Social History and the Politics of Manhood in Melville's *Redburn*

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Among the many conflicts which characterize American culture, few are more deeply rooted than that between the claims of free enterprise and those of social justice. Few contending claims are more difficult to reconcile and also more prone to political smoothing over through rhetorical recourse to "middle-class" values. Perhaps, then, this is the time to look back at the Jacksonian era with a view to suggesting the degree of family resemblance between nineteenth-century entrepreneurship and twentieth-century corporate capitalism. Certainly, the two seem to share a common ideology and a reluctance to consider the psychic cost of economic survival in bourgeois society.

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No American thinker or artist in either the nineteenth century or up to the present brooded longer or to greater effect upon the tragic paradoxes of American individualism that did Herman Melville. Perhaps because his own coming-of-age was just a step behind that of the nation in the Jacksonian period, Melville was particularly sensitive to the way that the interaction of capitalism and democracy—those bitterly entwined historic siblings—shaped middle-class male identity in America. *Redburn* (1849), a fictional autobiography set in the Jacksonian era, was his first attempt to explore these issues in a realistic setting, making this work particularly relevant for an understanding of the problems that continue to plague Americans today.

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Melville intended *Redburn* to be a "plain, straightforward, amusing narrative" (qtd. in Leyda 306) that would win back the popular audience he had lost with the creatively venturesome, but allegorically turgid *Mardi*. Recently married and with a first-born son, Melville felt a pressing need for cash. The book that was to help meet the demands of fatherhood is, tellingly, the story of a genteel adolescent boy, Wellingborough Redburn, whose father died a bankrupt (as had Allan Melvill when Herman was twelve) and who, therefore, must leave home and go to sea as a common sailor. Taking the form of a first-person retrospective by the adult Redburn, the novel chronicles the boy's experiences among his illiterate shipmates and the wretched poor of Liverpool, but its emotional center lies in the loss of the father and the role played by Redburn's memory of him in his uncertain sense of place in the world.

The deep interconnection in Melville's work between identity formation and sociopolitical consciousness has not gone unnoticed by various critics (see Bercovitch, Rogin, Tolchin). In particular, Michael Bell's "*Redburn*: Initiation and Authority" focuses on Redburn's struggle with failed authority figures and his ensuing sense of betrayal and isolation. Building on Bell's attention to the problem of manhood in post-Revolutionary America, but grounding my interpretation in recent work by social historians of the Jacksonian period, I wish to argue that the plight of Melville's protagonist is designed to be not merely a moral judgment on the era but a complex response to survival anxieties produced by contradictory pressures within the emerging culture of bourgeois capitalism.

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Redburn's "First Voyage" (the subtitle emphasizes the initiatory aspect) takes him from his village home in upstate New York to Liverpool and back again. Although the journey motif suggests the typical movement from innocence to experience, this rite of passage is at best equivocal, since the lesson of the voyage is the connection between isolation and self-preservation in a world in which individual survival is ultimately dependent upon an arbitrary fate. As the older narrator asserts at the end of the novel, "But yet, I, Wellingborough Redburn, *chance* to survive..." (312; emphasis mine). Indeed, Redburn's premature exposure to a heartless world enacts an extreme version of a pattern of filial separation and class dislocation which appears to have been widespread among Jacksonian youth.

Joseph Kett has shown that in antebellum America (sources are largely focused on the northeast), leaving home had become a rite of passage for girls and boys at all social levels, many of whom would later meld into the new middle-class culture forming in towns and cities. After 1820, among farm families, both boys and girls sought work outside the home domain, departing and returning in an intermittent, seasonal pattern. Wealthy merchants, such as Melville's father had once been, often sent their sons to sea as cabin

boys at the age of eight or nine and as supercargo at fifteen or sixteen as part of a process that would lead to an entrepreneurial merchant role for the son. Kett views these separations as a stage of semidependence, since most of the youths would not be fully incorporated into the work force until age sixteen at the earliest. The separations encouraged a combination of vocational self-assertion and emotional self-restraint calculated to prepare boys, especially, for the increasingly competitive and unpredictable market economy (Kett 17-31, 45, 94-103).

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, relying on anthropological models, sees Jacksonian society as itself the adolescent, poised between the shattered old world of Colonial America with its traditional agrarian and mercantile social order, and the uncertain future of commercial and industrial capitalism: "Within this unknown and evolving world, few could be certain where they would find either places of power or zones of safety" (99, 86). Fathers could no longer determine the economic future of sons, and sons could no longer rely on fathers for guidance and support. Even as young men felt themselves to be frighteningly alone and at the mercy of little-understood economic forces, they served a symbolic function for others: their behavior became the focus of a multitude of social fears and practical concerns (Smith-Rosenberg 108, 88).

Smith-Rosenberg believes that the emphasis by Jacksonian reformers on bodily self-control, particularly when expressed as a horror of masturbation and sexual license, can best be understood in terms of the anthropological insight that the human body is always the locus of social as well as physical and psychic realities: "when the social fabric is rent in fundamental ways, bodily and physical imagery will assume ascendancy" (90). Especially for the upper and middle strata of Jacksonian society, anxiety over the violence of social transformation was displaced and transmuted into the need to control and direct the bodies of their sons: "The male adolescent became the symbol of both the vitality and the problems inherent in these massive social changes" (88).

Historian Mary Ryan has shown that as work and home formed separate spheres, and the family shifted from an economic unit to one of social and moral governance, mothers replaced fathers as the ruling hand. In place of the older reliance on will-breaking, which involved direct confrontation between father and son, mothers were now advised to use manipulative and indirect techniques of control—withdrawal of affection or the martyrdom of not eating—to produce the good character thought necessary for "maximizing individual gain" in the "increasingly mobile, segmented and impersonal social order" (159, 144). Ryan contends that the psychic dimensions of bourgeois training—child and parent were bonded more closely than ever by "ties of affection, self-sacrifice, guilt and all the mysterious machinations of conscience" (185)—led to "a method of socialization that used a child's close emotional ties to the mother as a pawn in a game of conformity and passivity" (159).

The work of such social historians complicates our understanding of the way the ideology of individualism and the imperatives of economic survival interacted in Victorian America. If, as historian Stuart Blumin also asserts, domestic womanhood was crucial "in generating new social identities" (191) to meet the challenges of an unfamiliar and frightening world, its effect was to produce deep conflicts between the images of manliness demanded by a competitive laissez-faire capitalism and the sense of helplessness and dependency bred in the private sphere of the home. Individualism may be an imperative of market society, but to the degree that it is bound to middle-class mores within the home it becomes a problematic term, a locus of tensions between conformity and independence or, as Ryan puts it, between allegiance to the domestic privacy which nurtured it and to that most extreme form of privacy, the integrity of the individual who seeks freedom from all compromising or constraining bonds (147).

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Ryan's description might well serve as an epigraph for Melville's novel. Although Redburn's journey begins in rage and self-pity, it concludes in self-control and perspicuous silence. Indeed, Redburn is far more observer than character on the voyage home. Though he ends cheated of his wages by the captain he had wished to trust, Redburn—like the sailors he indicts as "craven" (309)—has learned to protect his "freedom" by, paradoxically, swallowing his anger at injustice: "Owe *him!* thought I...but I concealed my resentment" (307).

Throughout his tale, Redburn's desire to please and his sense of duty consort uneasily with the role of rebel and Ishmaelite outcast in which he finds himself. He regularly sees his own anger and that of others as shameful or dangerous. On the packet boat to New York, ordered out into the rain because he lacks a dollar for the ticket, he calls his rage a "wicked" feeling, attributing it to "the devil in me...[mounting] up from my soul" (13). His persistent characterization of anger as "insane" or "crazy" suggests an underlying fear of falling prey to the kind of monomania exhibited by the seaman Jackson, whose bitterness is a grotesque projection and displacement of Redburn's own.

On one level, then, Redburn's physical journey serves as social discipline; it can be read as a fictive analogue to the semidependent condition Kett outlines. Redburn, we should not forget, is at most only fifteen years old (Gilman 178), so it is entirely natural that he returns to his family at the end of his four-month trial. His first voyage would appear to complete the first stage of growth from youth to manhood.

If growth signifies moral development, however, Melville suggests that the demands of economic and social survival produce a deepening self-division and deficit in that emotional center from which genuine moral action derives. In his capacity for sympathy with others, especially with his

tormentor Jackson, Redburn develops as a moral being. Yet the deeper levels of inner growth are blocked by the exigencies of the individualism he must live by. Redburn's tale illuminates the difficulty of knowing on what ground a coherent sense of identity might be established within the expanding capitalist order of his day. As Bell has demonstrated, all the father surrogates in Redburn's narrative are presented as betrayers of actual or potential social authority (565)—the gentlemanly, ineffectual Mr. Jones; the duplicitous entrepreneur, Captain Riga; the demagogic seaman, Jackson. Also discredited, however, is Redburn's much discussed attempt to ground his identity in a utopian ego-ideal of democratic brotherhood through international free trade—a dream he would seem to have absorbed through having slept with *Smith's Wealth of Nations* as a pillow.

Because Redburn believes that his survival depends upon silence and self-control, he cannot allow himself to think through, much less act upon, the rage he feels toward all who exemplify moral and social betrayal. His is a circular bind. The more he feels that he is an economic and social (as well as filial) orphan, the more his anger toward the patriarchy that has failed him must be suppressed in the name of survival. The more anger he suppresses, however, the more lonely and friendless he feels, and the more crucial the need for silence and self-restraint becomes. The narrator's habit of dismissive self-mockery suggests that he is as much afraid of his own inner experience as he is horrified by the depravity, suffering and selfishness he sees around him. The figure who emerges from all this seems more and more isolated, not only from his shipmates and potential brothers but from profound elements within his own nature, as dramatized by the death of Harry Bolton. On this equivocal note of loss and longing the novel concludes.

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Melville's narrative makes clear that Redburn's subconscious wish in going to sea is to seek (and to bury) his father—a longing crucial to the boy's own sense of who he is and what he may become. In keeping with this ambivalence, the voyage is laced with nightmare images of death and destruction, while Redburn's conscious memories of the father he idolizes are colored by daydreams and fantasies. Neal Tolchin relates Redburn's search directly to Melville's unresolved mourning for his father, and argues that Melville's mother's extended display of grief (which lasted until the time of her own death) displaced his own ability to come to terms with his feelings for his father (85, 20). Whether or how mourning for a parent who dies in one's youth is ever fully "resolved" is not a question for this essay. Yet in stressing that the act of grief was a ritual performance relegated to women in American Victorian culture, Tolchin's discussion indirectly illuminates the value of the sea as masculine territory in Melville's emotional life, and thus supports my sense of the more cryptic (and largely unexamined) correlative motive for young Redburn's voyage: the impulse to escape his

deep attachment to his mother's dominating presence, and the anxiety over psychic impotence that such attachment provokes.

The anxiety is expressed obliquely throughout the voyage. It surfaces in relatively trivial forms in the nickname he is given, "Buttons," which symbolizes impotence (Rogin 66), and in the sailors' verbal attacks on Redburn as a "mama's boy." It is also apparent in his immobilizing hunger and thirst brought on by a delay in the ship's departure; and, most memorably for the reader, it is manifested in the impact on Redburn of his encounter with the starving family of Launcelott's-Hey.

After having given up hope of retracing his father's footsteps in Liverpool, Redburn stumbles upon a nightmare-like return of repressed fears—a tableau of helpless suffering in which a ghostly mother, dead babe in her arms, and two dying children, passively await death by starvation. The family scene, conspicuously minus a father, presents a grotesque parody of the secularized madonna figure sentimentalized by the cult of domestic privacy, whose guilt-inducing power Ryan discusses. In the open vault of Launcelott's-Hey, privacy and privation merge ("here they...might die in seclusion" [183]), as mother and children are shunned by their neighbors, while Redburn futilely tries to revive them. This haunting image is surely in Redburn's mind when, once back in New York, dismaying news from his mother and sisters compels him to hurry home to meet a crisis. From first to last, Redburn's identity struggles are enmeshed in an intricate web of fears and needs bound as much to home and mother as to his deceased father.

All of these examples might be subsumed under the major and most richly ambiguous symbol of the narrative—the glass ship which serves the narrator as a touchstone for the voyage, conflating the multiple contradictions of his personal and cultural history.

The association of Redburn's father with the sea is established at the outset of the story when the narrator provides us with early recollections of how Walter Redburn's cosmopolitan life aroused his boyhood imagination. This problematical association of father, sea and beauty is figured in the image of a fanciful glass ship of French manufacture, named "La Reine," which Redburn Senior had brought home from Hamburg some thirty years earlier for young Redburn's patrician forebear, Senator Wellingborough—"a member of Congress in the days of the old Constitution" (7). The ship, with its complement of glass sailors forever mounting the rigging, has long reverted to his mother's care in the parlor and, its parts "sadly shattered," is now filled with dust. While the narrator particularly mourns its figurehead, "a gallant warrior" who has fallen from his perch into the "calamitous sea" below (9), he also recalls the "insane desire" he had as a boy "to be the death of the glass ship" and plunder the treasure he imagined within its dark hull (8).

At the most obvious emotional level, the narrator's memories mingle nostalgic family pride with primal impotence and rage for power—a domestic miniature of the conflict felt by Melville's own political generation of the 1840s, which sought to throw off the dead hand of the past by pronouncing its

authority an outworn barrier to national (manifest) destiny, as irrelevant as the old-fashioned glass ship is to the brutal realities that Redburn's voyage will disclose. Thus both psychically and socially the burden of Redburn's voyage will be the need to overcome his "insane desire" to smash the inherited ship—an image that conflates fears of familial with national anarchy and places rampant individualism in opposition to domestic social order. At the level of structure, however, the ship's history would seem to symbolize and conflate many cultural categories which the narrator experiences as fundamental oppositions in his emotional life: patrician cosmopolitan past/maternally-dominated bourgeois present; delicacy and fantasy/effeminacy and stasis; art/labor; wealth/poverty; action/passivity; and, of course, child/parent.

In his seminal study, *Symbolism and American Literature*, Charles Feidelson has observed that symbolism tends to obscure the real and important differences between the logical oppositions it conflates. In the network of associations Melville's narrator evokes, however, we can conversely see the way that an unconscious logic controls symbolic condensation—the desire to somehow harmonize what appears to the subject as an ineluctable "complex of logical oppositions" (133). The oppositions that the ship conflates are not necessarily inherent in the nature of things, but they are inherent in the way the narrator has experienced the world. Pertinent here is Ryan's observation that middle-class identity not only produced separate spheres in external gender arrangements but even divided "human emotions into male and female domains" (191). Melville's subtitle reminds us that Redburn's "First Voyage" records an initial attempt (surely, in part, Melville's own) to come to terms with the conflicted allegiances expressed through the symbol. The narrator's recollections show us the cost to the self of the oppositions that he, like the ship, seeks to contain.

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Wearing his elder brother's shooting jacket and carrying his old-fashioned fowling piece, Redburn leaves home, a shabby patrician warrior. These outlandish effects, however, attract rather than protect him from the scorn of his fellows, not only the passengers on the packet boat to New York but Captain Riga and the sailors whose harsh treatment epitomizes the masculine social order to which he must accommodate himself.

To mark his transition to a new role Redburn exchanges his fowling piece for a red woolen sailor's shirt, which he wears under his shooting jacket. The shirt may reflect crypto-revolutionary sympathy with the dispossessed, but Redburn elicits little fellowship from the seamen of the *Highlander*. Although his courage and endurance in climbing the rigging win him a measure of respect, he remains a visitor to the forecastle. It is not worth their while for the sailors to teach him to steer the ship because they know he has signed on for only one voyage. His white hands and gentlemanly manners continually remind them of the social gulf between them; and this

gulf is reciprocally reinforced by Redburn's own fantasies of power and mastery which bind him to a version of his father's world. Aloft, he ties down the rebellious canvas "like a slave to the spar," imagining how "young King Richard must have felt, when he trampled down the insurgents of Wat Tyler" (116). As the narrator's pointed commentary on his younger self makes clear, at this first stage of the voyage, Redburn, like most ambitious young men, instinctively identifies not with the lowly and oppressed but with their lords and masters.

In Captain Riga, however, Redburn is introduced to the realities of a commercial world that humiliates his patrician expectations. Riga's duplicitous appearance and behavior (sleek and benevolent on shore, slovenly and autocratic at sea) make him an obvious surrogate for Redburn's idolized and betraying father. In this novel, however, Melville's symbolic method condenses many levels of experience and points of view within single characters as well as images. If Riga is suggestive of Redburn's father, the Captain's petty greed, masked by manipulative accounting procedures, also suggests the real nature of the "hidden hand" behind the seemingly impersonal market forces that destroyed the elder Redburn. By associating the foreign Riga (he is Russian) with the market calculus, Melville emphasizes the way that the new culture of commercial capitalism seems "foreign" to Redburn's patrician class.

Moreover, by displacing his anger toward his father onto the market that unmanned him, Redburn, at voyage end, is able to triumph over his father's fate without acknowledging his rage toward that father. In garnisheeing Redburn's wages, Riga turns him into a petty bankrupt and restages in miniature Walter Redburn's financial fate. Unlike the elder Redburn, however, his son endures. At once identified with and distinguished from his father, young Redburn's self-distancing irony becomes the mark of his separate (if shrunken) identity, enabling him to survive in a world where nothing is what it seems.

Throughout the voyage, nourishment, survival and suppression of rage form an indissoluble emotional nexus. This core experience governs the pattern of events, often dream-like in their intensity, that forms the major portion of Redburn's recollections. From the suicide of the sailor suffering from *delirium tremens* to the blood-bespattered Jackson riding the masthead to eternity, rage and morbidity are seen to be fatally linked; in contrast, those who suffer most conspicuously from poverty and exploitation and should have most justification for revolutionary anger—whether "friendless" sailors, crippled beggars or emigrant Irish—are unable to sustain the defiance necessary to oppose their fate. The narrator observes that they turn their wrath on one another, and "themselves drive the strongest rivet into the chain, by which their social superiors hold them subject" (264). Yet, ironically, it is their very ability to repress the memory of their ordeal that enables the emigrants to face the New World with a measure of energy and hope.

The journey reveals the cost to the psyche that the ideology of individualism

demands and which, paradoxically, undermines all impulses toward genuine self-assertion. If survival ultimately must depend upon one's efforts alone, then all are potentially as powerless as "orphaned" Redburn who cannot afford to express a rebel's outrage against any figure (alive or dead) who may have authority over him.

As the voyage progresses, Redburn seems to sublimate his personal pain into a growing sympathy for those around him, but it is precisely the limits of sympathy as an adequate response to social suffering that the narrator himself indicts. He recollects that Max, the Dutchman, who complimented him on his feat of climbing the rigging was the kindest to him of any of the sailors. Although he often discoursed on the state of Redburn's tattered wardrobe, however, "he never offered to better" it by loaning him anything "from his own well-stored chest. Like many other well-wishers he contented himself with sympathy" (79). One of these "well-wishers," however, is Redburn himself who, passing the crippled beggars on the Liverpool docks, is aware of how utterly incapable he is "in any way to help" them (188). He can do nothing but offer up a prayer. Later, musing on the sad lot of sailors, whose "case as a class is not a very promising one," the narrator can find no solution to their problems but time and Providence (138).

Given the unstable tone of the narrator's voice—sometimes mocking bourgeois piety and its moral hypocrisy through the naive responses of his younger self, sometimes seeming to share bourgeois perplexities, sometimes confounding them with his own Christian challenge ("We are blind to the real sights of this world; deaf to its voice; and dead to its death" [293])—many critics have been tempted to seek a single Melvillean point of view, a coherent ideology, beneath the narrative cross-currents. I would argue, however, that to posit an ideologically certain author is to simplify the nature of the artistic struggle. As Edgar Dryden, a formalist critic, has said of Melville's novels, their form "is not so much an imitation of a unified reality as a search for one"(6). Melville's narrator is unsteady in his relation to the past because he is still (as he tells us at the end of the first chapter) in the grip of his memories, still trying to define himself through them. Indeed, it is the narrator's self-contradictions that pose the most timely question in *Redburn*: in light of its conflicted commitments, how effective can bourgeois liberalism be in overcoming the hard realities of human degradation and suffering? Melville's concerns with the dynamics of power and oppression invite political scrutiny; those who would fit him into a particular political mold short-change the exploratory, dialogic quality of his work.

Redburn's notion of what it means to be a democrat is a problematic one. Though his experiences in Liverpool have deepened his sense of human woe, on the voyage home he is no closer to the emigrants whom he pities than to the sailors whom he loathes. Of the emigrants, he condescendingly observes: "No experience seemed sufficient to instruct some of these ignorant people in the simplest, and most elemental principles of ocean-life" (286).

Indeed, Redburn's dismay at the behavior of those with whom he sympathizes most strongly implicitly serves as justification for his moral passivity. As Melville depicts it, bourgeois liberalism is not likely to bring on the millennium, despite the paean to providential hope that Redburn supplies.

It is the central thematic paradox of the narrative that Redburn, discovering the irrelevance of his father's guidebook to his own experience, should seek to overcome the conflict between patrician past and democratic present, between Capitalism and Christianity (as Duban puts it [53]), through a vision of fraternity in trade, expounded in a city whose suffering poor are largely the waste products of an industrialism nourished by international commerce.

On his "filial pilgrimage" through Liverpool to spots "hallowed" by his father's earlier presence (154), Redburn discovers the home truth in the culture of self-reliance: "this world...is a moving world" and every age must make "its own guide-books" (157). Like the deteriorating miniature ship, the past has become a curiosity which can be preserved only under glass. Upon achieving this insight Redburn declares his independence from the Old World and its associations with his father, acknowledging that he is "not the traveler his father was....[but] only a common-carrier across the Atlantic" (160).

Yet the vision of this "common-carrier" develops in terms far grander than any aspiration Walter Redburn ever claimed for himself. Putting his faith in the future, Redburn suddenly finds in the ships of all nations, lying side by side in the Liverpool docks, "an epitome of the world." Just as "yard-arm touches yard-arm in brotherly love," so the force of trade will bind nation to nation (165). His father's commercial failure is obliterated in this apocalyptical dream of a new social order, a New World Zion (under the aegis of the United States) in which the earlier, exclusive Puritan millennial zeal, based upon an identification with the biblical Israel ("a narrow tribe of men") is rejected for the nineteenth-century's more inclusive and liberal one—"We are not a nation, so much as a world; for unless we may claim all the world for our sire, like Melchisedec, we are without father or mother." Identifying his own orphanhood with that of the nation, Redburn finds a new and grander source of authority: the idea that America has all the world for its paternity—"all tribes and people are forming into one federated whole" (169).

The effect of the narrator's words is momentarily to transmute the meaning of his personal past. Like Emerson who can claim instant identity with Plato, the narrator looks beyond his immediate biographical and racial history and finds himself heir to all the ages. His orphanhood is his freedom. It makes him the heir of "St. Paul and Luther, and Homer and Shakespeare." His father's authority is not lost but transcended. His break with the past is no break at all but a natural extension and fulfillment of historical currents, through which all human suffering will find providential relief in "the fullness and mellowness of time" (169). Thus in one stroke Redburn's struggle with authority is transmuted into a universal brotherhood of

interdependent self-reliant citizens. It is a resolution as psychologically dubious as it is optimistically inflated.

In this regard it is worth noting that Melville first heard Emerson speak in Boston while he was awaiting his wife's lying-in. He was "agreeably disappointed" with what he heard ("Say what they will, he's a great man" [Leyda 287]), and Redburn's eulogy to brotherhood, the most Emersonian moment in the novel, may well reflect the impact of this encounter. If so, however, its position midway in the narrative reflects as well Melville's dialectical response to Emersonian idealism. Redburn's epiphany is an emotional highpoint that the voyage home deliberately undercuts. It is after this vision that young Redburn, in fact, discovers the dimensions of human suffering and inhumanity in the crowded city.

Just as Liverpool is said to resemble New York in everything but the former's extreme poverty, so the essential qualities of exploitive human nature seem unchanged between the two commercial ports. In Liverpool an army of hungry scavengers picks over the bodies of the drowned, hunting "after corpses to keep from going to the church-yard themselves" (179). On the voyage home, fear and self-interest rule. The cruel absurdity of the fifteen cabin passengers roping off their space to prevent the transfer of contagious disease from the five hundred starving emigrants—"packed like slaves in a slave-ship" (241) in the steerage below—is echoed in the fight for place among the emigrants themselves. America may have all the world for its paternity, but will this legacy make it the Promised Land?

One response to this question may be Melville's use of the figure of Jackson, whose dark nature seems the inevitable shadow of human hope. From his first days on board, Redburn is conscious of the strange bond that springs up between himself and the diseased seaman who dominates the forecastle and orchestrates the sailors' bullying attacks on Redburn. Jackson, Redburn recognizes, is the true scapegoat.

"A Cain afloat," Jackson is in thrall to a despair and self-hatred so deep that for him there is "nothing to be believed, nothing to be loved; and nothing worth living for." These melodramatic phrases emphasize Jackson's larger-than-life function within Redburn's psyche. Though he is terrified by Jackson's sadism and bullying, Redburn is fascinated by Jackson's relations with the crew. Like children, the seamen plot against Jackson in his absence, but no one dares confront him when he is among them. Redburn feels that because of his youth and health he, in particular, is the object of Jackson's hatred and spite, as if innocence itself might be a form of social resistance. It is the power of Jackson's depraved will, the energy and ferocity of a formless, purposeless freedom that fuels Jackson's tyranny over his fellows. Jackson's rage, however, is also cauterizing. Because it seals him off, it allows the others to defend themselves against any recognition that they may share something of his emotional state. Only Redburn is able to make an imaginative connection to this wounded taboo figure whom he likens to a "wild Indian...in his tawny skin and high cheek-bones" (104). Like the

cornered Indian in American national life, whose savagery serves to displace that of his persecutors and who might well think that "all the world was one person and had done him some dreadful harm" (61), Jackson plays a sacrificial role in Redburn's narrative.

René Girard has argued that when social structure breaks down, a scapegoat sacrifice draws off the violence of society, which is always seen as contagious; if the unconscious strategy is effective, the scapegoat will be seen as criminal (146). The violently daring Jackson (who falls to his death riding the masthead as if it were a warhorse) is said by the narrator to be a "near relation of General Jackson of New Orleans" (57), and we should take him at his word. Rather than merely establishing a link to Andrew Jackson, as some critics assert (Duban 55), the allusion connects the demagogic and brutal characteristics of the late president with the nightmare fears of the era to which his name serves as rubric—the anarchy, violence and corruption that an individualistic, socially fluid age fears it will unleash. As Bell puts it, "If Jackson's skill as a seaman represents the hope of democracy, his demonism represents the peril of democratic revolution, of the unleashing of the primary depravity of human nature" (569). The question that remains is: whose view of democratic peril is being adumbrated in the portrait of Jackson?

Jackson's savagery represents no essential social or psychic truth of democratic experience. Rather, in Jackson's likeness to the cornered Indian, Melville begins to examine the psychology of violence that fuels the chain reaction by which victim becomes victimizer—"savage" bonds to "civilized," brother to brother, son to father. Though the sources of Jackson's suffering remain mysterious, his self-hate seems as indicative of blows received as of blows given. Those critics most concerned with *Redburn*'s relation to Melville's psychobiography see Jackson primarily as an embodiment of Allan Melvill's deathbed rage and his son's repressed anger toward the dead father (Tolchin 90; Rogin 66). While memory may indeed be the source of Melville's conception, the character of Jackson encompasses far more than the pathos of Allan Melvill's last days. Jackson confirms the anxieties of a prudent bourgeoisie frightened by the tendencies of its own egalitarian rhetoric. On the *Highlander*, Jackson's authority feeds on the social formlessness and moral cowardice produced by the mutual isolation of the crew, and so justifies Redburn's countervailing imperative to self-restraint: "I prayed...that [my hatred] might not...make a fiend of me...like Jackson" (62). As a scapegoat figure who bears the guilt of an expansionist, Indian-tormenting era in his diseased and wasted body, Jackson ultimately arouses Redburn's pity: "there seemed even more woe than wickedness about the man; and his wickedness seemed to spring from his woe...I have pitied no man as I have pitied him" (105).

In his profoundly ambivalent reaction to Jackson, Redburn objectifies the fears and fantasies of the era which David Rothman describes as aiming at the heights of perfection, on the one hand, but doubting its own survival,

"fearing it might succumb to chaos," on the other (69). Thus Jackson's death, which occurs without anyone raising a hand against him, allows Melville's audience, if not Redburn himself, to maintain hope for the Providential design of American society. In the midst of a terrific gale, Jackson, madly riding the "yard-arm end," spits out a "torrent of blood" onto the "bellying sail" and plunges "like a diver" into the sea (295). Though his death is the sailors' deliverance (297), this blood stain, like the mark of Cain, remains. Ambiguously, it can be read both as a reminder of man's common heritage in transgression, and as a sign of God's protection and ultimate mercy.

Entitled *The Discovery of the Asylum*, Rothman's study has shown how Jacksonian reformers' efforts to control criminal and deviant behavior, particularly insanity, came to be based on an analogy between mental and moral corruption and physical sickness (70-71, 125-29). Although both insanity and criminality were believed to be primarily caused by social factors, they were treated as if they were contagious and could be warded off by a prophylactic regimen based on self-discipline and social isolation. Because insanity was like a contagious disease it must also be left to run its course. The best one could do to protect oneself was to remain at a distance and humor the victim—in effect, the tack Redburn and the crew take toward Jackson.

To conceptualize insane rage as a contagious disease, however, is a sure way to make confrontation with one's anger a fatal prospect—especially in light of that metaphoric link between the physical and social body emphasized by Smith-Rosenberg. Hence, the sense of emotional passivity so prevalent on the *Highlander*. Because Jackson bears all the suffering of aggressive rage, he becomes the object of Redburn's pity but not the subject of self-recognition. In terms of Redburn's active engagement with the world around him, Jackson provides an evasion, a substitute for Redburn's inability to deal with the experiences of his own psychic life. Redburn finds it odd that the crew never speak of Jackson once he is gone. Yet neither does he. The mutual silence forcibly dramatizes the repressive function of the scapegoat.

Melville's *Redburn* points to a central paradox in his culture's version of middle-class manhood. While men, under the imperative of social mobility, are encouraged to define themselves anew, they (like women) are actively discouraged from developing the psychic tools that might make democratic individualism a truly vital ideology. Rather than wrestle with one's own demons or sublimate them in personal or political action, the dangers of social chaos dictate a self-restraint whose narrow boundaries seem crippling. It is this self-miniaturization that is ultimately symbolized in Redburn's glass ship, and that continues to bind him to his father and his home.

At the end of his voyage, Redburn remains alone. His trip home began with the prospect of an enduring friendship with Harry Bolton, the young Englishman who appears just when Redburn has put aside his father's guidebook and most needs a sympathetic friend. Although Redburn stows

his shooting jacket in Harry's trunk and we hear no more about it on the voyage back, the isolation that it signified remains the essential character of his condition on board ship. Theorize about brotherhood as he will, Redburn is unable to be his brother's keeper. Indeed, the coda that reports Harry's death seems primarily designed to provide a shaky Redburn with reassurance of his own, contrasting, survival. For Harry's end (crushed to death in the cutting-in of a whale) completes the thematic interrelation of economic failure and death with which the journey began.

In the final chapter, Redburn learns that Harry, depressed and despairing, left New York to go to sea once again because he could find no employment, no place for himself, on shore. To the degree that Redburn tries to "escape" Harry, to separate himself from Harry's behavior and fate, he evades his own fears of going under. It may be that Redburn's abandonment of Harry is an enactment of Melville's own anger at his father's abandonment of him, as Tolchin suggests (96). If this is so, however, the brooding tone and disjunctive effect of the final sequence reveal another aspect of biographical truth: Redburn can no more forget Harry than he can forget the deepest part of himself. Melville's ending establishes Harry as a continuously mourned absence. Though Redburn thought he had shed his father's values in Liverpool, it would seem that in finding a "brother" he had only found another uncanny image of his cosmopolitan, bankrupt parent.

Slim and slight, with long beautiful hands and a dandyish air, Harry is an exotic, esthetically seductive and fundamentally unreliable. Unable to do anything, to complete any act, even to be a successful gambler, Harry suggests a surreal compression of the artist, dreamer and elegant con man that conveys at bottom Redburn's (and Melville's?) profound distrust of the part of his own nature that he most deeply associates with his father. Harry is, in effect, *La Reine* come to life. By a process of metonymy common in the symbolism of the unconscious, Harry derives from the depths of Redburn's own childhood memories of his father's travels, his father's world, and so the first stirrings of his own imaginative life. The voyage is indeed circular. Harry takes us back to the opening chapter of the book. As the narcissistic, "childish" part of Redburn, he must be crushed again and again, if the youth is to survive and become a man. This is not to justify Redburn's much-discussed abandonment of Harry when news from home intervenes (see Seelye 52; Franklin), but to try to understand it in terms of the dynamics of the character Melville has created.

Harry's childlike qualities disable him from competing in the harshly "masculine" society of modern commercial capitalism into which Redburn has been initiated. Like the ferocious Jackson, Harry carries a kind of contagious disease: his epicene estheticism is as subversive of middle-class norms as is Jackson's phallic rage. Although it is often noted that both figures represent personality extremes that Redburn must shun, it is not so commonly recognized that these emblems of self-division continue, paradoxically, to exert a hold upon Redburn through his resistance to them.

Like Jackson, Harry ends by falling into the sea, returning to his source in the depths of the narrator's unconscious.

Though Redburn's moral intelligence sets him apart from others, his needs and fears do not. At the voyage's end, anxiety and distrust divide each man not only from his fellows but (if Redburn is at all representative) from the deepest aspects of his own nature. Wai-Chee Dimock has recently argued that *Redburn* depicts "an economy of powerlessness" which reflects Melville's rage as an authorial "imperial self" who must submit to the infantilizing tastes and values of his middle-class audience in order to sell books (82, 9, 87). While such an attack upon the reader is surely a feature of the book, I suggest that it is a projection of a deep conflict within Melville himself. Through the several voices of his protagonist, Melville sketches a dimensional portrait of a figure just coming into view on the American scene—one which bound him to his audience more closely, perhaps, than he wished: the young male caught in the paradox of a middle-class morality that nurtures an empathic conscience, even as it demands a self-reliant, self-distancing individualism as the price of survival in a new and threatening world.

Redburn raises many uncomfortable questions for the middle-class reader because it challenges middle-class liberalism's credentials as a force for social justice. The novel undermines the facile optimism about American society so prevalent in Melville's day and still present today. Yet it offers no ideological alternative, which is precisely why it is so discomforting. While Melville never rejects individualism, his novel suggests that unless it is grounded in principles greater than mere economic survival, the result will be a profound psychic impoverishment. Melville's depiction of the anxieties generated by the imperatives of capitalism, then, is an early prognostication of what has often proven to be the price of individual prosperity in America.

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