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Hermeneutics and Melville
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ARTICLES

ROUNDTABLES

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Editor's Introduction: Melville and Interpretation

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Why dedicate a special issue of *Analectica Hermeneutica* to Herman Melville (1819-1891), American novelist and poet? What do works such as *Moby-Dick* (1851), *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (1856), *Benito Cereno* (1856), or *The Confidence-Man* (1857) have to do with the concerns of hermeneutical philosophy? Melville's literary corpus has not only presented an object of interpretation in the approximately 130 years since the author's death; Melville's texts themselves often make the very process of interpretation a major driver of narrative. In *Benito Cereno*, Melville at one point expresses figuratively Amasa Delano's failure properly to interpret almost anything within the scene aboard the *San Dominick* in a literal knot no one can untie—and which therefore one sailor tosses overboard. Much of the action of *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (1856) proceeds from the title character's refusal simply to read a legal document (and in a novella that addresses directly the second-person "reader" with frequency, Bartleby himself becomes a "cipher" whose meaning frustrates the first-person narrator long before the story ends in revelation of Bartleby's prior employment at a dead-letter office: a facility for messages that are never received let alone understood). And at one juncture of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael dilates the problem of reading the features and expressions of human faces to the prospect of discerning meaning in the white whale itself:

> Champollion deciphered the wrinkled granite hieroglyphics. But there is no Champollion to decipher the Egypt of every man's and every being's face. Physiognomy, like every other human science, is but a passing fable. If then, Sir William Jones, who read in thirty languages, could not read the simplest peasant's face in its profounder and more subtle meanings, how may unlettered Ishmael hope to read the awful Chaldee of the Sperm Whale's brow? I but put that brow before you. Read it if you can.

Clearly Melville raises questions that concern deeply the same issues that preoccupy Hans-Georg Gadamer and his students, questions that energize the study of hermeneutics. More specifically than that—a point that connects many of the contributors' works that comprise this special issue of *Analectica Hermeneutica*—both Gadamer and Melville seem to have fixated upon interpretation as a fundamentally social act, an undertaking that affirms human community and connectedness. Just as often as Melville draws our attention to scenes of interpretation, as in the several examples above, he frequently expresses his powerful conviction that the decoding of the world occurs within the horizon of intersubjectivity, relationality. In *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (1852) he insists that "We cannot live only for ourselves," since "A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men; and along these fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects."[1] At first glance Melville's formulation might not seem so distinct from Emerson's notion, about ten years earlier in "Compensation" (1841) that "The world looks like a multiplication-table or mathematical equation, which, turn it how you will, balances itself," since "Every secret is told, every crime punished, every virtue rewarded, every wrong redressed, in silence and certainty"[2]; but even more specifically than Emerson Melville so often addresses the possibility that what sustains these retributive, incipient "fibers" of connection is the cause of interpretation and understanding. Like Gadamer, who insists in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* that "Being that can be understood is language," and that "Thus, understanding is not the mere action of one subject, but the interaction of several subjects," Melville is drawn to moments of shared understanding—but also, just as often, scenes of catastrophic interpretive failure.[3] Remember what may be the most gutting sequence in all of Melville, where Ahab confronts Starbuck—who has "come here to hunt whales, not my captain's vengeance" or so he exclaims in response to Ahab's appeal to the men that they now dedicate themselves and the *Pequod* to hunting not whales but the white whale—by goading him and by implication all the crew to "strike through the mask" of Nature.[4]

It's a ruse, or perhaps it's more accurate to call it a choice of emphasis, pitched to stoke such grievance in the crew, such false recognition and misidentification, as to

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[1] Footnote *Pierre*.
[2] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo* Emerson, eds. Robert Spiller, et al. 10 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1971-2013), 2: 60.
[3] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans. And ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley: U of California P, 1976), 31.
[4] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or, the Whale*. 1851. (New York: Modern Library, 1926), 162.

incite them to self-destruction. When the men of the *Pequod* acquiesce—agreeing to connect en masse with Ahab's death drive—Ishmael admits (perhaps from the vantage of present-tense survivor's guilt) that he too raised his voice with the rest to enjoin what he later calls "our horrible oath."[5] The white whale *means something to all of them*, Ahab insists, even as he also forwards an "inscrutable thing" as the object of his "hate," and therefore necessarily the hated object of them all. Ishmael's shame as he recollects this turning-point of the novel, this scene of mass-interpellation that occurs on the quarter-deck, is not simply the shame of having voted for death. Not simply shame, but despair; for what Ishmael attempts to exorcise as he confesses to having raised his voice with the rest is his despondent understanding that what drives that catastrophic decision to go with Ahab rather than Starbuck is, indeed, precisely, community.

Part of what makes Ahab so resonant today has to do with what should make Gadamer so germane as well: a statement included in *Truth and Method* to the effect that "The essence of the *question* is to open up possibilities and keep them open."[6] The opening up of semiotic possibility is the opposite of what occurs in the quarter-deck chapter, but it is precisely what penetrates Ahab's regime of semiotic closure at other moments. One contributor to this special issue, Alexander Crist, writes that "Openness [. . .] has to do with being open to the possibility of transformation and of being wrong about a particular subject matter." Openness in a Gadamerian sense involves a proliferation rather than contraction of interpretive possibility, a proliferation we see in the chapter on "The Doubloon," where suddenly the gold piece that had once arrested the crew's collective capacity to resist Ahab—so ringingly did its signification of Ahab's mission and message then seem—now appears so rich with varieties of meaning. If Melville sides with any of the crew's diverse and often conflicting readings of the doubloon in this chapter, perhaps it is that of Pip, who notes, simply, "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look."[7]

Pip's commentary at this moment is not only key for the implicit democracy of its vision—not simply for the fact that in a democracy, just as on board the *Pequod* and its crew "federated along one keel," all have a capacity not only to look but to hazard one's own reading. The "we" and "they" who look and make meaning are like the generalized other of George Herbert Mead, or the Big Other of Jacques Lacan, both of which signify the abiding notion of something akin to a total community of speakers—all of us, all invested in the prospect of signification itself and all of whose

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[5] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 414.
[6] Gadamer, *Truth and Method.* 1975. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury 2013), 310.
[7] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 432.

belief therefore is affirmed in every possible utterance. I think this is something like what Crist gets at as he explains that "Hermeneutic trust is a trust in language or linguisticality. It is a trust in the very condition for the possibility of interpretation and understanding to occur at all."[8] Which is to say that when I, you, she, he, we, ye, or they cease looking—cease hazarding one's own idiosyncratic view of sense in the way *Moby-Dick* repeatedly invites us and which Ahab attempts to suspend on the quarter-deck—the possibility of linguistic meaning itself collapses, at least temporarily.

Cornel West has referred to Ahab as a "gangster," an epithet he has also applied to President Trump.[9] Perhaps if the two figures share something, even beyond the apparent similarities that may appear as Ahab throws a rally on the deck of the *Pequod* to convince each of the crew, over the rational objections of his first mate, to join him in striking at the sun itself ("Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me"[10])—a tactic that precludes Make America Great Again in its group psychology if not in its poetry—it is in the capacity of each figure to shut down the process of individual meaning-making. In each scene of conscription, it's really only one person who looks. And I am struck by the contrast between such an asymmetrical economy of meaning-making and the process that has resulted in this special issue. When many months ago I conceived this issue of *Analectica Hermeneutica* in partnership with Professor Ramsey Eric Ramsey, the journal's regular editor, I had a certain general idea of what it might mean to take up that subject of Melville and interpretation through the lens of hermeneutic philosophy; but over the course of taking in the essays that follow this Introduction, my own sense for the scope of the issue shifted entirely. Which obviously is a crucial part of Gadamer's worldview concerning meaning, interpretation, and us, and Melville's too.

The first section of this issue is comprised of four essays, each of which attaches to some aspect of Melville and interpretation. The first, by Ashley Barnes, breaks new ground in addressing a particular aspect of the history of Melvillean interpretation: the Melville revival of the 1920s and its engagement with spiritualism and its "quasi-religious" receptivity to the dead, including dead authors. Following this is Alexander Crist, who approaches Meville's *The Confidence-Man* through the lens of Gadamerian hermeneutics in order to map out the confluences and divergences of

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[8] Alexander Crist, "Hermeneutic Virtue and Moral Masquerading: Gadamer and the Question of Solidarity in Melville's *The Confidence-Man*, *Analectica Hermeneutica* 16 (2024): 7.
[9] On Ahab as a gangster, see for example "Radio Open Source" podcast of 20 August, 2020: https://radioopensource.org/moby-dick-in-2020/. On Trump as a gangster, see for example "This is what Neo-Fascism Looks Like," *Democracy Now* 1 December 2016: https://www.democracynow.org/2016/12/1/cornel_west_on_donald_trump_this.
[10] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 162.

these two thinkers as they consider the mutual dependencies of meaning and sociality. Continuing the exchange concerning Melville and Gadamer, Lisa Watrous maps out the interstices of *Dasein*, connectivity, and the impasses of interpretation in the human connections that sustain *Moby-Dick*, especially the connection of Queequeg and Ishmael. After these two experiments in Gadamerian reading, Thomas Dutoit offers a reading of Melville's posthumously-published *Weeds and Wilding, chiefly, With a Rose or Two* rooted in the interpretive practices of one of Gadamer's great critics, Jacques Derrida. Finally, Andreea Norica Bălan follows with an essay that traces further the Gadamerian echoes that reverberate through Melville's narrative art—this time, *Moby-Dick,* which for Bălan condenses a consideration of "radical finitude" in the figure of Pip, the child of the *Pequod* whose transformation to "oceanic" subjectivity presents us with an illustration for how "hermeneutical events change one's being in the world and one's connection with others."

We follow this collection of essays with an interview conducted by Alenka Koželj with the Slovenian translator Jernej Županič, who discusses with Koželj Melville's reception in Slovenia, a country whose "maritime vocabulary is very limited," and where Melville's magnum opus has been "strangely absent from Slovenian cultural consciousness."

Finally, we are pleased to close this issue with a roundtable formed of contributions by Vítor Alves, Carlos Tapia Martín, William Homestead, and Christopher Yeomans, an exchange that ranges between such various subjects as contemporary architecture undertaken in response to *Moby-Dick*; Kantian ethics in and about Melville; othering; and Melville as an author of speciality. Very lastly, I could not be more delighted to end this issue with a verse response to "The Monkey-Rope" by *Analectica Hermeneutica*'s regular editor, my friend and colleague Ramsey Eric Ramsey.

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The Life Is the Work: Melville's Revival and the Birth of American Literary Studies

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Abstract

This essay argues that the resurrection of Herman Melville as a literary genius in the 1920s helped achieve a key goal for American literary studies, namely the institutionalization of a style of labor hitherto seen as no labor at all: a quasi-religious receptivity that I see as most significantly popularized at that time in US culture by Spiritualist mediums. The biographers who launched the Melville Revival helped to establish the value of a labor aesthetic I call "willful passivity," a working style that later New Critics would codify into a professional methodology. Recovering the labor of mediumship as a source for our disciplinary standards is not an exposure of a bankrupt opportunism. Rather, I wager that this occult genealogy could help today's literary scholars justify our own labor on the texts of any dead author. When we understand Spiritualist practice as a core antecedent for literary scholarship, we find new authorization for not only discovering (in the authors we teach and study) but modeling (in our own teaching and scholarship) a form of non-instrumental, potentially death-defying, creativity.

Keywords: Herman Melville, biography, literary criticism, crisis in the humanities, American literature, Spiritualism, immortality

In 1919, on the hundredth anniversary of Herman Melville's birth, Raymond Weaver published an essay in *The Nation* praising the author.[1] At that time, Melville had been largely forgotten in the US. His career as the popular author of seafaring adventures had gone astray with *Moby-Dick* (1851) and then definitively halted with *Pierre* (1852). In the American literature anthologies published around the turn of the century, Melville was scarcely represented. If Weaver wanted to rehabilitate Melville's reputation, he would need to convince everyone they had read him wrong. Weaver took on that task in earnest, after the initial magazine piece, by writing a biography that constructed a Melville whose life matched the gravity and achievement of his work. Over the next two decades, Weaver arranged the republication of many of Melville's texts that had gone out of print. Weaver—with Lewis Mumford, who published his version of Melville's life in 1929, and other critics in between—helped launch what came to be known as the Melville Revival. That revival installed Melville as perhaps the single most important justification for studying American authors at the college level. The Melville Revival, I will argue, amounts to a collective séance that won the scholars of American literature a legitimate place in the research university.

Melville's life was made a proof-text for the value of Melville's work, and—just as importantly—for the value of the interpretive labor of the critic who revived Melville. Melville's resurrection helped achieve a key goal for American literary studies, namely the institutionalization of a style of labor hitherto seen as no labor at all: a quasi-religious receptivity that I see as most significantly popularized at that time in US culture by Spiritualist mediums. What I call willful passivity could be understood as a translation of Keats's negative capability into a white-collar job description. I would frame it, too, as a transfer to the critic of those mediumistic qualities that T. S. Eliot in 1919 applied to the ideal poet, whose susceptibility to the dead kept alive the European literary tradition. The "mind of the mature poet," Eliot says, is "a finely perfected medium," a "catalyst," "inert, neutral, and unchanged" by the "numberless feelings, phrases, [and] images" that it gathers from the past and transmutes into a new poem.[2] As both a poet and a critic himself, Eliot made it easy to confound both authorship and literary criticism with the labor of mediumship. But to professionalize the labor of inert catalysis required demonstrating that the scholar's version of that labor was valuable and the medium's was not.

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[1] Raymond Weaver, "The Centennial of Herman Melville," *The Nation* vol. 109 iss. 2822 (2 August 1919), 145-146.

[2] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," reprinted in Frank Kermode, ed., *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, centenary edition (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1975), 40-41.

However much we may now think Spiritualists were unserious, they posed a serious challenge to a nascent literary profession. Spiritualist practices vied with the humanities disciplines in their promises to cultivate Americans' mental powers and to replace Protestantism's waning cultural authority in the later nineteenth century and onward. Spiritualists assured the public that virtually everyone had the intuitive power to communicate with the dead and only required training to develop their skills. David Walker sees Spiritualists as experimenting with the question of what we can know about immortality: mediums "invited discussion of what it might look like if communication [with the dead] were achieved, what it might look like if communication were faked, and what might be the social significances of connecting with unseen knowledge."[3] Daniel Cottom makes the point that Spiritualism as a movement contended with America's "system of education and its other institutions" for authority to weigh "the very organization of meaning in modern life."[4] Thus Ann Douglas can read Melville's "The Apple-Tree Table," a tale that pits Spiritualist girls against their realist father in the task of diagnosing an evidently haunted table, as a parable of the fight to control "the content and form of American culture."[5] If Spiritualism claimed to make the immortal power of human language accessible to all, literary scholars sought sole power to judge whose language actually had immortal power. And if, as Cottom argues, Spiritualist mediums made communication with the dead look too easy, literary scholars had a motive to present their work as much harder, even if it looked like just sitting and thinking. Melville's ghost helped to validate that claim to hard labor.

None of this is to say that Melville's work was not worth resurrecting. I am grateful to Weaver and Mumford and all the revivalists for making their case. My goal is not to diminish the work of my disciplinary forebears by comparing their work to parlor tricks. It is rather to argue that those parlor tricks testified to genuine aspirations that were worth professionalizing. Literary scholars, like occult practitioners, competed for the authority to access undying truths. Taking Melville's biographers as case studies in that competition contributes to our account of what Mimi Winick has called "the enchanted humanities."[6] It participates in a recovery of the cross-talk between modernizing scholars and the progressive-minded occultists they frequently

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[3] David Walker, "The Humbug in American Religion: Ritual Theories of Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism," *Religion and American Culture* 23.1 (2013), 37.

[4] Daniel Cottom, *The Abyss of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 32.

[5] See Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 118. Noted in Sword 7.

[6] Mimi Winick, "Scholarly Enchantment," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 73.2 (2018): 187-226.

consulted with. My account here builds on the work of scholars like Jason Josephson-Storm, Helen Sword, and Simon During, who show how occult practices influenced the emergence of the modern humanities in general and the agenda of literary modernism in particular (both by embrace and disavowal).[7]

This alternate genealogy can help literary scholars see how our professional profile developed as the practice of judging whose voices are worth channeling. Recovering the labor of mediumship as a source for our disciplinary standards could help us justify our own labor, not just the work we do on Melville's texts but on those of any dead author. Moreover, this disciplinary history focuses our attention on a labor ideal that is more foundational than the familiar surface-versus-depth or critique-versus-postcritique conflicts. Bringing back Melville from the dead was a way to exemplify good work: powerfully creative in its output yet compellingly passive in its openness to sources and payoffs beyond the worldly economy. When we understand Spiritualist practice as a core antecedent for literary scholarship, we find new authorization for not only discovering (in the authors we teach and study) but modeling (in our own teaching and scholarship) a form of non-instrumental, death-defying generativity. The founding disciplinary labor ideal of willful passivity is worth recalling in a moment when the professional standing of literary scholars is fragile. It offers a hopeful source of resistance from within the neoliberal university.[8]

By creating Melville as a model for and mirror of their own work, Weaver and Mumford helped define literary labor for the emergent discipline of American literature studies. They accomplished that goal not so much, as Paul Lauter would later argue, by turning Melville into a manly cosmopolite who flattered intellectuals' pretensions, but by constructing Melville as an artist who demonstrated the virtues of willful passivity. That is one case I hope to make in what follows. The related argument I pursue below is that the Melville Revival was necessary to ground the professional claims of New Criticism, a program still nascent in the 1920s, even though New Critics explicitly disavowed the biographical work that Weaver and Mumford made the basis for their claims to the value of American literature. Ultimately, I argue, the biographical readings of the Melvilleans and the anti-biographical principles of New Criticism

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[7] See Jason Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell UP, 2002); Simon During, *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (Harvard UP, 2002).

[8] See, for starters, Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015) and Christopher Newfield, *The Great Mistake: How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix Them* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016). For more on the neoliberal university, the "Criticism, Ltd." season of Matt Seybold's *American Vandal* podcast offers a valuable and wide-ranging series of dialogues.

merge in their professional aspirations. Those aspirations have less to do with interpretive method than with the claim to a paradoxical style of labor, willful passivity, that is quietly strenuous. New Critics found their own model and mirror for willful passivity in great poems, not in the greatness of the poems' authors. But Weaver and Mumford recreated Melville's life as a great poem. In this way the text, its author, and the scholar who wrote about them could all claim the special labor of willful passivity.

The Biographer (and the Poet, and the Critic) as Medium

The biographical appetite for Melville, once whetted by Weaver and Mumford, has never been sated. The urge to bring Melville back, to evaluate the genius that went unappreciated in life, has produced a swath of biographical studies. These range from the day-by-day archival gathering of Jay Leyda's *Melville's Log* (1951) to the ideological critique of Michael Rogin (1985) to Nicholas Delbanco's creative nonfictional account (2005). We have biographies of the biographers: Clare Spark's 700-plus-page account of the players in the Melville Revival (*Hunting Captain Ahab*, 2001) and Aaron Sachs's study of Mumford's study of Melville, *Up from the Depths* (2022). Hershel Parker's heretofore standard two-volume biography (1996, 2002), each volume over 900 pages, is currently being rivaled by John Bryant's "fluid-text" reading of Melville, the first two (of a projected five) volumes of which take us up only to the end of Melville's seafaring years before he began to write.[9] It is not only that the significance of Melville's works continues to be debated, but that his personality continues to be kept alive. Melville haunts American literary studies with an unrivaled tenacity.

It is not difficult to see the work of literary biography and of Spiritualist mediumship as two competing ways of making the past present. Both biographer and medium are tasked with making a dead person's voice audible. Weaver's biography of Melville devotes pages at a time to reprinting extracts from letters and journals. Weaver also projects himself into Melville's senses, imagining the author sniffing the "same starched calico smell" in "his sisters' dresses" when he returns to upstate New York after three years at sea.[10] Mumford occasionally tries to write like Melville, paraphrasing Melville's entire London travel diary. He mixes his own voice promiscuously with Melville's: "Since I have drawn freely on Melville's own words whenever they were

[9] See Laura Dassow Walls, review of *Herman Melville: A Half-Known Life Vol. I: Eternal Ifs: Infant, Boy, and Man (1819-1840) Vol. II: Melville at Sea (1840-1846)* by John Bryant, *Leviathan* 24.2 (2022): 93-101.
[10] Weaver, *Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic* (2023 Bibliotech Press reprint of the 1921 edition, published by George Doran & Company, New York), 160.

available, frequently without quotation marks, the voice that will accompany [readers] . . . will often be that of Herman Melville."[11] Both Weaver and Mumford identify with what they see as Melville's politics. They adopt his opinions and use his authority to offer their own tirades against American imperialism and capitalism, taking on a political stance that can tip toward the reactionary (Mumford expresses some regret that the agrarian south was conquered by an industrial north, a view that would be shared by the American New Critics) or toward the progressive (neither biographer approves of American empire or capitalist excess).

No doubt Melville taught his later critics to think of his artistry as connected to an afterlife. Melville's famed review of Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse* begins with a reflection on how great men, Jesus for example, are misrecognized in life and knowable only after death through their written traces. Weaver accordingly paints Melville as a misfit who "sinned blackly against the orthodoxy of his time" and who, like other "poets, prophets, and saints," was "venerated more by posterity than by [his] neighbors" (10). In other words, Melville, like Jesus, is more alive for his later disciples than for the obtuse contemporaries he walked among. Melville's disciples competed for the most accurate insight into their leader's life. When Weaver portrayed Melville's last forty years as a "long quietus," Mumford objected. When Mumford diagnosed Melville's repressions, the poet Archibald MacLeish wondered if Mumford would "care to face Melville himself" with such armchair psychology.[12] British writer H. M. Tomlinson likewise feared rebuke from a ghostly Melville. In a preface for a new edition of *Pierre*, the semi-autobiographical novel that followed *Moby-Dick*, Tomlinson admits his fear that "the misty form of Melville" might mock Tomlinson's literary-critical efforts with a "spectral hoot."[13] This is no idle fancy, Tomlinson proposes, since Melville's ghost may be "of greater importance and potency than most of the living men we know."[14] This dread of facing down a resurrected Melville was not weak-minded superstition, as these Melvilleans saw it, but proof of the critic's proper estimate of his subject. A critic who could channel Melville's power could make a legitimate claim to know what counted in American culture.

To claim that authority required asserting the literary scholar's willful passivity as superior to the inert channeling performed by a medium. Spiritualist mediumship was, like literary scholarship, a writing job. And of course, it was nothing new to

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[11] Mumford, *Herman Melville: A Study of His Life and Vision*, revised edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), xiv.
[12] MacLeish, "A New Life of Melville," *The Bookman* 69.2 (April 1929), 184.
[13] Tomlinson, Preface to Herman Melville, *Pierre* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1929), ix.
[14] Tomlinson, ix.

envision a writer as a vessel possessed by otherworldly forces.[15] But the competition between Spiritualism and literary interpretation that played out across the decades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced a peculiar set of overlaps. Dead authors kept producing: in the nineteenth century, after his death, Poe continued to publish (putatively) through the mediumship of his friend Sarah Helen Whitman;[16] in the early twentieth, Oscar Wilde's reflections from the afterlife were recorded in a Spiritualist newspaper.[17] Other writers, still living, promoted Spiritualist practice, most notably and energetically Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Some practitioners made a living by writing answers from the dead in response to letters from the living; many built their reputations on channeling specific figures, whether long-dead (from Shakespeare to indigenous leaders) or recently deceased (from newspaper moguls to your own mother). One prominent Spiritualist, calling himself a "humble amanuensis," described his "mind [as] . . . an instrument which vibrates to the thought atmosphere, and is possessed of a selective power, responding most clearly at different times to thoughts (I should say to 'thought waves') of different character."[18] Like a poet possessed by the muse, or a scholar rapt by his subject, for the medium, "there is always a state of intense absorption or concentration, out of which I have no assistance."[19]

Those are the words of a male medium. But more often the job was identified with women. Spiritualist publications typically conveyed communications from dead (usually male) authors whose spirits possessed living (usually female) mediums. Women mediums often buttressed their published spirit communications with all the appurtenances of scholarly books: "introductions" by male authorities, "footnotes, appendixes, illustrations," citations and "jargon."[20] Spiritualism thus enabled aspiring professional women to claim the meaning-making power of men "by deploying traditionally 'feminine' behavioral traits such as passivity, receptivity, and insensibility

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[15] As glossed by Susan Stewart, Plato envisioned the poet as fundamentally irresponsible, "possessed by an unfathomable and external agency" and producing work that could lead to civic mischief. See Stewart, "Lyric Possession," *Critical Inquiry* 22.1 (1995), 38.

[16] See Eliza Richards's chapter titled "Sarah Helen Whitman, Spiritualist Poetics, and the 'Phantom Voice' of Poe" in her book *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[17] "The Strange Case of Oscar Wilde: A Problem of Personality" in *Light: A Journal of Spiritual Progress & Psychical Research*, 22 March 1924, archived in the Harry Houdini Papers at the Harry Ransom Center, Austin TX.

[18] Hudson Tuttle, *Mediumship and Its Laws: Its Conditions and Cultivation* (Chicago: Progressive Thinker Publishing House, 1900), 2-3. Accessed on Hathi Trust.

[19] Tuttle, 2.

[20] Sword, 22.

in the service of intellectual commodities typically coded as male, for example, knowledge, productivity, and reason."[21] Preventing those behavioral traits from emasculating their intellectual output gave literary scholars a reason to claim their labor as more willful than the involuntary work of a medium controlled from beyond, even if both aimed to prove the transcendent possibilities of human language.

Hence the scholar, as aspiring professional, took care to distance himself from any actual medium. This was an acute need for those who wished to make American literature the subject of university study. In the 1920s American literature was seen as less worthy than, say, Shakespeare's plays; it was taught largely in classes aimed at women and Black students who were expected to become future schoolteachers.[22] The mission to elevate literary criticism as the disciplinary norm aligned other forms of literary scholarship, namely oratory and rhetoric, with schoolmarms and superstition. In a 1910 lecture, Columbia University's Joel Spingarn dismissed the "old terms of classical rhetoric" as so many "signs of the zodiac, magical incantations, astrological formulae," terms suggestive to Spingarn of "the drone and singsong of many school-mistresses."[23] His targets included generalists and humanists teaching literature in the university, some of whom were all too happy to see their labor as that of mediumship. Hiram Corson, who taught at Cornell from 1870 to 1903, regarded literary studies not as "a knowledge subject" but as the task of voicing-up dead poets.[24] Corson, who later embraced Spiritualism, advocated a version of the literature professor as orator.[25] Literature was timeless; the professor's task, as Corson saw it, was not to research a text to death but to read it out loud into life.

Corson's view would be superseded; literary scholars' professional aspirations could not be grounded on channeling voices. They needed a value-added claim for their own expert labor. But they would not totally banish the occult. Spingarn, who saw poet and critic as each "instinct with the same vital life," described the critical laborer as entering a rare and mystical state of oneness.[26] The critic's, like the poet's, work requires "subduing the mind to [a] transcendental system": that is the only route

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[21] Sword, 3.

[22] Elizabeth Renker, *The Origins of American Literature Studies: An Institutional History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8-9.

[23] Spingarn, *The New Criticism: A Lecture Delivered at Columbia University, March 9, 1910* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911), 25, 26. Accessed on archive.org.

[24] Corson, quoted in Michael Warner, "Professionalization and the Rewards of Literature: 1875-1900," *Criticism* 27.1 (1985), 8.

[25] For an overview of Corson's career, see Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 47-49.

[26] Spingarn, 35.

past "mere reflection" and "intellectual curiosity," those latter terms designating bad, insufficiently reverent, approaches to language and literature.[27] Spingarn leaves his nascent discipline's professional success in the hands of the deities. "[T]he gods are kind," he writes, "if they give up their secret in another work of art, the art of Criticism, that serves as some sort of mirror to the art of Literature, only because in their flashes of insight taste and genius are one."[28] Mirroring was the key mechanism by which the willful passivity that elevated a poet's work could also dignify the critic who sought a professional home in the university.

Juxtaposed with this ideal of submissive receptivity were images of the author as laborer—images that emerged in full force in the late-nineteenth-century decades when copyright laws were being fought for. The push to get such laws in place (finally passed in 1891, the year of Melville's death) prompted encomia to the heroic labor of authorship. Henry Van Dyke, lobbying from his pulpit against "The National Sin of Literary Piracy" in 1888, proposed an image of the author as a working man whose intellectual property was stolen. While "disembodied ideas are no man's property," Van Dyke admits, "the embodied ideas, which have been brought into shape and order by the lonely worker in the sweat of his brain, are his own"—and the writer was not languidly awaiting his muse, but was practicing a "toil which is more arduous and exhausting, toil which requires more patience and self-denial, toil which costs a larger outlay of time and money to prepare for it, and a greater wear and tear of vital tissue to execute it, than perhaps any other kind of labor."[29] If we pay a farmer for the wheat he harvests or acknowledge a sculpture as the work of the hands that carved it, so we must accord ownership to the writer who wrote the text.

Van Dyke's commonsense picture of payment for services rendered had its limits, though, for scholars who increasingly resisted the measures of a commercial economy, for their own work and for the works they studied. If money was not an object, then passivity could be construed not as surrender but as a refusal to serve mammon. As John Crowe Ransom would later put it, in a manifesto for the New Critics' professional legitimacy, the poem "is an artistic object, with a heroic human labor behind it," but it is shielded from instrumentalization—as most labor output is not—by its "tissue of irrelevance."[30] The anti-market theory of literary value, whereby

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[27] Spingarn, 35.
[28] Spingarn, 35.
[29] Van Dyke, *The National Sin of Literary Piracy: A Sermon Preached by Henry Van Dyke* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1888), 12. For more context, see Claudia Stokes, *Writers in Retrospect* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), chapter 3.
[30] Ransom, "Criticism, Inc.," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 13.4 (1937), 596, 602.

the most authentic labor was least compensated, matched the logic by which mediums' urge to make money was commonly taken to prove their work fraudulent. Ransom's valorization of irrelevance as a shield against commodification was, of course, well-precedented. Melville's first biographers were already arguing the value of Melville's labor by its failure to be compensated by the market; Hawthorne's famed complaint about scribbling women was also a judgment on the bad labor—a mindless churning-out of product—seen as most rewarded by the public. It was easy, on this view, to give the world what it wanted. The hardest work was knowable by its meeting the least reward.

The Author's Labor: Melville as a Case Study in Willful Passivity

The sweaty wearing-out of vital brain tissue did characterize Melville's labor as pictured by Weaver and Mumford. But its strenuousness was also portrayed as exquisitely receptive. Near the start of his biography, Weaver offers an image of Melville's preternatural, if not supernatural, insight. He proposes that Melville has the "second sight" of "poetic imagination," much like William Blake (a favored comparison for Mumford, too).[31] And he offers up a description of Melville's seemingly mesmeric power as recorded by Sophia Hawthorne (Nathaniel's wife). She is, Weaver says, "one of Melville's most penetrating critics."[32] In a long quote from Sophia's account of receiving Melville as a guest at the Hawthornes' home in the Berkshires, we read that:

> [Melville] has very keen perceptive power; but what astonishes me is, that his eyes are not large and deep. He seems to see everything very accurately . . . Once in a while, his animation gives place to a singularly quiet expression, out of these eyes to which I have objected; an indrawn, dim look, but which at the same time makes you feel that he is at that moment taking deepest note of what is before him. It is a strange, lazy glance, but with a power in it quite unique. It does not seem to penetrate through you, but to take you into itself.[33]

What looks quiet, indrawn, strange, and lazy is actually powerfully penetrative; it conquers you, pulling you in. Weaver elaborates on Sophia's spooky Melville,

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[31] Weaver, *Herman Melville*, 4.
[32] Weaver, 7.
[33] Quoted in Weaver, 6.

portraying him as a mad genius, seen by his terminally bland countrymen as the victim of "demoniac possession"—a verdict that Weaver celebrates, noting that "In ancient and medieval times, of course, madness, when not abhorred . . . was revered as a holy and mysterious visitation."[34] As with a medium, the power operative in Melville comes upon him from realms beyond. Weaver seems to regret that Melville was sentenced to death not by a spectacular "public crucifixion" (as a more primitive society would have had it) but by the slow obscure grind of an office job in Manhattan (his twenty years' stint at the Customs House). "[C]arelessly to let live may be more cruel than officiously to cause to die," Weaver concludes, and it is a stated aim of his biography to see that Melville's life story ends where it should: with the publication of *Moby-Dick*.[35] That novel, by quashing the public appetite for Melville's labor, proved the value of his labor by showing its freedom from the market.

For his part, Mumford describes Melville's labor on *Moby-Dick* as a concentrated stillness, but indisputably masculine. Writing is a desk job, but it is the labor by which Melville plumbs an inner volcano and returns with fire and lava and ashes.[36] "[S]o many hours of writing and reading, are as exhausting as the direction of a battle," only without the chance of "lying up in winter quarters" or the "delegation of responsibility."[37] Mumford tells us that Melville begins "writing out of his health and ecstasy," and over several pages he imagines Melville composing *Moby-Dick* as the seasons pass on Melville's farmstead at Arrowhead.

> Spring comes; but it is no spring for Melville. He will not even be bothered for dinner. Some days he sits at his desk till 4:30 without writing a word; in the spring twilight, when the catkins of the maples glow in the mild sunset and the bluebirds dart about the field like unfettered flowers, he at last comes out and creeps about like an owl . . . In the midst of his writing, his soul reaches a pitch of exaltation, as it does defiantly in a terrible gale, when the hand is firmly on the wheel, and the dangerous seas that wash the decks do not loosen the hold: the letters that he writes to Hawthorne then are prophetic, and deep, and full of proud mastery. In building up his vast symbol of the whale, he strips the universe down to his own ego; like Ahab himself, he says no to all the powers and dominions that lie beyond it.[38]

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[34] Weaver, 3.
[35] Weaver, 3.
[36] Mumford, *Herman Melville*, 193.
[37] Mumford, 102.
[38] Mumford, 102-103.

As magnificent as this nay-saying sounds, Mumford will later propose that Melville's real achievement lies in the future, on the decline from such heights of mastery. Melville's greatness ripens in his late-in-life reconciliation to what Mumford calls the tragic vision of life (more on that below).

Weaver's biography ends abruptly, appropriately for his thesis that Melville outlived himself. But it opens with a magnificent vision of life everlasting. Weaver concludes his opening chapter with a long section borrowed from Melville fan and novelist-of-the-sea, John Masefield. He adapts from Masefield's fiction a heavenly vision shared by an old sailor who pictures a day when Moby-Dick joins all the whales to pull Jesus and the apostles and all the dead sailors on all their sunken ships into the western horizon, singing as they go. This opening vision of a sailors' resurrection is the most exalted moment in Weaver's life of Melville. It offers a fantastically hopeful image that seems designed to pre-empt the petering-out of the biography's later chapters. Weaver seems to suggest that the glory that was denied to Melville in his life on earth can only be imagined in his life in heaven.

Weaver's biography is thus embarrassed by Melville's longevity. Weaver proposes that Melville would have done better to die, or at least to quit writing, after publishing *Moby-Dick* (or after publishing *Pierre*, which gives us what Weaver calls Melville's spiritual autobiography). "After *Pierre*," he says, "any further writing from Melville was both an impertinence and an irrelevancy."[39] Weaver declares *The Confidence-Man* a "posthumous work" and says, "[t]he rest, if not silence, was whisper."[40] It is not that Weaver finds Melville's later writing worthless, but that he sees the aging Melville as approaching the immortal company of "infinitely greater souls" known by their non-writing careers. The greatest men never published: Buddha, Socrates, Christ (who "wrote once only, and then in the sand"[41]). Weaver finds support for his judgment in *Pierre*, citing (without considering their possible irony) narrative comments like "When a man is really in a profound mood, then all merely verbal or written profundities are unspeakably repulsive, and seem downright childish to him."[42] Like the protagonist of that novel, Weaver's Melville is a tormented genius. Unlike Pierre, in Weaver's telling, Melville doesn't die young but spends nearly half his life reading Schopenhauer and cultivating his disdain for the fallen world. Had he died at the right time, Melville would emerge as the fully towering genius, the antimodern critic, whose detachment from the scene of decadence would be complete. The book's

[39] Weaver, 221.
[40] Weaver, 224.
[41] Weaver, 221.
[42] Quoted in Weaver, 221.

declaration of Melville's creative death at age 32 makes Melville into the walking dead in his own lifetime,[43] and thus all the more susceptible to being raised again by a biographer thirty years after Melville is buried.

Mumford, as we have seen, disputes Weaver's death sentence, but agrees on the triumph of *Moby-Dick*. And Mumford captures something of the immortality and silence of the great company that Weaver identifies for Melville in describing the paradoxical quietude of Melville's enormous labor on that novel. This paradox comes through in Mumford's account of the book as doing more than we can find words to say that it does. Like all great art, and like The Sermon on the Mount, Mumford says, the force of *Moby-Dick* is not to give answers but to "summon up thoughts and feelings profounder than those to which it gives overt expression . . . In these pages there are colors beyond those of the spectrum, hitherto unrecorded, though often present. These invisible ultraviolet and infra-red lights affect us, penetrating deep tissues, even if they do not register to the human eye."[44] The quality of Melville's labor in all its concentrated vigor transfers into the novel itself, which does a kind of work that does not register as work—the hallmark of willful passivity. That work, a penetration so subtle that we do not even notice it, requires the explicatory labor of the biographer.

As I will explain below, this subtly penetrative labor would align the figure of Melville that was resurrected by these biographies with New Criticism's principles, however much those principles disregarded an author's life. Mumford's appreciation of Melville's art testifies to a willful passivity that presents the calm surface of reconciliation even as its complexity seethes within the completed form. The art is not merely contemplative and transcendent, divorced from human social life. Nor is it slavishly bent on verisimilitude and utilitarian aims. It gives us a way, as Mumford says, to think beyond the ephemeral labors of our lives and to value "that which is 'useless,' the graven image . . . [which] continues to nourish the spirit of man."[45] In this line, praising the artwork's uselessness as a rebuke to the market's non-nutritive production, Mumford has arrived at a statement of the ideal of willful passivity that will be shared by New Critics. Both biographies, especially Mumford's, vivify in Melville's life and work what I am identifying as the foundational standard that New Critics would later insist on for their professional status: the ideal of willful passivity, labor that may look lazy but that penetrates deeply with its infrared radiance. Willful passivity characterized the text, the critic, and—in the hands of the biographers—the author himself.

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[43] Weaver, 217.
[44] Mumford, 132.
[45] Mumford, 129.

The Author as Text, the Biographer as (New) Critic

This is not an obvious case to make. The idea that biographical labor is at odds with the critical labor idealized by New Criticism is longstanding and well-founded. New Critics wanted to displace an earlier mode of literary study that had been much concerned with author's lives, namely the "[s]ource and influence studies" which were "the most common type of article found in *PMLA* at least through 1925."[46] As recently as 2012, the Melville biographer Hershel Parker would fulminate against New Criticism for disregarding biographical research and thereby "dehumaniz[ing]" authors.[47] Parker's ire may seem outdated—historicist methods recaptured literary scholarship from New Critical approaches in the 1980s—but he is certainly right that the New Critics enshrined the text alone as valid data for interpretation. Cleanth Brooks, for instance, cautioned against being "drive[n] . . . back to a study of [a poet's] reading, his conversation, his letters."[48] The co-authors of "The Intentional Fallacy"—the definitive outlawing of textual interpretation through the lens of an author's life—faintly praise "literary biography" as "a legitimate and attractive study in itself."[49] W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley warn against "confusing personal and poetic studies" and chide "the fault of writing the personal as if it were poetic."[50] In the pronouncements of New Criticism, the professional value of literary criticism had nothing to do with channeling dead poets, because the poem itself, if it was good enough, was deathless. But whether it was the work or the worker being judged, the passive-yet-generative style of labor was what counted.

It is not hard to spot violations of the intentional fallacy in Weaver's and Mumford's biographies. Some of these are weak spots that remind us why New Critics warned off biographical interpretation in the first place. Both Weaver and Mumford offer diagnoses of Melville, playing the critic as armchair psychoanalyst, explaining a text as the residue of childhood trauma. Mumford ascribes some of Melville's writing troubles to Melville's sexual troubles: repression is bad for his prose. Weaver is more circumspect. He acknowledges the seductions of psychoanalytic criticism: "*Pierre* is a

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[46] David Shumway, *Creating American Civilization: A Genealogy of American Literature as an Academic Discipline* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 112.

[47] Parker, *Melville Biography: An Inside Narrative* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 171.

[48] Brooks, "Keats's Sylvan Historian," in *The Well-Wrought Urn* (New York: Harvest Books, 1947), 153.

[49] Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (New York: Noonday Press, 1958), 10.

[50] Wimsatt and Beardsley, 10.

book to send a Freudian into ravishment," he warns.[51] And Weaver recognizes that it is easy for any biographer to write up his own story rather than that of his ostensible subject. "Critical biographers," he says, "have contrived a method to hand themselves down to posterity through the gods of literature . . . by taking the heads off their statues, and clapping on their own instead. Criticism is a perennial decapitation."[52] Weaver and Mumford do not put their own heads on Melville. But they do confuse the personal with the poetic, reading Melville's characters as transparent autobiographical avatars. (This is not an unwarranted slip, given that Melville routinely drew on his experience as a sailor to write his fiction.)

Weaver and Mumford certainly mine the kinds of sources that Wimsatt and Beardsley place off-limits (journals, letters, and the like) for clues to what Melville meant in his novels and poems. The documentation they gather is illuminating. But a great deal of their interpretation focuses as chastely as any New Critic would wish on the printed words of Melville's finished texts. Both argue for *Moby-Dick* as a masterpiece on aesthetic, not personal, grounds. In a move that accords with the New Critics' preference for poetry, Mumford makes a point of reading *Moby-Dick* not as a novel so much as a "poetic epic" that "again and again rises to polyphonic verse."[53] Most significantly, Mumford identifies *Moby-Dick*'s supreme achievement as its wholeness. Wholeness or unity is a quality that New Critics would prize as the achievement of paradox, their master trope of great literature.

My claim is that the literary wholeness achieved by paradox is a formal means of manifesting the privileged labor of willful passivity. For Mumford, Melville's novel achieves a paradoxical unity by reconciling the modern split between science and faith, incorporating these antagonistic forces into an "imaginative synthesis" and a "modelled whole."[54] *Moby-Dick* includes not just romantic visions but also modern scientific fact (the natural history of the whale, its life and habits, its role in human industry, etc.): all the elements "that orthodox criticism… regards as extraneous or unimportant."[55] It is Mumford's work as a biographical critic that brings to light how Melville's achievement of paradox had been overlooked.

Mumford also concurs with New Criticism's anti-biographical principles when he declares that only an aesthetically botched work is fair game for biographical diagnosis. Only a work that is incomplete or flawed, like *Pierre*, invites such criticism.

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[51] Weaver, 32.
[52] Weaver, 77.
[53] Mumford, 123.
[54] Mumford, 116.
[55] Mumford, 131.

"If, as a work of art, Pierre was whole, we should have no good reason to suspect Melville's wholeness," says Mumford; "[i]t is the failure of Pierre as literature that draws our attention to Melville's predicament as a man."[56] In other words, a flawed book reveals its author's kindred flaws.

This is a crucial analogy between text and author that helps explain how the biographical image of Melville can bolster the anti-biographical New Critical program. The New Critics repudiated translating a poem by its author's life. But when we speak of an author's life as lacking wholeness, or as achieving wholeness, we treat his life as a work that can be judged like a poem. As Weaver puts it, in a formulation that turns the intentional fallacy on its head: "Melville's complete works, in their final analysis, are a long effort towards the creation of one of the most complex, and massive, and original characters in literature: the character known in life as Herman Melville."[57] If Melville can be made a work of art, then the biographer is as good as any critic.

Both Weaver and Mumford, then, construct a life story that makes Melville a text worthy of New Critical interpretation. Again, we know that for a New Critic like Wimsatt, "the personal interest is not the critical"; he dismisses literary fandom that sighs over "not only . . . the first edition and the holograph, but . . . the lock of hair, the teapot, and the writing desk."[58] Yet Wimsatt will also say:

> a poem is, if it is anything at all, a verbal discourse . . . hence it is a human act, physical and mental. The only "thing" is the poet speaking. To treat this act of thought, feeling, and verbal expression not just in its psychological causes nor in its effects on hearers, nor yet in its abstract logical existence as communicable ideas merely, but precisely as a kind of solid "thing," an objectification of thought and feeling in verbal expression, is a requisite for critical thinking.[59]

Weaver and Mumford each aim to present Melville's life as a solid thing—to treat him as a completed text, and to present and explain that text to their own readers. That move enables the identification of biographer with critic. Mumford, like Weaver, equates the life with the work, and the biographer with the critic, because "Melville's life and work were one. A biography of Melville implies criticism: and no final criticism of his work is possible that does not bring to it an understanding of his personal

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[56] Mumford, 149.
[57] Weaver, 10.
[58] Wimsatt, "History and Poetry," in *The Verbal Icon*, 265, 264.
[59] Wimsatt, "The Chicago Critics," in *The Verbal Icon*, 50.

development."[60] Mumford's greatest affront to New Criticism might be his declaration that "the highest product of art is not a painting, a statue, a book, a pyramid, but a human personality."[61] But insofar as a personality can be rendered a solid verbal expression, in the form of a biography, Mumford shows that it can meet New Critical standards.

In the textualization of Melville's life, we can see how the New Critics' favorite trope, the paradox, serves as the literary emblem of the labor ideal that I am calling willful passivity. In Weaver's and Mumford's hands, Melville's work—Melville's whole life—takes the form of a state of conflicted unity. Each biography builds Melville's life into a paradoxical union of immense vigor and quiet obscurity. Weaver's portrait of Melville's long quietus makes the author himself a parallel to Cleanth Brooks's vision of the Grecian urn as "a 'silent form'" that paradoxically "speaks, not by means of statement, but by 'teasing us out of thought.'"[62] Weaver's Melville does not so much lapse into silence as achieve silence. Mumford develops his picture of the paradoxical Melville by correcting Weaver's write-off of the last four decades of Melville's life. For Mumford, these were years of reconciliation when Melville's power was slowly tempered by love, reaching a balance-point of tragic resignation. As in *Moby-Dick* Melville "achieved . . . that double vision which sees with both eyes—the scientific eye of actuality, and the illumined eye of imagination and dream," so, for Mumford, Melville's own life conjoins the invisible spirit and the body in society, the ideal and the practical.[63] Unlike Weaver, Mumford needs Melville's whole long life to demonstrate that art is "[t]he issue of power and love, knowledge and sympathy, connivance and imagination" and that "Power and Love must work together, harmoniously married . . . before man's triumph is anything but evanescent."[64] Such was, Mumford proposes, Melville's eventual discovery, after being confronted by the pyramids on Melville's trip through the Holy Land in 1856-1857. This discovery sets up the happy ending that Mumford has in mind for Melville's life, namely that near the end Melville will write not only with power, as he did in *Moby-Dick*, but with love.[65]

Wimsatt himself offers some justification for the creation of Melville as the paradoxical man. Wimsatt's own version of the paradox, what he called the "concrete universal," is in the first place an instance of willful passivity, in that it pictures labor

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[60] Mumford, xvi.
[61] Mumford, 188.
[62] Brooks, 163.
[63] Mumford, 132.
[64] Mumford, 188.
[65] Mumford, 188.

whose output mysteriously exceeds its input. Musing on how it is that the literary artifact is identifiable by its strange quality of being both intensely universal and intensely individual, Wimsatt proposes that a text can be indelibly unique and specific, on one hand, and recognizable across time and space, on the other, because of its special arrangement of details. The relation among elements established by the poet, his arrangement of parts into a whole, manages to confer special relevance on things that would otherwise seem irrelevant. Wimsatt turns to the construction of characters to make the point: Falstaff or Cleopatra, he says, "are concrete universals because they have no class names, only their own proper ones," but we are nonetheless persuaded by Shakespeare's craft to think of them as much bigger than themselves; "each demands a special interpretation" that must be referred to the whole "realm of human values."[66] This is, Wimsatt says, a way of adding value to what would otherwise be a mere pile-up of details of physical or mental attributes or behaviors.

Wimsatt quantifies that value. He argues that in Shakespeare's characters—and, I would say, in the character of Melville as constructed by Weaver and Mumford—we find an "awareness of self" linked "with a pleasure in the fact" that grants every detail of the character a "double or reflex value."[67] In other words, a sufficiently self-aware, self-pleasing linguistic craftiness can produce twice the power of a less-careful arrangement of details. Or, as Wimsatt puts it a few paragraphs down—underscoring the positive return on investment—the great author's linguistic labor yields a "third-dimensional significance" to his verbal output.[68] In this way a character, complexly crafted of disparate elements into a unified whole, achieves the kind of power we saw Mumford attribute to *Moby-Dick*, a power we only know by its very discretion. "The poetic character of details," says Wimsatt, "consists not in what they say directly and explicitly (as if roses and moonlight were poetic) but in what by their arrangement they *show* implicitly."[69] The poet's labor is thus sub-verbal, almost invisible. But by that token we know how hard he worked. Such is the labor that Weaver and Mumford aspire to in their biographies.

All of this seems miles away from the work of mediumship—except for the shared aspiration to make seemingly passive labor (cogitating, writing) yield enormous payoffs (transmitting eternal truth). And in fact Wimsatt retains a degree of mysticism for the work of the critic, however little he cares for reverencing dead poets' relics. Wimsatt insists that critics retain faith in "the metaphoric capacities of language and

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[66] Wimsatt, "The Concrete Universal," in *The Verbal Icon*, 79.
[67] Wimsatt, 79.
[68] Wimsatt, 80.
[69] Wimsatt, 77.

the moral importance of valid linguistic expression" and in "our conception of truth as a thing beyond language."[70] Wimsatt's will to maintain that faith leads him to grant rarefied power to poetic language—a language whose power, he stipulates, the critic also shares. The language of literary criticism must partake of "analogy and metaphor," just as poetry does; otherwise, criticism is stuck on the register of "historical report" or "academic exercise."[71] Here is his job description for the critic:

> The situation is something like this: In each poem there is something (an individual intuition—or a concept) which can never be expressed in other terms. It is like the square root of two or like pi, which cannot be expressed by rational numbers, but only as their *limit*. Criticism of poetry is like 1.414 . . . or 3.1416 . . . , not all it would be, yet all that can be had and very useful.[72]

The poem is limitless and irrational; the critic's work is to help register how far the poem exceeds rational limits. The critic translates the untranslatable into something like rational terms, though the closest he can get is a string of decimal places that goes on forever.

Weaver and Mumford elevate the quality of their labor by identifying it with the creative labor done by Melville, who, hunched at a desk, works as if steering a ship through a gale. Insofar as Weaver and Mumford treat Melville's life like an artwork, shaping Melville's life into the solid thing of a paradox, they can identify the biographer with the critic. And insofar as their criticism deploys poetic tropes, it is like a poet's work. Everyone's labor—biographer, critic, poet—thus takes on the quality of willful passivity: doubly or three-dimensionally valuable because it quietly rejects the demands of the market. Spiritualist mediumship never escaped its identification with feminine, amateur, popular entertainment. But by claiming to partake of, or at least to make manifest, an author's willful passivity, the literary critic could make channeling the dead a viable profession. Weaver's and Mumford's idealizing of willful passivity in the life of a novelist helps clarify the puzzle of how the 1920s Melville Revival could aid and abet the 1930s (and onward) legitimizing of American literary studies by New Criticism.

In closing, I want to return to Paul Lauter's justly famous 1994 essay "Melville Climbs the Canon." Lauter makes a powerful case that the mission of the Melville Revival was to create a hero for an emergent intellectual elite—to invent Melville as a

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[70] Wimsatt, "Poetry and Christian Thinking," in *The Verbal Icon*, 279.
[71] Wimsatt, "Chicago Critics," 49.
[72] Wimsatt, "Concrete Universal," 83 (italics in original).

red-blooded American who globe-trotted without besmirching his white manhood.[73] But if reviving Melville did generate that hero figure for some, such a project is not, it seems to me, what motivates Weaver's and Mumford's biographies. For one thing, both Weaver and Mumford ally themselves with a resolutely anti-imperialist Melville. I see no reason to read them as only mouthing, for instance, Melville's critique of the Protestant missions to Polynesia. Weaver sounds sincerely disgusted by romanticizers and religious zealots alike, lambasting "the frivolous, the sentimental, and the ungodly" who "were busy converting Tahitian savagery into a Georgian idyll" while "the well-starched Wesleyan conscience crackled in horror at the black unredemption of the South Sea heathen."[74] Mumford likewise uses Melville's anti-modernism to criticize the alienation and inequality produced by the capitalist boom that accelerated from Melville's time to the present in which Mumford wrote. These biographers were no radicals; their anti-capitalism was not pro-communism. But nor were they inhabiting Melville's progressivism in bad faith.

I have argued that both Weaver and Mumford are essentially co-opting the skills of mediums by masculinizing the labor of channeling the dead. But it would be a mistake to reduce their Melville biographies to Professional Managerial Class job development. The ideal of willful passivity that they create for Melville and his work—like the labor of mediums who transmit signals from beyond—is a worthy ideal. There is such a thing as strenuous receptivity, and it should be modeled in literature classrooms and protected from being monetized into a salable skillset. The university is a fragile shelter whose relative autonomy from the market is more threatened than ever by a "steady pressure . . . to elevate vocational training and therefore STEM fields above all else," as Wendy Brown notes, "an elevation that gravely threatens the most important remaining venue for deep and informed reflection on the world."[75] If literature faculty must convince people of the public good of our scholarship, one way to do that is to affirm that human communication does not stop with death. We are not only mouthpieces for the past, though. As interpreters we are creators too. That interpretive work requires both active striving and passive absorption. We can teach

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[73] Lauter, "Melville Climbs the Canon," *American Literature* 66.1 (1994), 1-24; see, e.g., " 'Melville' was constructed in the 1920s as part of an ideological conflict which linked advocates of modernism and of traditional high cultural values—often connected to the academy—against a social and cultural 'other,' generally, if ambiguously, portrayed as feminine, genteel, exotic, dark, foreign, and numerous" (6).

[74] Weaver, 111.

[75] Brown, *Nihilistic Times: Thinking with Max Weber* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2023), 103.

others, by modeling and practice, how to do it right. We can show how language that seems useless, irrational, irrelevant, or dead might yield untold value for the living.

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Hermeneutic Virtue and Moral Masquerading: Gadamer and the Question of Solidarity in Melville's *The Confidence-Man*

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Abstract

While Hans-Georg Gadamer does not offer a substantial or systematic account of what he means by solidarity, several Gadamer scholars in recent years have begun to organize and clarify his comments on the topic within his broader project of philosophical hermeneutics. In this paper, I turn to Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man* in order to clarify and challenge some of the conditions for solidarity that Gadamer puts forward. In particular, I focus on certain hermeneutic virtues such as openness, trust, charity, humility, and good will, all of which are necessary for Gadamerian solidarity. In *The Confidence-Man*, Melville depicts a world not only of strangers who lack these virtues, but one in which many of these strangers are conned by sophistical appeals to confidence and faith in one's fellow human being. Melville's text raises a series of important questions for Gadamerian solidarity: Is there any possibility of solidarity with those who are disingenuous actors, who yet hide beneath the guise of faith, trust, and confidence in humanity? How are we to discover new solidarities if we are fundamentally distrustful or suspicious of each other? What if the call for hermeneutic virtue is just another masquerade in a world marked by insincerity, iniquity, and alienation? Ultimately, I claim that Melville's text demands that Gadamer scholars reexamine some of the limitations of the hermeneutic virtues, and by extension, the limitations entailed in affirming and discovering solidarity with others.

Keywords: hermeneutics, Gadamer, solidarity, Melville, virtue, *The Confidence-Man*

Melville's prose works have often been important for major figures in twentieth and twenty-first century continental philosophy, such as Albert Camus, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guittari, Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Zizek, and Cornel West. Within the last ten years, scholars in Melville studies, literary criticism, and philosophy have made a turn towards considering Melville's works as philosophical texts. This includes Mark Anderson's *Moby-Dick as Philosophy: Plato – Melville – Nietzsche*,[1] K.L. Evans' *One Foot in the Finite: Melville's Realism Reclaimed*,[2] and David Faflik's *Melville and the Question of Meaning*.[3] Furthermore, Corey McCall's and Tom Nurmi's *Melville Among the Philosophers*,[4] and Branka Arsić's and K. L. Evans' *Melville's Philosophies*,[5] are two edited volumes which bring several scholars into the conversation about Melville himself as a philosopher. In the field of philosophical hermeneutics, Gert-Jan van der Heiden's new book, *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony*,[6] contains an entire chapter to Melville's famous short story, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," in which van der Heiden identifies Bartleby as a figure who resists linguistic expression and brings hermeneutic interpretation to its limits.

While van der Heiden's analysis of "Bartleby" does not draw explicitly from the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, the turn to Melville, as an author who so often pulls the reader up short in the event of interpretation and understanding, is a crucial, and perhaps necessary, next step for Gadamerian scholarship. The number of conference papers, journal articles, and book projects which offer a Gadamerian approach or interpretation to a particular text is vast and for good reason. Gadamerian hermeneutics provides incredible resources for interpreting and understanding a text, ourselves, and others in a more profound manner. Yet this kind of scholarship often ends up uncritically affirming hermeneutic principles in the act of interpretation. In Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, he describes conversation and dialogue as the model for articulating the event of understanding. One of his guiding ideas in this regard is the ability to allow one's own prejudices to be put into play, to be challenged, and possibly transformed. Every so often, this should be applied to Gadamer's own work and to Gadamerian scholarship itself, and

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[1] Mark Anderson, *Moby-Dick as Philosophy: Plato – Melville – Nietzsche*, (Nashville: S. Ph. Press, 2015).
[2] K.L. Evans, *One Foot in the Finite: Melville's Realism Reclaimed*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017).
[3] David Faflik. *Melville and the Question of Meaning*, (New York: Routledge, 2018).
[4] Corey McCall and Tom Nurmi, *Melville Among the Philosophers*, (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017).
[5] Branka Arsić and K. L. Evans, *Melville's Philosophies*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).
[6] Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019).

Melville's texts are an excellent vehicle for this task. This is to say, an honest Gadamerian interpretation of Melville means that Gadamerian scholarship must be open to an examination of its own hermeneutic prejudices related to hermeneutic experience, interpretation, and understanding. It is in this spirit that I turn to Melville's novel, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, in order to show how this text opens up a series of challenging questions related to Gadamerian notions of trust, good will, and solidarity.

Aside from this critical aim, there are some important scholarly reasons for reading *The Confidence-Man* alongside Gadamer and his notion of solidarity. First, a Gadamerian approach to the works of Melville contributes to interrupting what Cornel West has called "the philosophic silencing of Melville."[7] As philosophers begin to turn with more frequency to the works of Melville, Gadamer scholars should jump at the chance to engage this new and promising interpretive space. Second, philosophical research on Melville largely avoids *The Confidence-Man* in favor of more popular works from Melville, such as "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," and *Moby-Dick*.[8] Lastly, there has been a focus in Gadamer scholarship in the past several years on providing a coherent articulation of Gadamer's many fragmented comments on solidarity. A reading of the *Confidence-Man* not only contributes to this project but will shine a light on some important tensions in Gadamer's notion of solidarity as well.

In this essay, I first discuss recent scholarship on Gadamerian solidarity and examine some crucial passages from Gadamer on the importance of solidarity in the modern bureaucratic world of the twentieth century. While Gadamer makes several remarks on solidarity, I will focus primarily on the importance of what Robert J. Dostal refers to as the hermeneutic virtues of trust, good will, and friendship for any kind of solidarity to form in a community. Second, I turn a few scenes from *The Confidence-Man* which highlight some obvious questions about solidarity, such as the possibility of solidarity in a society full of strangers, hypocrisy, and mendacity. Is there any possibility of solidarity with those who are disingenuous and sophistical, yet hide beneath the guise of faith, trust, and confidence in humanity? How are we to discover new solidarities if we are fundamentally distrustful or suspicious of each other? Ultimately, I claim that Melville's text demands that Gadamer scholars reexamine some of the

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[7] Cornel West. "Afterword" in *Melville Among the Philosophers*, edited by Corey McCall and Tom Nurmi, (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017), 213.

[8] One notable exception in this regard is Jason M. Wirth, "The Self without Character: Melville's *The Confidence-Man* and Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*," *Humanities* (1), 25, 2018. https://doi.org/10.3390/h7010025. Wirth details the many masks of the figure of the confidence-man and the mirroring quality of his character upon the other characters in the novel.

limitations of the hermeneutic virtues, and by extension, the limitations entailed in affirming and discovering solidarity with others.

Gadamer on Solidarity

Gadamer's comments on solidarity are scattered throughout several of his later essays after *Truth and Method*, including "Friendship and Solidarity,"[9] "What is Practice?: The Conditions of Social Reason,"[10] and "Culture and Media."[11] While Gadamer does not offer a substantial or systematic account of what he means by solidarity, several Gadamer scholars in recent years, such as Darren Walhof,[12] Georgia Warnke,[13] Theodore George,[14] Cynthia Nielsen,[15] and Robert Dostal,[16] have begun to organize and clarify his comments on solidarity within his broader project of philosophical hermeneutics. When reading their work alongside Gadamer's own comments on solidarity, a Gadamerian notion of solidarity seems to affirm a few basic ideas. First, Gadamerian solidarity is not a matter of all parties thinking and acting in the same way, but is fundamentally a matter of recognizing and respecting the diversity, difference, and the otherness of the Other. Second, Gadamerian solidarity is not a specific political theory, position, or judgement, but is something like a condition for the possibility of a responsible and flourishing political context to emerge at all. This is what George calls the "political as not yet politics."[17] Such a notion of solidarity is a matter of disclosing and illuminating ourselves, our traditions, and our differences to each other.

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[9] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Friendship and Solidarity," *Research in Phenomenology* 39 (2009), translated by David Vessey and Chris Blauwkamp, 3-12.
[10] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "What is Practice?: The Conditions of Social Reason," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981), 69-87.
[11] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Culture and Media," in *Cultural-Political Interventions in the Unfinished Project of the Enlightenment*, ed. Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Clause Offe, and Albrecht Wellmer, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 171-188.
[12] Darren R. Walhof, "Friendship, Otherness, and Gadamer's Politics of Solidarity," *Political Theory* 34, no. 5, 2006, 569-593.
[13] Georgia Warnke, "Solidarity and Tradition in Gadamer's Hermeneutics," *History and Theory* 51 (December 2012), 6-22.
[14] Theodore George, *The Responsibility to Understand: Hermeneutical Contours of Ethical Life*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).
[15] Cynthia R. Nielsen, "Gadamer and Scholz on Solidarity: Disclosing, Avowing, and Performing Solidaristic Ties with Human and Natural Others," *Journal of the British Society of for Phenomenology* 48, no. 3, 2017, 240-256.
[16] Robert J. Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: Between Phenomenology and Dialectic*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2022, 82.
[17] George, *The Responsibility to Understand*, 128.

This is to say, Gadamer lays emphasis on solidarity as something to be discovered instead of something created or manufactured in some way. Third, Gadamer considers friendship to be an important and local model for solidarity at the level of society. Fourth, solidarity requires what Dostal has described as the "hermeneutic virtues" of "openness, trust, charity, humility, and good will."[18]

Many of Gadamer's comments on solidarity stem from his concern for the lack of solidarity in the modern industrialized world, which is marked by anonymity, bureaucracy, mass communication, and the threat of various global crises. In response to ecological crises and atomic weapons, Gadamer considers solidarity to be crucial for responding to these issues:

> We are still a far cry from a common awareness that this is a matter of the destiny of everyone on this earth and that the chances for anyone's survival are as small as if a senseless attack with atomic weapons of destruction were to occur if humanity in the course of one or perhaps many, many crises, and in virtue of a history of experience involving many, many sufferings, does not learn to rediscover out of need a new solidarity.[19]

Likewise, in "Culture and Media," he refers to solidarity as the reason for pointing out the many difficulties of living in a society of masses and mass communication:

> The mass is characterized by a lack of articulation and differentiation, and this includes the anonymity that weighs heavily on humanity. In saying that, I do not mean to join in with the usual tirades of culture critique. I mention it only because I am looking for ways of dealing with our fate of living in this society and of continually using these means and media, in order to learn how to build true solidarity in our culture.[20]

Gadamer also considers the lack of solidarity to be one of the three forms of "alienation" inflicted upon faculty and students in the "modern mass university" system: "What I find to be most dangerous in our situation is that it has become so unbelievably difficult just to discover an existing authentic solidarity."[21]

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[18] Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 82.
[19] Gadamer, "What is Practice?," 85.
[20] Gadamer, "Culture and Media," 174.
[21] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Idea of the University – Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, eds. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 59.

Despite these calls for the necessity of discovering new solidarities, Gadamer provides few substantive comments about what solidarity consists of and how new solidarities are supposed to be discovered in the first place. His most extensive response to these questions of solidarity appears in his 1999 essay, "Friendship and Solidarity," in which he focuses on the crucial role of friendship in mass society and the "age of anonymous responsibility."[22] In particular, Gadamer focuses on the Greek notion of self-love (*Philautia*) and being a friend to oneself as crucial for friendship with others. He is careful to note the typically negative connotation that we hear in this phrase as one that is associated with egoism or narcissism. His reference to self-love, however, has much more to do with a sense of unity or harmony with oneself: "One must be united with oneself if one is to be a friend for another, and even if only a lover, even if only a business friend, even if only a co-worker. Everywhere those who cannot be one with themselves will feel living together with others to be a handicap and to be foreign."[23] However, this does not mean that one should or can only be a friend to another person that is like oneself. Friendship (and solidarity) is not a matter of holding the same views or positions as the Other. In fact, for Gadamer, deep friendship is a matter of affirming the otherness of the Other, and being at home with the Other. However, Gadamer nevertheless raises the question about the possibilities for coming to know ourselves and others in an increasingly anonymizing age: "What does it mean for our society as it becomes anonymous, what does the necessity of a rationalized mass existence mean, to which then also belongs the uncanny character of statistics, without which no global economy would work? Are not too many things in which we could really recognize ourselves being withheld from us?"[24] With fewer

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[22] Gadamer, "Friendship and Solidarity," 3. Gadamer attributes the phrase "age of anonymous responsibility" to Karl Jaspers and does this in at least two other essays as well. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Anxiety and Anxieties," in *The Enigma of Health* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 159; "*Philosophische Begegnungen*," in *Hermeneutik im Rückblick*, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 10 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 395. In the latter essay, he attributes the phrase, "*Zeitalter der anonymen Verantwortlichkeit*" to Jaspers in his 1931 text, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* (*Man in the Modern Age*). While Jaspers certainly discusses the anonymity of individuals in a mass society and various questions about responsibility and freedom in this society, I cannot find Jaspers ever using the phrase, "*Zeitalter der anonymen Verantwortlichkeit*." Interestingly enough, Jaspers discusses the crucial role of solidarity in the age of the masses. Solidarity, for Jaspers, requires the genuine communication, openness, faithfulness/fidelity between true friends. True friends, however, must also affirm their own self-being (*Selbstsein*) and existential honesty. Gadamer will make a similar comment about friendship in his reference to Plato in "Friendship and Solidarity." Friendship (and solidarity) not only requires a certain responsibility or loyalty to the friend, but perhaps most importantly, it requires a responsibility to oneself. See Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, *Sammlung Göschen*, Bd. 1000, (Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter), 177-179.

[23] Gadamer, "Friendship and Solidarity," 8.

[24] Gadamer, "Friendship and Solidarity," 10.

opportunities for properly encountering others and cultivating friendships with ourselves and others, how are individuals supposed to affirm the kind of solidarity that, as Gadamer explains, means a real sacrifice of one's own interests and genuine commitment to others? In some of the final lines of this essay, he points to what is perhaps the most important condition for solidarity, namely, ". . . the complete dedication of our good will."[25]

Solidarity, Trust, Good Will, and the Hermeneutic Virtues

Robert Dostal has done the most work in bringing attention to the crucial role of good will, trust, and other hermeneutic virtues in relationship to Gadamer's notion of solidarity. In his recent book, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: Between Phenomenology and Dialectic*, Dostal refers to some of the core ideas in Gadamerian hermeneutics that Gadamer develops in *Truth and Method*, such as the importance of *Bildung*, the art of listening, the fusion of horizons, and the model of conversation as the event of understanding. All of these practices attempt to find agreement with the Other and disclose a shared, common world. Gadamer and Dostal likewise recognize the finite or limited nature of these practices as well. There is no perfect agreement and conversation often fails. What is primary for any kind of successful conversation or understanding with others is the cultivation of a disposition that allows one to be open to the possibility of being genuinely changed or transformed by the Other. We have to always be open to the possibility that our partner in conversation is right and we are wrong and allow for our prejudices to be put into play such that they may undergo a transformation if they have been shown to be inappropriate to the subject matter at hand. Cultivating this kind of disposition goes hand in hand with what Dostal refers to as the various hermeneutic virtues, which he identifies as "openness, trust, charity, humility, and good will," and most importantly, practical wisdom (*phronesis*).[26]

Openness, as we just saw, has to do with being open to the possibility of transformation and of being wrong about a particular subject matter. As Dostal writes, "Without this [openness and willingness to listen], no conversation can get off the ground."[27] Charity, humility, and good will all refer to a collaborative and generous spirit one should bring to any conversation. Instead of attempting to attack and dismiss another's position, we ought to assume the possibility that any kind of weakness or

[25] Gadamer, "Friendship and Solidarity," 11.
[26] Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 82.
[27] Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 81.

contradiction can be reconciled in some way. Dostal rightly identifies the most important virtue for Gadamer as practical wisdom, which emphasizes "good judgment, which knows what is best to do in the circumstances in which one finds oneself."[28] Practical wisdom, or good judgement, requires knowing "the right thing to do in the right way at the right time in regard to the right person(s),"[29] all of which requires knowledge or understanding about the various personal, professional, social, and political contexts we find ourselves in.[30]

This leaves us with one interesting and rarely discussed hermeneutic virtue on this list: trust. In an earlier essay, Dostal describes Gadamerian hermeneutics as a hermeneutics of trust in opposition to a hermeneutics of suspicion.[31] Hermeneutic trust is a trust in language or linguisticality. It is a trust in the very condition for the possibility of interpretation and understanding to occur at all. As I have argued elsewhere, Gadamer offers some of his most explicit comments on trust and language in an essay analyzing a poem from Hilde Domin.[32] What it means to trust in language is to maintain an active disposition towards finding and cultivating a common language with the other in order to understand the subject matter at hand.[33] In tying together trust with the possibility of language and understanding, Gadamer is concerned, among other things, with the distortion, falsification, or confusion of language. If language is the medium of hermeneutic interpretation and understanding, and language itself has become corrupted, then the possibility of trust, understanding, and ultimately, solidarity with others has broken down. Trust, then, becomes as important as any hermeneutic virtue in the promotion of solidarity. Without such a trust in language, which provides the condition for the possibility of any kind of understanding to take place, it is impossible to develop the other hermeneutic virtues of openness, charity, humility, and good will. More than this, without a trust in language the other aspects of Gadamerian solidarity, such as recognizing the otherness of the Other, disclosing our traditions and prejudices for each other, and cultivating friendships, are likewise put into question.

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[28] Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 82.
[29] Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 82.
[30] Ultimately, all of these virtues require a fundamental "respect for others" in any kind of exchange (Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 82).
[31] Robert J. Dostal, "The World Never Lost: The Hermeneutics of Trust," *Philosophy and Phenomenology Research* 47, no. 3 (1987): 413–34.
[32] Alexander Crist, "A Hermeneutics and Poetics of Trust: Gadamer and Domin on Trust and Language," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 14, no. 3 (2022), 139-158.
[33] For more detailed comments on what it means to trust in language, see Crist, "A Hermeneutics and Poetics of Trust," 147-151.

In fact, one could say that solidarity is on the same ontological footing as language. If, for Gadamer, "Being that can be understood is language,"[34] then a trust in language is a trust in the possibility of the event of understanding to occur at all. At bottom, solidarity *is* this trust in language or linguisticality. If solidarity involves the linguistic disclosure of a common world and the coming into an agreement in the event of understanding, then what it means to discover solidarity with each other is to trust and participate in language as the medium of hermeneutic experience. If Gadamer sometimes refers to the discovering of new "solidarities" in the plural, trust in language is the original or primary solidarity we can discover for and with each other. Solidarity is an active trust in the possibility that, despite our differences and competing prejudices, we can understand one another and the subject matter at hand, and that we are open to the possibility that we may be transformed by what the other says to us. Solidarity, as trust in language, affirms and actively cultivates the common bond that we all share in the linguisticality of understanding itself. Any specific political decision, action, or project taken up in a community is then downstream of this solidarity that we discover in our trust in the linguisticality of understanding.

Gadamer understands the great difficulty in rediscovering this kind of trust in a world in which this trust has been abused. In his essay on Domin, he does not think the regaining or rehabilitation of trust is an easy or quick thing to accomplish, especially in a community in which language has been propagandized and weaponized to a great extent (Gadamer makes a veiled reference to the Nazification of the German language under the Nazi regime).[35] There is inevitably going to be a long period of disappointment, despair, and confusion on the road to a recovery of trust. Yet despite this, Gadamer is ever hopeful about the return to trust and the possibilities for individuals to affirm trust at any given moment.[36]

Nevertheless, a series of pragmatic questions still remain: how exactly (concretely) is one supposed to take up this trust in language in a world rife with deception, dishonesty, and sophistry? How is one supposed to comport oneself in a world in which so many others are not willing to engage in this trust, or in which many even weaponize notions of trust in order to deceive others? Without others developing this trust, what are the real possibilities for solidarity to be discovered? This is where we should turn to Melville and *The Confidence-Man*.

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[34] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 490.
[35] Crist, "A Hermeneutics and Poetics of Trust," 146-147.
[36] Crist, "A Hermeneutics and Poetics of Trust," 147.

The Confidence-Man as a World of Strangers, Distrust, and Hypocrisy

The events of *The Confidence-Man* take place on April 1st on a steamboat heading down the Mississippi River towards New Orleans, presumably in the mid-1850's. The novel itself consists of several dialogues between a single, mysterious, shapeshifting character presumed to be the confidence-man himself, and several other characters aboard the steamboat. As is common in Melville's texts, the setting of a boat or ship at sea is often a microcosm for America itself. In this instance, the narrator describes all the passengers on the ship as strangers that are constantly boarding and leaving, "so that, although always full of strangers, she continually, in some degree, adds to, or replaces them with strangers still more strange."[37] The name of the steamboat itself is the *Fidèle*, a French word denoting faith or faithful, and a cognate with the English word fidelity. Already in the first few pages of the text, Melville's title and description of the passengers on the ship raise a significant question for the reader: Can a land full of strangers be grounded in a kind of faith or fidelity to one another? What, if anything, binds such strangers together as a community?

Throughout the novel, the masquerading confidence-man engages several passengers on the steamboat in conversation and advocates for a necessary faith, confidence, charity, and/or trust in all humanity. The apparent goal of the confidence-man in these exchanges is to extract money or some favor from the other passengers. To have faith, trust, or confidence in all humanity means that the passengers should likewise trust him and his good nature. If a passenger is unwilling to give him their trust or confidence, the confidence-man will often claim that one must be charitable, for we are all in this together. Our common ground is our common humanity. Distrust and skepticism of others leads to misanthropy and misery, a most terrible condition unbefitting of humankind that ultimately leads to the degradation of society.

This tension contained within the confidence-man's appeal to solidarity and his assumed intention of exploitation appears in several moments throughout the novel. In chapters twenty-one and twenty-two, the confidence-man takes on two different forms in his interaction with a no-nonsense, rugged, and cantankerous frontiersman from Missouri, named Pitch. The first form of the confidence-man is that of the herb-doctor, who tries to sell what the reader presumes to be false cures or medicines to passengers on board. In overhearing the herb-doctor successfully cajole an old, infirmed miser into purchasing a box of his "Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator,"

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[37] Herman Melville. *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, Volume 10 in *The Writings of Herman Melville*, (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1984), 8.

Pitch calls out the herb-doctor's scheme. The herb-doctor's main line of argument in selling his dubious remedies is that one should have confidence in nature and natural medicines, such as his herbs. In addressing the Missourian, he claims that it is "carrying the spirit of distrust pretty far" to not have confidence in nature.[38] Pitch, of course, responds with how the natural world has caused great damage and harm to him and his property. The herb-doctor responds with all of the ways in which humanity is indebted to nature, and thus should have confidence in nature. In order to persuade Pitch, the herb-doctor offers him a box of his medicines for free, which Pitch denies. No matter what argument the herb-doctor puts forward, he is unable to convince Pitch to have trust or confidence in either nature or his herbal medicines. At the end of this chapter, it appears that Pitch is able to see through the herb-doctor's charade and put him in his place. The herb-doctor politely exits from the scene.

The confidence-man reappears in the next chapter as a representative from the "Philosophical Intelligence Office (P.I.O.)," whose services include providing young boys for work on farms and homesteads. Pitch explains his cynical view on the matter and his own poor experiences with boys for work on his property. The Missourian is now in search for a machine to replace human labor:

> My cider-mill – does that ever steal my cider? My mowing-machine – does that ever lay a-bed mornings? My corn-husker – does that ever give me insolence? No: cider-mill, mowing-machine, corn-husker – all faithfully attend to their business. Disinterested, too; no board, no wages; yet doing good all their lives long; shining examples that virtue is its own reward – the only practical Christians I know.[39]

Pitch is set in his ways and has learned his lessons through hard experience: "Don't try to oil me; the herb-doctor tried that. My experience, carried now through a course – worse than salivation – a course of five and thirty boys, proves to me that boyhood is a natural state of rascality."[40] More than this, Pitch considers not just young boys to be of a vicious mien, but all humanity, in fact, lacks a natural virtuous state. The P.I.O. officer claims that in his many years of experience, he considers all of humanity to be inherently moral. Instead of assuming that all boys are rascals and will grow up to be rascals, one should have confidence, trust, or faith that they will grow out of this disposition.

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[38] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 107.
[39] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 116.
[40] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 117.

The P.I.O. officer offers a physical analogy. Just as a young boy's first set of teeth are fragile and ultimately deficient, a new set of teeth emerge which are firm and stable. So, while a young boy may display early signs of vicious behavior, one should only have just a little bit of patience, as they will ultimately bloom into a virtuous disposition. Pitch rightly calls the P.I.O. officer a "punster," a "talking man," and a "wordy man," who engages in wordplay, analogy, and sophistry at the expense of any clear, rational argument.[41] However, the P.I.O. officer manages to convince the Missourian through more analogies that he was too quick to judge his previous boy servants: "Had you but kept that thirtieth boy – been patient with his sickly virtues, cultivated them, hoed round them, why what a glorious guerdon could have been yours, when at last you should have had a St. Augustine for an ostler."[42] With some reserve, Pitch ultimately applies for a new boy servant with the P.I.O. officer "for the sake purely of a scientific experiment," to which the officer responds: "Respected sir, never willingly do I handle money not with perfect willingness, nay, with a certain alacrity, paid. Either tell me that you have a perfect and unquestioning confidence in me (never mind the boy now) or permit me respectfully to return these bills."[43] As the Missourian affirms his confidence, the officer leaves the steamship with the following remarks:

> Thank you. Confidence is the indispensable basis of all sorts of business transactions. Without it, commerce between man and man, as between country and country, would, like a watch, run down and stop. And now, supposing that against the present expectation the lad should, after all, evince some little undesirable trait, do not, respected sir, rashly dismiss him. Have but patience, have but confidence. Those transient vices will, ere long, fall out, and be replaced by the sound, firm, even and permanent virtues.[44]

Pitch, along with the reader, is led to believe that he was conned out of a few dollars by this sham philosopher and his fallacious "doctrine of analogies."[45] But more than this, Pitch is confounded as to how he was persuaded to relinquish his "general law of distrust" in humanity, when such a principle would have served him well in dealing with such an "operator."[46] Yet even if the confidence-man's methods and aims were

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[41] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 124, 125.
[42] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 126.
[43] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 128.
[44] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 128.
[45] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 130.
[46] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 130.

self-serving or even diabolical, is he so wrong about the importance or significance of having faith, trust, or confidence in humanity?

One of the significant reasons for why the confidence-man is successful in his charade is due to the lack of genuine solidarity aboard the ship. Aside from various naïve or gullible passengers, most of the characters in the story are distrustful, insincere, or lack a virtuous character in some way. Pitch, for instance, may not be a liar or schemer, but he is certainly cynical and perhaps a genuine misanthrope. Other characters display shades of disingenuity or hypocrisy (as we will see in the next section on the Black Guinea). Many are cautious and suspicious, many are simply desperate, and many find themselves alienated from each other on this ship of strangers still more strange. In the novel, the confidence-man knows just how to exploit these weaknesses of character and fragmented social conditions. Even if he is unsuccessful in a first encounter with someone as distrustful as Pitch, the confidence-man merely returns in a new disguise and a new form of casuistry tailored to the passenger and circumstances. If the *Fidèle* lived up to its name, and all or most of the passengers on the ship promoted the kind of honesty, good will, and trust necessary for solidarity, then arguably the confidence-man would be quickly exposed and denounced as such. Dishonesty and duplicity would likely be conspicuous to a community exercising practical wisdom and the other hermeneutic virtues.

The very existence of the confidence-man is something of a product or symptom of a society rooted in hypocrisy, suspicion, alienation, anonymity, deception, and desperation. It is difficult to read the novel without thinking that these are precisely the conditions of nineteenth century America that Melville is criticizing. In fact, one could argue that Melville is more concerned about the "impact of anonymity" and the emerging "world of strangers" in antebellum America than he is about individual confidence-men or women.[47] Karen Halttunen describes this new world of strangers in early to mid-nineteenth century America as marked by deep concerns about hypocrisy and insincerity. She documents a series of advice manuals for young men in the early nineteenth century entering into the city from the countryside as warning against the downfalls of hypocrisy. Yet, as she shows, their concern was not particular to these young men but about Melville's generation as a whole: "The advisers' broadest fear was not simply that a small corps of confidence-men roamed American society, but that an entire generation of Americans was being tainted with

[47] See Lyn H. Lofland, *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America*, 1830-1870, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 35.

hypocrisy."[48] Such a world of hypocrisy leads to a bewildering kind of irony, in which "deceit masquerades as faith, misanthropy as universal brotherhood, and cynicism as philanthropy, and the misanthropic Pitch is the true lover of his fellow men."[49]

Elizabeth S. Foster, in her introduction to the 1954 Hendricks House edition of *The Confidence-Man*, identifies some of these societal conditions and character flaws that Melville draws our attention to in this new world of strangers:

> The dearth of charity amongst Christians, greed, gullibility – the light of satire glances constantly over these human failures and foibles. It is focused sharply and wittily from time to time on certain characteristics of Western, and particularly American and nineteenth century civilization – the invasion of all areas of life, even religion and philanthropy, by the "Wall Street spirit," the hope of millennial enlightenment from a free press, *laissez-faire*.[50]

Furthermore, Foster refers to *The Confidence-Man* as a nineteenth century American version of Voltaire's *Candide*, yet one that avoids an overt irony and instead favors a "subtle, pervasive, elusive irony, of suggestion and understatement rather than exaggeration, or talk rather than action."[51] These are the subtle and sophistical conditions of an alienated world that raise a challenge to Gadamerian solidarity. The confidence-man in the novel is not a bully or mob boss enforcer who extorts a local shop owner under the obvious and transparent lie of 'protection.' As we saw in the above example, the confidence-man requires more than money. Pitch needs to believe, to some extent, in the truth of what is being said, or rather, the lie must be believed in order for the transaction to take place. He requires Pitch to give him his confidence, his trust, his faith in the officer, in the virtuous nature of young boys, and ultimately in humanity itself. For Foster, and for Melville, it is this particular kind of masquerade and this more up-to-date version of living in the "best of all possible worlds" that indicates a real "danger to humanity."[52]

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[48] Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 33.
[49] Elizabeth S. Foster, "Introduction," in *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* by Herman Melville, (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1954), xciv.
[50] Foster, "Introduction," xvi – xvii. Hershel Parker, in his own historical note to the 1984 Northwestern University Press/Newberry Library edition of the *Confidence-Man*, refers to Foster's 1954 introduction as the "single most important study to date" of Melville's text. See Hershel Parker, "Historical Note," in *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, Volume 10 in *The Writings of Herman Melville*, (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1984), 335.
[51] Foster, "Introduction," xiv.
[52] Foster, "Introduction," xiv – xv.

Melville's concern with the hypocrisy, insincerity, and lack of character comes through in the third chapter of *The Confidence-Man*. Unlike many other chapters, this scene involves the confidence-man (as the "Black Guinea") involved with a multitude of passengers instead of a focused, one-on-one discussion. The scene begins with the narrator describing a "grotesque negro cripple," who though homeless and otherwise in a poor condition, manages to be cheerful and endearing for many of the passengers on the ship.[53] Due to his cheerful nature, many passengers offer small donations to help with his poor condition. However, several of the passengers begin to treat the Black Guinea like a dog and attempt to throw their pennies into his open mouth. The narrator describes this as a "*diversion* and charity," which places the Black Guinea "on a canine footing."[54] His appearance becomes that of a dog and he begins to be treated like a dog. Already in the beginning of this scene, Melville highlights for the reader the significance of appearances insofar as they betray the superficialities and hypocrisies of those engaged in the charade. In taking appearance for reality, the human being appears as a dog, what appears to be charity is really a humiliation or indignity, and what pretends to be virtue is really a capricious pastime or distraction at the expense of another human being.[55] At this point, however, each character is perfectly fine playing out this masquerade. The confidence-man, as the Black Guinea, has acquired the confidence and money of the other passengers, and the passengers can pretend to be charitable and beneficent while passing the time on their journey.

The illusion is put in jeopardy, however, by the entrance of a figure presumed to be "some discharged custom-house officer" who, in his misanthropic and scornful manner, calls out the Black Guinea as a cheat and a fraud.[56] The narrator remarks how this individual, who himself walks on a wooden leg, is initially quite successful in motivating the crowd to suspect the Black Guinea. However, after the wooden legged man asserts himself too forcefully, the crowd then begins to take the side of the Black Guinea. Though it is a subtle point, Melville indicates here yet again the disparity between appearance and reality. While the passengers appear to be esteemed individuals with character and integrity (two of the figures in the scene are clergymen), they are easily swayed by passion, rhetoric, and crowd sentiment, changing positions back and forth like a game of pinball. Ultimately, the wooden legged man removes

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[53] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 10.
[54] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 11.
[55] The narrator refers to the pitch-penny game of the passengers as a "game of charity," indicating the disingenuous nature of such 'charitable' activity (Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 12).
[56] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 12. Melville himself would end up acquiring a position as a New York customs inspector in 1866 after many financial setbacks as an author.

himself from the scene and the rest of the passengers decide to further question the Black Guinea. They ask him if he has any identification on him, any "documentary proof," or any "plain paper about him."[57] When the Black Guinea says he does not have any, an Episcopal clergyman steps in, who the narrator describes as "manly; with a clear face and blue eye; innocence, tenderness, and good sense triumvirate in his air," and who asks the Black Guinea if there is anyone on the ship who will testify to his good nature.[58] In response, the Black Guinea describes several individuals on the ship, which the reader will eventually come to realize are just the different forms and outfits of the confidence-man himself. The Episcopal clergyman then leaves the scene to find one of these individuals.

The wooden legged man returns to the scene and considers the search for the Black Guinea's witnesses to be a "wild goose chase" and refers to the Black Guinea as "some white operator, betwisted and painted up for a decoy."[59] A Methodist minister then enters the scene and asks the wooden legged man: "Have you no charity, friend?" To which the wooden legged man responds: "Charity is one thing, and truth is another."[60] After the Methodist minister continues to press the matter, the wooden legged man articulates what he considers to be the hypocrisy of charity: "Here on earth, true charity dotes, and false charity plots. Who betrays a fool with a kiss, the charitable fool has the charity to believe is in love with him, and the charitable knave on the stand gives charitable testimony for his comrade in the box."[61] This begins to chip away at the cool and patient demeanor of the minister, who ultimately descends into his own kind of hypocrisy by calling for charity and simultaneously denouncing the character of the wooden legged man: "'Reprobate!' cried the other, his indignation now at last almost boiling over; 'godless reprobate! if charity did not restrain me, I could call you by names you deserve.' 'Could you, indeed?' with an insolent sneer."[62] At this point, the Methodist minister accosts the wooden legged man and further betrays his own hypocrisy: "You took me for a non-combatant did you? – thought, seedy coward that you are, that you could abuse a Christian with impunity. You find your mistake."[63] Melville indicates here how patience, charity, and turning the other cheek all seem to go by the wayside when they are challenged. For Melville's America, the Christian virtues appear to have their limits. Once the wooden legged man leaves the scene yet

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[57] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 13.
[58] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 13.
[59] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 14.
[60] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 14.
[61] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 14.
[62] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 15.
[63] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 15.

again, the Methodist minister preaches to the crowd the perils of mistrusting one's fellow human being and the crowd affirms the message.

At this moment, the Black Guinea asks the crowd if they will then have confidence in him, to which several passengers return to their suspicions about him and deny him this trust. Even the Methodist minister after his speech is unmoved by the Black Guinea:

> Once more the negro wailed, and turning in despair from the last speaker, imploringly caught the Methodist by the skirt of his coat. But a change had come over that before impassioned intercessor. With an irresolute and troubled air, he mutely eyed the suppliant; against whom, somehow, by what seemed instinctive influences, the distrusts first set on foot were now generally reviving, and, if anything, with added severity.[64]

Yet, at the last minute, one of the characters affirms his confidence by handing the Black Guinea a half dollar, which the crowd perceives as a kind of admonishment for not likewise affirming trust, charity, and confidence in the poor and downtrodden. Yet there is a deeper and more profound irony in this entire scene. Despite all of the unappealing flaws, hypocrisies, and prevarications of the passengers, the narrator strongly suggests (without explicitly telling us) that the Black Guinea is in fact the confidence-man himself, that this is actually an imposter (perhaps in some form of blackface) faking an infirmity, that this is a dishonest and deceptive individual playing on appeals to trust, charity, and confidence in order to swindle some advantage from those around him. Even though the suspicious and misanthropic mien of the wooden legged man precludes the possibility of friendship and communal flourishing, even though the Methodist minister does not live up to his own appeals to charity and trust in others, this inherent distrust in the Black Guinea by both characters seems to be precisely the disposition that could potentially keep one from being taken advantage of on board the *Fidèle*.

While these more distrustful characters are to some degree protected from the schemes of the confidence-man at an individual level (although even this is not guaranteed, as in the case of Pitch), this comes at a high price for the community. In order to avoid being exploited by the various operators in Melville's America, one must be distrustful of others, always on guard, or perhaps even assume the worst in people. With this disposition, however, one sacrifices a genuine faith or trust in humanity. What is lost in defending oneself from the world and others is solidarity with the world

[64] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 16-17.

and others. Furthermore, one ultimately contributes to a world in which the confidence-man is able to exist and thrive in the first place. A world in which we are all strangers to each other and inherently suspicious of each other leads to a quasi-Hobbesian state of nature, in which one might actually have to develop the skills of a confidence-man in order survive or gain some kind of critical advantage.[65] While a cynical worldview might provide some safeguard against being hoodwinked by cunning individuals, it does not lead to a flourishing solidarity in the community. Yet, if one attempts to be trustful and honest in a dishonest world, then one is left open to be a mark for the many artful operators of this world. The con is effective either way: one either loses their money or their faith in humanity. In some cases, one might lose both. This is a fundamental tension that Melville raises for the reader, and this is the kind of double bind that the confidence-man knows how to exploit in Melville's America.

Along with decrying a world of hypocrisy and insincerity, Melville is trying to demonstrate the great wager or risk involved in confidence. Cornel West, in a conversation about *The Confidence-Man* with D. Graham Burnet, articulates this sentiment perhaps most clearly when he quips: "In every 'con' there's a little 'con,' if you know what I mean!"[66] This is to say, community is a risk. Confidence, trust, or faith is important for solidarity in any community, but this can easily be abused. Both prefixes con- and com- in confidence and community imply togetherness, 'withness.' But the con in confidence, the idea that the foundation of community is built around trust, faith, or fidelity can just as easily be the con of the confidence-man, the one who abuses that trust and faith in others. At another point in the conversation, West remarks that, as a Christian, he is "radically unhoused" by Melville's text, and that "Melville pushes a Christian like me up against the wall."[67] As West says:

> Yes, for the Christian 'He is risen, hallelujah, He is risen.' But there are still children in the gutter, eating garbage . . . So we Christians, who have the audacity to say that the seemingly weakest force on earth - love - will ultimately transform a world of hatred and bigotry and cruelty and

[65] In the epilogue to *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, Halttunen describes the transition from deploring the deceptive practices of the confidence-man to actually valorizing skills in charm and manipulation in postbellum corporate America: "The major reason for the confidence man's disappearance from advice literature was the growing acceptance of the idea that the young American on the make had to become a kind of confidence man himself in order to succeed" (Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 205).

[66] Cornel West and D. Graham Burnett, "Metaphysics, Money & the Messiah: A Conversation about Melville's '*The Confidence-Man*,'" *Daedalus* 136, no. 4 (2007): 105.

[67] West, "Metaphysics, Money & the Messiah," 111, 114.

> xenophobia and domination and oppression, we also seem to make the best haters! And then, on top of that, here comes Melville, saying, 'But anyway, what difference does the practical part make? Since y'all are just enacting a masquerade anyway, with various kinds of masks that hide the incongruity and the dubitability of this set of illusions that you call the Christian story.[68]

For West, and perhaps for any Christian reading Melville's text, what is the point of faith, hope, and love, when it is all just a masquerade? For Gadamer scholars reading *The Confidence-Man*, what is the point of affirming the hermeneutic virtues in a world of hypocrisy and deceit? What is the point of discovering new solidarities in a world only interested in a dangerous kind of pseudo-solidarity? If Melville in any way pushes Gadamer up against a wall, it is to say that despite the good intentions behind the call for openness, trust, good will, and friendship, it may all just turn into another masquerade in a world marked by insincerity, iniquity, and alienation. Perhaps even more disconcerting, such appeals may turn out to be another confidence game carried on and propagated by those who attempt to gain your trust with appeals to charity and humanity, and who are all the while picking your pocket in a dark corner of a steamboat.

Conclusion—Revising and Adding to the Hermeneutic Virtues

In conversation with Carsten Dutt, Gadamer claims that in affirming a philosophy of "rational self-responsibility," we must "find the paths ourselves: the paths of solidarity and of reaching understandings. Among the tasks of politics today, I think a top priority should be to make us more generally aware of our deep solidarities."[69] In referring to various global crises, such as atomic energy and immigration, Gadamer compares our situation, of all things, to being thrown together on a rowboat: "I am convinced that our thinking today with the framework not only of the nation-state but also of Europe is proving to be outdated. Isolation from the rest of the world is no longer possible. Humanity today is sitting in a rowboat, as it were, and we must steer this boat in such a way that we do not all crash into the rocks."[70] Yet how would an individual on board the *Fidèle* take up this project? As Georgia Warnke notes, many of

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[68] West, "Metaphysics, Money & the Messiah, 111, 113-114.
[69] Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, ed. and trans. Richard E. Palmer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 80.
[70] Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation*, 81.

Gadamer's own examples of a community discovering solidarities occur as a reaction to a traumatic and life-threatening event, such as war or military invasion.[71] Yet the dangerous conditions on Melville's steamboat are not as obvious. The sophistry is subtle and all hypocrisy, insincerity, and mendacity inherent to Melville's community remain largely hidden under a veneer of virtue and appeals to our common humanity. If the rowboat (or steamboat) of humanity we all find ourselves in today is really a ship of fools,[72] will we even be able to catch sight of the rocks we are about to crash into?

This tension that Melville's text raises in Gadamer's notion of solidarity is one that requires a few reflections. At the outset, it would not be controversial to claim that the hermeneutic virtues have certain limitations. For instance, one's openness and good will in a conversation is not warranted if the other is exhibiting violent, aggressive, or otherwise extreme behavior. However, how is something like trust, good will, and openness supposed to work with those who are subtle deceivers or sophists of a high caliber, who play and prey on the very claims for confidence and faith in our fellow human beings? First, I think it necessitates a rethinking of the hermeneutic virtues. For instance, what would *phronesis* look like within a community rife with distrust and suspicion, or without the proper character traits? For Aristotle, to properly develop the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom, one first needs to cultivate the moral virtues at a young age. Moral virtues allow one to have the proper desire to pursue a virtuous end, while practical wisdom allows one to deliberate about the virtuous action (the virtuous mean between two extremes) to achieve this end. Yet this implies a community in which a virtuous education is not only encouraged but is actually successful.

However, suppose that an individual or a series of individuals can acquire practical wisdom in a less than ideal or even morally corrupt community. What kind of 'good' judgment would such an individual prescribe? Here, I think, is the first frustrating insight that *The Confidence-Man* brings to our attention about Gadamerian solidarity: In a corrupt community, the only good judgment practical wisdom can dictate for us is precisely not to act at all. It means recognizing that there may be no

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[71] Warnke, "Solidarity and Tradition in Gadamer's Hermeneutics," 21.

[72] The wooden legged man in chapter three at one point admonishes the other passengers for their inability to see the confidence-game being played upon them: "'You fools!' cried he with the wooden leg, writhing himself loose and inflamedly turning upon the throng; 'you flock of fools, under this captain of fools, in this ship of fools!'" (Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 15). Melville is probably referring to the *Ship of Fools* painting by Hieronymus Bosch and the 1492 book of the same name by Sebastian Brant (*Das Narrenschiff*). Yet the image or allegory of a ship of fools goes back to Book VI of Plato's *Republic*, in which Socrates and his interlocuters discuss the many obstacles in the way of a true captain or philosopher king to emerge and be recognized as such by the community.

right thing to do, no right way, no right time, and no right person in the contemporary situation. While it might not sound like a hermeneutic gesture, sometimes the good will and circumstances necessary for a genuine conversation are not available, and maybe it is just a waiting game. Solidarity, according to Gadamer, is not something one can manufacture, fabricate, or force. In fact, this is precisely Gadamer's insight about conversation as the model of hermeneutic experience and the event of understanding. No one can force a conversation or singlehandedly will it into existence. Instead, "it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it . . . the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led."[73] Solidarity is not a solidarity of one. In a community of corruption and hypocrisy, without others willing to match our good will, one's comprehensive knowledge of context might reveal that one is simply hamstrung to act in any productive manner towards solidarity with others.[74]

While part of the frustration in this notion of practical wisdom is its apparent passivity in the face of corruption, this should not imply an inherent laziness or complacency in Gadamerian solidarity. Insofar as one encounters the liar, the cheat, the gaslighter, or the confidence-man in his or her many forms, one should attempt to bring such dishonesty into the light. There is precedence in many of Gadamer's works which call for the strengthening of one's individual judgment and critical capacities.[75] This, I think, calls for the cultivation of vigilance. Not only should one remain vigilant in withstanding and exposing mendacity and falsification, but vigilance to remain ever attentive to the possibility of a new genuine dialogue partner or new friend to emerge. This kind of vigilance means remaining wakeful with open eyes for the Other to come into view. It means to hold vigil, in the sense of holding on to and holding open the flame of solidarity for others to see from a distance, inviting others to discover solidarities together.

However, in Melville's world of confidence-men and moral masquerading, how is one supposed to maintain this kind of vigilance and hope for others to affirm solidarity, while also avoiding the pitfalls of cynicism and suspicion? Solidarity

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[73] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 401.

[74] This point raises a set of obvious epistemological concerns about self-deception and about how one knows they are in fact the 'one' or one of the few who can not only identify the corruption at hand but are also themselves virtuous and capable of affirming solidarity in a corrupt community. Unfortunately, properly addressing this issue is beyond the scope of this essay.

[75] See, for instance, "Culture and Media," "What is Practice?," and Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Limitations of the Expert," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, ed. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, transl. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 181-192.

ultimately requires two or more individuals to come together in trust, friendship, and good will, which ultimately requires a certain amount of risk. This risk is at least twofold. First, and most obviously, one risks being taken advantage of by others. The offering of trust, friendship, and good will can easily be exploited by many subtle operators and institutions who have no qualms about treating others as mere means to their self-interested ends. Second, as Foster indicates, there is a real risk in accepting the naïve Panglossian position of living in the best of all possible worlds in modern (or contemporary) America. This is to say, in the spirit of solidarity and affirming the hermeneutic virtues, one might end up deceiving themselves about the world they live in, which is either incapable or has no interest in reciprocating one's hermeneutic gestures. This, in turn, may lead to actively ignoring or making excuses for the dishonesty and hypocrisy of others. Ideally, proper vigilance would keep one from accepting such a deception or distortion of reality, but it remains unclear how one is supposed to maintain this virtuous balance between false hope and dangerous gullibility on the one hand, and undue suspicion and cynicism on the other hand.

Lastly, *The Confidence-Man* places the Melvillian Drummond light on one of the most fundamental tensions within Gadamerian solidarity, namely, that the discovering and affirming of solidarities is not something one can coerce, manipulate, or force others into doing. Dostal's work not only emphasizes the role of good will in Gadamer's notion of solidarity, but in his recent book, he also details the often-overlooked influence of Immanuel Kant's practical philosophy on Gadamer's hermeneutics.[76] We should likewise here refer to Kant and his notion of what it means for a rational being to act with a good will as it relates to Gadamerian solidarity. For Kant, having a good will means that one acts from one's duty to the moral law. As an act of the will, this means that whether one acts from one's *a priori* duty or from *a posteriori* inclinations is a matter of one's free choice of the will. Crucial to having a good will means that one has to take it up for him or herself. Furthermore, attempting to coerce or manipulate another rational being into having a good will, especially through any form of dishonesty, would be a violation of the autonomy of that rational being, and means that such an individual engaging in this deception is likewise not acting with a good will.

While Gadamer is not a strict Kantian by any means, Gadamerian solidarity functions in a similar fashion. To bring about a world in which we are all attempting to discover and affirm already existing, but perhaps hidden, solidarities means that

[76] See Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 8-54. This chapter is entitled: "Gadamer's Ambivalence toward the Enlightenment Project."

each individual ultimately has to choose to do this on their own. One might provide arguments and at best attempt to persuade others to take solidarity seriously, but it is not something one can force, manipulate, strongarm, or coerce others into. Furthermore, persuasion cannot be achieved through dishonest means, as this would not be in the spirit of good will, trust, openness, and friendship. Especially if solidarity fundamentally means a trust in language, then forms of dishonesty and duplicity are a basic violation of this trust. This would be the exact opposite of caring for and cultivating the linguistic possibilities for understanding. To put it simply, one cannot run a confidence game on others in order to bring about solidarity in the world. One masquerade cannot be replaced by another masquerade, as West notes in his interview, "Once you let loose a lie in the world, it can easily take on a life and logic of its own. So that it may initially have been sustaining or whatnot, but the canker works gradually. The danger is that lies can become habit-forming. That's part of what Melville is saying here too you see?"[77] Despite all the tensions and difficulties in his notion of solidarity, Gadamer would wholeheartedly agree with this. Whether it is the duplicitous world of Melville's America aboard the *Fidèle*, Gadamer's modern world of alienating bureaucracy and instrumental rationality, or our own issues with deception and dishonesty in the twenty-first century, discovering and affirming solidarity with each other cannot come at the sacrifice of honesty, good will, and hermeneutic virtue.

[77] West, "Metaphysics, Money & the Messiah," 112.

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The World in a Word: A Hermeneutic of Wonder in Melville's Whale

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Abstract

Herman Melville's Moby-Dick is a tale of vengeance, mortality, and human fragility, framed through the lens of language and interpretation. This essay explores the hermeneutic openings in Moby-Dick, emphasizing how Melville's engagement with language invites readers to wonder and make meaning. Drawing on the philosophical hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger and his intellectual successors, as well as Richard Kearney's concept of the "inaugural instant of reckoning," this analysis positions Moby-Dick as a call to cultivate a hermeneutic of wonder. By examining the interplay between the crew, the captain, and the whale, the essay discloses Melville's invitation to confront the ineffable and embrace the beauty of interpretive beginnings. Ultimately, these hermeneutic openings point toward both the everyday call to wonder and the ethical responsibility to navigate life's uncertainties with openness and awe, offering readers a pathway to begin again.

Keywords: Gadamer, Heidegger, wonder, hermeneutics, responsibility, care

> These things are reciprocal; the ball
> rebounds, only to bound forward
> again...Can't ye see the world where
> you stand?
> —Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* is a tale of rupture, of terror, of human fragility, and of the way we must always, it would seem, begin again and again. Certainly, it is the story of vengeance in the face of the unknown, or better said, it is the song of the man who believes himself capable of controlling, narrowly escaping, and thus overpowering his own mortality. It is also the daring refrain of men on the run from the mundanity of the land in the heart of the sea. And, it is the story of a great and awesome creature who will not let her nemesis have the final word. Indeed, there is no final word. Melville undertakes a wildly hermeneutic adventure that begins, where we always are beginning, in language. The story gets its start, not in the sea, but in a library, with the nostalgia of a bookkeeper found affectionately dusting off his old grammar school books because in them he had been oft reminded of his humanity.[1] As such, the line that seems to be accepted as the starting point for the tale, "Call me Ishmael,"[2] is little more than a punctuating marker amid Melville's love letter to language. *Moby-Dick* begins with an etymology echoed throughout by textual interludes of definition and exegesis. Just as the reader finds herself settled into the narrative she, like the crew of the *Pequod*, is jared from slumber and asked to wonder where it all began. This return is not a nostalgic longing for what might have been, but instead, a comportment toward the ineffable, or as Catherine Keller suggests, "regroup[ing] before the impossible."[3] Awash in language, Melville invites readers to make meaning. And, as we move between the crew, the captain, and the whale we find ourselves first and foremost in the presence of the impossible, which is to say beautiful language, or hermeneutic beginnings.

It is these hermeneutic openings that are of central importance as they point both to the call of everyday wonder, as well as the responsibility left to us in the wake of the wondrous. In other words, Melville's beginnings might assist our own understanding of the possibility of a hermeneutic of wonder. Throughout this essay we will call upon an understanding of philosophical hermeneutics granted to us

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[1] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick Or The Whale* (New York: Penguin Group, 1992), 3.
[2] Ibid., xxxvii.
[3] Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 16.

through the work of Martin Heidegger and his many philosopher-theologian students. Taking as a frame of reference Richard Kearney's call to return to the "inaugural instant of reckoning,"[4] the following sections are an attempt to disclose Melville's hermeneutic openings in order that we too may begin again.

I ~ The long way 'round

> We can begin (and we must always be beginning)
> only where our history has so far brought us.
> —Wendell Berry, *Life is a Miracle*

Long before the reader is introduced to the titular character of the text she is led, by way of the narrator, Ishmael, to a painting and a sermon. Said differently, we find Ishmael in a world of things and words of ultimate relational significance.[5] In each of these moments we find him filled with foreboding as he recalls the fatal voyage. He knows the journey ends badly, and as he retells the story, he does so after the fact, looking back in order to look ahead. Significantly, the reader cannot interpret the text outside of the narrator's invitation to look back, and looking back, or rather thinking back establishes the inherent hermeneutic effort required to make any kind of sense of the story.

Before the narrator boards the ship he is beckoned by a painting. He cannot make sense of the artwork but he is called, nonetheless, to make it mean something. Melville's description of Ishmael in the presence of the painting is a commemorative hermeneutic invitation.

> On one side hung a very large oil-painting so thoroughly besmoked, and every way defaced, that in the unequal cross-lights by which you viewed it, it was only by diligent study and a series of systematic visits to it, and careful inquiry of the neighbors, that you could any way arrive at an understanding of its purpose. Such unaccountable masses of shades and shadows, that at first you almost thought some ambitious young artist, in the time of the New England hags, had endeavored to delineate chaos bewitched […] Yet there

[4] Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 7.
[5] Martin Heidegger, trans. Joan Stambaugh, *Being and Time* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 85.

> was a sort of indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity about it that fairly froze you to it, till you involuntarily took an oath with yourself to find out what that marvelous painting meant.[6]

The painting requires much of the viewer. He cannot let the image go. He is confronted by what Gadamer calls the, "mysterious intimacy," of art that, "grips our entire being, as if there were no distance at all between us and the work and every encounter with it were an encounter with ourselves."[7] Through the poor lighting of the inn, the smoke that separates the viewer from the painting, amid the shades, shadows, colors, and cracks, Ishmael must interpret, and he is aware that the painting will not be understood in one sitting. He must interpret, over and over.There is no other option. Once confronted by the painting the viewer must return again and again to the site. He must study the composition, reflect on the colors, and consider, if ever so briefly, the artist. Admitting the difficulty of understanding such a piece, the viewer must "ask the neighbors," and converse with others in order to find some kind of meaning. He cannot do it alone. The image is murky, the colors are dark and faded. But he knows the painting is saying *something* to him. Indeed, he is summoned by a disclosure that will ultimately, as Gadamer asserts, "shatter, and demolish the familiar with a joyous and frightening shock."[8] The painting calls the viewer-narrator and the reader alike into question and discloses the world anew.

Melville anticipates his reader well, we may want the whale, but what we need is the world. And, the world is revealed not by statements and assertions of how things are, but rather, by a hermeneutic posture of questioning the things themselves. Possibilities of world and of meaning are evoked in the questions addressed to the narrator by the painting he attempts to understand. The chaos and uncertainty of the journey is manifest in the unknown and extraordinary wonder of the painting. A wonder that demands much and is, following John D. Caputo, an "interpretive imperative that lays claim to us so relentlessly as to constitute the very thing, if there is such a thing, that makes us who we are."[9] Being thus addressed, is according to Gadamer, the "first principle of hermeneutics."[10] However, while it may be the case

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[6] Melville, 13.
[7] Hans-Georg Gadamer, edited by Richard E. Palmer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings* (IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 124.
[8] Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," 131.
[9] John D. Caputo, *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information* (UK: Penguin, Random House, 2018), 141.
[10] Gadamer, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, *Truth and Method* (NY: Continuum, 2004), 298.

that Ishmael is addressed by the work of art, it is one thing to be addressed by something, and an entirely different thing to hear the summons. Here Heidegger's reminder that Dasein is always already in truth and untruth finds ground for Melville's reader.

> Thus, Dasein must explicitly and essentially appropriate what has also been discovered, defend it against semblance [Shein] and dissemblance [Verstellung], and ensure itself of its discoveredness again and again [. . .] Truth (discoveredness) must always first be wrested [abgerungen] from beings.[11]

From the ontic grasp of beings, plans, objects, and assertions, Dasein is called. The painting is a call to the viewer, just as the text is a summons to the reader and we must, it would seem, interpret all the way down. Wresting meaning from the image is a hermeneutic work of wonder. That is to say the image may be aesthetically pleasing, but its beauty, its wonder lies in the interpretive work it evokes from the viewer. Ishmael takes the painting so seriously as to "make an oath" with himself to return again and again to the site of wonder in order to make meaning there.

The throughline of call and response follows Ishmael from the pub to the pew where sanctuary vestments and a minister's words reveal a sacred hermeneutic invocation. "These things are not without their meanings,"[12] he laments as he makes his way through a somber congregation to his seat before the pulpit. The things, which are epitaphs of whalers long lost at sea, awaken the dread of the unknown, and serve as a fleeting reminder of the human condition. "Perhaps," Ishmael remarks, "we have hugely mistaken this matter of life and death, "as "[t]he [deathly] business of whaling is a speechlessly quick chaotic bundling of man into Eternity."[13] The would-be whaler must contend with the harsh reality of the fragility of his own existence. It is one thing to be beckoned by an interpretive opening as he stood before an unknown work of art, knowing he can return again to harvest meaning. It is altogether different to face the interpretive imperative made evident in facing one's own death. He may, like all the rest, lose himself to the sea, the whale, the monster. However, Ishmael does not dwell long in this depressing disclosure. Indeed, being-towards-death is, for Heidegger, a primary catalyst for hermeneutic authenticity, and in Ishmael we witness the

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[11] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 213.
[12] Melville, 42.
[13] Ibid.

considerable and bittersweet struggle in every interpretive opening.[14] Just as quickly as the thought is awakened within him he returns to the service with a hopeful lens toward his vocation. He reminds himself of something like latent hope in the very face of doubt, "[f]aith, like a jackal, feeds among the tombs, and even from these dead doubts she gathers her most vital hope," he remarks.[15] The condition for the possibility of despair is also the hope that compels him to the water.

At war with himself and in the disquieting truth of death he resolves otherwise. Or he thinks himself in some way untouchable, that is to say, he is able to distance himself from the death of the others. Ishmael's response within the chapel stands in stark contrast with his having been addressed by the painting at the inn. Whereas the painting is a beginning as well as the evidence of relentless wonder and further inquiry, the church and her somber congregation do little more than conceal the wonder of being. This interpretive road block offers an opening which will later serve as a hermeneutic framework to help the reader justify Ahab's outrageous demands. Ahab, Starbuck, and every whaler that somehow manages to return bears witness to the reasonableness of the journey. Heidegger calls this posture toward death an evasion and an acceptance. Here his words are helpful.

> The evasion of death which covers over dominates everydayness so stubbornly that, in being-with-one-another, [. . .] [i]t wants to bring him back to Dasein by helping him to veil completely his ownmost nonrelational possibility. Thus, the they provides a constant tranquilization about death. But basically, this tranquilization is not only for the "dying person," but just as much for "those comforting him." [. . .] Entangled, everyday being-toward-death is a constant flight from death. Being toward the end has the mode of evading that end–reinterpreting it, understanding it inauthentically, and veiling it.[16]

The difficulty Melville articulates here, in the chapel, is not necessarily the fact of the danger of the business of whaling, but rather the understanding concealed in the activity in the first place. The chapel does not awaken the whaler. He will not return to the chapel as he will the painting. As such, this opening towards death and authenticity is left unattended and will require further hermeneutic wrestling.[17] Certainly Ishmael is moved to thought concerning his own mortality however, he does

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[14] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 243-244.
[15] Melville, 45.
[16] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 243-244.
[17] Ibid., *Being and Time*, 247-248.

not linger there. "Surely," he thinks, "their fate is not mine." After all, it was Sunday, and the minister had prepared a sermon. He must begin again.

As if to further the dread faced by every whaler, Melville introduces Father Mapple's pulpit and readers are met with the familiar biblical tale of Jonah. Jonah is the fugitive prophet who contends with a terrifying great fish and lives to tell about it. He is the very representation of anomalous optimism and hermeneutic entanglement. Father Mapple's sermon is full of the righteous indignation of a whaler who has come to terms with his powerlessness and lived. And, as expected, the response of the congregation is little more than affirmation of what they think they already know of Jonah's story. The sermon, rather than opening up alternative possibilities of interpretation and response, solidifies a long accepted misunderstanding. That is to say, while the minister attempts to dissuade his audience, his words cannot be heard. Gadamer lends insight into the trouble found in making meaning within a tradition mistaken for having been understood once and for all and asserts that the efficacy of the tradition is wholly dependent on the ongoing work of interpretation.[18]

Mapple's Jonah sermon expects too much of an audience ill prepared to make sense of the story, pregnant with meaning, but covered over all the same. Melville anticipates this problem and before Mapple enters the sanctuary, Ishmael pauses before the pulpit. The wonder of this Sunday service is not found in the preacher, but in the hopeful potential of words yet to be uttered. "What could be more full of meaning?" he asks. He then proceeds to call attention to the wonderful reservoir of language gathered in the pulpit.

> [T]he pulpit is ever this earth's foremost part; all the rest comes in its rear; the pulpit leads the world. From thence it is the storm of God's quick wrath is first descried, and the bow must bear the earliest brunt. From thence it is the God of breezes fair or foul is first invoked for favorable winds. Yes, the world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow.[19]

While the sermon will underscore an already made meaning, the pulpit points to the not yet realized possibility of interpretation anew. In other words, the pulpit is an eschatological rendering of hope grounded in language yet to be spoken. It is the site, at least for Melville, where words make way for hermeneutic redemption. Caputo, following Gadamer, names this redemption as an inherent hermeneutic potential

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[18] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 398.
[19] Melville, 45.

found in a text "able to speak again and again, in ever-new contexts."[20] The power of Father Mapple's pulpit is not the man behind it but the words spoken from it. It is a sacred, ordinary thing that points to the real and true. Unlike the chapel, or the sermon, the pulpit–like the painting–invites conversation over and again, each time calling forth wonder from, as Karl Rahner asserts "the true and real hidden in all the ordinariness" of the world.[21] As the reader follows Ishmael from the church to the ship she is left with the great responsibility of attending to the varied call of wonder found in being-with and among the cacophony of the world of things, of people, of words.[22]

II ~ You and me and everything in between

> Our rich and complex international networks of
> production and distribution have come to an end before,
> but here we are, you and I, and here is humanity.
> —Sally Rooney, *Beautiful World, Where Are You*

Of course, Melville does not end his narrative in Nantucket. The pulpit and the painting are the first of many hermeneutic openings along the way to the whale. However, beyond being a catalyst for arousing Ishmael out of (mis)understanding, they also point to a central characteristic of being-in-the-world. Namely, we find ourselves in a world always already shared with others.[23] And, those others with whom we share the world make meaning with us. We need each other to make sense of things. That is to say hermeneutic openings are evident, thanks to language, in relation with others. In other words, interpretation is not a solitary endeavor. The painting requires conversations with the neighbors. The pulpit faces an audience in varying levels of readiness to apprehend and converse with the sacred text. In other words, we cannot and do not make meaning outside of our being-with. The hermeneutic imperative may be inescapably who we are,[24] and we are always in it together. Indeed, according to Gadamer, the task of hermeneutics is, to clarify the miracle of understanding, which is to say sharing in a common meaning,"[25]

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[20] Caputo, *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information,* 100.
[21] Karl Rahner, translated by Annemarie S. Kidder, *The Mystical Way in Everyday Life* (NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 5.
[22] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 115.
[23] Ibid., 116.
[24] Caputo, *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information*, 141.
[25] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 292.

Finding common meaning, or meeting one another in the miracle of hermeneutic possibility, is no small charge. However, Melville once again seems to anticipate the shared interpretive injunction as his characters are led toward one another in such a way that they can only be said to be in relation with one another through and through. Ishmael may have been able to evade impeding thoughts concerning his mortality in the chapel, but once aboard the *Pequod*, in the company of friends there remains little opportunity for willful ignorance. Wonder, here in these hermeneutic beginnings, is found in the arms of a friend, and the labor of the community aboard the ship.

You will remember that Ishmael arrives in Nantucket without a place to stay filled with the hope of a journey he could never imagine. Every inn is full of whalers and dreamers, and at last he agrees to share a room with the strange and foreign cannibal, Queequeg. Melville describes Queequeg as a "tattooed abominable savage," and also a man unlike any other man who treated Ishmael with remarkable "civility and consideration."[26] Ishmael's unlikely friendship with Queequeg reveals the relational dynamic of hermeneutic possibility and is the first of many interpretive beginnings where being-with is a structure of understanding otherwise. Melville's lengthy description of their "bosom friendship," is helpful.

> How it is I know not; but there is no place like a bed for confidential disclosures between friends. Man and wife, they say, there open the very bottom of their souls to each other; and some old couples often lie and chat over old times till nearly morning. Thus, then, in our hearts honeymoon, lay I and Queeqeug–a cosy, loving pair. Be it said, that although I had felt such a strong repugnance to his smoking in the bed the night before, yet see how elastic and stiff our prejudices grow when love once comes to bend them. For now I liked nothing better than to have Queequeg smoking by me, even then.[27]

While the powerful moment where prejudices are washed away in the intimacy of an evening shared certainly lends understanding to a hermeneutic of openness and care toward others of difference, we would do better to reflect on the conversation that took place prior to Ishmael's reflective response. In other words, in their being-with, in their world that was nothing less than words, they uncovered the possibility of caring differently for one another. Language, according to Gadamer, thus had its "true being

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[26] Melville, 30.
[27] Ibid., 59-60.

in dialogue, in coming to an understanding." Furthermore, coming to an understanding is not a passive happenstance, but rather intentional work, purposeful action, a "process in which a community of life is lived out."[28] In the presence of the other, with difference on full display, Ishmael and Queequeg work out their understanding together. They interpret, and they embrace. As they do so they make meaning otherwise, and there was no other way. They learn to love one another, and herein is the wondrous, the impossible. Love is the hermeneutic rendering of a world always already shared. Rahner attends to this kind of being-with in the language of his theology writing,

> When people truly love their neighbor, they drop into and penetrate the ultimate depths of their existence, the ultimate realities of the world and creation and are—without necessarily calling it this—mysteriously encountering God [by] virtue of their love.[29]

How easy it is to love when differences are not so evident. The truly wondrous makes way, not in the realm of similarity, but rather in the hard work of being-with and abiding difference. Which is to say the presence of the impossible that neither party could have foreseen. Caputo calls this a religious experience of the impossible where, "our sense of reality and of its limits is disturbed and we begin to lose our grip and find ourselves in the grip of something that carries us along." In this space we are transformed, "exposed, vulnerable, expectant, in motion, moving, being moved, by the impossible."[30] More than an evening shared between new friends, what Melville brings us to in the early days of Ishmael's relationship with Queequeg is the very possibility of love as a hermeneutic of wonder in a world shared between at least two.

This hermeneutic is further underscored in Melville's account of the interdependent labor demanded between crewmates and harpooners fastened tightly together by the fate of the whale and the monkey rope. Queequeg's life was dependent on Ishmael's. They were inseparably linked and thus found themselves no longer able to look away from the harsh truth of human fragility. Describing the "humorously perilous business" of the monkey rope, Ishmael recalls,

> For better or worse, we two, for the time, were wedded; and should poor Queequeg sink to rise no more, then both usage and honor demanded, that

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[28] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 443.
[29] Rahner, *The Mystical Way in Everyday Life,* 77.
[30] John D. Caputo, *On Religion 2nd Edition,* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 17.

> instead of cutting the cord, it should drag me down in his wake [. . .] So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that while earnestly watching his motions, I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two. Still further pondering, I say, I saw that this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes; only, in most cases, he one way or another, has this connexion with a plurality of other mortals.[31]

The monkey rope that connects him to his friend disallows the extravagant evasion of the reality of death, and binds the whalers together such that they cannot flee. Significantly, their interpretation is wholly dependent on being-with one another. While the whalers are no strangers to death, they are, however, placed in relation to it differently by virtue of the monkey rope. Ishmael and Queequeg find themselves in varying degrees of care for each other.[32] Significantly, care structures being-with, and is accompanied by the real possibility of sharing and facing death, which brings forth a hermeneutic invitation to wonder.[33]

Sustained by the monkey rope, Melville leads his protagonist and reader alike to reverence for the humanity of the other of himself, and the common meaning being made between two. Prior to the monkey rope, Ishmael had little desire to consider the very real possibility of his death. The monkey rope thus, not only moves him toward a hermeneutic of authenticity, but also, requires, to some degree, that he linger there. It is to this *lingering* that we now turn.

III ~ Dwelling here, being-there

> Tomorrow he would buy a new notebook and write them down. Tonight he would write down enough. He had time to feel the strangeness of before and after; an hour ago there had been no poems, and now they came like rain and were real.
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> —A.S. Byatt, *Possession*

[31] Melville, 349.
[32] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 118.
[33] Ibid., 249.

Each of the previously discussed hermeneutic openings have underscored the call and response character of (mis)understanding. Or, to use Heidegger's language, we have seen truth and untruth as the constitutive reality of Dasein having fallen prey to the everydayness of a world increasingly resistant to understanding. Furthermore, the work of wresting understanding from concealment is ongoing, "Dasein must explicitly and essentially appropriate what has also already been discovered, defend it against semblance [Schein] and dissemblance [Verstellung], and ensure itself on its discoveredness again and again."[34] As such, interpretive possibilities, or hermeneutic openings require a certain willingness to linger in order to hear the call of truth through the chaotic noise of untruth. And lingering might be said to be the dwelling place of wonder.

Of course you will recall Aristotle and Plato as naming wonder as the origin of philosophy. Significantly, Heidegger follows suit with this origin story and describes wonder as a disruptive dispositional dwelling place. That is to say, we wonder, and can only be wondering from within a world we're always already amid.

> Wonder is the basic disposition that primordially disposes man into the beginning of thinking because, before all else, it displaces man into that essence whereby he then finds himself caught up in the midst of beings as such and as a whole he finds himself caught up in them.[35]

In other words, while it may be the case that we find ourselves wondering before a hitherto inexperienced new thing, that *new* thing cannot appear outside of the world of things and words we have already called home. Jeff Malpas underscores this notion, "[w]onder is thus a returning, sometimes with the abruptness of a sudden shock, to the world to which we always already belong."[36]

Certainly, the common use of *linger* is something like waiting, or loitering, simply staying a little longer in place. However, we would do well to reflect on the word beyond its everyday usage. To linger not only suggests a waiting, or a yielding but also the two-fold possibility of dwelling and desire.[37] To linger is to "dwell, abide,

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[34] Ibid., 213.
[35] Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected Problems of "Logic,"* trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 147.
[36] Malpas, Jeff, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Topology of Being.* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2012), 267.
[37] See Ramsey Eric Ramsey's, "Before the Work of Art: Education as Yielding to Art's Address," *Phainomena*, vol. 28. 110-111, 2019, 307-322.

or stay," and it is also called upon to indicate a "longing, craving, or hankering."[38] Heidegger names dwelling the "manner in which mortals are on the earth."[39] Said differently, to linger is to stay a while, to recollect and reflect, on account of that which we lack, and know not what, and may not yet have the sense to articulate. And, to linger is to occupy a middle ground somewhere between truth and untruth, the sacred and the profane, the earth and the sky. It is, akin to the account Plato's Socrates offers of Love, the child of Plenty and Poverty, who beckons time and again to understanding otherwise.[40] That is to say, dwelling or lingering is how and who we are. We pause before the painting, the conversation, the other, not because we have already understood, but because we want to understand. Significantly, the desire to understand, that leads to wonder is not, as Malpas warns, mere puzzlement or curiosity that will be resolved in some kind of answer.[41] Rather, lingering brings forth wonder, and makes way for understanding. To linger is to recollect oneself, to withdraw from the everyday within the everyday and somehow make our way home. This ongoing movement of return and wonder, or lingering in the everyday and longing for home is central to Melville's insistent hermeneutic provocation.

For the most part, the hermeneutic invitations we've explored thus far have been from the vantage of a generally amenable subject. That is to say, Ishmael, though taken up with everyday concerns, is a character in whom we see the hopeful possibility found in being at least willing to heed the call of understanding. He seems aware of his misunderstanding and so he waits, he listens, and he finds himself over and again in a space of interpretive possibility toward what he does not know. However, this orientation toward understanding is not the norm. We are, according to Heidegger, in flight from thought. Our everyday concerns and moods cloud our thinking and make it difficult to find relief let alone linger.[42] In many ways, Captain Ahab serves to remind of this very challenging reality. He cannot see further than the nemesis he pursues. His understanding is as limited as the forestructures of thought that hold him captive.[43] Captain Ahab's rigidity and arrogance, then, stand in stark contrast to Ishmael's hermeneutic humility and provide a frame of reference where wonder languishes amid interpretive stopgaps of our own making.

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[38] *Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "linger (v.)," March 2024, https://doi-org.services.lib.mtu.edu/10.1093/OED/9408004489.*

[39] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Basic Writings*, edited by J. Glenn Gray and Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 326.

[40] Plato, *Symposium* trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[41] Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place,* 253.

[42] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 131.

[43] Ibid., 151.

Melville strikes a balance between Ishmael's perception of Ahab's obsession with hunting the whale and the crew's desire to follow Ahab to their most certain end. It is this tension that brings Ahab's dangerous rigidity into focus. Neither the clear thinking of Starbuck, nor joyful recklessness of Stubb could alter Ahab's course.

> Such a crew, so offered, seemed specially picked and packed by some infernal fatality to help him to his monomaniac revenge [. . .] For one, I gave myself up to the abandonment of the time and the place; but while yet all a-rush to encounter the whale, could see naught in that brute but the deadliest ill.[44]

The journey begins with Ahab as a myth of sorts. He's on the ship, but no one has seen him. He stays below deck with an undisclosed illness shrouded in the lore of the sea. When he finally emerges, he does so with a spirit so forceful as if to awaken himself from the internal conflict that brought him to the *Pequod* in the first place. He raises his war-cries against the white monster of the water and enthusiastically beckons the crew to join his vengeful journey. And, then he makes his presence daily known on deck. He broods in anger and grief. He fantasizes over a successful hunt. He leads his crew to their death. Of course, these details are well known. However, more troubling than Ahab's tenuous relationship to reality, is his irreverence in the face of the great creature and the towering waters of her residence. That is to say, while Melville was certainly calling attention to Ahab's consuming vengeance, his hubris in the presence of the unknown was far more fatal. He could not linger, he would not wonder, he thought he knew what he could not have known. He treats both whale and water as predictable, and in so doing ceases to wonder, and as Wendell Berry powerfully notes, Ahab thus, "gives up on life."[45] Malpas follows a similar refrain and reminds that "wonder involves a way of seeing the world, and the things in it, that is independent of what one may know or what one can explain, even though it may also have an important role in making knowledge or explanation possible."[46] Wonder is the beginning of understanding allowed by having misunderstood in the first place. In other words, misunderstanding is the condition for the possibility of understanding and wonder arrives as the beautiful consequence of having come to understand at all.

Thankfully, Ahab's story is not merely one of hubris and the absence of wonder. Melville, by way of a coin, causes Ahab to linger, if only for a little while and

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[44] Melville, 203.
[45] Wendell Berry, *Life is a Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition.* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2000), 6.
[46] Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place,* 253.

along the way we meander through various interpretive possibilities of world and word.

> But one morning, turning to pass the doubloon, he seemed to be newly attracted by the strange figures and inscriptions stamped on it, as though now for the first time beginning to interpret for himself in some monomaniac way whatever significance might lurk in them. And some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher, except to sell by the cartload, as they do hills about Boston to fill up some morass in the Milky Way.[47]

After making his morning rounds about the deck and pausing to gaze at the sea in hopeful anticipation of finally capturing the whale, Ahab notices the dubloon, as if he'd never seen it before. There were no answers to be uncovered in the presence of the coin. Neither he nor the crew could predict with any kind of accuracy what was to be the success of their voyage and thus the fate of the whale or the dubloon. He had seen the coin a thousand times before. But, on this morning, it caught him off guard and he lingers there so enamored that the crew begins to take notice.[48] And then, as if by miracle, those aboard the *Pequod* one after the other pass by the coin to offer their interpretation, to preach a word about the world. Ahab sees himself and his pain. Starbuck sees destruction and failure, and then he prays. Stubb reads the stars and prophesies concerning the times, the seasons, and the sure success of their voyage. Others see nothing but a coin. Queequeg takes and compares notes. Pip tries but cannot make sense at all. None of the interpreters nor their interpretations are superfluous, and if taken seriously may be read as invitations to participate in the language-world inhabited and shared aboard the *Pequod*. Each of the crew members respond with sincerity to what Caputo calls the "business of life," which is to, "strain to hear what is addressing us, to enter into dialogue in which the world beckons and respond."[49] Thus Ahab lingers before the dubloon. His desires, like our own, may be as banal as the day before, but, if only for a moment, he dwells amid hermeneutic wonder and, remarkably, he leads his crew to do the same, enlarging their world by the very words they share.

Time and again Melville leads the reader to hermeneutic openings that demand nothing less than lingering in the face of the unknown from within an everyday marked by the mundane. Ishmael was the lone survivor of the *Pequod's* first and final voyage.

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[47] Melville, 470.
[48] Ibid., 471.
[49] Caputo, *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information*, 310.

But we are not alone. We are here, in the world and of the world and so, we too must begin again. We respond. And we, like Ishmael, are wanderers, for whom it is, "generally well known that out of the crews of Whaling vessels (American) few ever return in the ships on board of which they departed."[50]

[50] Melville, l.

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'Since hearsed was Pan': Marvel Melville Underground

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Abstract

This essay reads the "clover" poems of *Weeds & Wildings Chiefly: with A Rose or Two*, and its preface "To Winnefred" as dis-seminal, ionic, and fractal writing. Reading such attests the fabric of Melville's poems as partial reverberation. Its reading is an activity of hearsing: burial, decomposition, yet also recomposition. Re-hearsing: to hear song; or, poetry. Parts and particles of each poem are strewn across the others, and create the stage of interpretation. Verse is an affair of companions, associating ions and Pan in commonality, a poetic sovereignty that is counter-institutional or substitution to static or State institution. Celebrating weeds, wildings, low life, the ground as fundamental redistribution, *Weeds & Wildings,* Melville's ultimate leave-taking, addresses reading, its possible incarnation or actualisation in a hypothetical reader. Its preface, "To Winnifred," structures the relation of writer and reader, writing and reading, by layering the "clover" poems upon the expression *living in clover*. Rehearsing it as the irreducible differance of reader and writer, this essay invokes Melville and his text as living ink lover.

Keywords: Melville, *Weeds & Wildings*, clover, dissemination, living, Pan, reading, wilding, writing

> If there is no thematic unity or total meaning to be reappropriated beyond textual instances in an imaginary, an intentionality or lived experience, the text is then no longer the expression or the representation (be it felicitous or not) of some *truth* that would come to diffract itself or to gather itself in a polysemous literature. In the place of this hermeneutic concept of *polysemy* there must be *substituted* (my emphasis) the concept of *dissemination*. [. . .] For all of that, is dissemination the *loss* of such a truth, the negative interdiction of accessing such a signified? Far from leaving one to *suppose* (my emphasis) that a virgin *substance* (my emphasis) precedes or surveys truth, dispersing itself or interdicting itself in a secondary negativity, dissemination *affirms* the always already divided generation of meaning.[1]

Opening

Dissemination sub-stitutes, -stitutes in the root sense of an institution or constitution that is below, and this substitution or sub-(in)stitution signs, affirms (*firma*, signature), cutting before any supposed whole substance. As such, dissemination is a sub-stitution before any supposed unitary substance. Derrida defines dissemination by way of a prefix "sub-" in this preference of substitution to any supposition or substance, and this preference positions the sub- as ground in its pulverized acceptation of "infinitely divvied, ground up." Meaning is authored by dissemination, which means its genesis is shared among particles.

Ground

The last deleted poem of the "Appendix" for Melville's *Weeds and Wildings* is entitled "Under the Ground," an echo no doubt of the last poem in Part II "A Ground-Vine," in which "a groundling," the "Ground-Vine," "*Intercedes with the Queen of Flowers/ For the merited recognition of Clover*" (the italicized subtitle).[2] The ground-vine aims to win some share of the sun—recognition—for the lowly "Clover" (29) in its appeal to the rose. The word "win" (15, 26), and "winsome" (30) retrieve the importance of this

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[1] Jacques Derrida, *La dissémination (*Paris: Seuil, 1972), 319; 326. Translation mine.

[2] The collection's full title is *Weeds and Wildings Chiefly: with A Rose or Two*. Edition used: *The Writings of Herman Melville, Volume Thirteen*, Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Uncompleted Writings, eds. Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall, Robert A. Sandberg, G. Thomas Tanselle (Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library: Evanston and Chicago, 2017). All quotations of poems therefrom are succeeded by their line numbers, and from its Preface, by the abbreviation NN + page number.

syllable *win* which the collection's preface, "To Winnefred," puts in place and towards and from which our study moves. The words "share" (13, 22) and "share-and-share-alike" (18) also materialize the core proclamation of the Preface ("We are all Communists here" [NN 75]) whose principle—we intend to demonstrate—is Melville's ground poetics in *Weeds and Wildings*. Trace of the collection's basic two part division,[3] "A Ground-Vine" argues on behalf of a common entanglement, palpably recognizant of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* ("And, ranked with grass, a flower may dwell,/ Cheerful" [19-20]). From such entanglement, pragmatic heteronymic obligation follows because the common share of all life ("we plants are all akin./ Our roots enlock" [14-15]) is turned toward space, air, weather, and the sun. The "groundling" first denounces its denial ("Each strives to win/ The sampler space, the balmier air./ But beauty, plainness, shade, and sun – / Here share-and-share-alike is none!" [15-18]). Yet, the richly multiple subjunctive modal, "may," affirms being part and parcel with climate: "And, ranked with grass, a flower may dwell/ […] In bloom that shares the broader weather; Charmful" (19, 22-23). Full of "Charm" and "Cheer," this clover will share also, via the "char-" of the collection, in words such as "orchards," "charters," and "charnel," and in its birdsongs of cheer (as in "Cheer" and "*Chee-chee*"), making of *Weeds and Wildings* a disseminal textual echo chamber. The Appendix's final deleted poem re-entwines this link of rose and clover.

"Under the Ground" recounts the story of the poetic I, presumably Melville, who, on a "footpath" that "threads" "through clover" between a "garden" and an "old tomb," is "marvelled" by the fact of a gardener's boy who crosses his path in order to take roses to inhume in an old tomb. Melville had, at this final moment of his life as writer, precisely just turned his back on its "gloom" so as to stay among the "clovers" that line the path back to the garden. As a writer, he had thought that the way of *his* "thread" amid these clovers could not "read" "th**read**s" toward death. In the paronomasia of "marvel" that resonates in his name, Melville becomes younger than the boy, for "marvel," which is Melville's final verb, his final action, is the synonym for Descartes' "admiration" that itself translates Aristotle's *thaumazein*, the originary or innocent reaction to the 'what is' or the 'that is' (of phenomena as such) that precedes even the question, or act of question. "I marvelled" is what Melville does and it takes the form of a stupefied question: "Roses! you would not these inhume?" That question itself follows his rhetorical question of "whither you wend?" when this question,

[3] The Northwestern Newberry editors' manuscript analysis shows how in the genesis of *Weeds and Wildings* the "rose poems" came before the "clover poems." Melville inverted this order and placed the "rose poems" at the end after the Spring of 1888. "Clover" had been a possible title for the whole, and Melville dubbed its poems "clover-heads" (NN 551-52).

knowing the boy takes the path to the tomb, is a distant echo of the question in "Field Asters," "Whither bound?" which itself denoted bound-for-death. Yet the boy's answer is twice yes, twice "Yea." The "dank" of the dark charnel vault has the "charm" of keeping the roses' bloom, during the time while the boy's "Master" waits to wed his bride ("for against the bridal hour/ My Master fain would keep their bloom"). Thanks to its denotation of a marshy spot, the "dank" is a kindly thought (*dank*, Germanic origin of 'thank' and 'think') whereby Melville's "charnel" becomes "charm." Although this final poem associated with *Weeds and Wildings* was relegated to an Appendix, commentary upon it may ally its alliance between Master and bride with the alliance that "To Winnefred" begins by recalling, be it between Herman and Winnefred or between the scriptor and the reader. That alliance is grounded by dissemination, affirmed, like a vote yea, in and for all its particulars, particles, in and for what we shall attempt to elucidate as all its companions.

The Northwestern Newberry editors observe that, leaving its trace on Melville's manuscript, "an unknown hand identified the 'Winnefred' of the dedication as 'Lizzie' (Melville's wife, Elizabeth Shaw Melville)" (NN 547). Directed by that unknown scriptor, the writers of the "Historical Note" of the NN edition weigh in for the biographical equation, without supporting their claim about its inclusion among her other, unspecified, nicknames: "he revised his more-or-less autobiographical dedication to 'Winnefred' (one of several affectionate names for his wife)" (365, "Historical Note, NN). Criticism on "To Winnefred" prolongs this biographical interpretation. The present study will finish in a return to this criticism and the preface.

Noting the oddity of its spelling, the editors comment on the spelling of this apparent name when they induce possible sources for the name, or as it may have been, nickname: "The manuscript spelling is retained, though Melville may have been alluding to St. Winifred, the patron saint of bakers, or the "Song to Winifreda," a poem about happy married life included in Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765)" (NN 365). My reading of "To Winnefred" submits the claim that the implication of the reader is more expansive and complex than these biographical and precursor explanations of, respectively, an empirical reader or possible sources, without however invalidating them: after all, to state the obvious, "Herman" is the husband of his wife, the man of his woman, and thus "To Winnefred" can be from her man. Hearing its title as "Two win if read" or "To win if read", or even "to when if read," implies the structure of readership, the structure of a text into whose activation is built the possibility of the reader-to-come the counterpart of which is the ideality, or ghostliness, of the writer that cannot be said entirely to disappear, if the text is to be

form of any kind and not reduced to sheer and inchoate matter.

The Scene of Interpretation

The poem "Field Asters" stages itself explicitly as questions of interpretation and meaning. The basic phenomenon is "cheer," its existence. In this collection, "cheer" does not beam by itself but rather is charged by the word, the cry of the bird, the "chee-chee," the voice in its phatic expressive activation. This "cheer" is the *quod*—the that it is. It is already open to interpretation and therefore to the *quid*, the what it is, the meaning of the that or *quod*.

In "Field Asters," "asters" and "arrest" interconvert, the same letters (with a double "s" becoming a double "r") rearrange in the differance between "asters" that signify the existence of the phenomena, and "arrest" that denotes the attempt to stop, to seize, to fix (i.e. interpret) the phenomena. This tension concerns what might be called the stoppage that happens in instances of the double 'e-e', as in the "**e**-y-**e**-s" (7) whereby the simple "s-**ee**" (3, 4, 5) happens to be ghosted by an accruing "int-**e**-rpr-**e**-t" (6). The poem is a scene and the seen of reading, but also inversely, a reading of seeing, a scenario of the seen.

There is a triangle of directed gazes in the poem. The stars see ("peep," 2) the flowers, and not the humans. The humans ("us," 8) gaze ("star-gazers," 8) at the stars, not at the flowers. The flowers look at ("scrutinize," 8) humans, not at the stars. This non-reciprocity of gaze puts dissemination at the heart of any supposed dyadic relation between onlooker and looked-at, between reader and text. This ricochet already is an incipient model for the reading gaze or the functioning—concatenation—of the poems in *Weeds and Wildings*. The lack of a one-to-one relation may figure an echo effect in the verbal materiality of the poems, a phenomenon whereby, say, a reader sees a given word, that word looks to, to so speak (by its sound effects, by its letters) other words that by those effects of letters look to, in turn, the reader: in any event, and even without the personification of words being able to "look" elsewhere, this ricochet-effect constitutes, *by scattering*, any one-to-one relation between reader and word.

The meaning of the flowers' scrutinizing "Us" (8) is itself not interpretable, "inscrutabl[e]" (7). This inscrutability is perhaps because "we" do not look at, i.e. interpret, the field asters. They are "seen—," "seen of all," and "seen indeed" (3, 4, 5), but although "seen" it is as if we do not ever arrest that seeing, i.e. reflect upon that seeing, and therefore the poem seems to express the idea that neither their existence

(their "cheer," their being-there) nor their intentionality or consciousness as it were ("what they mean/ when [. . .] their eyes/ Us [. . .] scrutinize") is arrested, i.e., reflected upon, submitted to hermeneutics, to a type of *ti esti* questioning (i.e. the question, what is it? What does it mean?).

"Field Asters" is about a doubling or mirroring: sky and ground, stanza 1 and stanza 2, eyes looking down at eyes looking up, for example. Effect of doubling, the recurrence of "ee" arrests the reading eye and ear: "peep" (2), "seen—" (3), "Seen" (4), "Seen," "indeed," "cheer" (5) make visible such doubling. The m-dash of "seen—" (3) depicts its echo in "Seen" (4), and "indeed" enacts this repeated recurrence. Traces of this "ee" can be seen in other words, albeit separated by interceding letters. For instance, among others, "nam-**e**-sak-**e**-s," "h-**e**-r-**e**," "**e**-v-**e**-ry," "int-**e**-rpr-**e**-t," "**e**-y-**e**-s" or across words such as the title, "Fi-**e**-ld Ast-**e**-rs" (2, 2, 3, 6, 7).

In this poem, and in the context of "Part I: The Year" of *Weeds and Wildings*, how may we interpret this "e-e," what meaning for such a phenomenon, for such a materiality, if instead of looking to the stars, "[We] star-gazers" turn our eyes to it? The poem immediately before "Field Asters" draws our attention to its insistent double ee. "The Chipmunk" consists of three stanzas. The first, in italics announces the suitable weather of the heart of autumn, comparing it to "sherbert" [sic]. The second introduces the seen eponym of the poem, the chipmunk, seen by the poetic I/eye. The chipmunk makes noise gleefully. A contrastive conjunction "But" (11) however intervenes, which is the effect of a "wee" noise and the chipmunk vanishes "whither" the I knows not (12, 14). The third stanza compares to this chipmunk what seems to be the child of the poetic I (and presumably the I's partner who shares his or her hearth): "Baby" (15) whose departure while "Crowing mirth" (16) is occasioned also "By some inkling" (18). The poem "The Chipmunk" records a splitting that is a flitting, a separation. This separation seems to be staged in the poem as that by which a sound is cloven into two or by a second non-identical sound that introduces difference into sameness. "Ee" becomes "e'e" (17); this introduction of a syncope that creates echoing and alterity is corroborated by the way certain words from a given poem are scattered and turn up in adjacent poems across the collection. A word is always already echo, so that when a sound occurs in one poem (such as "crowing mirth") that crowing is already reverberating with the crow who will be in the following poem, as if conjured into existence by the sound/ word. This reverberation is true for potentially all the words but can be seen (and identified as such) in examples such as "star," "crow," "pan," "ver."

Companions

Let's demonstrate, in detail. First, the process of "ee." The rime of the trisyllabic lines of the italicized quatrain first stanza, consists in "meet" and "sweet" (2, 4). The second stanza that introduces the poetic "I"/ eye who contemplates the "*him*" of the poem's title, "The Chipmunk," is replete with alliterative sound effects or repeated morphemes ("**St**-ock **st**-ill **st**-and," "**P**-ry-*ing* **P**-ee-**p**-*ing*," "**Cr**-i-**ckl**-*ing* **cr**-a-**ckl**-*ing*" [5, 7,9]). The drama of the recurrent "ee" consists in the *way* by which a little, virtually inaudible, sound serves as a clinamen that triggers its scission, its movement: after the "s-**ee**," "p-**ee**-ping," "B-**ee**-ch Tr-**ee**," and "Gl-**ee**-fully" (6, 7, 8, 10), during which the "I" watches the chipmunk's musical fun (i.e. glee), instantaneous or immediate disappearance occurs via the word "w-**ee**" (12). The plosives in "But," "By," "Presto!" (11, 12, 13) are perhaps all effects of a "wee sound," a sound whose description does not only emphasize its quasi-inaudibility and movement ("wee" comes from Germanic *Weg*, 'way', from *bewegen*, 'move') but also signals a human species presence that, in the context of the Anthropocene, is anathema for that which ***Wee**-ds and Wildings* as book of poems is written to save, and against which the poem "When forth the Shepherd leads the flock" protests. This latter poem, a celebration of "A Wilding with the Weeds!" (13), laments the fact that ever since the god of nature was put into a coffin ("Since hearsed was Pan" 16) by "farmers" who take them, i.e. all the weeds, "out" of the biosphere, the hegemony of the human species, of the We that may be heard in "wee sound," has jeopardized that which *Weeds and Wildings* is written to preserve, to wit, what Melville calls "other inutilities."[4] The "wee" emerges not only readably as the human species. Meaning a measurement that is slight, "wee" also denotes movement—"wee" comes from *weigh* and both come from "movement." That movement is intimated in the end rime for "By wee sound": "Whither bound?" (14). Disappearance, evanescence, a movement to no telos, at best to an eskhatos, is intimately near ("Presto!" 13, meaning 'near', 'at hand') to manifest glee, to life.

This separation and this departure, by which the ee, say, of "glee" and its predecessors is split and deviated by the ee of "wee," are graphically represented by

[4] From analysis of the manuscripts, the Northwestern Newberry editors cannot rule out such "inutilities" as justifiably belonging to the heading or title of *Weeds and Wildings*. They remark that the second title for the collection, "before revision, had read, *Weeds & Wildings*/ with/ *Other Inutilities* / and / *A Rose or Two*." The first title was "Wildings and Roses"—but they also add that "Clover" was "an earlier title for the volume or the section" "of Melville's projected volume" "that became" "Weeds and Wildings." They conclude that "[t]here is no decisive evidence for choosing between the two similar titles," i.e. the one with "inutilities" and the one without. "The choice of title is thus essentially arbitrary" (NN 560).

the only ee in stanza three, taking the split form of "E'en." This stanza instances no other ee, and this sole occurrence, I propose, carves into the phenomenon of life's affirmation its inseparable pre-condition, namely its phenomenalization of death, of leaving life or life leaving. This stanza compares the chipmunk from stanza 2 to "Baby" (15). By its "b-b," the word "Baby" repeats the plosives that introduced the "wee sound": "But" and By." This "Baby" may be said to be the child of the poetic I and its reproductive partner, of Herman and Winnefred, as the word "our" in "our hearth" (21) indicates that this baby was their child. But the "Baby' is also the progeny of the scriptor and the reader for whom both the chipmunk and the baby are the metonymic phenomena for an animated text in the time of its reading, which is as much as to say, its writing. The fate of "Baby" is similar to that of the chipmunk: although it was voicing its "mirth" ("Crowing mirth" 16), a barely discernible sound initiates its disappearance. "Flit" here has its Northern England or Scottish meaning of "leaving home," "escaping from." Seemingly, "Baby"—whether gone as when an adolescent departs from home or as when an infant dies—has radically disappeared. In both the case of "wee" and "e'en," it is as if the phenomenon of ee denotes a splitting of "e" into "e" and "not e," into "e" and "'e," that amounts to a ghosting. In the specific case of "e'en," the barely audible sound is recorded by "some inkling/ Touching Earth" (18-19). 'To inkle' is a rare verb that denotes the utterance of an undertone. The verb 'inkle' sounds close to 'in-kill', and "inkling," perhaps an 'in-killing'. Certainly, *Kling*—as in the ring of a bell, a knell—inheres in "inkling," perhaps echoing "knell" in "The Blue-Bird" (l. 10). "Ink[-]ling" seems to be the linguistic ink that inheres in voice as the latter's pre-condition. "By some inkling/ Touching Earth," there is an inkling that touches earth. Earth's touch inkles. Touching earth, either as subjective or objective genitive (earth touches something or something touches earth), utters an undertone, and this inkling is in-killing or denotes the split of "ee" into "e'e." The "e'e" of "e'en" repeats the function of the "ee" in "wee"—the function of "wee" is the split in sound that makes the manifestation of life (in the chipmunk) disappear, depart, without any knowable destination. Hence, "e'en" records the divisive sound that constitutes the manifestation of life in "Baby," its "Crowing mirth," as pre-cisely its very destitution. Its destituting substitution is its supposed substantial constitution. "Baby" in line 15 becomes merely the "By" in line 18 whose agency is the startling "some inkling/ Touching Earth": that enigmatic undertone which however was already announced, as we will now argue, by the "Crowing mirth" of Baby.

"The Chipmunk" does not only do this separation via the intratextual poem. By reverberation among poems, this separation is infused into any given poem whose activation is pre-empted by other nodal points in the collection. The verb "startled"

(17), which means a sudden movement, and both a leap and a fall, comes just before the following poem, "Field Asters" and its reflection upon seeing, and/ or interpreting, "stars" (1). The poem after "Field Asters," "Always with us!," contrasts a robin that leaves in autumn/ winter and returns in spring with a crow, "thou, black Crow" who never leaves, and whose call, "*Caw! caw! Caw!*" is the "foreboder" of death, something that the poetic I, or Melville, is most aware of at the end of his life. In "Crowing mirth" in "the Chipmunk," that vocal manifestation of life by "Baby" is already announced as being the inkling of death, of the "black Crow"/ "Croaker" in "Always with us!" (these two words haunting the "Crickling, crackling/Gleeful []"of "The Chipmunk"). In this way, annunciatory vociferation of death by the "Crow" is already inkling or undertoning in the "Crowing mirth" of Baby that otherwise would be the simple eruption of life's existence. Similarly, the verb "startled" in "The Chipmunk" *already* reverberates the doubling of "star" in the poem right after, "Field Asters." In addition to its denotation—disrupted, unsettled—the verb "startled" makes the split of which the word "star" of "Field Asters" is the emblem—between sky and ground, between "see" and "interpret," between "e" and "e" in all its words ("Peep," "seen" [thrice], "indeed," "cheer") that persists in split occurrences (most evidently in "e-y-e-s")—start to lead the reading of the word "start[-]led" in "The Chipmunk." "Start," but also always already "led," the subject-agent ("start") and the passive-object ("led") in "start[-]led," such is what the poem "The Chipmunk" is about, with the chipmunk whose existence or liveliness (noisily manifest) is coincident with the "wee sound" that is its vanishing, or with "Baby" as we just demonstrated. Thus, the second line, "*Weather meet*" (2), i.e. mete weather, fits with and joins the thirteenth line "Wither bound"; likewise for the anagrammatic "*Heart*" (1) and "Earth" (19), each encapsulated in the therefore portmanteau "hearth" (21).

The penultimate poem, "Stockings in the farm-house Chimney," is about the stock king, the king of fairies, "Oberon," in whose "clan," is the "something of a man," Santa Claus, who fills the "stockings" of the poem's title (8, 8, 6, 4). The poem celebrates those children or young in mind who are "Happy," because they "believe," and are "Happy in hope! in hope to receive/ These stockings well stuffed from Santa Claus's sleigh" (1, 3-4). The "O" in the king fairy's name, Oberon, gives voice to the wishes of the poetic voice, first about the belief in the fabulous, "O the delight to believe in a wight/ More than mortal, with something of man," and second in the desire for the postponed arrival of truth, "Stay, Truth, O stay in a long delay!" (5, 9). This rime, "Stay/ delay," arrests the circular verse in non-motion miming its wish (the poem's quatrains masterfully suspend movement by iterative horizontal line rimes, for example, "believe/ Eve," "delight/ wight"). "Truth," which here harnesses the *ruth* of

the loss of play or fable ("fable play") and may be the scriptor's avoidance of the Verity given the importance throughout the thirteen poems of the lexemes and severances "Ver" and "-ver," is to be delayed so that the medley of "delight/ wight/ spright," continues, and this combination is the idea that a man-spirit, Santa Claus, he who brings alms, is the "Almoner blest." This counter-truth, in the form of a deferring counter-time, manifests itself in the final two lines of the third quatrain that precisely differ and defer: "let them fo-**rever** with fable play/ E-**ver**-more hang the Stocking out!" The fabulous play here is that of a dream-verse, a revery that endlessly goes back and forth without loss, as the palindrome, "rever" (in "fo-rever") condenses dream (*rêve*, in French) and verse, dream and spring, dream and worm, in a dream-work-worm-word.

"Stockings in the farm-house Chimney" thereby reverses the "croaker, foreboder" of the immediately previous poem, "Always with us!" that itself struggles so to pre-se**rve** its play with "se**ver**," "**Rev**isit . . . fore**ver**" (1, 3) and what it calls "Ver" (20). But "Stockings in the farm-house Chimney" (and "chimney" reactivates the "from our hearth" of the third poem earlier, "The Chipmunk") also announces in the "clan/man" rime (6, 8) the return of "pan" ("Pan" from "When forth the shepherds," "pan" from "A Dutch Christmas," and "companioned" in "Madcaps") and how Melville positions himself, in "A Dutch Christmas," as poet versus Santa. It will again be a question of "alms." "Stockings in the farm-house Chimney" conjures the "More than mortal" "Almoner" as the conjugation of "spright" and "wight" which is the joining of what is *man*, "something of man," while also being fairy-ily "of Oberon's clan." This "man-clan" rime announces the rimes of the fourth verse of the subsequent, and final, poem of this part of *Weeds and Wildings*, "A Dutch Christmas. Up the Hudson/ In the Time of Patroons": "scan:/ pan./ *Van*—/ man" (stanza 4). This man, the "merry Christmas man"—certainly different from the "florist" establishing the "*ran*king with the floral *clans*" in "To Winnefred"—is "Tuenis *Van der Blumacher,*" or 'of the flower-maker' (my emphases). His coming is to a house in preparations for Christmas, at year-end enjoyment of harvests. The poem starts with one word directly motivated by the combination of O and -ver in "Stockings in the farm-house Chimney": the exclamative "O" (5 and 9), "Oberon" (8) and that fabulous play of "forever/ Evermore" (11, 12) condense in the first word of the last poem's incipit, that is, in "**O**-**ver** the ruddy hearth" (1). As in "When forth the Shepherd leads the flock" where "hearsed Pan" (16) was the riming demise of the "**Dan**-del-ions" that "prance" and "dance" (11, 12), the return of "pan" in "A Dutch Christmas"—a simple pan in which "the cream" is being prepared, perhaps for the "pudding" at the end of the poem—announces the verse immediately after it that celebrates festivity:

"**pan**-ting from **dan**-ce," all revel (15). This scene depicted is one where the poetic I has created a delightfully festive atmosphere, "The yoke-cattle's horns did I twine with green holly./ Good to breathe their sweet breath this blest Christmas morn" (22), in a recollection of how he imagines "Winnefred" to have liked the breath of heifers in the preface "To Winnefred." It is in this place that, in the antepenultimate verse, are heard, "Sleigh-bells a'jingle! 'Tis Santa Claus: hail!" The verse remarks upon Santa Claus's magical tour that defies time and forgets not the "one man in jail." That verse prepares the penultimate verse, that contrasts Santa Claus with the poetic I; this contrast operates on the difference between "clever" and "never" and on their respective "alms": "Our Santa Claus a cle[-]**ver** way has, and a free:/ Gifts from *him* some will take who would ne[-]**ver** take from me." The colon introduces the contrast. "Clever" contrasts with "never," suggesting that whereas Santa's gifts are "free," "me['s]" "pudding" is not otherwise free. The final two lines of the quatrain might express some sarcasm: "For poor hereabouts there are none: – none so poor/ But that pudding for an alms they would spurn from the door." One might speculate that the "pudding" over which Katrina was told not to "scan" so as to give its cream its time to rise in the pan is also Melville's verse or writing. Another, dilated or delayed, scan may be needed. His pan, in which he repeatedly places Pan and all Pan's companions, the many ions of communal pans, may well be the pithy moral couplet upon which this first part of *Weeds and Wildings* concludes: "All the same to all in the world's wide ways--/ Happy harvest of the conscience on many Christmas Days." Be it the "clever way" or the "never" way, all in all, all the world-wide ways of these different alms seem to rehearse—to scatter and to reactivate—pan.[5]

Hearsing

Although *Weeds and Wildings,* as its title indicates, celebrates the "profitless" creatures that an ignorantly utilitarian world wishes to extirpate, the burial of Pan ("Since hearsed was Pan") seems to spell their demise ("But alack and alas/ For things of wilding feature!") in "When forth Shepherds [. . .]"). "Buttercup and Dandelion, /

[5] Melville's disseminal *herm**a**neutics* of Pan perhaps recalls that Pan was the offspring of Hermes and of Penelopeia. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, and other sources (theoi.com/Nymphe/NymphePenelopeia.html) note a frequent fusion or confusion between Penelope the weaver and Penelopeia mother of Pan fathered by Hermes. Contributing to this confusion is the possible derivation of Penelopeia from the Greek words *pênê* and *lopas*, meaning "needle and thread."

Wildings, and the rest,/ Commoners and holiday-makers," appear at first to be doomed to eradication. The line with its colon, "Note them in one test:" introduces a list of lines repeating the word "out" in "scout, rout, without" telling of all, from "farmers" to "florists" who *would* eliminate them (23, 24, 25). But the semi-colon after "them;" (27) pivots the reversal in the poem whereby this "hearsing" fails. To "hearse" is not only to bury in but to rake the ground and open and aerate and seed the ground. Such failure, their success, comes in the spade-like 'v' that redoubles itself in the action verbs of which the children are the agents: "**w**oo" (where the double o-o doubles the v in w), "Lo**v**e," "repri**ev**e," "Retri**ev**e," "in**w**ea**v**e," "ne**v**er" (28-31). The nine-times-in-nine-lines (22-30) repeated end and internal sameness, "them," "them," "them," "them," "them," "them," "them," "them," "them"—the four "them" that would be "out" are equalized by the four "them" that are the direct object of the five "v" verbs—disperses the "hearsed Pan" into a rehearsing of pan, a re-inscribing "dibbling in the garden" (to use this poem's image of planting by making holes in soil with a dibble whereupon, "then the world begins anew" [3-4]). Unlike G. M. Hopkins' "Spring and Fall" Margaret's grieving, Melville's weeds and wildings are "Never sighing" (30), this "never" echoing the "never" of the scriptor signing in "A Dutch Christmas."

Example of "hearsed Pan," the weed or plant "Dandelion" in "When forth the Shepherd leads the flock" is a word that both occurs mid-line in-between "And" and "prance" ("And Dandelions prance") and in the fourth stanza at line-end, "Buttercup and Dandelion." The suffix -ion returns in two other places in *Weeds and Wildings*: in the word "Companioned" in the poem "Madcaps" three poems after "When forth the Shepherd [. . .]" and in the following poem, "The Old Fashion" both in the title and in "old-fashioned" and "old-fashion." This "-ion" from "Companioned" becomes the seed out of which this following poem, "The Old Fashion," develops.

Yet, prior to dwelling on "ion," the word "it" lifts itself from the iterative ground. The poem "Madcaps" functions around two letters, the 'i' and the 't' in "I" (l. 1) and "it" (l. 5) and "It" (l. 10). The story it tells is that of an "I," the poetic narrating voice (adult, we may conjecture) who observes the world which the "I" describes and in which the "I" follows two children. What the "I" observes is "It," which are the "Madcaps" (l. 12) from the title. In between the "I" of line 1 and the capitalized nominal "It" (l. 10) is the iterative "it" which pleonastically repeats the nominal subject: "The *Clover it* throws/ Perfume in their way" (5-6, my emphasis). The iteration of "it" does enable the line 5 to have five syllables, like lines 2, 3, 4, 6, 9 and 12, but more importantly the iterative "it" carries into the poem "Clover," which was the title of the

poem before "Madcaps," the quatrain "Clover." "The Clover it" not only makes the previous poem the fundamental influence in the poem, and "clover" not only retrieves the "pleasant figure of speech, *Living in clover*" from the preface "To Winnefred" of *Weeds and Wildings*, with its idea of "clover" being a common plant not sold as property by florists. It also is not limited to announcing the entire latter parts of *Weeds and Wildings* dominated by variations on "Rose," staged in the poem "A Ground-Vine." While that is true, and while the action, in "Madcaps," of "Clover" is to lead the children to the Red Rose ("The Clover it throws/ Perfume in their way/ To the hedge or Red Rose;" (ll. 5-7), it is the emphasis of "it" in line 5 that diagonally connects the "I" in line 1 to the "It" in line 10. Its (and "It"'s) importance is to localize the "Strawberry" (l. 9). "Straw," and "berry," the colors of "Strawberry" can be the referred-to predicate of line 10, "It is Lilly and Cherry." However, line 10, "It is Lilly and Cherry" also could be the identification of the "two children," the "they" and "their," whom the "I's" eye has been following. The capitalized agency of "I"—an adult, but presumably also a poet—is transferred to the capitalized "It" in "It is Lilly and Cherry," where "It is" can **both** be "It, the Strawberry, is Lilly and Cherry" so that "It is" is a personalized pronoun "It" for the noun "Strawberry," **and** a recollective and anticipatory periphrastic impersonal subject of the verb "is" linking the "two children" to "Lilly and Cherry." The two children become strawberry, strawberry is the two children, and that is what all companions are, together with "Butterflies" (11): these companions are "madcaps" and these heads, *caput* or cloverheads, are a kind of chief or head that transfers the capitalization of the adult, "I," to the capitalization of the *companions* ("Companioned") who are the ions of Pan hearsing and rehearsing, singing in this book of songs, the adverb of whose title, *Weeds and Wildings Chiefly: with A Rose or Two*, places their poetic sovereignty above what the poem "A Ground-vine" had temporarily conceded as the "Queen of Flowers," i.e. the "Rose." These ions of Pan are common, communicating all over the "living in clover" poetic signatory and his reader, addressee, destinatory, that when-if-reader, *Winnefred* who makes two win if one is read, *To Winnefred*, an address that joins the infinitive and infinite "to win," with the word *par excellence* for imagination, *if*. Read (Pan names the "reed," also) or re(a)d as, "we are communists here," hear.

This 'ion' of "Companioned" becomes then the charged electron of the collection's next poem "The Old Fashion." As Svante Arrhenius showed in 1884, ions compose materials. Bonded in, say, a solid state, ions when dissolved in, say, water, are sent, electrically, in different directions. Electricity, the movement of such ions, can be channelled into current. In *Weeds and Wildings*, ions might be thought of as the components of words and their redistribution in the collection as the results of

different election, or reading. Also, the suffix -ion, in general, indicates verb action become noun, or a resulting state. In English, "fashion" is both verb and noun. The title therefore reads in two ways, a bit according to what electric or elective charge is given to the "ion": noun + verb, i.e. the Old are those who Fashion, making, shaping, styling, *facere*. Fashion is the verb action of "The Old," but in the poem, these "Old" are Ver, here Spring. Ver is "youthful" and "juvenile" and "eternally new." "Ver" is fashioned by the Old, "Old-fashioned is Ver" (7). This process by which "The Old Fashion" is however the hoary process, the result, the old movement or way, is what the choice of "ion" as word drawn from its Greek verb, *ienai* infinitive 'to go', *ion,* present participle 'going'. 'To go' as in 'to spring' (i.e. "Ver"), but also 'to go' as in 'to leave': "The Old Fashion" recounts the hour, the season, the *hora* or "Year after year" (13). This coming and going is the principle of the "And" as the "end" which is none, therefore iterative, multiple. The "And" (twice in 2, 3, 4, 8), not only shares with Melville's unpublished poem "Pontoosuc" the latter's explicit ionic bond between "And" and "End" but also the very iteration of "ver." In "The Old Fashion," "Ver" veers ionically, electrically, currently, in "forever" (2) and "never" (5), and by rimes adheres in "her" (8), "Year" (twice, 3), and the "-ter" of "after" (3), itself sent to bond with the "-ter" of "eternally" (7). The Old therefore fashion, styling these "var[ious]" ions as phonemes or lexemes, as clusters of letters that the songbirds in the poem, emblematic of these poems as songs, represent in their name, "bo[-]bo[-]link," as if the word itself were the thing it represents, the linkage of echoing and severing sounds, just as their songs "*Chee- Chee!*" "vary never/ In juvenile cheer" (5-6). This "Ver" that is "And the same, and forever," thus "Keep[s] the old-fashion true" (2, 10), reappearing in the poem "Always with us!" in the palindromic rev-ver of its third verse, "**Rev**isit he would, so remains not fore**ver**" (3). Verity, truth, reduces to "ver" iteration, at the level of the *ver* (worm) and *vers* (verse).

Working by induction, *Weeds and Wildings* is a sort of Faraday cup, the device named after the coiner of the term of ions in 1830, Michael Faraday, that measures the number and movement of these ions of pan, these companions.

Children, lilly and cherry, butterflies, all companions . . . the ions of pan are the mad caps, the poetic sovereignty: clever-/clover-/never-heads. This companion announces the old fashion, which is the making of Ver, which is the same, forever, year after year, never varying. Chee is the verse of cheer and cherry.

"Butterfly Ditty" also is also written with the drifting and re-landing verbal seeds of "Madcaps" and "The Old Fashion." "Butterfly Ditty" is the song of the butterflies that have flitted from the companioning butterflies in "Madcaps" and this song continues the bobolinks' song of "The Old Fashion." The welling sound of its

final two lines, "they **will** sing/ **While** the **wel**kin is blue" becomes the run-on "We'll" (3, 6, 7, 7, 8, 9, 9) that is the butterflies' conveyance: "From garden to garden/ Such charter have we" (5-6). This charter (to "rove," "revel,/ And idlers" "be" [7-8]) is what the "we," the butterflies, have, and this "we'll" is continuance of the "**wel**kin" from "The Old Fashion," to wit, it is the idea that the birds, the butterflies, the ions, form a "-kin," from which "Man, Eden's bad boy" has excommunicated himself. The "we'll," the butterflies' "rove" and "revel," are concerned by nothing except by Man: the "rove" and "revel" and "idler" of "we'll" is "Concerned but for this, – / That Man, Eden's bad boy, / Partakes not the bliss" (10-12). This separation (*con-cernere*)—by dint of Man's non-participation—operates by the cuts: by the comma and m-dash in "this, –" and by the sudden flurry, unprecedented in the poem, of dentals and plosives ("but," "-den's bad boy," "Partakes," "not") and the |k| of "Concerned" and "Partakes" not heard since line 1, "Come," "like." Sound—its *phonemalized mobility*—tells the story that was encapsulated in the word "welkin" of the final line of "The Old Fashion" echoing out of which "Butterfly Ditty" resonates.

In this cluster of poems the head, or chief, or sovereignty, conveys a charter that is idle and ideal, poetic. Melville called the poems themselves in *Weeds and Wildings* "clover-heads," "Clover" being the poem that precedes "Madcaps." These "madcaps," these "weeds and wildings," have no end in the sense of a use or utility. They are what Melville the singer-poet strove, like his bobo-links, in the pleonastic line of "The Old Fashion," to "keep […] true" (l. 10: "keep," like "true," means the *wahren*, the keep-true that *Wahrheit* is the name of): to wit, the idle as ideal. The trace of "idlers" in "Butterfly Ditty" is honored in the poem from Part II of *Weeds and Wildings* whose title is a clear echo of the Wordsworthian inscription poem tradition: "Inscription. For a Boulder near the spot/ Where the last Hardhack was laid low/ By the new proprietor/ of the Hill of Arrowhead." Written against property and proprietorship as all of *Weeds and Wildings* is, this inscription poem takes the epitaph form: "A weed grew here.—" Perhaps like the "inutilities" that are the poems in *Weeds and Wildings*, this weed had no use ("Exempt from use"), and "turn[s] no wheel," makes nothing run ("nor run"), is not even aesthetic ("Radiance pure or redolence/ [. . .] this had none"). In the fifth of this six-line poem, the repeated inscription of the spade-like letter "v," reinforced by the "y" in the key pivot word in the poem, "yet," insists on the planting, the downward inscription, rooting/ writing, of this "weed." Redoubled by the conjunctive "And" that starts lines five and six in order to name an end not conceived according to art or economy but only as a supplement that is not sublimatable in either of them, these lines contrast idleness against the utilitarian or the aesthetic. In the recurrence of "it"—"And yet heaven gave it leave to live/ And

idle it in the sun" (5-6)—the scriptor performs a transition from the weed as pronoun "it," first in the dative (heaven gave *to it*) but thereby immediately into the nominative (it *has* leave), that when repeated in line six becomes an accusative (idle *it*, accusative) but with no other direct object than the sameness of this dative, nominative and accusative it. Heaven gave to the weed (to "it") the "leave" not only "to live" but also "to idle it." Grammatically, the "it" of "idle it" is iterative but no direct object attaches to this "it." The verb "idle" expands to existence itself. Such "it" is the seamlessness here of this dative, nominative and accusative "it." The Whitmanian expression "leave to live" brings a new sense which Whitman does not explore in the many instances of "leave" throughout *Leaves of Grass*: permission, stay, furlough. Given leave from economy and aesthetics, the weed idealizes iteration. Its aeration—the plant rehearsing and participating in the air—is idle: without end (utility, art). Therefore, ideal here should be understood in the sense of ongoing in the "And." Yet objective inscription is the condition of possibility of ideality for without it, ideality would be trapped inside itself. Such was Derrida's insight. Here, for Melville, it "idles it in the sun." The solar energy order, unlike the fossil fuel order, functions according to temporal and spatial conditions that the modern petroculture—already revved up in the 1880s—drastically subordinated to accelerated economy and even aesthetics.[6] As in the inscription of the poet as writer, giver of (unwanted) poems, in "A Dutch Christmas," the poem "Inscription" for an epitaph on a "Boulder" is also for the writer himself. The epitaph, "Here grew a weed." is to be inscribed on a boulder that is near "the spot/ Where the last Hardhack was laid low." The periphrasis of "weed" for "Hardhack" forms a sort of contraction of the weed and the writer, their union, the double reference of "Hardhack" as tree and as the old writer of these "inutilities" that are *Weeds and Wildings*. "Weed" as *we'd* , the would or wood of a we, those in common communion, weed and Melville.

To Winnefred

To this issue of reading, of what happens when and if reading occurs, in other words, to this issue of the uncertainty of destination or survival, it behooves us to consider Melville's address to "the reader," or, at least, his sending to the addressee, to the receiver.

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[6]Tobias Menely, *Climate and the Making of Worlds: Toward a Geohistorical Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

Melville opens *Weeds and Wildings* with an address to his wife (at least if we follow literary criticism) entitled "To Winnefred." Addressed not in fact to his wife's name, this title "To Winnefred" would gain if read, were it to be read, and more than one would win or gain. *Two win if read* has not been gathered by readers who have given interesting accounts of how Melville was not with his wife on great terms (Lyon Evans[7]) even though others (Bryant[8]) have stressed on the contrary that the collection attested their late-found harmony, while others such as Osborne have argued for the addressee being Melville's longstanding virtual interlocutor, Hawthorne.[9] In any case,

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[7] Although Lyon Evans does note that Melville "gives instructions on how the gift poems should be read," his reading approaches the question of the addressee of *Weeds and Wildings* at a strictly biographical level, registering yet not examining the substitution of "Winnifred" for "Elizabeth":"how can we be sure that the affection he expresses for Elizabeth—or rather, for Winnifred (itself a curious discrepancy)—is an honest expression of how he really felt?" *Leviathan. A Journal of Melville Studies* 2007 79-94, 85. In his perceptive response to this article, Scott Norsworthy reinforces the equation of Elizabeth and "Winnifred": "Melville (or his fictive narrator) reminds Elizabeth (or the fictive dedicatee of 'To Winnefred')," "The Melting Mood in 'To Winnifred': A Response to LyonEvans," *Leviathan. A Journal of Melville Studies* 2009: 133-138.

[8] John Bryant, "Melville's Rose Poems: As They Fell," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, Volume 52, Number 4, Winter 1996: 49-84.

[9] Gillian Osborne stresses that the "primary piece of textual evidence linking Melville's wife to the manuscript as a whole is tenuous": the handwriting of the name "Lizzie," added in pencil beside a dedication "To Winnefred" belongs neither clearly to Melville nor his wife. "Herman Melville, Queen of the Flowers," *Leviathan* Volume 18, Number 3, October 2016, pp. 129-48, 135. While acknowledging the critics for whom *Weeds and Wildings* is entirely a collection for his wife, Osborne argues that it also "worries over and celebrates" Melville's (homoerotic) relation to Hawthorne, and to a lesser, general, extent, to men (132). Building off James Creech's work, she argues that the flowery is a sort of cover: "The floweriness of *Weeds and Wildings* has been interpreted as an appeal to a particular, feminine, reader. Everything else about the manuscript [. . .] hides in plain sight" (133). Under the cover of a conceited address to his wife (we suggest "*living in cover*" within "*living in clover*"), *Weeds and Wildings* would be an address to Hawthorne (the fact that Hawthorne is at this time deceased does not diminish this possibility), and more generally to certain male readers themselves under cover in public. Osborne formulates a question the pertinence of which the present essay attempts to extend further in its reading of "Winnefred" in the dual directions of "When, if read" and "win if read": "whether Melville expected any sort of understanding readership for his late works—even in a very specific reader such as his spouse—remains an open question" (133). We certainly agree with Osborne's assertion: "Reading Lizzie as the only meaningful interlocutor across the manuscript interprets "To Winnefred" too literally" (135), with the caveat that reading "To Winnefred" to substitute for "To Lizzie" is not literally literal at all, as our more literal and literary reading of the address "To Winnefred" tries to unfold. Thus, we endeavor to open Osborne's conclusion, "these flowery confessions performed in the absence of a reader is the work of *Weeds and Wildings*" (144), onto a different way of thinking the work's relation to the ever-uncertain possibility of being-read. Osborne's closing two sentences, "Literature has its individual blossoms, its periods of moldering, and its species-life. Melville suggests here that his writing, and perhaps our reading, like Rip's lilac, does not need him, even if he was responsible for the 'founding' of the plant" (144-45), inspire our attempt to exploit the complex periodic temporality of blossoming, moldering, and

Melville's wife was not named Winnefred.

Melville begins the prefatory address by praise of the clover, the Red Clover, and also the White Clover. To him and his wife, it is "one of the dearest of the flowers of the field," and he passes to why that is so. It is dear **not** because the clover shows the aptness to their own relationship of the figure of speech, "*Living in clover,*" **nor** because Melville found a four-leaf clover forty-four years earlier the month they married, which he calls "a specimen by the wayside," and which would have been happy augury for their marriage. Those explanations not being active, what might be underfoot in his nonetheless leaning, in his italicization, on it? Perhaps, *living in clover* might winningly be read phonically as *Living Ink Lover*. In doing so, we draw breath or inspiration from Tom Nurmi's conclusion to his "Pebbles" chapter: "Melville leaves us in the eco-eschatological time of Revelations, inhaling haunted sprays of planetary precarity. We are healed only by a pitilessly honest, wind-inspired art, kept from despair by our poetic faculty for making and remaking ourselves into artistic communities of belonging and mourning" (Nurmi 224). Encapsulating the gist of his reading of Melville in *Magnificent Decay*, Nurmi's two sentences here also testify to the change of scale between the understanding of the figure of speech *living in clover* which Melville himself disqualifies ("It is not, for example, because [. . .]"; "Neither have we" [NN 75]) and its displacement to a level where the fundamentally disjointed temporality and spatiality of *Living Ink Lover* is in adequation with eco-eschatological time and the space in which breath itself is haunted: *Living Ink Lover* is the genetic structure of life-death to which a phrase like "inhaling haunted sprays of planetary precarity" poetically condenses in its alliteration and assonance (h; hal/ haun; tary/ rity; ray/ tar/ car), and meter (plan-e-tar-y; pre-car-i-ty), its merging of breath and death (inhale/ haunt), and its dissemination (sprays) of global fragility, with the cryptic vestige of Latin *precors* or "pray." The poetic faculty that makes and remakes artistic communities constituted by the yoking of belonging and losing is also at work in the displacement of an anodyne figure of speech into something like what the *Living Ink Lover* bequeaths to us, when and if we read it. Melville and his wife perhaps were not *living in clover*; rather, this infelicitous speech figure might relate to Melville's writing career itself, i.e. to this *living ink lover*, where material inscription amounts to his being a lover of living ink, and to life in the trace, the lover even being this living ink, this limited and in some way unlimited ink. The lover is essentially wed to living ink. The name or compound word "Winnefred" to which the "To" is addressed starts with the letters "Winn." This

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species-life, in our reading of "To Winnefred" and "*living in clover*." Cf. her chapter, "Melville and His Flowers," in *The New Melville Studies*, ed. Cody Marrs (Cambridge University Press 2019), 27-42.

winning initiation already denotes striving, and even love:

> Win: from Proto-Germanic *winnaną, from Proto-Indo-European **wen-* ("to strive, wish, desire, love"). Cognate with Old Saxon winnan (Low German winnen), Dutch winnen, Old High German winnan, Old Norse vinna (Swedish and Icelandic *vinna*, Norwegian vinne), Gothic 𐍅𐌹𐌽𐌽𐌰𐌽.[10]

A living ink lover, in between subjective and objective genitive, in between living ink that loves and the love that, insofar as performative jussive or optative subjunctive, makes ink live and come alive, is it not the name of the relation between writer and reader, between writing and reading, between the scriptural trace on paper and its reactivation by the *lecteur* who selects and elects, recomposes that which is left to lie on the page, and who thereby reactivates the past and otherwise passive inscription? For ink to be living, it is necessary to reactivate the voice that is passive in the script from which the force of the intelligence and thus of the voice of the writer has been eclipsed by the form that remains, the composition that without reading would decay into compost. Derrida signaled this way to respond to Living Ink Lover, to understand the relation of writing and reading, when he wrote the following.

> The field of writing has for originality its capacity to do without, in its meaning, any actual reading in general ; however, without the pure juridical possibility of being intelligible for a transcendental subject in general, and if the pure relation of dependance regarding a writer and a reader in general were not to announce itself in the text, *if a virtual intentionality not haunt it*, then, in the vacancy of its soul, the field of writing is nothing but a chaotic literality, the sensible opacity of a defunct designation, that is to say, deprived of its transcendental function. The silence of prehistorical arcanes and of inhumed [*enfouies*] civilizations, the burial [*ensevelissement* ; also, "shrouding"] of lost intentions and of kept secrets, the unreadability of lapidary inscription detects the transcendental meaning of death, that which unites it to the absoluteness of intentional right [*droit*] in the very instance of its defeat [*échec*].[11]

An actual, empirical, reader can be generally absent, for the originality of the transcendental field of writing is that it is without that kind of subject. But the field of writing would be sheer unreadable materiality were there no general transcendental

[10] https://www.wordsense.eu/winnan/. Consulted 5 May 2024.
[11] Jacques Derrida, *Introduction* to Edmund Husserl, *L'origine de la géométrie* (Paris: PUF, 1962), 85, translation and emphasis mine.

subject (an ideal and perhaps idle subject, a ghost), and if writing were simply writing without the possibility of a retrieving reading: chaotic literality, sensible opacity, imploded signs. Writing, when and if it is read, wins. Two win if read, if or when reading happens, activating that which otherwise is dumb, mute, voiceless, sheer matter, a trace of force without actualizable form. Melville, whose penchant for burning the manuscripts of his printed texts and also his correspondence is oft-attested, addresses *Weeds and Wildings* to the possibility of reading more or less spectrally shrouded by a tradition that has palimpsested onto the address the identity of "Lizzie" or his wife "Elizabeth" or, in the case of Osborne, Hawthorne. Without the ghost of virtual intentionality, the field of writing is vacated of any idea of a soul. Such haunting is the possibility of any meaning. Intentionality survives in a text in the mode of a ghost. This ghost is as much haunting an empirical writer who never commands entirely her or his intention as it necessarily accompanies a reader faced to a text. Addressed to a time of supposed, hypothetical or wished-for reading (To When, If Read), so that what is expressed is an idea that Two Win If Read, two being sender and receiver whereby the receiver virtually becomes the sender returning to the "original" sender thereby made into receiver, this "Living Ink Lover" is a specific incarnation of that "axis of sameness and difference" which Nurmi maintains as the linchpin of his various analytic readings: a writing that would be entirely in the control of its writer would not even be objectified, inscribed or externalized and therefore would *both* not be writing *and* instead remain bound inside its sheer interiority; a reading that could not in some at least minimal way re-activate the meaning of writing would be purely different from that which it "reads" and would therefore not even be reading. Nurmi, Melville, and Derrida take this "textual relation" out of its anthropocentric and limited sense of writing and generalize it to all kinds of traces, of which the "writers" and "readers" can encompass the mineral, the vegetal, the "animal" and the human, in a network wherein "sender" and "receiver" can variously be conceived along a sliding axis of sameness and difference.

This Living Ink Lover that exceeds the life of Melville and his wife not living in clover is a relation on a differantial axis of difference and sameness, of writing and voice, of death and life, of ink and living, a relation whereby Ink is the differance, the pure trace, between Living and Lover. This mediational Ink is itself not something constituted, stabilized. Rather, it is the place of pure movement between "Living" and "Lover": "Living" and "Lover" both attest presence, but they relate through the trace that is "Ink." The Lover might be living in the love for ink, or loves ink that itself lives. Ink mediates these two possibilities of reading: one is that the lover loves an ink that is living, the other is that the lover loves and lives ink into that life. In "living ink lover,"

both sides (living, lover) are played against the middle. A fundamental undecidability is the relation of these two determinations. The ink of inscription is the mediation of sender and receiver, the written and the read, and it names less the substance used by Melville (his manuscripts are overwhelmingly in pencil) than the fact of "burning-in," the Greek *enkaiein*, that gives the word "ink." Nurmi retrieves Derrida's *feu la cendre* (that can mean both "the deceased ash" and "fire ash") to read living as the burning in that living which tracing is. As such trace, ink is the name of the movement between these two determinations that produces their difference, but a difference wherein the one inverts into the other, the living lover of ink into the lover of living ink: "therefore at issue here is not a constituted difference but rather, prior to any determination of content, the *pure* movement that produces difference. *The (pure) trace is differance.*"[12] Such is in play and sway, when and if reading Melville addressing the possibility of reading.

"Winnifred," "*Living in clover*": their communion is reading and writing, read ink, thereby invoking an axis of sameness and difference that can be called the axis of the always the same—the specificity of a literary text, not only after the invention of copyright, is that its reproduction not change one iota of it—and the always different—every reactivation or reading is anew, different. The axis of sameness and difference is that of the written and the read. The life of ink, life only possible as from ink: this relation of living (and) ink implies the spectral virtualization that is in the being of the word, even in the very being of grammar. This is irreducible life-death, that accordion of scales which is the awareness of planetary Melville (to echo Nurmi) or that awareness that was tantamount to Derrida's archi-writing.

> The life of language (*langue*) is also the life of specters. [At issue] is a spectrality proper to the body of language. Language, the word, in a certain manner the life of the word, has a spectral essence. It would be like the date : it repeats itself as itself and is each time other. There is a sort of spectral virtualization in the being of the word, in the very being of grammar. And it is therefore in language already, on language (*à même la langue*, or, "on level with language") that the experience of life-death exerts itself.[13]

The life of the word, like the life of the date, is inseparable both from its arrestation in inscription, in an embodiment of language, and its *revenance* or reactivation from

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[12] Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 92. Translation mine.
[13] Jacques Derrida, "La Langue n'appartient pas." *Europe* 861-862 (2001): 81-91, here 88. Translation mine.

precisely this inscription. The very being of grammar, or of the word, and of tracing generally, is the exertion of living ink, the stepping-out of life from ink (the winning out, when and if reading happens, from the ink or the written, of its possibilities for survival or living on, living over, where "living" and "lover" combine in living over, over-living, living-on). "To Winnifred," to win if read and addressed to when, if read: this address says something of the life of writing, of the loving of living ink, the virtual intentionality that must haunt a text for it to exist at all as text and for it to be readable, and thus write-able, at all.

When, if read: names a temporality that binds together, yet irreducibly, a time "when" which belongs to the possibility of a future, and the virtual possibility of actualization, reading, which makes of the receiver the sender of that virtual ghostly subject that haunts the read, or writing.[14]

[14] The poem that Melville positioned as his very "last" sending at the end of his "Uncollected Poetry," "Adieu" expresses this general genial structure of "To Winnifred" and of the "Living Ink Lover."

> Ring down! The curtain falls, and ye
> Will go your ways. Yet think of me.
> And genial take what's genial given
> And long be happy under heaven. NN 292.

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Pip's Unmediated Vision: Toward a Gadamerian Hermeneutics in *Moby-Dick*

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Abstract

In Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, the young black boy, Pip, poetically embodies Gadamer's notion of the meaning of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics promotes an encounter with a subject-matter in a way that changes one's life. Pip's experience in the ocean in chapter 93 of Melville's magnum opus is a hermeneutical event of such magnitude that it leads to his acquiring an oceanic identity, one that is aware of life as a three-dimensional reality. Having become acquainted with his radical finitude, Pip can then act as a complement to Ahab, who is caught in an angelic mindset. In this way, Pip mimetically displays how hermeneutical events change one's being in the world and one's connection with others, building a bridge to those who seem beyond reach. Moreover, his seemingly simple use of language enables him to capture the essence of the *Pequod's* crew's experiences, exposing them as subjective, private *Erlebnisse* rather than hermeneutical *Erfahrungen*.

Keywords: Melville, Gadamer, Pip, hermeneutics, Moby-Dick, poetic madness

> The imagination works sometimes in ways that the imagining
> mind can fail to fully understand.
> —Salman Rushdie, *Knife*

In a poem she probably penned in 1862, Emily Dickinson takes issue with the unexamined confidence we place in our everyday experiences:

> Much Madness is divinest Sense –
> To a discerning Eye –
> Much Sense – the starkest Madness –
> 'Tis the Majority
> In this, as all, prevail –
> Assent – and you are sane –
> Demur – you're straightway dangerous –
> And handled with a Chain –

Dickinson questions the commonplace understanding—an opinion that the "Majority" may hold—that madness and rationality are absolute, objective categories uncolored by biases. On the contrary, Dickinson maintains that what appears to be mad to an "[un]discerning Eye" is, in actuality, "divinest Sense." To express such a thought, however, renders one vulnerable to the "Chain" to which an obdurate "Majority" will confine one. Perhaps a reference to the barbaric treatment of the mentally ill in the nineteenth century, the poem can also be interpreted as a challenge that many poets before and after Dickinson have proffered: poetic knowledge is different than scientific knowledge. Dissecting reality to the smallest particle, seeking for experimental repeatability—this is akin to reducing poetic knowledge, and by extension the humanities, to a corpse, on which a medical examiner can then perform a postmortem autopsy. To avoid this, the poet must learn to dwell with the questions, to let the objects she encounters question her, to remain attuned to a different substratum of reality. In this way, the poet will find herself on the opposite side of the "Majority," or with the fool rather than the king, but making "divinest Sense." As Hans-Georg Gadamer writes in "Boundaries of Language," "The poets, especially, are the ones who make use of the flexibility of the linguistic gamut beyond rules, beyond conventions, and who yet know how to bring the unsaid to speak within the possibilities that language itself offers."[1] It is not that logic and science do not have a

[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Boundaries of Language," trans. Lawrence K. Schmidt, *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (London: Lexington Books, 2000): 9-17, 12-13.

place in human knowledge—they do, and Gadamer in no way opposes the sciences, which he considers valid modes of knowledge—but they are not the primary tools, so to speak, of the poet. The poet pushes "beyond rules" and "beyond conventions" for the sake of "the unsaid," which is part and parcel of language as a medium: it conceals and reveals, it says and unsays because of the finitude of human beings. At the same time, poets are able to render the linguistic soil hospitable to a subject-matter whose whole cannot be understood in its entirety, or all at once, because it is greater than we are.

Something akin to the phenomenon of poetic madness occurs in Heman Melville's *Moby-Dick* to the black boy Pip, whom the other shipmates easily dismiss throughout the journey. Pip's solitary experience in the water allows him to acquire a new oceanic identity that eventually translates into an intimate relationship with the captain of the *Pequod* himself, Ahab. In this way, Pip becomes the most important character in the novel in regard to his ability to change the mind of the mad Ahab. Pip's encounter with the depth of things—a kind of depth hermeneutics—frees him from the landsman's fantasies of omnipotence by revealing human finitude, the only possible cure to the angelism of Ahab. In other words, if Ahab insists on flying upward toward the heavens, Pip attempts to plunge him downward, back to earth, the proper place for humans. For, to borrow a phrase from Robert Frost's "Birches," Pip understands that "Earth's the right place for love: / I don't know where it's likely to go better."

In chapter 93, "The Castaway," Ishmael describes this "most significant event [that] befell the most insignificant of the Pequod's crew."[2] The "little negro Pippin by nick-name, Pip by abbreviation"[3] is thrown overboard during a whale hunt, with the harpooneers giving chase to the whale and leaving Pip behind "like a hurried traveller's trunk."[4] The event ensures that "the little negro went about the deck an idiot,"[5] and we witness the other mariners' poking fun at him in "The Doubloon." None other than Ahab, however, shelters young Pip in his cabin, yelling at the sailors, "Hands off from that holiness!"[6] What Pip experiences while alone in the ocean, then, puts him in touch with a being—that "miser-merman, Wisdom"[7]—that renders his language

[2] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018), 305.
[3] Ibid., 305.
[4] Ibid., 307.
[5] Ibid., 308.
[6] Ibid., 375.
[7] Ibid., 308.

incomprehensible to other members of the *Pequod* but that allows him to speak to the mad Ahab in a way "too curing to [his] malady."[8]

Pip's encounter reveals that a true hermeneutical event has the power to alter our innermost self. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer terms what Pip comes into contact with "radical finitude."[9] In a rebuttal of those who misunderstand Heidegger's *Dasein*, Gadamer maintains,

> Instead of holding on to the methodological significance of the existential analytic of Dasein, people treat Dasein's existential, historical temporality, determined by care and the movement towards death—i.e., radical finitude—as one among many possible ways of understanding existence, and they forget that *it is the mode of being of understanding itself which is here revealed as temporality*.[10]

While Gadamer makes these comments in the context of an encounter with an artwork, they are an appropriate summary of Pip's experience as well. For the immensity of the ocean "drowned the infinite of [Pip's] 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."[11] In the aftermath of his experience of a subject-matter with depth—a kind of third dimension unbeknownst to Pip, the "infinite" of Pip's soul becomes properly oriented toward the finite. What remains, thus, is a posture of humility, which, in Pip's case Melville suggests is evident in Pip's new use of language. As Gadamer argues,

> *Being that can be understood is language*. The hermeneutical phenomenon here projects its own universality back onto the ontological constitution of what is understood, determining it in a universal sense as *language* and determining its own relation to beings as interpretation. Thus we speak not only of a language of art but also of a language of nature—in short, of any language that things have.[12]

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[8] Ibid., 383.
[9] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. and rev. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 125.
[10] Ibid., 125, emphasis added.
[11] Melville, 308.
[12] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 490.

Language is a necessary condition for the disclosure of the world. Unlike animals, who dwell in an environment that they cannot constitute linguistically, human beings have the capacity to take something *as* something, i.e., to relate meaningfully to things as they are within the linguistically-expressed space of intentionality. Put differently, human linguisticality elevates a mere environment into a meaningful world.[13] Because Pip comes back onboard the *Pequod* able to speak, albeit in an altered way, as we will see, the others render him an idiot, but not Ahab, who takes him under his wing, as it were. Pip then mimetically displays how hermeneutical events change one's being in the world and one's connection with others, building a bridge to those who seem beyond reach. In this way, his seemingly simple use of language enables him to capture the essence of the crew's experiences, exposing them as subjective, private *Erlebnisse* rather than hermeneutical *Erfahrungen*.

From the beginning of the novel, the narrator Ishmael calls attention to our land-based prejudices, revealing that water—and by extension, hermeneutics—requires a fluid mindset that challenges the ossified beliefs that living only on land—or only viewing the subject-matter through one lens—inculcates. As the narrative unfolds, apostrophes to "landsman" or "landsmen" proliferate, culminating in Ishmael's arguably severest indictment in chapter 45, "The Affidavit": "So ignorant are most landsmen of some of the plainest and most palpable wonders of the world, that without some hints touching the plain facts [. . .] of the fishery, they might scout at Moby Dick as a monstrous fable, or still worse [. . .] a hideous and intolerable allegory."[14] The landsman's imagination is so restricted that he cannot fathom another way of life, i.e., the whaleman's. Traveling on the ocean demands a change in one's mental terrain, therefore, a letting go of what one thinks one knows in favor of the unknowable. As James Weldon Long puts it,

> Moving across the ocean facilitates [a radical perspectival shift] because the ocean's nature as an open space allows for freer movement. There people have the capacity to float between realms not clearly marked as one country's particular possession. For this reason, an oceanic perspective offers a way of challenging the fervent nationalism that flourished in the nineteenth-century United States.[15]

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[13] I would like to thank my anonymous reader for these sentences, which are based on his or her report.

[14] Melville, 164.

[15] James Weldon Long, "Plunging into the Atlantic: The oceanic order of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*," *Atlantic Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1 (March 2011): 69-91, 71.

Long chooses to focus on a historical issue, but his observation extends to any "fervent" viewpoints that a person may cherish. As such, one must divest of one's mentality that would see Moby-Dick only as a "monstrous fable" or "intolerable allegory" and adopt an oceanic mind that experiences the whale as a "grand god [who] revealed himself."[16] In Gadamer's terms, "Understanding, then, does not consist in a technical virtuosity of 'understanding' everything written. Rather, it is a genuine experience (Erfahrung)—i.e., an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth."[17] One must humbly submit to a reality that cannot be boiled down to once-and-for-all moral or philosophical maxims, a posture that easily weaponizes truth for its own purposes. Rather, because we can never reach the end of understanding, so to speak, an oceanic perspective ensures that one comes to any hermeneutical event willing to be challenged, open to seeing things from a new perspective. To experience Moby-Dick as a "grand god," then, is to assign to an aquatic mammal—and by extension to all the natural world and to every object outside of the self—a radical otherness that requires the relinquishment of the subject's desire for mastery of the object.

Despite Ishmael's insistence that the ocean acts as a corrective to the landsman's mindset, he acknowledges that it may be elusive even to fishermen, people who spend much of their life apart from the land—as elusive as the white whale itself. He observes, for instance, that "in calm weather, to swim in the open ocean is as easy to the practised swimmer as to ride in the spring-carriage ashore."[18] The ocean has many facets, and one can be easily fooled into thinking one knows it if one comes into contact with it only during serene weather. Swimming in such waters is not dangerous, in other words. Furthermore, most of the whalemen in *Moby-Dick* are by necessity confined to the surface of the ocean, evidenced in how Stubb and the rest discover signs of the presence of whales: "Suddenly bubbles seemed bursting beneath [Ishmael's] closed eyes; [. . .] But lazily undulating in the trough of the sea, and ever and anon tranquilly spouting his vapory jet, the whale looked like a portly burgher smoking his pipe of a warm afternoon."[19] The harpooneers must learn to read the surface of the water for signs of whales, not needing any knowledge or experience of depth to hunt for them. In the commercial world of the nineteenth-century fishery, one of Melville's intended targets of criticism, such expertise would be useless and arguably even counterproductive: money awaits those who catch the most fish the

[16] Melville, 393.
[17] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 504.
[18] Melville, 307.
[19] Ibid., 220.

fastest, not those with extensive know-how of oceanic profundity. But, as José Ortega y Gasset astutely comments, "Some men refuse to recognize the depth of something because they demand that the profound should manifest itself in the same way as the superficial. [. . .] [T]hey pay exclusive attention to the clarity peculiar to surfaces. They do not realize that to be hidden beneath the surface, merely appearing through it, throbbing underneath it is essential to depth."[20] Despite his *hamartia*, Ahab displays precisely Ortega's understanding that the deep hides a being whom those with merely surface knowledge—like Stubb—cannot comprehend. His quest for Moby-Dick, misguided as it may be (in part because it sinks the *Pequod* along with him), bespeaks Ahab's depth of soul and his desire for more than mere façade. Put differently, what ultimately motivates Ahab is a longing for a hermeneutical encounter that would jolt awake a language deadened by the concerns of mercantilism, capable of acting as a salve to his wounded body and of (re)populating the world with numinous presences.

It is this kind of a life-changing hermeneutical encounter that Pip undergoes in the ocean. Ishmael narrates,

> 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 heaps; and among the joyous, heartless, 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; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man's insanity is heaven's sense.[21]

What Pip experiences is the antithesis of Stubb's surface knowledge: the "wondrous depths" reveal the "strange shapes" of the "primal world" where "God's foot" is on the "treadle of the loom" of Time, weaving an oceanic tapestry of meaning that, perhaps, is "as indifferent as his God."[22] He experiences Wisdom as a presence, a "merman," a Gadamerian transcendence-within-immanence that facilitates his witnessing the "coral insects" that "heaved the colossal orbs." Bainard Cowan argues that "Pip's vision is far from a beatific vision. [. . .] [A]ll temporal instruments of man, including language, are of no use to him. He has looked into the heart of the mysteries

[20] José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote*, trans. Everly Rugg and Diego Marín (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1961), 62.
[21] Melville, 308.
[22] Ibid.

of nature and been 'converted,' although the conversion is a radical discontinuity that does not permit ordered reflection or interpretation to take place."[23] It is true that after this incident, Pip frequently refers to himself as "missing,"[24] indicating that his vision is not what Dante beholds at the end of *Paradiso*. However, it is not that Pip no longer has any use for language. It is precisely because he "spoke it" that they call him mad for they do not understand him.[25] In other words, Pip's language returns with him once back onboard the *Pequod*, albeit in symbolic form rather than in conversational form. His experience forces him to relate to language differently, to point out in compressed form truths that only someone touched by the "miser-merman, Wisdom" can do. As Jimmy Packham notes, "The consequences of Pip's return are to highlight the limitations of his shipmates' language, but also to perform language differently, offering a language that engages with the oceanic depths by positioning itself vertically."[26] In this way, Pip challenges the normal mechanisms by which interpretation occurs, which in the world of the *Pequod* are monological, primarily because the destiny of the crew is tied to Ahab's governance of the boat. His is the binding, authoritative word, and the other mariners cannot offer an alternative. Furthermore, as Ishmael comments on Stubb's leaving Pip in the ocean, "Hereby perhaps Stubb indirectly hinted, that though man loves his fellow, yet man is a money-making animal, which propensity too often interferes with his benevolence."[27] Many of the other sailors are dedicated to profit-making, a shallow pursuit that cannot engage dialogically with Ahab so as to bring about an attunement to the polyphonic register of human existence. On the other hand, Pip's "insanity," which is "heaven's

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[23] Bainard Cowan, *Exiled Waters:* Moby-Dick *and the Crisis of Allegory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 158.

[24] Melville, 375.

[25] In a personal exchange, Cowan shared that the word "spoke" in the phrase "and spoke it" may also be a pun on a nautical synonym for "hailed" or "called to" or "tried to establish contact with." Whether we interpret Pip's life-changing experience as a transcendent experience (in which God or the gods have perhaps singled Pip out as the prophetic seer to be charged with knowing the transcendent good of nature and the tragic mistake Ahab is making by opposing it) or under the modern laws of mind (in which Pip has simply seen some heretofore unencountered sea life and, catalyzed by his traumatic marooning at sea, is robbed henceforth of ordinary discourse but gifted with a new channel of his imagination in which he tries repeatedly to come to terms with his vision), in both cases he is wounded in his conversational speech abilities. However, he acquires a capacity for symbolic speech that his crewmates do not have and that sets him up for a deep relationship with Ahab.

[26] Jimmy Packham, "Pip's Oceanic Voice: Speech and the Sea in *Moby-Dick*," *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 112, no. 3 (July 2017): 567-581, 577.

[27] Melville, 307.

sense''—a stunningly similar conclusion to Dickinson's poem—can find common ground with the monomaniacal Ahab.

Arguably the most significant part of Pip's ordeal—its loneliness—reveals the crucial aspect community plays in one's self-understanding, as well as one's understanding of the world. Ishmael poignantly reflects,

> But the awful lonesomeness is intolerable. The intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity, my God! who can tell of it? Mark, how when sailors in a dead calm bathe in the open sea—mark how closely they hug their ship and only coast along her sides.[28]

The image of the sailors as they hover around their ship while swimming in the ocean emphasizes the need for a larger linguistic community where conversation can take place. The farther from the ship one ventures out, the greater the risk that something catastrophic will take place. Thus, the vast expanse of the ocean weighs heavily on young Pip, who has no one with whom to share his experience. As Gadamer writes, "Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding."[29] Since understanding only occurs in language, however, and since Pip's vision is one unmediated by language, happening before "his passive eyes," it triggers a madness that essentially renders him "an idiot"[30] to his shipmates. Language works properly only when shared in a dialectic of equality, serving as a reminder of one's limits, of one's need of others, of the necessity of dialogue to bring about understanding. Gadamer continues, "For language is by nature the language of conversation; it fully realizes itself only in the process of coming to an understanding. That is why it is not a mere means in that process."[31] Without this communal aspect, words become simply private utterances stripped of the possibility of fostering an encounter with truth or a meaning-making event. In short, such a scenario erases the public sphere of meaning, paralyzing the hermeneutical field by not harnessing the power of language.

Yet it is not clear that full community would ever have been open to Pip, whom we have already seen Ishmael describe as the "most insignificant of the Pequod's crew"; regardless of this isolation, however, Pip shows himself as someone cognizant of reality as more than a flat surface. By virtue of his dark skin, he is somewhat ostracized on the ship, despite the diversity of the crew members—much less so than

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[28] Ibid., 307.
[29] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 403.
[30] Melville, 308.
[31] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 463.

on land, to be sure, but still excluded. This is evident the first time we meet him in Chapter 40, "Midnight, Forecastle." As the sailors begin their revelry, one of them calls to him, "Pip! little Pip! hurrah with your tambourine!"[32] and "Go it, Pip! Bang it, bell-boy! Rig it, dig it, stig it, quig it, bell-boy! Make fire-flies; break the jinglers!"[33] Associated with music, Pip stands apart from others, providing entertainment but not fully participating in it. As the storm gathers force, all the sailors scatter, and Pip, alone on the deck, delivers his first monologue, ending with a prayer: "Oh, thou big white God aloft there somewhere in yon darkness, have mercy on this small black boy down here; preserve him from all men that have no bowels to feel fear!"[34] Pip, it seems, has always been aware of depth. Because of his status as a social outcast, Pip is acutely sensitive to such categories as "the high" and "the low." And although he prays to a "white God," this deity nonetheless lives in "yon darkness" and is therefore inscrutable; the darkness, in the end, nullifies God's whiteness. Put differently, Pip's marginalized rank in society enables him to maintain a liminal outlook on life, an attunement to the paradoxical nature of reality—arguably also an allusion to Melville's own Transcendental bent. Furthermore, his wish for preservation from "men" with "no bowels" bespeaks an imagination that understands that the viscera give one the ability to withstand cataclysmic events. Louise Cowan, for example, links them to the ability to view tragedy: "As readers of novels, we lack the viscera for tragedy; we are all minds and sensibilities."[35] To be "all minds and sensibilities" points to removed and somewhat angelic personalities. Tragedy requires strong bowels for it plunges one into depth; confronted by the gods, the tragic hero must penetrate deep into the nature of reality without any comic alleviator. Fear, arguably one the most primal and strongest human emotions, root one to this material world, allowing for the unmasking of reality, a terrifying and dark reality at times—but a reality with depth. Even before his encounter with "Wisdom," then, Pip displays a remarkable insight into the nature of truth. To borrow a phrase from T.S. Eliot, "We are the hollow men" leads to "This is how the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper."[36] Men with insides rage against meaninglessness, ensuring that if the world must end, it will do so with a bang, not a whimper.

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[32] Melville, 139.
[33] Ibid., 140.
[34] Ibid., 144.
[35] Louise Cowan, "Introduction: The Tragic Abyss," *The Tragic Abyss*, ed. Glenn Arbery (Dallas: Dallas Institute Publications, 2003): 1-19, 4.
[36] T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems: 1902-1962* (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc. 1963), 79, 82.

Perhaps because of his marginalized status, the ocean can claim Pip as its own, taking his sanity (which could not reach Ahab anyway), but giving him a new relationship to language. In a conversation with Ahab, Pip says, "They tell me, sir, that Stubb did once desert poor little Pip, whose drowned bones now show white, for all the blackness of his living skin."[37] Pip comes to embody the paradox of the God to whom he prays earlier: his white bones are enclosed by black skin, just as darkness enfolds the white deity earlier. Furthermore, his use of "drowned bones" matches the exact words Ahab uses in an apostrophe to Moby-Dick: "Oh, thou dark Hindoo half of nature, who of drowned bones hast builded thy separate throne somewhere in the heart of these unverdured seas."[38] Pip becomes inextricably linked to the god of the deep. As such, he acquires a new mode of being in the world, one that Ahab himself notices: "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!"[39] His solitary encounter in the ocean renders him a source of knowledge to the troubled Ahab. As Donald Pease writes, "Pip, who both is and is not yet dead, opens a hole in [Ahab's] symbolic authority by embodying the excess plenitude that Ahab cannot rule."[40] Pip, in his oceanic identity, serves as a reminder that reality is not the monological tapestry that Ahab would weave. Put differently, Pip reveals that Ahab, in Gadamer's words, thinks "like Lucifer, like one who wants to prove his own divinity by the fact that the whole world has to obey him. In this case the world's being-in-itself is a limitation of the omnipotence of his imagination."[41] Ahab's *hamartia* lies partly in his suppression of other voices. He does not allow language to be a conversation, but forces it into binding others to his purpose, as he does in Chapter 36, "The Quarter-Deck." Pip, however, has been reconstituted in the image of the oceanic depth, becoming an "excess plenitude" that cannot be subsumed in Ahab's all-consuming narrative.

In a stunning move, the ocean impresses upon Pip his own finitude, which alone is able to recall Ahab to this world. Ishmael's phrase, "The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul,"[42] reveals a Gadamerian sensibility about hermeneutics: it is not open to an angelic being, which, as an unembodied entity, perceives directly via intuition. As Gadamer writes,

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[37] Melville, 383.
[38] Ibid., 360-61.
[39] Ibid., 380.
[40] Donald Pease, "Pip, 'Moby-Dick', Melville's Governmentality," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 45, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 327-42, 339.
[41] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 464.
[42] Melville, 308.

> Similarly, the universality of the hermeneutical experience would not be available to an infinite mind, for it develops out of itself all meaning, all noeton, and thinks all that can be thought in the perfect contemplation of itself. The God of Aristotle (as well as the Spirit of Hegel) has left 'philosophy,' this movement of finite existence, behind. None of the gods philosophizes, says Plato.[43]

The ocean throws Pip more vigorously into this life. The God to whom he prays earlier in the book is not in "yon darkness," but in the depth of this finite world. The ocean thus discloses the depth of this material world—its third dimension, as it were. In other words, God is transcendence-within-immanence, an eminently Gadamerian idea. Put differently, transcendence can never be reached except through the definite. William Lynch calls the definite the "generative finite" and explains,

> Whether we believe in [Christ] or not, He represents the ideal point at which the imagination can relax the strain of its double aspirations; if He is there, then at that point at least we can keep penetrating more and more deeply into the detail of Him, who is penetrating the detail of life as a way to life, and let the other side of the picture—the dream, the divine, the unlimited, the beauty—take care of itself.[44]

The "dream, the divine, the unlimited, the beauty" are all abstractions that, unless grounded in the material, finite world, can be easily misused toward nefarious ends. Pip, however, by glimpsing "wondrous depths," is plunged more deeply into bodily existence, succoring Ahab's soul with "wondrous philosophies." In this way, by diving into the material, he acquires the poetic imagination that has curative properties.

Before examining more closely Pip's relationship with Ahab, it is important to note one last thing about this incident: the title of the chapter. Gordon Mills draws attention to the fact that "shipwrecked" would have been more appropriate than "castaway."[45] He goes on to connect Melville's choice of words to a poem that the author may have read, but the text suggests at least two other possibilities. The first connects to Father Mapple's sermon back in chapter 9. In a paragraph replete with imprecations, the preacher concludes, "Yea, woe to him who, as the great Pilot Paul

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[43] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 502.
[44] William Lynch, *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 15.
[45] Gordon H. Mills, "The Castaway in 'Moby-Dick,'" *The University of Texas Studies in English*, vol. 29 (1950): 231-248.

has it, while preaching to others is himself a castaway!"[46] Ishmael corrects Father Mapple's severe outlook on life, which delineates sharply between the good and the wicked. In a reversal, it is now the castaway—the ultimate outsider—who, preaching in an unknown tongue to most men, is revealed as the ultimate insider, for Pip is the only member of the *Pequod* who can reach Ahab. Furthermore, the castaway, as we will see, would bind himself to Ahab, the ultimate outsider, for he does not want to give up on anyone. Unlike Mapple, who uses Jonah's story as a cautionary tale that suggests a demarcation between success in this life and eternal salvation in the afterlife, little Pip will not abandon Ahab to the grave even though Ahab is ultimately misguided. Put another way, Pip reveals Ahab's humanity to our eyes, even though Ahab may have more in common with Mapple than with anyone else in the novel. The second possibility relates to Ishmael himself. After finishing narrating Pip's near-drowning accident, Ishmael writes, "[I]n the sequel of the narrative, it will then be seen what like abandonment befell myself."[47] Ishmael identifies with the young black boy, and given his own name—or rather, the name that he asks someone (us? the Muses?) to call him—this connection enriches the meaning of the word "castaway." For his biblical namesake was an outcast himself, his mother, Hagar, driven into the desert by a jealous Sarah. There, she encounters God—the first person in Genesis to do so—who promises to take care of her and her son, who will also become a father of nations. By its huge, uninhabited expanse (at least at the surface level), the ocean has more in common with the desert than with land, and Ishmael chooses to associate himself with Pip. The link that he forges between himself and Pip, then, reveals that Pip, indeed, does receive a kind of revelation—not angelic, as we have seen, but a peering into the depths of the world. In this way, Pip's poetic madness acquires an oracular dimension. As Gadamer writes, "[T]he poet is a seer because he himself presents what is, was, and will be, and hence he himself attests to what he proclaims. It is true that poetic utterance has something ambiguous about it, like an oracle. But this is precisely where its hermeneutical truth lies."[48] Pip's seemingly enigmatic language intimates that reality is not as it seems. His oracular dimension holds the promise of a hermeneutical encounter that can change one's life. Because of his breadth, in other words, Pip can now reach those who seem to be beyond reason, beyond humanity, beyond help.

Pip's oceanic being, a balm to the soul of the beleaguered Ahab, acts as a reminder that if others seem beyond reach, it is because we have not found the right language with which to communicate with them. As F.O. Matthiessen puts it, "[T]here

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[46] Melville, 50.
[47] Ibid., 308.
[48] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 503.

would seem to have been small scope given to 'the humanities,' which Captain Peleg insisted were also to be found in Ahab. They rise to the surface in his relations with Pip."[49] No crew member experiences Ahab's "humanities,"[50] but Pip manages to remind Ahab of something he has lost, or perhaps like Pip himself, has never had: community. In Ahab's own words, "Thou touchest my inmost centre, boy; thou art tied to me by cords woven of my heart-strings."[51] Ahab suggests the most intimate of human relations between him and Pip. To be "woven of [his] heart-strings" suggests that Pip becomes Ahab's bosom friend, his second self, as Aristotle himself points out.[52] Pip shares this sentiment. When Ahab threatens to leave him behind as he continues hunting for Moby-Dick, Pip pitifully pleads, "No, no, no! ye have not a whole body, sir; do ye but use poor me for your one lost leg; only tread upon me, sir; I ask no more, so I remain a part of ye."[53] As Sharon Cameron comments on this dialogue,

> [T]he self needs to be completed in the way made possible by relationship in order to be at all [. . .]; and in Pip's plea that Ahab survive his multilation [*sic*] by treading on him, Melville literalizes the point. Pip will be what Ahab is not. Two will be one. The idealism of that union [. . .] will triumph over the malignancies of a severative world.[54]

Pip's plea transforms Ahab's earlier mention of "cords" that are "woven of [his] heart-strings" into an image of an umbilical cord, a kind of pre-birth unity between mother and child. Their union is so strong that one cannot speak of Ahab without thinking of Pip and vice versa. In other words, this incident embodies what Gadamer terms a "*hermeneutical conversation*,"[55] Pip's and Ahab's "mutual understanding"[56] of their relationship to each other in a way that can stand up to a "severative world," binding what their circumstances may dictate to them to rupture. Moreover, wholeness is

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[49] F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), 449.
[50] Melville, 74. Arguably Ishmael sees Ahab's "humanities" as well, but as one who narrates after the events, he is a special case. One is left to wonder how much of Ishmael's portrayal of Ahab is influenced by his contact with Pip.
[51] Ibid., 376.
[52] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1170b7.
[53] Melville, 383.
[54] Sharon Cameron, "Ahab and Pip: Those Are Pearls That Were His Eyes," *ELH*, vol. 48, no. 3 (Autumn 1981): 573-93, 578.
[55] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 406.
[56] Ibid., 406.

communal, not simply individual, and Pip attempts to remind Ahab of his earlier remarks. Tragedy comes about because Ahab chooses to forego friendship in favor of his singular purpose.

Pip's influence has broader reverberations, affecting even how Ahab interacts with others, not just with him. Ahab blesses the captain of the Rachel, for instance, even though he refuses to help him find his lost son.[57] Once he decides to remain committed to his task of killing Moby-Dick, he tells Pip, "So: God for ever bless thee; and if it come to that,—God for ever save thee, let what will befall."[58] As Charles Olson notes, "Though Ahab continues to curse the gods for their 'inhumanities,' his tone," from the moment he recognizes Pip as "woven of [his] heart-strings," is "richer, quieter, less angry and strident. He even questions his former blasphemies, for a bottomed sadness grows in him as Pip lives in the cabin with him."[59] Pip, it seems, plants the seeds of another world in Ahab, seeds that, if watered, will sprout into a recognition that there is another course of action possible for him. There is no doubt that Pip uncovers cracks in Ahab's worldview, cracks that trouble Ahab, for he intuits that demands are now placed upon him to change his life. In turn, this hints that the matter—*die Sache*—between Ahab in Pip relates to the journey of the *Pequod* and the possibility of its return to land and safety. Such a change of course, though, would require the ultimate sacrifice of Ahab: acceptance of his finitude and humility in the face of a universe greater than he is. Ultimately, Ahab refuses this invitation that Pip extends to him, failing therefore to engage in proper interpretation. As Gadamer points out, "Like conversation, interpretation is a circle closed by the dialectic of question and answer."[60] Herein perhaps lies Ahab's most Luciferean proclivity: he closes himself off to the challenge that truth presents to humans, namely, that of a thorough examination of one's life that never results in transhistorical or ahistorical moral (or otherwise) axioms. For truth is more concerned with my reaction to it than on imposing what I think it says on those around me.

That interpretation is key to Pip's new poetic status is especially evident in Chapter 99, "The Doubloon," when his linguistic insight throws light on his shipmates' hermeneutics, or lack thereof, as an extension of their private worldview. As Ahab passes by the coin he had nailed to the mast of the ship, he stops to ponder its meaning since "some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little

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[57] Melville, 382.
[58] Ibid., 383.
[59] Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael: A Study of Melville* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1947), 60.
[60] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 407.

worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher."[61] Others soon follow suit, offering their own interpretations of the signs inscribed on the doubloon, while Stubb eavesdrops and comments on everyone's comments. As Maurice S. Lee writes of this episode,

> Flask offers a literal reading of the coin that delimits its symbolic implications [. . .] Along these lines, Starbuck insists that the white whale is only a "dumb brute," resisting Ahab's transcendental idealism and suggesting that the safest interpretation of signs comes from a realist, empirical point of view. [. . .] Also—Flask's literalism notwithstanding—the doubloon shows how interpretations can proliferate until signs become so laden with subjective referents as to preclude any shared understanding.[62]

The crew members don't speak to each other, so much as *at* each other. This is the opposite of the hermeneutical conversation between Pip and Ahab. It is at this moment that Pip, with "that unearthly idiot face,"[63] shows up to read, saying only, "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look," upon which he is accused of studying "Murray's Grammar."[64] Three times Pip repeats the same grammatical line. For Michael West, Pip "practices grammatical rather than historical etymology. Instead of deriving meanings of words from something outside language, Pip emphasizes how meanings derive from the structure of language itself."[65] Samuel Otter argues that "Pip's words do not emphasize distinct perspectives but, instead, define perception as a shared, structurally linked activity."[66] Both West and Otter emphasize that the nature of reality is linguistic—or rather, we do not know reality outside of how we come to speak about it and understand it in language. Furthermore, understanding takes place in community, as Pip's use of multiple pronouns indicates.[67] This highlights an essentially Gadamerian notion:

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[61] Melville, 317.
[62] Maurice S. Lee, "The Language of *Moby-Dick*: 'Read It If You Can,'" *A Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Wyn Kelley (London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006): 393-407, 402.
[63] Melville, 321.
[64] Ibid., 321.
[65] Michael West, *Transcendental Wordplay: America's Romantic Punsters and the Search for the Language of Nature* (Athens, GA: Ohio University Press, 2000), 328.
[66] Samuel Otter, *Melville's Anatomies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 170.
[67] Packham underscores this communal aspect as well, but he grounds his inquiry in Saussure and Sartre, not Gadamer.

> It is not for nothing that the special problematic of understanding and the attempt to master it as an art—the concern of hermeneutics—belongs traditionally to the sphere of grammar and rhetoric. Language is the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement take place between two people.[68]

Pip's grammatical rejoinder draws attention to language itself, hinting not only that interpretation at its best takes place in concert with others, but also that one's experience must be broader than the private one that the mariners lead. Put differently, for interpretation not to devolve into private utterances that lead down subjective dead-ends, it must be undertaken in conversation with others, where one's own *Erlebnis* can be challenged and transformed into a meaning-making *Erfahrung*. As Nicholas Davey explains, for Gadamer "*Erlebnisse* understood as units of intense, immediate, personal feeling can only ever convey the psychological predicament of the reading subject. [. . .] By contrast, *Erfahrungen* are recursive not circular in nature. *Erfahrungen* are not grounded in the subject but in what transcends it, enabling it to encounter and be changed by what lies outside itself."[69] Stubb's commentary then is far from the experience Gadamer has in mind, for no one can countermand his interpretation. Furthermore, no one challenges anyone else's interpretation; no one dialogues with anyone in this scene. It is Pip's witty quip that exposes the crew as mired in "intense, immediate, personal feeling[s]," which by their nature cannot disrupt Ahab's monologic narrative. While not to the same dangerous extent as Ahab, most of the crew exhibit similarly monologic tendencies, revealing that hubris is widespread among them. And hubris cannot speak to hubris.

Despite the fact that Pip's oceanic existence challenges everyone onboard the *Pequod*, his shipmates, too, eventually reject him, trying to contain any damage that he may cause to their worldview. It is important to underscore, however, that out of everyone on the ship, Pip is the only one who nearly deters Ahab from his purpose. Pip's contact with oceanic depth allows him to acquire a new dimension of language, one that reminds those with ears to hear that to remain on the surface of things is to live a two-dimensional life. Furthermore, he poetically embodies Gadamer's notion of hermeneutics, i.e., a way to engage with a subject-matter in a way that changes one's life and consequently one's relationship to others. And even though Ahab hears Pip,

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[68] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 402.

[69] Nicholas Davey, "Lived Experience: Erlebnis *and* Erfahrung," *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Niall Keane and Chris Lawn (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016): 326-332, 328.

he is free to reject what he hears—and he does. But if Pip fails with (most of) those in the novel, however, he does not fail with the narrator, Ishmael, who preserves Pip's memory in his retelling of the story. I have already alluded a while back to Ishmael's connection with Pip via the word "castaway." And while there is no way decisively to prove this, I would like to suggest that we can read the narrator's decision to pick the name of another castaway—Ishmael—as his namesake as having been born from his encounter with Pip. Ishmael, therefore, shows us how to properly engage with an oceanic self. As he puts it in chapter 26, "Knights and Squires," in relation to Starbuck,

> But were the coming narrative to reveal, in any instance, the complete abasement of poor Starbuck's fortitude, scarce might I have the heart to write it; for it is a thing most sorrowful, nay shocking, to expose the fall of valor in the soul. Men may seem detestable as joint stock-companies and nations; knaves, fools, and murderers there may be; men may have such mean and meagre faces; but man, in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature, that over any ignominious blemish in him all his fellows should run to throw their costliest robes.[70]

Unlike Ahab, who chooses to reject Pip's message, Ishmael internalizes it to such an extent that it affects his narrative style. For his "costliest robes," among many other things, can be interpreted as the very stuff of poetry, namely, the vaulting and beautiful language he uses throughout. The novel itself, in this way, becomes a poem of epic proportions—a paean to the human being in all his splendor and his decadence. Put otherwise, if Pip changes Ishmael, the latter shows it in how he crafts the entire story. And consequently, Melville shows how the human heart can engage with castaways—all those whom society rejects for one reason or another—in such a way as to prevent the worst impulses from dictating how we lead our lives: we are to throw our "costliest robes" over our fellow human beings' weaknesses. Such an action inevitably raises many ethical questions, which of necessity we must ponder if we are to form a more perfect union. Melville would remind us, however, that if Ishmael can identify with the young black boy Pip in pre-Civil War America, then there is hope that a true hermeneutical encounter—which is always possible when we open our imagination to something greater than we are—will engender a desire for truth, dialogue, love, and forgiveness in us, mere mortals, too.

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[70] Melville, 97.

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How Big Is a Whale, Mr. Melville? Space and Knowledge in *Moby-Dick*

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> My object here is simply to project the draught of a systematization of cetology.
> I am the architect, not the builder.
> —Herman Melville

In 1996, the *Chicago Tribune* reported on the traveling exhibition at the Mary and Leigh Gallery, (today known as the Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, Illinois) where the influence of *Moby-Dick or, the Whale* by Herman Melville was visible in a collection of 86 objects created between 1927 and 1994. The exhibition's starting point was Elizabeth Schultz's book, *Unpainted to the Last: Moby-Dick and Twentieth-Century American Art* (1995), in which the author followed the effects of Melville's seminal work on a variety of artists including Jackson Pollock, Frank Stella, and Richard Serra: creators employing aesthetic languages ranging from realism to abstract expressionism and minimalism. Their generic means of expression were equally diverse: cartoons, painting, sculpture and even architecture attempted to translate the power of the novel into their particular mediums. In this regard, the case of *The House at Martha's Vineyards* by Steven Holl, also known as the Berkowitz-Odgis House (1988-2013), is particularly eloquent, mainly due to the disparity between the literary inspiration provided by *Moby-*

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Dick and the architectural achievement of the structure that stands near Vineyard Sound. In the short text that serves as a description and justification of the work, the architect explains how Melville's words helped him build a "house as a kind of a primitive hut,"[2]

> In the locally inspired novel Moby Dick, Melville describes an Indian tribe, which made a particular type of dwelling on the island. Finding a beached whale skeleton, they would pull it to dry land and stretch skins over it, transforming it into a house. Inspired by this practice, the house is an inside-out balloon frame structure, elevated over the landscape. The wooden "bones" of the frame carry an encircling veranda affording ocean views.[3]

Although Steven Holl referred to the wigwam, like the one Ishmael observes on the quarter-deck of the *Pequod* before they set off on their journey in the chapter "The Ship" (ch. 16), it is also possible to see in this house resonances of other passages in the book. In fact, Elizabeth Schultz had already observed the way in which the construction is implanted in the dune landscape "is perceived as a whale or a ship,"[4] or how the rhythm and tone of the wooden porticos are close to the bleached skeleton, allowing Holl, "as does Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*, to create, if not the whale itself, then, a 'Temple of the Whale'," [5] as described in the chapter "A Bower in the Arsacides" (ch. 102).

However, perhaps less evident is the relationship between the Berkowitz-Odgis House and the type of construction and spatial organization of the "Spouter-Inn"—which follows the typology of traditional 19th-century buildings in the Northeastern United States. In this chapter, the moment before entering the inn's public room, Ishmael crosses the "low-arched way—cut through what in old times must have been a great central chimney" (a place where the fire was extinguished to give way to men?). From Melville's description, one can understand the size of the element—large enough for someone to cross it—but also that, despite its function no longer being the same, it was not removed, suggesting that, whether for reasons of stability of the building or spatial arrangement, the demolition of the chimney would

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[2] Steven Holl, "A Conversation with Steven Holl," interview by Alejandro Zaera Polo, *El Croquis* 78, 1996, p. 15.
[3] Steven Holl, "Projects: Houses: House at Martha's Vineyard: Description," Steven Holl Architects, accessed April 25, 2024, https://www.stevenholl.com/project/marthas-vineyard-house/.
[4] Elizabeth Schultz, *Unpainted to the Last. Moby-Dick and Twentieth-Century American Art* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), p. 320.
[5] Schultz, p. 317.

not be necessary or possible. In the next sentence, in the public room, Melville talks about the "low ponderous beams" and the "old wrinkle planks," a squat, wooden space, similar to a ship's chamber. These two elements—the chimney and the adjacent compartments—function as the basic components of this type of construction: the farmhouse. Usually, the chimney, in the center and in a more robust and perennial material such as brick, crosses all floors of the building and functions as a hinge between the two wings of wooden compartments. Just as it happens in the Berkowitz-Odgis House—with a slight adaptation in the chimney that is built with locally gathered stones set in concrete instead of bricks—allowing Holl, through spatial arrangement and materiality, to anchor the house to the place not only in historical terms but also literary ones.

In this sense, it is possible to interpret the chimney of the Berkowitz-Odgis House as an architectural device to organize space in the same way that the chimney of the "Spouter-Inn" functions as a narrative one, endowing it with spatial qualities and a human scale. But it is in Melville's short story "I and My Chimney" (1856) that this architectural element acquires greater relevance, both in the house and in the narrative itself. Here, the chimney is the protagonist, not only because of its spatial arrangement and physical qualities that survive the deterioration of the materials that make up the rest of the building, but also because it contains a metaphysical dimension. According to Anthony Vidler's interpretation, the chimney, in addition to providing warmth and stability to the entire house, its pyramidal geometry highlights something funereal about it; it is a kind of Egyptian tomb, the place where the symbolic fire of life burns.[6] But perhaps more interesting is the way in which Vidler establishes the link between architectural elements such as chimneys and the Freudian notion of the uncanny—as nothing new or strange, but something familiar and sedimented that becomes alienated through a process of repression—and which perhaps finds in the house, a place of intimacy and protection par excellence, one of its most intense and unsettling manifestations. Melville's chimney, hiding mysteries and dark secrets, viscerally connecting the narrator to the architectural element, transforms one into an extension of the other. For Vidler, "Melville's reflection on the secret recesses of domesticity leads to a discussion of the role of the uncanny in the fantasies of burial and return that were inseparable from the historical and archeological self-consciousness of the nineteenth century."[7]

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[6] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 42.
[7] Vidler, p. xi.

The relationship between Melville and architecture seems particularly intense, having been the subject of prolonged attention by Vicky Halper Litman in the essay "The Cottage and the Temple: Melville's Symbolic Use of Architecture" (1969). Here, Litman shows how Melville establishes analogies between the architectural elements in his writing and his protagonists, showing how Melville establishes metaphorical connections between certain buildings, materials, and colors. In general, according to Litman, it is possible to distill Melville's practice here to two architectural typologies—the temple and the farmhouse—, following the nineteenth-century architectural historian Andrew Jackson Downing's interpretation of "absolute beauty" and "relative beauty," respectively. The first, where architecture materializes forms that express ideas of perfection, and the second wherein buildings reveal through architectural forms the temperament of their occupants in an almost physiological way. Such architectural symbolism also conditions *Moby-Dick*'s representation of U.S. antebellum racial demography when, for example, the "block of blackness, not houses" anticipates "A hundred black faces turned round in their rows to peer" (ch. 2).

Therefore, it's important to highlight the effects of architectural analogies or relationships between certain everyday objects in *Moby-Dick*, that allows Melville to establish, starting from a set of references that anyone will be familiar with, a spatial association between the reader and an animal of massive dimensions. This correspondences span, for example, from vehicles where "the vast arched bone of the whale's jaw, so wide, a coach might almost drive beneath it" (ch. 3), to furniture where "the Right Whale's mouth would accommodate a couple of whist-tables, and comfortably seat all the players" (ch. 83), and architectural elements such as "roof," "ridge pole," or "Venetian blinds," as described in "The Right Whale's Head" (ch. 75). As literary mechanism, spatial analogies humanize the ferocious monster, that is even incorporated, physically, by Ishmael through the tattoo of the cetacean skeleton measurements (ch. 102). The human's approach to the immeasurable takes place, therefore, in a tangible way through the knowledge imbued in space and architectural elements. Which means that there is a form of spatial knowledge that Melville still does not want to give up, even after Victor Hugo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831) decreed that with Gutenberg's invention "This will kill that. The book will kill the edifice." It is this quality of architecture as a form of knowledge that makes Garrett Urban, basing his contentions on Jacques Derrida's conception of the archive, justify Ishmael's archival anxiety in retaining and accessing knowledge: "through the medium of architecture, history is directly encoded within the architectural form, obviating the

problem of the lack of first-hand access to the past."[8] To the idea of archive considered by Urban via Derrida, Suzanne Conklin Akbari advances the notion of encyclopedia through the way Melville's novel systematizes and orders knowledge about whale anatomy, where the chapter "Cetology" (ch. 32) is its greatest evidence.[9] It would, however, be equally legitimate to consider it as a kind of manual or treatise on how to hunt whales, due to the way it describes the terms, activities, procedures, principles, values, categories and characteristics of its object of study. But also due to the intimate relationship between the size of the cetacean and the size of the folios in that same chapter, presupposing a question of scale and representation so that cetacean knowledge can be correctly organized and transmitted, as happened in ancient architectural treatises.

However, if, as we have seen, the relationship that Melville has with architecture allows him to explore particular narrative effects, it is no longer clear why he uses the figure of the architect as the one capable of organizing knowledge, especially when he attributes some fragilities such as the inability to completeness and perfection (ch. 32). In fact, this is a question that causes some perplexity, which Akbari also mentions.[10] Her explanation lies in the architects' own planning capacity and not in their qualities of finalizing objects that are more appropriate to the skills of the builders—even though it is these same builders who left the Cologne Cathedral unfinished at the time of the novel's publication (ch. 32). Yet, one could insist on considering the use of the figure of the architect due to his inclusive and widespread vision or the consistency of his organization with which he is usually recognized. But even so, this recognition would be uncommon when Melville wrote his novel—or at least not as common as today—which would mean him knowing closely how it works. Certainly, Melville's proximity to the English Art's and Craft's movement, as demonstrated in Urban's study, and his sensitivity to architecture, especially Greek—quite evident in the poems *Greek Architecture*, *Greek Masonry*, *The Parthenon*—, explain his awareness and ease in this universe. However, the long and curious look, the dedicated attention, the desire to find meanings in objects other than their short functionality, the understanding that they are repositories of knowledge, require a

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[8] Garrett Urban, "In the Belly of the Whale: Archive and Access in Melville's Moby-Dick" (MA diss., University of South Carolina, 2016), p. 23.

[9] Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "The Encyclopedic Genius of Melville's Masterpiece. On *Moby Dick* as a Way of Seeing the World," Literary Hub, accessed April 24, 2024, https://lithub.com/the-encyclopedic-genius-of-melvilles-masterpiece/.

[10] I would like to thank Dr. Erin Sellner for bringing this issue to my attention.

specific devotion from those who want to find them and which is not easily conveyed by circumstantial expertise.

If the relevance of a work is measured by its persistence over time and the impact it has on others, then *Moby-Dick* is undoubtedly just such a work that not only continues to be read and taught, but that also inspires artists working in other media. Melville's relationship with architecture illustrates a rich and multifaceted intersection between literary narrative and architectural practice, offering significant perspectives on both disciplines. It is important, nonetheless, to mention that Melville's attention to architectural elements and the affection he derives from them is that of a poet and writer and not that of an architect, despite his acute and unusual lucidity of what he understands by architect's task and underlined in the introductory quote. This craft, according to the author, involves more the spatial organization of knowledge than the construction of buildings, even contradicting the more traditional view of the discipline. This is what is contained in the idea of a project, this launching into the future from the present, the outline of a possible reality to come, realized with and by others, collectively. And this may well be a precious lesson that Melville has yet to teach us.

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Moby-Dick, Novelising the Grey Architectural Enunciation of the *Maritorium*

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Whereas to dwell on land we created architecture, to dwell in the sea we had to invent seamanship, not shipbuilding. There is a factual impossibility of equating the two forms of life—those anchored to land with the marine epigenesis—whose descriptions are excited by their contraposition in *Moby-Dick* without the need for explicit comparison. Like Ishmael, my aim here is simply *to design a systematization of indeterminacy* in the space of life within the body of water. Meville sought to understand it by cetology, however I, by maritorium. We both uttered the phrase "I am the architect, not the builder." From a hermeneutical point of view, you don't make houses any more than you make boats. What is made, from the inversion of the processual conventionalism of creation, is architecture.

The maritorium is a dynamic and multifaceted space that includes maritime and coastal areas, characterized by its changing morphology, the indefiniteness of its borders and the fluidity of its laws.[1] A maritorium is not static, but is in a continuous process of transformation due to ecosystem dynamics, as well as anthropogenic processes and climate change. Moreover, its geographical and legal boundaries are inherently fuzzy, reflecting complex and often conflicting claims to sovereignty,

[1] For more information and the origin of the concept, see Ricardo Álvarez, Francisco Ther-Ríos, Juan Carlos Skewes, Carlos Hidalgo, Diego Carabias, and Christian García, "Reflexiones Sobre el Concepto de Maritorio y su Relevancia para los Estudios de Chiloé Contemporáneo", *Revista Austral de Ciencias Sociales* no. 36 (2019): 115–26.

jurisdiction and use of maritime resources.[2] In the maritorium, the relationship between coastal communities and the marine environment is fluid and evolving, influenced by public policy, cultural and economic practices, and international law, which often needs to adapt to these changing realities. The management of the maritorium must be flexible and adaptive, incorporating resilient and sustainable approaches that consider both the conservation of marine ecosystems and the well-being of the communities that inhabit and co-evolve with these spaces, within a regulatory framework that can be ambiguous and subject to reinterpretation.

It is obvious that it is not possible to say that a maritorium is the same as a territory, but located on the sea. It is simply not possible to transpose the one to the other. Nor are we interested in confusing maritorium with what C.L.R. James proposed as a Universal Republic exemplified by the diversity of the whaler's inhabitants.[3] What is important is what is revealed by an intelligence that would bring *deterritorialization* to the territory itself and that is already placed in Melville's novel on a plane of interpretation that has been little explored. To accept it would imply a catharsis like that other, very hard but illusionary one, to which Ishmael submits himself when he embarks on the *Pequod*. For decades, interpretations of the changes in the directional structure of dialogue in the novel's chapters have been the subject of controversial debate. The need to add an epilogue after the first edition, to say that the narrator has to save himself to tell the tale, the addition of appendices such as lexicographical appendices to understand what a terrestrial being would not understand from experience alone, here the thought-voice of the protagonist, there the thought-voice of Ahab, taking centre stage in different chapters, articulates a mental space in the narrator subject commensurate with the complexity of a maritorium.

Many have interpreted Melville's novel as a mental space. Howard P. Vincent, in his study *The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick*, argues that *Moby-Dick* is a novel that transcends mere narrative and delves into the creation of a complex mental universe.[4] He underlines how Melville uses symbols, images and metaphors to build a world that reflects both personal obsession and the human condition in general. Charles Olson, in *Call Me Ishmael*, offers a reading that focuses on the human condition, on the

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[2] Johana Herrera Arango and Carlos Tapia Martín, *La 'Dialéctica Del Monstruo' En Las Pesquerías Olvidadas Del Caribe: Desafíos Culturales de La Agenda 2030,* in *Agenda 2030, Derechos Humanos y Territorios,* ed. Jesús Delgado Baena and Juan de Dios García Serrano (Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch, 2023), 223–38.
[3] C. L. R. James, Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In (Dartmouth College, 2001).
[4] Howard P. Vincent, *The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1949).

symbolic depth and mental richness of the work.[5] Olson sees the novel not just as a whaling story, but as an exploration of the human mind and spirit, emphasizing symbolism and imagery as vehicles for an inner journey. Richard Chase, in *Herman Melville: A Critical Study*, takes the view that the novel is an act of the visionary imagination.[6] According to Chase, Melville uses narrative not so much to tell a story, but to explore philosophical and existential themes, creating a series of mental images that invite the reader to reflect beyond the events narrated. For his part, in his introduction to the Norton edition, Bezanson discusses how the novel can be seen as a series of mental and symbolic fragments, as a complex mental construction to confront grand metaphysical themes.[7]

Recently, Sloterdijk has written about the essence of philosophy and recovers Nietzsche, who anticipately circumnavigates in Melville's mind.[8] He refers specifically to the idea of the transvaluation of all values (*Umwertung der Werte*) that Nietzsche develops in *The Antichrist* (from 1888 but not published until 1895). In this context, Sloterdijk suggests that Melville, through his work and his focus on the sea, addresses an inversion of extremes without diminishing the existing high tension. It is this idea that underlies our hypothesis: a procedural inversion whereby the understanding of the indeterminable of the sea could be brought to land. And dwell in that place on the assumption that it has not bowed to the enlightened prerogatives of Modernity. Only, as the author of Karlsruhe also states, white (of the Leviathan) is no longer the colour that our time would interpret as a symptom of contemporaneity: it is grey. That diffuse color does not offer an outline, but an indeterminacy, a zone that is not burdened with the sharp vertical vector of determination, but with multiple circumstantial vital impulses. The polymath Lewis Mumford, reading *Moby-Dick*, has a memorable phrase for it:

> in the final issue of life and death, science is impotent: it can but tell where the ship is on the planet, but not where one drop of water or one grain of sand will be tomorrow noon (1929, 173).[9]

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[5] Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael* (Valmy Publishing, 2018).
[6] Richard Volney Chase. 1949. *Herman Melville: A Critical Study*. New York: Macmillan Co. Richard Volney Chase, *Herman Melville: A Critical Study* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1949).
[7] Walter E. Bezanson, "Introduction to Moby-Dick," in Moby-Dick, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002).
[8] Peter Sloterdijk, *Gris: El Color de La Contemporaneidad* (Madrid: Siruela, 2024).
[9] Lewis Mumford, *Herman Melville* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929).

It is the grey that predominates in the eyes and mood of a shipwrecked person who talks to and about himself in the hours of despair, clinging to a log. The mind, at that moment, uses various defence mechanisms, such as dissociation (mentally separating itself from reality), fantasy (creating imaginary scenarios) and rationalisation (finding logical explanations for the situation). And this is observed in the novel, interweaving taxonomic-scientific descriptions with thoughts, with examinations of conscience or daydreams. As Mumford (1929, 188) has said, while Ishmael is aboard ship, Sir John Paxton is changing the experience of land-dwelling, with his hothouse of modern dreams. It is the year 1851 of which Sloterdijk has spoken so much with his theories of mental spherology.

A castaway's mental time is spent reflecting on his life, his mistakes, his relationships and the meaning of his existence. This is an introspective process that can provide solace or increase despair, depending on the individual's mental fortitude. Personality splitting, or dissociation, can occur in extreme situations, such as in a shipwreck, due to intense psychological and emotional pressure. In the context of a shipwrecked person adrift, this dissociation may manifest as a sense of being detached from one's own body or mind, or experiencing the situation as if one were an outside observer. In extreme cases, some castaways may develop alternative identities—hybrid, multiple, impersonated, etc.—as a way of coping with unbearable stress. These identities may take responsibility for survival or provide emotional comfort. It is in this space—mental and liquid—that we understand Ishmael.

Despite some critical objections, Michael Jonik's book, *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman*, provides theoretical insights that resonate with Melville's.[10] His characters metamorphose into hybrid forms of the human and the inhuman, linked to singular material and affective relations that transcend the realm of cognitive consciousness. These characters become invisible within the landscapes, implying that, even symbolically or representationally, the boundaries between them and their environments are blurred and unclear. It is the opposite of rootedness, of territorialization. In this sense, the maritorium can be understood in terms of *deterritorialization* by recognizing its dynamic nature, the indefiniteness of its boundaries and the constant interaction between natural and human forces.

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[10] Michael Jonik, *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Critics have noted that while Jonik's analysis is thorough and inventive, it can sometimes feel overly exhaustive, particularly in chapters where the argument seems to catalog every possible instance of "inhumanity" in Melville's work. This exhaustive approach, according to some, may dilute the conceptual clarity of what Jonik defines as the "inhuman" by encompassing a broad and sometimes overwhelming range of examples.

Deleuze and Guattari describe *deterritorialization* as a process of uprooting and transformation where fixed territories and identities are destabilized and reconstituted in new contexts. This concept also applies to flows and processes that escape rigid, territorial structures. "A Thousand Plateaus" unfolds the idea that *deterritorialization* implies a movement beyond established borders and the reconfiguration of normative and spatial structures. [11] These challenges fixed delimitations and promoted new forms of organization and regulation. The interplay between the natural and the social emphasizes the interdependence among different forces (social, economic, political) that destabilize and reconfigure territories, creating new realities out of these flows and tensions. Here is an example of my country perceived as a maritime territory by Melville himself:

> 'Spain—a great whale stranded on the shores of Europe.'
> *Edmund Burke*. (*somewhere*.)[12]

Geographical co-impertinences, amphibious identities, surprising indeterminacy, uprooted estrangement, alien pain, empathy in otherness, veiled critique, poetic sublime, compressed history, psychological diagnosis, legal judgment, projected desire, in an apothegm so ambiguously precise that one need not remember where it was written down: that is a maritorium. Like Queequeg's birthplace, which "It is not down in any map; true places never are" (1851, 100).

Some *Moby-Dick*-derived attempts to bring the maritorium ashore that have come to say intimately to me "call me Ishmael" have been "call me W.G." or "call me Philip" or "call me Allan" or "call me Charles," who, in turn, called each other, and who are—persons and characters—those Sebald, Hoare, Sekula, or Murdoch.[13]

Sebald's plot concatenations are of a Homeric epic that, taken to the coastal territory—which, through him, becomes maritorium—, are transmuted into watery dissolutions that only a *Cheever—style* swimmer has the audacity and inventiveness to map. Hoare is one of those swimmers who rub up against whales, literal and mental, in a dense, greyish sea of black bile, which is the Mare Lugubris to which one longs to return, even as an ancestral memory. And Iris Murdoch's Charles is another of those

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[11] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
[12] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick: Famous Sea Stories by Herman Melville* (Dana Estes & Company, 1892), 11.
[13] W. G. Sebald and Michael Hulse, *The Rings of Saturn* (New Directions, 2016); Philip Hoare, *The Sea Inside* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014); Allan Sekula, *Fish Story,* vol. 202 (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995); Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, the Sea* (London: Penguin, 2001).

othernesses, dissociated lives that seek each other in the inner space that by immunological overpressure keeps afloat a castaway who fears that a—snorting—*Snark* will emerge. Transvaluation of the values in all of them from which an architect is made for a procedure of very high potentiality.

In an interview that architect Barbara Probst Solomon did with an irascible Mumford in 1982, he did not admit to being a specialist or a technician, and warned her that just as a criminologist did not commit crimes, but investigated them, he could not have written his books on architecture if he had been one of them.[14] Mumford wrote the book on Melville's complete works in 1929. He had started reading the whole of his work eight years earlier. Solomon said of his interview that his mood brightened when the subject matter approached Melville and soured on everything else. In the book on Melville, Mumford goes so far as to propose the consequence of reading Moby Dick: "a young architect reads the book and leaves his drawing board to work as a merchant in the Marquesas, where he becomes a specialist in Polynesian dialects" (1929, 71).

We have already said that, interpretatively, what is done, from the inversion of the processual conventionalism of creation, is architecture. And its place of action is the maritoriums, whose greyness is traversed by returning again and again to *Moby-Dick*.

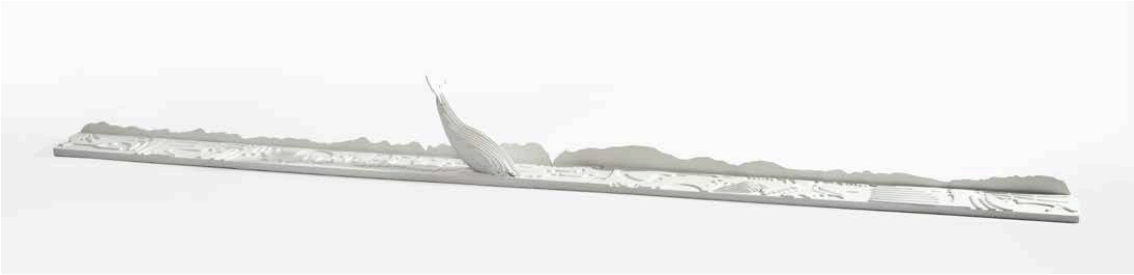

Fig. 1 "Bogotá". *1995. Gustavo Zalamea. Painted wood assembly.*

[14] Barbara Probst Solomon, "Encuentro Con Lewis Mumford y Herman Melville," *Arquitecturas Bis* vol. 19-20, (1983): 43.

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Listening to Melville with an Equal Eye: Relational Hermeneutics in *Moby-Dick*

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In *Why Read Moby-Dick?* Nathaniel Philbrick describes Melville's slowly unfolding narrative as "encyclopedic and detailed," "maddeningly digressive," a "magnificent mess," and a "most quirky and demanding ride."[1] For Philbrick, these are not criticisms but reasons for the novel's greatness, along with Ismael's nuanced voice, which, of course is Melville's. Taking the ride and reading *Moby-Dick* is an open-ended and rewarding challenge. In many ways, questions drive the narrative, questions that are inevitably maddening and messy and demand our time.

Melville's "call me Ishmael" opening line establishes a "methinks" subjectivity that foregrounds the complexity of interpretation. Ishmael ponders the draw of water and the sea, asking metaphysical and mystical questions. He asserts a universal, "Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever," yet this assertion is a fount for ongoing exploration.[2] That exploration includes self-questioning on free will versus the call of the wild, "wonder-world" of whaling, and then proceeds to the wild-like intricacies of New Bedford and more self-questioning as he looks for a cheap inn.[3] Ishmael displays a fertile mind and searching soul that also establishes an openness to listening.

A revealing entryway into reading *Moby-Dick* is Martin Buber's relational ontology, which Melville, via Ishmael, turns into a living (on the page) relational hermeneutics. Buber makes a distinction between I-thou and I-it orientations, with an I-thou attitude perceiving others as having subjectivity and aliveness while an I-it

[1] Nathaniel Philbrick, *Why Read Moby-Dick?* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).
[2] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, edited by Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 17.
[3] Ibid., 20.

attitude treats others like objects. Buber admits that I-it relations are inevitable, but more complete knowing comes from I-thou relations marked by listening and learning.[4] There is an ongoing tension between I-thou and I-it relations in the novel, especially via Ishmael and Captain Ahab, who is less open and illustrates the dangers of an I-it dominant world.

I-thou and I-it orientations and attitudes should be understood as a situational spectrum. Plenty of interpretative insights emerge from applying a Buberian relational hermeneutics to the unfolding situations of *Moby-Dick*, which are often tense, sometimes amusing, and always revealing. For example, Ishmael finds the cheapest New Bedford Inn, encounters Queequeg, the mysterious harpooner, and ends up sharing a bed with him. The scene is both humorous and telling as they warm up to each other. Ishmael is initially taken aback by Queequeg's island otherness, but comes to see him as a fellow thou: "What's all this fuss I have been making about, thought I to myself—the man's a human being, just as I am: he has just as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him. Better to sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian."[5]

Ishmael is clearly willing to listen to, learn from, and be transformed by others. A lesson of Queequeg is this: there is no real difference between so-called savagism and civilization. Melville continually plays with and plays out that tension, as well as Ishmael's openness to the vast sea versus the I-it isolation of the ship and being stuck with Ahab. Ishmael is driven by the mystery of the sea and deadly yet wondrous whales, which stimulate curiosity, reflection, and risk; Ahab is driven by obsession stimulated by revenge. And that is one of the reasons that Ahab so starkly stands out: he is more comfortable with I-it monologue rather than I-thou dialogue.

There is over one-hundred pages of build up to Captain Ahab finally making his entrance on the deck of the *Pequod*. Ishmael shares a first impression: "So powerfully did the whole grim aspect of Ahab affect me, and the livid brand which streaked it, that for the first few moments I hardly noticed that not a little of this overbearing grimness was owing to the barbaric white leg upon which he stood."[6] Peg leg Ahab is damaged physically, but as the narrative progresses his grimness reveals a damaged psyche; he is filled with woe and is described as megalomaniacally mad. Yet Ahab is also filled with will and soon manipulates the crew with charismatic rhetoric:

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[4] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Walter Kaufman (New York: Scribner's, 1970).
[5] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, edited by Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 33.
[6] Ibid., 103.

he convinces them to be on board with his obsession to hunt down the white whale Moby Dick.[7]

Treating Moby Dick as an "it" deserving of death is a powerful motivator. Rage and revenge are also powerful motivators. Ahab even wears down the skeptical Starbuck, his first mate and an emblem of conscience, with his hate: "God keep me!—keep us all!"[8] But it is not hard for Ahab to convince the crew to take his side, or to take on his obsession: "Ha! Starbuck! But the deed is done! . . . God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death."[9]

There is an alluring transcendence in hate; the othering of Moby Dick unites the crew. There is also an alluring transcendence in love. And there is a long history of I-It transcendence rooted in hate and I-thou transcendence rooted in love. The feeling is similar: losing ourselves in something larger. But love ultimately transcends hate, as the unity of everyone, including seeing all species as kin, is much larger than the unity of a specific group. The crew's choice, if you can call it that, is the latter, which is no doubt influenced by the isolation of the ship. They are unable to make a distinction between unity inspired by their oceanic view and being one with Ahab's cramped obsession. Starbuck again: "My soul is more than matched . . . she's overmanned; and by a madman!"[10] Even Ismael is momentarily seduced: "A wild, mystical, sympathetic feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud was seemed mine."[11] But he soon recovers when he once again realizes Ahab's quest is based in hate.

Ahab is symbolic of the dangers of an I-it attitude, as well as falling for this attitude, or being seduced by it. Shadow darkness and ego fears all too easily come to the surface when prodded by Ahab's seductive rhetorical tricks. Ahab stokes and feeds on darkness and fear; yet, he is not a monster but human with monstrous traits. Near the end of the novel, he revels in a lovely day and then states, "Thinking is, or ought to be, a coolness and calmness," but then he continues, "our poor hearts throb, and our poor brains beat too much for that."[12] Ahab is a self-reflexive thinker who contemplates himself amid the universe, but his addled heart and brain sees no meaning in it and thus he is ultimately a limited thinker.

Ahab's I-it hermeneutics is too narrow. It is telling that he can't figure out Queequeg, calling him a "devilish tantalization of the gods!," while Ishmael's I-thou

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[7] Ibid., 130-136.
[8] Ibid., 133.
[9] Ibid., 135.
[10] Ibid., 136.
[11] Ibid., 144.
[12] Ibid., 402-403.

relations with him reveal more and more, yet Queequeg defies complete knowing.[13] An incomplete hermeneutics is inevitable but not working to be more complete, more whole, is dangerous for all involved. And we are all involved amid the unity-in-diversity of life on our wondrous, watery planet. But the crew is involved with, caught up in, and doomed by the obsessive I-it attitude of their captain.

We are incomplete in good and bad ways: good in the sense of not-knowing and honoring otherness; bad in the sense of not honoring listening practices that allow us to know more. I-thou dialogic listening is necessary for being more whole; but Ahab, and those influenced by him, are incapable, or incapacitated. A lesson of Ahab: we all suffer when incapacitated by a willfully incomplete hermeneutics, or because of physical and psychological damage.

Ishmael is educated by experience and always interpreting and learning while Ahab's self-awareness is drowned out by narrow-minded bias. But the I-thou and I-it relations in *Moby-Dick* extend beyond Ishmael's open-ended "methinks" ponderings and Ahab's white whale death stare. Whales are treated like "its," but so are people. On the ship, the diverse crew is not judged by color but by ability; yet they are exploited pawns in the lucrative I-it economic game of whaling. The *Pequod's* owners are supposedly Quakers but Ishmael remarks that "a man's religion is one thing, and this practical world quite another."[14] Wealthy whites have the money; people of color provide most of the muscle.

Melville's metaphysical and mystical questioning also does not include an embrace of an uncritical oceanic oneness, as "whales must be seen to be killed."[15] Whale ship captains don't want a Platonic idealist or pantheist in the crow's nest, who may be "lulled into opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie . . ."[16] Buber moved from mysticism to dialogue; he does not deny "ecstatic" religious experiences of unity, yet he's critical of the escapist attitude that sometimes issues from it. Instead of bringing I-thou relations to whole existence, there may be a fleeing into "detached feelings of unity of being, elevated above life . . ." For Buber, in such "higher hours" the other disappears and "the great dialogue between I and thou is silent; nothing else exists than his self, which he experiences as *the* self."[17]

Buber is rooted in relationship, which assumes distance, as well as a dialogic relationship of oneness that focuses on heightening our experience of this world.

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[13] Ibid., 351.
[14] Ibid., 69.
[15] Ibid., 128.
[16] Ibid., 129.
[17] Martin Buber, *Pointing the Way*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), xv-xvi.

Melville is also rooted in relationship although his focus is often dark and existential. There are two translations of *I and Thou* from the original German, a 1937 version by Ronald Gergor Smith, who translates "du" as the more theological sounding "thou," and a 1970 version by Walter Kaufman, who translates "du" as the existential sounding "you." Smith's "I-thou" suggests we should seek the sacred in each other and what we have in common; Kaufman's "I-you" suggests we should respect each other's difference. These are interrelated truths and Buber is open to both, but these differing translations reveal the complexity of interpretation.

Melville, as a searching agnostic, seems to lean toward "I-you" more than "I-thou," but both are on the other end of the spectrum from I-it relations. Again, Melville plays out these tensions, which are questions of meaning, via Ishmael, who longs to know more amid a largely uncertain world, and Ahab, whose rage against Moby Dick may be interpreted as rage against meaninglessness; his response to the absurdity of life and certain death is to find meaning in his obsession and purpose in revenge.[18]

Ishmael begins a cetology classification book, but always comes back to not-knowing: "God keep me from completing anything," he states, "The whole book is but a draught—nay, but the draught of a draught."[19] Ishmael asserts that we ultimately know little, yet his I-thou ruminations throughout the novel consistently take us out of the darkness. He even celebrates "democratic dignity" and "divine equality" that "radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute."[20] Yet such appeals to a great Thou are counter-balanced by evidence of an I-it universe of existential absurdity: "There are certain queer times and occasions in this strange mixed affair we call life when a man takes this whole universe for a vast practical joke . . ."[21]

Despite knowing "a draught of a draught," *Moby-Dick* supplies many detailed I-it facets of whales (like blubber) and whaling (like how to kill).[22] But Ishmael also shares more: gazing at the head of the sperm whale "you feel the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature."[23] Of course, in this moment the whale ceases to be an object but a fellow thou, in the sense of a fellow being and unfathomable awe-inspiring other. Nature, after all, is indeed living.

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[18] Nathaniel Philbrick, *Why Read Moby-Dick?* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 57-59.
[19] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, edited by Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 118.
[20] Ibid., 97.
[21] Ibid., 179.
[22] Nathaniel Philbrick, *Why Read Moby-Dick?* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 71.
[23] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, edited by Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 262.

Life is a strange mix of knowing and not-knowing: "There are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness is the true method."[24] Or, as Ishmael further puts it when contemplating the visible and invisible: ". . . rainbows do not visit the clear air; they only irradiate vapor. And so, through all the thick mists of the dim doubts in my mind, divine intuition now and then shoot, enkindling my fog with a heavenly ray . . . Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye."[25]

A lesson of *Moby-Dick*: To listen and learn more of the strange mix that is life we must continually turn an equal eye to I-thou and I-it relations.

[24] Ibid., 272.
[25] Ibid., 280.

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Moby-Dick: On Failure of Purpose and the Cunning of Reason

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My brief reflection is that of a fascinated reader completely innocent of the voluminous secondary literature on Melville and *Moby-Dick*. The subtitle signals my own background as a Hegel scholar, but I hope more as an evocative phrase to describe my response than a category applied a priori to the work. More than anything, the contrast between the effects of two failures interests me: Ahab's failure to kill the white whale, and Melville's failure to make Ahab's failure something tragic. For to me, Ahab is the least interesting character in the book, a caricature of brooding vengeance while life goes on all around him. Unlike a tragic hero whose drama expresses the tensions of the time and place that they represent, Ahab's tensions are his own; they are merely idiosyncratic rather than a heightened and concentrated experience of tensions more generally felt. And yet: the novel so evocatively and exhaustively presents those more general tensions—presents the form of life in comparison to which Ahab reads as idiosyncratic—that the novel is a success despite Melville's failure of purpose. Ahab fails at his goal of killing Moby Dick and takes everyone else down with him. But Melville's failure enlivens the thick descriptions of a form of life that are the great joy of reading the book, since their very independence from Ahab and his purpose means that significance of that form of life itself is not brought down with him.

In pointing to Ahab's failure to be tragic I might seem to be relying on what one might consider a social-expressivist theory of tragedy. That is, I have said that Ahab fails to be tragic because he is merely idiosyncratic, not a manifestation of something larger than himself. But I mean this to be a diagnosis of the failure rather than an argument for it. I don't even take anything particular to turn on the notion of

tragedy or any attribution of intent to Melville. And I take no view on whether the inescapability of this failure for this reader is due to my circumstances rather than Melville's skill, or to express any confidence in any such explanation. But I simply find Ahab so completely uninteresting—the least interesting character discussed in any detail aboard the *Pequod*—and yet the novel so compelling, that I am myself compelled to understand how both could be the case.

Part of the difficulty, no doubt, is excessive self-consciousness of Ahab. The inevitable end is not sneaking up on him unawares, but rather he tells Starbuck "Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled."[1] This goes quite beyond fate to a Johannine inflection of predestination. And as Max Weber has shown us, election by grace does not produce fertile soil for the kind of humanism required as the context for a tragic figure; rather, it produces an experience of extreme and anxious loneliness which resolves itself only in the dedication to a calling. We do get this extreme isolation from Ahab: "But even with a broken bone, old Ahab is untouched; and I account no living bone of mine one jot more me, than this dead one that's lost. Nor white whale nor man, nor fiend, can so much as graze old Ahab in his own proper and inaccessible being."[2] It is not that Abab demonstrates this dedication—quite the contrary: it is the three mates and the harpooners who demonstrate this sort of calling. Rather, it is that this value of the dedication to the calling provides the context in which to understand Ahab's obsession. And in this connection it cannot but be viewed as a pathological form. Nothing smacks more of worship of the creature than Ahab's search for vengeance to the detriment of the profitability of the calling of the whaler. But there is nothing tragic or even particularly interesting in this from the perspective of either human character or the individual's relation to social norms—it is just a garden-variety vice, even if it is one that kills the whole crew save one.

To relate this to the contrast with the effective aspect of the book—its portrayal of the collective life on the sea of the whalers—it can be noted that it is impossible to imagine any of the other characters in the book turning into Ahab. There is no sense in which but for fate or even but for the grace of God, the other characters might have been Ahab. Contrast Greek tragedy—any Greek man might have fought for pride at the crossroads as did Oedipus, and any Greek sister might have felt compelled to bury her brother as did Antigone—but there is no attempt by Melville to present Ahab in this way. He is monstrous, not tragic, and the continued

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[1] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick: An Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Hershel Parker, A Norton Critical Edition (New York London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 480.
[2] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 479.

comparisons with the whale itself only serve to confirm his uniqueness to the point of caricature: "Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled."[3]

Of course, the primary contrast to Ahab which Melville offers is that of the first mate, Starbuck. Starbuck the Quaker is precisely as Weber would have him: viewing his courage as "a thing simply useful to him, and always at hand upon all mortally practical occasions. Besides, he thought, perhaps, that in this business of whaling, courage was one of the great staple outfits of the ship, like her beef and her bread, and not to be foolishly wasted."[4] When Ahab reveals his purpose for the voyage, Starbuck explains that he is game, "if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow; but I came here to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance" which "will not fetch thee much on our Nantucket market."[5]

The second mate Stubbs is similarly far from anyone who could become an Ahab: "A happy-go-lucky, neither craven nor valiant; taking perils as they came with an indifferent air . . ."[6] The exception that proves the rule is the third mate, Flask, "who somehow seemed to think that the great Leviathans had personally and hereditarily affronted him; and therefore it was a sort of point of honor with him, to destroy them whenever encountered."[7] One might expect that the connection between Flask and Ahab is developed in some detail, but primarily Flask appears as a character to whom the other mates speak and even his status as an obstacle to Ahab's vengeance is set down to his "pervading mediocrity."[8]

Instead, the real joy of reading *Moby-Dick* lies in its description of the way a society grows both aboard the ship and between ships. Despite the fact that the whole business of whaling which it describes now seems to us archaic, cruel, and environmentally disastrous—and has for generations of readers now—the thick description of this form of life remains just as compelling as it ever was. It is not that this joy is impersonal—rather that the joy is essentially social. And it is this compelling cast of characters and their interactions, as they voyage over the oceans of the world, that fills the reader with wonder at so full a form of life. This life proceeds despite Ahab's crusade and is only first substantially affected by it at the time of its destruction

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[3] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 487.
[4] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 139.
[5] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 179.
[6] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 141.
[7] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 142.
[8] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 201.

in the sinking of the *Pequod*. Though Ahab himself is said to have "piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down," no one else on the ship seems to participate in that rage and hate.[9] Even Flask's desire to kill whales gives him not hate but rather makes him "a little waggish in the matter of whales; he followed these fish for the fun of it."[10]

One final thought is also inspired by Weber. In the same way that Weber thought that the institutional form which the protestant ethic had animated had long ceased to need that animation, such that that the psychological forces which created that form are now simply habits rather than duties—much less religious duties—it might be the case that the inner dynamic which animates Ahab has simply ceased to speak to us. But why is the form of shipboard life which was produced by men of Ahab's general psychology still so compelling to us several centuries later? Surely that is no less archaic. And yet I suppose that the *Pequod* shows up to us as a distinctive sort of workplace, both with respect to its own crew and its distinctive activities, and with respect to the other ships that it meets in the fishery. But there is no tragedy in the demise of the *Pequod* either, since the dangers of whaling are so much present in the awareness of the way of life itself. Though the *Pequod* sinks, the life goes on.

[9] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 199.
[10] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 142.

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Moby-Dick in Slovenia: An Interview with the Translator Jernej Županič

Alenka Koželj
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The Reception of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* in the Slovenian Cultural Space

An indisputed classic of world literature, *Moby Dick* is many-folded, an unbelievably rich tapestry of the many nuances of human dwelling, an intricate allegory of an individual's fight with nature, of humanity's eternal struggle for self-determination while yet within the horrific jaws of destiny. The novel's core, complex, manifaceted metaphor—the white whale—speaks to readers of manifold times and backgrounds, in the USA as well as in Slovenia.

The novel *Moby Dick* first appeared in the Slovenian language under the title *The White Whale* (*Beli kit*) in 1966 and was translated by a well-known, prolific Slovenian writer and translator Mira Mihelič (1912–1985). The translation might have been motivated by the legendary 1956 cinematic adaptation of *Moby Dick,* which featured Gregory Peck in the role of the unrelenting Ahab. (Indeed, while referring to *Moby Dick* in Slovenia, it is quite common to hear the comment: "Oh, Moby Dick – I haven't read the book, but I do remember the movie.") The writer of the afterword to the new Slovenian translation, Igor Divjak, underlines the fact that Slovenian libraries often catalogue the book in young adult or adventure sections; it's a noteworthy categorization, since *Moby Dick* is famously complicated thematically, a challenging book that leverages a broad literary and cultural background.

Mihelič's translation has not been reprinted and has subsequently become difficult to find. However, in 2022 a younger Slovenian translator and writer, Jernej Županič, embarked upon his own exquisite journey of translating *Moby Dick* into

Slovenian once again. His exceptional work did not go unrewarded: in 2023, he received the Sovre Prize, the highest prize attainable to a Slovenian translator, named for Anton Sovre, one of the most distinguished Slovenian translators (known for his translations of Greek and Roman classical literature). His translation, although full of antique nautical expressions, is modern and enticing and invites the reader to dive into Melville's epic tale full of poetry and philosophical nuances.

In addition to his work as a translator, Županič is a literary critic, prose writer, and poet. He studied Comparative literature and Philosophy. He has translated authors including Jonathan Franzen, David F. Wallace, Taiye Selasi and others and was in 2017 awarded the Radojka Vrančič Prize for young translator. In 2018 he received a Critics' Prize for his first novel *Mammoths* (*Mamuti*).

Interview with Jernej Županič

Alenka Koželj: Sometimes it is interesting to know the motive that leads to a translation of literary work into the cultural space of a different language. Where did the incentive for a new Slovenian translation of *Moby Dick* come from?

Jernej Županič: The incentive was actually my own. A couple of years before the translation was published, one of Slovenia's major publishing houses, Beletrina, was planning to launch a series of world literature classics. I was chatting with my friend Špela Pavlič, one of the editors of the proposed series, and we were brainstorming ideas for books that could be included. Since the publisher was also considering re-translating some previously translated works, I suggested Melville's *Moby-Dick*. At the time, I didn't really have a strong opinion about the existing translation; I just knew that it had been a while since it was published and that the book, despite being Melville's magnum opus, was strangely absent from Slovenian cultural consciousness.

Melville himself, interestingly enough, was not – thanks to Slavoj Žižek and his analysis of Bartleby's famous dictum, "I would prefer not to." [footnote Žižek] So, while Melville was a significant figure in philosophical circles, his most important work had long been out of print and difficult to find. I felt this lack needed to be addressed. The publisher evidently agreed, and not long after, they asked me to take on the translation. I was more than happy to accept.

Koželj: The novel has already been translated into Slovenian in 1966 by Mira Mihelič. Were you influenced by this predecessor when embarking on your own translation?

Županič: I tried not to be. I completed most of the work – the whole first draft – without consulting Mihelič's translation, only referring to her version later when revising my own. This is my usual approach when translating texts that have already been translated. I know that if I looked at the existing version, I might either unconsciously follow it too closely or try to hard to deviate from it, even when it wasn't necessary.

That said, I did make one exception in this case: the famous opening line, "Call me Ishmael", often hailed as one of the greatest opening sentences in literature. I couldn't exactly pretend it didn't exist – it's right there on the first page (Mihelič's translation omitted the Etymology etc. sections of the book). I worked hard to come up with an alternative to the existing version, but ultimately I had to settle on the same translation: "Recite mi Ishmael". Every other option I considered either over-interpreted the original or sounded unnatural.

Koželj: Did you compare your work with the translation of *Moby Dick* in other languages?

Županič: Only a couple of times, and only when I was stuck on a particularly challenging passage. Since I'm not fluent in any other languages besides English, my ability to rely on these translations was quite limited. I think I referred to the German translation a few times and glanced at the French and Italian versions once or twice when even the German one didn't clarify the issue for me.

Koželj: Melville's novel is full of various technical expressions pertaining to whaling. How did you find the convenient solutions in the Slovenian language? Was that a particular challenge?

Županič: Yes, absolutely. The cultural contexts are vastly different – Slovenia has no whaling tradition, and compared to the Anglo-Saxon world, it barely registers as a seafaring nation. While we do have a coastline (about 43 kilometers of it, to be precise), Slovenian maritime vocabulary is very limited. For example, where English has dozens of terms for different types of sails, Slovenian has only a few, and even these are mostly modern terms, borrowed from Italian and generally used for smaller sails on smaller boats (e.g. the genoa sail, the spinnaker, etc.).

Fortunately, I did find a resource that had done most of the hard work here: *Slovenska pomorska terminologija* (*Slovenian Nautical Terminology*), a 2003 diploma thesis by

Rok Sorta, which is available online and which, although focused primarily on modern shipping, was of great assistance to me.

Still, there were cases where I had to improvise. For instance, the English term "right whale" is a folk name for three different whale species, but Slovenian doesn't have an equivalent – it only has technical names for each species, names that are unfamiliar to the general public. I decided to avoid the technical jargon and instead coined a term that captures the same feel as "right whale". I translated it as *pravi kit*, which back-translates to "true whale" or "common whale". My goal was to create a term that felt authentic, like something 19th-century Slovenian whalers might have used, rather than strictly adhering to scientifically accurate terms.

Koželj: Translation often presupposes an in-depth familiarity with at least two cultural spaces. What is in your opinion the role of translation in discovering other languages and cultures?

Županič: Translation has always been a vital way for languages and cultures to interact, and it plays an essential role in the evolution of language itself. At the same time, I believe a translation is most successful when this interface becomes almost imperceptible. In my view, a great translation doesn't "offer a glimpse into an exotic foreign culture". Instead, it adapts the foreign culture so that it feels natural and relatable to the target audience – at least in terms of language.

Of course, when cultural differences are significant, some of this "foreignness" is unavoidable, but I think it's best if it stays at the level of content, not language. What I mean is that I want to translate *Moby-Dick* in such a way that a Slovenian reader can imagine hypothetical Slovenian whalers doing all this, all while keeping the story firmly rooted in its original context. I'm not relocating the narrative to the Adriatic just because it's the sea most Slovenes are familiar with.

Koželj: You are a successful writer in your own right. How does the act of translating affect your own creativity?

Županič: To be honest, not all that much, I think. For me, writing and translating are very distinct activities, and I don't think there's a lot of overlap. Of course, when I'm working on a major project like *Moby-Dick*, I do spend a lot of time immersed in the book's theme and motifs, and some of that inevitably finds its way into my writing. For instance, I'm sure my poems from the past three years feature more whales than

they would have if I hadn't translated Melville. But I don't feel the influence runs much deeper than that.

That said, I've noticed some changes since I started translating Shakespeare (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and some of the sonnets). The rhythm of my poetry has changed somewhat, leaning towards a more flowing iambic structure – not metrically precise, but influenced nonetheless.

And thus, my perspective on this might evolve. Ask me the same question in a year, and my answer could be quite different.

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Moby-Dick or the Whale—
Chapter 72 "The Monkey Rope"
(An Ekphrastic Contribution to the Forum)

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How diverse the songbook
Whence the world's music grinder plays
As we the tethered—the wedded ones—dance.

Ah, the monkey-rope
Wound of telling threads
Sounded, plucked, moved by every conceivable thing.

Leading and following, often out of joint
losing the rhythm—missing the mark
As if all the time something slippery underfoot.

Or pulling, or pushing too much, or not enough.
Notwithstanding, occasionally rescued by warm human temperance
Arising always from a fathomless longing to be graceful.

The choreography remains perpetually vague
yet somehow it outlines a sequence of steps,
all the while also making possible the happenings of surprise.

Together circling, together mortal, together turning.

Barred forever the benefit of a full rehearsal.
Step by step—often ere we're ready—following the lead of waves.

Look anywhere, see anyone
likewise cast and crew. They are in our company,
Called alike to having to be this way.

Now here, now over there, tumultuous after it begins.
The summons to the command performance always looming—
Ever now.

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Book Review
Political Eschatology
By Sean J. McGrath
(Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2023), 176 pages

Saitya Brata Das
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I.

In the discursive economy of the systematic theology, "eschatology" occupies its place as one doctrinal element among others. In the received history of this concept, eschatology implies nothing more or less than the doctrine of the end: the history of the world, understood in light of the divine "economy of salvation," is irresistibly drawn towards its end by a transcendent force. In the secularized transformation of this concept, which decisively constitutes the foundational principle of the discourse of modernity, such transcendence is transformed into immanence: a new "philosophy of history" announces itself whose metaphysical ground lies in a self-legitimizing ideology of progress, implying a certain conception of temporality that is at once quantitative and successive, temporality that grows and ripens on an immanent line of irreversible becoming that makes manifest, in its very unfolding, of its end immanent in it—and thereby needing no transcendent force. Such a transformation implies a certain "death of God," insofar as it consists of neutralization or liquefaction of transcendence: this is "experienced" as something truly emancipatory, even though it must pass through the abyssal "experience" of nihilism, a nihilism that not only

delivers all given, existing values to a "nihil," but also transforms them into something radically new. Sean McGrath shows that we are at once inheritors of this impossible "experience"—of modernity—, but also of something "more," something even more gigantic and abyssal that remains an undertow like a counterforce: this something "more" is at once sought to be erased by the discursive economy of modernity's philosophy of history in the very process whereby modernity tries to appropriate it. This double of inheritance—or, this doubling of inheritance—constitutes the paradox, where one is at once non-contemporary to the other, even radically dissymmetrical to the other, while speaking of the same thought (namely, "eschatology"): from this, Sean McGrath teases out the very future of a thought. This thought, at once enigmatic and yet simple, is the future of thought, insofar as it is the thought of the future *par excellence*. Such a thought of the future lets itself *come* in the event of disjunction or in the event of disparate between the received history of a thought, which is older than two millennia, and the originary spirit whose explosiveness infinitely overflows and exceeds our ability to receive such a thought, even though we have been trying to think it in the last two millennia. Sean McGrath thereby indicates—in a fashion that is nothing more or less than what we can call as *indicative*—the excess and the measurelessness of a thought, which, having been thought in the history of the last two millennia, remains nevertheless unthought and not-yet-thought, and thereby remains thought-worthy for our time. For McGrath, "eschatology" is nothing more or less than this index, which is pregnant with possibilities that do not annul themselves in having been "realized" in the history of its becoming. Such an index, explosive with nameless possibilities, cannot be one doctrinal element among others within the discursive economy of something like systematic theology. McGrath, following Jürgen Moltmann in this aspect at least, understands eschatology as the very heart of the *logos* of *theos* as such; and like Moltmann, McGrath purveys the whole *logos* of *theos* as an eschatological seeing, without minimizing *the paradox* that constitutes and de-constitutes the *eschaton*, without neutralizing the paradox that co-joins and dis-joins the end and the beginning, despair and hope, the thought-thought and the unthought-thought of eschatology. That the minimization of this paradox would effectively reduce the unnamed and unnamable possibilities into the sense that the received history of the concept offers itself to us: this is the lesson McGrath learns as a student of this history, which he carefully delineates in the very first chapter of his book. To receive the history of a thought in a responsible way would be to respond to what that history forgets to recount: this is the prodigious responsibility McGrath assumes in this exemplary work on political eschatology. To assume such a responsible task of responding to the call of thinking would be to open thinking itself to that, which exceeds the measure of the

thinkable in a fashion that does not so much negate but calls the task of thinking to be rigorous. Consequently, along with what McGrath calls "eschatology," the thought of the "political" itself must then undergo radical transformation. The term "political," put before the word "eschatology"—as one puts an adjective before a noun—is here not a mere qualifying word among others of what eschatology could be, as though eschatology could also be other than "political." Rather, it is precisely otherwise: eschatology for McGrath is and will always be political through and through. The "political" here for him is not understood to be a particular sphere of our social *being* and *acting* that is delimited from all sides, a sphere where we human beings—and we human beings only—are engaged in the dialectical, antagonistic negotiation of force with force with the aim of instituting a universal hegemonic power like the institution of the state. If the sense of the political is wholly determined by such a *telos* of legitimacy, then eschatology could perhaps also be otherwise than political, and then, "political" would be a mere adjective among other adjectives for eschatology. To show that this is not necessarily so, that "political" is not a mere adjective among others for eschatology—this is the task of political eschatology as McGrath envisions it. This task would amount to be nothing less than the radicalizing of the thought of transcendence itself, after the death of God as it were (if one permits to say so, for McGrath poses this difficult question for us: which God has died?), where transcendence advents, comes, arrives to interrupt, disrupt, rupture all politics of legitimation of earthly sovereign powers: such would be the sense of the "political," so difficult to think, when we speak of *the political* in terms of "political eschatology." Only then would eschatology be thoroughly political, and the political would be thoroughly eschatological. This means that *eschatology* would no longer be understood as a noun, as a substantive, but verbally in the infinitive sense, and that *political* would no longer be similarly understood as adjective, for the supposed noun has become verb in the infinitive sense. Eschatology, understood as the doctrine of the end, as it is understood in the received history of this concept, becomes for McGrath an infinite thought of the verbal: *coming, arriving, adventing*—to. This verbalization of the *eschaton* itself would be nothing short of being *political par excellence*. To lay bare this enigma is precisely the task that Sean McGrath gives himself in this recent work. Whenever we annex the infinitive "to" to the verb *eschaton*, then the end must open itself, from the very heart of its history, to an unthinkable and unthought *beginning* that is more than what something has-been in the history of its becoming: this *more* is its *possibility*. Possibility—a word that McGrath takes to be one of his *Grundbegriffe*—is something extra, something more than what-has-been, in such a way that what-has-been cannot measure up to it. That which cannot be measured by what-has-been is the futurity of

a prodigious beginning—as gigantic or even more gigantic than the end—, which, in *coming*, does not come simply to pass by and to become another has-been in turn. However infinite may be the series of what-has-been and what-is-available-present, where temporality is understood in a substantive sense, it cannot measure up to the *arriving* of the new *beginning* that would de-formalize all series in turn, by interrupting all such series. This impossible thinking is the heart of the political eschatology that would consist of *possibilizing* the forms of the world *in toto*. Such *possibilization* is the very possibility of messianic justice that political eschatologians may indicate or glimpse in the gleam of time, but without thematizing it in any form of axiomatic induction or deduction. If Sean McGrath undertakes a history of the concept of eschatology—and that he does so well in the very first chapter—, he does so not to apply to history an axiomatic of induction or deduction, but to expose those *possibilities* that are intrinsically otherwise than deductive or inductive.

II.

For McGrath, it is important to rigorously and carefully discern the true depth of futurity that lies at the very heart of the eschatological thought and to distinguish it from other alleged thoughts of the future, which, though they take their inspiration from eschatology, end up by distorting the true depth of futurity in its radical contingency, incalculability, and un-predictability. It is interesting how McGrath here re-stages the *polemos* between Hegel and Schelling around the crucial problematic of history. While Hegel's tremendously influential philosophy of history indeed provides the metaphysical foundation to the philosophical discourse of modernity, it is rather in Schelling's eschatological conception of history that McGrath finds the true thought of possibilities, and of the true thought of futurity. Such *possibilization* of the world, whose possibility is an *advient* from a radically incalculable transcendence, cannot be understood in terms of Hegel's *teleological* philosophy of history, insofar as such a teleological philosophy of history that seeks to preserve what it negates (as Hegel's *Aufhebung* implies) would not be able to open itself to the event of a radically new inauguration, coming from an incalculable future, for it would end up thinking the beginning as nothing more or less than an ineluctable consequence or an inevitable result of what-has-already-been. For only by transforming the apocalyptic sting of transcendence into an immanent metaphysical principle of time as a continuous series of incremental becoming could Hegel metaphysically ground modernity in terms of a teleological philosophy of history. The taking-over of the view of temporality from the

Judeo-Christian eschatological conception of history, and yet distorting its thought of break *as* break—in other words, secularizing the thought of epochal break through a process of immanentization—, this transformation, is for McGrath a *symptom* of our historical condition whose air we breathe today, finding ourselves, as it were, at the end of a movement whose contingency is visible to us only now. Thus, the teleological philosophy of history that takes over from the eschatological vision of history its temporality and yet transforms it by immanentizing the apocalyptic thought of the end into a moment of *telos*, this Hegelian metaphysics of Spirit, is more of a symptom for McGrath, of a metaphysical sickness—or a sickness of metaphysics—, rather than its redemptive-therapeutic possibility. McGrath's diagnostic analysis, which is much inspired by Max Weber's concept of "disenchantment," makes manifest not only the theological origin of this metaphysical sickness, but also the sickening oblivion of the redemptive-therapeutic possibilities that lie in the theological-eschatological vision, a vision that still finds its genuine expression—at the very heart of our modern historical condition—in the eschatological thought of Schelling. Here, I think it will be better for me to let McGrath speak for himself:

> To appreciate Schelling's alternative to the far more popular Hegelian philosophy of history, it is necessary to clarify a subtle distinction between teleological time and eschatological time. On this distinction, the fundamental claim of political eschatology rests. Teleology is final causality, directedness to an endpoint. But it is not determined by the future, for the end comes from out of the past. […] Eschatology, by contrast, is the time of the event. It is time in which the new negates what was. It is determination by possibility rather than potency, by that which is genuinely futural, new, and irreducible to what has come before. Eschatology is not the actualization of potentiality but the time of the disruption that is not explicable in terms of what has preceded it and that occurs without direct causal relation to anything already underway— indeed, that brings all prior processes to a halt, not by fulfilling them, but by de-actualizing them, rendering them potency for the new real. The de-actualized time disrupted by the event is not in potency towards the disruption or to the new that follows it. The disruption or eschaton disrupts precisely because it is not a fulfillment or final causal consequent of what precedes it. The becoming potent of the de-actualized is the event of eschaton. (36)

In other words, teleological time with its logic of *Aufhebung* transforms the radical possibilities for the world into an apology for what-has-been; on the other

hand, eschatological time, on which McGrath constructs his political eschatology, is a radical disinvestment in the form of the world as it has been formed in the given history of its formation. This, in turn, enables us to think of interruptions as not mere attenuated variations of an even and ever more fundamental metaphysical continuum. Only thus can eschatology be what it is meant to be: "The anticipation of the end as the advent of justice [which] places the present under the strictest censure: the world as it exists is unjust and will be condemned as such by what is to come." (37) It is in Schelling's prophetic intimation of this *eschaton*—rather than in Hegel's teleological theodicy of history that deifies the form of the world as it exists—that McGrath hears this eschatological message of the coming Kingdom, of the coming of the Kingdom that renders the form of the world as it exists as truly *historical*, that is, as truly the transient order, the order that is *to* pass away. It is in this infinitive "to" of the verbal, explosively expressive of the eschatological spirit that renders the total order of creation as the order "to pass away": it is here, in the *transitivas*, where the total order of creation is in transit, that McGrath hears once again Jesus's eschatological message of *Basileia tou Theou*. The coming Kingdom renders the total order of creation as it exists into an order for passing away. With this, any theodicy that conceives the sedimentation of the form of the world as what-has-been as the very condition of possibility of what-is-to-come is transformed into eschatological hope. McGrath in this connection justly invokes Kierkegaard who speaks of such a theodicy (that conceives any what-is-to-come on the basis of what-has-been) as being existential in an unredeemable despair. In that sense, we can say, extending McGrath's analysis, that the fundamental attunement (*Grundstimmung*) of our historical condition of modernity is despair. However, neither Kierkegaard nor McGrath remain stuck in the vicious circle of despair, trying to tease out redemptive possibilities from the myth of the eternal return of the same; Kierkegaard as much as McGrath, in truly eschatological spirit, hopes through despair and beyond despair, hoping what is un-hoped for. Only such hope can truly be hope, a thought that Saint Paul formulates in an eschatologically condensed paradox: "hope against hope" (Roman 4:18). That "the fashion of the world passeth away" (1 Corinthians 7:31) is neither for McGrath nor for Kierkegaard an occasion to remain eternally in despair, but rather the opportune moment to make despair itself into a *transitivas*, through this very despairing that nothing tangible now appears in the world that lets us hope for anything redemptive. For both McGrath and Kierkegaard, political eschatology is thus bound to a hope that can only appear to be a paradox for human understanding, not a thought-thought, but an unthought-thought, an unthought, not-yet-thought in the metaphysical history of being and acting. It is this eschatological paradox that Hegel's secularized theodicy of history

neutralizes: the result is a deification of the world as it exists. But McGrath reminds us, and Kierkegaard too, that Jesus spoke of something else, something more offensive to human understanding that cannot be smoothed out into a logical process of what-is-to-come as a mere consequence of what-has-been, something that is terrifyingly offensive to the world's hegemonic powers: that with the coming of *Basileus tou Theou* all principalities, powers, and dominions of the world will pass away. I quote McGrath:

> Jesus' eschatological message was simple, direct, and undeniably political: this world and its rulers are passing away; the *Basileus tou Theou* is coming. […] The transformation to come would indeed be political since it would overthrow all the kings of the earth and substitute for every earthly regime the reign of justice. But it would not be brought about through political means. […] The Kingdom would not come through military insurrections or even through any known form of political power. It would, rather, arrive with grace and mercy, overthrowing not only the kings of the earth but the earthly system of power that grants the right to rule to the dominant. The Christ would rule by making himself the servant of all, thus overturning the logic of earthly power itself. (39)

This paragraph speaks, in the most condensed formulation possible, about what McGrath means by "political" in his formulation of political eschatology. Political eschatology is *political* not in any recognizable sense of the term; it is political not in the sense of being the conditioned realm of negotiation of intra-mundane force with force. Seen from the perspective of our recognizable sense of the term, *Basileus tou Theou* is anything but political, for *Basileus tou Theou* is not a regime of power and force that can be accomplished and achieved by human beings on the basis of their own capacity and by virtue of purely political means. How, then, can we make sense of this political, which does not deploy political means? Yet, for McGrath this is precisely, where the true sense of the political lies, the political that does not deploy itself as a means. This paradox, like all those paradoxical formulations of Saint Paul (hope that can be hoped for is not truly a hope; faith that only believes in what is visible and intelligible in our knowledge is not truly faith; love that only loves the lovable is not truly love) and those of Kierkegaard, is that which shows the fecundity and complexity of McGrath's political eschatology. It amounts to thinking the political without means, that is to say, to letting the political emerge in its incalculable, irreducible, unpredictable possibilities, which are, first and foremost, eschatological ones, those possibilities that advent, eventuate, arrive without being "means": pure eschatological possibilities *as such*, neither *of* this nor *of* that, not the kind of possibility

of *this* new political regime of force in place of *that* old political regime of force. Here, if we let ourselves extend McGrath's political eschatology of events, a fascinating thought of event is gained: only those events are truly events, which are eschatological possibilities, precisely because they are possibilities as such—the very possibilities of events; for these events immediately—without mediation by force, without conceptual measure, without deployment as means—, and these events alone, establish justice, because they are not means at all. What does not have to be a means to an end at all is called *grace*. Force, on the other hand, establishes and is established, maintains and is maintained, by the deployment of itself as a means, and is without grace. This is why no worldly power can establish justice in any true sense of the term. Grace alone welcomes joyously the Kingdom of justice, because it does not deploy any means. Grace is not an adjective of a given substantive; rather, it is a pure verbal infinitive, gratuitously given at the limit of, and even beyond, human capacities to appropriate it. We are here not straying far from McGrath, for the *Basileia tou Theou* that McGrath awaits at the extremity of time is itself such a joyous eschatology of the event. Such an awaiting can only be a joyous one, the joy that has not shied away from the abyss of despair, but has learnt from it the eschatological joy of awaiting. McGrath writes:

> The key was political eschatology. This world would be transformed, and a new one would replace it, but it was indeed *this* world, this material and historical order that would undergo the change. If the transformation to come was of this world, this history, these bodies, these sociopolitical relations, then it was of utmost importance to attend to history, to the conditions of embodiment and social relations, and not, as the Gnostics argued, neglect the body, or even let it have its way, on the assumption that the true form of existence transcended it. It was not heaven and life beyond the body that the Christian hoped for; it was bodily resurrections and a "new earth." (40)

Such an eschatological awaiting—as Martin Heidegger speaks of it in his fascinating lectures on *Phenomenology of Religious Life* (and McGrath does not fail to discuss these lectures of early Heidegger)—is perhaps the most fundamental attunement (*Grundstimmung*) of McGrath's political eschatology. McGrath's political eschatology is the eschatology of waiting. But such a waiting does not imply a passivity that would be the opposite of passivity; we do not have to choose between despair and naïve hope, the hope that one hopes for only that which can be hoped-for. Despair emerges as the ultimate sense and destination of human existence, when the human being can only hope for that which can only be achieved on the basis of the human

beings' capacity and potentiality: it is in this way that the utopian politics that governs the project of modernity actually turns itself into dystopian hopelessness, and the *auto-nomos* of modernity that promises to release us from the tyranny of transcendence ends up subjugating human beings to an even more terrifying tyranny of immanence. Eschatology, which, like utopian politics, thinks of the possibilities of the future, is not utopian in one fundamental aspect: it does not turn itself into dystopian despair. In the same fashion that McGrath distinguishes eschatological time from teleological time, he also distinguishes political eschatology from utopian politics:

> But where utopian politics arrogates to the human being the means to bring about the desired end, either political or technical, political eschatology invests in the still-unfulfilled promise of the beginning and anticipates a transformation, the origin and end of which transcends all human political potentiality and fulfills the human being's innermost drive for justice and freedom. (38)

Thus, McGrath distinguishes the future (eschatological) from futures (teleological, utopian): these rigorous discernments are so many singular moments of awaiting and hoping that would not despair in turn. Such discernments are moments of eschatological vigilance that enable us, so McGrath seems to be saying on these fascinating pages, to be attentive to the truth that the Kingdom of God is not to be confused with any legitimacy-seeking earthly sovereign hegemonies in place. Forgetting this truth has led human beings to pay the prices, which we cannot afford to measure by any human measurements. One chapter after another of McGrath's book shows the immense price humanity has to pay for forgetting this truth. Only an infinite eschatological vigilance, at once patient and attentive, may keep such truth in our remembrance: this is the responsibility of being human, to which Sean McGrath calls our attention in this work.

III.

Sean McGrath's *Political Eschatology* engages itself with some of the most urgent and important questions that concern us today: unspeakable ecological catastrophes that engage our attention; extreme forms of capitalism in today's world of mass-consumption; depletion of our inner life as the new form of barbarism; the recent pandemic that has destroyed millions of lives; raging international wars that radically

put into question modernity's faith in the teleological progress of humanity on a homogenous, irreversible line of our historical becoming; dissolution of all traditional values and constraining of all inter-personal relations that have made our personal lives lonelier than ever before, etc. McGrath's book is tinged with a profoundly apocalyptic note, as if he is writing from the very extremity of time, finding himself at "the time of the end or the time that ends" (1). It is not surprising that the very first chapter has for its title "Endtime." Yet—and this is perhaps the deepest paradox of this book—, this is an intensely joyous book, a joy that goes beyond any facile opposition between pessimism and optimism. The intensity of this joy is profoundly eschatological, very much Pauline and Schellingian, these two being his all-time favorite philosophers. Like Paul, McGrath contemplates—and this is a deeply contemplative book—that "the fashion of this world passeth away" (1 Corinthians 7:31); but unlike Carl Schmitt, the German jurist who flirted (or, rather, more than flirted) with the Nazis, McGrath does not want to katechontically restrain this overwhelming passing away of the form of the world as it exists. Like Paul, McGrath welcomes this passing away, and immediately, just like Paul, teases out from this impossible experience of the utter transiency of the order of creation the very possibility of a new beginning, an entirely new inauguration, of a redeemed Kingdom to come. This joy, this peace that "passeth all understanding" (Philippians 4:7) is apocalyptic in the true sense of the term; for what is truly apocalyptic is not merely the catastrophic aspect of it, but along with it its "unprethinkable" (this is Schelling's word: *das Unvordenkliche*) transfiguration into a new joy in the arrival of redemption. McGrath contemplates this belonging-together of the disparate, this coincidence of the incommensurable that marks the apocalyptic moment, where the end and the beginning, despair and hope conjoin unthinkably, transfiguring all despair into joy, provided that we learn *to* let pass away what is *to* pass away. This is no stoic resignation, but an active hope that attends to the possibilities of incalculable transformations. For McGrath, more than anything else, it is this note that is genuinely "Christian": it consists of kenotically emptying out attributes of sovereignty, in order to release us for the joy in the "thy Kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10). McGrath's contemplation is not an indifferent contemplation of the essences of the world, which seeks to grasp them in thought; rather, his contemplation is an "engaged" one that vigilantly attends to the possibilities of incalculable transformations. He thereby takes a step, which is neither the reactionary, regressive step of a conservative thinker who desperately tries to preserve the existing form of the world, lest the world sink in the whirlpool of impending destruction; nor is his step that of a so-called "secular-liberal-progressive" thinker who thinks that what has come to be must be of a higher stage that what-has-just-been. McGrath also dissociates

himself from those who find green grass on the other side and take solace in the mythical order of eternal return. Contra prevailing attitudes, which either retain only the catastrophic aspect of apocalyptic thought or neutralize the catastrophic to take away the apocalyptic sting, McGrath teases out the possibilities for us precisely at a time, when the world appears to be darker than ever before.