiness.

It is the tortoise's ability to perfectly inhabit both temporality and eternity that disturbs the narrator. This harmonizing of differing temporalities is actually what one could call the truth of the tortoise, which causes the narrator's escalating "wild nightmare" (132). Melville brings the magnitude of the nightmare to light when the narrator tries to put the event behind him. Committing them to the comforts of his stomach and a

tractable memory, he converts the tortoises into "steaks" and "stews" (132). The fabulous feast comes as a response to the narrator's incapacity to reconcile his emergent discomfort. Moreover, the narrator remains consumed by the tortoises' endurance through time and eternity; he asks, "What other bodily being possesses such a citadel wherein to resist the assaults of Time?" (131). The question directly exposes the difference between the rugged longevity of the tortoise and the fragile short life of humans. The narrator's profound confusion, described as an unruly nightmare, shows its formidable effect through the word "assault." Because of their impenetrable armor, the tortoises appear almost numb to the harsh physical assaults of the Encantadas' sharp rocks and intense conditions, unlike the narrator's frail human body. Michel de Montaigne, whom Melville studied closely, frequently contemplates the psychological impact of age and sickness on bodies and how this physicality shapes philosophical reflection.[76] The voyager and the tortoise are Melville's way of displaying this pointed sense of physicality and frailty. The enchanted isles, then, convey the narrator's cognitive dislocation through black objects, and his realization of human bodily limitation through the "dark and melancholy tortoise" (130). The tortoise is both "black and white," yet the narrator claims that most people try to "deny the black" in order to focus on its livelier aspect (130).

In a similar vein, Salvator R. Tarnmoor, the pseudonym under which Melville published this story, further elucidates the import of the narrator's feelings of bodily constraint. Jonathan Beecher explains that Melville admired Salvator Rosa, a seventeenth-century Italian painter famous for his "wild and romantic landscapes (and seascapes)."[77] Rosa's *L'Umana Fragilita* (*Human Frailty*, 1656) unveils the ontological terror the tortoise induces. In the painting's foreground sits a child on a mother's lap writing the human constitution.[78] But behind their light clothes, in the dark, death or the demigod Terminus actually dictates what the child writes. The child's mother, his only protection, sits upon the unstable ground of fortune; neither she nor anyone else can prevent the eternal power of death from shaping human destiny. The deep blackness of the backdrop defines the reality although the mother and child sit innocently in the cruel light. Two knives lie in the foreground; they invoke violence and pain, which Melville has already shown to be central to his thinking about the Encantadas. The narrator refers to the multitudes of people who, as victims of unpredictable currents, died thrashing upon the sharp rocks. Against those same sharp rocks that deliver violent death to voyagers the tortoises thrash without injury.

Melville makes clear the narrator's ontological angst, which stems from the violence of life and the certainty of death. Yet, in doing so, he does not answer the narrator's question about how the tortoise endures the depths of the abyss and traverses the "assaults of Time." Melville subsequently inserts an answer to the tortoise's mythic endurance. He attributes the tortoise's survival to its "stupidity of resolution" (132); it lacks the narrator's desire to identify, consume, and know objects in the world. Melville allegorizes human subjectivity here. If we think of modern subjectivities, from Kant to Freud to Judith Butler, we understand them through intricate, sometimes even intimate, normative political and social attachments. No modern subject thrives in the way Melville figuratively depicts the tortoise in what Giorgio Agamben labels an empowered sense of "lack," or the capacity "to do without world."[79] Worldliness, in another form, as Terry Eagleton explains, emerges in the language of "culture"; humans do not live in the minimal biological requirements of need, and so every "actual situation is bound to secrete unrealized potential … we are historical animals."[80] Thus, it is worldliness as derived from history and culture that distinguishes humans from other life forms. Whereas the tortoise journeys into the "infinite," like Ulysses the narrator cannot travel into the abyss without dragging his body and history into its end. Thus, it is precisely the narrator's incapacity "to do without world" that highlights his nightmarish misrecognition and intensifying self-awareness of fragility.[81]

The narrator's nightmare culminates when he finds himself far away from the haunted islands and back in his normative social conditions in the United States (New England). He confesses that "even now," when he escapes from the city into the isolation of "deep-wooded gorges," he recalls the "spectre-tortoise" – the "*ages and ages* of the slow draggings" [my emphasis] (129). Significantly, amidst "scenes of social merriment" his memory overwhelms him, and in an instant, the multiplicity and spontaneity of social interaction transforms into a "fixed gaze" (129). Within this gaze he sees "Memento * * * *" on the back of a gigantic tortoise (129). This climatic image appears to the narrator, who refers to the tortoise's back as "black as widower's reeds" (131). Melville returns to this image of blackness, depicting a message in burning flames. "Memento Mori" sobers the onlooker to the inevitability of death. The sober warning stalls the present as he freezes his body amidst "social merriment" and his mind within the phantoms of "imagined solitudes" (129). The significance of this dichotomous moment of immobility is not the fact of contradiction by itself or that the narrator now realizes it; it is not merely a nightmarish

vision of this burning fact of a finite life in a universe of infinite matter, but rather how this fact is experienced through the embodiment of this temporal impasse. Blackness, symbolized in the turtle–narrator experience, discloses humans' exposure to unchanging eternity as the visceral and psychological pangs of limitation which paralyze those forced to endure the realization of its power.[82] This power divests the narrator of his ability to relate to, transform, or reimagine himself or other figures in his social environment, and in this way, the temporal impasse that blackness signifies is fundamentally antisocial.

On the contrary, if we think of the wider context of Melville's literary contemporaries, blackness operates as an idea, experience, or object that enables subjects to actualize their particular expressions of transformation as agents. For example, just as the tortoise encounters reveal torment and paralysis in the narrator-subject, in the same era Whitman writes in *Leaves of Grass* (1855) that because "the poet conquers … there is not left any … delusion of hell or the necessity of hell."[83] Whitman's poetic proclamations represent the high tide of intellectual trends that began much earlier in the nineteenth century. Primarily as a result of a vibrant Unitarianism amidst a waning Calvinism and the Second Great Awakening, various mid-nineteenth-century discourses, like Whitman's, made the ideas, traditions, and experiences of moral, social, and spiritual evil, expressed as blackness, traversable. For instance, Frederick Douglass renders slavery as the reigning "black power" in the United States and through political will, he claims, the people can abolish it.[84] The "two gigantic negroes," Quinbo and Sambo, from Harriet B. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) personify "the powers of darkness" because they follow the misanthrope Simon Legree.[85] But the evil spirit, which dominates Legree's cruel practices, cannot possess Quimbo and Sambo at all once they make the choice to accept Christ's light.[86] Though Stowe did not stop believing that people are "all Sinners," she was certainly convinced that religious transformation could eradicate social and political evil.[87] Edgar Allan Poe, according to Maurice Lee, overcomes philosophical blackness by creating an intellectual and geographical space free from actual blacks. This fabrication of absolute rationality allows the possibility for the subject to achieve true philosophical transcendence.[88]

Whether spiritual, philosophical, or sociopolitical, these former threads of blackness derive their significance from subjects' ability to change themselves or another object, while Melville's blackness in "The Encantadas" denies this transformative agency. The natural history in the New World, as Melville depicts it, creates another version of the "strongest

positive illustration" of blackness that he famously finds in Hawthorne and Shakespeare.[89] Like the nightmarish grip of the enchanted isles, the thunderous night in *King Lear* does not allow Lear to reiterate his mastery; the "tyrannous" night defines his virtual powerlessness and experience of cognitive disruption in the world.[90] Hawthorne's protagonist in "The Select Party" finds himself, much like "The Encantadas"' sea voyager, facing "darkness" and "deluded by all sorts of unrealities."[91] In both cases, subjects' surroundings unexpectedly show them to be powerless at the very moment they most confidently assume the mastery within them. Mary Louise Pratt demonstrates that to survey, as the references to Crusoe suggest, is also to look passively "out and possess," to gesture, even assert "bourgeois hegemony."[92] Melville's Galapagos sketches might not demonstrate fully the assertion of "bourgeois hegemony," but they do illustrate the foundational layer upon which Melville's anticolonial critique in "The Encantadas" is built. The perceptions of the ruined land and its heroic survivor that deeply disturb Melville's sea voyager forge the visual and experiential metaphorics of blackness, which destabilize the fundamental temporality that one needs to navigate one's social world. This elementary yet formidable destabilization lies at the heart of Melville's anticolonial critique; it challenges the visions of colonialist reformations in the Spanish Americas in *Putnam's* and other publications, since all modes of agential transformation cannot be separated from the temporality that constitutes modern historical subjects.

UNTIMELY COLONIES

A writer in a California paper, *The Pioneer*, sees the Galapagos through a colonialist gaze: "You think of yourself a Crusoe or Selkirk. You are a monarch of over all you survey."[93] The temporal impasse that Melville codes through blackness totally destabilizes this fantasy of possession that lays the ideological groundwork for colonial authority. Monarchial feelings of mastery cannot be realized in Melville's sketches, which stifle all social and political possibility, democratic or tyrannical. Melville, as the next section demonstrates, aims his conceptual impact at would-be colonists of the Americas. Blackness realizes death so powerfully in subjects that transformations in social life, colonial or otherwise, become impossible. Melville carries the social implications further when he imbues the final sketches, which concern racialized social hierarchy, with the antisocial force that blackness signifies. After the sketches of natural history, Melville has all but dropped the overt and psychically intensive references

to black objects. Yet Melville still cleverly inserts inanimate images that call attention to the blackness that defines the islands. For instance, the Dog-King's capital city and Oberlus's cave are constructed entirely out of black lava, and a single obsidian clinker anchors Hunilla's dwelling. The most significant change in how blackness operates in the later sketches concerns the entanglement of antisocial disruption discussed thus far with racialized social unrest. The blackness that Melville articulates in the earlier sketches finds new life in the closing sketches' scenes of racial conflict.

"The Dog-King" sketch involves a Creole adventurer from Cuba who fought valiantly on behalf of Peru in the war of independence against Spain. For his efforts, the Peruvian leadership paid him with Charles Isle in the Galapagos. Melville makes it clear that "this adventurer procures himself to be made in effect Supreme Lord of the Island, one of the princes of the powers of the earth" (147). His workers construct his capital city from the clinkers, cinders, and lava that make up the dark "general aspect" of the Encantadas (126). Ironically, the text announces the presence of the black artifacts that signal one's exposure to powerlessness in the very moment the king declares himself a colonial lord.

In addition to these overt black objects, what interests me is that Melville sets up the showcase of the would-be king's failure to be sovereign through the revolt of a racialized group of common coastal folk in addition to a motley crew of mariners, renegades, and castaways. Melville does not mention exactly what races the people belong to when the Dog-King fishes among them for new subjects in Callao, Peru. Darwin, however, describes the plebeian inhabitants from this "filthy, ill-built, small seaport" as a "depraved, drunken set of people" that appear to be a "mixture between European, Negro, and Indian blood."[94] Jean Piel corroborates Darwin's observations of racial mixture concerning coastal Peruvians: Coastal Peruvians, Piel explains, were a conglomeration of blacks, Indians, Asians, and other racial mixtures, and these social groups were ultimately subject to the ruling aristocracy of "all-powerful land owners."[95] Like many advocates for expansion, Darwin presents the colored panoply as depraved and unruly. The Peruvians of color "remained aristocratically grouped" as they were shipped to Charles Isle (147).

The Dog-King and his select crew cast "disdainful glances forward upon the inferior rabble there" (147). At the first sight of unruliness, the Dog-King exercises his self-ascribed power to execute his subjects. As supreme lord, he controls who lives and who dies. In the Encantadas, this ultimate act becomes significant; the sketches focus on undermining

anyone's claim on existence. It is not surprising, then, that the dark peasants and other social outcasts who subsequently populate the island rebel and overthrow the king. The king and his canine soldiers march to war against his riotous peasants and lose after the victorious peasants banish him and declare a republic of their own.

Thinking more broadly about U.S. expansionist goals, the Dog-King believes himself to embody the imperial "bright side" that inevitably can control, manage, or overtake "the black side." Melville shows that anyone who makes claims to inherent rule over others, especially based on racialized social hierarchy, is subject to be overthrown by forces he cannot predict or understand. Even in exile, the ex-king waited "to hear news of the failure" of the "unprincipled pilgrims'" attempt at a republic (149). "It was not democracy at all," Melville declares, "but a *permanent* Riotocracy" [my emphasis] (149). There was "no law but lawlessness" (149). The motley crew of sailors and dark people made no claims to Old World kingships or New World colonial governance.

This sense of disruption points out how the Dog-King reflects the misrecognition that is fundamental to the islands. The entire racial riotocracy in this failed colony inverts the only reality he knows because he is a powerless king pondering an unrecognizable social community. More important, modern historical subjects, like the narrator, the Dog-King, or Melville's readers, can see the chaos or lawlessness as not only antisocial, but also indicative of political impossibility. This profound political difficulty is rooted in racialized social unrest and the sense of misrecognition that distinguishes the islands' blackness.

In "The Hood's Isle" sketch, one finds Oberlus, who, like the Dog-King, embodies a will to dominate. More explicitly than the Dog-King, Oberlus embodies the blackness of the islands. He will kill, lie, cheat, or manipulate to achieve his desire for utter domination in pursuit of his own colony. The reader finds Oberlus having "sole power of every object around him," but the text shows he has never encountered humanity (164). Oberlus lands on a "Black beach," with its unmistakable "dark pounded black lava" (164). For that matter, his house is black; it is set in a black area and he is alone. Oberlus cannot be separated from the blackness of the Encantadas; he is completely isolated with a diabolical thirst for tyranny, yet his environment, like the Dog-King's, is heavily decorated with images that signal the impossibility of making tyranny manifest.

Melville borrows Oberlus's character from Porter's *Voyage*. Porter's version discusses a mean-spirited Irishman, Patrick Watkins, who, after becoming stranded in the Galapagos, sought to manipulate, bully, and

even kill his way to his own colony.[96] Although Melville lifts nearly all of the story's details directly from Porter, he transforms Watkins from an Irishman to a European more diabolical than "any of the surrounding cannibals" (163). This move from specific to general, from historical truth to the symbolic, illuminates the sketch's representative impact.

When ships visit the "Hooded Isle" where he dwells, Oberlus tries to capture them. In one instance, he tries physically to conquer "a negro" and enslave him (165). Oberlus manipulates and murders more people in his quest, but his encounter with the negro exemplifies his ethos of domination. Colonial slavery epitomizes colonial domination, especially for Northern apologists or Southern advocates like John Calhoun. Melville uses the black man's determined refusal to be enslaved by Oberlus to set in motion Oberlus's repeated failed attempts to secure absolute lordship. Oberlus actually does manage to secure himself a crew of followers whom he abuses (some fatally). But this rule over men is clearly only temporary and does not impede the dynamic that Oberlus's foundational encounter with the "powerful" negro begins (165). The power of "the negro" is not arbitrary, and it points to the disturbing effects black images cause throughout the sketches. This power of blackness is a subtle but significant moment of blackness that confronts the subject desiring colonial mastery with both his innate and circumstantial vulnerability.

Oberlus's attempts at absolute rule result in his total isolation within a jail "without windows" (169). His attempt at ultimate authority, initially articulated here as a symbol of white colonial supremacy over a free negro, completely removes Oberlus from consummating total mastery. Oberlus, moreover, emerges as a primordial figure of the Encantadas and the blackness it represents showing that the tyrannical force from the islands that imbues him only incapacitates human agency. Thus, the sequence of events that follows Oberlus's attempt to dominate and enslave the negro can also be read as his attempt to master blackness – a racially embodied figure that actualizes the historical contingency and social dislocation that the dead state of the islands produce in subjects.

The former sketches do not have the dark interior paralysis of the narrator's early encounters, but Melville shows how a singular inner temporal and cognitive incoherence in "The Encantadas" achieves its central valence in depictions of individual and collective destruction. Seeking colonial mastery in the realm of blackness, as these sketches tell it, most aptly reveals one's sense of powerlessness against movements of time and history, which one can never fully understand or control.

Paul Kahn argues that the power of terrorizing "the other," which the Dog-King and Oberlus relish, is actually the "the simultaneous experience of powerlessness"; in "suffering from the terror of powerlessness, the subject asserts a power to master death."[97] Kahn helps to expose the Dog-King and Oberlus's sketches as racialized rewritings of the temporal paradox symbolized in the tortoise's black shell of flames (*memento mori*). The failed attempt at political mastery over racialized bodies is not the defeat or repression of the sober warning of death, but a conquering of death as a temporal object, one's finite end in history, which attributes an irreparable defenselessness to every human subject. Thus, blackness highlights and allegorizes what it is to experience the impossibility of mastery in the southern Americas.

In between the Oberlus sketch and the Dog-King sketch, Melville abandons telling the story of subjects in whom the experience of blackness denies absolute power and narrates "The Chola Widow" sketch, in which Hunilla (the widow) endures powerlessness.[98] Melville characterizes the Chola Widow story as one of the "strongest trials of humanity" (149). The sketch begins by explaining how Hunilla, her husband, and her brother set out for the Galapagos to "procure tortoise oil" (152). The French fisherman who takes them, despite their negotiations with him beforehand, does not come back. Hunilla and company have a choice to believe in "the bright" in this Frenchman or "the black," and they choose the bright; the fisherman fails them and breaks their trust. But why doesn't he come back for them? Melville attributes this deadly breach of contract to the cruel arbitrariness of "contrary winds," and the Frenchman's "varying mind" (152). This initial breach of trust underscores the sketch's overall sense of disruptive and unpredictable contingencies. After Hunilla's brother and husband try to escape, dying in the effort, the story proceeds, focusing on her tragic and degraded psychological condition. Curiously enough, Hunilla's "home" on the Norfolk isle is not constructed entirely of black rock, but Melville remarks that a small clinker anchors her dwelling. In other words, the aura of blackness operates through the Hunilla sketch, but it is subtle in its markings. Her sketch is less consumed by overt black images and unconquerable dark people and more concerned with how *mestizo* racial identity magnifies the traumatic experiences she undergoes.

The narrator and his crew initially find her caught in "time," which was the "labyrinth, in which Hunilla was entirely lost" (156). Caught in "time," between her own life and the timeless death of the Encantadas, she now looks for "the living and the dead" (155). Hunilla embodies the

narrator's dark temporal splitting, but hers is not merely attributed to being on the eternity-possessed island itself or to her realization of her physical and mental limitations upon it.

Also important here is that there are no reminders of burning tortoises or the physical landscape, yet there is a mark of the temporal dichotomy and social alienation that the Encantadas' blackness signifies. Melville, as he did with the racialized riotocracy, craftily inscribes blackness in Hunilla's body, not only as temporal misrecognition and social disarray, but also through his emphasis on her racial mixture. This is clearly a matter of realism and knowledge, but the emphasis on racial splitting becomes conspicuous when Melville inserts both "half-breed" and "half-conscious" to describe Hunilla (155). She is part indigenous Peruvian, part member of Spanish Old World tyranny, and part of the disorders of Peruvian postcolonial independence.

Furthermore, Melville situates her narrative through the terms of racial mixture. He reminds the reader near the story's closing of Hunilla's split identity; her mixed blood marks her inner turmoil, and this confusion, both racial and temporal, paralyzes the relation between inner expression and her countenance. "There was something in her air, and yet it was the air of woe" – a "Spanish and an Indian grief, which would not visibly lament" (161). Her countenance, according to Melville, expresses a hesitancy that is also paralysis, and the story uses racial mixture to accentuate it. Ann Stoler explains that *mestizos* like Hunilla were commonly viewed by the aristocracy as potential enemies "from within."[99] Hunilla's sketch certainly is not about her revolutionary impulse for equality, yet the text deploys her racial hybridity to symbolize and convey a sense of inner turmoil between races, the Old and New Worlds, and temporalities within the self. Hunilla's character expresses the potential for political dissonance to which Stoler calls attention, yet she embodies it as a fixed conflict of racial interiority, permanently stalled in symbolic contradiction.

The myriad of contradictions that define her culminate as the captain realizes that the days Hunilla traced on the bamboo to keep track of her time on the island stop on the one hundred and eightieth day. "There were more days," said the captain:

"Senor, ask me not."

"And meantime, did no other vessel pass the isle?"

"Nay, Senor; – but –"

"You do not speak; but what, Hunilla?"

"Ask me not, Senor"

"You saw ships pass, far away; you waved to them; they passed on – was that it, Hunilla?"

Then the Captain asked whether any whale-boats had – But no interrupts the narrator … I will not file this thing for scoffing souls to quote, call it firm proof upon their side. The half shall here remain untold. Let them abide between her and her God. … In nature, as in law, it may be libelous to speak some truths. (157)

In this moment, when the narrator refuses to reveal the events that will complete Hunilla's tragic history, we are to think Hunilla was raped by whalers and left upon the island to continue to fend for herself or die. Sarah Chambers explains that for mixed women in Peru, sexual honor and shame were definitive features of the social rank and identity.[100] If Melville was aware of this, the sexual violation only amplifies the social import of Hunilla's ongoing and multivalent disruption.

Melville's narrator alerts the reader, "If he feel not, he reads in vain" (156). Melville turns the reader's attention to affect and challenges the reader's capacity to feel with the tale's crucial purpose. This overt sentimentalizing illuminates the possibility of what Lauren Berlant calls "disinterpellation."[101] Berlant argues that when sentimental readers experience the "affective aesthetic," they undergo an uncanny misrecognition through which they must imagine "themselves with someone's stress, pain, or humiliated identity." Hunilla's sketch contains its own affective aesthetic, which stems from two layers of misrecognition: Hunilla, who remains fixed within a stupor, estranged from her own "common sense of things," reminds readers of an overtly tragic version of the modern voyager's encounter with the spectral "memento mori" (129). The other misrecognition occurs in readers themselves as they take in Hunilla's unrelenting calamity.

During this riveting moment of sexual calamity in "The Encantadas," it is not the violent violation and disorder of Hunilla that Melville appears most interested in, but the reader's willingness and desire to know her history and his unwillingness to disclose it. Hunilla reveals the rest of the story, but only to those able to listen to her in person. Trouillot contends, "silences are inherent in history," and makers of histories commonly participate in "the practice of silencing."[102] In Hunilla's personal story, as the seminal feature of the lone heroic tale in the history of the enchanted isles, we see again the most forceful intervention of the narrator as a mediator; he controls historical truth, but the question is why? Why not fully disclose the sexual violence in some way? Authors of the most famous representations of sexual assault against women, such as Samuel Richardson, the author of *Clarissa* (1748), indicate rape by inference and suggestion.

What readers know in the Chola Widow sketch stems from the tone and other signs of traumatic violence, such as the fact that Hunilla stops counting days, resists telling what happens to her, and harbors her irremovable melancholy. Initially, Hunilla did not want to tell anyone; the captain, however, insists, and in his overzealous compassion, he draws it out of her. Even though the narrator and the captain apparently are satisfied, the readers remain compassionate in their desire for full disclosure.

Thus, instead of confirming anything, Melville drags readers into the force of uncertainty – a true window into Hunilla's embodied contradiction. The reviewer from *Godey's Lady's Book* refers to reading the sketches as precisely that: "wearisome" and "confusing."[103] Melville purposely obfuscates the story, and this obfuscation deepens the reader's integration and disinterpellation – a movement into the volatility that confronts the narrator, Oberlus, and the Dog-King with the greatest affective force. The ideal reader, wayward, confused, culpable – paralyzed and dispossessed of knowing – shares in Hunilla's experience of the Encantadas.

Whereas social conflict defines the blackness that overpowers Oberlus and the Dog-King, Hunilla's wounds originate from external conditions that make available her inner paralysis. Hunilla's experiences, then, are much like the narrator's internal conflict and the exterior disturbances of Oberlus and the Dog-King at once. Because of this convergence of manifold contradictions, which are sutured to marks of racial difference and suggested sexual violence, Hunilla's sketch broadens the reach and complexity of temporality and blackness in the colonial sphere. The text withholds Hunilla's total sense of violation precisely because it is inexpressible in its fullest sense. Yet through her, one finds the deepest imaginable trauma of body and mind, a racialized and gendered apocalypse of the self, which demand the reader contemplate irreparable boundary loss.

THE HALF-BREED AND THE END

Melville's blackness in "The Encantadas" illuminates Teresa Goddu's call for us to read the social significance of race in fictional moments when Cold War critics, and many others who followed, almost exclusively focused on metaphysical and humanistic modes of blackness.[104] Maurice Lee's subsequent readings of Poe and Melville revise Goddu by showing racial politics and philosophy to be intimately connected.[105] Lee is right to emphasize irreconcilable linkages between abstract philosophical problems, such as how absolute identity might be achieved, and concrete ones like slavery or colonialism, but as I have tried to show, irreconcilable

contradiction is not the place to foreclose discussions of Melville's blackness; it is actually the place to begin to analyze and discuss blackness. From this chapter's reading of "The Encantadas'" blackness as blackness in the colonial sphere, I argue that critics must further complicate the contention that blackness is political or philosophical, or the intimate and irreconcilable connection of both. Within notions of both the metaphysical questions and the political ones lies a fundamental tension that appears in "The Encantadas'" entanglements of time (temporal succession and history) and the sense of time's absence. This is the contradiction, which once recognized, actually defines the full scope of experiences (physical, psychological, spiritual, social, political) of the sketches' subjects and the potential impact of those experiences on readers. Hence, it would not be enough to recognize that Hunilla's racial identity and split consciousness and the temporal contradiction of the islands mutually inform one another. One must follow this logic all the way through. Her splitting and exposure to traumatic dislocations make manifest, both racially and temporally, a condition of fixed insularity akin to a somnambulist. She is numb and virtually mute from trauma. Her isolated condition, accordingly, cannot be described as a part of any normative social life or social relations. I identify this climax of Melville's power of racialized negativity in an individual because it points toward further implications for collective identity and history. Readers potentially lose themselves in the scene of New World ruin, depicted as the Dead Sea, widespread death and violence, and emphatic uninhabitable earth – all of which are apocalyptic images.[106] Melville read in *Putnam's* writers the ends of history through the nightmares of racial violence, but to pursue the implications of civilization's doom, it is more important to peer into the "doomed" self, one's own ruin, where the sketches achieve their import.

Melville emphasizes this unparalleled doom most forcefully through Hunilla. In Hunilla's narrative, Melville writes, "I worship not in the laurelled victor but in the vanquished one" (157). He does not devalue rape or violence against the *mestizo* woman through his silencing of her story, but instead her enigmatic defilement is the only act powerful enough to capture the magnitude of what one might be willing or unwilling to endure to begin to revisit the New World anew. Melville's circling of the wagons around Hunilla's story does not remove readers from torment but captures them within it, since the text refuses to give readers the seeing knowledge of the colonialist, the historical truth, a refusal that sustains the force of enigma and ambiguity. We readers bear a contradictory relation to Hunilla's embodied violence. We are at once dispossessed by proximity to the event and Melville's deliberate silence, yet this textual distancing does not release us from horror, outrage, and latent culpability; no details

fully unravel the scene, and her phantoms of uncertainty become our relation to Melville's projection of her endless torment. Luring the reader into enigma and uncertainty captures the potential to resurrect meaning in Melville's apocalyptic negativity.

The endless torment, as the end of self and a social world of relations, is not merely the apocalyptic end, but a flash or whisper of a messianic beginning. Hence, in the aftermath of destruction to which Melville calls attention lies the remnant of possibility.[107] Discussing the messianic voice in apocalyptic time, Agamben explains that a subject's revelation is that "when I am weak, I am strong.[108] That is why Melville champions "the vanquished," and not the laurelled victor. To read deeply and open oneself to profound affect obviously does not annihilate anyone, but if one feels as Melville requires at the beginning of Hunilla's sketch, one can confront the ultimate loss of mastery, which reflexively engages readers' self-concept, in the very moment when expansionist advocates profess self-mastery and mastery over the world. Melville's haunted allegory of the southern Americas showcases an iconography of one's own end, the end of personal and collective historical imaginings of a secure future, as the only doorway to what one might be prepared to give up in order to realize a glimmer of the possibility that there could truly be something beyond the ideology of conquest. Blackness in "The Encantadas" asks subjects to imagine themselves in hellish ambiguity where all sociopolitical avenues vanish in the throes of intractability – a dramatization of the end to all things, where the demise of total mastery can only be realized in the remnants of utter boundary loss and self-sacrifice.

Notes

PREFACE

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