Man and Nature in Herman Melville's "The Encantadas"

Jay J. Jackson

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MAN AND NATURE IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S
"THE ENCANTADAS"

BY

JAY J. JACKSON

A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree Master of Arts, Major in
English, South Dakota
State University

1971
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to naked summer days when I lay quiet on a barren beach where grass never grew; to the metaphorical tortoise, a patient plodding animal who does more good than evil, and to a fine old goat tethered in memories past on whose back I rode while I ate eggs and watched the lillies grow in the Spring.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It would be felonious of me to accept credit for this thesis or for any part of my graduate studies of which this thesis is a culmination without paying due respect to a few people who have given me a generous measure of their time and knowledge. I would like to thank Professor Ruth Alexander who has given me excellent guidance and criticism both in classes and in this paper; Professor J. W. Yarborough for his enlightening answers to many difficult questions; Professor Paul Witherington whose "polymorphous perversity" I am beginning to understand, and I would like to extend a special thanks to Professor Jack Marken whose professional and personal integrity has left me inspired.

Jay J. Jackson
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This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable as meeting the thesis requirements for this degree, but without implying that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

Thesis Adviser Date

Head, English Department Date
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. MELVILLE EXPLORES MAN AND NATURE</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. MELVILLE: SCIENTIST OR ARTIST?</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. MELVILLE'S SUPER-NATURE</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. MAN ON THE ENCHANTED ISLES</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. SUMMARY</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When Herman Melville disembarked from the American frigate, United States, in October, 1844, a literary career of epic proportions was about to be launched. Bursting with episodes and tales from "the most exciting adventure of his life,"¹ the young sailor, then twenty-five, immediately proceeded to write the memoirs of his recent fascinating boyage to the South Seas. From his venture into the world of ships and whales, men and nature, Melville created an artistic canon perhaps unparalleled in American letters. No less than eight novels, including Moby-Dick, considered by some critics to be America's greatest literary achievement, and a series of short stories and sketches, are the direct result of the author's archetypal experiences aboard a merchant ship, a whaling ship, and an American man-of-war. All of Melville's works that have their roots grounded in this experience deal with three basic topics: the sea, man, and nature.

The list of books that Melville published concerning one or all of these subjects is indeed impressive. In January 1846, only one year after he had started work on the original manuscript, Melville finished the first edition of Typee, a travelogue written out of his harrowing adventure in the Marquesas islands. Because of Typee's

immediate success, *Omoo*, its sequel was published in 1847. The public, either highly outraged or pleasantly pleased with the travel-elogues, balked at *Mardi*, Melville's first attempt at allegory, when it was printed in 1849. This work is an imaginary voyage through an imaginary archipelago which symbolizes man's search for truth. Shortly after the failure of *Mardi*, Melville returned to a traditional narrative style and wrote *Redburn* in 1849 and *White-Jacket* in 1850. These books deal with Melville's initiation voyage on a merchant ship and his experience on an American man-of-war. Here ended what might be called Melville's "first period," the pre-*Moby-Dick* period, during which he experimented with literary forms before beginning work on his masterpiece.

The year 1851, as any student of American Literature knows, found *Moby-Dick* ready for publication. In this philosophical, and perhaps prophetic novel, Melville achieved a fullness of style and a richness of substance that he was never able to find again. His "magnum opus" was written, but much to his dismay, it was largely ignored by the critics and the reading public of his time. In *Moby-Dick*, as in no other work, Melville was able to fuse his three great themes--the sea, man, and nature--and bring them to a powerful if inconclusive end. Dejected and psychologically exhausted, Melville turned from the sea as subject matter in order that he might support his impoverished family. Neither *Pierre* in 1852 nor *Israel Potter* in 1855 drew from the wealth of his experience at sea before 1845.

At this point in his career, Melville was considered to have been "written out;" his great works about the sea were poorly received
and his popular travelogues, Typee and Omoo, had gone out of fashion. But Melville had not finished. In May 1856, a collection of short stories called The Piazza Tales was published in New York by J. A. Dix. The "Tales" drew some praise from reputable critics and sold "one thousand and forty-seven copies"\(^2\) in a matter of a few months. The critic for the United States Magazine and Democratic Review, a first-rate magazine of the day, decided that the stories exhibited the kind of richness of language and description that was typical of Melville in his great sea novels.\(^3\) The publishers and critics alike almost unanimously agreed that The Piazza Tales had merit and that sales might be moderately good. Only Athenaeum, an English magazine, felt that the stories "showed 'indications, not fulfilment' of excellence . . . ."\(^4\) In retrospect, it seems that the American critics of the mid-1850's had a better insight into the value of this work than did their counterparts of the following seventy-five years. Despite the fact that these tales have often been referred to as an afterthought of Melville's great work, they are an integral and important part of the author's thoughts concerning man, nature, and the sea. Moreover, The Piazza Tales in general are an extension of, not apart from, the philosophy espoused by Melville in Moby-Dick.


\(^3\)Piazza Tales, p. x.

\(^4\)Piazza Tales, p. xi.
Of the six stories that appear in The Piazza Tales, "The Encantadas" is the most directly related to Melville's work that deals with his triad of subjects. Set in the Galapagos archipelago, the ten "sketches" of "The Encantadas" are all associated in some way with Melville's continuing concern for the relationship between man and nature. Enigmatically, however, little critical work has been done on these important pieces. There has been only a handful of good criticism written on the sketches, and most of the commentators discuss only such literary topics as Melville's source for the sketches and the unity of form in the work as a whole. Unfortunately, virtually nothing has been done with either the content or the characterization of "The Encantadas," and no critic has taken a really philosophical approach to the story. For some reason, Melville scholars have been somewhat reluctant to study with any seriousness the ideas in "The Encantadas" that seem to this writer to be as important as those in Moby-Dick.

This is not to say that some very good scholarship has not been done with respect to the work. Among the better articles is I. Newberry's "'The Encantadas': Melville's Inferno," written in 1966. As the title implies, Mr. Newberry compares Melville's island with Dante's vision of Hell. "Here is Melville's Inferno, ringed like Dante's into various circles of damnation."5 The critic goes on to describe the haunted isles: "Evil is here a supra-human,

semi-environmental force, and the life affected includes natural life and human life, a pattern which is reflected in the arrangement of the sketches."\(^6\)

Although Newberry's article puts "The Encantadas" in some sort of perspective, it still remains basically a contribution to source study. In all fairness, it must be reported that Newberry, unlike some of his colleagues who have written on the subject, successfully recognizes that there is something more to "The Encantadas" than merely a literary problem of how Melville achieved unity within the sketches.

Some other source studies that have shed new light on this work are C. G. Hoffman's "The Shorter Fiction of Herman Melville,"\(^7\) and Russel Thomas's "Melville's Use of Sources in 'The Encantadas.'"\(^8\) Of the two, Professor Thomas's article proves to be the most useful. Published in 1932, this piece provides a line by line comparison of Melville's words with the sources from which he supposedly took them. Thomas has established that Melville "borrowed" lines or sections of his work from log-books and diaries of sea captains to which he had access. Melville used Porter, Colnett and Gowan, three men of the sea, as sources from which he wrote parts of "The Encantadas." In addition, Thomas's article provides a valuable map of the Galapagos to which the reader can refer if the need arises. In some respects, it

\(^6\)Newberry, p. 50.

\(^7\)Charles G. Hoffman, "The Shorter Fiction of Herman Melville," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 52 (1953), 414-430.

\(^8\)Russel Thomas, "Melville's Use of Some Sources in 'The Encantadas,'" *American Literature*, 3 (1931-32), 432-456.
is the map more than the source study that enables the reader to understand what Melville is saying when he discusses the islands in relationship to one another. Source studies, as interesting and scholarly as they often are, frequently ignore an author as artist and deal too matter-of-factly with any work under scrutiny.

Although these articles are crucial to Melville studies and are fascinating reading, they all are wide of the mark in that they fail to recognize the single most striking aspect of "The Encantadas," nature and man's place in it. Only Elizabeth Foster in "Melville and Geology" begins to approach the subject, but her approach is a scientific one, and she ignores the integration of geology and art that makes "The Encantadas" a significant part of Melville's artistic achievement. She addresses herself only to Melville's knowledge of Lyell and geologic fact, and not to his ability to combine fragmented facts and imagination into a workable artistic whole. In short, it is Melville rather than Melville's work that is the topic of her discourse. If she had only realized the importance of the relationship between the geology and the art that is manifested in "The Encantadas," her extremely valuable article might have been more comprehensive.

It is in light of the fact that no critic has yet seen fit to explore "The Encantadas" with regard to Melville's theme of the man-nature dialectic that this thesis is written. It is the purpose of this paper to show how Melville views man, nature, and their relationship to each other within the bizarre setting of the Galapagos

islands. In no other work save *Moby-Dick* does Melville so deeply cut to the roots of the question of man and his role in the natural scheme of the cosmos.

In order to examine the man-nature tension of "The Encantadas," I propose in Chapter II to evaluate Melville's exploration of man and nature in his life and his earlier writing. In Chapter III, I will try to resolve Melville's apparently ambivalent approach to the islands as a scientist or artist. Chapter IV discusses Melville's view of nature as found in "The Encantadas," and Chapter V explores his picture of man in the harsh environment of the Galapagos islands.
CHAPTER II

MELVILLE EXPLORES MAN AND NATURE

Whenever Herman Melville's name is mentioned, the one image that is immediately called to mind is the ocean. Undeniably, he is associated with the sea. Using the tractless expanses of waves and the precarious existence aboard a whaling ship as a metaphorical setting for life, Melville spent much of his career as an artist searching for the very essence of man and nature. For him, the sea was the heart of nature herself, raging with unmeasurable force and matchless beauty against the frail but cunning creature, man, who had come to challenge nature in a deadly test of wit and strength. Although Melville drew upon his experiences at sea for inspiration and subject matter, the most important question to be answered is, why did he go to sea in the first place? What makes a man flee a rather safe, if not comfortable, life on land to sail the unnamed and often uncharted face of the deep? A number of people have tried to answer these questions concerning Melville; some have met with reasonable success and some have found no success whatsoever, but all of their answers must be entertained in order to achieve a perspective of Melville's own experience with men and nature.

Possibly the most striking aspect of Melville's character is that he was hopelessly insecure. In 1832, when Herman was 13, his
father died leaving a widow and eight children.\textsuperscript{1} None of the children suffered as much emotionally as Herman did from this event. His death was the direst and the most decisive event emotionally of Herman Melville's early life. Deprived of an idolized father on the very verge of adolescence, the boy Melville underwent—can there be any doubt?—an emotional crisis from whose effects he was never to be wholly free. In the midst of a general insecurity, the most vital embodiment of security, the security of fatherhood, was forcibly wrested from him...\textsuperscript{2}

Melville literally felt his world fall away. "The wonderful security, material, social, emotional, of his infancy and childhood had collapsed abruptly, and what was now in store for him, as for his family, was a chaotic insecurity."\textsuperscript{3} To help support his family, he had to take on a number of jobs, to some of which he was completely unsuited. In a period of a few years, he clerked in his brother's store, worked on his uncle's farm, and taught school both in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and New York. None of these vocations pleased him, and by 1839 his future looked dismal.

It is partly because his life fell into a general chaos that Melville became an Ishmael and went to sea.

With what was certainly a 'know of intrinsicate' of feelings—eagerness for adventure and shrinking from an unfriendly world, reluctance to leave his mother and sister... Melville betook himself to New York early in June and signed up as a 'boy' on a merchant vessel, the \textit{St. Lawrence}, and a few days later was carried by it out of New York harbor and across the Atlantic to Liverpool.\textsuperscript{4}


\textsuperscript{2}Arvin, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{3}Arvin, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{4}Arvin, p. 26.
With the sailing of the *St. Lawrence*, Melville's unstable childhood came to an end, leaving him scarred, insecure, and in need of a father image. It is little wonder that he saw the world as he did—foreboding, threatening, a constant struggle for survival.

Now all biographers and critics agree that Melville went to sea as a reaction against his family situation, or, for that matter, as a reaction against anything at all. Charles Anderson in a most interesting chapter "Why Ishmael Went to Sea," cites at least one scholar who has a different idea of why Melville left New York. Arthur Stedman, a friend of Melville's later life, believes that it was Dana who influenced Melville to sail. He said, "it is probable that the publication of Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, in 1840, influenced him to follow the sea as a vocation, and to ship for Liverpool as a 'cabin boy'". Later, Stedman realized that this was impossible in that Melville had shipped out before Dana's book was published. As Anderson comments, "In his next biographical sketch, Stedman corrected this error, but he now applied the same motivation to Melville's second voyage." In other words, if Melville sailed for Liverpool on his own motivation, Dana's work inspired him to ship on a whaler in 1841. Raymond Weaver, another biographer, flatly denies the truth in Stedman's statement. "That the reading of Dana's book should have filled his head with a mere adolescent longing for

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6Anderson, p. 12.
brine-drenched locomotion and sent him gallantly off to sea is a surmise more remarkable for simplicity than for insight."7

A third and more believable thesis is proposed by S. C. Damon. He argues that Melville was a complete failure at land-based vocations and had no alternative but to go to sea for a living. "Going to sea was his 'substitute for pistol and ball.'"8 It seems reasonable that if Melville could do nothing constructive on land, he had to take the only road left for him, the sea. If the world of civilized man offered him nothing, then the world of the savage ocean might provide a salvation. Anderson was quick to denounce this idea by saying that "the added phrase that this was his 'substitute for pistol and ball,' however, merely carries the discussion back to Melville's artistic flourish in setting the dominant tone for Moby-Dick."9 In other words, Anderson saw this statement only as an explanation for Melville in 1850-59 and not for his whole life. Obviously, Anderson is not as willing as Damon to accept the argument that Melville sailed because he was vocationally incompetent.

Whatever truth there might be in the notion that Melville took to the St. Lawrence because he couldn't do anything else, it still does not sufficiently grapple with the problem of the author's search for security. The argument for land-based failure reduces the whole

7Raymond Weaver, Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1921), p. 131.

8Anderson, p. 12.

situation to one of vocational ineptness rather than to one of a diminishing mental stability. Weaver, a reputable Melville scholar, strikes toward the heart of the matter when he writes, "... in the light of his writing and the known facts of his life it seems likely that his desperate transit was made in the mid-winter of his discontent."10

Finally, Anderson himself forwards an hypothesis concerning the question. Melville was not the first man in his family to go to sea. He had a seafaring uncle, Captain John DeWolf II, who had been a sailor for many years. This uncle "retired from the sea in 1827, at the age of forty-eight, and lived thereafter (until his death in 1872) at Brighton, Massachusetts, and later at Dorchester, New Boston, where Herman certainly must have seen him on boyhood visits to his Melville relatives."11 Previous to writing Moby-Dick, Anderson says that Melville confessed to having a conversation about whales with the old mariner. Also, it is conjectured that Captain DeWold "discussed upon the charms of Polynesia, as he heard them from Langsdorf, at many a family gathering."12

It is also known that Melville had a kinsman with whom he was intimate that joined the United States Navy. It is thought that

10Weaver, p. 131.

11Anderson, p. 15.

12Anderson, p. 16.
Melville had spent most of his summers between 1830 and 1840 with his cousin Guert Gansevoort, who told him magnificent tales of life as a midshipman.

In October, 1828, the young midshipman sailed on his second cruise, this time in the United States ship St. Louis, round Cape Horn to the west coast of South America as far north as Maratlan, Mexico. Although his ship did not at any time penetrate farther into the Pacific, nevertheless he must have brought home rich tales of Spanish-American life.13

Also, Thomas Melville, another cousin, went to sea early in life. He was a midshipman in the navy from 1826 to 1834, when he retired because of ill health. Anderson feels that it was the combined influences of these men that was the ultimate cause of Melville's venture on the high seas.

Although it is impossible to ascertain exactly why Melville left for England on the St. Lawrence, there seem to be kernels of truth in all the versions of the story except for Stedman's rather untenable position. What is known for sure is that Melville left for England in the summer of 1839. He returned in that same year disillusioned because he had not seen the noble city of Liverpool that his father had described to him. He grew restless, and in the summer of 1840, he took an overland excursion to see Thomas Melville, who lived in Galena, Illinois. He didn't stay long because his relative's poverty appalled him. By the end of that year, "dry land was beginning to scorch Melville's feet," and it wasn't long before he set off to the greatest of the whaling ports, New Bedford in search of a job on a whaler.

13 Anderson, p. 17.
On the third of January, 1841, Herman Melville sailed on the ship Acushnet out of Buzzard's bay.

Of the reasons given for Melville's abdication of the land-locked life, Damon's seems to be both the most correct, and for this study at least, the most relevant. Damon's position is fortified by the fact that Melville sailed not once but twice, even though his first cruise proved to be very disappointing. When he signed on the Acushnet for a three year expedition, Melville temporarily bid good-bye to the civilized world. Because he saw nothing positive in the world of cities and towns, he set his course in the direction of the world of the seas and whale. Early in life, either from a sense of insecurity or failure, Melville knew that the society of America was not for him. He must have hoped that he might find his place in the natural order of the world.

Melville wrote later that the whale ship became his Harvard and Yale, and although he didn't like it, the life at sea provided him with a great number of experiences that he would later incorporate into his art. In a large sense, the whaler was his metaphor for education. Unfortunately, Melville became disenchanted with his school work rather quickly. In July, 1842, he jumped ship with a companion and fled into the interior of one of the Marquesas islands. Jumping ship in those days was not an uncommon event, and in all, fifteen of the twenty-three men aboard the Acushnet had deserted before the voyage had come to an end. "At its worst," says E. P. Hohman in The American Whaleman, "the life of a whaling seaman
represented perhaps the lowest condition to which free American labor had ever fallen." It was the brutality and degradation aboard ship that caused Melville to escape.

Along with the fearful risks and dangers of the hunt itself, which carried a natural elation with them, there were a thousand things in mere day-to-day life on board a whaler that could have been galling to a youth like Melville, and have ended by reducing him to rebellious desperation: the cramped, airless, almost lightless filthiness of the forecastle quarters, the dreariness and monotony of the food, the prospect of drawing some trifling wage or no wage at all at the end of a three or four year's voyage, and the association for the most part with the typically brutalized and degraded members of a whaler's crew. Although there were some moments upon the Acushnet that must have been rewarding for Melville, they could not make up for the animal existence that made him desert.

As Melville recounted in Typee, he jumped ship in the Marquesas. With Toby Greene, a boy of seventeen, Melville took out for the ravines and thickets of Nuku Niva, a major island of the group. To their horror, the castaways found life in the natural environs of the island as difficult as life on the ship they had left. They suffered from hunger and thirst and found little rest under the temporary shelters that they nightly built for their protection. Finally, the pair was driven to a inhabited valley whose settlers were the "savage Taipis." The "savages," however, proved to be very gentle, accommodating people who restored Toby, at least, to full health. Melville himself still suffered a painful swollen leg that remained mysteriously inflamed.

Toby, who was allowed to go for medicine to treat Melville's malady,

14Arvin, p. 51.
15Arvin, p. 51-52.
was caught by a beachcomber and shanghaied upon another whaler. This left Melville alone and suffering among the Taips.

Much has been written about both the phenomenon of Melville's ailing leg and his relationship with Toby. D. H. Lawrence conjectures that Melville's sickness was purely psychological in nature and sprang from a guilt complex that reflected his fundamentalist upbringing. To atone for his sins of lust and hedonistic pleasure, Melville punished himself with a swollen leg, an obvious phallic symbol.16 Carl Bode criticizes in Freudian terms the whole of Melville's adventure, concluding that the Typee valley is a second Eden in which Melville through pronounced sexuality, finds the dicotomy of the pleasure-pain principle as a reality of sex and life. In short, "Melville can have Fayaway but he must also be punished for having her."17 Thus in the natural context, pleasure-pain, birth-death, and health-sickness delicately balance on a teeter board waiting for the weight of a psychological trauma to tilt the board one way or the other. In this way, Melville's leg strikes an equilibrium between his sterile past and his fertile present.

Some critics even go so far as to intimate that Melville's whole relationship with Toby was unnatural. Richard Chase writes that "Melville's strain of homosexuality was entirely inward and subdued,"18


17 Bode, p. 43.

and it came to light only when he was under great pressure. Characters like Harry Bolton, Queequeg, Toby, Long Ghost and even Ishmael have distinct homosexual overtones. Surely, the mating of Ishmael and Queequeg in *Moby-Dick* is a parallel to the marriage ceremony conducted for man and woman. The homosexuality would not be important if it were not for the fact that it is a perversion of natural activity. And as Melville shows in "The Encantadas," unnatural activity often leads to unhappiness or death.

From the Typee valley, Melville finally boarded a ship, the *Lucy Anne*, and in a few months landed in Paputee, Tahiti, only a day after the Queen was forced to abdicate her throne in favor of a French protectorate. Melville and his newly found friend, Long Ghost, were jailed on a trumped up charge of mutiny. They had served only a few days of their sentences before the *Lucy Anne*, manned by a new crew, sailed leaving the mutineers free on Tahiti. Again, Melville quickly tired of his surroundings. Although he liked certain aspects of life in Polynesia, the freedom of "savage" living, uninhibited sexual activity, the leisurely pace of life, and the manner in which the natives communed with nature, he left Tahiti because he thought that it was despoiled by French imperialism and Christian hypocrisy. He left for Hawaii in April 1843. He found, however, that Hawaii was even more Europeanized than Tahiti;

Probably he had quite ceased, for the time, to take any pleasure whatever in the spectacle of Polynesian life, at least as he saw it in these haunts of the invading and despoiling white; probably he was really weary not only of primitive existence but of his own anominity, and would have
seized upon almost any resource for getting home short of joining the crew of another whaler.\textsuperscript{19}

Early in August, an American frigate, the \textit{United States}, arrived in Honolulu and Melville signed on. For a little more than a year, Melville played the role of an American sailor. If he hated life on a whaler, he hated life on the \textit{United States} even more. The cruelty of life of the frigate burned a never-to-be-forgotten picture on his mind. The floggings sickened him, and \textit{Billy Budd} was written much later in memory of this cruise. In July 1844, Melville reached home filled with memories and scars.

When Melville disembarked in New York, he still had not found a place for himself in the universe. Before he sailed, he felt a stranger to the world of men; he now knew that as a man he was an intruder in the world of nature. Just as he had failed to acclimate himself to American society, he also could not adjust to life as a free "savage" nor to the human-natural brutalities of life at sea. Both man and nature were foreign to him, and his art reflects this fact. As an outcast from both the natural and the human world, Melville lived his life in a cosmic limbo waiting to be accepted into one of the two spheres. His only recourse of action was to explore in novels and short stories his estrangement.

As soon as he could, Melville began to compose his first manuscript that dealt with the adventures and trials that he had endured during his years at sea and in Polynesia. \textit{Typee} was an instantaneous success and became a best seller of its time, going through at least

\textsuperscript{19}Arvin, p. 70.
six editions while Melville was still alive. Melville, however, made little money from his craft. He received only $732.75 from the 6,500 copies that were printed in America, 20 and his profit from the English version was almost the same. His second book, Omoo, appeared in 1847 and proved to be even less of a financial and artistic success than was the first travelogue.

Typee and Omoo are not without merit however. In these volumes, Melville created the prototype of the rebellious renegade who fled from one harsh reality, the whaling ship, to one of more precariousness, captivity among the Taipis. Like Ishmael and Ahab, in the later Moby-Dick, Melville and Toby are in a constant search for their respective dreams of security and freedom. The note of the quest so brilliantly sounded in the travelogues is magically turned into a higher search in Mardi and Moby-Dick. In fact, critics have often clung to the notion that all of Melville's work had its germination in the experience that was literally manifested in Typee and Omoo. More important to this thesis is the fact that Melville's questioning of man and nature is first detected in these early endeavors. Also, in Typee Melville first began to assert that all men, natural and civilized, possess a "black" side. This idea as well as his themes of rebellion, defiance, man and nature, insecurity and freedom, subtle and well hidden in Typee and Omoo, thunder to the fore throughout the remainder of Melville's literary life.

20 Typee, p. 296.
Mardi (1849), a "romantic-sentimental allegory," was the artist's first attempt to find a new vehicle for his thoughts but it proved to be a mixture of German transcendentalism and sweet sentimentality. As a whole Mardi is an artistic failure. Newton Arvin agrees that "the book suffers irremediably as a work of art from the palpably written." He concludes that "what one mostly finds in Mardi is not the clarifying solemnity of tragic acceptance; it is the drifting and eddying fog of intellectual worry, vacillation and indecision, and in consequence there is no imaginative purification in reading it."

The artistic weaknesses found in Mardi are undeniable. But Mardi is an important work. In this book Melville was able to sort out and expand one of his major themes that bears heavily on his later works, especially Moby-Dick and "The Encantadas." This prime theme is man's relationship to nature. As has already been indicated, Melville knew that he had no place in his society and had been harshly dragged to the conclusion that the natural world was not home for him either. In Mardi, Melville came to the point where he verbalized his disenchantment with the natural world. Newton Arvin says that, unlike Emerson, Melville saw no good in either man or nature. "Melville

21 Arvin, p. 90.
22 Arvin, p. 90.
23 Arvin, p. 99.
24 Arvin, p. 99.
saw no such tendency in nature or in history; on the contrary, he failed to find in nature any warrant for the aspiration of humanity ('nature is not for us') and he failed to find in history or in his own experience any warrant for belief in human perfectibility. 25

But further than Arvin, D. H. Lawrence would say that "never man instinctively hated human life, our human life, as we have it, more than Melville did." 26 It is evident that Melville did not trust nature or man. For him there was only one thing worse than a "noble savage," a civilized man. Unfortunately for Melville, "as much as he hated the civilization he knew, he couldn't go back to the savages." 27

One can never return to a state of innocence after having known experience. This is precisely why Taji, a pseudo sun god in *Mardi*, was driven out of paradise and was denied his Yillah (happiness). It is important to note that Taji, a person who had murdered, was forced off the island paradise into the ocean, the womb of Melville's universe. In nature's most violent and mysterious phenomenon, the ocean, there might be salvation. Taji, like Melville himself when he left the Taipis, left a Hell-Paradise at the point of a spear. Here Melville is simply stating what to transgress against nature, the life of Aleema that Taji took, is to find spiritual, perhaps physical, death. This particular theme, first brought to light in *Mardi* becomes of paramount importance later in *Moby-Dick* and "The Encantadas."


27 Lawrence, p. 203.
If Mardi was an intellectual and literary detour, Redburn (1849) and White-Jacket (1850) were a "lowering of his sights a degree or two," to ponder the ever-increasing intellectual storm that was brewing in his head. In retrospect, however, these works amounted to more than just semi-fictitious accounts of Melville's own experience. There is no doubt that Redburn and White-Jacket are filled with fascinating information about the sea and life on a merchant ship and a man-of-war. Characters not as ambiguous as those in Mardi give the reader the feeling that he is once again dealing with a reality that can be grasped and understood, the reality of men. There seems to be a solidity and practicality about these books that was deleted from the experimental aspects of Mardi.

No matter how artistically poor Melville's early works are, they were valuable stepping stones that led him to his more powerful works that were published between 1851 and 1857. With the publication of Moby-Dick, his "Whale," Melville brought to fruition his dream that "prose and symbol might be completely fused in a powerful, polyphonic whole." To say that he realized his dream is an understatement. In one grand sweep of the whale's tail, Melville welded together all the diverse themes with which he had been toying since Typee:

One great question underlies the whole of Moby-Dick: What is man's proper relationship to nature? Although Melville never fully

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28 Arvin, p. 100.

29 Arvin, p. 101.

30 Arvin, p. 144.
answers this question, he gives some strong hints as to what he thinks
the answer should be. By pitting Ahab against the whale, Melville
symbolically puts at the opposite ends of the cosmic spectrum, man
and nature. Ahab abandons all reason and humility when he pursues
Moby-Dick. Ahab, the symbol of mankind challenging nature, is, in
the end, destroyed by that which he wished to destroy. By harpooning
the whale, Ahab in truth harpoons himself. The whale symbolizing all
that is natural—wildness, freedom, sex, evil, brute force—triumphs
in its own dumb-wise way over man the intruder in the seas.

One might logically ask, where could Melville go after Moby-
Dick? The answer is not simple, and its ramifications are many and
deep. Though Moby-Dick was an artistic giant, it was a financial
dwarf. The book was ignored by both the critics and the reading public
in general. Distraught, frustrated and emotionally drained from the
traumatic experience of his whale, Melville lived in deep depression
for nearly five years. In his famous letter to Hawthorne, he wrote:

Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is forever grinning
in upon me, holding the door ajar. My dear Sir, a presentiment
is on me,—I shall at last be worn out and perish, like an old
nutmeg-garter, grated to pieces by the constant attrition of the
wood, that is, the nutmeg. 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.31

Not until 1856, with the publication of a curious volume entitled
The Piazza Tales, had Melville regrouped his mental forces and was again
ready to return to the earlier themes and subjects. Of the six tales

31Herman Melville, The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell
R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960),
p. 128.
presented in this volume, "Benito Cereno" has been the most popular. John Freeman calls it "a flaming instance of the author's pure genius." In it, Melville returned to his theme of the "black caverns of the heart." By setting at odds a weak Spanish sea captain and a wiley Negro slave, Melville symbolically but paradoxically carries out a struggle between the forces of good (white-black) and evil (black-white). The reader, as was probably the case with Melville himself, is hard pressed to determine the victor since both sides destroy each other in the end.

Another popular story included in the Tales is "Bartleby," the story of an alienated scrivener who, like Melville, could not stand civilized life as it encompassed him in a city. Loneliness, dread, and boredom pervade the tale of the meek scrivener who always works facing a blank wall. Bartleby's complete rejection of society is akin to Melville's own hatred of commercial America. The "existential" overtones of the piece have made it a popular target for many critics. Along with "Benito Cereno" and "The Encantadas," "Bartleby" is seriously studied today because it like the other two is an integral part of Melville's complete artistic statement concerning man and nature.

It is, however, "The Encantadas" that most clearly follows the thematic conflict of man-nature that was set in Moby-Dick. For this reason, "The Encantadas" must be closely studied, keeping in mind Melville's attitude toward civilized man and savage nature. "The

"Encantadas" appears to be Melville's final attempt to solve the problem of the dialectic that was spawned in *Typee* and *Omoo* and came to full flower in *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*.
CHAPTER III

MELVILLE: SCIENTIST OR ARTIST?

One of the most interesting aspects of "The Encantadas" is the manner in which Melville approaches the natural setting of his piece, the Galapagos islands. Was Melville simply describing what he saw on the islands, or did he have some higher purpose in his discussions of the animal and vegetable life. On one hand, it might be argued that Melville did little more in "The Encantadas" than put on paper the empirical data that he collected while on a fishing and tortoise hunting trip to the island group. In many instances, his descriptions are, like a scientist's, factually precise and methodically stated. Conversely, in many of the highly descriptive sections of "The Encantadas," Melville uses his artistic tools of imagination and fancy to give the reader a larger sense of the nature that abounds on the islands. A brief comparison of some scientific works written about the Galapagos with parts of Melville's first chapters of "The Encantadas" should resolve the question of how the author approached nature in the work.

A scientist, because he is primarily interested in the discovery of new facts, describes phenomena in a detached, unemotional and extremely methodical manner, the "scientific method." According to this method, a researcher must define a problem, create an hypothesis, collect data through empirical methods, and propose a theory. After
his theory has been proposed, the scientist again collects evidence to support or refute his postulates. A man working from a scientific position must restrain himself from following any avenues of thought that cannot ultimately be supported by provable facts. Noticeably absent from the scientist's methodology are the uses of the poetic imagination and analogy (metaphor). This is not to say that a scientist cannot be creative. A successful man of science certainly must be a creative person, but his creativity must be pointed to one end, the establishment of a theory or hypothesis that can be substantiated by empirical evidence.

In opposition is the artist's approach to problem-solving or resolving a question. His interest is not to search for facts alone, no matter how important they might be, but to search for the relationships between the facts that he has found and some ultimate truth that he perceives, perhaps intuitively. In this respect, the artist has a definite advantage over the scientist in that he is able to plunge both his aesthetic and intellectual self into his work. The artist is not restricted to the use of pure empiricism to support his claim. For the artist, Melville included, the imaginative self is more important than the rational self, and therefore his descriptions of natural phenomena, although scientifically accurate, not only satisfy a reader's quest for factual truth about a subject, but also satisfy his aesthetic sense.

Comparing some typically scientific statements about the Galapagos Islands with Melville's descriptions of the same phenomena reveal Melville's primary interest. For example, a compilation of
facts concerning the Galapagos says: Lying 600 miles west of the coast of Ecuador, these remnants of volcanic violence have been the object of much biologic and geologic study since Darwin visited them in 1835. The Archipelago is comprised of 25 islands, all of which are located between $1^\circ N$ and $2^\circ S$ latitude and extend from $89^\circ W$ to $92^\circ W$ longitude. Because the islands are bisected almost at their midpoint by the equator, the climate in general tends to be extremely hot and dry.\(^1\)

Melville describes the islands in this manner:

Take five-and-twenty heaps of cinders dumped here and there in an outside city lot; imagine some of them magnified into mountains, and the vacant lot the sea; and you will have a fit idea of the general aspect of the Encantadas or Enchanted Isles, a group rather of extinct volcanoes than of isles...\(^2\)

Although on the surface both accounts of the Galapagos are an attempt at geographical placement and geologic description, a single glaring difference is seen. Melville uses metaphor and the scientists do not. In this case, the artist is trying to help the reader understand what the islands really look like by relating them to some common commodity, cinder piles. Also, the connotative value of "heaps of cinders" is far greater than the simple statement "the climate in general tends to be extremely hot and dry."

Aside from making the description of the islands more realistic and artistic, Melville's analogy is both accurate and useful. More

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\(^2\) *Piazza Tales*, p. 149.
than painting a realistic scene, Melville makes a very astute geologic observation. Although he was untrained in the science of geology, except for a little knowledge of Lyell's precepts, he perceived that the islands were formed by volcanoes and not by other processes. For a twentieth century school boy, this would seem to be a simple discovery. But in its historical perspective, his remark appears to be scientifically prophetic. Melville often spoke of the "clinkers," large chunks of black volcanic rock (basalt), that were strewn everywhere, and he was interested in the dark soil which was the remains of an ancient lava flow. To complete his initial comments, he adds that the isles generally look "much as the world might after a penal conflagration." In striking this metaphor, Melville moved beyond the empirical world into the world of symbol, a shift that points to his belief that natural things are at once real and symbols of ultimate reality. This reference to a burned out world after Judgment Day denotes atmospheric and imaginative qualities about the isles with which the reader can readily identify in mood and emotion.

After constructing his original metaphor, Melville is ready to deal with two outstanding characteristics of the Galapagos, "desolateness" and "solitariness." He claims "it is to be doubted whether any spot on earth can in, desolateness, furnish a parallel to this group."  

3 Foster, p. 54.  
4 Foster, p. 54.  
5 Piazza Tales, p. 149.
The countenance of the islands is compared to "abandoned cemeteries of long ago, and old cities by piecemeal tumbling to their ruin."  

And as for solitariness, the great forests of the north, the expanses of un navigated waters, the Greenland ice-fields, are the profoundest of solitudes to a human observer, still the magic of their changeable tides and seasons mitigates their terror; because, though unvisited by men, those forests are visited by May...  

What Melville sees as of primary importance is that seasonal change does not occur on the Encantadas. Again, he strikes to the heart of a scientific matter which to him has special significance. "But the special curse... of the Encantadas... is that to them change never comes; neither the change of seasons nor of sorrows, cut by the equator, they know not autumn and they know not spring."  

In a study of the climate of the Galapagos, Messers Palmer and Pyle, noted climatologists, have scientifically found some very interesting facts about these islands whose weather Melville thought was like that of Hell. Located in the "dry zone," and surrounded by equatorial rain belts, the Galapagos islands are subject to three types of climate variations. These are, the diurnal, the annual, and the recurrent. What this amounts to is the fact that "the Galapagos triangle has a distinct annual variation between a 'wet'  

6Piazza Tales, p. 149.  
7Piazza Tales, p. 150.  
8Piazza Tales, p. 150.  
9Bowman, p. 97.
season from January to April and a dry season for the rest of the year. The islands receive approximately four months of precipitation a year and are literally scorched for seven. The average rainfall is found to fluctuate greatly between a low of 1.4 inches recorded in 1950 and a high of 55.9 inches recorded in 1953.

Although Melville wasn't on the Galapagos very long and knew nothing about meteorology, he relates, in a different manner, the same kinds of climatological and topographical facts that Palmer and Pyle have since discovered.

The showers refresh the deserts, but in these isles rain never falls. Like split Syrian gourds left withering in the sun, they are cracked by an everlasting drought beneath a torrid sky. 'Have mercy upon me' the wailing spirit of the Encantadas seems to cry, 'and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.'

Melville's literary style and use of symbol adds reality to the empirical evidence that the scientists have uncovered. He obviously was in the Galapagos during the dry season of a dry year. His calling upon Lazarus and his allusion to the spirit of the Galapagos once again points out that Melville's approach to nature is different from that of the traditional scientist.

In keeping with his note of the desolation of the place, Melville concludes that the islands have an "emphatic uninhabitableness ... Encantadas refuse to harbor even the outcasts of men and

10 Bowman, p. 98.

11 Bowman, p. 94.

12 Piazza Tales, p. 150.
beasts.13 This observation is a direct function of the one made on the climate in which he hinted at the fact that the Galapagos are inhabited by no mammals except some sea lions and a few fur seals that are not indigenous to the region. His statement that "man and wolf alike disown" the enchanted isles is the culmination of his thinking about the desolation and solitude. The question he is really asking here is what kind of life flourishes on these cursed hunks of rock if he said man and wolf do not want them? He answers that "little but reptile life is here found: tortoises, lizards, immense spiders, snakes and that strangest anomaly of outlandish nature, the "Auguano" about in great numbers.14

Modern researchers surmise, as Melville found, that no predatory mammals exist on the Galapagos because the indigenous animalia were vegetarians, and few would be suitable food for "man or wolf." The geologist, Alden Miller, forewards an explanation that might solve the question that Melville asked. Miller says that the Galapagos are a rather new geologic group and arose from the sea completely isolated from any land mass that had significant forms of mammal life on it. Originally, the islands themselves were devoid of life and insects and other small species of animals came to them either by riding air currents, natural rafts, or by swimming.15 Also, the environment was suitable only for those animals who could life in an arid or sea

13 Piazza Tales, p. 150.
14 Piazza Tales, p. 150.
15 Bowman, p. 16.
habitat. Simply, Man and large beasts would have had great difficulty arriving by any of the aforementioned means, except by a raft as indeed Melville himself did, and they, like him, would have found the life there extremely harsh. Therefore, as Melville so perceptively noted and so imaginatively reasoned, only reptile, fish, and bird life could exist in abundance.

Of all the creatures that make their home on the barren rocks of the Galapagos, the birds seem to have been given the most attention. Melville says of Rock Rodondo, a huge round rock on a small island, "I know not where one can better study the natural history of strange sea fowl . . . it is the aviary of the ocean. Birds light there which never touched mast or tree." There were literally millions of birds on the rock when Melville explored it. To illustrate the number of birds that lived there, Melville said that the rock itself was covered with so much birdlime that ship's captains often mistook it for some distant sail. "Here and there were long bird lime streaks of a ghastly white staining the tower from the sea to air, readily accounting for its sail-like look afar." More than a century after Melville visited Rock Rodondo, Bryan Nelson, an ornithologist, and his wife spent more than a year studying and identifying the many species of birds that Melville earlier described. Although he had no zoological interest in the birds, Melville as an artist paid close attention to them.

16 Piazza Tales, p. 160.

17 Piazza Tales, p. 160.
Humorously, Melville was amused and confounded by the penguin. He asks, "what outlandish beings are these? Erect as men, but hardly as symmetrical, they stand all around the rock like sculptured caryatides . . . ." He had great difficulty deciding what a penguin was.

Their bodies are grotesquely misshapen; their bills short; their feet seemingly legless; while the members at their sides are neither fin, wing, nor arm. And truly neither flesh nor fowl in the penguin; as an edible, pertaining neither to carvival nor lent.

Like Melville himself, the penguin seems an alien to both the land and the sea. "On land it stumps; afloat it sculls; in the air it flops." These musings are not simply idle thoughts. Melville does think that nature and God are infallible. The penguin to him represents one of nature's grossest errors. "As if ashamed of her failure, nature keeps this ungainly child hidden away at the ends of the earth . . . ." The idea that some natural avenues of evolution are blind alleys might be inferred from his remarks about the stature of the penguin. This idea only became acceptable long after Darwin had published his Origin of the Species. In this instance, it is possible that Melville the artist through his powers of observation and intuition preempted some very important notions of the scientists.

As Melville moved from the base of the rock to its top, he hit upon the idea that a bird's position on the vertical face as an

18 Piazza Tales, p. 159.
19 Piazza Tales, p. 160.
20 Piazza Tales, p. 160.
21 Piazza Tales, p. 160.
indication of its place in the natural hierarchy. "As we still ascend from shelf to shelf, we find the tenants of the tower serially disposed in order of their magnitude."\textsuperscript{22} While Melville continually searched for a position in the natural order himself, he ascribed to the birds the human order. In a parody of Milton, Melville calls out to the birds, "thrones, princedoms, powers, dominating one above another in senatorial array . . . ."\textsuperscript{23} By addressing the birds in that manner, he remains close to initial metaphor of perdition while he painstakingly describes the beautiful but ominous bird called Mother Carey's Chicken.\textsuperscript{24}

That this mysterious humming bird of the ocean—which, had it but brilliancy of hue, might, from its evanescent liveliness, be almost called its butterfly, yet whose chirrup under the stern is ominous to mariners as to the peasant the death-tick sounding from behind the chimney jamb--should have its special haunt at the Encantadas contributes, in the seaman's mind, not a little to their dreary spell.\textsuperscript{25}

In this passage, one can see another point of departure between Melville and the scientist. Melville took the natural phenomena that he saw out of a strictly empirical context and put them into a higher context, super-nature. Here he looks for the paradoxes that are a part of the natural world. He sees the ominousness in beauty and finds that the beautiful creatures that give man aesthetic pleasure

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Piazza Tales}, p. 161.

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Piazza Tales}, p. 160.

\textsuperscript{24}Mother Carey's Chicken is a sea bird whose warble under the stern of a ship is supposed to be a sign of impending death.

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Piazza Tales}, p. 161.
can also bring him the signs of impending doom. The penguin and Mother Carey's Chicken metaphorically become a Melvillian microcosm of all natural things. That is, Melville thinks that there is neither perfection nor total innocence in nature. Unlike the scientist, he conceives of nature as the manifestation of a being which has great prophetic and vindictive powers.

From the birds of the air, Melville turned his observant eye on the "finny hosts which peopled the sea." At the base of the rock, there were numerous species of fish which were strange and exceedingly lovely, "and would have well graced the costliest glass globes in which gold-fish are kept for show." Melville was taken back by the huge schools of fish that he saw beneath the concentric ring of the water, and he tried a simple experiment with them.

To show the multitude, avidity, and nameless fearlessness and tameness of these fish, let me say, that often, marking through clear spores of water--temporarily made so by the concentric dartings of the fish above the surface--certain larger and less unwary weights, which swam slow and deep; our anglers would cautiously essay to drop their lines down to these last. But in vain; there was no passing the uppermost zone. No sooner did the hook touch the sea, than a hundred infuriates contended for the honor of capture.

After pondering the results of his experiment, Melville pronounces a particularly interesting admonishment: "Poor fishes of Rodondo! in your victimized confidence, you are of those who inconsiderately trust, while they do not understand, human nature."

26 Piazza Tales, p. 161.
27 Piazza Tales, p. 162.
28 Piazza Tales, p. 162.
29 Piazza Tales, p. 162.
In this last statement, Melville blames the fish, nature, for being naive. That is, the fish offer themselves up for slaughter. Not knowing that the men want to eat them, the "poor fish" vie for "the honor of capture." This is another example of how Melville sees nature as an artist rather than as a scientist. He personifies nature by ascribing to her some of the powers that men have. In this case, Melville accuses nature of not using her reason. She does not understand human nature which for Melville and other romantics and transcendentalists is beyond external nature herself. A scientist, of course, would not ascribe such human qualities to beasts, birds, and fish. As Melville sees it, the relationship between man and nature becomes one of the exploiter and the exploited. However, the exploited creatures ultimately triumph over intruding man. To see how well Melville handled this theme, one needs only to look at the episodes that take place between the white whale and Captain Ahab.

Even though Melville poses great questions about the man-nature relationship and tries to solve them philosophically and artistically, he seldom arrives at any single point of view to which he clings. At once he sympathizes with and curses the same natural phenomenon.

He leaves us to our own devices when in mid-afternoon he leaves Rock Rodondo:

Band after band, the sea fowl sail away to forage the deep for food. The tower is left solitary, save the fish-coves at its base. Its birdlime gleams in the golden rays like the white wash of a tall light-house, or the lofty sails of a cruiser. This moment, doubtless, while we know it to be a dead desert rock, other voyagers are taking oaths it is a glad populous ship.30

30Piazza Tales, p. 162.
Melville is saying that any approach to nature has to be subjective. While he knows that the rock is indeed a rock, others see it as a sail, and for them it might as well be a sail because their illusion stimulates them to act as if it were. For the artist, man's illusion is as real as objective truth.

Melville never claimed to be scientifically oriented, and a little geology was the only science to which he was ever exposed during his scanty education. It seems to this writer at least that Melville always discussed nature from the artist's point of view although he did make astute scientific observation. His greatest work shows this as well. What began as a kind of treatise on the whole and includes much data about the creature becomes in Moby-Dick an imaginative exploration of man's challenge to the natural order. His subjectivity, use of metaphor, personifications, and his perception beyond the empirical manifestations of nature to a reality behind nature clearly delineates him from the scientist. It might be the last point more than anything else, Melville's search for the force that drives nature, that solidly places him in the realm of great philosophy and art.
Although it is evident that Melville is quite successful as a nature writer and that he possesses a naturalist's sensitivity to his environment, his work amounts to much more than an author's reporting or recounting of natural phenomena to his readers. In fact, it is only when Melville's thoughts transcend the natural world into the realm of the supernatural that his purpose as an artist becomes clear. It is primarily within the metaphysical realm of super-nature that Melville makes known some profound ideas about man and his universe. In "The Encantadas" as in Moby-Dick, Melville thrusts the reader into a sense of the supernatural by setting up a tension between the two primeval forces of existence, good and evil. It is particularly evil, manifest in all its viable forms, that is a problem of paramount importance for an American Romantic like Melville.

Melville's initial indication to the reader that he is working with concepts outside the purely natural is given in the title. "The Encantadas" literally means the enchanted isles. The notion of enchantment has traditionally been associated with satanic forces, witches, and devils. Like Milton's Comus, the "spirit" of the Encantadas becomes an enchanter who would gobble up the unassuming sailors who periodically visit the isles. In a catalogue of the flora and fauna that he found thriving on the islands, Melville lists along
with "real things" some imaginary beings potentially harmful to man.

He says that the population of Albermale, one of the larger islands of the Galapagos, consists of:

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<td>Salamanders</td>
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<td>Devils</td>
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Looking at the list from a strictly rational viewpoint, it appears to be facetious. However, when seen in the higher context of the supernatural, it provides an insight into Melville's mind. That is, Melville had a great respect for the unknown powers which governed his universe. He reasoned that because of some unseen force no man could survive in the natural setting of the island. The explanation of the "force" for Melville was evil, the men-haters and the devils. It is also noteworthy that all of the animals catalogued here have a distinct common characteristic, human beings are usually afraid of them and equate them with the "black" powers of evil.

With the undertone of evil firmly established in "The Encantadas," Melville moves on to his definitive statement about the matter when he describes the great Galapagos tortoise. Melville was especially interested in the tortoise, but he does not speak of it in strictly natural terms. He noticed that the tortoise has two sides, a black top and a light or golden underplate. He immediately interpreted

1 Piazza Tales, p. 166.
the tortoise in terms of good and evil. For him, the tortoise is living proof that good and evil exist side by side in a harmonious tension. They are opposite sides of the same coin. He explained that although the tortoise "is dark and melancholy as it is up the back, it still possesses a bright side." For Melville, this creature, like the whale, is a natural embodiment of his idea that there is a nature beyond nature, some manipulative force that drives both man and beast. Melville makes much ado of turning a tortoise on its back so that the light underbelly is exposed.

Moreover, every one knows that tortoises as well as turtles are of such a make, that if you put them on their backs you thereby expose their bright sides without the possibility of their recovering themselves, and turning into view the other. But after you have done this, and because you have done this, you should not swear that the tortoise has no dark side.

In a very didactic manner, Melville is advising us to look at both sides of the question of good and evil without making the judgment that only one side exists because we can see it. He cautions, "Enjoy the bright, keep it turned up perpetually if you can, but be honest, and don't deny the black."

Melville further related a tale that proves that good and evil exist together. He felt that one could find the way to the light by searching through the darkness. One night three of the huge "ante-diluvian-looking" creatures were brought aboard his ship. We carefully scrutinized them and said that they were:

2 Piazza Tales, p. 154.
3 Piazza Tales, p. 154.
4 Piazza Tales, p. 154.
black as widower's weeds, heavy as chests of plate, with vast shells medallioned and ordered like shields that have breasted a battle, shaggy too, here and there with dark green moss, and slimy with the spray of the sea.5

As he pondered their size and age, the tortoises were transformed before his eyes into the "mystic creatures from beneath the world."6 They became "the identical tortoises whereupon the Hindoo plants his total sphere."7 As he continued to stare at them, they changed into three Roman coliseums in magnificent decay. He then entreated them, "ye oldest inhabitants of this, or any other isle, pray, give me the freedom of your three-walled town."8 By intently watching the tortoises, symbols of evil in this case, Melville saw them miraculously transformed into proverbial pillars of the universe. In the lumbering hideousness of the slimy and mossy tortoise, Melville found a symbol of security, something which he had needed throughout his life.

As he lay in his hammock the night that the tortoises were captured, Melville could hear the three terrapins moving with great difficulty upon the deck of the ship. He was astonished at their tenacity, and at sunrise he found one of the tortoises rammed against the foremast pushing against it as if to knock it down. "I found him butted like a battering-ram against the immovable foot of the foremast, and still striving, tooth and nail, to force the impossible passage."9

5Piazza Tales, p. 155.
6Piazza Tales, p. 155.
7Piazza Tales, p. 155.
8Piazza Tales, p. 155.
9Piazza Tales, p. 156.
Like Ahab in *Moby-Dick*, the tortoise had a monomania: he blindly followed a single path often filled with great obstacles. But unlike the ill-fated captain, the tortoise attacked the world with patience and strength, not with fanaticism and vengeance. The tortoise did not charge haphazardly against the mast; it slowly but resolutely placed itself in opposition to his obstacle. Eventually, as Melville points out, the contest of life does not become one of quick sharp blows, as Ahab perceived, but it is one of time. The implication is that the tortoise, the longest-lived creature of the animal kingdom might win its battle against the mast, a man-made object, by sheer tenacity.

In his musings about the tortoise, Melville began to wonder why the animal approached the problems of the past in the way it did, and in a burst of natural philosophy he arrived at an answer:

> Listening to these draggings and concussions, I thought of the haunt from which they came; an isle full of metallic ravines and gulches, sunk bottomlessly into the hearts of splintered mountains, and covered for many miles with inextricable thickets.  

This simply means that the tortoise butts against the mast because it is the natural action for it to take. Because the tortoise comes from an environment in which there are loose rocks strewn everywhere and because it is accustomed to moving the rocks by the sheer power of its body, its instincts tell it to ram the mast as it would ram a rock on one of the islands. Thus, the tortoise and the mast metaphorically become man and nature at odds with each other. While man often

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10 *Piazza Tales*, p. 157.
obtrudes his own devices and objects into nature, nature, using her traditional inexorable method, tries to eradicate them. Melville seems to imply that nature always wins.

Melville ends his encounter with the tortoises when he lapses, perhaps from exhaustion, into a trance-like state in which he has a vision of the creatures "century after century, writhing through the shades,"\textsuperscript{11} carrying the sins of the world on their backs. They crawl so slowly, as does time for the guilty, that fungus and mosses grow upon their shells. Melville mentally (metaphysically) follows the wondrous tortoises into the rotting world of blackened bushes and volcanic mazes until in a dream he sees himself sitting cross-legged upon a ship's foremast with a brahmin "similarly mounted upon either side, forming a tripod of foreheads which upheld the universal cope."	extsuperscript{12}

By closely studying and meditating upon the forces of good and evil as symbolized by the tortoises, Melville has achieved a kind of Demi-godhood. Through the attainment of such a state, he began to understand himself and his world. This is exactly what the study of nature and its "sunyata,"\textsuperscript{13} the supernatural, has done for Melville in his earlier work. The assumption is that if man can throw off his particular consciousness of manhood and meet nature and her counterpart on their own terms, then he can find a positive value in the cosmic

\textsuperscript{11}Piazza Tales, p. 157.

\textsuperscript{12}Piazza Tales, p. 157.

\textsuperscript{13}Sunyata: a Sanskrit term meaning the complement of reality; the void behind the appearance.
scheme. Melville's peering through the natural curtain into the realm of the supernatural is a soul-cleansing, almost redemptive, act.

Melville believed that if man could understand the evil that exists within nature and within himself, then man might be able to take his place at the top of the living hierarchy where he has always claimed to be. The tortoise and the whale, symbolizing the power, cunning, patience, and the good-evil paradox that exists in nature greatly affected Melville's thinking. His experiences with these creatures represent the epitome of the man-nature dialectic that the artist, and more recently the ecologist, is aware of. Man can only exist in nature if he submits to it; man the conqueror conquers only himself, but man the steward survives, or as Melville says about the tortoises, endures.

In "The Encantadas," Melville has warned that because of the existence of natural evil on the islands, man cannot exist on them. If man tries to inhabit them, he wars against nature and super-nature, and this can only bring him suffering and death. Melville continues to deal with the supernatural and its effect on man when he puts men on these uninhabitable islands. The results, although predictable, are important.
CHAPTER V

MAN ON THE ENCHANTED ISLES

Throughout the early sketches of "The Encantadas," Melville showed how the natural elements of the Galapagos islands prohibited successful human habitation of the archipelago. He intimated that in this world of fiends and serpents, man is an outsider who visits but does not remain for any appreciable length of time. Save for a few expeditions by sailors in search of food and water, the land remained unsettled and untilled by humanity. As he reiterated, even the outcasts of animals could not survive in the barrenness of the volcanic wastes. With sketch seven, however, Melville moved in a new direction.

He experimented with the problem of what happened when man was pitted against the natural harshness of the geography of the Galapagos. Of course, Melville could not choose to put "normal" or "average" men in this setting, because it would have been facetious to do so. The man who was comfortable in society would, under no circumstances, choose to live in such a Hellish place. Instead, Melville placed upon the islands only the dregs of humanity: men with illusions of grandeur, fortune hunters, and fugitives. Only the sediment of human kind was foolish enough to challenge nature on her own grounds.

The seventh sketch, "Charles Isle and the Dog-King," is the story of an unnamed Creole soldier who had fought for Peru's
independence from Spain. When the Peruvian forces were successful, the government was bankrupt and could not pay the mercenaries who had helped free it. The Creole, one such mercenary, decided that he would take his pay in land rather than in money. The government "told him that he might have his pick of the Enchanted Isles, which were then, as they still remain, the nominal appendage of Peru." 1

The soldier immediately embarked upon a voyage to the isles and decided that he was going to be the sole owner and sovereign of a small island known as Charles's isle. Moreover, he insisted that this isle be declared as free of Peru as Peru was of Spain. "To be short, this adventurer proclaims himself to be made in effect Supreme Lord of the Island, one of the Princes of the powers of the earth." 2

The self-proclaimed monarch quickly saw that one thing was awry with his kingdom: it had no subjects. To remedy this defect, he made a proclamation inviting settlers to his unpopulated state. According to Melville, some eighty people responded to the Creole's plea and migrated to the island. They boarded a ship stocked with tools, a few cattle and some goats and were off to create a real state. The king was the last man to board ship, and he was surrounded by "a disciplined cavalry company of large grim dogs." 3

These, it was observed on the passage, refusing to consort with the emigrants, remained aristocratically grouped around their master on the elevated quarter deck, casting disdainful

1 Piazza Tales, p. 175.
2 Piazza Tales, p. 175.
3 Piazza Tales, p. 176.
glances, forward upon the inferior rabble there; much as, from the ramparts, the soldiers of a garrison, thrown into a conquered town, eye the inglorious citizen-mob over which they are set to watch.4

This is how the Creole came to be known as the "Dog-King."

Immediately after debarkation, the rude company built their capital city out of the clinkers and lava chunks that lay abundantly on the island. But more important, they upset the natural chain of existence of the isle by pasturing their cattle and goats on the already barren hills and by slaughtering the ancient tortoises that lived there. In a very short time, life went badly for the dog-king because of the "peculiarly untoward character of many of the pilgrims."5 Greed and thievery ultimately forced the Creole to set up a system of martial law and institute an arbitrary system of justice. He "actually hunted and shot with his own hand several of his rebellious subjects, who, with most questionable intentions, had clandestinely encamped in the interior . . . ."6 Life on the isle became desperate and the death penalty had to be revoked because of the dwindling number of subjects. The Creole guards were dismissed and forced to work in the potato fields. Only he and his dogs were left to keep order. "Armed to the teeth, the Creole now goes in state, surrounded by his Janizaries, whose terrific

4Piazza Tales, p. 176.
5Piazza Tales, p. 176.
6Piazza Tales, p. 176.
bayings prove quite as sensible as bayonets in keeping down the surgings of revolt."7

Because of the dwindling population, the Creole king tried to entice people to come to the island.

By insidious arts he, from time to time, cajoles certain sailors to desert their ships, and enlist beneath his banner. Soon as missed, their captains crave permission to go and hunt them up. Whereupon His Majesty first hides them very carefull away, and then freely permits the search. In consequence, the delinquents are never found, and the ships retire without them.8

Thus the crafty monarch managed to increase his population while depleting that of other nations. But his methods were not without dire consequences. Like the Pretorians of ancient Rome, the lawless mariners mutinied against their master. The king marched against them with his army of dogs, and a deadly battle took place upon the beach. Melville relates that "it raged for three hours, the dogs fighting with determined valor, and the sailors reckless of everything but victory."9 Sarcastically, Melville announced that "three men and thirteen dogs were left dead upon the field, many on both sides wounded and the king was forced to fly with the remainder of his canine regiment."10 Classically, the victors returned to the capital, broke open the spirit casks, buried their heroic dead, and threw the enemy carcasses into the sea.

7 Piazza Tales, p. 177.
8 Piazza Tales, p. 177.
9 Piazza Tales, p. 178.
10 Piazza Tales, p. 178.
The men who survived the battle proclaimed a Republic and exiled the defeated king. The Creole returned to Peru an ex-king awaiting word that the Republic had failed. "Doubtless he deemed the Republic but a miserable experiment which would soon explode."¹¹ Much to his dismay, the Republic never fell. That is, there never really was a Republic, "nay, it was no democracy at all, but a permanent Riotocracy, which glorified in having no law but lawlessness."¹² Deserters of ships were hailed as martyrs and great inducements were made to make men join the ungainly ranks. Here Melville explained that the island became "off limits" to any sailors and, eventually, the colony died.

One can only speculate on Melville's reason for including this story in a group of sketches that are ostensibly studies of nature. There are several ideas which might be forwarded as answers, but Melville gives us a hint as to what is really happening in the stories: "the history of Charles's Island furnishes another illustration of the difficulty of colonizing barren islands with unprincipled pilgrims."¹³ Melville indicates that nature is law; it operates according to immutable principles dictated to itself by itself. The prime law of the barren islands is that no man can live there naturally. It would be stupid enough for "principled" men to think that they could create a society on the islands, but for the knaves who came to settle, it was

¹¹ Piazza Tales, p. 178.
¹² Piazza Tales, p. 178.
¹³ Piazza Tales, p. 178.
idiotic. In this deliberate understatement, Melville sneers, as he did in *Typee* and *Omoo*, at the "civilized" men who came to tame the "savage" wild. According to Melville's belief, there are no circumstances under which these men could have successfully inhabited Charles's isle. To believe that the Dog-King, an illusion to Cerberus at the gates of Hell, could have ruled the island, would be to believe that Ahab could have conquered *Moby-Dick*. In short, the outcasts of men and beasts, the Creole and his wolf-like dogs, were at the outset doomed to failure.

Another point that Melville challenges is the notion that man can "own" or rule the earth or any of its parts. The futility and facetiousness of land ownership is clearly seen in this sketch. The lord supreme of Charles's Isle was, in the final analysis, a slave to nature and to his subjects. He was easily overthrown and his island empire vanished into an island Republic. The important point is that after men and governments die and dissolve, the land remains. No man can rightfully claim dominion over nature. If he does, he succeeds only in enslaving himself. The lack of harmony, and the lawlessness that was indicative of the dog-king's government is analogous to the fact that he and his men were out of tune with the natural surroundings of the island. The goats, traditional satanic symbols, were the only creatures who were able to freely explore the hinterland of the island without ill effect. Thus in symbol and word, Melville restates one of the main themes of his entire canon; the natural order is superior to the order imposed by men in society. In essence, nature rules man and
not man nature. If a person is ridiculous enough to claim lordship over natural phenomena, he is, like the dog-king, reduced to a fool.

In sketch eight, the grim tale of the results of exploitation of nature is related. Hunilla, a beautiful girl of Spanish-Indian descent, came to the Galapagos with her brother Truxill and her Castillian husband Felipe to capture the great tortoises in order to extract the valuable tortoise oil. They had been transported from Peru to the islands by a French captain who promised to pick them up on his return trip from the South Seas. The Frenchman departed and left the three "Cholos" alone to fend for themselves in the blazing wilderness of the island. At this point, their entire existence was dependent upon the natural habitat of the islands, and their survival was predicated upon the delicate eco-system. However, their intentions were not to live in harmony with the natural resources, but to exploit them. This, as Melville forshadowed, was a disastrous error.

Yet, however dire a calamity was here in store, misgivings of it ere due time never disturbed the Cholos' busy mind, now all intent upon the toilsome matter which had brought them hither. Nay, by swift doom coming like the thief at night, ere seven weeks went by, two of the little party were removed from all anxieties of land or sea. No more they sought to gaze with feverish fear, or still more feverish hope. Beyond the present's horizons; but into the furthermost future their own silent spirits sailed.¹⁴

This slightly philosophical forewarning is a prelude to the events which quickly follow it. Melville cast the whole of the Cholo's operation in an evil shadow. By "The swift doom coming" the reader knows precisely what price nature demands for wanton slaughter of her

¹⁴Piazza Tales, p. 183.
creatures. After having "brought down to their hut many scores of tortoises," Truxill and Felipe "elated with their good success."\textsuperscript{15} built a catamaran in order that they might fish and rest. They joyfully made for the long jagged reef that surrounded the isle at a distance of about a half mile from the shore. But nature is not kind to entrepeneurs in flimsy boats.

By some bad tide or hap, or natural negligence of joyfulness (for though they could not be heard, yet by their gestures they seemed singing at the time) forced in deep water against that iron bar, the ill-made catamaran was overset, and came all to pices; when dashed by broad-chested swells between their broken logs and the sharp teeth of the reef, both adventurers perished before Hunilla's eyes.\textsuperscript{16}

Here is seen the impartiality and pitilessness with which nature strikes out against those who ravish her. The violations of Truxill and Felipe, committed by a lust for wealth, came to bear heavily upon them as they drowned helplessly in the sea. It is significant that Melville showed absolutely no sympathy for the drowned men. He spared not a sentence for lamenting them. The matter-of-fact way in which Melville described the Cholos' demise suggests that he accepted as inevitable the vindictive forces of the sea. In Melville's view, the terrible justice handed out by the waves and reef was righteous.

In a closer examination of the death scene, Melville's subtlety of mind is made clear. Aside from the prevalent undercurrent of enchantment that pervades all of the sketches, Melville personified,
for the sake of realism, the engines of the adventurers' destruction. For example, Melville described the killer waves as "broad-chested swells." This is a typically human metaphor. The reader can visualize the fierce pride and power of nature as the waves rise up to smash the intruding men. The sea becomes a brutal giant demanding recompense for his slain tortoises. Likewise, the reef becomes the jaw of the sea and its "sharp teeth" tear and grind the frail catamaran to bits.

Another quality that Melville injects into this crucial passage is mystery. For him, as for many artists, life and nature are the ultimate mystery in which bumbling men, because of their greed and hatred, inadvertently cut the strings of their own fates. The key to this idea lies in the line that beings, "by some bad tide or hap or natural negligence of joyfulness ..." The implication here is that some unknown force, possibly the same force that he described earlier in his sketches, has made itself manifest (hap), and has brought the deaths of the men. With regard to this passage, Melville's simple axiom is that exploitation of nature, where man has no place, is fatal.

One can profitably draw some parallels between the Eighth Sketch of "The Encantadas" and Moby-Dick. There are at least two obvious similarities between the works, and they lie, in a very broad sense, in the realm of characterization. In the two works, there are those characters who challenge and die, and those characters who are opposed to the monomaniacal fervour with which the ill-fated characters attack nature. More concretely, just as Ahab was doomed for his pursuit of the whale, so were Truxill and Felipe punished for their crimes
against the tortoises. Although it can be correctly argued that the motivations of the people involved here were different, it is ironic and perhaps logical that they succumb to the sea in similar manners. Philipe and Truxill violated the sanctuary of the tortoise, a Melvillean symbol of good and evil, with the same abandon that Ahab harpooned the Leviathan. None of these men paid any attention to the mysterious omens which forewarned them of their impending peril. Ahab on the one hand ignored Fedallah's prophesies and the Cholos on the other hand refused to take heed of the French sea captain's actions. On this point of characterization, Moby-Dick and The Eighth Sketch are literally similar even if the story of the Cholos is only a micro-cosmic reflection of Ahab's cosmic adventure.

As another point of similarity, one can look to the characters of Hunilla and Ishmael. It is obvious that both of these characters, one used by Melville as a narrator and the other as the primary source of the story, survived while their cohorts met terrible deaths. Why did Hunilla survive? A convenient answer would be to say that Melville needed someone to relate the tale to him. Whatever truth there might be in that line of reasoning, there is a larger truth lurking behind it. Hunilla like Ishmael survived because she refused to take an active part in the evil enterprise in which her husband and her brother had been engaged.

This is not to say that either Ishmael or Hunilla were not aware or had no part at all in the main characters' actions. The attitudes that they held toward what was happening was their redeeming element. Although Ishmael was certainly a Whaleman, he never whole
heartedly consented to be a party to Ahab's insanity. Thus he, as no one else on the Pequod, retained a kind of natural innocence which allowed him to survive. Hunilla in the same spirit, is never described as having been totally committed to the capturing of the tortises. In fact, Melville makes it obvious that Hunilla came to the Galapagos out of love for her husband. In one of the final scenes of the Eighth Sketch, Melville emphasizes the love Hunilla held for Felipe, and in a way it is the same kind of love that Ishmael held for Quee Queg.

... I remembered the husband buried by Hunilla's hands. A narrow pathway led into a dense part of the thickets. Following it through many mazes, I came out upon a small, round, open space, deeply chambered there. The mound rose in the middle; a bare heap of finest sand, like that unverdured heap found at the bottom of an hour-glass run out. At its head stood the cross of withered sticks; the dry, peeled bark still fraying from it; its transverse limb tied up with rope, and forlornly adroop in the silent air.

Hunilla was partly prostrate upon the grave; her dark head bowed, and lost in her long, loosened Indian hair; her hands extended to the cross-foot, with a little brass crucifix clasped between; a crucifix worn featureless, like an ancient graven knocker long plied in vain. She did not see me, and I made no noise, but slid aside and left the spot.17

Hunilla and Ishmael acted admirably and were in accord with both natural and social law, neither of them wished to use nature for their own purposes. This is, of course, one of Melville's prerequisites for survival. It seems that neither Hunilla nor Ishmael were as guilty, in degree, for the transgressions against nature as those who perished on the Pequod or in the catamaran. The lines of parallel between the two characters extend even to the point of their

17 Piazza Tales, p. 192.
respective rescues. Both characters were plucked from isolation and certain death by passing whaling ships. In the embodiment of Hunilla, one sees a sort of female counterpart to Ishmael, and in this phenomenon lies proof that Melville had not written himself out concerning his man-nature theme after Moby-Dick. He remains consistent and powerful and is constant to his view of nature.

Of the people Melville placed on the Enchanted isles, Oberlus, a "wild white creature,"\(^{18}\) is by far the most evil and the most unnatural. In truth, Melville suspected that Oberlus brought "into this region qualities more diabolical than are to be found among any of the surrounding cannibals."\(^{19}\) This statement is of course a reiteration of what Melville had previously said in Typee and Omoo. He believed that the civilized white man is more evil than the noble "savages" who inhabit the South Seas. To give the reader a further perspective on Oberlus and to set the tone of his "sketch," Melville said that:

His appearance, from all accounts, was that of the victim of some malignant sorceress; he seemed to have drunk of Circe's cup; Beast-like; rags insufficient to hide his nakedness; his befreckled skin blistered by continual exposure to the sun; nose flat; countenance contorted, heavy, earthy; hair and beard unshorn, profuse, and of fiery red. He struck strangers much as if he were a volcanic creature thrown up by the same convulsion which exploded into sight the isle.\(^{20}\)

By returning to his standard image of evil--whiteness--and by portraying Oberlus as an enchanted wild man, Melville set the stage

\(^{18}\)Piazza Tales, p. 194.

\(^{19}\)Piazza Tales, p. 194.

\(^{20}\)Piazza Tales, pp. 194-195.
for the main point of the story, the battle between good and evil on an enchanted island where men had no right to be. After much description of Oberlus' eccentricity, like his habit of approaching strangers with his back, Melville contrived a direct confrontation between the hermit and a Negro seaman. One day Oberlus spied a boat with a Negro standing by it. Perceiving that the Negro was alone, Oberlus accosted him. "The Negro aghast at seeing any living being inhabiting such a solitude, and especially so horrific a one, immediately falls into a panic, not at all lessened by the ursine sauvity of Oberlus, who begs the favor of assisting him in his labors." 21 Needless to say, the Negro, possibly the symbol of goodness in this case, was overwhelmed by Oberlus' cunning and might. At gun point, the black seaman was told that he was to be the hermit's slave. "But Oberlus, deceived by the first impulsive cowardice of the black, in an evil moment slackens his vigilance." 22 While passing through a narrow way, the black overtook Oberlus and returned him to the boat. There Oberlus, handcuffed, whipped, and robbed, finally escaped while the men of the ship destroyed his hut and potato fields.

Severely punished for his evil actions, Oberlus sat among the rubble of his hut and planned "a single revenge upon humanity." 23 Like the Dog-King, Oberlus decided that he would be the Emperor of his isle. In accord with this idea, he entreated "subjects," usually

21*Piazza Tales*, p. 197.

22*Piazza Tales*, p. 198.

23*Piazza Tales*, p. 198.
seamen, to come to his hut for a drink of wine. When they did so, 
he would serve them until they fell into a drunken stupor. When his 
guests were insensible, he tied and concealed them among the clinkers 
until their ship set sail. "When finding themselves entirely de­
pendent upon Oberlus, alarmed at his changed demeanor, his savage 
threats, and above all, that shocking blunderbuss, they willingly 
enlist under him, becoming his humble slaves, and Oberlus the most 
incredible of tyrants."24

Enlisting four subjects in this manner, Oberlus thought of a 
new plan for gaining power: "his probable object being to surprise 
some passing ship touching at his dominions, massacre the crew, and 
run away with her to parts unknown."25 When his chance came, Oberlus 
and his army of four were able to capture a single harpooning boat 
such as was in common use on a whaler. He and his unwilling subjects 
set sail for Guayaquil. However, Oberlus alone arrived in port, and 
his four slaves were never heard from again. Presumably Oberlus threw 
them overboard when his water ran low. From Guayaquil, Oberlus went to 
Payta and wooed a lovely dark damsel. He promised to take her back to 
his Enchanted Isle and make her a queen.

But unfortunately for the colonization of Hood's Isle 
with a choice of variety of animated nature, the extraordinary 
and devilish aspect of Oberlus made him to be regarded in 
Payta as a highly suspicious character. So that being found 
concealed one night, with matches in his pocket, under the 
hull of a small vessel just ready to be launched, he was 
seized and thrown into jail.26

24Piazza Tales, p. 198.
25Piazza Tales, p. 200.
Here Oberlus spent many years "a creature whom it is religion to detest, since it is philanthropy to hate a misanthrope."27

The story of Oberlus clearly indicates that in "The Encantadas," Melville sees the Enchanted Isles as a microcosm of the natural universe in which man is an unwanted tresspasser. Nature and her delicate balance live harmoniously in a silent world where if man appears at all, he is depicted as a plunderer, pirate, runaway, or hermit. Oberlus is the symbolic perversion of human kind who has come to the islands to create his own weird society. Characters such as Oberlus, the Cholos, and the Dog-King are the unlikely usurpers of the once peaceful volcanic isles. For Melville, these transgressors and men like them have no place in the natural order. The final sketches of "The Encantadas" seem to be a summary of what Melville repeatedly stated throughout his work concerning the man-nature problem. They not only illuminate but clearly define the stance that he takes when writing about the natural world which we inhabit.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

This study has explored Melville's ideas concerning man and nature as found within the framework of one of his last works, "The Encantadas." This writer discovered that other than a few literary source studies, little significant criticism has been written on this important piece of Melville's work. No critic has been inclined to examine the most outstanding aspect of "The Encantadas," the natural setting of the Galapagos islands. By unanimously ignoring Melville's concern for nature and man's place in the natural scheme as indicated in the story, the critics have never put "The Encantadas" in its proper place in Melville's artistic canon. "The Encantadas" are actually an extension of Melville's grappling with his major subjects of man, nature, and the sea.

To understand why Melville thought as he did about these themes, it was necessary to know why he left the civilized world to explore the world of nature, especially the sea. Although a number of theories have been constructed with regard to "why Ishmael went to sea," the most tenable one was given by biographers and critics who found that Melville was both insecure and a failure at land-based vocations. Because he could not make a success of clerking, teaching, or farming, Melville in 1841 was literally forced to sail. Unfortunately, however, while on the whaling ship, Acushnet, Melville
quickly learned that he was not suited for life as a sailor. He soon deserted ship and spent nearly three years island hopping in the South Seas. Convinced that life as a Polynesian "savage" was not for him, Melville returned to New York in 1844, aware that he was as much a stranger to nature as he was to civilization.

"The Encantadas" are Melville's final attempt to resolve this problem. In the story, Melville carefully describes the natural environment of the Galapagos islands, painstakingly pointing out the fact that they were not meant for man. Although his descriptions often border on the scientific, they fall securely within the realm of art in that Melville extensively used metaphor, imagination, and symbol to make his purpose and meaning clear. He was intrigued by the animal life forms that abounded on the islands, but he was even more concerned with the force that controlled the natural creatures, the supernatural.

The real truth of nature for Melville was found not in the living curtain of organic matter, but behind it in the world of supernature. Here, he came to terms with the cosmic problems of the Good-Evil dialectic and the nature of man himself. By using a natural being, the tortoise, as living embodiment of the Good-Evil tension, Melville concluded that both qualities exist in a natural harmony until a man chooses to view one side or the other forgetting that there is a complement to the side he sees. Thus Melville felt that man and animals contained some of each quality. For the romantic like Melville, however, the force of evil usually takes precedence over good.
Finally, Melville brought to flower his musings about man and nature when he placed men, evil men, exploiters and tyrants, in the natural habitat of the Enchanted isles. The Dog-King, a power-seeking Creole; the Cholos, speculators in tortoise oil; and Oberlus, a cruel "white" hermit, personified Melville's contention that man is evil when he tries to use nature for his own ends. Ultimately, Melville said that nature would triumph over man the intruder. The deposing of the Dog-King, the drowning of the Cholos, and the jailing of Oberlus proved in concrete terms that Melville felt that there was a proper man-nature relationship that if violated would bring unhappiness, perversion, and death.
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THE WORK OF HERMAN MELVILLE


