

2012

The Whale and the World in Melville's Moby-Dick: Early American Empire and Globalization

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THE WHALE AND THE WORLD IN MELVILLE'S *MOBY DICK*:
EARLY AMERICAN EMPIRE AND GLOBALIZATION

By

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Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in English Literature

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

May 2012

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English Literature

The Whale and the World in Melville's *Moby-Dick*: Early American Empire and Globalization

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Reading *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale* (1851), this study examines literary arguments regarding Melville's capacity to appear prophetic through his written works in his predictions of the vast empire that America would one day become and the strategies which the country would employ to do so.

In my introduction I assert that Melville is not a "Prophet," but rather, he is a keenly analytical observer of the world around him as he recognized in America patterns of imperialism: structures he charted in his global voyages as a merchant and then a whaler. In his observations, he saw that America was not merely concerned with continental expansion, but angling for expansion on a global scale. Utilizing Immanuel Wallerstein's seminal text on the subject of the globalized economic system, *World Systems Analysis* (2004), I identify the concepts of the system as they are presented by Wallerstein and described by Melville in *Moby-Dick*. In Chapter One I outline and explain the essential aspects of the global economic system that Wallerstein details in his treatise on the subject, which have only in the mid-twentieth century garnered the serious attention of academic and professional study. Chapter Two chronicles Melville's seemingly apparent understanding of the particulars of this system in *Moby-Dick*, with particular attention focused on Chapter Ninety Nine, "The Doubloon". Finally, my third chapter concludes the thesis with a coda, wherein I describe more in depth the particulars of Melville's upbringing in a family that struggled financially and his worldly experiences, factors which I believe led to his specific attention given to the global economic system and America's role within it.

*Dedicated to my family, in particular, my mother and my father
who instilled in me an enduring love for reading and learning.*

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INTRODUCTION

“Whaling not respectable? Whaling is imperial!”

-Melville

Oftentimes, critics refer to Melville as prophetic, as he seems in his works to have predicted not only the great empire that the United States of America would become one day, but also the imperialist stratagems through which the country would achieve its global hegemony. Charles Waugh, for example, points out that *Moby-Dick* “contends with global issues like massive and rapid human migrations, the strengthening of European and American control over much of the globe along with the development of the systems necessary to maintain that control, as well as the establishment of regular, global communication and media pathways” (205). This insatiable hunger for control and “the development of the systems necessary to maintain that control” are characteristics of a country striving to move past its role as a weaker periphery region and evolve into a more influential core country within the global hierarchy of wealth and power. An eventual outcome of this, although not necessarily the goal of all core regions, is to attain the role of hegemonic world-power: a process Melville, as a keenly analytical observer of the world around him, recognized occurring in America.¹ In wading through the vast sea of scholarly criticism concerned with the author, “the prophetic Melville” is a phrase which often appears.² However, to describe Melville as a “prophet” carries with it an inevitable association

¹ The reason most core countries do not work towards dominance is that the economic stability inherent to core regions has, historically, been jeopardized as a country attains hegemony. Upon reaching the role of hegemon, that country is put into a position in which their political, economic, and cultural ideologies influence those of the rest of the world. As the country’s dominant role requires the consent of other core regions, the hegemon must also adhere to their basic ideologies, while balancing the needs of the global community as well as the needs of the hegemon in power. In the past, the end-result is a country which eventually spreads its resources to such vast extents that expansion is no longer probable and growth is inhibited.

² Several books and articles on Melville contain the term “prophet” within their titles: Rowland A. Sherrill’s, *The Prophetic Melville: Experience, Transcendence and Tragedy*, Herman Melville, *Romantic and Prophet*, and Jean-Francois Leroux’s “*Of Sharks and Pilot-Fish*”: *Melville’s Prophetic Art and the Dream of (French) America*.

with the Bible; to identify him as such is to argue that he was in some manner a messenger of God, chosen to present the world with divine deterministic insights into the future of America as the country progressed.³ In fact, quite the contrary is true. Melville's analysis of America's imperial nature in the early nineteenth century was deeply grounded in the ways in which he perceived that the country was not merely concerned with *continental* expansion, but rather, in the days of *Moby-Dick*, angling for empire on a *global* scale. In other words, Melville's prophetic status had everything to do with the material, capitalist world rather than Christian theology. While most literary critics and historians date America's imperial ambitions to the Spanish-American War of 1898, Melville's prescience was to recognize the global reach of an American empire in the making when he saw it in the 1830s.

I argue that *Moby-Dick* is a text inextricably woven with Melville's criticisms of the early phases of the imperial economic and social order of the United States from its inception through the early twenty-first century. Other critics, such as Andrew Delbanco, agree. Delbanco writes in his biography of the author "that though Melville had been born and had died in the 19th century, *Moby-Dick* was the work of a 20th-century imagination. As we begin our transition into the 21st century, this book has lost none of its salience" (175). It is apparent there has historically been, and will always be, pertinence to the multidimensionality of Melville's writing. *Moby-Dick* was not a work for the time, but instead maintains relevance to subsequent

Additionally, analysis of Melville's work often incorporates this term within its margins at some point; for example: "[Melville is] an 'aboriginal' and 'plunger' whose prophetic spirit probed with almost nervous intensity the outer edges of human awareness," and "[*Moby-Dick*] impressed countless modern readers as a prophetic work" (Lee 8; Parini 7). It has also been claimed that Ishmael's imagined performance bill of current events in Chapter One was thought as prophetic of the conflict in Afghanistan at the turn of the twentieth century in tandem with the controversial election of American President George W. Bush: "'Grand Contested Election for the Presidency of the United States./ 'WHALING VOYAGE BY ONE ISHMAEL./ 'BLOODY BATTLE IN AFFGHANISTAN'" (22). For a study of the actual historical events to which Melville refers, see Mukhtar Ali Isani, *Melville and the "Bloody Battle in Afghanistan."* *American Quarterly* Vol. 20, No. 3 (Autumn, 1968), pp. 645-649.

³ "prophet": "a. A divinely inspired interpreter, revealer, or teacher of the will or thought of God or of a god; a person who speaks, or is regarded as speaking, for or in the name of God or a god" (*OED*).

generations as Delbanco argues. In the mid-1800s, Melville seems to have clearly recognized and comprehended the conditions of globalization and the world-system manifest within his lifetime, conditions that only since the 1970s have garnered the necessary attention of serious study in America.⁴ Although *globalization* functions in a number of discursive contexts appropriated by nations, countries, corporations, environmentalists, employers, or workers worldwide, the basic premise remains the same: globalization represents a vast increase in the movement of people, trade goods, or finances across international borders as the far reaches of the globe became ever more attainable and time and space are compressed in conjunction with a process of global deterritorialization. For scholars like Immanuel Wallerstein, globalization is predicated on a capitalist world-economic system: “The imperative of the endless accumulation of capital [generates] a need for constant technological change, a constant expansion of frontiers—geographical, psychological, intellectual, scientific” (2). This expansion was controlled by the more economically and militarily powerful countries, leaving weaker populations at their mercy as they spread into the uncharted regions of the world.

With uncanny perception, Melville demonstrates clear recognition of those conditions as outlined by Immanuel Wallerstein in his seminal treatise on the subject of globalization, *World-Systems Analysis* (2004): a methodology that developed “in the early 1970s as a new perspective on social reality” (1). Wallerstein writes that “World-systems analysis was an attempt to

⁴ Christopher Chase-Dunn offers a fairly succinct description regarding the genesis of globalization analysis as the concept gained prominence:

Today the terms ‘world economy’, ‘world market’, and ‘globalization’ are commonplace ... But few know that the most important sources for these phrases lies with work started by sociologists in the early Seventies. At a time when the mainstream assumption of accepted social, political, and economic science held that the ‘wealth of nations’ reflected mainly on the cultural developments within those nations, a growing group of social scientists recognized that national ‘development’ could be best understood as the complex outcome of local interactions with an aggressively expanding Europe-centered ‘world-system’ (Wallerstein [*The Modern World System, Vol. 1.*]; Frank [*World Accumulation 1492-1789*]). Not only did these scientists perceive the global nature of economic networks 20 years before they entered popular discourse, but they also saw that many of these networks extend back at least 600 years. Over this time, the peoples of the globe became linked into one integrated unit: the modern world-system. (188-89)

combine coherently concern with the unit of analysis, concern with social temporalities, and concern with the barriers that had been erected between different social science disciplines,” and he proposes three specific aspects to address these “concerns” (16). First, with regard to “concern with the unit of analysis,” reliance on the concept of the nation-state ignores the fact that the boundaries of the planet have evolved, and this outdated descriptor must be replaced by a focus upon the larger scale, all-encompassing world-system when analyzing global social structures. Second, rather than separate, distinct treatment of “social science disciplines,” a multidisciplinary attitude must be adapted regarding various fields to acknowledge their interconnectedness – history, political science, economics, and sociology, for example, cannot be fully understood without one another, yet they have come to be studied independently. Finally, this must all be combined with a macro-scale approach to world history, or Fernand Braudel’s “insistence on the multiplicity of social times and his emphasis on structural time—what he called the *longue durée*” (Wallerstein 18).⁵ Within *Moby-Dick*, Melville evinces these three particular tenets of world-systems analysis through the novel’s encyclopedic nature, various experimental generic conventions, and interaction between global peoples and cultures; evident via the *Pequod*’s multi-racial crew and gams between various ships of the world encountered throughout the text. In particular, Melville’s understanding in the mid-nineteenth century of the *longue durée* proves interesting by reason that this concept, which revolutionized humanity’s perceptions of the past, present, and future, was not fully developed by thinkers like Braudel until one hundred years later.

In brief, Fernand Braudel, of the French Annales School, outlines the concept of the *longue durée* in *Histoire et Sciences Sociales: La Longue Durée*, a text that Wallerstein and

⁵ Wallerstein defines *structural time* as “long-lasting, but not eternal, basic structures [of time] that underlay historical systems” (15).

other world-systems analysts rely heavily upon for development within their field. As Wallerstein has described it, the concept of the *longue durée* is derivative of both “insistence on the multiplicity of social times and his emphasis on structural time” (18). Wallerstein points out that this is important because, for world-systems analysts, “the *longue durée* was the duration of a particular historical system. Generalizations about the functioning of such a system thus avoided the trap of seeming to assert timeless, eternal truths” (18). In other words, if those systems were not eternal, then each would essentially have a life-span with a beginning, middle, and end. The idea behind the concept of the *longue durée* is that this perspective does not view history through rigidly separated structures, but instead recognizes that historical events intertwine with and overlap one another in a way that presents history not as a single, linear event, but considers history to be more multidimensional. Wallerstein’s application of this concept in world-systems analysis challenged the firmly rooted notion that the transition from the feudal to the capitalist world-system was an “inevitable occurrence,” rather than the result of a series of occurrences which could potentially have resulted in a completely different type of system (18).^{6,7} Similarly, Melville was aware that American expansion into the west was not an “inevitable occurrence” or a “Manifest Destiny,” but rather the result of a continental ideology developed through expansionist propaganda that did not end at the west coast, continued on at a global level. Like Melville, Wallerstein and other world-systems analysts were “skeptical about the inevitability of progress” into the capitalist world-system, seeing it as only one possibility for

⁶ Wallerstein cites Maurice Dobb’s *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* and Paul Sweezy’s refutation of that article as playing a seminal role in development of what was widely accepted as explanation for the transition from feudalism to capitalism. See *World-Systems Analysis* pp. 13-22 for more.

⁷ This term has faced scrutiny for having been so inconsistently used throughout history that it has essentially become devoid of specific meaning. For use within this work, however, Wallerstein defines *feudalism* as “The name normally given to the historical system that prevailed in medieval Europe. It was a system of parcelized power, in which there was a ladder of lords and vassals who exchanged social obligations (for example, use of land in return for some kind of payments plus social protection)” (93). He points out that, “The world in which we are now living, the modern world-system, had its origins in the sixteenth century,” presumably as a replacement for feudalism (23).

an economic world-system that could take on various other forms (18). In this way, analysts were inspired to look at what caused such a transition to occur, an investigative project which in turn enabled us to better understand how such a system came into being and other potential manifestations of that system.

The notion of the *longue durée*, combined with the concept of a unidisciplinary attitude toward social sciences, attempts to break down the barriers that have been established to separate disciplines and to, in turn, avoid the trap of linear history. Dale Tomich summarizes Braudel's ideas in *The Order of Historical Time: The Longue Durée and Micro-History*:

Braudel makes the case for a historical social science and a conception of history...by emphasizing the plurality of historical time and privileging the *longue durée*. From this perspective, Braudel attacks the linear conception of historical time and emphasis on the events that characterize positivist history. At the same time, through an examination of the conception of historical time in the various social sciences, he makes the case for the importance of plural temporalities and for the *longue durée* as the methodological ground for a unified historical social science. (1-2)

The result then of the world systems perspective, according to Wallerstein, involves not only looking at history over extensive periods of time, but doing so through a multidisciplinary lens. In other words, not only the history of historians, but also of economists, political scientists, biologists and sociologists into a unidisciplinary, long-term history not focused around specific events. It is necessary to combine these fields into a unidisciplinary "single analytical frame," that does not keep them apart from one another, but instead treats them as one body of complex knowledge (Wallerstein 19).

In summary, there are three basic components on which Wallerstein bases world systems analysis: an understanding that the capitalist world-economy is based upon “world-systems rather than states as units of analysis, insistence on the *longue durée*, and a multidisciplinary approach” to the social sciences (19). Globalization occurred when, as time and space were compressed on a global scale, the capitalist world-economy escalated to such a point that it spread across the planet and connected people in ways they never imagined. Through his own precise descriptions, yet without having the terminology to attach to these concepts, Melville demonstrates a remarkable understanding of the global world-system which Wallerstein and other scholars will come to discern over one-hundred years later. These distinct features permeate Melville’s writing in works such as *Moby-Dick*, *Typee*, *Redburn*, and *John Marr*.

Part of Melville’s “prophetic” powers with regard to the nascent global reach of the United States was his material experience aboard whaling ships. Unlike most peers within his social class, Melville did not attend college; however, like Ishmael, who claims “a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard,” the author received a cogent education nonetheless (*Moby-Dick* 101). Rather than a secondhand education, stifled by the classroom, Melville’s voyages took him to parts of the globe that others could only read about in travelogues—second-hand sensationalized accounts filled with the inescapable biases of an outsider.⁸ Malini Schueller asserts in *Colonialism and Melville’s South Seas Journeys*, that Melville’s writing is

⁸ Travel narratives were often written with a colonial mindset, as touring the world was a privilege generally allotted to those with wealth. Globe-trotting was an expensive and time-consuming activity in which an excess of both money and leisure time were needed. Even the reading of travelogues was an activity reserved for those with the benefit of spare time. Most travel narratives were written (although perhaps not consciously) in support of colonial endeavors and further propagated primitive cultural myths. Mary Pratt discusses this in *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing and Transculturation*:

Travel books ... gave European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement, and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized. Travel books were very popular. They created a sense of curiosity, excitement, adventure, and even moral fervor about European expansionism. They were ... one of the key instruments that made people ‘at home’ in Europe feel part of a planetary project; a key instrument, in other words, in creating the ‘domestic subject’ of empire. (3)

“the recording of the lives of disempowered ‘natives’ by the privileged Westerner” (16). I argue instead that he had been granted firsthand experience of the world as an intelligent, well-read *laborer*, not a tourist, which made his experiences with people and places radically different than those of others. Melville’s experience of the world and the systems in place that affect humankind were not limited to a continental level, as in the case of most of his peers, but introduced to him on a global scale. Life on the deck of a whaleship provided time for intellectual reflection upon that labor, since it was filled with bursts of urgent industriousness between whale sightings by long stretches of banality, as Ishmael describes:

It was a cloudy, sultry afternoon; the seamen were lazily lounging about the decks, or vacantly gazing over into the lead-colored waters. Queequeg and I were mildly employed weaving what is called a sword-mat, for additional lashing to our boat. So still and subdued and yet somehow precluding all the scene, and such an incantation of reverie lurked in the air, that each silent sailor seemed resolved into his own invisible self. (179)

Melville, like other sailors, had long periods of time with only his thoughts as company. During the span of three years he spent aboard the *Acushnet* that time of rumination was not spent prophesying, but thinking and analyzing.⁹ As Charles Waugh reasons in “*We are not a nation, so much as a world*”: *Melville’s Global Consciousness*, Melville “acknowledged the important connection between the local and the global, the particular and the universal”; ideas that must have never seemed to make more sense than when gazing out upon seemingly endless expanses of space as he sailed the oceans of the planet (208). Through these connections, Waugh argues,

⁹ Of his duties at watch Melville appears to make a confession through Ishmael:

Let me make a clean breast of it here, and frankly admit that I kept but sorry guard. With the problem of the universe revolving in me, how could I—being left completely to myself at such a thought-engendering altitude,—how could I but lightly hold my obligations to observe all whaleships’ standing orders...Beware of enlisting in your vigilant fisheries any lad with lean brow and hollow eye; given to unseasonable meditateness; and who offers to ship with the Phaeton instead of Bowditch in his head (135).

Melville grasped that America was *not* the axis around which all other cultures existed, but instead part of an inextricably linked global community:

His engagement with the whole of the real, physical world makes him stand out ... as not just making a theoretical relationship between humans and nature: He actually demonstrates how transcendentalism, a philosophy about the hidden connections between humans and things, in practice becomes globalization, a process in which people, production, travel, nature, and commerce are ever increasingly connected. (208)

The political and societal commentaries within *Moby-Dick* look beyond the amnesic disposition so prevalent to the American historical consciousness. When the country began to exponentially grow in the early 1800s, the idea of Manifest Destiny, justifying expansion as God's plan, veiled the brutal methods settlers used to remove native peoples and pioneer the West.¹⁰ Robert Hine and John Faragher point out in *Frontiers: A Short History of the American West* that "the wars between the natives and the Puritans deeply influenced the way Americans would think about the frontier" (26). Referring specifically to the exceptionally violent Pequot War (1634-1638), this series of battles set the stage for the brutal tactics Americans would employ in their efforts to conquer the west and those who occupied its territory. Exemplifying the prevalent attitude of the era, Captain John Mason writes in *A Brief History of the Pequot War*, "Thus the Lord was pleased to smite our Enemies in the hinder Parts, and give us their land for an Inheritance" (44).¹¹ Alluding to the Mystic Massacre in which hundreds of Pequot people were slaughtered,

¹⁰ The term "Manifest Destiny" was first used by *New York Morning News* editor John L. O'Sullivan in an 1845 article from *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* called "Annexation": "... in a spirit of hostile interference against us, for the avowed object of thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions" (2).

¹¹ The barbarism of the Mystic Massacre is fairly summed up by Captain Mason who additionally writes of the Pequots: "But God was above them, who laughed his Enemies and the Enemies of his People to Scorn, making them as a fiery Oven: Thus were the Stout Hearted spoiled, having slept their last Sleep, and none of their Men could find their Hands: Thus did the Lord judge among the Heathen, filling the Place with dead Bodies!" (30).

this savage war marked the beginnings of a new chapter in American incursion that contributed greatly to the development of both expansionist fervor and the destructive means with which to express it. As Melville witnessed American movement westward, he recalls this war and the tradition of violence it created, noting, in reference to the novel's whaleship, "Pequod, you will no doubt remember, was the name of a celebrated tribe of Massachusetts Indians, now extinct as the ancient Medes" (69).

As Americans made their way west, Native people were removed in brutally violent ways from regions where their families had lived for generations and where their connections to the land were far more integral to their lives than any white settler could possibly have imagined. The endless accumulation of wealth that in part defines capitalism – the economic predicate of both American expansionism and empire – tends to breed a capacity to overlook the long-term effects of short-term gains. With Manifest Destiny as justification and motivation, western conquest occurred free from guilt while entire native nations were destroyed and resources plundered as Americans overran the continent – regardless of what would be result from those actions. Immanuel Wallerstein observes of the global expansion of capitalism that "the imperative of the endless accumulation of capital had generated a need for constant technological change, a constant expansion of frontiers – geographical, psychological, intellectual, scientific" as it was necessary to continually seek out new resources for exploitation (2). In the early nineteenth century, this was occurring, literally, at the western forefront of the frontier as it molded the zeitgeist of the era, an era that would come to shape the American ideology of relentless expansion. It is important to note, however, that the concept of Manifest Destiny was not an innate, natural characteristic of American thought, but rather, as Hine emphasizes, "it was the self-conscious creation of political propigandists" bent on proliferating expansionist

domination (80). In other words, it was through the extensive efforts of the government and the media that this mindset of ruthless expansion was drilled into the American psyche.

In the opening lines of his chapter *War and Destiny*, Hine offers a telling anecdote about Manifest Destiny when he discusses Stephen Douglas' speech to the Congress in 1845: "he would 'blot out the lines on the map' that marked the national boundaries at the time, and 'make the area of liberty as broad as the continent itself.' An empire for liberty!" (80). Melville, on the other hand, recognized more than others that there would be eventual repercussions for such hubris and this mode of thought would not simply dissipate once the western reaches of the continent were tamed. It was not that Melville was prophetic, but rather, he clearly understood that the furor driving America's insatiable expansionist political endeavors would not come without long-term effects.

Utilizing Wallerstein's text, *World Systems Analysis* as a primary source for Melville's understanding of globalization, I will analyze the ways in which the author recognized the main components of the phenomenon as it existed within his lifetime, and in turn, the economic and social sphere that his observations "prophesized" for the future of America. "Upon topics of real life," Melville writes in *John Marr*, one must realize that "whether as to persons or events, one can not always be talking about the present; much less, speculating about the future; one must needs recur to the past" (394). Without having the specific term for it, Melville recognizes that Braudel's concept of the *longue durée* must be taken into consideration to understand that the past is what determines not only the present, but also future endeavors. As the *Pequod* slips beneath the surface of the icy Pacific in the final sentences of *Moby-Dick*, readers behold not

simply the sinking of a whaleship, but an object that has come to represent myriad aspects of the capitalist world-system; “The Ship of State” and its inevitable self-destruction:¹²

And now, concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the *Pequod* out of sight. [...] Then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago. (426)

Melville writes this in the nineteenth century, foreseeing in the fate of the *Pequod* the same catastrophe inherent to eventual realization of the asymptote, and the inevitable collapse of the system.¹³

Melville’s “mighty book” includes “mighty themes” of Manifest Destiny and American Imperialism along with globalization and the capitalist economic world-system as James Annesley well-summarizes in *Melville’s No Logo: Moby-Dick and the Globalisation Debate*:¹⁴

Whaling [is] not simply a narrow emblem of westward expansion, but an industry that allows Melville to connect ideas linked to Manifest Destiny with processes of Americanisation, imperialism, and globalisation. *Moby-Dick* makes this point explicit through its constant play on the global nature of whaling and the descriptions of ways in which Nantucketers have ‘overrun and conquered the watery world’. (22)

Rather than view American globalization as an event separate from Manifest Destiny expansionism, Melville recognized that this process was an extension continuing on the same trajectory of imperial conquest. In *Moby-Dick*, prairie schooners and wagon circles are replaced

¹² “The Ship of State” is referred to in Alan Heimert, “*Moby-Dick* and the American Political Symbolism,” *American Quarterly* 14.4 (Winter, 1963): 498-534. However, this correlation to the *Pequod* has certainly surfaced elsewhere.

¹³ Or, the point at which there can simply no longer be further accumulation. The asymptote will be described in detail in Chapter One.

¹⁴ A reference to Melville’s statement, “To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme. No great and enduring volume can ever be written on the flea, though many there be who have tried it” (349).

by whale-ships and gams as the setting wherein Melville charts the spread of global American empire.

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville writes in depth on a multitude of subjects: economics, politics, biology, psychology, sociology, geography, philosophy, and religion. This novel, having initially been criticized as “not worth the money asked for it, either as a literary work or as a mass of printed paper,” is so massive in scope that it seems no aspect of the past, present, or future of American society eludes Melville’s critical, yet precise, acumen (Davey 71). The conceptual notion of the “Great American Novel” refers to a piece of writing which not only captures the zeitgeist of the country at its time of publication, but also has the wherewithal to be vast in content, transcend time and reveal widespread truths to every generation; Melville in many ways has achieved that through *Moby-Dick*. He recognized the patterns inherent to the *longue durée* and the need to combine various schools of thought for proper understanding of global interaction as others had not. Melville also recognized the breakdown of the nation-state concept, which still continues to constitute global movement of culture and finance in the capitalist world-system and also motivates global human interaction. The goal of this examination is to acquire insight into Melville’s understanding of globalization and the expansion of America as it occurred within his lifetime. In turn, I hope to better distinguish how the author came to be the “Prophet” of the globalized world system within which we presently live. Melville was not “charmed” or instilled with God-given insight into the world, but rather, he was a deeply analytical thinker who understood and recognized the conditions of a system for which he did not have a word, globalization; he understood that system in a way that set him apart from most of the people of his era as the American empire expanded worldwide.

CHAPTER ONE

“To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme”
-Herman Melville

“Thou requirest a little lower layer”:
An Explanation of the Modern Capitalist World-System

We do not know what Columbus and his men envisioned when they came ashore...But we know that in those first hours a process began we now call an incursion. In the name of distant and abstract powers, the Spanish began an appropriation of the place, a seizure of its people, its elements, whatever could be carried off.

-Barry Lopez, *The Rediscovery of North America*

I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large and without mercy.

-Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*

Part One

“Away, Whole Oceans Away”

Global Time-Space Compression through Human Exploration and Discovery

In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey claims that the compression of space and time occurs when communication technologies become increasingly more attainable by the general public, and when both the speed and distance with which those networks are able to connect people on a global level also increases.¹⁵ By definition, *space* refers to “an empty place or part; a void; a gap,” in other words, an expanse to be filled (*OED*). Human advancement and

¹⁵ Relating this to the capitalist world-system, Harvey asserts that “the dimensions of space and time have there been subject to the persistent pressure of capital circulation and accumulation, culminating (particularly during the periodic crises of over accumulation that have arisen since the mid-nineteenth century) in disconcerting and disruptive bouts of time-space compression” (326).

growth has historically been driven by efforts to fill in the gaps of our species' collective knowledge. The open expanses of blank space on maps – the unknown – were once filled with elaborate cartouches and horrific depictions of fantastical beasts fierce enough to put the fear of God into any explorer's heart. As faraway places were discovered and charted, those creatures were over time replaced by newly discovered territories, lines of longitude and latitude, locations of dangerously shoaled shorelines, as well as the whereabouts and direction of the trade winds. With new discoveries came claims of ownership, and there is historically no better way to claim new-found lands to ownership than to commit the discovery to paper—to name and chart the discovery for the historical record.¹⁶ The genesis of the world-system that Immanuel Wallerstein theorizes resulted from European expansionist lust, leading to initiation of the “process of incursion” that Lopez identifies as characterizing European colonialism in the New World. With technological progress, the evolution of cartography and exploration has come to be replaced by satellite imagery, terrain maps, and three-dimensional maps that go so far as to even depict the specific buildings of a city—navigation by the stars, dead reckoning, compass, and sextant have all been made obsolete by pinpoint accurate Global Positioning Systems and Geographic Information Systems. As a result of the ease with which the world can be accessed, the gaps in time and space have become compressed and the world has become one single, homogenized unit wherein there are very few unknown variables.

Comparing Melville's era with our own in regard to time-space compression, Charles Waugh points out in *Melville's Global Consciousness*, that, in summary, the telegraph, steamship, and train in addition to other revolutionary industrial inventions and innovations led

¹⁶ Charles Olson writes in *Call Me Ishmael*, “A FACT: whale logbooks are today furnishing sea lawyers first claims to islands—the flag and all that” (19). The Doctrine of Discovery favors colonial expansion by giving precedence to Eurocentric land discovery (*Terra nullius*) as opposed to possession by native peoples. See U.S. Supreme Court case *Johnson v. M'Intosh* (1823) for more.

to a situation in which the nineteenth century underwent changes that were equally, if not more rapidly effective than those on which Harvey relies upon for his discussion of the twentieth century. Waugh claims that “it is only with a solipsism of the present that one could attempt to argue that their collective impact was less on Melville and his contemporaries than the impact of the twentieth century’s media technology has been on us” (206-7). There is no contesting that the developments in telecommunications technology, travel, and economics over the last century have moved at lightning-fast speeds; however, the creations and innovations of the nineteenth century exist as the major breakthroughs that paved the way for today’s technologies. The changes that came during the Industrial Revolution—progression from manual and draft-animal labor to steam engine-based manufacturing, cottage and craft industry to the factory, as well as major advancements in metallurgy—created the very foundation from which the technological advancements of the twentieth century would emerge. Evident through Melville’s writing is that the changes which he witnessed during his lifetime, when paired with his global travel experience, heightened his awareness of the advancements which would result from these new technologies as the world became ever more accessible.¹⁷ As Americans began to spread into the west and out across the globe, Melville’s works consistently demonstrate that he recognized that this “process of incursion” and expansion would continually gain momentum through the nineteenth century as the world became more accessible and maintain that trajectory until

¹⁷ In the film *Into the Deep*, Nathaniel Philbrick further supports this idea as he explains, in depth, just how advanced the technology for whaling had become by Melville’s era:

And this was now a state-of-the-art industry. I mean, the ships - we think of them as square-rigged, quaint little crafts - but these things were state-of-the-art, decades in development. They were not only the perfect factory ship for rendering the oil, they could go anywhere. They were magnificent exploration vessels, and they lasted pretty darn long under horrible conditions. One of these ships could sail up to a Pacific atoll, could stand by as three whaleboats went out and brought back a 60-ton whale, and yet it was also a home for several dozen men for three, four years. And so, they were the spaceships of their day, where they could travel to unknown worlds, killing whales and rendering the oil. This was a technology that I think is much more like what we're thinking in terms of, ‘What if we have to leave this planet, and, you know, go to other solar systems?’ Well, the Nantucketers were doing it in the 19th century. And the universe for America at that point was the Pacific, and the Nantucketers were the true astronauts of American history. (Burns)

somehow impeded. He observes a world in which Americans “from their ant-hill in the sea, overrun and conquered the watery world like so many Alexanders; parceling out among them the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans as the three pirate powers did Poland” (65). Melville additionally points out in *John Marr* that “America can to-day hardly be said to have any western bound but the ocean that washes Asia” and, in a sense, the sun will never set on the flourishing American empire (396).¹⁸

Reading *Moby-Dick* and other works of Melville in relation to the concepts that Wallerstein addresses in his seminal treatise on world-systems analysis offers a varied contemporary perspective through which the novel can be viewed. While Melville’s writing has solidified its place in the canon and has been the subject of countless methods of critical interpretation and thought, what I offer is an analysis of *Moby-Dick* that connects the novel, written over one-hundred and fifty years ago, to issues that have only in the mid-twentieth century garnered the serious attention of academic and professional study. America’s crisis of reaching the point of the asymptote, as defined by Wallerstein and described by Melville, is an inevitable, fast-approaching eventuality as the sun begins to set on one global empire and shine its light upon a new hegemon, yet to be determined.¹⁹ This chapter serves to outline, in detail,

¹⁸ Melville not only recognizes the unimpeded expansion of America, but he also identifies the plausibility of hunting whales to extinction as they are more aggressively pursued around the globe; yet another result of rampant overextension. In the chapter, *Does the Whale’s Magnitude Diminish?—Will He Perish?*, Melville outwardly calls attention to this potential as he had witnessed it through the slaughter of bison:

Comparing the humped herds of whales with the humped herds of buffalo, which, not forty years ago, overspread by tens of thousands the prairies of Illinois and Missouri, and shook their iron manes and scowled with their thunder-clotted brows upon the sites of populous river- capitals, where now the polite broker sells you land at a dollar an inch; in such a comparison an irresistible argument would seem furnished, to show that the hunted whale cannot now escape speedy extinction. (352)

¹⁹ Although this concept will be further elucidated upon later within this chapter, Wallerstein defines *asymptote* as: “A concept in mathematics, referring to a line which a particular curve cannot reach in a finite space. The most frequent usage is in referring to curves whose ordinal is measured in percentages, and for which 100 percent represents the asymptote” (91). However, more directly to its use with regard to world-systems, Wallerstein describes it thus:

If over time the percentage is moving upward in an overall linear fashion, it means that at some point it cannot continue to do so. We call this reaching the asymptote, or 100 percent point. No characteristic can

the concepts of globalization as described by Immanuel Wallerstein in *World-Systems Analysis*. First published in 1974, this fundamental text is the cornerstone for development and study of world-systems theory, the understanding of which yields practical insight into the modern capitalist world-system that drives humanity's everyday interactions and motivations.

Part Two

“Ah, the World! Oh, the World!”

World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction and Explanation

Immanuel Wallerstein posits in *World-Systems Analysis* that we are now living in a “global world-system,” not a system “*of the* (whole) world”, but a system “*that [is]* a world” (16-17). He further explains that this is an important distinction to make because it clarifies the idea that “in ‘world-systems’ we are dealing with a spatial/temporal zone which cuts across many political and cultural units, one that represents an integrated zone of activity and institutions which obey certain systemic rules” (17). World-systems analysts declare that the modern world-system in which we presently live is a capitalist world-system, which replaced feudalism in a transition that took place around the sixteenth century.^{20,21} With constant expansion of the global marketplace, the limits of feudalism inhibited growth and, in turn, the capitalist world-

be ascribed more than 100 percent of any group. This means as we solve the middle-run problems by moving up on the curve, we will eventually run into the long-run problem of approaching the asymptote. (31)

²⁰ F.L. Ganshof offers a concise definition of *feudalism* in his eponymously titled monograph on the subject: ‘feudalism’ may be regarded as a body of institutions creating and regulating the obligations of obedience and service—mainly military service—on the part of a free man (the vassal) towards another free man (the lord), and the obligations of protection and maintenance on the part of the lord with regard to his vassal. The obligation of maintenance had usually as one of its effects the grant by the lord to his vassal of a unit of real property known as a fief (xvi).

²¹ Paul Halsall summarizes Wallerstein’s analysis of the demise of feudalism in the *Modern History Sourcebook*: According to Wallerstein, the feudal crisis was probably precipitated by the interaction of the following factors: (1) Agricultural production fell or remained stagnant. This meant that the burden of peasant producers increased as the ruling class expanded. (2) The economic cycle of the feudal economy had reached its optimum level; afterwards the economy began to shrink. (3) A shift of climatological conditions decreased agricultural productivity and contributed to an increase in epidemics within the population.” See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System, Volume 1* (New York: Academic Press, Inc.) 37.

system gained prominence. As capitalism continually spread across the globe, it became humanity's dominant economic system – a process now commonly known as *globalization*. As the system grew, writes Thomas Barfield in *The Dictionary of Anthropology*, the “need of capitalists for labor, raw materials, and markets drove the expansion of trade networks, sometimes through formal colonization,” thus creating a situation wherein growth was fueled by the need for consistently more resources in a seemingly endless cycle (498). It was “not the first world-economy ever,” Wallerstein clarifies, “but the first world-economy to survive as such for a long period and thrive, and it did this precisely by becoming fully capitalist” (17). We presently exist in a world where nearly any good imaginable can be attained both at a fraction of the time and the expense once involved, the present circumstances of which came as the result of a system long-lasting in its development. By understanding world-systems analysis, Wallerstein claims, we as a unified planet will be able to “make our choices about the directions in which we want the world to go...and we must finally figure out how we can act in the present so that it is likely to go in the direction we prefer,” thus giving us collective control of a sustainable future world-system (88).

It would seem to most people that the world has evolved into a globalized, compressed system to which “there is no alternative,” yet, Wallerstein asserts that both the present capitalist world-system and the United States as hegemonic power are in a state of decline as a new world-system currently develops.^{22,23} “Hegemonic powers define the rules of the game,” Wallerstein

²² Margaret Thatcher, prime minister of Great Britain from 1979-1990, utilized the acronym, TINA—“There Is No Alternative”—in claims that the capitalist world-economy is the only possible structure under which the system as a whole can function. This is a myth propagated by neoliberals and, as Robert McChesney writes, refers to the policies and processes whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximize their personal profit. Associated initially with Reagan and Thatcher, neoliberalism has for the past two decades been the dominant global political economic trend adopted by political parties of the center, much of the traditional left, and the right. These parties and the policies they enact represent the immediate interests of extremely wealthy investors and less than one thousand large corporations (40).

points out; however, “hegemony does not last very long and is very self-destructive” primarily because the struggle to maintain the position requires constant accumulation and growth (94). This is primarily because the struggle to maintain that level of power requires constant expansion and accumulation. In *World-Systems Analysis*, Wallerstein writes that world-systems analysis is a methodology that developed “in the early 1970s as a new perspective on social reality [as] an attempt to combine coherently concern with the unit of analysis, concern with social temporalities, and concern with the barriers that had been erected between different social science disciplines” (16). As discussed in the introduction herein, Wallerstein outlines three particular ways in which the firmly established epistemological boundaries of the world-system must be broken down to break free from their outdated constraints. Discussed in my study of *Moby-Dick* is Melville’s seeming recognition of these characteristics.

As Wallerstein’s concepts are necessary to my study of Melville, it is necessary to reiterate and clarify their role within the study of the world-system. Wallerstein proposes first, that when analyzing global societal structures, the nation-state as unit of analysis must be substituted by the *world-system*, a single, all-encompassing unit. The concept of the nation-state is no longer sufficient as people have gained access to far reaches of the globe and increased migration has created extreme diversity in communities. With boundaries becoming ever more fluid, the defining characteristics of a specific national archetype have in turn lost their congruency. Secondly, Wallerstein addresses that the specific disciplines of study which have been pigeon-holed over time need to be studied within what he calls a “single analytical frame”

The capitalist world-system is essentially protected by these individuals because they inherently gain more wealth while keeping those periphery populations oppressed and unable to break away from their current financial situations.

²³ Wallerstein points to the bifurcation of the system of the system as going in one of two directions: liberty or equality. In short, “we shall be opting either for a hierarchical system bestowing or permitting privileges according to rank in the system, however this rank is determined (including meritocratic criteria), or for a relatively democratic, relatively more egalitarian system” (89). For more, see *World-Systems Analysis* pp 88-90.

that is not multidisciplinary, but unidisciplinary. Finally, Wallerstein includes Fernand Braudel's "insistence on the multiplicity of social time—what he calls the *longue durée*" (18). This concept "strongly reinforced the insistence that social science had to be historical, looking at phenomena over long periods as well as over large spaces," rather than as a series of specific isolated instances (18). Wallerstein notes that this "triple set of critiques—world systems rather than states as units of analysis, insistence on the *longue durée*, and a unidisciplinary approach—represented an attack on many sacred cows" as this radical change in thought upended firmly established compartmentalization of specific intellectual fields or disciplines (19). However, Wallerstein also points out that most global issues and conflicts arise, in part, because "we have studied these phenomenon in different boxes to which we have given special names—politics, economics, the social structure, culture—without seeing that these boxes are constructs more of our imaginations than of reality" (x). By separating disciplines in such a way, there is an inherent tendency to overlook that in actuality, these boxes are interconnected in such ways that they all to a certain capacity affect one another and without the others, a single box on its own cannot be completely understood.

The *longue durée*, a concept on which Wallerstein relies heavily for the development of world-systems analysis, is outlined in Braudel's *Histoire et Sciences Sociales: La Longue Durée*, written in 1958. Wallerstein illustrates the importance of this concept in *World-Systems Analysis*, as it means that entering into a new system is not an impossibility, but in fact a likelihood as societies evolve:

For world-systems analysts, the *longue durée* was the duration of a particular historical system. Generalizations about the functioning of such a system thus avoided the trap of seeming to assert timeless, eternal truths. If such systems were not eternal, then it

followed that they had beginnings, lives during which they “developed,” and terminal transitions. (18)

This then led to the notion that the evolution into a capitalist system from a feudal system was not, as Wallerstein suggests, an “inevitable occurrence” (18). “World-systems analysts began to be skeptical about the inevitability of progress,” seeing it “as a possibility rather than a certainty” and in this way, analysts were inspired to look at what caused such a transition to occur, an investigative project which in turn enabled us to better understand how such a system came into being and could potentially do so again (18). In summary, the three basic tenets of world-systems analysis that Wallerstein proposes are that the capitalist world-economy is based upon “world-systems rather than states as units of analysis, insistence on the *longue durée*, and a multidisciplinary approach” (19). These concepts, paired with Harvey’s time-space compression, helped to create the globalized world in which we now live, and as America’s ideologies, language, currency, as well as economic reach spread worldwide, it became the global hegemony.

II. “*And the accountants have computed their great counting-house the globe*”: An Explanation of the Modern Capitalist World Economy

Part One

Although in many ways *Moby-Dick* romanticizes the whaling industry and those men who risked their lives to hunt the immense animals, Melville never loses sight of the fact that this is a capitalist venture wherein the investors of whaling voyages “were bent on profitable cruises, the profit to be counted down in dollars from the mint” (158). As a whaler aboard the *Acushnet*, Melville was part of the industry that gave America its sea-legs to grow into an economic powerhouse. In *Moby-Dick* there are constant reminders that this is not simply a sea-faring yarn, but a novel rife with observations of American life in the mid-19th century, including the economic impact of the whaling industry, as evident in *The Advocate*:

we whalemens of America now outnumber all the rest of the banded whalemens in the world; sail a navy of upwards of seven hundred vessels; manned by eighteen thousand men; yearly consuming 4,000,000 of dollars; the ships worth, at the time of sailing, \$20,000,000; and every year importing into our harbors a well reaped harvest of \$7,000,000. (98)

This industry propelled America into an economic position in which the country was able to sever ties with England and eventually establish itself as a major player in the global economic system.

Wallerstein states, “A defining feature of a world-economy is that it is *not* bounded by a unitary political structure,” but rather, “there are many political units inside the world-economy” (23). Additionally, a world-economy maintains that myriad cultures, languages, religions, etc. exist within it and it is the *division of labor* within the system which acts as the catalyst binding the capitalist world-economy. This system gained prominence with the rise of both free markets

and as trade with other countries seeking to accumulate wealth in similar ways expanded on a global scale. But, as Wallerstein and other economic theorists will point out, people collecting goods to sell for a profit and the exchange of labor for a wage are practices that “have existed for thousands of years all across the world” (24). In other words, those are merely two aspects of capitalism, but they are not defining factors of the system. Wallerstein clarifies that “We are in a capitalist system only when the system gives priority to the *endless* accumulation of capital. Which consequently means “that people and firms are accumulating capital in order to accumulate still more capital, a process that is continual and endless” (24). As these countries became wealthier, those places that refused to participate in this type of economy or were not as opportunistic as they could have been did not develop at the same pace and were left behind. It is important to reiterate this notion that the capitalist system “gives priority to the *endless* accumulation of capital” as those regions that took advantage of such a system became more wealthy and, with that, more powerful. “Unequal development” and increasingly widening divisions in labor are, according to Wallerstein, “what unifies the [capitalist system’s] structure most” (23). This division of labor is the basis of the core-periphery model which to this day governs much about the economic and political roles of countries within the capitalist world-system (23).²⁴

Wallerstein asserts, “a world-economy must necessarily be capitalist and that capitalism can only exist within the framework of a world-economy. Hence, the modern world-system is a capitalist world-economy” (92). Within the context of world-systems analysis Wallerstein has

²⁴ The *core-periphery model*, as defined by Wallerstein, “is a relational pair, which first came into widespread use when taken up by Raúl Prebisch and the UN Economic Commission for Latin America in the 1950s as a description of the axial division of labor of the world-economy. It refers to products but is often used as shorthand for the countries in which such products are dominant...the key element distinguishing core-like from peripheral processes is the degree to which they are monopolized and therefore profitable” (93). Core-periphery will be further expounded upon within this text in chapter one, section two.

delineated three distinct types of world-system: the no-longer existent mini-system, the world-empire, and the world-economy. The mini-system operates on a fairly small scale of reciprocal trade, as with tribalism or feudalism for example, and can quickly wear itself out as the system expands to such a point that it is not possible to maintain sustainability. The world-empire, Wallerstein describes, is “a large bureaucratic structure with a *single* political center and an axial division of labor, but multiple cultures,” whereas a world-economy “is a large axial division of labor with *multiple* political centers and multiple cultures” (emphasis added 99).²⁵ Although it is possible for more than one of these systems to exist at a time and there are alternative systems, the current globalized world has evolved to such a point that the capitalist world-economy has superseded all others to become the dominant governing system.

Wallerstein points to three major historical events that led to the modern world-system now in place. First is “the long sixteenth century during which our modern world-system came into existence as a capitalist world-economy,” in other words, the Renaissance period beginning around the mid-fourteenth century and culminating in the mid-seventeenth century (x). It was during this period, most importantly, that science and religion became entities separate and distinct from one another, leading to new perspectives on both the advancement of knowledge and gaining a better understanding of the world. Wallerstein points out that this then evolved into creation of the modern university system, wherein subjects of study were divided under two headings: the sciences and the humanities, which were then further divided into disciplines (3). These boundaries, specific to particular areas of thought, are a human construct that world-

²⁵ Wallerstein clarifies his use of the hyphen within world-systems analysis by noting:

‘World system’ without a hyphen suggests that there has been only one world-system in the history of the world. ‘World economy’ without a hyphen is a concept used by most economists to describe the trade relations among states, not an integrated system of production (99).

systems analysts have pushed to abolish in favor of focusing on a unidisciplinary approach to the world.

Secondly, Wallerstein points to “the French Revolution of 1789 as a world event which accounts for the subsequent dominance for two centuries of a geoculture for this world-system, one that was dominated by centrist liberalism” (x). Wallerstein attributes two major changes in the geoculture of the modern world-system to the French Revolution: first is that it made “political change, into a ‘normal’ phenomenon, something in the nature of things and in fact desirable...And secondly, the French Revolution reoriented the concept of sovereignty, from the monarch or the legislature to the people” (51). The changes brought about by the French Revolution, in combination with the long sixteenth century; or the Renaissance, marked two paramount concepts that would irrevocably affect the manner in which governments are regarded and operated as traditional methods were questioned.

Last to play a seminal role in the path to the modern world-system, according to Wallerstein, was the political turmoil that led to the protests of 1968 which were spurred by the culmination of the disillusionment of humanity that resulted from the violence and atrocities of World War II and anti-war activism of American involvement in the Vietnam conflict. What Wallerstein calls “the world revolution of 1968, which presaged the long-terminal phase of the modern world-system in which we find ourselves and which undermined the centrist liberal geoculture that was holding the world-system together” (x). Wallerstein describes the world revolution of 1968 as the period in which two things occurred to disrupt the world-system:

One was the rejection of U.S. hegemonic power, simultaneously with a complaint that the Soviet Union, the presumed antagonist of the United States, was actually colluding in the

world order that the United States had established. And the second was that the traditional anti-systemic movements had not fulfilled their promises once in power.²⁶ (84)

This revolution was in many ways the impetus for identification and study of the modern world-system in an effort to understand the world in which we live and, in turn, contemplate potential alternatives to this system. As Wallerstein points out though, it is the combination of all three of these historical events which have helped create the modern capitalist world-system within which we presently live as they were pivotal in changing the seemingly inherent and immutable dominant societal paradigms.

Part Two

Braudel's *économie-monde*, or world economy, "is a large geographic zone within which there is a division of labor and hence significant internal exchange of basic or essential goods as well as flows of capital and labor" (Wallerstein 23). As countries developed at varying degrees of speed, this division of labor eventually led to a bifurcation of the world into the hierarchy that makes up the core-periphery model: core, semi-periphery, periphery, and external countries. The core-periphery model, applied to the social science studies field by Raúl Prebisch in the 1950s, outlines this symbiotic relationship wherein each type of country has come to rely upon the others to sustain the intricate web woven by the development of such a world-system. At its most basic, the idea is fairly straightforward dependency theory and assumes only the existence of core and periphery countries: "Some countries were stronger than others (the core) and were therefore able to trade on terms that allowed surplus-value to flow from the weaker countries (the periphery) to the core" as a process of unequal exchange (Wallerstein 12). Arguing that this

²⁶ Wallerstein notes of *anti-systemic movements*: "I invented this term to cover together two concepts that had been used since the nineteenth century: social movements and national movements. I did this because I believed that both kinds of movements shared some crucial features, and that both represented parallel modes of asserting strong resistance to the existing historical system in which we live, up to and including wishing to overthrow the system" (91).

model was much too simplified, Wallerstein added to it semi-periphery and external countries.²⁷ External countries within the model are places which have been able to maintain an exclusive economic system and have not assimilated into the world-system, while semi-periphery countries exist in the grey area somewhere between the two extremities; exhibiting characteristics of each, and may at any point be considered either a core region in decline or a periphery country jockeying to improve its lot in the system.

It is these countries, Wallerstein claims, which struggle most with their position in the core-periphery hierarchy: “Under pressure from core states and putting pressure on peripheral states, their major concern is to keep themselves from slipping into the periphery and to do what they can to advance themselves toward the core” (29). They not only produce finished products to be exported to peripheral countries, but they also import a multitude of various products from core countries. Examples of semi-periphery countries in our time include Portugal, Turkey, Mexico, Spain, South Korea, Brazil, and India—“countries with strong enterprises that export products (for example steel, automobiles, pharmaceuticals) to peripheral zones, but that also regularly relate to core zones as importers of more ‘advanced’ products” (Wallerstein 30).

Peripheral countries are those weakest regions of the world which primarily export raw materials to core and semi-peripheral regions and are, in turn, forced to then import finished goods and products back from those more industrialized places. Thomas Barfield adds further that the periphery “produces raw materials and is marked by weak states, a small bourgeoisie, and a large peasant class” (498). The majority of Africa is constituted of countries that display attributes of being peripheral, as well as much of underdeveloped Southeast Asia and the lesser developed regions of South America. This hierarchy developed primarily as the result of

²⁷ Margaret Anderson and Howard Taylor point out, “Another way that countries are sometimes [more commonly] labeled is as first, second, and third world nations. This language grows out of the politics of the Cold War and reflects the political and economic dimensions of global stratification” (250).

historical colonization by dominant outside forces early in the development of these regions when they were exploited for their resources, as Wallerstein further clarifies:

The weakest states are those we call colonies, by which we mean administrative units that are defined as non-sovereign and fall under the jurisdiction of another state, normally distant from it... To ensure the incorporation of such areas into the world-system in a satisfactory manner, these areas were conquered and colonial regimes installed. (55)

Although colonial takeover dates back to 1492, the residual effects continue to plague those colonized regions, keeping them locked into a cycle of oppression from which it is nearly impossible to surmount—due primarily to the core regions that control the system and maintain its existence for their own benefit.

An inevitable eventuality as surplus-value raw goods move from the periphery to the core, is the periphery's development of dependency upon those core countries. Many times, regions in the periphery will devote all of their country's efforts and resources toward the development and extraction of one particular good for export—bananas, timber, or minerals, for example – but, once a core country no longer needs that item, has exploited it to its end, or is able to find it elsewhere for less cost, the products and the periphery are abandoned. In this, core regions not only have control of the system, but they are also to continually oppress periphery countries while at the same time maintaining their role in the upper echelons of global wealth. Any progressive attempts made by peripheral countries to increase prices on products or unionize labor for better wages or working conditions are suppressed by core regions as they simply move on to the next viable option of peripheral supplier. Notably, these exports are not necessarily limited specifically to raw materials, but can also draw on export of people as migrant laborers or emigration of white-collar intelligentsia to core regions, attracted by potential

for greater prosperity (a phenomenon known as “brain drain”). Additionally, outsourcing communication labor and use of sweatshop labor from core to periphery countries can be considered alternative forms of export. Wallerstein points out that “the very weak states, which contain a disproportionate share of peripheral production processes, are usually unable to do very much to affect the axial division of labor, and in effect are largely forced to accept the lot that has been given them,” thereby further perpetuating the illusion that there seemingly is no alternative to the present system (29). The reality of the system, however, is that it is knowingly controlled by those core regions that reap all of the financial rewards and consistently benefit from overt exploitation of peripheral regions. To effectively change the endlessly oppressive cycle of such a system would need to be instigated by core countries; however to do so, would essentially equate to financial suicide graves as the result would be an economically egalitarian society.

The opposite of peripheral regions, core countries, are the most wealthy nations of the globe and, as Barfield argues, they specialize in “advanced industrial production and distribution” while they are “marked by relatively strong states, a strong bourgeoisie, and a large working class” (498). Core countries are the ones wielding control over the markets of various raw materials because they choose the peripheral countries from which to buy. “Core states, acting on behalf of the capitalist class, extract materials, cheap labor, and new markets from the other regions,” Barfield explains, yet with the presence of a multitude of countries on the periphery from which to choose, as well as those places being dependent upon those core countries’ patronage, they are often exploited as they have very little control over which core buyers they sell to and at what prices. Wallerstein emphasizes this point:

What we mean by core-periphery is the degree of profitability of the production processes. Since profitability is directly related to the degree of monopolization, what we essentially mean by core-like production processes is those that are controlled by quasi-monopolies. Peripheral processes are then those that are truly competitive. (28)

In this sense, then, it is peripheral countries vying for the sale of their products to core regions that in many ways feeds this cycle of oppression. As goods and workers become cheaper in one peripheral region, those with similar products must in turn make sacrifices to lower costs and once again become a financially appealing option to core buyers. To further solidify this notion, Wallerstein explains that when these types of exchanges occur, “competitive products are in a weak position and quasi-monopolized products are in a strong position. As a result, there is constant flow of surplus-value from the producers of peripheral products to the producers of core-like products,” the flow of which is fueled by competition created among those peripheral countries (28). The outcome is that core countries have multiple options from which they can choose to buy products while peripheral countries are left constantly trying to attract buyers by cutting wages and production costs.

As core countries grow and become more and more powerful within this system, there is inevitable competition between the strongest regions to contend for dominance over all others. Wallerstein asserts that there are two different manners in which regions may attain that status within the world: one is to transform the system from a world-economy into a world-empire and the second is to achieve the level of hegemony in the world-system (57). As previously defined, the world-empire has only one single political center, whereas a world-economy exists under multiple political centers. Throughout history, there have been attempts to establish a world-empire – Napoleon Bonaparte’s conquest of Europe in the early nineteenth century and Adolf

Hitler's quest for the *Lebensraum* in the mid-twentieth century are the most recent attempts.²⁸

Wallerstein acknowledges that only three core countries have ever acquired hegemonic power: the Netherlands in the mid-seventeenth century, the United Kingdom in the mid-nineteenth century, and the United States in the mid-twentieth century (57).

In terms of world-systems analysis, a hegemonic power is the dominant core country that holds economic, political, and military leverage over all other countries to give them “superiority over other strong states” within the system, “and therefore has both military and cultural leadership” over all states, both weak and strong, within the system—presently in 2011, it is the United States (Wallerstein 94). This power does *not* necessarily need to be asserted over those states, but it is merely the threat of their strength that maintains order within the hierarchy. As other core countries could potentially combine their resources to usurp the globe's hegemonic power if the need should arise, such as the events of World War II for example, it is to an extent agreed upon which power holds that position. Wallerstein points out that the hegemonic powers in the past have been able to maintain control of the “interstate system, to dominate the world-economy (in production, commerce, and finance), to get their way politically with a minimal use of military force (which however they had in goodly strength), and to formulate the cultural language with which one discussed the world” (58). Through attaining the role of hegemon, those countries imposed their ideologies on a global scale of control and, in particular, over the weakest periphery regions. Additionally, despite a hegemon's loss of power, the cultural and political ideologies that it spread while in power perpetually influence present and future global systems. As William A. Williams declares in his article, “Expansion, Continental and

²⁸ Wallerstein describes that world-empires have not been successful in the past as they “in fact stifle capitalism, because it would mean that there was a political structure with the ability to override a priority for the endless accumulation of wealth” (58). In other words, a world-empire would potentially hinder “the endless accumulation of wealth” and with that, influences the world to stand up to the threat of such a takeover.

Overseas,” “Today, the sun never sets on American territory, properties owned by the U.S. government and its citizens, American armed citizens abroad, or countries that conduct their affairs within limits largely defined by American power” (365). Eventually, however, there will undoubtedly come a moment of crisis for the hegemonic power and the world-system over which it predominates as the one-hundred percent point or asymptote is reached. This is a point in time wherein the system can no longer progress, and, as Wallerstein asserts, “the system encounters problems it can no longer resolve, and this causes what we may call systemic crisis” (76).

A change in hegemonic power is necessary and unavoidable, as it creates stability within the world-system, and can come as a result of various circumstances based primarily on Kondratieff cycles of asymptotic analysis.²⁹ Wallerstein describes of this concept that, with the passage of time, if a “percentage is moving upward in an overall linear fashion, it means by definition that at some point it cannot continue to do so. We call this reaching the asymptote, or 100 percent point. No characteristic can be ascribed to more than 100 percent of any group” (31). This model applies to the capitalist world-system, in that “the endless accumulation of capital” cannot, by definition, go into infinitude as certain resources will eventually be exhausted to the point where they are either no longer profitable or simply no longer exist. With regard to the decline of a hegemony, Wallerstein writes:

To become a hegemonic power, it is crucially important to concentrate on efficiencies of production which lay the base for the hegemonic role. To maintain hegemony, the hegemonic power must divert itself into a political and military role, which is both expensive and abrasive. Sooner or later, usually sooner, other states begin to improve

²⁹ Wallerstein writes, “Hegemony typically occurs in the wake of a long period of relative breakdown of world order in the form of “thirty years’ wars”—wars, that is, that implicate all the major economic loci of the world-system and have historically pitted an alliance grouped around putative hegemonic power. Hegemony creates a kind of stability within which capitalist enterprises, especially monopolistic leading industries thrive. Hegemony is popular with ordinary people in that it seems to guarantee not merely order but a more prosperous future for all” (58).

their economic efficiencies to the point where the hegemonic power's superiority is considerably diminished, and eventually disappears. With that goes its political clout. And it is now forced to actually use its military power, not merely threaten to do so, and its use of military power is not only the first sign of weakness but the source of further decline. The use of "imperial" force undermines the hegemonic power economically and politically, and is widely perceived as a sign not of strength but of weakness, first externally then internally. (58-9)

In other words, while a hegemonic power must commit time and resources specifically to making excessive wealth and ever-increasing power on a global scale, lesser core regions concentrate specifically on making those gains within their own country. Once a hegemon extends its imperial reach too far, the resources for expansion inevitably diminish and, as a result, optimal control and dominance are undercut as the hegemony has reached the point of the asymptote of growth. Suffering from imperial overreach, the authoritative power has become overly diffused and refusal to slow down the endless accumulation of capital drives the hegemony down a path of eventual self-destruction.

This is a process which can presently be seen as the United States in the early twenty-first century faces its downfall as hegemony. Martin Jacques describes this decline in his book, *When China Rules the World*, wherein he points to "the burden of maintaining a huge global military presence, with over 800 American bases dotted around the world," as the root cause of the country's massive deficit, while he additionally asserts that the United States "has ceased to be a major manufacturer or a large-scale exporter of manufactured goods, having steadily ceded that position to East Asia" (7). Although America is a core region, through outsourcing its resources, the economic strength of the country has actually been compromised as fewer and fewer goods

are exported while continuously more are imported. The financial crisis the U.S. faced beginning in 2007 is one of the characteristics which Wallerstein points to as an earmark of a hegemon in decline: “We can expect, [as] we are already seeing, wild fluctuations in all the institutional arenas of the world-system. The world economy is subject to acute speculative pressures, which are escaping the control of major financial institutions and control bodies, such as central banks” (87). In addition to this, many have pointed to the September 11, 2001 destruction of the Twin Towers as the beginning of the end of American hegemony. Not only was this a blatant attack on innocent citizens, but also an outright challenge against the perceived military might of America, which played a pivotal part in maintaining its role at the apex of the global hierarchy of power. Although in many ways necessary, this actual use of military force to retaliate against such an attack is recognized as the lashing out of a hegemonic power well-aware of its fate. As the country’s power is challenged, Wallerstein points out that those involved in the system will make efforts to maintain the familiar methods which have to this point resulted in economic growth and prosperity, although this will only act to expedite the process. Wallerstein asserts that “The customary ways are the familiar ways, and they promise short-run benefits, or they would not be the customary ways” and now, the accustomed fashions of accumulation have “resulted in secular trends that are approaching asymptotes [and] continuing in customary ways simply aggravates the process. It makes sense in the very short run” (87). Now, the system is breaking down around populations that have only lived life within the hegemon and understand their existence solely in those terms as they desperately put more stock into the system that has traditionally resulted in prosperity; yet at the asymptote, there is nothing more to be reaped from the system so this only precipitates its finality. Wallerstein writes at the conclusion of *World-Systems Analysis* that there is no telling what the future holds for America’s role as hegemon

within the system, the only certainty is that history has demonstrated the results from a system in crisis and the effects of such. What will come next is the culmination of how that knowledge of the past can be best utilized to transition into a system which benefits the majority rather than the minority.

CHAPTER TWO

“There’s another rendering now; but still one text”: Currency and Multi-Legibility in *The Doubloon*

“Some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world is but an empty cipher.” -*Moby-Dick* (331)

“A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.”
-*Capital* (Marx, 42)

Arguing that Melville recognized the nature, trends, and developmental trajectory of globalization without necessarily having the specific contemporary terminology for the concepts, I have thus far laid out those ideas as presented by Immanuel Wallerstein. To support my thesis, this section focuses on Melville’s insights presented in his chapter *The Doubloon*, wherein he describes the reactions of various crew members as they look at and meditate upon the coin Ahab has offered as reward to the first man to sight the white whale in an earlier chapter, *The Quarter Deck*. In that chapter, Ahab summons the crew together to realign their mission’s goal as not just premised on “A dead whale or a stove boat,” but instead on seeking out his own vengeance against the white whale, which left him dismembered (137). To whosoever “of ye raises me a white-headed whale with a wrinkled brow and a crooked jaw; whosoever of ye raises me that white-headed whale, with three holes punctured in his starboard fluke” (the whale that ‘dismasted’ Ahab), the captain offers to that crewman as reward the valuable doubloon (138). “Look ye! d’ye see this Spanish ounce of gold? – holding up a broad bright coin to the sun - it is a sixteen dollar piece, men. D’ye see it?” (138). With this offering, the objectives of the crew

dramatically change as they commit to hunting one specific whale, known throughout the world to be particularly dangerous, while giving up on other more easily taken and financially profitable whales (138). The responses of various crewman to the doubloon will truly not address Ahab's question, "D'ye see it?" for another sixty-three chapters, in *The Doubloon*, as they each gaze upon the coin, individually deciphering its value.

The doubloon, made from "purest, virgin gold, raked somewhere out of the heart of gorgeous hills, whence, east and west, over golden sands, the head-waters of many a Pactolus flows" represents in itself the fact that Melville experienced the globe on a more intimate scale than did his contemporaries (332).³⁰ Notably, Melville utilizes this globally representative object, based upon a coin that was actually minted between 1838 and 1843, as Ahab's reward – not an American coin. This Spanish coin, forged in Quito, Ecuador, South America, is a representative artifact of the once vast Spanish empire that assumed control over native people of South America and territory in much the same manner as Europeans did North America. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville uses this coin to represent the expansiveness of the burgeoning American empire, as it took over the hemispheric control that once seemed to belong, in the South, to the Spanish Empire. As one empire was exchanged for another, the capitalist world system extended its tentacles out into further reaches of the globe and the whaling industry played an inextricable part in furthering that venture. Through this worldly coin, Melville creates an object

³⁰ *Pactolus* refers to the Pactolus River, a stretch of water in Turkey with a vibrant historical and mythological past which truly fleshes out the multidimensionality of well thought-out, greed-filled reference made herein by Melville in the shape of the coin. Melville refers to the myth of King Midas, well known in mythology for having been granted his vain prayer to have the 'golden touch,' came to find the blessing in all actuality a curse, as all food and drink he came in contact with was also transformed. Lest he starve to death, he was instructed to bathe in the Pactolus River to reverse the torment bequeathed unto him. Mythology claims that from the day of his cure, the river's silt became rife with gold dust. Described in H.W. Wilson's *A Guide to the Ancient World*, the city of Sardes, nearest to the river, "subsequently became the capital of the powerful Lydian Kingdom (c 680–547/4)—whose monarchs issued the world's earliest coinage there, made of pale gold (electrum) washed down by the Pactolus" ("Sardes").

that reveals, to use one of the author's terms, the "multitudinous" dimensions of the economic world system and those who exist as cogs within it (321).

Melville writes in the opening paragraphs of *The Doubloon*, that certain material objects have value only because humanity has ascribed to them such: what Marx would call the *exchange-value* of a commodity.³¹ As a defining characteristic of *commodity*, exchange-value must be differentiated from *use-value* as the former refers to the exchange equivalent of an item compared to another item or items, while the latter is distinguished by an object's usefulness as defining value. Marx points out that use-value and exchange-value must always be distinguished, as "the exchange relation of commodities is characterized precisely by its abstraction from their use-values" (23). In Melville's claim that a "certain significance lurks in all things," he implies that the "significance" of an object does not necessarily refer to monetary value, but instead to exchange-value. Marx writes in *Capital* that "a commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another" (13). This concept is exemplified through the various reactions of crewmen of the *Pequod* as they closely examine the doubloon that Ahab has nailed to the ship's main mast as reward to the one who first spots the white whale. This coin, however, comes to represent much more than simply a monetized exchange item to each man who gazes upon it. Marx explains this phenomenon in reference to notion of a commodity:

The nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference. Neither are we here concerned to know how the object

³¹ *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought* defines *exchange-value* as follows:

"The exchange-value of a commodity consists of the quantity of some other commodity against which it will exchange in equilibrium conditions. When the other commodity is money, exchange-value becomes price. Exchange-value is a principal subject-matter of quantitative economics, and must be distinguished from (another term of classical economics) use-value, which requires independent theoretical treatment."
(*Exchange-Value*)

satisfies these wants whether directly as means of substance, or indirectly as means of production. (13)

From this stems the idea of commodity fetishism, which Marx identifies as essentially deriving from the “existence of the things *qua* commodities, and the value-relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities” (83). This relationship, however, does not arise from the objects themselves or the materials used to produce them. Marx concludes that “it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things,” meaning that this ‘relation’ is a product of human desire (83). Reading *Moby-Dick* with regard these terms allows for a solid foundation on which Melville’s writing can be related in even more concrete ways to the work of Wallerstein and the global capitalist system.

Marx is applied to Melville in subtle ways in Dan Beachy-Quick’s *A Whaler’s Dictionary*, his exhaustive study of the deeper meanings and interconnectedness of words and ideas within the novel. Beachy-Quick argues that the doubloon is a “medium of exchange”:

The distance between desire and the desired is a distance of exchange. The coin is a medium of exchange. Seeing the whale earns you sixteen dollars, the sum that is the sun. To see the whale is to begin the process of exchange. What is the white whale worth? Whoever sees the white whale begins a chase that is economic. *Purchase*’s etymology is to seek, to pursue in order to obtain. What does one purchase when one pursues Moby Dick? What is the nature of Ahab’s currency exchange? (64)

The marketplace of exchange, one could say, extending Beachy-Quick, is not simply America, it is the world. In his claim, Beachy-Quick asserts the doubloon’s role as a product of exchange within the capitalist world system – ‘sixteen dollars’. “What is the white whale worth?” he asks. Well, as a commodity with a linear value, it is the worth current global market value for the oil,

baleen, and other saleable products it contains. But, as we see from each crewman, the white whale is in a sense a “medium of exchange” that exists on an infinite number of various levels, the most revealing of which comes from Pip—the madman. I would argue that Beachy-Quick’s statement regarding the “distance between desire and the desired is a distance of exchange” refers specifically to Melville’s intention to lay out within the chapter an analysis of the doubloon, showing that this object represents as many different values as there are various crewmen from around the world aboard the ship that sails the seas of an economically globalized world. The exchange-value of the object varies as each determines what its worth would be to them individually, not as a mass of people agreeing on a more certain and linear value as an exchange good. What Pip reveals in his observation of the doubloon is the commodity fetishism that develops as various figures evaluate the coin. In his insanity, he assumes the role of an oracle, aware of the inevitability of the asymptote as the ship reaches for accumulation beyond its means.³²

There are plenty of instances throughout the narrative pointing to an ill-fated end to the *Pequod*; however, the crew has opted to discount these, tempted by the doubloon. Ahab’s seemingly simple solution to stave off the possibility of mutiny as he pursues his singular goal has convinced the crew to overlook the bigger picture of what they are committing to, and, instead, focus on one particular end without regard for the potential outcomes which have been foretold. “What does one purchase when one pursues Moby Dick? What is the nature of Ahab’s currency exchange?” To answer Beachy-Quick’s postulation, chasing this particular loose fish enlists each man into the ranks of the global capitalist system. However, despite the individual exchange values the crew assigns to the doubloon – representative of the capitalist world system – Melville predicts that the eventual realization of the asymptote is as inevitable as sinking of the

³² Refer to pages 34-35 herein for a definition of *asymptote*.

Pequod. Referring to Wallerstein's analysis, the global capitalist system based on limitless wealth simply cannot sustain itself because, "If over time the percentage is moving upward in an overall linear fashion, it means by definition that at some point it cannot continue to do so" (31). The endless accumulation of wealth does in fact have an end, and upon arrival at this point, like a ship headed full speed for a shoal, there is no option for a gentle conclusion.

In much the same manner that Ahab has heaped all in the world that he despises onto the hump of the white whale's back, so too has the crew in a similarly monomaniacal fashion piled all that they value into the small circumference of the doubloon. Melville makes a significant number of references to the concentric circles that seem to resonate from the coin itself: "this equatorial coin" nailed to the main mast at the center of the ship, a coin forged in "a country planted in the middle of the world," "the ship's navel" is as magnetic to the crew of the *Pequod* as the planet's molten core to the ship's compass (332-5). Shined by Ahab on his jacket, the coin is as a mirror facing another mirror, creating an endless hall of images, and in turn, reflecting infinite meaning upon a symbol which has a translated worth based upon what that person most values: "For it was set apart and sanctified to one awe-striking end; and however wanton in their sailor ways, one and all, the mariners revered it" (332). The initial brief description of the coin is that upon it "you saw the likeness of three Andes' summits; from one a flame; a tower on another; on the third a crowing cock" (332). Issuing from the first summit, it seems logical to align this flame with the combustible that drives this narrative as a taper burning the oil of whales massacred by Americans for an industry driven solely by profit. The Babel-like tower, perhaps symbolic of what Melville would refer to in *John Marr* as "another successive overleaped limit of civilized life...in places over-populous with towns over-opulent," as man's hubristic drive to conquer the world around him came represented by an attempt to build a tower

to heaven (396). And finally, what Ahab describes as “the courageous, the undaunted, the victorious fowl,” which seems so naturally analogous to the eagle, symbolically meant to convey those same characteristics representative of the American national identity. As Ahab says of the coin, “this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self” (332). Even the term for the coin itself, doubloon, carries within it the word *double*, reflecting this dual nature (*doubloon* is actually derivative of the Spanish word *doblón*, meaning “double”). In this chapter, as each man faces the burnished coin, he has reflected back upon himself a different aspect of the economic world system which Wallerstein will come to describe in *World Systems Analysis* over one hundred years later. Melville, as this thesis argues as a whole, bridges the historical gap between the 19th and 21st centuries, making clear the nature of capitalism’s *longue durée*.

As Ahab shines the coin to “heighten its lustre” for the crew of the *Pequod*, he adds radiance to a symbol for the capitalist world system that drives the crew to the far reaches of the terraqueous globe in search of profit, the primary source of their individual motivations. Ahab, whom Marx would refer to as *the capitalist*, offers up a commodity which is in fact monetary to the crew, the *labor power*. Their use-value is not only the physical labor utilized to keep the ship functioning, but also the insurmountable risks taken again and again through their countless assaults on whales in the name of profit. Quito, Ecuador, at the mid-section of the planet is the very omphalos of the globe in much the same way the round coin has become the central focus of the ships’ crew who, “however wonton in their sailor ways, one and all, [...] revered it as the white whale’s talisman” (332). Each crewman is magnetically drawn to the doubloon for reasons and for profits as varied and different as they are. The coin becomes a source of gravity the same as the center of the earth, the “navel” of a series of concentric circles. As each man

looks at the coin, their interpretation of what is seen represents a certain aspect of Wallerstein's analysis of the capitalist world system.

As for Captain Ahab, he sees in the coin the all-encompassing capitalist system that he is a cog within – a role which he now rebels against. *Moby-Dick* takes place at period in which Ahab, sparked by the violent loss of his leg, is going through a crisis of existence as he realizes that he's committed his entire life up to this point to fulfilling his part within the capitalist system. Now, he is crippled and ruined and as for remuneration to such committed servitude, he has received very little return in terms of the life and limb he has quite literally sacrificed. Ahab seemingly understands capitalism's ability to endlessly accumulate profit; however, after surviving an immensely traumatic event, he has now focused his attention on the due vengeance he views as a different form of profit.³³ He sees in the doubloon "something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; [...] three peaks as proud as Lucifer" (332). The captain's observation discloses a kinship with the fallen angel who in Biblical history suddenly found himself, because of his rebellion, sundered by those who were at one time his peers.³⁴ Ahab has come to realize that the *Pequod's* investors care little for him as a person, but only view him as a tool to accumulate profit. "I'm all aleak myself," Ahab reveals to Starbuck who urges him to stop the ship so a leaking oil cask in the ship's hold might be repaired, "Yet I don't stop to plug my leak; for who can find it in the deep-loaded hull; or how

³³ Ahab, once outside of the capitalist system, views the white whale in terms of how its capture will fulfill his desires and needs:

Nantucket market! Hoot! But come closer, Starbuck; thou requirest a little lower layer. If money's to be the measurer, man, and the accountants have computed their great counting-house the globe, by girdling it with guineas, one to every three parts of an inch; then, let me tell thee, that my vengeance will fetch a great premium here! (139)

³⁴ There are additional likenesses between Lucifer, who proclaimed himself a deity, and Ahab, "their supreme lord and dictator" who "would strike the sun if it insulted me," in many ways does likewise (107, 140). In Luke 10.18, "Satan as lightning fall from heaven" is struck down in the same manner as Ahab, "Old Thunder" who has presumably been struck by lightning: "Oh! thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on these seas I as Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee, that to this hour I bear the scar" (382).

hope to plug it, even if found, in this life's howling gale?" (362). Ahab's trauma incites the steady decline of a man of once sound reason and thought into a madman, driven solely by monomaniacal rage not influenced by the promise of monetary profit, but solely vengeance:

It is not probable that this monomania in him took its instant rise at the precise time of his bodily dismemberment. Then, in darting at the monster, knife in hand, he had but given loose to a sudden, passionate, corporal animosity; and when he received the stroke that tore him, he probably but felt the agonizing bodily laceration, but nothing more. Yet, when by this collision forced to turn towards home, and for long months of days and weeks, Ahab and anguish lay stretched together in one hammock, rounding in mid winter that dreary, howling Patagonian Cape; then it was, that his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing, made him mad. That it was only then, on the homeward voyage, after the encounter, that the final monomania seized him, seems all but certain from the fact that, at intervals during the passage, he was a raving lunatic; and, though unlimbed of a leg, yet such vital strength yet lurked in his Egyptian chest, and was moreover intensified by his delirium, that his mates were forced to lace him fast, even there, as he sailed, raving in his hammock. In a strait-jacket, he swung to the mad rockings of the gales. (156-7)

After Ahab "lay like dead for three days and nights," he is risen again a changed man bent on revenge, not solely focused on the whale, but on the capitalist system to which he has been a slave for much of his life and, whether he is conscious of it or not, this is what the whale has come to represent to him (87). Despite the fact that his lay as a captain would have given him a decent payout concluding a successful voyage, as he lies delirious and writhing with pain after losing a limb, Ahab eventually concludes that the capitalist system cares little for his well-being

and his pay is worth nothing if he does not even live to spend it. C.L.R. James writes in *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, that with the pain and suffering that came from the loss of Ahab's leg, his "doubts and difficulties and frustrations about the world in which he lived came to a head. In *Moby Dick*, he decided, was the solution of his problems. If he killed Moby Dick it would solve all that was troubling him" (9). As one might imagine, this traumatic brush with death completely changes Ahab's perspective on the life he has up to this point lived and causes him to question the career to which he has devoted his life.

Although it is often argued that through his monomania Ahab descended into complete madness, I would assert that the captain has not entirely lost his sanity. Although his sole companion becomes the idiot Pip, himself given over to madness after falling overboard where he "saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. . . . God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad" (321). That Ahab is not wholly lunatic is demonstrable in the differential way in which Pip's madness is depicted in *Moby-Dick*. Pip's madness is directly described through the observations of various crewmen and located in the babblings of his nonsensical speech and strange actions. Ahab on the other hand, maintains enough clarity of mind to communicate with his shipmates and continues to captain the ship in a way that, although disagreeable, is still effective enough to maintain control. In his search for Moby-Dick, for instance, Ahab does not pass by opportunities to pursue killable whale, as a captain who has become completely mad would likely do. Additionally, Melville provides the reader glimpses into a consciousness that is rational and clear: there are moments at which Ahab contemplates giving up the hunt for the white whale. In "The Symphony," readers witness a crack in the hard

exterior of Ahab as he thinks back on the fruitless life he has lived as a result of becoming a whaler, as revealed to Starbuck:

When I think of this life I have led; the desolation of solitude it has been; the masoned, walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness [...] that young girl-wife I wedded past fifty, and sailed for Cape Horn the next day, leaving but one dent in my marriage pillow - wife? wife? - rather a widow with her husband alive! Aye, I widowed that poor girl when I married her, Starbuck [...] how the richer or better is Ahab now? [...] Close! stand close to me, Starbuck; let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God. (405-6)

These are not the ranting's of a madman, but the words of a man who is facing the crisis of coming to terms with the life he has lived to this point.

James adds further support to this designation of Ahab's madness as contingent on a capitalist world-system pointing, out that "Never for a single moment does it cross [Ahab's] mind to question his relations with the people he works with. Those relations he accepts" (8). The trauma of the violent near-death event which Ahab has experienced causes him to examine the life he has led up until this incident and is the impetus for his crisis. Melville points out specifically that "Small reason was there to doubt, then, that ever since that almost fatal encounter," Ahab came to put upon the whale, "...not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations" (156). The author asserts in these lines that Ahab's bodily disfigurement is not the only consequence of this occurrence, but that the results extend beyond the wound. Ahab is left "Gnawed within and scorched without, with the infixed, unrelenting fangs of some incurable idea"; that "incurable idea" being complete disillusionment

with the system that has controlled and driven his life to this point (158). In this progression of thought he comes to discover that up until this crisis of nearly dying, he has not lived a single day fulfilling his own needs. “The masoned, walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness” has pushed Ahab into the reaches of social excommunication, giving rise to the initial inklings of his breaking away from the system (405). As the self-reliant captain of a vessel with only one goal for this voyage, he sees reflected in the coin the only person he knows he can trust at this point—himself:

The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab; and this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self. (332)

Opposite Starbuck, Ahab sees the world not as a spiritual place, filled with the wonders of God’s work, but instead the global economic marketplace that drives everything, a conclusion culled from nearly half a century of experience as a whaler. He has awakened to the reality that his life was not lived for himself, but for those who invested only money, not sweat equity, into whaling:

Forty - forty - forty years ago! - ago! Forty years of continual whaling! forty years of privation, and peril, and storm-time! forty years on the pitiless sea! for forty years has Ahab forsaken the peaceful land, for forty years to make war on the horrors of the deep!
(405)

Ahab’s life has not been lived in the world of psalms, or prayers, nor blind faith and hope, but instead in a global world where charts, compasses, sextants, and a hand on the tiller determine one’s fate rather than providence. It is economic gain that Ahab has been pushed to pursue for the vast majority of his life, and he has become well-aware of the futility of such, as made

evident through his claim referring to the problems of man. “Great pains, small gains for those who ask the world to solve them; it cannot solve itself” is not the thinking of one who believes the almighty hand of God will protect him in times of turmoil, but instead of a man who has come to rely upon only his own grit and strength to survive in a much larger arena of struggle in the world system (332). Ahab, up until the loss of his limb, had been content to exist within that system, but as James further describes it, this event has left him forever changed:

If there descends upon [men] a violent catastrophe that ruins them and convinces them that the life that they have been living is intolerable and the grave doubts that have previously tormented them are justified, then they are going to throw aside all the traditional restraints of civilization. They are going to seek a new theory of society and a program of action, and, on the basis of this theory and this program, they are going to act.
(8-9)

Ahab has worked his way up through ranks as a cog in the global economic system, from being a sailor (wage-earner) with a lay similar to Ishmael’s, to becoming the captain of a whaling ship and her crew. In the final chapters of *Moby-Dick*, however, Melville presents a man in the midst of a crisis, realizing that his existence has been making profit for others:

When I think of this life I have led; the desolation of solitude it has been; the masoned, walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness, which admits but small entrance to any sympathy from the green country without - oh, weariness! heaviness! Guinea-coast slavery of solitary command!³⁵ [...] the madness, the frenzy, the boiling blood and the smoking brow, with which, for a thousand lowerings old Ahab has furiously, foamingly

³⁵ Giving this sentence an interesting double meaning to the idea of “Guinea-coast slavery”, Ahab also makes the claim: “If money's to be the measurer, man, and the accountants have computed their great counting-house the globe, by girdling it with guineas, one to every three parts of an inch; then, let me tell thee, that my vengeance will fetch a great premium here!” (139)

chased his prey - more a demon than a man! - aye, aye! what a forty years' fool - fool - old fool, has old Ahab been! Why this strife of the chase? why weary, and palsy the arm at the oar, and the iron, and the lance? how the richer or better is Ahab now? (405)

After forty years of his integration into this system, Ahab, who is well aware of the potential for the huge profits in the whaling industry, has become disillusioned by the allure the sea and the grandeur of life as a whaleman, understanding that the culmination of all of his efforts have essentially left him with nothing. He is the one who has made all of the sacrifices to accumulate immense profit for others, *not* the investors. He married a woman whom he immediately abandoned for whaling, he has a son whom he does not know because of whaling, and he has “fed upon dry salted fare” inherent to the trade for most of his life, also for the sake of whaling (405). Referring to the hard tack he has endured as the “fit emblem of the dry nourishment of my soul,” Ahab is a man who has not even had the pleasure of ever eating a satisfying meal (405). These basic components of life were stripped away for “the honor and the glory of whaling” and this pursuit of maritime profit has left Ahab, as the captain of a vessel, alone and broken. As readers, we are witnessing Ahab’s realization that the culmination of his life’s combined efforts and sacrifices have been for naught – squandered in a system wherein others have accumulated immense profits, using him as a puppet to achieve such ends. Within the pages of *Moby-Dick*, Ahab is in a position where he has chosen to break the fetters of the capitalist system that has enslaved him and for once work for something from which *he* profits.

If Ahab’s reaction to the coin reveals a man who no longer accepts his role within the system, Starbuck sees the doubloon through a looking glass framed by his Quaker upbringing and the similarly indoctrinated ideologies of the global capitalist system. Wallerstein’s description of this system is one of indoctrinated beliefs and an ideology that influences both

choices and motivations. Ideology, defined by Wallerstein, is “more than a set of ideas or theories [and] more than a moral commitment or worldview. It is a coherent strategy in the social arena from which one can draw quite specific political conclusions” (60). Based upon his own ideology, it is the great and mysterious works of God that pious Starbuck, Melville’s personified Quaker, sees when gazing at the doubloon, evident as the first mate approaches the coin and observes:

A dark valley between three mighty, heaven-abiding peaks, that almost seem the Trinity, in some faint earthly symbol. So in this vale of Death, God girds us round; and over all our gloom, the sun of Righteousness still shines a beacon and a hope. (333)

A Quaker to the very core, his thoughts echo Psalms, “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me” (23.4). When Starbuck views the coin, the religious beliefs which have come to make up his constitution limit the lens through which he interprets the doubloon. His upbringing and the doctrines of Quakerism are so ingrained in Starbuck’s intellectual architecture that there is no alternative but to see the world in this way. Similarly, the ideologies of the capitalist world system have left people to view and understand functions of humanity through one particular lens, and it is the only perspective they have ever known.³⁶ Despite the plausibility of various other ideological paths, the capitalist system is the one most adhered to and most trusted particularly the result of its familiarity. As Melville makes clear, the ideologies of Christianity and capital are essentially one in the same as their influence is proliferated by those who are their disciples.³⁷ In this way capitalism and Christianity formulate an integral and symbiotic

³⁶ Refer to the notation on page 19 herein describing Thatcher’s acronym *TINA*, “There Is No Alternative.”

³⁷ See direct discussion of the relationship between ideologies of capitalism and Christianity below on page 53.

relationship as, for instance, new territories are discovered where commodities may be extracted while at the same time religious decrees are indoctrinated into native peoples.

A glaring example of this is the Manifest Destiny ethos that pervaded American thought as the country began to expand continentally and globally in the early and mid-nineteenth century. In 1845 John L. O'Sullivan, the *New York Morning News* editor who first used the term *Manifest Destiny*, claimed that it was God's will that Americans expand their territory across the continent:

... in a spirit of hostile interference against us, for the avowed object of thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions (2).

American colonists overran and conquered the continent "like so many Alexanders," as Melville would claim of the Nantucketers who went out into the world (65). In doing so, they not only increased the amount of land that America controlled, but also the abundant resources present within those newly acquired territories. Melville recognized that the expansionist mindset would not simply end as Americans reached the western shores of North America, but through his experience as a whaler, saw that the country would continually extend its reach:

Let America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let the English overswarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun; two thirds of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketer's. For the sea is his; he owns it, as Emperors own empires; other seamen having but a right of way through it. (65)

Imperative for accumulation of capital is the need for a steady, dependable supply of the resources necessary to support continual expansion. Wallerstein states that "the imperative of

the endless accumulation of capital [generates] a need for constant technological change, a constant expansion of frontiers”; these processes of expansion and accumulation are plainly evident as Manifest Destiny fueled America’s growth (2). Those who followed the commandments of capitalism and gave themselves over to it completely were the ones who most prospered from its potential, which is still true today. Fearing that he may be drawn into false idolatry of what is, ultimately, a worldly possession – a coin – Starbuck can’t bear to look at it for very long before he must move on, thus also limiting the amount of time in which he may potentially have had any of his own thoughts as to the coin’s meaning.

Interestingly, as Auden writes, “Whalemen kill for their living [...] The proprietors of the *Pequod* are Quakers, i.e., they profess the purest doctrines of non-violence, yet see no incongruity in this” (62). The ability for capitalism to override all other beliefs and morals becomes evident through this. Melville writes that “Ex officio professors of Sabbath breaking are all whalemen,” and Starbuck, as well as other Quaker characters throughout *Moby-Dick*, Peleg and Bildad for instance, make no efforts to hide their true goals of profit for their investment in the *Pequod* (244). They instead justify their actions and prosperity as the will of God, in much same way as do the propagators of Manifest Destiny – this justification is evident as Bildad cries out to the departing ship, “Don't whale it too much a' Lord's days, men; but don't miss a fair chance either, that's rejecting Heaven's good gifts” (96). Starbuck, ever the capitalist, is always looking to the necessary financial result of this voyage, as is clarified when faced with Ahab’s proposed outcome:

I am game for his crooked jaw, and for the jaws of Death too, Captain Ahab, if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow; but I came here to hunt whales, not my

commander's vengeance.³⁸ How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, Captain Ahab? it will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market. (139)

As the ideologies of his religious upbringing saturate his view of the world around him, so too do the ideologies of the capitalist system. Starbuck will do anything necessary to see that the financial goals of the ship are met; even face death, for “the way of the business” that drives him to chase after profit. Ahab’s vengeance is similarly motivated, and his drive to succeed in finding and killing the whale has reached such an extent that it cannot be impeded by any obstacle. Starbuck’s observation that his captain has seen upon the coin’s surface the dark prophecies written to King Belshazzar by a disembodied hand carries with it a true Melvillian twist of irony.³⁹ Despite his righteous beliefs, Starbuck is no different in his quest for oil from Belshazzar in his worship of “the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone” (Dan. 5.22-3). “This coin speaks wisely, mildly, truly, but still sadly to me. I will quit it, lest Truth shake me falsely,” Starbuck poetically muses on the doubloon; however he is already slave to this false idol and the system that produced it (333).

Similar to Starbuck, an often simplistically philosophical Stubb sees the doubloon through the lens of what Wallerstein would call the *longue durée* and a unidisciplinary outlook that has been developed through his experiences travelling a world without economic boundaries. His perspective’s inclusion of the *longue durée* and a unidisciplinary attitude are

³⁸ Melville’s familiarity with the Bible is abundantly evident, and he was likely aware of God’s assertion that mortal man does not have the authority to enact vengeance upon those who have wronged him, but it is instead his duty to do so: “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom 12.19).

³⁹ A Biblical reference to the impending destruction of Babylon as prophesied by God for Belshazzar’s blatant blasphemy and worship of false idols. Here Melville seems to create an analogy between the King, the captain, and the mate:

Belshazzar has not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone. (Dan. 5.22-3)

important because they contribute to the breakdown of territorial and economic boundaries, opening up the world to be viewed for the single unit that it is. Auden writes that a figure like Stubb “who almost makes a religion out of the comic is unable to face suffering. He is bound to deny it and look the other way. When Stubb looks at the Doubloon, he abstracts from it the features which can fit into his view of life and ignores the rest” (130). Noting that this doubloon is not unlike any other coins he has come across in his travels, Stubb wonders what about it could be “so killing wonderful” (333). Through his oceanic voyages as a whaler, he has had plenty of opportunities to come in contact with coins from across the planet, as he casually points out:

I have seen doubloons before now in my voyagings; your doubloons of old Spain, your doubloons of Peru, your doubloons of Chili, your doubloons of Bolivia, your doubloons of Popayan; with plenty of gold moidores and pistoles, and joes, and half joes, and quarter joes. (333)

Through this, one can conclude that Stubb is not a man simply of America, but he has become integrated into the much larger economic system of the globe. Like Melville, he sees that the world economic system is not controlled by humanity’s manifestation of ideas such as the nation-state, but instead has no limiting bounds. As discussed herein, Wallerstein points out that the breakdown of reliance on the nation-state is one of the first and most important aspects of global world system and is necessary for progress (16).

Stubb, learning from Bowditch’s *Epitome* and an almanac that the signs depicted on the coin’s face are symbols of the zodiac, describes the significance of each as he reads them off. His fixation on the coin’s astrological symbols points to both a global and unidisciplinary interpretation. This unidisciplinary approach to the history translates from Wallerstein’s maxims

of world system analysis in that the symbols of the zodiac, ancient in origin and representative of man's interconnectedness with the cosmos, demonstrate a wide-sweeping look at the universe represented on the coin's surface. Concepts behind the *longue durée* are exemplified and the "plurality of historical time," as mentioned by Dale Tomich in this paper's introduction (page 6), becomes evident through a subject such as the zodiac (1). Astrology has played an important role in society for much of history and is, in a sense, the genesis of most religious beliefs. From this beginning, as time progressed, various schisms branched from this main source and wove themselves into the various temporalities of mankind; they did not follow a linear path through history. Pointing out that it is "the life of man in one round chapter," Stubb's examination reveals a vast historical survey present between the coin's beveled edges. Concluding his interaction with the coin, Stubb observes of Flask's interpretation: "There's another rendering now; but still one text. All sorts of men in one kind of world, you see" (335). The coin offers Melville the opportunity to reveal a multitude of perspectives on not only the economic world system, but also the various aspects that make up that system. The zodiac on the doubloon represents much that has been historically held sacred; now, this coin represents the economic world system and its boundless limits which mankind has come to revere.

Taking a more pragmatic, conventional approach to the meaning of the doubloon, Flask sees it as only as an exchange item; a monetary reward for spotting the white whale: "I see nothing here, but a round thing made of gold, and whoever raises a certain whale, this round thing belongs to him. So, what's all this staring been about?" (334). Although this seems in many ways the simplest conversion of the coin, it is a return to both Melville's notion that "Some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth," as well as both Marx's concept of exchange value and Beachy-Quick's concept of the "distance of exchange". He then

gives the coin value as he sees fit: “It is worth sixteen dollars, that's true; and at two cents the cigar, that's nine hundred and sixty cigars. I wont smoke dirty pipes like Stubb, but I like cigars, and here's nine hundred and sixty of them” (334). Interestingly, however, the discerning reader would quickly realize that this math equates to the purchase of only eight-hundred cigars at the price of two cents each, whereas nine-hundred and sixty would leave Flask three dollars and twenty cents short. Why does Flask make this miscalculation?

My opinion is that likely Melville recognizes the tendency for the overextension and overspending that seem inherent to capitalism. Evident through his written notes, Melville is a knowingly bad speller, but it seems unlikely that a blatant detail such as this would make it also past editors to the presses, let alone twice in one paragraph. Like Ishmael, “having little or no money in my purse,” many of the sailors who joined the ranks of whalemens set upon their journeys by buying supplies from the investors whom they worked for only to become indebted to them (18). This was, for all intents and purposes, a form of indentured servitude wherein the financial return on a typical lay would not cover the debt owed. The tentacles of the capitalist system are ever-controlling as one attempts to break free from its constraints and, as Melville’s autobiography demonstrates, he and his family were no strangers to this.

Indeed, one character who knows and has analyzed the doubloon is the author himself. Melville, had he been a character numbered among the crew, would have also had something to say about the coin since money so dominated his existence from an early age. Melville’s father, Allan, who was a merchant of various French clothing items and accessories, squandered much of the family’s money on far-fetched investments in fashions that had very little in the way of demand.⁴⁰ Delbanco writes that “the yield from his talent was meager. Year by year, Allan

⁴⁰ In *Melville: His World and Work*, Andrew Delbanco, cites an advertisement Allan placed in a New York newspaper from 1824 conveying goods he dealt in:

turned his life into an almost sordid tale of reckless borrowing and groveling appeals for cash to carry him through the next promised bonanza” (20). A once prominent upper-class family that lived in a large, comfortable home and even had servants was slowly forced into consecutively smaller residences with less and less luxury. Allan eventually died in a fit of delirious insanity, leaving behind a destitute family. Charles Waugh writes of Melville that “he was thrust into poverty when his father lost his fortune through the vagaries of the global economic system in 1830, and he lost his father so shortly thereafter that it must have seemed his father's death was associated with the system itself” (203). As is pointed out by numerous scholars, Melville was deeply affected by having witnessed his father’s violent death.⁴¹ Allan’s overspending left the Melvilles to fend for themselves in a system that did not, and still does not, allow leniency for those facing turbulent times, but instead rewards only the endless accumulation of wealth – a lesson the author obviously never forgot. In a famous 1851 letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, just prior to the publication of *Moby-Dick*, Melville writes “Dollars damn me!” referring to the capitalist system that even goes so far as to limit his bounds as an author (*Moby-Dick* 539). In the end, the writer’s work was in fact so constrained by the need for financial income he felt that he was a failure: “What I feel most moved to write, that is banned, -- it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches” (*Moby-Dick* 539). In many ways, through a statement such as this, Melville becomes much like Ahab in that he is controlled by the very system of which he is such an integral part. Like the efforts of his whaling captain, the eventual outcome is primarily beneficial to those

Fancy Hdfks. and Scarfs ... Elastic and Silk Garters, Artificial Flowers, Cravat Stiffners, &c. Also in store ... rich satin striped and figured blk Silk Vestings, Gros de Naples Hdkfs, Belt and Watch Ribbons, 7-16 & 7-22 Silk Hose ... Horse Skin Gloves ... Cologne and Lavender Waters, &c. (20)

⁴¹ Melville references this incident through his character, Wellingborough Redburn, who recalls, “But I must not think, of those delightful days before my father became a bankrupt, and died, and we removed from the city; for when I think of those days, something rises up in my throat and almost strangles me” (*Redburn*, 44).

various people who have invested in a product that is expected to make them profit with little regard for those who do the work to achieve that end. For Ahab, it was hunting whales for the investors of the *Pequod* while, for Melville, it was writing only books that his publishers had determined fit would the formula to become successful. In each man, however, this pattern did not hold for long before the need for something greater overtook them. For Melville, it was, as he reveals to Hawthorne, the authoring of a “wicked book” that fulfilled only his own desires, disregarding its potential for financial profit in the capitalist system; an act which left him feeling not only “spotless as the lamb,” but also instilled in him the “profoundest sense of being” after having completed such a work (*Moby-Dick* 545).

As a culmination to the collective community analysis done in *The Doubloon*, the essential message of the chapter and the theme of inevitable catastrophic finality of the capitalist world system are brought to a head in Pip’s dialogue; Pip, the idiot mystic who sees the truth behind the coin that the others do not. It is Pip who, in his madness, “strikes through the mask” to the doubloon’s true purpose.⁴² Melville reveals the source of where this idea of the sanity of madness developed in *Hawthorne and His Mosses*, wherein he writes about Shakespeare’s King Lear, “Tormented into desperation, Lear the frantic King tears off the mask, and speaks the sane madness of vital truth” (*Moby-Dick* 522). When mad Pip exclaims, “Oh the gold! the precious, precious gold! –the green miser ‘ll hoard ye soon!” he has similarly torn off the mask to “speak the sane madness of vital truth” (335). He sees the magnetic draw of the coin and the effect it has upon the men: “Here’s the ship’s navel, this doubloon here, and they are all on fire to unscrew it. But, unscrew your navel, and what’s the consequence?” (335). The literal answer to

⁴² One of Ahab’s most important declarations is also derived from this:

Hark ye yet again, - the little lower layer. All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event - in the living act, the undoubted deed - there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? (140)

this rhetorical question is revealed in Parker's notation that "According to folklore, the consequence is that one's rectum falls off" (335). Continuing his soliloquy, Pip points out that, "Then again, if it stays here, that is ugly, too, for when aught's nailed to the mast it's a sign that things grow desperate," meaning that when the doubloon is gone, it will mean that it has been won by the crewman who's spotted Moby-Dick. This being the case, the prophecy that Pip forecasts will be well on the way to its conclusion. However, Pip in uttering his prophecy, leaves the crew balanced upon a double-edged sword since he designates the ship's fate as the seafloor, regardless of whether the white whale is sighted or not. If the doubloon is not removed, it will remain there as the ship goes down; Pip asserts: "How did it get there? And so they'll say in the resurrection, when they come to fish up this old mast, and find a doubloon lodged in it, with bedded oysters for the shaggy bark" (335). Pip's foretelling of the sinking of the *Pequod* indicates Melville's recognition of the unavoidable trajectory towards the notion of the asymptote that Wallerstein defines over a century later. Melville concludes *Moby-Dick* not with a successfully fulfilled capitalist venture, but instead with the sinking of his 'ship of state' as, "concentric circles [seize] the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, [carrying] the smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight" (427). Once the tradition of the capitalist world system is driven into a culture has been done in America, that course, like a whaleship at full-speed, cannot be simply diverted or reversed, but will continue on that trajectory until it destroys itself.

Beachy-Quick writes of the doubloon, "Seeing the whale inspire, the man on the masthead draws in his breath and exhales his song. He sings and earns a coin. His inspiration is not his song; his song sings at inspiration" (63). The inspiration that man sings at is the reward

of the coin itself. None of the men, except Ahab, are motivated by potential capture of the white whale. They only see the potential of what the reward offers to their particular life. Beachy-Quick continues his analysis pointing out that, “A purpose promises a transmigration of meaning. One substance is exchanged for another we believe to be of equal value” (64). Echoing Marxist thought, this observation describes the way in which exchange value of a commodity is determined. In the crewmen of the *Pequod*, we see what each believes to be his personal exchange value with regard to the doubloon; that worth which is derivative of their specific ideological beliefs. Starbuck sees his indoctrinated religious beliefs reflected back from the coin’s shiny surface, Stubb follows a string of reason around the coin’s perimeter, Flask equates simple exchange for an indulgence that would potentially leave him indebted, and Ahab sees the system which has consumed his being and whittled away at his life, the system he is now desperately rebelling against.

By giving these different values to the doubloon, Melville has created an object that represents multiple aspects of a unitary world economic system as varied as the *Pequod’s* globally diverse crew. Additionally, he has chosen to put these varied interpretations into single piece of gold, the mineral on which currency’s value has come to be based. Through the doubloon, Melville has woven a fabric tightly knit as sail cloth which represents a web of global interconnectedness centered upon a single inanimate object. Giving value to this object in such a way is derivative of the capitalist system overall and the ways in which profit functions. Interestingly, to add yet another dimension to the coin’s signification, the images described upon it had in fact been misinterpreted by Melville, as pointed out by Kathleen Kier in *A Melville Encyclopedia*: “His ‘flame’ is really a vulture; his ‘crowing cock’ is really a condor; there were no volcanoes on coins of Ecuador” (301-2). This aberration only further solidifies the idea that

many “renderings” can come of “one text,” as Stubb points out, and the coin as signifier has myriad meaning within the context of the global capitalist system (335).

Through the interpretations of various crew members, we see that Melville gives the coin as a globally valued exchange item larger significance than if he were to have selected an alternative reward for the sighting of the whale. According to Parker and Hayford’s footnote, the coin is valued at sixteen *Spanish* silver dollars, not sixteen *American* dollars. In that, the doubloon represents the capitalist system not limited only to America, but a system predicated on a global scale. When Melville takes time within the narrative to describe the details imprinted onto the South American coin with vivid acuity, and additionally points out that “it was set apart and sanctified” while “one and all, the mariners revered it,” he reveals the importance of this particularly artifact (332). “On its round border it bore the letters, REPUBLICA DEL EQUADOR: QUITO. So this coin came from a country planted in the middle of the world, and beneath the great equator, and named after it,” the novel’s narrator tells the reader, illuminating the fact that the central significance of the coin is as a representative of the global world market at the very heart of the planet, *not* as a representation of American capitalism. It is in this specific description we see Melville reaching past the bounds of American territory and writing on a much larger global scale.

Stubb’s observation that many “renderings” can come from this single object offers a clue that *The Doubloon* may require readers to look for “a little lower layer” within these pages (335, 140). As a whaleman, Stubb, like Melville, has been exposed to the globe in a manner vastly different than most other Americans during the mid-19th century. The various perspectives described in this chapter give insight to the observations and opinions developed by the author as a whaler, and through this, for Melville, what had been revealed was something “of

the checkered globe” (394). His global experiences are what made Melville an author who wrote not just about America, but about America’s role in a larger world system predicated on ideologies of capitalism. Ahab claims of *Moby-Dick*, “What is best let alone, that accursed thing is not always what least allures. He's all a magnet!” pulling the captain toward eventual self-destruction (340). Similarly, the insight of insane Pip identifies the doubloon as the magnetic attractant to the crew of the *Pequod*, driving them to the culmination of a disastrous end as they set their course on the maps and charts they find in the valuable doubloon, despite the consequences of which they have been repeatedly forewarned.

CHAPTER THREE

“Dollars Damn Me”: Melville’s Economic History, America, and the Writing of *Moby-Dick*, A Coda

Upon nearing completion of this project, I reflected back on my interpretations of *Moby-Dick* and the ideas that were at the heart of my specific analysis of Melville’s world and work. I came to the conclusion that two particular factors were primary influences on the author’s understanding of the global economic system and the role America fulfilled within it. The first, and most obvious, is Melville’s own worldly experience as a sailor who initially served aboard the *St. Lawrence*, a merchant vessel loaded with cotton as it was exported to England, and then, the *Acushnet*, a whaling vessel that traversed the globe in search of profit. It was in this manner that Melville beheld the globe as a man “who was long-eyed enough to understand the Pacific as a part of our geography, another West, prefigured in the Plains, antithetical,” as Charles Olson does excellent work summarizing in *Call Me Ishmael* (12-13). The second factor of influence (not quite so immediately evident) is Melville’s upbringing in a family that was consistently afflicted by economic strife. His once affluent family, through a series of unsuccessful businesses, over-borrowing, and misfortune, came to be bankrupted and financially ruined during the formative years of the author’s youth and any progress toward recovery of their financial situation was repeatedly thwarted by misfortune. This pattern of economic hardship would perpetually haunt Melville and his family through his death in 1891, at which time his status as a writer was completely forgotten.

Part One: “*I am Destitute of Resources*”

The economic biography of Melville reveals a Sisyphean struggle that would almost be comical were it not true. Through the details of his family's financial and class struggles one begins to piece together a history of hardships and gain an understanding of the ways in which these events deeply affected Melville. In *Melville: His World and Works*, Andrew Delbanco details a particularly pertinent event that Melville experienced which gives insight to his family's economic situation:

[On] a stormy October night in 1830, his business in ruins, and owing several months of back rent on his house, Allan Melvill, accompanied by eleven-year-old Herman, fled New York City via steamboat for Albany, where his wife and the rest of the children had preceded him.⁴³ (23)

What must Melville have been thinking as he and his father escaped the city in the dead of night, like wanted criminals? There is no way of knowing whether or not Allan Melvill admitted his economic inadequacies to his son that night, but what we do have are references Melville integrated into his writings, particularly a work like *Redburn*. These personal struggles and experience of financial loss are, in my opinion, one of the reasons why Melville gives particular attention in his work to the capitalist economic system and the role it plays on a larger scale in the world around him.

The once well-to-do Melvill family, was in the years following Allan's death plagued by poverty: the result of a series of poor business decisions and overextended credit. As Delbanco points out, "one thing at which Allan Melvill was adept was living beyond his means, and so his children grew accustomed to comfort and even a touch of opulence" (22). In an effort to elude

⁴³ *Melvill* was the original spelling of the family name; however, Allan's wife, Maria, added the "e" to their surname after his death, perhaps in an effort to distance the surviving Melville's from his economic failures and, as Delbanco writes, "signify her hopes for a fresh start" (22).

his debts and business failures, Allan moved his family to Albany, New York, where they could escape their past and start with a clean slate. Completely bankrupt at this point, Allan was forced to ask his father for financial support, as evident through an 1830 letter Delbanco cites, in which Allan writes, “I am destitute of resources and without a shilling [and] may soon be prosecuted for my last quarters rent...without immediate assistance I know not what will become of me” (23). If Melville, eleven years old at this time, did not have some intimation of his family’s financial burdens, they were certainly revealed to him a year later when, upon his father’s death, he and his brother, Gansevoort, were forced to quit school and join the labor force to contribute to familial expenses. Allan Melvill’s early demise, the result of a bout with pneumonia, came after a trip to Manhattan in blustery conditions and his death is directly related to his financial concerns, as Melvill travelled to the city with the intention to quell his debts. As earlier referenced (on page 58), Charles Waugh points out that Melville certainly would have correlated this event to his family’s struggles within the capitalist economic system.

Melville writes in his semi-autobiographical novel, *Redburn*, that at the age of twelve, he was made “to think much and bitterly before [his] time” as his family was forced to cope with the legacy of financial burden their father, Allan, left behind upon his death (15).⁴⁴ This statement is relevant to the central claims of this thesis in many ways, as Melville was a man whose world and economic experiences also pushed him “to think much and bitterly” *ahead* and *behind* his time in terms of the *longue durée* and to think, because poverty pushed him to do so, with a broad view of the global economic world-system. Melville demonstrates his

⁴⁴ Melville reveals that this account is semi-autobiographical in a letter regarding *Redburn* written to his publisher, Richard Bentley, in 1849:

I have now in preparation a thing of a widely different cast from "Mardi":—a plain, straightforward, amusing narrative of personal experience—the son of a gentleman on his first voyage to sea as a sailor—no metaphysics, no conic-sections, nothing but cakes & ale. I have shifted my ground from the South Seas to a different quarter of the globe—nearer home—and what I write I have almost wholly picked up by my own observations under comical circumstances. (318)

understanding of such in *John Marr*, where he writes, “whether as to persons or events, one cannot always be talking about the present; much less, speculating about the future; one must needs recur to the past” (394). Melville’s upbringing is characterized by a deterioration from a life of economic comfort to one of constant struggle and this experience exerted a major influence on his art. Melville reveals just how tremendously he was affected by the trauma of his family’s economic collapse in *Redburn*, where he writes, “Talk not of the bitterness of middle-age and after life; a boy can feel all that, and much more... And never again can such blights be made good; they strike in too deep, and leave such a scar that the air of Paradise might not erase it” (16). Having experienced this economic tumble at an impressionable age, he concludes that “it [is] a hardhearted world,” and, as a result of such, Melville continually maintains a critical, if not to say bleak, perspective in his writing on the capitalist system that left his family ruined. It seemed as though the Melvill’s were cursed as one financial woe followed another in a series of debts and bankruptcies that constantly pitted them against the system; it was a battle they would never win. This economic struggle had a profound effect on Melville’s worldview, as is evident throughout his oeuvre, and it would come to specifically drive much of the narrative in *Moby-Dick*.

As Delbanco details, following Allan Melvill’s death, Melville worked at odd jobs while Gansevoort followed their father’s footsteps into the “cap and fur business, and by the summer of 1834 he was doing well enough to hire his brother as his assistant, sending Herman’s wages straight into their mother’s account” (25). The family fortunes began to rise again due to the influx of capital earned by the brothers, but the family’s financial success was yet again ruined, when in 1835 a fire ravaged the store and destroyed most of their stock. Not long after this, the Depression of 1837 finished off what remained of the business, as money was scarce and people

were not spending on luxuries. This new catastrophe left the Melvill's once again bankrupted. Following this failed venture, Melville began a short-lived career as a teacher, a job for which he only received pay for two of his three years of service – once again a result of the Depression. This series of financial pitfalls lead Melville to take to the sea, perhaps in search of his own new beginning as a man who, like Ishmael, was “tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote” (*Moby-Dick* 22).

Part Two: “Over the Wide Watery World”

On June 5, 1839, at the age of twenty, Melville, like Ishmael, “having little or no money in [his] purse, and nothing in particular to interest [him] on shore,” enlisted in the merchant marines and boarded a ship bound for Liverpool, England in his first voyage across the Atlantic (*Moby-Dick* 18). Not long after returning to America, he signed on as crewman aboard the *Acushnet*, a transnational whaling vessel.⁴⁵ In these voyages, he was afforded the opportunity to travel to the far reaches of the world, populated by people with customs, histories, and lives vastly different from his own. The result of Melville's sea-roving experiences was that he gained a global perspective vastly different from that of land-locked Americans at the time. As W. Jeffrey Bolster writes of Atlantic sailors in *To Feel Like a Man*, they “had been shaped by shipboard cultural forms that endowed them with distinctive attitudes and perceptions” that did not necessarily fit with those of their shore bound counterparts (358). Melville not only saw New York and Massachusetts, but also the westernmost edge of the American frontier in Illinois, the Hawaiian Islands, Tierra del Fuego, France, England, Rome, Jerusalem, and the Marquesas Islands, specifically Nuku Hiva, the location of one of America's first off-continent colonial

⁴⁵ For more, see: Delbanco, Andrew. *Melville: His World and Work*. New York: Vintage, 2006, p 37.

exploits.⁴⁶ Melville's travels heightened his global awareness and played an indispensable role in the development of "a keen sense of cultural relativity that set him at odds with the pious conventionalities of his society," as Hershel Parker writes (*Moby-Dick* 466). It was exactly this global perspective, in conjunction with Melville's economic struggles, which I believe gave the author his particular understanding and perceptions of the world-system made manifest within his works.

Melville's perceptions of both the accessibility of the globe and the unified global economy can be seen through the author's representation of such in Captain Ahab's ship, the *Pequod*, as the vessel is described analogously to America: "Yet now, federated along one keel, what a set these Isolatoes were! An Anacharsis Clootz deputation from all the isles of the sea, and all the ends of the earth" (107). Through this symbol, Melville presents readers with an object that like America's motto, *E pluribus unum*, represents "out of many, one." As Wallerstein states, "in world systems we are dealing with a spatial/temporal zone which cuts across many political and cultural units, one that represents an integrated zone of activity and institutions which obey certain systemic rules," referring directly to the breakdown of the nation-state and global socio-political boundaries (17). Similarly, when Melville writes of America in *Redburn* that "We are not a nation, so much as a world," it is clearly evident he recognizes that both the boundaries of the nation-state and the global economic system are simply manmade constructs that are not viable foundations for a thorough understanding of the world-system

⁴⁶ According to *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, "In 1813, Commodore David Porter claimed Nuku Hiva for the United States, naming it Madison Island, but the U.S. Congress never ratified the claim" (*Marquesas Islands*). Notably, the ship Porter captained was named the *Essex*, the same name as the fabled whaleship struck and sunk by a sperm whale – the story of which inspired Melville to write *Moby-Dick*. Refer to Owen Chase's account, *Shipwreck of the Whaleship Essex* for more.

(169). This understanding is made clear throughout Melville's work, particularly in *Redburn*, as the narrator observes the global commerce necessary to build the ships docked in Liverpool:

Here are brought together the remotest limits of the earth; and in the collective spars and timbers of these ships, all the forests of the globe are represented, as in a grand parliament of masts. Canada and New Zealand send their pines; America her live oak; India her teak; Norway her spruce; and the Right Honorable Mahogany, member for Honduras and Cam-peachy, is seen at his post by the wheel. Here, under the beneficent sway of the Genius of Commerce, all climes and countries embrace; and yard-arm touches yard-arm in brotherly love. (165)

Although obviously it was possible to build a ship from supplies of a single origin, Melville takes this opportunity to describe a ship that is not only the product of global interaction and commerce, but also the vehicle by which the far reaches of the globe can be accessed. Melville's understanding of "space and time compression" in regard to the global marketplace surfaces in this passage, specifically when he writes, "Here are brought together the remotest limits of the earth; and [...] all the forests of the globe are represented, as in a grand parliament of masts." Melville describes a world at the docks of Liverpool that supersedes the traditionally identified bounds of the nation-state and, rather, views the shipyard as an integrated and unified system. In this, the ship can be viewed as analogous to the larger scale global economic system that is not inhibited by socio-political boundaries, but rather supersedes those to become another symbol (like the doubloon) of international commerce and interaction.

Melville sees in this one ship he describes in *Redburn* a product of the interconnectedness and accessibility of the global marketplace as it existed in the early to mid-19th century. The *Pequod* functions as a similar product of the global economic system, and, in turn, so too does

the United States as represented through this particular “Ship of State.”⁴⁷ America as a country was created in a way that greatly differed compared to those places around the world from which its first settlers arrived. Wallerstein’s definition of the nation-state is that it is a place where “all persons can be said to be of one nation and therefore share basic values and allegiances...It almost always means speaking the same language...[and it] often means having the same religion;” however, this did not apply to America in the way that Melville knew it in the Atlantic port cities where he most experienced the nation (96).⁴⁸ Melville’s experiences growing up in Manhattan were that the country was a veritable try-works of various cultural identities and beliefs not particular to a single origin, but the result of global movement.

Part Three: “*And now, concentric circles seized the lone boat itself*”

A. Hyatt Verrill writes in *The Real Story of the Whaler* that we often forget “the prominent part [whalers] played in our history, the prosperity and wealth they brought to the infant Republic, or the influence their rough and ready lives had upon the civilization, exploration and commerce of the globe” (xix). In this, he aptly describes just how important the role of whaling was to American history and its growth as a young country trying to find its place in the world. Whaling provided the initial impetus for America’s commitment to a role in the global capitalist system, as John Matteson discusses in *Duty and Profit Hand in Hand: Melville, Whaling, and the Failure of Heroic Materialism*:

⁴⁷ For more on this reference to the “Ship of State” see page 12 herein.

⁴⁸ Melville describes just such an experience in *Moby-Dick*, wherein he portrays the diverse populations which congregate in port towns:

In thoroughfares nigh the docks, any considerable seaport will frequently offer to view the queerest looking nondescripts from foreign parts. Even in Broadway and Chestnut streets, Mediterranean mariners will sometimes jostle the affrighted ladies. Regent street is not unknown to Lascars and Malays; and at Bombay, in the Apollo Green, live Yankees have often scared the natives. But New Bedford beats all Water street and Wapping. In these last-mentioned haunts you see only sailors; but in New Bedford, actual cannibals stand chatting at street corners; savages outright; many of whom yet carry on their bones unholy flesh. It makes a stranger stare. (31)

A question for Melville and his contemporaries was how the United States was to define itself: as a vast wielder of mechanical and commercial force or as a place to which the world might look for a renewal of artistic and spiritual vitality. This question led irresistibly to reflection of a deeper kind: was the finally important reality to be discovered in the world of experience and the values of the marketplace, or was it to be sought in the life of the soul? Was heroism to be demonstrated through physical struggle, through spiritual transcendence, or through the conspicuous acquisition of wealth? (170-171)

When Americans began to formulate a national identity with which they could relate, the economic system and the nation's role in the generation of capital became central, as was perhaps inevitable given its Puritan roots. As Melville began work on his self-proclaimed "wicked book" in the mid-nineteenth century, America had nearly reached the "Golden Age" of whaling and, by this point in time, he recognized that this commitment to profit would be constitutive – a process that he continually dissects in *Moby-Dick*. According to Obed Macy in *The History of Nantucket*, some Nantucketers stood on top of a hill that overlooked the sea "observing the whales spouting and sporting with each other, when one observed 'there,' pointing to the sea, 'is a green pasture where our children's grandchildren will go for bread'" (33). As Eric Dolan argues in *Into The Deep*, the country's first truly large-scale industry had at this point provided the necessary financial support to not only break away from England, but to eventually fund the endeavors of a nation bent on rapid westward expansion. The earliest beginnings of American Manifest Destiny can be seen in Melville's whaling dominated era, as Philip Armstrong describes it in "'Leviathan is a Skein of Networks'":

Moby-Dick emerges at a point of crucial historical transition in several areas of American life. By the mid-nineteenth century, the growth and global expansion of the nation's economy following the War of 1812, and the pugnacious expansionism exemplified by the Mexican War and the ideology of manifest destiny, were giving way to signs of strain and impending civil discord. (1040)

By 1846, under James Polk, the U.S. Congress voted to annex Texas from Mexico and in turn sent troops to the border in order to enforce this declaration. This act of blatant expansionist aggression by the American government led to the Mexican-American War and in 1848, Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, wherein the majority of the country's territory was ceded to the U.S.

Americans are historically thought to be the greatest whalers the world has ever seen, and the country eventually managed to control the entire industry. Charles Olson writes in *Call Me Ishmael*, that “of 900 whaling vessels of all nations in 1846, 735 were American” (19). Jay Dolan attributes this fervor to the notion that when colonists first came to America, “they wanted to succeed, in their own terms, in this new land. And whether it was the entrepreneurial spirit, the desire to make money on your own, the willingness to risk a lot, the Americans just latched onto whaling early on and wouldn't let go” (*Into the Deep*). As America solidified its place in the world, the desire to find some sort of nationalistic identity with which its people could attach themselves played a major role in the development of the country. Whaling was the first industry in which all early Americans could potentially have a stake while it also became a source of national pride for its people. As whaling expanded to become an endeavor on a global scale for Americans, Melville considered those who participated as the true explorers of the wide world, as he states in his chapter, *Nantucket*:

And thus have these naked Nantucketers, these sea hermits, issuing from their ant-hill in the sea, overrun and conquered the watery world like so many Alexanders; parceling out among them the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans, as the three pirate powers did Poland. Let America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let the English overswarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun; two thirds of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketer's. For the sea is his; he owns it, as Emperors own empires. (65)

As whalers became consistently more adept at their skill, it became necessary for them to extend their voyages into further, uncharted waters. They inevitably began to discover parts of the world that had been unknown to Americans, and as Melville implies above, those ventures carried with them all the earmarks of Imperialism. In the same fashion as the conquest of the American West, the whaling industry extended the capital-driven reach of the young country to the farthest corners of the globe. "For many years past the whale-ship has been the pioneer in ferreting out the remotest and least known parts of the earth," writes Melville. "She has explored seas and archipelagoes which had no chart, where no Cook or Vancouver had ever sailed" (99). Although perhaps it is true that whaling provided the platform on which unknown parts of the world were discovered, it was not necessarily done for the sake of appeasing Americans' curiosities about the planet which they inhabited, but rather for the accumulation of property and wealth.

Melville writes that "though the world scouts at us whale hunters, yet does it unwittingly pay us the profoundest homage; yea, an all-abounding adoration! for almost all the tapers, lamps, and candles that burn round the globe, burn, as before so many shrines, to our glory!" (98). Through this claim, Melville reveals his understanding that whaling, like most industry, has a

dark side that most consumers would prefer to ignore. While “the world scouts” at whalemen, it does so while maintaining dependence on whale oil. That small spit of sand off of the coast of Massachusetts, populated almost entirely by “Quakers with a vengeance,” as Melville quips, was the epicenter of the world whaling industry and the source of the planet’s rendered whale products. Nantucket acted as a forerunner of industrialism, with its proto-assembly line processing and factory level “try-works,” processes which would eventually evolve to be streamlined for efficiency aboard the very ships that hunted their raw materials.

Moby-Dick upon its release was an utter failure when compared to the commercial success of *Typee* and *Omoo*, books that launched Melville into literary fame. One reviewer of the novel from the *Boston Post* went so far as to assert, “‘The Whale’ is not worth the money asked for it, either as a literary work or as a mass of printed paper” (*Moby-Dick* 604). With the benefit of hindsight, we now recognize *Moby-Dick* as the writing of a genius who was not working within the ideological bounds of his era, but rather, writing across a span of time as vast as the great grey sea. In an observation that would in many ways be a later reflection of the author himself, Melville writes of Waldo Emerson in 1848, “I love all men who *dive*. Any fish can swim near the surface, but it takes a great whale to go down stairs five miles or more” (qtd. in Davey 49). When others had clung safely near the surface, Melville’s own diving plunged him deep into the murky depths of the American conscience where he revealed the unpleasant aspects of the country and its insatiable appetites. However pure Melville may laud whale oil to be in *Moby-Dick*, there is no contesting that the brightest, cleanest burning lanterns in America were fueled by a violent enterprise that left violent death and devastation in its wake. With capitalism as the driving force behind expansion and whaling as one of America’s first major capitalist industrial undertakings, the furor with which the great beasts were hunted parallels the

opening of the American West and the making of a nation-state, which as Melville claims in *John Marr*, “can to-day hardly be said to have any western bound but the ocean that washes Asia” (396).

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