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ELIZABETH SCHULTZ

Melville's Environmental Vision in *Moby-Dick*

In contemporary American culture, the image of Herman Melville's white whale is enlisted in the service of such environmental organizations as Greenpeace and the Center for Marine Conservation, appearing for the one as an active defender of the world's oceans and for the other as a cuddly toy, any kid, even Ahab's son, would encourage his Dad to buy. Other environmentalists, however, associate Ahab and Melville's "nineteenth-century image of brave New Englanders risking their lives in rowboats against leviathans" with the perpetuation of an irresponsible and illegal slaughter of whales in our times (McCarthy 23-25). These contemporary interpretations of the significance of *Moby-Dick* (1851) for twentieth-century environmentalists suggest a diversity of political and commercial ends to which Melville's novel is being put. At a time when the health of the world's oceans and their inhabitants is indeed of increasing global concern and when first-time readers of *Moby-Dick* can see very little "honor and glory" in the enterprise of whaling, such interpretations raise important questions as to what the environmental vision of Melville's novel might be.

Unlike his contemporaries, Ralph Waldo Emerson and, to a greater degree, Henry David Thoreau, Melville has not been canonized by the Environmental Movement, by ecologists, or by nature writers of the late twentieth century. However, like his contemporaries, Melville focuses his attention on "nature" throughout *Moby-Dick*, a word which appears forty-four times in the novel.

Donald Worster's pioneering 1977 study, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, identifies two dominant perspectives toward nature in the antebellum period, one which he associates with Thoreau,

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the other with Charles Darwin. More familiar with the writings of Thoreau's transcendentalist teacher, Emerson, than with those of Thoreau himself, Melville had an opportunity to read Darwin's *Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited during the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle round the World* in 1844 on board the *United States* and purchased his own copy in 1847 (Parker 267, 499). In general terms, Worster contrasts Thoreau's perspective with Darwin's, aligning one with subjective transcendentalism, the other with objective science. Although recent scholars have identified Thoreau's own interest in Darwin and his increasing interest in interpreting nature in scientific terms, Worster's differentiation of these two dominant nineteenth-century perspectives is useful in examining the environmental vision which Melville constructs in *Moby-Dick*. While endorsing both of these perspectives, Melville also questions them and in the process reveals not only an environmental conscience but also an environmental position whereby nature and culture might co-exist.

Melville's central characters—his narrator, Ishmael, and the captain of the whaleship *Pequod*, Ahab—both respond to nature in transcendental terms, seeing themselves in relation to its infinite and unknown possibilities. Thus Ahab's declaration—"'O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies! not the smallest atom stirs or lives on matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind'"(312)—not only epitomizes the transcendentalists' credo but also demonstrates a momentary humility in the *Pequod*'s arrogant captain. Ishmael's immersion in a transcendental vision of the sea—"that deep, blue, bottomless soul pervading mankind and nature" (159)—however, nearly precipitates his drowning in it. He hence comes to understand his limitations more fully, simultaneously realizing both the danger of the sea and of transcendental speculation.

In the course of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael and Ahab as well as other characters interpret the white whale according to their subjective points of view. In his often-cited quarter-deck speech, announcing his commitment to the pursuit of Moby Dick, Ahab proclaims that, "'The inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate, and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him'" (164). Ahab, therefore, despising nature's inscrutability, feels compelled to name the white whale as agent or principal of evil. If Melville provides his readers with ample opportunity and reason to be appalled at the results of Ahab's demonizing of nature, through humor and hyperbole, he deflates Ishmael's contrasting deification of the white whale. The conclusion of Chapter 105, "Does the Whale's Magnitude Diminish?—Will He Perish?," in which the whale as a species is proclaimed to be immortal, is both preposterous and glorious:

> we account the whale immortal in his species, however perishable in his individuality. He swam the seas before the continents broke

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> water; he once swam over the site of the Tuileries, and Windsor Castle, and the Kremlin. In Noah's flood he despised Noah's Ark; and if ever the world is to be again flooded, . . . then the eternal whale will still survive, and rearing upon the topmost crest of the equatorial flood, spout his frothed defiance to the skies. (462)

When at last the *Pequod* meets Moby Dick, Ishmael hyperbolically compares the white whale to Jove, claiming that not even "that great majesty Supreme! did surpass the glorified White Whale as he so divinely swam" (548). Although his narrator's awestruck deification of Moby Dick at this point in the novel is aesthetically appropriate—given the long and arduous narrative pursuit, Melville's description of Moby Dick's behavior and appearance as "a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness" (548) remains too ambiguous for allegorical equation. As Ahab had himself proposed, Ishmael, as a result of his later cetological explorations, reveals his more mature consciousness that the whale is indeed inscrutable, "beyond all utterance," beyond definitive human comprehension.

Through both Ahab and Ishmael, Melville also reflects an objective, scientific perspective. In contrast to his demonic interpretations of nature, Ahab also contemplates it as an incomprehensible life-force; for example, he observes that quite indifferent to his own mighty endeavor, the sun continues to shine "unblinkingly" (500), the grass to grow everywhere—in Greenland as well as on Vesuvius (563), the winds to blow around the earth (564), the mosses to creep into cracks in the *Pequod*'s mast (565). Ahab, however, goes mad because he persists in perceiving one whale, Moby Dick, in absolute moral terms, whereas Ishmael, persists in contemplating all whales in objective and scientific as well as historical, cultural, and literary terms and simultaneously accepts them, as he does the sea and implicitly nature itself, as "an everlasting terra incognita" (273). Thus his attempts at classifying whales in Chapter 32, "Cetology," reveal only "the constituents of a chaos" (134); after dissecting whales in Chapter 86, "The Tail," he realizes, "I go but skin deep; I know him not, and never will" (379), and while seeking to take the measure of whales, he knows himself merely to be "vain and foolish" (453).

To say that Melville presents cetaceans more accurately and fully than he does other species or than do other novelists is a non sequitur. Beginning with Howard Vincent, who forty years ago identified the seventy chapters in the middle of *Moby-Dick* as its "cetological center" (Vincent 121), scholars have noted his reliance upon his "numerous fish documents" (443). In examining Melville's attempt to classify whales, to analyze their behavior, and to describe their anatomy, they have also been quick to point out his scientific inaccuracies as well as his deviations, subverions, and refutations of his scientific sources.

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Skeptical with regard to interpreting nature according to either a transcendental or a scientific perspective, Melville, I argue, developed a third perspective, one based on an understanding of a unity between humanity and nature, a unity derived from an emotional and social kinship. Lawrence Buell asserts that in *Moby-Dick* "Melville's interest in whales was subordinate to his interest in whaling," and chastising him for anthropocentricism, maintains in general that "Melville's environmental imagination was too homocentric" (4-5). Through this third perspective, an anthropocentric perspective which counters Buell's reading of Melville and supports a bonding of humans and nature, it is possible to see that Melville evolves an environmental vision with a conscience. Explicitly, he proposes a redemptive and responsible alternative to the extermination of whales from the world's waters. Humanized, with shared emotions and behavior, whales are made to appeal to his nineteenth- (and I may add, twentieth-) century reader's feelings, and consequently that reader is forced to consider human beings as agents for the whales' suffering and destruction. Dissolving any absolute dichotomy between humans and whales, Melville cannot represent their suffering and destruction with equanimity. By bringing his reader to identify with whales through this perspective, he indicates an intrinsic and irresistible interdependency among diverse species of life.

In general, Melville's references to nature are freighted with allusions, metaphors, and symbolic implications which link nature with humans. For example, both sea and sky in *Moby-Dick* are impressively represented as the physical media in which life—human and non-human—struggles and continues. Water and sea equally form the natural and the human setting for *Moby-Dick*. Through his description of the vibrating harpoon line, Melville sets a whaleboat in both elements: "from its now being more tight than a harpstring, you would have thought the craft had two keels—one cleaving the water, the other the air—as the boat churned on through both opposing elements at once" (285). Ahab stands forth in "the lovely aromas of [the] enchanted air" (543); Moby Dick "booms his entire bulk into the pure element of air" (558). But the air may also howl and roar, and generating a typhoon, "burst from out [a] cloudless sky, like an exploding bomb upon a dazed and sleepy town" (503). In a carefully wrought trope, Melville genders the sea and the sky:

> Hither, and thither, on high, glided the snow-white wings of small, unspeckled birds; these were the gentle thoughts of the feminine air; but to and fro in the deeps, far down in the bottomless blue, rushed mighty leviathans, sword-fish, and sharks; and these were the strong, troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea. (542)

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Throughout *Moby-Dick*, Melville associates the appearance and behavior of humans with animals. He compares the rout of the pods of whales to the disarray of elephants in battle with Alexander, to herds of sheep alarmed by wolves, to buffaloes fleeing before a horseman, and finally to humans at the theater, "rush[ing] helter-skelter for the outlets, crowding, trampling, jamming, and remorselessly dashing each other to death" at the call of fire, generalizing in his conclusion that "there is no folly of the beasts of the earth which is not infinitely outdone by the madness of men" (385). Men are equated with a diversity of animalistic appearances and behaviors, e.g., the *Grampus'* crew arriving in shaggy coats and iced beards seems "an eruption of bears from Labrador" (15); Ahab, presiding at the cabin table, is "a mute, maned sea-lion . . . surrounded by his war-like, but still deferential cubs" (150); the idealized Steelkilt, "a tall and noble animal," has a golden beard "like the tasseled housings of [a] viceroy's snorting charger" while Radney resembles a mule (246); when Ahab's boat is smashed by Moby Dick, its crew struggles out from under the gunwales "like seals from a sea-side cave" (559). Although men are associated with diverse animals, of all the animals alluded to in *Moby-Dick* whales alone take on specific human characteristics. The connection between humanity and cetaceans Robert Zoellner persuasively illuminates in *Salt-Sea Mastodon* (1973). He argues that in the course of *Moby-Dick* Ishmael develops "a growing feeling of *fraternal congenerity* regarding the whale . . . which leads in turn to more subtle feelings of tragic affinity and metaphysical consanguinity with this unbelievably vast taxonomic relative." "Leviathan is, after all," Zoellner asserts, "not an alien [to Ishmael]. Rather, and in literal scientific fact, he is a brother" (185). He concludes his discussion of the whale's profound relationship to humanity by contending that Ishmael comes to realize that both whales and humans belong to "the living earth" and are "part of a tragic continuum from which *nothing* is free" (188).

At least one of Melville's contemporaries also observed his yoking of whales to humans; this anonymous reviewer notes that *Moby-Dick*

> . . . is all whale. Leviathan is here in full amplitude. Not one of your museum affairs, but the real, living whale, a bona-fide, warm-blooded creature, ransacking the waters from pole to pole. His enormous bulk, his terribly destructive energies, his habits, his food, are all before us. Nay, even his lighter moods are exhibited. We are permitted to see the whale as a lover, a husband, and the head of a family. So to speak, we are made guests at his fire-side; we set our mental legs beneath his mahogany, and become members of his interesting social circle. (*New York Spirit* 63)

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In Chapter 87, "The Grand Armada," Melville most fully evokes the relationship between humans and cetaceans through descriptions of their anatomy, psychology, and social behavior. Because this chapter also vividly demonstrates the appalling effects of human greed upon cetacean life, Melville's recognition of the significant relationship between humans and whales is intensified. Although Vincent identifies Melville's dependence on three whaling authorities as the basis for "The Grand Armada," Melville's extensive elaborations and revisions of their work confirms the cetacean-human kinship and his commitment to persuade his readers of humanity's implications in cetacean suffering and destruction.

Often either Melville or his characters correlate men with predators. Ahab identifies the *Pequod*'s harpooners as leopards (164); Fleece identifies Stubb as a shark (297); Starbuck imagines Ahab as tiger (515). The harpooners, especially the Asians comprising Ahab's crew, are repeatedly associated with tigers (217, 220, 223, 284, 355, 550, 566). Ahab himself, being more frequently represented than other characters as a beast of prey, also participates most fully in a rapacious universe. He is bear (153), moose (163), wolf (165), tiger (515). It is Ahab, who "with tornado brow, and eyes of red murder, and foam-glued lips, leaped after his prey" (223), and who legitimates his pursuit of Moby Dick by the tuna's pursuit of flying fish: "'Look! see yon Albicore! who put it into him to chase and fang that flying-fish?'" (545).

Melville's focus on the predatory nature of humans and creatures in *Moby-Dick* reflects his awareness of Darwin's *Journal of Researches*, to which he makes a direct allusion in his "Extracts," albeit misquoting its title as *Darwin's Voyage of a Naturalist* (xxviii). Repeatedly the novel exemplifies the theory from the *Journal of Researches* that with "different species of animals–the strong [are] always extirpating the weaker" (520), an early version of Darwin's later survival-of-the-fittest theory (*On the Origin of Species* 1859). Starbuck's retort to Ahab's quarter-deck speech that Moby Dick is a "dumb brute," which struck him from "blind instinct" (163-4), and Fleece's sermon to the sharks whose "woraciousness" characterizes the "natur" of all his "fellow-critters" (295) reinforce this Darwinian view of nature as ruthless and rapacious, predicated in savage survival strategies. This view complements Melville's vision of a "wolfish world" (51); of the "universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began" (274); of the "horrible vultureism of earth! from which not the mightiest whale is free" (308); it is made manifest in Melville's representation of the sharks' orgiastic feasting on dead whales, of the sea birds' attack on a cetacean corpse, of Moby-Dick's onslaught against the *Town Ho* and the *Pequod*, not to mention

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the relentless, ferocious, and wasteful pursuit of whales by numerous whaling crews, including that of the *Pequod*.

Thomas L. Altherr perceives that Melville shares this view of nature as constant strife in *Moby-Dick* with Francis Parkman, whose *California and Oregon Trail* (1849) he reviewed for Evert Duyckinck's *The Literary World* on March 31, 1849. Altherr specifically compares Melville's description of the sea's cannibalism above with Parkman's observation that "from minnow to men, life is incessant war" (8) as well as Melville's description of men's intoxication with the pursuit of whales with Parkman's similar description of the buffalo hunt, arguing that in both works "[w]arfare and its corollaries—cannibalism, survival, sharkiness, and greed—seemed omnipresent all along the biological spectrum" (9).

In *Moby-Dick's* Epilogue, the sharks, surely the most savage of the predators in *Moby-Dick*, and the cruel pelagic sea birds seem at last to heed Fleece's admonishment to "gobern" their "woraciousness" (295): *"The unharming sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks"* (573). In *Moby-Dick*, the only creature unable to curb its voracious insatiability is the human being. The greed of humans, extending beyond their bellies, assumes moral, political, and philosophical as well as environmental implications in Melville's novel. He recognizes that such excessive consumption, in ethical terms, causes immense suffering and, in environmental terms, causes the diminution of natural resources, species, and habitats. His reference in the second paragraph of "The Grand Armada" to "the all-grasping western world" (380), which threatens the eastern world imperialism and environmental destruction conveys all of these implications. Ostensibly "the inexhaustible wealth of spices, and silks, and jewels, and gold, and ivory" of the east is guarded from "the all-grasping western world" by the straits of Sunda, but Melville indicates that this "significant provision of nature" proves only a "central gateway" for the exploitation of natural resources as the *Pequod* passes through the straits in ferocious pursuit of whales.

The whales which the *Pequod* subsequently encounters also appear "inexhaustible"—"thousands on thousands. Broad on both bows, at the distance of some two or three miles, and forming a great semicircle, embracing one half of the level horizon, a continuous chain of whale-jets" (382). In attempting to claim for future harvest as many of these whales as possible, the *Pequod*'s crew, as Melville describes the effects of their greed, is both cruel and wasteful. To accomplish its ends, they use two common technological devices of the whaling trade: druggs, heavy wooden blocks which, attached to a harpoon, tag a whale for later slaughter, and cutting-spades which, when darted into a whale, in Melville's words, "hamstring him . . . by sundering or maiming his gigantic tail-

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tendon" (389). Melville's straightforward explanation of a single cutting-spade's disastrous impact upon a pod of whales would have been as disturbing to the nineteenth-century reader as it is to the whale-loving twentieth-century reader:

> But agonizing as was the wound of this whale, and an appalling spectacle enough, any way; yet the peculiar horror with which he seemed to inspire the rest of the herd, was owing to . . . the cutting-spade [having] worked loose from his flesh. So that tormented to madness, he was now churning through the water, violently flailing with his flexible tail, and tossing the keen spade about him, wounding and murdering his own comrades. (389)

In light of the abusive tactics of the *Pequod*'s crew in their endeavor to take more than can be consumed, Melville's simple sentence concluding "The Grand Armada" allows justice to prevail: "Of all the drugged whales only one was captured" (390).

The horrors of the whaling trade, Melville heightens in "The Grand Armada," as suggested above, by relating them to humanized descriptions of cetacean social life. This contrast is apparent in his general description of the scene: "thus though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternations and affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the centre freely and fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concernments; yea, serenely revelled in dalliance and delight" (388-9). The ensuing scene of a cetacean nursery, however, is jarringly interrupted by Melville's description of newly born whales, resembling human babies, entrapped through the entanglement of their umbilical cords with harpoon lines; the deaths of these infants happen "[n]ot seldom in the rapid vicissitudes of the chase" (388), he notes with understated emotion.

In conjunction with these domestic scenes, Melville creates a complex footnote in order to connect women and female whales. A matter-of-fact explanation of the female whale's two breasts is followed by an image of atrocity and agony: "When by chance these precious parts in a nursing whale are cut by the hunter's lance, the mother's pouring milk and blood rivallingly discolor the sea for rods" (388). Melville's description of the deaths of these nursing mother whales not only signifies the deaths of their young but also creates a memorable scene of human beings bringing mayhem into a setting of domesticity and harmony, affecting creatures so very like themselves. Melville's footnote concludes with a sequence of astonishing imagistic juxtapositions: the red-and-white of destruction is transformed into the red-and-white of nourishment, which, then, shifts into a confirmation of cetacean and human kinship, sexual and social: "The milk is very sweet and rich; it has been tasted by man; it might do well with strawberries. When over-

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flowing with mutual esteem, the whales salute *more hominum*"—in the ways of humans (388).

Throughout *Moby-Dick*, Melville's illustrations of dying whales graphically project revulsion and remorse at the waste and loss of cetacean life, revulsion and remorse which is underscored because of the kinship between whales and humans. These emotions are apparent in the description in Chapter 61 of the first whale killed by the *Pequod*'s crew:

> . . . now abating in his flurry, the whale once more rolled out into view; surging from side to side; spasmodically dilating and contracting his spout-hole, with sharp, cracking, agonized respirations. At last, gush after gush of clotted red gore, as if it had been the purple lees of red wine, shot into the frighted air; and falling back again, ran dripping down his motionless flanks into the sea. His heart had burst! (286)

In dying, this whale is not merely a statistic or a resource; Melville transforms it, especially through his touching concluding sentence, into a suffering, feeling being. At a period when a child's death might occupy Harriet Beecher Stowe for four chapters, he lingers over the painful death of an ancient whale in Chapter 81, extending his description beyond the death described above and investing this whale with distinction and dignity. Melville adds the rhetoric of sentiment to that of sensationalism to intensify his reader's sorrow for the whale's death. On the one hand the old whale dies "spouting thick blood, . . . bespattering [the whaleboats] and their glorying crews all over with showers of gore," while on the other hand its eyes, "blind bulbs," are "horribly pitiable to see," and its "last expiring spout" "most piteous" (357). Flask's unnecessary pricking of the whale's ulcerous protuberance, which Melville claims goads the whale "into more than sufferable anguish," is as unnecessarily cruel as Cornwall's plucking of Gloucester's eyes in *King Lear*.

The subtext for this excruciating episode is apparent in Melville's ironic editorial comment, in which the whale is analogized as a stately, elderly victim in an indifferent and hypocritical society: "For all his old age, and his one arm, and his blind eyes, he must die the death and be murdered, in order to light the gay bridals and other merry-makings of men, and also to illuminate the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to all" (357). Touched by Melville's recognition of the whale's suffering and by the implications of its loss, Vincent quotes Arthur Tresidder Sheppard—"a sense of the linking of all creation and the tears of its common fate are seen in the surge of pity when the old blind whale [dies]"—and concludes his own discussion with Virgil's "*Sunt lacrimae rerum*" (there are tears in the nature of things) (Vincent 269). In the conclusion of this episode, Melville explic-

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itly condemns the whalers' excesses by refusing to allow them either to desecrate the whale's body or to profit from it. In language which might be used to describe the actions of thieves and pillagers, Melville explains that the whalers are prevented from "rummaging" through the body and "rifling" its "treasures"; in the plainest rhetoric, comparable to that used to evoke justice at the end of "The Grand Armada," Melville explains simply that "the carcase sank" (358-9).

In the title of Chapter 105, the last chapter which he devotes to cetology, Melville asks, regarding the survival of whales as a species, "Will He Perish?" From a late twentieth-century environmental perspective, which considers the seas' pollution and the whales' diminishing numbers, Melville's defiant and deifying response, cited above, reflects wishful, if not desperate, thinking. Although his hyperbolic statements regarding the whale's survival may imply his belief that *Moby-Dick* will make the whale immortal, the book, he repeatedly indicates, cannot substitute for the whale itself. Having written 105 chapters of his narrative in which he situates whales at its center as analogous to nature, indeed, to "the ungraspable phantom of life" (5) itself, however, he cannot rhetorically propose the demise of the whale as a species. I will argue here instead that despite Moby Dick's triumphant defeat of the *Pequod* and his apparent and glorious survival at the end of the novel, Melville's vision of whales as possibly "perishable" represents his profound anxiety for this species as well as for all life.

Numerous nineteenth-century antebellum writers, including Alexander Wilson, William Cullen Bryant, John James Audubon, George B. Emerson, and Thoreau, deplored the increasing loss of American wildlife and habitat. For example, Bryant, in "The Prairies" (1832), notes that beaver and buffalo have left eastern landscapes: ". . . The beaver builds / No longer by these streams, but far away, / . . . In these plains / The bison feeds no more. Twice twenty leagues / Beyond remotest smoke of hunter's camp, / Roams the majestic brute" (37). Thoreau, responding in 1842 to George Emerson's *A Report on the Trees and Shrubs Growing Naturally in the Forests of Massachusetts*, comments on humanity's debilitating impact on nature in his observations on the loss of an even greater number of species: "The bear, wolf, lynx, wildcat, deer, beaver, and marten, have disappeared; the otter is rarely if ever seen here at present; and the mink is less common than formerly" (54). Emerson himself spells out the losses of New England's habitats for these animals. (Worster 67-70). In 1834 *Silliman's Journal* identifies the causes for these drastic and sweeping changes—population and industrial growth:

> The advanced state of geographical knowledge shows that no countries remain to be explored. In North America the animals are slowly decreasing, from the persevering efforts and the indiscriminate slaughter practiced by hunters, and by the appropria-

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> tion to the use of man of those rivers and forests which have afforded them food and protection. They recede with the aborigines, before the tide of civilization. (qtd. in Branch 95)

In the third paragraph of *Moby-Dick,* in an attempt to explain why he and others are heading to the sea in such numbers, Ishmael poses a rhetorical question: "Are the green fields gone?" (4). His question comments indirectly on the increasing development of urban areas and the simultaneous loss of meadows and fields during the antebellum period. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg points to the overfarming of New England lands and commercial and transportation developments as the reason (80). Melville notes, as Smith-Rosenberg later confirms, the particular role of the Erie Canal in shifting population and industry from the Atlantic coast into the "land-locked heart of our America" (244).

In "Will He Perish?" the line of inquiry which Melville initiates in Chapter 1 with his question regarding the loss of the green fields is extended through a comparison of the buffalo's and the whale's fate:

> Comparing the humped herds of whales with the humped herds of buffalo, which, not forty years ago, overspread by tens of thousands the prairies of Illinois and Missouri, and shook their iron manes and scowled with their thunder-clotted brows upon the sites of populous river-capitals, where now the polite broker sells you land at a dollar an inch; in such a comparison an irresistible argument would seem furnished, to show that the hunted whale cannot now escape speedy extinction. (460)

In this critical environmental chapter, Melville joins other antebellum writers in expressing dismay specifically at the buffalo's disappearance from the central prairie states as a result of expansion. In 1844 Josiah Gregg, for example, laments that

> the slaughter of these animals is frequently carried to an excess, which shows the depravity of the human heart in very bold relief. . . . Whether the mere pleasure of taking life is the incentive of these brutal excesses, I will not pretend to decide; but one thing is very certain, that the buffalo killed yearly on these prairies far exceeds the wants of the traveler, or what might be looked upon as the exigencies of rational sport. . . . Were they only killed for food, however, their natural increase would perhaps replenish the loss; yet the continual and wanton slaughter of them by travelers and hunters . . . [is] fast reducing their numbers, and must ultimately effect their total annihilation from the continent.

Although the bison's extermination in the western U. S. occurred following the publication of *Moby-Dick,* Melville's visit with his uncle in

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Illinois in 1840 would have apprized him of the extermination of bison in the central prairie states, a condition which William P. Hornaday, writing in 1887, maintains had been completed east of the Mississippi by 1830.

In the context of the bison's extinction from regions he himself knew well and of queries raised by Nantucketers in Charles Wilkes' 1845 *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, a source for *Moby-Dick* (Vincent 366), Melville addresses the possibility of the whale's extinction. Altherr points out the resemblances between the quarries of the buffalo and the whale hunter: "[w]hale and buffalo alike had humps, great bulk, and adamantine brows. Except for the misanthropic old bull or rogue, both were gregarious animals, roaming in great armadas. Both species displayed a timid or indifferent demeanor but would charge when shot at or lanced. When captured and killed, both were sliced up immediately for their choice hump-rib cuts" (9). As buffalo hunters were moving their swath of destruction across the North American continent from the East coast during the antebellum period, Melville was aware of the penetration of whaleships from diverse nations into the world's seas, leading him to ponder "whether Leviathan can long endure so wide a chase, and so remorseless a havoc; whether he must not at last be exterminated from the waters" (460). An early description of Ahab in *Moby-Dick* indicates his consciousness of the loss another species from the continental United States: "He lived in the world, as the last of the Grisly Bears lived in settled Missouri. And as when Spring and Summer had departed, that wild Logan of the woods, burying himself in the hollow of a tree, lived out the winter there, sucking his own paws" (153). Melville's inquiry regarding the continuation of species hunted by humans persists in *Pierre* (1852): "Say, are not the fierce things of this earth daily, hourly going out? Where now are your wolves of Britain? Where in Virginia now, find you the panther and the pard" (34)?

In *Moby-Dick* Melville implicitly acknowledges that species loss derives from habitation loss and that habitation loss derives from both human land hunger and population increase. New England's green fields are gone; Missouri has become settled; "the polite broker" sells Illinois prairies; the destruction of old-growth forests is alluded to in a comparison of the extraction of whales' teeth to "Michigan oxen drag[ging] stumps of old oaks out of wild wood-lands" (332). Noting that "so short a period ago . . . the census of the buffalo in Illinois exceeded the census of men now in London, . . . though at the present day not one horn or hoof of them remains in all that region" (460-1), Melville tacitly correlates the numerical expansion of humans with the numerical decrease of animals.

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Melville's representation of a kinship between whales and humans is dramatically reinforced through allusions correlating the extinction of whales with the extinction of humanity. The ramifications of this correlation are developed as he also implies an interrelationship among diverse species by considering the disastrous consequences resulting from the loss of a single species. Thus Melville correlates the death of the old whale not only with the fall of "the noblest oak" but also with the demise of the planet itself: "over and over [the whale] slowly revolved like a waning world" (358). Earlier references in *Moby-Dick* to the happy-go-lucky, pipe-smoking second mate; to damned Ahab, who gives up his pipe as well as serenity (129); and to a doomed whale whose last "vapoury jet" resembles the smoke from a "portly burgher's" pipe (283) again link humans and whales and reach a moving culmination in "Will He Perish?" in Melville's speculation that "the last whale, like the last man, [will] smoke his pipe, and then himself evaporate in the final puff" (460).

Melville's concern for the extinction of bison in "Will He Perish?" provides a catalyst not only for reexamining his well-known allusion to the domesticated colt's instinctual terror of a buffalo robe in Chapter 42, "The Whiteness of the Whale," but also for considering his recognition of the interrelationships among species and of the implications of species loss. In 1834 John Jacob Astor, described as epitomizing capitalistic success in "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (14), took advantage of the decrease in beavers as a result of over-trapping and of the subsequent shift in men's fashions in hats (from beaver to silk) and sold his American Fur Company to a Missouri-based company. Keeping Astor's name, this company came to command a growing international demand for buffalo robes (Branch 95). According to Francis Haines, "In 1840, the American Fur Company alone shipped 67,000 buffalo robes, and by 1848 this number had grown to 110,000" (117). To Melville's New England colt, the buffalo robe thus evokes "the rending, goring bison herds" of the wild west as well as the "knowledge of the demonism in the world" (194) and the knowledge and terror of death. First the beaver, then the buffalo, next the colt. Given Melville's concern for the buffalo's declining numbers, the overwhelming apprehension of evil raised by the musky robe is in its stench associated with the pointless death of countless living beings.

Forty years later, Melville updates this provocative image to reflect changes in the environment, transforming the colt of *Moby-Dick* to a horse in *Billy Budd, Sailor* and the musky buffalo robe to a vile-smelling chemical factory. The horse attempts through repeated snorts to "get [the smell] out of his nostrils and lungs." Like the colt, the horse reacts violently to the presence of "evil of some sort" (84). The evil

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now emanates from the chemical factory, emblematic of an increasing industrial power which dangerously pollutes the air on which all living beings depend.

The pursuit of Moby Dick concludes with the white whale's turning on its pursuers to destroy first Fedallah and Ahab, then the *Pequod* and the remaining crew. Following the maelstrom created by the sinking ship which sucks all but Ishmael into its vortex, Melville elegiacally draws the shroud of the sea over the dead, indicating that "the sea [rolls] on as it rolled five thousand years ago" (572). As an anonymous pundit has declared, "Ish and Fish survive," and Melville's conclusion reinforces a Darwinian vision of the survival of the fittest—not to mention, in the case of Ishmael, the luckiest. It also supports a moral vision in which human and whale lives, wrongfully and wastefully expended, are vindicated, thus anticipating the desire, if not the design, of twentieth-century environmental activists for the annihilation of forces antagonistic toward marine conservation. In addition, it implies the power of nature to take care of its own, to restore itself to a prelapsarian condition.

But Melville does not in fact conclude the chronological narrative of *Moby-Dick* with the survival of Ishmael and Moby Dick. In the wake of his survival, Ishmael begins to travel—geographically, culturally, and literarily—to learn what he can about life and nature, whales and human beings. In doing so, he implicitly recognizes human dependency upon technology: it is, after all, the means for book production. However, in the service of human expansion and greed, technology—in the form of druggs and cutting spades, in the form of the factory ship—is also the means throughout *Moby-Dick* by which humans deny their interdependency with nature. Yet Ishmael, I would argue, seeks a compromise.

Leo Marx's continuing study of the pastoral, which integrates human society in the green world, provides a context for re-assessing the interrelationship between human and nonhuman nature in *Moby-Dick*. In responding to Buell's dismissal of anthropocentricism as a viable factor in an ecocentric philosophy and his dismissal of *Moby-Dick*'s environmental significance, he recently contended that "A disregard of humanity's unique place in nature is the central flaw of much environmental, and especially ecocentric, writing. It is manifest in the recoil from anthropocentric thinking, and in the ambiguous use of the idea of 'nature' to mean an entity that either includes or excludes humanity" ("The Full Thoreau" 48). In *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Marx specifically expresses a resolution for the dichotomy between the technological and natural worlds in *Moby-Dick*, proposing that Melville queries whether it is "possible to mediate the claims of our collective, institutional life and the claims of nature" (285). In Marx's argument such mediation occurs as Ishmael

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matures. Although the strength of his analysis regarding the authority of Melville's machine imagery may weigh against his interpretation, Marx maintains that Ishmael, long after his journey with the *Pequod*, discovers an appropriate fusion of human artifice within a natural setting in Chapter 102, "A Bower in the Arsacides." In a complex symbol, Melville relates a whale's skeleton, "woven over with . . . vines; every month assuming greener, fresher verdure . . . Life folded Death; Death trellised Life" (450) to a loom in a textile factory; Marx believes, "It is a bold conceit, this green factory inside the whale– . . . Ishmael deliberately making his way to the center of primal nature only to find, when he arrives a premonitory sign of industrial power. Art and nature are inextricably tangled at the center" (312).

Marx might have strengthened his position by noting that Melville also simultaneously compares whales to natural forms and to human technological inventions in several instances. Right whales, for example, are compared to great boulders and their eating to scything, and in *Moby-Dick*'s three climactic chapters, the white whale is compared to a diversity of natural beings—Virginia's Natural Bridge, tornadoes, a glacier, a cat, a weasel, as well as to the Eddystone Lighthouse and a locomotive. These technological metaphors locate whales in a human context and on land, with the description of the right whales evoking a particularly pastoral setting: "As morning mowers, who side by side slowly and seethingly advance their scythes through the long wet grass of marshy meads; even so these monsters swam, making a strange, grassy, cutting sound; and leaving behind them endless swaths of blue upon the yellow sea" (272). Through such images which extend the relationship between humanity and nature to bring technology and nature together, Melville expresses a dynamic environmental vision. While he protests the excessive and gratuitous waste of nature through human greed and abuse of technology, Melville's compound images of monster whales also invoke Donna Haraway's cyborgs. "Cybernetic . . . systems which embrace organic and technological components," cyborgs, she argues, are hybrid and "boundary creatures . . . [They are] literally, *monsters*, a word that shares more than its root with the word, to *demonstrate*. Monsters signify" (2). In Haraway's terms, "a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines" (154).

From F. O. Matthiessen's 1941 reading of *Moby-Dick* in *The American Renaissance* to Christopher Sten's 1996 reading in *Sounding the Whale: Moby-Dick as Epic Novel*, with few exceptions, criticism of the novel has contrasted Ishmael's multi-nuanced response to all whales with Ahab's monomaniacal response to the white whale. This dominant critical interpretation provides the basis for establishing Ishmael as a proto-en-

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vironmentalist, one who, according to Zoellner, "never . . . sees either the whale or the world as *antagonist*. He is part of the world, at one with it, and so cannot conceive of it as adversary" (266). Haraway's monster, like Melville's provocative, compound images of Moby Dick, also assists us in erasing the dualism between nature and culture. It moves us toward the elimination of a facile romantic unity with nature. It moves us toward the elimination of nature as abstract other—whether as divinity, as voraciousness, or as endlessly exploitable object. It allows us to entertain the possibility, as does Ishmael from the very beginning of *Moby-Dick*, that one may be "on friendly terms with all the inmates of the place one lodges in" (7).

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