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RESISTING THE VORTEX: ABJECTION IN THE EARLY WORKS OF HERMAN MELVILLE

by

JENNIFER M. WING

Under the Direction of Robert Sattelmeyer

ABSTRACT

"Resisting the Vortex" examines the tenuous role of the abject in Melville's early writings. While much psychoanalytic criticism on Melville and his works is driven by Freudian and Lacanian analyses, my study explores the role(s) of women, particularly that of the mother, through the lens of Kristeva's theory of abjection. I suggest that Melville's depiction of the abject evolves and becomes more apparent as his writing career progresses. I include *Typee*, *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre* in my analysis since these texts demonstrate the evolution of Melville's relationship to the abject mother. I argue that throughout each of these works, the female (and some of the male native characters as well) are depicted in terms that are similar to Kristeva's concept of the idealized chora and the abject mother. While the male protagonists of Melville's early works are drawn to women who seem to embody the chora (the energies and drives that are regulated by the mother's body), they recoil from women who are abject and seem to threaten their sense of identity. Although man must reject/abject the mother in order to maintain a sense of autonomous identity, he still longs to recreate the symbiotic

relationship he once had with the mother as an infant. He seeks the language of the mother's body – that of the semiotic, which issues from the chora, – in an effort to return to the safe haven of the womb. This tension between maintaining a sense of identity that is separate from the mother while simultaneously longing to return to the mother, is evident in each of Melville's aforementioned works to varying degrees. However, it is in *Pierre*, a work that chronicles a young man's attempt to escape the suffocating influence of his mother, that the threat of the abject becomes the central theme of one of Melville's novels. Ultimately, man should strive to balance his need for an autonomous identity with the realization that he may never fully "escape" the mother's presence in his life. Unfortunately, Melville's leading men fail to recognize this paradox and the consequences are dire.

INDEX WORDS: Melville, Kristeva, Abject, Chora, Semiotic, Mother, Nature, Body, Sexuality, Psychoanalysis

RESISTING THE VORTEX: ABJECTION IN THE EARLY WORKS OF HERMAN MELVILLE

by

JENNIFER MARY WING

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2008

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2008

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May 2008

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to the women in my life who have all been mothers to me in one way or another: Marcia W. Wing, Jacquelyn Gentry, Corrine Whitman, Marianne Kintz and Tress Bonura.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Robert Sattelmeyer for his patience and thoughtful analysis of my work. He listened to my ideas and sent me off on new tangents of thought and lines of inquiry that made this work what it is today. His knowledge, kindness and shrewd sense of humor made this whole process manageable. I also owe unending gratitude to Janet Gabler-Hover for nurturing the germ of this dissertation which emerged out of my Master's thesis. She has encouraged me to write with conviction and she has also pushed me beyond what I thought were my capabilities as a writer. This dissertation also could not have been possible without Calvin Thomas and the theoretical knowledge he so expertly conveys to his students. He has taught me new ways of looking at the world and myself. I would also like to thank Marti Singer for being a mentor and friend to me throughout my experiences here at Georgia State. She has taught me how to be a teacher and for that I am eternally grateful. Finally, this project would have been impossible without the support and loving understanding of my partner, Tress. She has patiently endured the writing process and all of its eccentricities with me and still managed to make me smile every day. My sister, Marianne, has listened patiently across the miles to my dissertation woes and helped me keep things in perspective. And, the women of Etowah Dr. have been my support group and strength. Finally, I have to thank Peanut and Buddy for being my canine companions throughout the writing process.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Herman Melville and his works have been the subject of much psychoanalytic criticism which has been rooted firmly in the Freudian / Lacanian tradition for the most part. Beginning with *Moby-Dick* in particular, critics have analyzed themes such as language, race, gender, and sexuality in Melville's work through the lens of psychoanalysis.[1] Adding to this discussion have been numerous feminist critics who question and attempt to destabilize what are perceived to be phallocentric interpretations of Melville's work. For example, Melville's performance of masculinity in his adventure and seafaring novels has been open for much debate. Some perceive this "performance" of masculinity to be oppressive to the women and minorities in Melville's texts,[2] while others suggest that it signifies various masculinities that are full of possibilities.[3] Meanwhile, very little criticism has attended to the women of Melville's texts, the earlier novels in particular. And, the bit of criticism that does exist often focuses on the absence of women in these text(s)[4] or the role of women as symbols for creativity.[5] Beginning with *Pierre*, one may easily find a myriad of perspectives on the women of this text and those that come after it as well. Yet, one is left to wonder why Melville wrote the first half of his works without any fully defined, complex female characters and then, why all of a sudden he completes a novel such as *Pierre*, wherein the leading male protagonist is accompanied by and defined by three leading ladies (his mother, Isabel and Lucy)?

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[1] See for example, Robert K. Martin's *Hero, Captain, and Stranger*, the works of Caleb Crain, Andrew Delbanco, Justin D. Edwards, William Heath, David Mitchell, Hershel Parker, Paula Miner-Quinn, Book Thomas, and Daneen Wardrop.
[2] See the works of Wai-chee Dimock, Juniper Ellis, Nancy Fredricks, Elizabeth Renker, and Robyn Wiegman for example.
[3] See the works of Robert K. Martin and Leland S. Person.
[4] See Nancy Fredrick's work.
[5]See works of Thomas Brook, Jennifer Toner DiLalla and Leland S. Person's *Aesthetic Headaches*.

This question has puzzled me ever since I first began researching Melville and his relationship to the female characters in his works. When I first wrote about Melville and women, I took a rather extreme position, wondering if perhaps he truly was a misogynist. However, after reading more and more of his works and reflecting upon them I don't believe the answer to be as simple or tidy as that. While poring over the various depictions of women in Melville's adventure novels, I realized that these women were either innocent, young, beautiful women or dangerously alluring "dark" women. This conclusion has been noted by several critics who each offer their own line of reasoning as to why Melville's employs "light" and "dark" women in his narratives.[6] However, I began to see that these light and dark women might serve as an overarching metaphor for Melville's relationship to the women in his texts (and very likely the women in his own life as well). Perhaps, instead of reading these women through the more traditional lens of Freudian and/or Lacanian psychoanalytic theory where they are mere players in the quest for the phallus (to be or to have), I could try a Kristevan reading which would allow a focus on the women of the texts as bearers of the chora and the abject which both in turn, affect man's sense of identity.

I began examining the "dark" female characters (and some native characters as well) through the lens of Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. And, after more thought and research I realized that the "light" female characters (and even a few native characters) could be read as idealized versions of the chora. These "light" characters spoke in highly poetic, musical languages that seemed reminiscent of Kristeva's semiotic. Could it be that through this vacillation between "light" and "dark" females (or even

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[6] For a thorough discussion of this see Nathalia Wright's, "The Head and the Heart in Melville's *Mardi*." *PMLA* 66.4 (1951): 351-62.

"feminine" natives) the narrators of these texts (and maybe even Melville himself) were demonstrating the ultimate quest to reunite with the mother (not Lacan's Real, but the chora)?

Before proceeding it might prove useful to briefly summarize Kristeva's theory of the chora and the process of abjection. I provide a more thorough explanation of these theories in chapter one. Kristeva claims "…the drives, which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a non expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated" (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 25). This chora is the receptacle for drives and energies that are regulated by the mother's body. The infant in the womb "communicates" with the mother via the chora in a symbiotic relationship of sorts. When the infant is immersed into symbolic language (practically at birth) its separation from the mother becomes all the more clear physically and linguistically. This child begins to struggle to define himself and create an identity that is separate from the mother. During this never-ending process, he must "ab-ject" the mother in order to preserve some sense of a separate identity. Kristeva notes, "…I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (*Powers of Horror* 3). This process of abjection is continuous because one can never be fully rid of the mother/maternal. And, ironically enough, that which we seek to abject is also that which we are constantly drawn back towards. Despite our efforts to separate from the mother and craft autonomous identities, we still long for the symbiotic relationship we once had as infants with our mother. This paradox of sorts is something I would venture to say everyone confronts at some point or other throughout their lives. Despite the

contemporariness of Kristeva's theory of abjection, she tells a story that has affected men and women for centuries – the story of a child who must reconcile his own sense of identity with the identity he once shared with the mother. I am suggesting that much of Melville's writing inadvertently addresses this struggle of reconciliation with the mother. His vacillations between female figures who seem to embody the chora and speak in a language of the semiotic (a language of utterances emerging from the drives and energies of the chora) and female figures who seem to embody the abject (that which "disturbs identity, system, order" [*PH* 4]), represent this cyclical process of reconciling oneself to the mother.

I have chosen several texts to follow the thread of the abject that runs throughout much of Melville's early works. I begin with his first novel, *Typee*, to establish Melville's depiction of both women and at times natives as well to designate the chora and the abject respectively (for the most part, there are a few exceptions). Then I examine *Mardi*, his first self-described romance, where he begins self-consciously to explore psychological themes, and I then turn to the role of the abject in *Moby-Dick* and then conclude with *Pierre*. While very few females populate the text of *Moby-Dick*, specific sections of the work offer rich portrayals of the abject through homosocial encounters and at times graphic representations of abject substances. Yet, *Pierre* is especially important to my argument because it fully demonstrates the lead character's attempt to define himself against his mother. After toying with the abject in his earlier works, *Pierre* functions as the culmination of his earlier efforts to wrestle explicitly with this "taboo" subject.

In order to maintain a sense of continuity and coherence throughout my analysis, I have chosen to divide this study into three rather lengthy chapters with a brief "Interlude" in between. The first two chapters on *Typee* and *Mardi* respectively, are lengthy because I've tried to establish the foundation of my argument and application of Kristeva's theory in rather extensive detail. The "Interlude" on *Moby-Dick* is the briefest of all sections because it does not provide as much direct evidence for my argument as some of the other texts. The chapter on *Pierre* serves as the concluding chapter in that it exemplifies the narrator's engagement with the abject mother. Additionally, *Pierre* marks the end of the phase in Melville's career where the novel served as a vehicle for his own journey into the psyche. *Pierre* is often perceived as the final work in a psychological trilogy that includes *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*. In 1926, Carl Van Vechten referred to this trilogy as "a kind of tragic triptych" and noted that "*Mardi* is a tragedy of the intellect, *Moby-Dick* a tragedy of the spirit, and *Pierre*, a tragedy of the flesh…" (qtd. in "Historical Note" of *Pierre*, 1971 ed.). This "tragedy of the flesh" makes for the final text in my analysis of Melville's relationship to the abject.

Chapter one addresses how the narrator's description of the landscape and its natives resembles that of the chora and/or abject in *Typee*. I address moments in the text where the landscape is portrayed in Edenic, chora-like terms and places in the text where this same landscape becomes threatening or abject. In another section of this chapter I suggest that the language of some of the natives (particularly Fayaway and Marnoo) is semiotic. The musicality of their utterances is described in terms that closely resemble that of the semiotic. I also note the narrator's description of the native women of Typee as being creatures of nature and argue that the Gai-like character of Fayaway functions as

the embodiment of the chora and semiotic language. The figure of Marnoo is also examined in terms of the chora and semiotic language. Extending my analysis of the abject, I address the ways in which some of the native's customs surrounding marriage, sexuality, tattooing, and cannibalism are considered threatening or abject. And finally, I analyze the character of Kory-Kory as a native whose grotesque physicality and sexuality unnerve the narrator and threaten his own sense of identity. Ultimately, this chapter examines the abject as it relates to nature, the body and sexuality.

In chapter two, *Mardi* demonstrates the motif of the "light" and "dark" ladies as representations of the chora and the abject mother respectively. I suggest that Yillah, the innocent, naïve native embodies the chora and a language of the semiotic while Queen Hautia, the evil, dangerously alluring seductress serves as a representation of the abject mother threatening to engulf the male protagonist. I begin by discussing the character of Samoa, a native who is a companion of sorts to the male protagonist and narrator, Taji. I mention Samoa because he, like Kory-Kory in *Typee*, is depicted as a physically abject grotesque being whose sexuality threatens the narrator. Samoa has a disfigurement that further aligns him with the abject in that his body is fragmented and deeply disturbs the narrator's sense of physical identity. The native's wife, Annatoo, is also briefly discussed in terms of the abject. Yillah, the idealized version of the chora (before the subject's abjection of it) is examined in detail. I also address her use of semiotic-like language and Taji's response to it. In addition to Yillah, the male poet Yoomy, who serves as a crewmember to the protagonist, functions as a bearer of semiotic language. As a poet, he too is aligned with the semiotic and even discusses the "feminine" aspects of his language. Yoomy's association with the "feminine" extends beyond language in that he

dresses, acts and confesses that he feels within himself "a woman's soul" (*Mardi* 438). Finally, I address the figure of Queen Hautia and her role as the abject (M)other from whom Taji must separate himself in order to preserve his own sense of identity and autonomy.

The "Interlude" between chapter two and chapter three is a brief analysis of moments in the text of *Moby-Dick* where characters confront the abject. Similar to the previous portrayals of native men in his earlier adventure novels and *Mardi*, the native character of Queequeg is initially aligned with the abject due to his disturbing physical appearance and perceived threatening sexuality. I argue however, that Ishmael's evolving relationship with Queequeg demonstrates the former's willingness to embrace the abject in an attempt to foster an intimate relationship (not that different from that of mother and child). This "embrace" obviously occurs literally and metaphorically in the "bedroom scene" of *Moby-Dick*. This embrace of the abject, though, is short-lived in that very little is said of the two men's relationship after the "bedroom scene" and ultimately, Queequeg dies before the end of the novel. I also examine scenes from the text where the abject is embedded within the narrator's description of specific sea creatures and substances such as the whale spermaceti. The chapter in *Moby-Dick*, "A Squeeze of the Hand," offers an indirect analysis of the abject through the lens of subjectivity. The bulk of my analysis in this chapter is focused on a fragmented Ahab and his quest for Moby Dick. I suggest that Ahab is a character who struggles with his own abjected self and seeks to kill the whale or the metaphorical receptacle for the abject. I also note passages from the text that reveal Ahab's own occasional use of semiotic-like language. While Ahab desires the symbolic he cannot fully divest himself of his relationship to the abject

mother and the language of the chora. I end this chapter with a brief discussion of the vortex that functions like the watery womb of the abject mother that perpetually threatens to swallow man's identity.

The final chapter, on *Pierre*, explores the relationships between the lead character and the women of the text. I argue that Mary Glendinning, Pierre's mother and his half-sister, Isabel define him. This text is crucial to my overall argument because the abject becomes the focus of the novel. I suggest that Mary Glendinning is an exaggerated caricature of the abject mother. Her presence is felt throughout the text and Pierre never fully escapes her grip (even after her death). She constantly threatens the fragile autonomous identity he attempts to build. Contrary to Mary Glendinning, Isabel is a manifestation of the chora before the subject's abjection of it. She, like Fayaway and Yillah before her, is an idealized version of the chora from which a language of the semiotic issues. Yet, Isabel's use of the semiotic is almost exaggerated and actually *defines* her character; I argue that this is precisely what draws Pierre to her. He longs to return to a symbiotic relationship like that of mother and child. I reference Kristeva's ideas about the love interest serving as a surrogate mother of sorts to further my analysis. Despite Pierre's idealization of Isabel, he ultimately rejects her as well. She too becomes an abject (m)other by the end of the novel. Finally, I address Pierre's suicide and what this means for his relationship with the abject mother.

My conclusion retraces the threads of Melville's evolving relationship to the abject throughout his earlier works. I try to abstain (for the most part) from biographical criticism throughout my analysis of the abject in Melville's writings. Yet, this might prove an intriguing topic to be further explored. I would like to eventually continue this

study in an examination of Melville's later writings because I am convinced that the abject is a topic he wrestles with off and on throughout his literary career. Melville's relationship to the women in his texts (as well some of the natives) deserves further attention and careful analysis. We should not be content to simply acknowledge the absence of fully developed female characters in Melville's works or pass them off as abstractions of a male protagonists' creativity; instead, I advocate closer scrutiny of the women he *does* include in his writing and an examination of what these women *mean* to him and his sense of identity.

CHAPTER 2: *TYPEE*

Melville's first novel, *Typee* (1846), marked his entrance onto the literary scene as "the man who lived among cannibals" and lived to tell about it. Critics have debated the authenticity of this work as a travel narrative and the general consensus is that Melville relied heavily upon other explorers' observations to help fill in the gaps in his own limited knowledge of the island of Nuku Hiva. Some of these sources include: John S. Stewart's *Journal of a Residence in the Sandwich Islands* (1830), and *A Visit to the South Seas* (1831); David Porter's *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean* (1822); and William Ellis' *Polynesian Researches* (1833). While this novel raises some fascinating questions about Melville's composition process and extensive reliance on secondary material, I am much more interested in examining his portrayals of the native characters he encounters upon the island. Melville is often lauded for his efforts to expose the ethnocentrism of Western man while simultaneously championing the innocence and moral superiority of native peoples. While I agree that Melville had a genuine interest in promoting the welfare of these native peoples and in demystifying the intentions of missionaries spreading the gospel to the Polynesian islands, I question the idealization of Melville as a figure who is somehow outside of the culture he critiques so eloquently. Critics such as Douglas Ivison, Malini Johar Schueller and Justin D. Edwards among others have also grappled with Melville's location and/or positioning in a discourse of imperialism. Despite his critique of Western imperialism, he remains inextricably caught up in the nexus of this linguistic discourse and power structure. I have found that Melville's depictions of the "savages" and his interactions with them reveal moments of

crisis or rupture in the text, where he struggles with the "other." Specifically, this "otherness" is represented by an abject sense of femininity.

I am using the term "abject" in the sense that it is defined by Julia Kristeva in her two seminal works that explore this concept, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974) and *Powers of Horror* (1980). Before addressing the concept of the abject, it will prove useful to examine some of Kristeva's ideas regarding language and the subject. Specifically, Kristeva makes a distinction between what she terms, "semiotic" and "symbolic" language. The "semiotic" refers to a "distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof, engraved or written sign, imprint, trace, figuration" (*RPL* 25). These "traces" are what you might call the residuals of energies, drives, and emotions that emerge from the unconscious. The semiotic resides in what Kristeva names the *chora* (she draws upon this term from Plato's *Timaeus*). She claims that "…the drives, which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a *chora*" (*RPL* 25). What sets Kristeva apart from Freud and Lacan is her insistence that the *chora* is associated with the maternal, not the paternal. She claims:

> Drives involve pre-Oedipal semiotic functions and energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother…The oral and anal drives, both of which are oriented and structured around the mother's body, dominate this sensor motor organization. The mother's body is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*, which is on the path of destruction, aggressivity, and death. (*RPL* 27-28)

While the fetus is in the womb, Kristeva claims that it is dependent upon the mother's body and that its drives are ordered by this body. Yet, this reliance upon the mother's body does not end at birth. So, for example, even after birth, the oral drive is ordered around and regulated by the mother's body via breast feeding for instance. Additionally, she believes that the infant begins to recognize its separateness from the mother at a much earlier stage than Lacan's "mirror stage" (where the infant sees itself in the mirror for the first time and realizes that he/she is not only separated from the mother but is also a conglomerate of fragmented body parts). Kristeva claims that through the process of abjection, which can occur much earlier than Lacan's "mirror stage," the infant begins to notice boundaries between itself and its mother as well as boundaries between the "inside" of its body and the "outside". Noelle McAfee describes this process in *Julia Kristeva: Routledge Critical Thinkers*. She explains that "In order to become a subject, the child must renounce its identification with its mother; it must draw a line between itself and her. But it is so difficult to identify her borders: he was once in her and now here he is outside her" (48). Kristeva claims that the infant, who becomes an adult, continues to abject the mother in the sense that he tries to establish an identity that is separate from her. Yet, this is never really possible. Kristeva adds that the semiotic (again, those drives, energies that reside in the maternal chora) can never be severed from symbolic language either. Symbolic language refers to the process of signification that "depend[s] on language as a sign system" (*RPL* 27). In short, symbolic language is used to

convey information while semiotic language is often used to describe poetic language. Yet, neither of these terms is exclusive. Kristeva comments, "These two modalities are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved; in other words, so-called 'natural' language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and symbolic" (*RPL* 24). Kristeva seeks to reclaim the semiotic mode of language and bring the body back into writing. She suggests that semiotic language has been repressed because of its associations with the maternal, the feminine, the body and nature (or that which is abject). She criticizes Plato's dichotomy between the body and the mind, seeking instead a fusion of both that pays credence to both the body, including its drives, and the mind which molds these utterances into a symbolic language.

In Kristeva's later book, *Powers of Horror*, she speaks of the sublimation of the chora and focuses more specifically on the concept of the abject. She claims that the abject is "the 'object' of primal repression" (12). She defines primal repression as "the ability of the speaking being, always already haunted by the Other, to divide, reject, repeat" (12). In brief, the abject is that which we reject in order to maintain a sense of identity that is outside of the (M)other. Kristeva goes on to explain that "The abject confronts us, on the other hand, and this time within our personal archeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language" (13). This physical separation from the mother,

for Kristeva, is forever haunted by the individual's desire to separate psychically from his sublimated desires and drives. McAfee further explains:

> What is abjected is radically excluded but never banished altogether. It hovers at the periphery of one's existence, constantly challenging one's own tenuous borders of selfhood. What makes something abject and not simply repressed is that it does not entirely disappear from consciousness. It remains both an unconscious and a conscious threat to one's own clean and proper self. The abject is that which does not respect boundaries. It beseeches and pulverizes the subject. (46)

While the abjection of the mother is, in a sense, the ultimate form of abjection, Kristeva also mentions other examples of abjection (those objects that force us to question the boundaries of our own existence). For instance, she mentions "food loathing," something as simple as curdled milk or rotten food. She also includes the corpse as a "thing" that must be abjected because it forces us to question our own relationship to it (i.e. our own eventual death). She also includes vomit, excrement, etc. as basic examples of the abject, that which we spit out or exclude from ourselves. While these abjections are important to mention because they illustrate on a graphic level what it means to be abject, it is important to recognize that "It is thus not a lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva, *PH* 4).

According to Kristeva, the abject becomes closely linked with the perverse. She adds that society seeks to regulate it through institutions such as religion, morality and law (16). The abject becomes associated with defilement and then requires a purification ritual. Kristeva's link between the abject and the perverse will heavily inform my reading of *Typee* as a text where Tommo (and I will argue perhaps Melville as well) is confronted with sexuality as it is expressed through the feminized landscape and native characters. Kristeva claims that "The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law, but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts, uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them. It kills in the name of life…" (*PH* 15). The abject in this sense acts on drives. In reference to writers and their depictions of the abject Kristeva remarks,

> The writer, fascinated by the abject, imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it and as a consequence perverts language--style and content. But on the other hand, as the sense of abjection is both the object's judge and accomplice, this is also true of the literature that confronts it. One might thus say that with such a literature there takes place a crossing over of the dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality. (*PH* 16)

For writers, the abject becomes something to be explored, tested and performed vicariously through fictional characters. The ambiguity between categories mentioned in the above quote is something that Melville has laced many of his texts with (blurred

distinctions between "good" and "evil," "civilization" and "primitivism," etc.). In the text of *Typee*, Melville vacillates between confrontations with the abject (via the landscape/nature and native characters) that at once intrigue him yet also disgust him. My task here is to extract key passages from the text that demonstrate how at times, Melville aligns the natives with femininity, nature and innocence. Yet, at other times, most notably during scenes that suggest a heightened sense of sexuality, he denigrates what could be considered the feminine abject (the physical body and expression of its sexuality).

The Garden of Eden and The Chasm of Horror

I would like to begin my discussion of Melville's tenuous relationship with the feminine savage and the concept of femininity in general, by examining the landscape and the positive, feminine connotations it contains. This analysis will illustrate Melville's propensity to become enchanted by the beauty of the feminine, sublime (m)other; later, I will demonstrate how this same beauty may become dangerous and threatening when steeped in the dark recesses of sexuality and applied to a physical body. Before turning to specific scenes where these associations become apparent, it would help to examine the forced relationship between femininity and nature through the lens of ecofeminist theory. Greta Gaard, in her article, "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature," remarks:

> the way in which women and nature have been conceptualized historically in the Western intellectual tradition has resulted in devaluing whatever is associated with women, emotion, animals, nature, and the body, while

> simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, human, culture, and the mind. One task of ecofeminists has been to expose these dualisms and the ways in which feminizing nature and naturalizing or animalizing women has served as justification for the domination of women, animals, and the earth. (4-5)

In this section I will try to analyze the ways in which Melville layers the landscape with concepts associated with femininity - nature, the body and sexuality in particular.

Typee is described in Edenic terms, a perpetual Paradise of innocence and beauty, pre-lapsarian. Critics such as Richard Ruland in his article, "Melville and the Fortunate Fall: *Typee* as Eden," have noted this but haven't really viewed it specifically through the lens of gender. Such discussion is necessary because Melville situates the lead female character of Fayaway in the midst of this lush, paradisiacal "garden-island" (to borrow W.H. Auden's term). Some critics have argued that the travel narrative that leads Melville and his readers to an island far, far away (forgive my pun on Fayaway) affords him the luxury of discussing "exotic" topics such as the beauty of the natives and their unrepressed sexuality. Douglas Ivison addresses this idea in his article, "'I saw everything but could comprehend nothing': Melville's *Typee*, Travel Narrative, and Colonial Discourse." He claims that "*Typee* simultaneously exposes the erotic desire that is implicit in colonial discourse and participates in it" (119). Ivison explains that "in the European imagination, since the eighteenth century tropical islands have served as 'fantasy islands' that 'provide the perfect breeding ground for white men's dreams' (Woods 127), and the travel narrative has 'permitted the exploration of alternate

sexuality'" (Martin 19; Ivison 120). Ivison suggests that Tommo engages in this "alternate sexuality" and assumes the role of the feminized, passive other. When describing how the young women anoint Tommo's body, Ivison claims that "Tom is always the passive recipient of physical sexual attention, not the active partner" (164-65) (123). I would like to add that much like Tommo himself, even the landscape takes on the persona of an exotic woman or other waiting to be penetrated by the heroic Western explorer.

Much of the language used to describe Tommo and Toby's ascent of the mountains and descent into the valley of the Typees is phrased in terms of penetration. To begin with, both men seek to reach the summit of a mountain but must first force their way through dense underbrush. Tommo remarks, "Two or three times I endeavored to insinuate myself between the canes, and by dint of coaxing and bending them to make some progress; but a bull-frog might as well have tried to work a passage through the teeth of a comb, and I gave up the attempt in despair" (38). Yet, eventually, the pair make their way to the top of one mountain and Tommo reflects upon the antiquity of the island. He claims:

> The whole landscape seemed one unbroken solitude, the interior of the island having apparently been untenanted since the morning of the creation; and as we advanced through this wilderness, our voices sounded strangely in our ears, as though human accents had never before disturbed the fearful silence of the place, interrupted only by the low murmurings of distant waterfalls. (44)

Tommo perceives the Typeean landscape through a paradisical travel narrative. He and Toby have set foot upon the dawn of creation and will utter the first words spoken. However, this magnificent, lofty view of the landscape quickly takes a turn for the worse once they encounter a deep chasm they decide to seek shelter in for the night. Tommo remarks that the view of the chasm will forever stay with him and proceeds to describe the scene:

> Five foaming streams, rushing through as many gorges, and swelled and turbid by the recent rains, united together in one mad plunge of nearly eighty feet, and fell with wild uproar into a deep black pool scooped out of the gloomy-looking rocks that lay piled around, and thence in one collected body dashed down a narrow sloping channel which seemed to penetrate into the very bowels of the earth. (45)

Tommo's description of the chasm turns rather macabre and dangerous. In a land that has heretofore been described in terms of its vegetation and vitality, Tommo now nears the source of all life - the metaphorical womb. Yet, for the narrator, this womb is not a comforting, safe space. Rather, the womb-like structure of the chasm conjures thoughts of the unknown or more specifically, the abject. Melville's metaphorical use of the landscape to illustrate the human form has been noted in one of his later works, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids." Dorys Grover, in her article, "Melville's Mill 'Girls' and the Landscape," writes extensively about the "hostile" (10)

landscape that leads the narrator down into the bellows of the paper mill. She suggests that "The seedsman's description of the land [earthly feminine] is detailed with anatomical imagery. Man descends into the womb of the eternal woman as he does into eternal Mother Nature, and he often does so as a kind of machine" (11). While the anatomical imagery in his later short story might seem more obvious to the reader than the reading I am offering of Tommo and Toby's descent into the landscape of Typee, I think it will help to elucidate a pattern that seems to occur between Melville's descriptions of nature and the female anatomy. In this particular scene in *Typee*, Tommo is repulsed by the open womb embedded within the earth. He is standing on the precipice of the opening to a gaping womb, replete with bodily fluids and folds that eventually lead to the "bowels of the earth" or yet another abject space, the rectum. He completes his description of the chasm with these final comments:

> Overhead, vast roots of trees hung down from the sides of the ravine dripping with moisture, and trembling with the concussions produced by the fall. It was now sunset, and the feeble uncertain light that found its way into these caverns and woody depths heightened their strange appearance, and reminded us that in a short time we should find ourselves in utter darkness. (45)

While on a literal level, the roots of the trees tremble due to the vibrations created from Tommo and Toby's fall into the chasm, the use of the word "tremble" bears some significance. This word can carry an erotic connotation and with Melville as the ultimate

wordsmith (and a times a bawdy wordsmith at that!) I don't think it's implausible that this is the case within the context of the previous word choice used to describe the chasm. Given this reading, the chasm or womb is literally pulsating and aroused or brought to life by the penetration of the two men into this space. Emphasis is placed upon the darkness of the cavern which in turn, accounts for its "heightened" strangeness. Again, Tommo's depiction of the obscurity and foreignness of this place suggests this is indeed an abject space. Through this scene and the quick juxtaposition that is made between Tommo's description of the lush, paradisiacal landscape at large and the dark, threatening recesses of the chasm, a pattern emerges. This pattern of oscillation between the benign, beautiful innocence of nature (which I am claiming takes on a feminine connotation for Melville) and confrontations with the horrific, dangerous potential of being consumed by it, effectively mirrors his relationship with what he considers to be feminine - his own body and sexuality.

After Tommo and Toby leave the chasm, they find momentary refuge above the "bosom of a valley" and Tommo muses about the beauty of the scene below him.

> Over all the landscape there reigned the most hushed repose, which I almost feared to break lest, like the enchanted gardens in the fairy tale, a single syllable might dissolve the spell. For a long time, forgetful alike of my own situation, and the vicinity of my still slumbering companion, I remained gazing around me, hardly able to comprehend by what means I had thus suddenly been made a spectator of such a scene. (49)

Here, Tommo seems mesmerized by the beauty of the surrounding landscape. And, yet again, reference is made to silence and a sort of land before time began. As an interloper, the narrator fears his speech in particular will violate or break the spell of a nature that is separate from man. Tommo's fear resides in breaking the spell of the semiotic with that of the Western symbolic (language). Josephine Donovan, in "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory," claims that "The anomalous and the powerless include women and animals, both of whose subjectivities and realities are erased or converted into manipulable objects--'the material of subjugation'--at the mercy of the rationalist manipulator, whose self-worth is established by the fact that he thus subdues his environment" (175). While Donovan's work focuses primarily on the connections made between women and animals, I believe that her idea can be extended to include nature itself as well. Donovan also references Estella Lauter's concept of women and myth as expressed in her book, *Women as Mythmakers.* Lauter claims that "Many of these artists accept the affinity between woman and nature as a starting point--in fact, creating hybrid images of woman/animal/earth until the old distinctions among the levels in the Great Chain of Being seem unimportant" (182). Women, animals and the earth itself become synonymous with the concept of femininity.

The Nature of the Typee Language: Semiotic Utterances

While Tommo stresses the silence of the Typee landscape as he and Toby maneuver their way through dangerous ravines that eventually lead them to the heart of Typee, the narrator also later remarks upon the Typee language itself. Yet, to begin even a brief analysis of Tommo's (and possibly Melville's) perception of the Typee language, one must consider the emphasis placed upon silence in the first portion of the book and

how this silence functions as a language of sorts within itself. Previously, I have mentioned how the hush that envelopes the land as Tommo and Toby hike through it is representative of the pre-lapsarian, pre-verbal Garden of Eden. I would like now to follow this line of thought in a bit more detail and analyze it specifically through the lens of Kristevan semiotics. Kristeva makes a distinction between two "modalities" of language she refers to as "the semiotic" and "the symbolic" (*RPL* 24). I have briefly referenced these two concepts previously, but I would now like to apply them to the "non-language" associated with Typee. Again, the chora functions as the "place" or "receptacle" from which semiotics (a non-verbal utterance that does not rely on signs but carries drives, emotions, etc.) emerges. In this light, it might be interesting to view the landscape of Typee as the chora or "place" that holds the semiotic language of the Typees. This line of thought can be supported by the associations Melville makes between the Typee natives and their connection to the land, body and sexuality (or the abject in Kristevan terms).

The silence Tommo and Toby comment on is important because it reinforces the idea that Typee is a land before time and language. To quote again, Tommo remarks,

> The whole landscape seemed one unbroken solitude, the interior of the island having apparently been untenanted since the morning of the creation; and as we advanced through this wilderness, our voices sounded strangely in our ears, as though human accents had never before disturbed the fearful silence of the place, interrupted only by the low murmurings of distant waterfalls. (44)

This language of silence is a silence that emerges from the womb-like chora of the Typee landscape. The only sound to be heard is that of the fluid, liquid water rushing over the banks of waterfalls. This sound is semiotic, not symbolic. Tommo and Toby attempt to capture this semiotic language of nature in their own symbolic language as it is expressed through the signification of language.

One critic who has provided a Lacanian reading of language in Typee is Daneen Wardrop in her article, "The Signifier and the Tattoo: Inscribing the Uninscribed and the Forces of Colonization in Melville's *Typee*." Wardrop claims that "One of the central tensions in *Typee* arises from Tommo's struggle, in Lacanian terms, to determine whether a culture will be claimed into the symbolic or allowed to remain immersed in the real" (135). While Wardrop uses the Lacanian version of the word "symbolic" in a similar sense that Kristeva does, Lacan's use of the word "real" can *roughly* correspond to Kristeva's "chora" (the place where drives, emotions, etc. reside before being put into language). Despite the Lacanian slant to Wardrop's reading of Typee, she does mention Kristeva's concept of the chora briefly in one sentence. When referring to the spell-like silence of the Typee landscape she notes that "A syllable might dissolve this world, so tenuous is its chora-like existence. Such are the potential powers of logos, the colonizing forces of the word, that a single syllable might destroy the whole landscape" (144). Despite this brief reference to the "chora-like existence"of Typee, Wardrop drops this analysis and focuses her analysis on the topic of language as she perceives it through the theoretical framework of Lacan. She mentions that Tommo "is in a valley of preconsciousness, as critics have pointed out, and also of pre-signifier ecstasies and

drives (in the sense, precisely, of the pre-written), of Lacan's real. It may be that what is most important to Melville is what lies just beyond or before the reach of language" (147). While Wardrop's interest in Melville's apparent fascination with the preconscious "pre-signifier" portion of the Typee landscape is very similar to my own, we differ in that she reads this as Melville's attempt to inhabit the Real while I see it as his attempt to re-connect with the chora itself and the sublime maternal. Instead of fleshing out a reading of this scene through the lens of the chora and the maternal, Wardrop continues discussing the topic of language through the theoretical framework of Lacan. I agree with Wardrop's reading, and without the influence of Lacan, a Kristevan reading would be impossible; but I would like to entertain the idea of analyzing the Typee language solely through the lens of Kristevan semiotics.

After describing the "chora" of the landscape, Tommo describes the language of the Typees. Aside from his discussion earlier in the text of the difference between the two words, "Typee," or "Happar," in chapter thirty, Tommo claims that "The Typee language is one very difficult to be acquired; it bears a close resemblance to the other Polynesian dialects, all of which show a common origin" (224). He comments upon the repetitiveness of the language and duplicity of the words (capable of possessing multiple meanings). This semiotic language leads Tommo to remark upon how "annoying" it is to have one word mean so many different things. I would attribute Tommo's frustration with the Typee language and its lack of clarity to his own linguistic background in a language that is highly symbolic and penetrable. The following passage will help to further illustrate this idea:

> So one brisk, lively little word is obliged, like a servant in a poor family, to perform all sorts of duties; for instance, one particular combination of syllables expresses the ideas of sleep, rest, reclining, sitting, leaning, and all other things anywise analogous thereto, the particular meaning being shown chiefly by a variety of gestures and the eloquent expression of the countenance. (224-25)

To begin, it is interesting that Tommo, and possibly Melville, refers to some Typee words as "servants" who serve a "poor family" which could be interpreted as the family of the Typee language itself. The inference that can be drawn here is that Tommo views the Typee language as a rudimentary one, especially when compared to his own "civilized" tongue. Another intriguing comment Tommo makes in this passage is that the Typee words are differentiated through the accompaniment of physical gestures and facial expressions of the *body*. The Typee's language is not "sophisticated" enough to rely merely upon an intricate symbolic language, but must include the abject, cumbersome physical body to convey meaning. The only pseudo-praise Tommo offers the Typee language is when he claims that "The intricacy of these dialects is another peculiarity…and I doubt whether Sir William Jones himself would not have despaired of mastering it [the conjugation of a Hawaiian verb]" (225). But again, the overall impression left with the reader about the Typee language is one of obscurity. As a Westerner speaking from a patriarchal symbolic language, Tommo stresses the apparent difficulty in mastering a language of semiotics or one of "obscurity."

Perhaps the passage that most convincingly supports the notion of the Typee language as one of semiotics occurs in chapter thirty-one. Here, Melville describes the natives' custom of chanting. Through Tommo, we learn that each night, before the natives retired, they would meet to chant for a few hours (226). Tommo describes the scene as follows:

> Sometimes when, after falling into a kind of a doze, and awaking suddenly in the midst of these doleful chantings, my eye would fall upon the wild-looking group engaged in their strange occupation, with their naked tattooed limbs, and shaven heads disposed in a circle, I was almost tempted to believe that I gazed upon a set of evil beings in the act of working a frightful incantation. (226-27)

The combination of naked natives with tattooed limbs uttering incomprehensible sounds obviously disturbs Tommo deeply. He likens the process to a satanic ritual complete with evil song. Remarking upon these "songs," Tommo claims, "The sounds produced by the natives on these occasions were of a most singular description; and had I not actually been present, I would never have believed that such curious noises could have been produced by human beings" (227). The other-worldly or dare we say "animalistic" sounds issuing from the lips of the savages suggest semiotic utterances. They are sounds that convey to Tommo the internal drives, fears, and emotions connected to the body before the process of symbolic signification snaps them up into the web of "civilized" language. After making this observation, Tommo applies a linguistic stereotype to

"savages" in general. He remarks, "To savages generally is imputed a guttural articulation" (227). He adds, "the labial melody with which the Typee girls carry on an ordinary conversation" gives "a musical prolongation to the final syllable of every sentence" (227). He adds that their "liquid, bird-like accent, was singularly pleasing" (227). The emphasis placed upon the fluidity and liquid sound of the female utterances is reminiscent of Kristeva's description of semiotic language. She claims:

> Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm. We must restore this motility's gestural and vocal play (to mention only the aspect relevant to language) on the level of the socialized body in order to remove motility from ontology and amorphousness where Plato confines it… (*RPL* 26)

The chants or utterances issuing from the females' lips serve as a representation of a semiotic language that arises from the chora or receptacle of energy, drives, emotions, etc. It is a language that defies the ordered structure of the symbolic language (everyday speech). And, interestingly enough, Melville picks up on the "labial melody" that falls from the lips of the *female* chanters. However, while Melville is initially drawn to the female chanting, in the very next line he charges that the natives have no idea of how to sing a song. This is an interesting point because it illustrates Tommo's desire to mold the lyrical incantations into a song with words that more closely resemble the symbolic (his own primary language). He remarks, "Although these savages are remarkably fond of

chanting, still they appear to have no idea whatever of singing, at least as that art is practiced among other nations" (227). Through Tommo, Melville creates a scene where the former tries to teach King Mehevi a song with rather humorous results. Tommo concludes, "…nothing could be more ludicrous than his vain attempts to catch the air and the words. The royal savage seemed to think that by screwing all the features of his face into the end of his nose he might possibly succeed in the undertaking, but it failed to answer the purpose (227). For Tommo, it appears "impossible" for the native to enter the realm of symbolic language and string a line of signifiers together to form meaning. Also, again, Melville emphasizes through Tommo's description of Mehevi, that the King relied more upon his *body* to express himself than the words of the song. While Mehevi is not a biological female, Melville aligns him with what could be labeled the "feminine" utterances of a semiotic language. He also aligns him with the body and its subsequent connection to nature. In the next section I will further explore Melville's propensity for aligning the natives with what I will call the "feminine" constructs of the body and the land.

Nymphs, Sylphs and Mermaids in the Garden of Eden

Another episode that suggests a bond between nature and femininity is the scene where the female natives swim out to sea to greet Tommo and Toby. At this point in the narrative, Melville associates the female characters with nature, the body and sexuality. These women are personified as "mermaids" and "swimming nymphs" (14). He also refers to them as "sylphs" and remarks upon the "abandoned voluptuousness in their character which I dare not attempt to describe" (15). Within the span of a few sentences Melville manages to personify these women as elements of the earth, water, and air.

These are wild women who seem to share some primitive connection to the nature they inhabit. Tommo remarks in disdain that the sailors often take advantage of these women and their wanton ways. He makes sure to resist implicating himself in this "polluted" (15) orgiastic event. He pities the women who are "Unsophisticated and confiding, they are easily led into every vice, and humanity weeps over the ruin thus remorselessly inflicted upon them by their European civilizers" (15). After having read original accounts of sailors docking in the bay, one realizes that this image of the women running out to greet and even engage in sexual activity with the Western males was actually a rather common occurrence. According to William Heath, in "Melville and Marquesan Eroticism," historically, "swarms of young women would swim out to a ship and offer themselves to the crew" (45). Eventually, these women realized the power their sexuality held over these men and they began to barter sex for goods (45). In light of historical evidence and Heath's claims, it is interesting that Melville characterizes the women who swim out to greet sailors as those who are "easily led into every vice" (15). It would appear that instead it could be perceived as just the opposite scenario with women leading the sailors into sexual "vice" in exchange for goods, etc. Yet, Tommo perceives the native women based upon his perceptions of Western women who are sometimes portrayed as passive victims who are easily corrupted by the male influence.

Upon arriving in the valley of the fierce Typee, Tommo and Toby find themselves surrounded by "young females, fancifully decorated with flowers, who gazed upon me as I rose with faces in which childish delight and curiosity were vividly portrayed" (77). As the men recline on the mats they are surrounded by females and Tommo remarks upon their "prying inquisitiveness which time out of mind has been attributed to the adorable

sex" (77). Here, Tommo infantilizes the females and then refers to them as "unsophisticated creatures" who have "overstepped the due limits of female decorum" (77) in attending to every man's whim. In a similar scene, Tommo describes the daily ritual of being anointed with fragrant oils by the young women of the house (110). He boasts that they "would anoint my whole body with a fragrant oil, squeezed from a yellow root, previously pounded between a couple of stones, and which in their language is denominated 'aka' (110). In a scene ripe with sensuous description, Tommo adds the finishing touch by referring to the luxury of having the "juices of the 'aka'…applied to one's limbs by the soft palms of sweet nymphs…" (110). The narrator also notes that these massages occurred daily and that they helped him to forget "all my troubles" and keep sorrow at bay (110). Emphasis is placed upon the body and nature's ability (via the "sweet nymphs") to ease a troubled male spirit. A couple of chapters later, Tommo comments upon the state of civilization and how it pales in comparison to the island of Typee and its tranquil atmosphere. He compares the Westernized female sex to that of the female islander and observes:

> In this secluded abode of happiness there were no cross old women, no cruel step-dames, no withered spinsters, no love-sick maidens, no melancholy young men, no blubbering youngsters, and no squalling brats. All was mirth, fun, and high good humor. Blue devils, hypochondria, and doleful dumps, went and hid themselves among the nooks and crannies of the rocks…[and] There you might have seen a throng of young females, not filled with envying of each other's charms, not displaying the

> ridiculous affectations of gentility, not yet moving in whalebone corsets, like so many automatons, but free, inartificially happy, and unconstrained. (126-27)

In this passage, Melville goes to great lengths to expose the differences between his own culture and that of the Polynesians. In regards to the women of Typee they are carefree, beautiful and vivacious. And, most importantly, they are "unconstrained" in more ways than one. While Melville directs this comment towards the practice of Western women wearing corsets that literally contain their flesh, he is also using the corset as a metaphor for a repressed sexuality. For Tommo these female natives are pivotal figures because they overtly mirror the desire and sexual yearnings women at home and the author himself feel unable to express.

Later in chapter eighteen, Melville further illustrates this free abandonment the women of Typee share. He remarks that bathing with the throngs of young girls was "one of my chief amusements" (131). He comments upon their swimming that:

> The ease and grace with which the maidens of the valley propelled themselves through the water, and their familiarity with the element, were truly astonishing. Sometimes they might be seen gliding along, just under the surface, without apparently moving hand or foot--then throwing themselves on their sides, they darted through the water, revealing glimpses of their forms, as, in the course of their rapid progress, they shot

> for an instant partly into the air--at one moment they dived deep down into the water and the next they rose bounding to the surface. (131)

Again, Melville makes a direct comparison between the Typee female natives and their close relationship to nature. He makes sure to personify them as either nymphs, mermaids or sylphs throughout the novel. Here, he claims a direct link exists between the females and the element of water. Additionally, he suggests their ability to move with great ease between sky and water. They are earthbound bodies who slip seamlessly in and out of the sky and sea. While some strands of ecofeminism celebrate this supposed innate connection between women and nature, other strands recognize the danger in this supposition. Janis Birkeland, in her article, "Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice," reflects upon the complex relationships between animals, nature and women. She claims,

> Ecofeminism is a value system, a social movement, and a practice, but it also offers a *political analysis* that explores the links between andocentric and environmental destruction. It is 'an awareness' that begins with the realization that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man's attitude toward women and tribal cultures or, in Ariel Salleh's words, that there is a 'parallel in men's thinking between their 'right' to exploit nature, on the one hand, and the use they make of women, on the other. (18)

While Melville offers a critique of imperialism through *Typee*, he falls into the "trap" Birkeland speaks of by associating women with animals and nature while simultaneously overlooking and addressing the link he has created between the two. In short, Melville fails to analyze Tommo's gaze directed towards the native women and fauna as an essentialist act of colonization. Birkeland stresses that "the assertion of "difference" is based on the historical socialization and oppression of women, not biologism" (22). Melville does not seem to acknowledge this crucial idea; for him, the link between the female natives (and ultimately, the feminized male natives as well) is indeed essential.

In the next passage, Melville muses that he sought to playfully dunk one of the "river-nymphs" under the water, when "the amphibious young creatures swarmed about me like a shoal of dolphins, and seizing hold of my devoted limbs, tumbled me about and ducked me under the surface, until from the strange noises which rang in my ears, and the supernatural visions dancing before my eyes, I thought I was in the land of spirits" (132). This passage is even more explicit in its connection between the feminine, essential connection between women, nature and spirituality. Melville relies upon classical Greek mythology, specifically in his references to various types of water nymphs, to describe the female natives of the region and their otherworldliness. In a scene that is reminiscent of the nymphs' dance upon Mount Olympus in Greek mythology, Melville describes the beauty of the natives' female form. He does this through his description of their dances. He describes a scene where female figures sway in the moonlight, unfettered and free from restraint:

> The young girls very often danced by moonlight in front of their dwellings. There are a great variety of these dances, in which, however, I never saw the men take part. They all consist of active, romping, mischievous evolutions, in which every limb is brought into requisition. Indeed, the Marquesan girls dance all over, as it were; not only do their feet dance, but their arms, hands, fingers, ay, their very eyes, seem to dance in their heads. In good sooth, they so sway their floating forms, arch their necks, toss aloft their naked arms, and glide, and swim, and whirl, that it was almost too much for a quiet, sober-minded, modest young man like myself… (152)

While Tommo's reference to himself as a "quiet, sober-minded, modest young man" might be taken tongue in cheek, the narrator is quick to rely upon, even if it is in jest, "civilized" society's expectations of him. These encounters with young native women, or "girls," serve primarily two functions: one is to create the illusion of a feminine innocence or Eve's return to the Garden and the other is to contrast this naked innocence with the narrator's knowledge of "civilization" and the discursive set of sexual mores that go along with it.

Fayaway

While the nymphs of the valley are described intermittently throughout the text, the leading role of the ingénue is cast in the character of Fayaway. Described as a "beauteous nymph," Fayaway is said to have achieved "the very perfection of female grace and beauty," similar perhaps to the Greek goddess Aphrodite (85). Tommo further

remarks upon her perfection and declares, "each feature as perfectly formed as the heart or imagination of man could desire" (85). This last phrase is especially important since Fayaway represents the author's attempt at sublime artistic perfection through the depiction of a beautiful woman. Tommo offers an illustration of Fayaway as follows:

> Her full lips, when parted with a smile, disclosed teeth of a dazzling whiteness; and when her rosy mouth opened with a burst of merriment, they looked like the milk-white seeds of the 'arta,' a fruit of the valley, which, when cleft in twain, shows them reposing in rows on either side, imbedded in the red and juicy pulp…The easy unstudied graces of a child of nature like this, breathing from infancy an atmosphere of perpetual summer, and nurtured by the simple fruits of the earth; enjoying a perfect freedom from care and anxiety, and removed effectually from injurious tendencies, strike the eye in a manner which cannot be portrayed. (85-86)

Fayaway walks among the many "nymphs" of the valley, yet Tommo stresses that she stands apart from the others. I contend that what sets her apart from the other native women is her implied position as mother earth or Gaia. While some ecofeminist critics such as Catrin Gersdorf laud the artistic connections authors often make between women and nature seeing the potential for a recovery of the earth, others such as Donna Coffey view this relationship as far too problematic. Gersdorf, in "Ecocritical Uses of the Erotic," insists "on the erotic as a feasible concept to rethink the human place in nature and to change culture's fatal will to master nature into a will to know it lovingly" (180).

One could argue that Melville sought to celebrate this "erotic" connection between the land and woman through the character of Fayaway, but I beg to differ. The concluding lines of the above passage suggest a naiveté on the part of Fayaway, stressing that she enjoys "a perfect freedom from care and anxiety, and [is] removed *effectually* from injurious tendencies" (86). Sheltered from the blight of "civilization," Melville idealizes Fayaway based upon her connection to the land of Typee. One ecofeminist critic who has addressed the danger in associating women with the earth is Donna Coffey. In "A Sense of Place," she notes, "Essentialist ecofeminism, positing an image of woman as inherently closer to nature than man, runs the risk of perpetuating the female as a new type of noble savage. The Angel in the House becomes the Angel in the Environment, whose purity will clean the mess men have made" (132). She adds, "Indeed, the connotations of purity, beauty, domesticity, and nature contained in the Angel in the House image have framed women's relationships with nature over the past several centuries" (132). While Coffey does not apply this theory to Melville's work, I think it definitely could be a lens through which to view much of *Typee* and its depictions of women in particular. Sheltered, much like Yillah in *Mardi*, Fayaway isn't the goddess of the hearth, but more aptly the goddess of the earth, Gaia.

In keeping with the classical allusions, it might also be helpful to view her as the goddess, Aphrodite. Through his eyes Fayaway becomes Nature personified. Her lips are "rosy" and the narrator compares her open mouth to the "arta" fruit which reveals milky white seeds (teeth) nestled in a ripe red hull. Samuel Otter in *Melville's Anatomies* discusses this description of Fayaway's mouth, "whose metaphors are extended and literalized until the organ becomes a menacing vagina dentate" (25). I would like to

suggest that Fayaway's mouth is metaphorically compared to her gaping *womb* ripe with seed. This description of Fayaway is important for several different reasons. To begin, in the sexual sense, the reader must ask whose "seed" is Fayaway carrying? In the literal sense, I don't have a definitive answer. But, perhaps this image is a projection of Tommo's desire to plant *his* "seed" in her womb. Or, it might also suggest that Fayaway is already sexually experienced, as Otter has claimed (25). One other more plausible interpretation involves the description of the womb and its seed as a metaphor for creativity. Fayaway is Mother Earth in the creative, generative sense. Here, the womb is portrayed as a metaphor for artistic creativity and lacks the threat of the abject. Perhaps the reason for this disparity in interpretations of the womb is linked to the difference between Melville's idealized fantasy of *who* and what a woman should represent and the reality of a female sexuality that might threaten one's manhood. Kristeva indirectly touches upon this idea in *Desire in Language*. In the chapter entitled "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," Kristeva discusses the tension the male artist grapples with when trying to portray the mother through art. Here is an excerpt:

> It is as if *paternity* were necessary in order to relive the archaic impact of the maternal body on man; in order to complete the investigation of a ravishing maternal jouissance but also of its terrorizing aggressivity; in order somehow to admit the threat that the male feels as much from the possessive maternal body as from his separation from it—a threat that he immediately returns to that body; and finally, in order, not to demystify the mother, but to find her an increasingly appropriate language, capable

> of capturing her specific imaginary jouissance, the jouissance on the border of primal repression, beyond, although always coexistent with, the imagery of full, mimetic, and true signs" (263).

While Kristeva describes Bellini's struggle as an artist to strike a balance between the threatening, possessive mother and the sublime Romanticized mother, the same rationale could be applied to Melville's portrayal of Fayaway. He seeks to find a language that suppresses the abject, threatening side of the mother figure and replace that with a sublime Romantic configuration of Fayaway through the language of nature. She serves as a muse of sorts to both Tommo and Melville. She is safe in that she, like Yillah in *Mardi*, is merely a projection of the ideal "feminine principle." Appreciated for her beauty and inspiration, Fayaway, speaks from the chora. Her home language consists of soft murmurings that fail to conform to the precepts of symbolic language. To further stress the distance between Fayaway's semiotic language and that of the symbolic, one must acknowledge that she is not given any *specific* dialogue throughout the entire novel! Even once she begins to learn bits and pieces of English, we never hear directly from her; her discourse is always translated through the tongue of Tommo. Fayaway is also secluded from the "injurious" blight of civilization. After commenting upon the relatively few tattoos blemishing Fayaway's pure skin, the narrator describes her manner of dress. He notes that "Fayaway--I must avow the fact--for the most part clung to the primitive and summer garb of Eden" (87). Aside from the white "tunic" Fayaway wears, she also dons jewelry of a botanical sort. Again, Tommo observes that amidst the young girls:

> Flora was their jeweller. Sometimes they wore necklaces of small carnation flowers, strung like rubies upon a fibre of tappa, or displayed in their ears a single white bud, the stem thrust backward through the aperture, and showing in front the delicate petals folded together in a beautiful sphere, and looking like a drop of the purest pearl. Chaplets too, resembling in their arrangement the strawberry coronal worn by an English peeress, and composed of intertwined leaves and blossoms, often crowned their temples; and bracelets and anklets of the same tasteful pattern were frequently to be seen. Indeed, the maidens of the island were passionately fond of flowers, and never wearied of decorating their persons with them; a lovely trait of their character, and one that ere long will be more fully alluded to. (87)

Again, this motif of the Gaia-like woman garbed in nature will repeat itself in Melville's third book, *Mardi*, through the characters of Yillah and Hautia. The physical connection Melville makes between femininity and nature is sensuous, as is his love of the "chase", yet this abject desire can become dangerous once the potential for sexual fulfillment is realized. This can most certainly be seen through the character of Hautia in Melville's later work. The narrator plays a "cat and mouse" game with the female characters of *Typee*. He eroticizes the women of the island, as well as some of the male natives, but the danger of sexual fulfillment is never fully realized. Tommo continues to rely upon his role as the modest observer.

In perhaps one of the most explicit scenes between Fayaway and Tommo, the celebrated nymph is disrobed upon the prow of the canoe! After convincing Mehevi to allow Fayaway to set sail upon the lake, the couple along with Kory-Kory spend an afternoon languishing and smoking upon the lake. After dismissing Kory-Kory, Tommo notices that Fayaway has "disengaged from her person the ample robe of tappa which was knotted over her shoulder…and spreading it out like a sail, stood erect with upraised arms in the head of the canoe" (134). The narrator adds, "We American sailors pride ourselves upon our straight clean spars, but a prettier little mast than Fayaway made was never shipped a-board of any craft" (134). Numerous critics read this scene as a metaphor for sexual union between Tommo and Fayaway. Henry Hughes, in "Fish, Sex and Cannibalism," offers an interesting take on the role of food as a metaphor for sexual behavior, but he also provides a helpful summary of various critics' interpretations of the canoe scene. Hughes notes of the scene, "The symbolic expression of sex and its diversionary humor appears in the famous canoe scene of Chapter 18" (8). He remarks that "It is not difficult to appreciate the sensuous arousal and shared pleasure of Tommo and Fayaway as the phallic canoe glides through the feminine lake and 'dashe[s] up the soft sloping bank'" (8). He then adds that "Bryant concludes that the chapter 'marks Tommo's fullest sexual development'" (8). Hughes counters Bryant's comment by claiming that in Marquesan society, oral sex was held in higher regard than coitus (8). Hughes develops this argument by stressing the importance of the eating of raw fish as symbolic of oral sex. I, however, am not interested in following this line of thought. I am intrigued though, by Hughes' negligence in examining the metaphor of Fayaway as a phallic symbol in this specific scene. I find it fascinating that the most sexually explicit

scene between Tommo and Fayaway occurs when he is comparing *her* to a *mast*, an obvious phallic symbol. The obvious pun on "spars" that are kept "straight and clean" suggests that Fayaway's disrobing has indeed aroused the narrator. Yet, an interesting layer of complexity is added to this double entendre when one remembers that Fayaway is being compared to a mast. Melville completes the phallic imagery of Fayaway by saying that *she* "stood erect" and that "a prettier little mast than Fayaway made was never shipped a-board of any craft" (134). The woman in this scene *is* the phallus in the Lacanian sense, albeit a small, "pretty" one. Yet, another perhaps less obvious but still interesting reading of this scene can be garnered through a Kristevan reading of Fayaway functioning as the idealized "mother-father," or "imaginary father" to Tommo. Kelly Oliver explains Kristeva's concept of the "mother-father" and offers a helpful analysis in " Kristeva's Imaginary Father and the Crisis in the Paternal Function." I will quote from Oliver to succinctly summarize the primary difference between Kristeva's "imaginary father" and Lacan's father who bears the almighty "no."

> …for Kristeva, the child can overcome the abject mother only through some paternal agency [*Desire for Language* 263]. Although this paternal agency brings with it the need to symbolize, it is not Lacan's authoritarian father [*Powers of Horror* 118, 44; *Kristeva Reader* 314]. Rather, as Kristeva suggests in *Tales of Love*, it is the loving father against Lacan's stern authoritarian father. (51)

Kristeva's "'imaginary father,' is a combination of the mother and the father (the 'father-mother conglomerate' [40]). It has no sexual difference but has the characteristics of both masculine and feminine [*Tales of Love* 26, 40]" (51). She further explains that "Insofar as the mother is primarily a speaking being, the Other is already within her. That is, she is always already implicated in signifying systems. The mother-father conglomerate, then, is the combination of the mother and her desire. It is a father within the mother, a 'maternal father'" (52).

This "maternal father," or "imaginary father" as Oliver names it, serves as an idealized locus where the adult-child may reclaim his status in the womb or chora. Oliver explains:

> Perhaps the fantasy of the imaginary father enables the child to insert itself into the primal scene [of its conception]. Through the figure of the father, the child can rejoice in a (re)union with the mother. Through this fantasy, the child can rejoice in the beginnings of its existence, an existence founded on (imagined) pleasure rather than lack. Kristeva suggests that imagined pleasure may be more of an incentive to leave the maternal body than the oedipal father's threat of castration. (53)

The imaginary father functions as a mental tool of sorts that enables the child (when using this term it refers to the adult or grown child as well) to separate from the mother and re-enact the jouissance of his own conception and pleasure through the coupling with another. Oliver notes that for Kristeva, "adult love in the form of the couple, homosexual

or heterosexual, is a recreation of the imaginary father, who once again turns out to be the mother" (53).

The rather lengthy summary of Kristeva's concept of the "maternal father" provided above was necessary in order to examine the potential for reading Tommo's attraction to Fayaway as an attempt to re-connect with the jouissance and pleasure he experienced in the womb or more aptly, the chora. Tommo's fascination with the figure of Fayaway as a "pretty" phallic mast serves as a striking image of Kristeva's "maternal father" or "imaginary father" (she uses these phrases interchangeably). I have previously stressed Tommo's idealization of Fayaway as a mother earth figure and the canoe scene extends this idealization to include both sexes (the mother and the father) into a combined metaphor that suppresses his fear of the abject (m)other.

One last thought that helps to contextualize this scene is the fact that historically, Heath, among others, notes that geologists have confirmed that there are no lakes in the Marquesas (56). While many of the events narrated by Tommo could have happened, all of the canoe scene is fabricated. Similarly, Kristeva's "maternal father" figure and Fayaway's possible embodiment of this idea are fantasies as well – fantasies for a return to a chora-like existence or return to the womb which is metaphorically represented by the lake.

Marnoo as a Liminal Figure

While the preceding section discusses Tommo's fantasy of returning to the womb or chora via the idealized character of Fayaway, my discussion of Marnoo will focus on this character's role as a liminal figure whose potential bisexuality challenges Tommo and serves as a metaphor for the abject (that which disrupts boundaries between

masculine or feminine, gay or straight). Before examining the text itself, I would like to discuss the relationship between Kristeva's concept of the abject and homosexuality (and bisexuality as well). Kristeva has been rightly criticized for neglecting to address homosexuality (and subsequently bisexuality as well) extensively in her writings. Critics such as Judith Butler and Teresa de Lauretis have interrogated (and rightly so) Kristeva's relegation of lesbianism to an instance of psychosis. Yet, even more germane to my argument, several critics have actually tried to analyze various ways in which Kristeva's theory of the abject does indeed offer much insight into queer theory even if it is only implicitly implied. One such critic is Sarah Cooper, who asks if Kristeva really is a "stranger" to queer theory as many have previously supposed. In her book, *Relating to Queer Theory: Rereading Sexual Self-Definition with Irigaray, Kristeva, Wittig and Cixous*, Cooper acknowledges one of the more problematic ideas of Kristeva's regarding homosexuality. Cooper references Kristeva's claim that homosexuality is the "foundation of heterosexuality" and explains that for Kristeva, "While homosexuality is thus understood to subtend all intersubjective relations, it is not located within the realm of cultural representation" (145). She adds:

> Kristeva exiles homosexuality from symbolization and cancels out any subversive potential that might otherwise have been produced by associating homosexuality with exile in her writings. However, if we turn to her work on cultural otherness, exile, and estrangement, namely in *Etrangers a nous-memes*, we see how she reacts against any distancing mechanism that could create such a gulf between self and other. Not only

> do some of her arguments in this text bear similarities to some recent arguments in queer theory; they also allow us to read her writings on cultural otherness against her writings on sexuality. (147)

Cooper relies upon one of Kristeva's later works, *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) to expose the possibility of reading one's sexuality as yet another way in which we are indeed "strangers to ourselves." By delegating homosexuality to the sidelines of representation, Kristeva seems to "miss" a fruitful connection that could be made between exile and an "exiled" sexuality as such.

Another critic who questions Kristeva's depictions of homosexuality is Iris Marion Young. Young examines the intersections of various types of oppression in her article, "Abjection and Oppression: Dynamics of Unconscious Racism, Sexism, and Homophobia." Young begins by summarizing Kristeva's abject: "Any border ambiguity may become for the subject a threat to its own borders, a revelation that the separation between Self and Other is the product of a violent break, an irretrievable loss, a lack without name or reference. The subject reacts to this abject with loathing as the means of restoring the border separating self and Other" (208). Then, she proceeds to explain how various "-isms" become abject. Young notes,

> This account of the meaning of the abject enhances, I suggest, an understanding of a body aesthetic that labels some groups as ugly or fearsome and produces aversive reactions to members of those groups. Racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and able-ism are partly structured

> by abjection, an involuntary, unconscious judgment of ugliness and loathing. The account does not explain why some groups become associated with degeneracy, fearful sexuality, or death, but once they do, these associations lock into the subject's identity anxieties. The subject reacts with fear, nervousness, and aversion to members of these groups because they represent a threat to identity itself, a threat to what Giddens calls the *basic security system*. People from groups marked as different fulfill the function of what lies just on the other side of the borders of the self, too close for comfort and threatening to cross or dissolve the border" (208).

While Kristeva does not come out and explicitly make all of the connections between various types of oppression and the abject as Young does here, I think that these ideas are implicated in Kristeva's work even though all of them are not overtly discussed or referenced. It is through this particular line of thought (most aptly summarized by Young) that I would like to examine some of the remaining figures in Typee. I am most interested in the connections implied in Kristeva's thought between homosexuality and the abject and the ways in which this idea is manifested in Tommo's response to Marnoo and some of the other characters in *Typee*.

Marnoo serves as a liminal figure of sorts who indirectly threatens Tommo's sexual identity. Tommo's description of Marnoo is significant to my argument because it establishes the Westerner's fascination with a native figure who is androgynous – one who is comprised of both masculine and feminine traits. We encounter the male foil to

Fayaway in the figure of Marnoo. Marnoo is described as one of "the most striking specimens of humanity that I ever beheld" (135). He, like Fayaway, stands apart from the other natives because of his unsurpassable beauty. Tommo describes him as "the statue of the Polynesian Apollo," and proceeds to outline his bone structure and physical stature to resemble one of the Greek gods. Yet, amidst this classical description of the native, the narrator complements this ideal with a nod to femininity and nature that resembles his description of Fayaway. He claims, "his cheek was of a feminine softness, and his face was free from the least blemish of tattooing" (136). It appears that Marnoo's unsurpassed beauty is enhanced by the lightness of his skin color or to be more concise, his whiteness.[7]

Despite Marnoo's fairness compared to the other natives of Typee, Tommo does provide an extensive description of the tattoo that spreads across the native's back. Unlike the other male natives in the text, Marnoo only has *one* tattoo that covers his back, *not* his face. Additionally, Tommo's description of Marnoo's tattoo is favorable and compared to the other native's tattoos. In fact, Tommo uses the words "unique" and "elegant" to describe Marnoo's tattoos while he perceives the tattoos of darker natives to be excessive and ugly. While observing Marnoo's Apollo-like physique, Tommo notes:

> Traced along the course of the spine was accurately delineated the slender, tapering, and diamond-checkered shaft of the beautiful 'artu' tree. Branching from the stem on either side, and disposed alternately, were the

[7] Several critics have commented upon the lightness of Marnoo's skin. See Justin D. Edwards' "Melville's Peep-Show: Sexual and Textual Cruises in '*Typee,*'" *ARIEL*, 30.2 (1999), 65. Malini Johar Schueller's "Colonialism and Melville's South Seas Journeys." Schueller explores the "Romantic Racialism" of Marnoo p.12;

> graceful branches drooping with leaves all correctly drawn, and elaborately finished…A rear view of the stranger might have suggested the idea of a spreading vine tacked against a garden wall…The tattooing I have described was of the brightest blue, and when contrasted with the light olive color of the skin, produced an unique and even elegant effect. (136)

In this passage, the narrator metamorphizes Marnoo's body into the likeness of a solid, sturdy, artua tree. Robert K. Martin, in *Hero, Captain, and Stranger* (1986), suggests that Marnoo is "…identified as a life force, bearing the tree of life. He retains the original phallic power that is otherwise disappearing from the Islanders" (34). From a Lacanian perspective, Marnoo does indeed hold a great deal of power (or the phallus) over the other natives. Yet, I think it's of value to ask *why* Marnoo possesses the power of the phallus as signifier (as Melville suggests). We are told that Marnoo is "taboo," speaks several languages and has made contact with the colonists. I think that the lightness of his skin overall is another "trait" that allows him to move between the worlds of the natives *and* the colonists. To further illustrate Marnoo's position as a liminal figure it is helpful to reiterate that while he may represent the phallus as Martin claims, Marnoo is similar to Fayaway in that he too functions as a "pretty" phallus or an androgynous figure like that of the "maternal father." While Marnoo's physique is described in feminine terms as previously stated, his clothing is rather feminine as well. Tommo notes, "a slight girdle of white tappa, scarcely two inches in width, but hanging before and behind in spreading tassels, composed the entire costume of the stranger"

(136). Here, the narrator describes Marnoo's dress as a "girdle of white tappa" (136), and classifies his clothing in feminine terms (a piece of cloth that typically girds a woman's figure).

In an often cited scene, the gallant Tommo offers his seat to Marnoo only to be rebuffed. The noteworthiness of this scene is captured in Tommo's response to this slight: "Had the belle of the season, in the pride of her beauty and power, been cut in a place of public resort by some supercilious exquisite, she could not have felt greater indignation than I did at this unexpected slight" (136). After assuming the typically "masculine" role of the chivalric gent offering his seat to a "lady," Tommo characterizes himself *and* Marnoo as *women*. He likens his experience to a beautiful woman or "belle" who is slighted and embarrassed by another more exquisite beauty than herself. This subtle form of jealousy is quickly replaced with admiration for Marnoo. As Marnoo describes the French invasion of Nukuhiva, Tommo relishes, "The grace of the attitudes into which he threw his flexible figure, the striking gestures of his naked arms, and above all, the fire which shot from his brilliant eyes, imparted an effect to the continually changing accents of his voice, of which the most accomplished orator might have been proud" (137). The emphasis on the "nakedness" of Marnoo's arms and the "fire" in his eyes can be read as the narrator's subtle attempt to reveal Tommo's perception of the god-like figure as a passionate, sexual being. It is important to note that according to *Bulfinch's Mythology*, "Apollo was passionately fond of a youth named Hyacinthus" (67). Melville aligns Marnoo with the figure of Apollo in order to further suggest the homoerotic tension between the two.

In the same passage, Melville again touches upon Marnoo's sexual appeal. The author is sure to add that Marnoo addressed and effected responses from both men *and* women: "To the females, as well as to the men, he addressed his discourse. Heaven only knows what he said to them, but he caused smiles and blushes to mantle their ingenuous faces" (138). Here, Marnoo projects a bisexuality that allows him to appeal intellectually and physically to both sexes. Marnoo, functions as the ultimate liminal figure who blurs the boundaries between race, class (in that he moves amongst the colonists) gender, and sexuality as well. He disrupts the dichotomous either/or thinking that structures symbolic language and offers the alternative "and." He is a native *and* a somewhat "civilized" figure; he is light-skinned *and* dark (inscribed with a tattoo); he is masculine *and* feminine; and, finally, he appeals to both women *and* men. Marnoo is a living embodiment of the abject. And, Tommo is drawn to yet also fearful of Marnoo's liminal/abject position.

An example of Tommo's hesitancy to fully explore his attraction to Marnoo occurs when Tommo exempts himself from the native's charm. Tommo notes that "I am, indeed, very much inclined to believe that Marnoo, with his handsome person and captivating manners, was a sad deceiver among the simple maidens of the island" (138). While he characterizes the maidens as too "simple" to detect Marnoo's presumably "ulterior" motives, he makes sure to classify himself as one of the more discerning of Marnoo's subjects. Also, by addressing the maidens, Tommo deflects his own weakness for Marnoo onto the female or "weaker" sex.

Yet, Tommo still falls prey to Marnoo's charms. Upon Marnoo's proffering of his hand, Tommo remarks, "Of course I accepted the courteous challenge, and, as soon as

our palms met, he bent towards me, and murmured in musical accents,--'How you do?' 'How long you been in this bay?' 'You like this bay?'" (139). It is significant to note that Marnoo speaks to Tommo in *English*. Marnoo is able to physically slip seamlessly between the natives and outsiders just as he is capable of verbally slipping between the semiotic and symbolic. Marnoo's ease in shifting amongst these two types of discourse exemplifies Kristeva's insistence that the semiotic and the symbolic are not necessarily exclusive. In *Revolution in Poetic Language* Kristeva claims: "Because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (24). While the symbolic is often privileged over the semiotic, the character of Marnoo defies this privilege and speaks from the chora as well as from the symbolic.

While Tommo tries to resist Marnoo's semiotic murmurings, he envisions a simple handshake to be a meeting of the palms, an act that is often evoked during matrimonial ceremonies. His characterization of Marnoo's voice as musical murmurings also suggests a lover whispering sweet nothings in his love's ear. Tommo's response to this gesture is as follows: "Had I been pierced simultaneously by three Happar spears, I could not have started more than I did at hearing these simple questions!" (139). The "piercing" "spears" Tommo speaks of have the obvious connotation of a lover pierced or wounded by a lover's glance, or in this case three questions, yet these spears also have phallic significance. An act of penetration is metaphorically veiled through a verbal exchange. Tommo's rather extreme response to Marnoo's "simple questions" indicates

his anxiety over the native's abject, threatening, liminal presence - one that "pierces" and forces the Westerner to question his own identity.

Marriage and Sexuality

While the liminal figure of Marnoo intrigues Tommo through his use of semiotic language and enamors him to this "tabooed" man, the marriage customs and sexuality of the natives further peaks Tommo's interests and threatens to unsettle his own sexual mores. Tommo discovers that the Typee follow a system of polygamy where *wives* may take more than one husband. William Heath comments upon the practice of polygamy in Marquesan culture in his article, "Marquesan Eroticism." He references the concept of "peiko," which refers to "a system of secondary mateship in which women of the upper class had two or more husbands" (49). He adds that "Given the tension between sensual indolence and moralistic rectitude in Melville's personality, the primitive world he shared for a few weeks seemed perfectly designed to speak to both his deepest fears and desires. With his own eyes he saw acted out and permitted things which his own culture, and consequently his own personality, had subjected to the sternest renunciations" (53-54). While Heath doesn't specifically include homosexuality in his analysis of Marquesan sexual behavior, Caleb Crain does in his "Lovers of Human Flesh: Homosexuality and Cannibalism in Melville's Novels." Crain summarizes Robert C. Suggs' description of Marquesan sexual culture as originally stated in his book, *Marquesan Sexual Behavior* (1996):

> Recent anthropology has confirmed the homosexual activity of the Marquesans. Homosexual and autoerotic play is standard for Marquesan children and adolescents. If women are scarce on a particular island,

> homosexuality is considered a normal practice for adult men as well. Married men sometimes conduct homosexual liaisons. If homosexual activity is habitual in an adult and is combined with female mannerisms and a woman's socio-economic role, the individual is labeled a *mahu* but is not, by and large, stigmatized. These practices and attitudes were probably more or less the same when Melville lived among the Typee in the nineteenth-century. (31)

Obviously, accepting homosexuality as a part of life would become negatively juxtaposed with Western civilization's repugnance with such a practice *and* would also conflict with Melville's upbringing as many critics have noted. Heath refers to Melville's upbringing in the "Calvinistic strictures of the Dutch Reformed Church" (45). And Robert K. Martin, in "'Enviable Isles': Melville's South Seas," concludes, "What we may call his Calvinist conscience makes him doubt the virtues of a society devoted to pleasure, and that doubt, together with Melville's inability to deal with the novel's homosexual implications, drives Tommo back to the ship, abandoning the benign phallicism of a matriarchal society for the phallic aggression that comes to dominate the patriarchal world of *Moby-Dick*" (230). This "matriarchal society" Martin refers to is all the more threatening to Tommo because it (Typee) serves as a locus for Kristeva's chora. Tommo flees the island because he flees the abject, that which he seeks to repress in order to preserve his own sense of identity that is separate from the Mother.

The Typees' sexual freedom and emphasis on pleasure disturb Tommo. This sexual freedom, specifically as it relates to homosexuality, was referenced in an earlier edition of Typee when Melville referred to the island as "Buggery Island." Martin

comments on Melville's use of the term "Buggery Island" and claims that he was aware of the homosexual subculture of the islanders. Martin notes that editors deleted this revealing phrase and explains that "the term 'homosexuality' did not exist in the 1840's, and thus buggery and sodomy were the only terms possible to describe such an activity" (226). Martin further claims, "…it seems that Melville distinguished between homosexual practices as might occur on shipboard, frequently involving force and arising more out of necessity than out of affection, and a passionate love between men which he repeatedly described as an ideal and sought a place for" (226). I am suggesting that this sought after place Martin mentions is the land of the Typee or in Kristeva's terms – the chora- a place where drives, emotions and most importantly, pleasure is accessible. It seems that while Melville was aware of the novel's homosexual overtones and tried to explicitly reference this through the loaded phrase, "Buggery Island," he still seems to resist fully exploring this theme in the novel. Of course, Melville might have refrained from portraying an explicit sexual relationship between two men because he feared alienating nineteenth-century readers, yet I think there is more to it than just that. While Melville seems drawn to the idea of "alternative" sexualities as they are expressed through the native characters of Typee, he is resistant to allowing the Western figure of Tommo to *engage* in said homosexual activities because he fears the transgression of boundaries between the symbolic and semiotic. Homosexuality can serve as a metaphor of sorts for the abject. It involves skewing the boundaries (established by a paternal heterosexist symbolic law) between what is deemed masculine and feminine. It disrupts the binary division of gender that is reinforced by a symbolic language. Seeing this disruption of gender codes and compulsory heterosexuality places the observer/subject

(in this case Tommo) in the unique position of reassessing and reasserting one's own gendered, sexual identity in order to remain different from the Other. While Young is not a Melville critic, she does a fine job of explaining how and why homophobia may serve as an example of what is deemed abject. She claims, "Homophobia is one of the deepest-held fears of difference precisely because the border between gay and straight is constructed as the most permeable; anyone at all can become gay, especially me, so the only way to defend my identity is to turn away with irrational disgust" (209). It is during the fire-starting scene with Kory-Kory that Tommo reveals his own "irrational disgust" (to use Young's term) with the native's sexuality as veiled through the metaphor of starting a fire. This scene will be discussed later in more detail. Yet, even Tommo's encounter with Marnoo suggests not so much a sense of disgust, as a distancing of sorts. He reassures himself that he will not fall under the spell of the "tabooed" stranger.

Melville creates a space or receptacle in the island of Typee, much like that of the chora complete with a language of the semiotic that could most definitely include a fluid definition of gender and sexuality, yet he refuses to allow Tommo to act on his own drives and desires. Through the character of Tommo, Melville is able to safely explore his liminal position as a potential participant in "inversion" (one of the terms used to describe homosexuality before the term was coined in 1870 by Carl Westphal in *Archiv fur Neurologie*, 1870) (Foucault *Discipline* 43). He was able to re-present his own internal struggle as a man desiring other men, tentatively seeking out a space where he could confront his own sexuality (and his resistance to it), one that Western civilization had pathologized. According to Michel Foucault in his groundbreaking work, *The History of Sexuality*, originally published in 1976, "The nineteenth century homosexual

became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology" (43). And, more germane to Melville's "case," I am suggesting that he associated his sexuality with that which is deemed "feminine" and ultimately "abject." Within his early sea novels in particular, expressions of homosexuality are played out amongst *native* characters, characters he describes in traditionally prescriptive *feminine* terms. And, when Tommo is approached by even subliminal expressions of homosexuality, he is simultaneously drawn to them yet he is also repulsed by them (hence, the association of the feminine and all of its messy connotations - the body, sexuality, etc., with the abject).

Tattooing

One of the more subtle markers of homosexuality from Tommo's perspective is that of the tattoo. In this section I will analyze how the tattoo functions as a marker for homosexuality but, before I begin it is important to acknowledge the perhaps more overt representation of the tattoo as a racial marker. Many critics perceive Melville's depictions of the natives as a response to the racial geneticism of the nineteenth century.[8]

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[8] See Leonard Cassuto's "'What an object he would have made of me!': Tattooing and the Racial Freak in Melville's *Typee*." *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. Ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson. NY: NYU Press, 1996. 234-247. Cassuto examines how the facial tattoo "becomes the literal marker in his [Tommo's] mind between 'normal' (linked to whiteness and American identity) and 'freak,' a liminal figure who is foreign and black" (235). Timothy Marr suggests in "Melville's Ethnic Conscriptions." *Leviathan* 3.1 (2001): 5-29; that the ethnic characters in Typee served as "multicultural mouthpieces" who were able to express native culture better than the white narrator himself. In Samuel Otter's, *Melville's Anatomies*. Berkeley: U of CA P, 1999. 9-49. he offers a detailed account of how the tattoo serves as a metaphor for the practice of craniometry and phrenology that was so popular during the day. Also, see Stephen Jay Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man*. NY: Norton and Co., 1981. for a historical study of scientific racism. Malini Johar Schueller, in "Colonialism and Melville's South Seas Journeys." *Studies in American Fiction* 22.1 (1994): 3-18; argues that even though Melville attempted to expose the horros of colonialism and imperialism, he was still implicated in colonial discourse. She argues that Melville romanticizes the natives and simultaneously Europeanizes them by giving them lighter skin. Daneen Wardrop, in "The Signifier and the Tattoo: Inscribing the Uninscribed and the Forces of

While these contributions offer an insightful commentary on race relations amongst colonists and natives during Melville's time, I am interested in analyzing Tommo's (and perhaps Melville's as well) perception of the tattoo as an inscription or "stamp" that identifies one as an abject, sexualized being.

Another custom that comes to be most abhorred by Tommo involves the practice of tattooing. Despite his Edenic portrayals of a people graced with innocence and beauty, the tattoo functions as a marker of the dangerous, abject side of the native. In earlier sections of the text, Tommo perceives the tattoo as a blemish. Yet, in Chapter thirty, Tommo's dislike for the mark of the tattoo grows into outright hatred and fear. He witnesses the "operation of tattooing" and describes the venture in clinical terms that border along the lines of torture. He names the tattoo artist a "tormentor" and compares the process to someone "working away for all the world like a stone-cutter with mallet and chisel" upon human flesh mind you! (217). Tommo also refers to the tools of the trade as "cruel-looking mother-of-pearl-handled things which one sees in their velvet-lined cases at the elbow of a dentist" (218). Here, the metaphor of tattooing as a surgical procedure comes full circle. He likens the procedure to a turn in the dentist's chair! He also refers to the tattoo artist as an "artist, with a heart as callous as that of any army surgeon" (218). Believing that Tommo would like to obtain a tattoo, Karky, the artisan/surgeon, seizes hold of the shaken stranger and begins wielding his instruments about his face in anticipation. Yet, Tommo, in a moment of crisis, states, "Horrified at the bare thought of being rendered hideous for life if the wretch were to execute his purpose upon me, I struggled to get away from him, while Kory-Kory, turning traitor,

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Colonization in Melville's *Typee* ." *ESQ* 47(2(183)) (2001): 135-161; focuses specifically on the practice of tattooing as a method of inscription into Lacan's Real.

stood by, and besought me to comply with the outrageous request" (218). Later, we learn that the horror lies in the thought of Tommo's *face* being tattooed. Tommo assumes that "the idea of engrafting his tattooing upon my white skin filled him with all a painter's enthusiasm…" (219). The suggestion here is that Tommo fears losing the "whiteness" of his face, and hence his racial identity, to the chisel and colors of a savage.

Several critics have remarked upon this passage. Otter has commented rather extensively upon the infamous "tattoo scene" in Chapter 30 of *Typee*. He begins his discussion with a reference to perceptions of race and notes that "there is a striking shift in visual interest from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth-century: from the spectacle of blacks naturally turning white, which was greeted as a positive development by Enlightenment scientists, the antebellum specter of whites being coerced into indelible color" (30). To many nineteenth-century viewers, the tattoo was not merely a curiosity, but a racial marker. Otter notes that "Tattoos are 'engrafted upon white skin' – as though the operation involved a translation of living tissue from Polynesian to American" (40). Through the lens of nineteenth-century ethnology, Otter astutely claims that:

> The designs of the Typee seem eerily reminiscent of nineteenth-century ethnological engravings on the skin, face, and head. These ethnological lines chart departures from the human norm and, in so doing, they establish and reinforce the norm. They are lines that fulfill the ethnological vision of a body whose surface is legible—of a face with character, a skin that is revealing. (42)

To Westerners, the tattoo served as a visual re-presentation of race. The ink of the tattoo drew a line between "black" and "white." Yet, Otter is also careful to note that:

> While the marking on individual Marquesan faces are permanent, the location and arrangement of these marks do not persist from face to face. The ethnological guarantee that the individual recapitulates the race is invalidated. Marquesan faces offer the horrifying prospect of indelibility *and* insecurity. On Marquesan faces, it becomes impossible to chart the regular gradations in man. (45)

The tattoo patterns are neither predictable nor static. Therefore, it becomes more difficult to "fix" the race or ethnicity of a person. These faces are "branded" with the semiotic, a language that is artistic/poetic and possesses the ability to "mean" more than one "thing." This excess of meaning disrupts the boundaries of symbolic language. Marquesan faces in particular threaten the established order of ethnological distinction. For Tommo, Otter claims that Karky's desire to tattoo him "threatens transformative penetration and graphic rape. The reversal, the invasiveness, the excess, the arbitrariness, and the indelibility all disturb in this scene and ultimately provoke the violent counterattack that climaxes the book" (46). I would like to add that this fear of "excess," "arbitrariness," etc. can more generally be described as a fear of the abject, or that which exceeds boundaries and resists definition.

Several other critics have also commented upon the significance of the tattooing scene. In his article, "'What an object he would have made of me!": Tattooing and the Racial Freak in Melville's *Typee*,'" Leonard Cassuto claims that the facial tattoo "becomes the literal marker in his [Tommo's] mind between 'normal' (linked to whiteness and American identity) and 'freak,' a liminal figure who is foreign and black" (235). In reference to the title of his essay and consequently, the crux of his argument, Cassuto notes "What an object he [Karky] would have made of me!" (30/219). "This observation--made after his escape and return to the United States--shows that Tommo is concerned not simply with crossing the border separating American from Typee, but also with slipping over the one separating human being from thing. He feels that if he had been marked a Typee, he would cease to be a person at all in his own (American) eyes" (236-7). While the bulk of Cassuto's essay focuses on the tattoo as a racial marker, he does briefly mention a crucial link between being tattooed against one's will and the role of women in tattooing narratives. He states,

> Women are closely implicated with the coercive aspects of the standard tattooing narrative, with forced marriage frequently accompanying forced tattooing. (In O'Connell's case, the two are conflated, with the female tattooist literally marking him--against his will--as her husband.) This reversal of gendered power relations figures the tattooed man as a woman, and the bodily violation of tattooing as a figurative form of rape. (240)

Wardrop also discusses Tommo's perception of being tattooed as a "kind of cultural rape" where he must resolve to stand firm upon his "stylus/stilt" and continue to occupy the position of the phallic signifier (*not the signified*) (142). She claims that "The Typees want to inscribe his body, almost as a kind of ecríture feminine--but in that case the woman writer writes her own body while in this the writer would write the subject's body, one culture inscribe another" (138). Again, I feel that this inscription is so repellent to Tommo because it signifies precisely what Wardrop hints at…a semiotic language that is feminine, other, abject (from the narrator's perspective) regardless of the sex of the inscriber. The native, for Tommo and ultimately I would argue for Melville as well, represents an abject femininity and consequently, the language that threatens Tommo *must* be feminine.

Another interesting thought drawn from Foucault's theory of the homosexual as a personage in the nineteenth century is the possibility that this inscription upon his body might suggest an overt representation of Tommo's association with a culture that condones homosexuality. Foucault states of homosexuality that "It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away" (*History* 43). So, on a deeper level, one might speculate that the tattoo, a physical representation that "marks" one as a member of a community and its mores, threatens to out not only Tommo, but perhaps the author as well.

After offering his arm to Karky, Tommo realizes that nothing but his face will satisfy the flesh hungry native. He comes to the stark realization that "in some luckless hour I should be disfigured in such a manner as never more to have the face to return to my

countrymen, even should an opportunity offer" (219). Again, Melville stresses the importance of Tommo's racial identity and how the mark of the tattoo would make the Westerner one of "them" and hence, make him unrecognizable to the people of "civilization." In all actuality, historically, this isn't necessarily the case. It was actually quite common for sailors to obtain tattoos while on voyages and return home to show their wares as validation of their sea stories and stays amongst the islanders. According to Cassuto, "Tattooed sailors, as Melville certainly knew, were sidewalk exhibits whose popularity can be dated back to the early nineteenth century" (238). So, while there might be some truth to Tommo's rationale, I would suggest that the larger reason for his refusal to be "marked" lies in his resistance to being labeled the abject (and even more specifically, savage and possibly homosexual as well). On one level, Tommo's fear of not having "the face to return to my countrymen" can implicate his fear of being racially marked and identified with the savage. Yet again, on a more subtle level this fear of being marked also carries with it the fear of being associated with a sexually "promiscuous" culture. By acquiring a facial tattoo, Tommo would indirectly become associated with a language of the semiotic complete with its poetic enunciations of one's deepest, "darkest" drives. While Melville mentions that the tattoo served as a marker for religion and stresses this through Tommo's dialogue, it also serves as a mark of one's matrimonial status (i.e. whether one is available or not). I would like to suggest that the mark of the tattoo signifies, for Tommo, induction into the feminine abject, a world of the body, sexuality, spirituality, and in short, femininity. According to Edwards, "If, as theorists have suggested, tattooing transforms an individual's sexual zone by extend[ing] and proliferat[ing] them, creating the whole abdomen, arm, back, neck, leg, or face--

whichever surface is tattooed or marked--as an erotic site,' we may account for Tom's panic as partially based on a fear of increasing the erotic sites on his body" (70). Again, I would suggest that this link between the tattoo and sexuality is, for Melville, a feminine, abject occurrence. Similar to the objectification of women, Tommo cries, "What an object he would have made of me!" (219). After several more attempts to "brand" him, the natives abandon hope of tattooing him and Tommo likens the act of tattooing to an act of conversion. Baffled, he concludes that tattooing, "like the still more important system of the 'Taboo,' it always appeared inexplicable to me" (221). While Tommo is using the word "taboo" here as it relates to Typeean culture, it might prove interesting to entertain the notion that Melville might be playing upon the word as it applies to Western culture as well. Obviously, one of the greatest taboos in Western culture is incest, but homosexuality is one as well. One could read this statement as the taboo against homosexuality is "inexplicable," which would reflect frustration at a sexually conservative society, or the line could be read in relation to the thing itself that is tabooed…homosexuality (something that is "inexplicable" to Melville).

Cannibalism

The other process that proves "inexplicable" to Tommo is the shrouded practice of cannibalism. While various hints are made at the probability of cannibalism amongst the natives, Tommo does not find "evidence" of this until chapter thirty-two. Melville foreshadows this grim discovery of anthropophagy through the reoccurrence of Tommo's throbbing, wounded leg. Serving as an internal barometer of danger, Tommo's leg "began again to show itself, and with symptoms as violent as ever" (232). Tommo arrives from the "Ti" to discover the natives quickly covering "three human heads" (232).

Upon closer inspection, he realizes that "two of the three were heads of the islanders; but the third, to my horror, was that of a white man" (233). Aside from the gruesome discovery of three heads, for Tommo, the real horror lies in the fact that one of these men was *white*. The body of one of his *own* had been desecrated. Perhaps, the head even belonged to Toby! Yet, Tommo quickly remembers that he had seen the packages hanging before Toby's disappearance. However, after an invasion from the mighty Happars, Tommo notices the Typees carrying what appear to be bodies of the enemy back to camp. After numerous attempts to gain access to the ceremony that only chiefs could attend, Tommo convinces Kory-Kory to walk with him to the "Ti" or tabooed grounds. Here, he spots a canoe laden with some mysterious cargo. He approaches and discovers, to his horror, "the disordered members of a human skeleton, the bones still fresh with moisture, and with particles of flesh clinging to them here and there!" (238). While the natives attempt to convince Tommo that the remains are from a pig, the shrewd outsider has no doubts about what he has seen. Tommo comes face-to-face with the ultimate abject act, that of eating human flesh - a sacred practice to the Typees, but one that is considered sacrilegious and repellent to civilization. While this might be a common response of a Westerner to an act of cannibalism, for Tommo, I believe that this act is so very disturbing because it forces him to confront his relationship with his own mortality and more specifically, his own physical, sexualized body. Edwards claims that "it is not surprising that Melville affiliates cannibalism with sexuality, for, by the mid-nineteenth century, a long discursive tradition has linked anthropophagy with sodomy" (71). He also notes that "Tom, read as *Typee*'s 'seeing-man,' might be considered a precursor to the twentieth-century sexual tourist, for the island serves as a space where he

can explore different forms of eroticism while resisting a loss of self or cultural identity" (72). Tommo is indeed a voyeur who relishes in the natives' liberal sexuality just as long as he maintains a distance from it. He is drawn, yet repelled at the same time to the supposed cannibalism of the natives.

Crain also notes the homosexual overtones of Melville's depiction of cannibalism. He claims "that in Melville's hands cannibalism was an erotically charged power by which one man could threaten or control another" (42). While Crain doesn't use the word "abject" here, he does remark upon the similarities between Tommo's encounters with cannibalism and the horrific realization of homosexuality in Gothic novels. He states that in both works, "An irresistible curiosity impels the hero. He is attracted to something repulsive; he is not in control of his own actions" (32). This repulsion Crain speaks of leads him to examine Melville's conflation of homosexuality and cannibalism through the theoretical lens of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of "homosexual panic" taken from Freud. Crain cites Sedgwick's definition of homophobia as a form of "social blackmail" and summarizes her belief that "When a man becomes aware, however liminally, of attraction to another man, he resorts to paranoia and projection of the sort Freud outlined in his analysis of Schreber. It is a desperate defense. The attraction becomes revulsion, horror, and even violence" (33). Again, no reference is made to the idea of the abject but Crain does mention that both cannibalism and homosexuality negatively affect the participant because in short, "He would not be his own man. He would no longer be free; he would be as subject as a woman; and he would therefore no longer be fit for the role of citizen in a democracy" (34). I would like to say more about Crain's comment upon the homosexual male who "…would be as subject as a woman"

(34). While Crain seems invested in stressing the loss of status for the homosexual male (i.e. he can no longer serve as a "citizen in a democracy") there is also the idea that the male would become *subject to another man* (i.e. become a passive receiver/ receptacle) just as women are subject to men figuratively and literally. I am most interested in the implied connection made between the homosexual and hence, feminine male, and the social construct of woman as a receptacle for femininity or more specifically, the abject.

Kory-Kory

While the act of cannibalism forces Tommo to confront his own abject body and potential homosexuality, his relationship with Kory-Kory more specifically illustrates this idea. Kory-Kory's physical description is similar to Melville's portrayals of Samoa in *Mardi* and Queequeg in *Moby-Dick*. Tommo observes: "Kory-Kory, though the most devoted and best natured serving-man in the world, was, alas! a hideous object to look upon" (83). The use of the word "object," ironically, is repeated when Tommo faces the threat of becoming objectified via the mark of a tattoo upon his visage. Kory-Kory, like Fayaway, Marnoo, and so many of the other natives is then described in terms of nature. Commenting upon the savage's tattooing, Tommo concludes:

> His countenance thus triply hooped, as it were, with tattooing, always reminded me of those unhappy wretches whom I have sometimes observed gazing out sentimentally from behind the grated bars of a prison window; whilst the entire body of my savage valet, covered all over with representations of birds and fishes, and a variety of most unaccountable-looking creatures, suggested to me the idea of a pictorial museum of

> natural history, or an illustrated copy of 'Goldsmith's Animated Nature.' (83)

Interestingly enough, Tommo refers to Kory-Kory as "my savage," signifying ownership and then he proceeds to detail his specimen's physical appearance. The "bars" across Kory-Kory's face most likely serve as symbolic bars that keep malevolent forces away from and outside of the native's person. In short, as Bronwen Douglas claims in "Cureous Figures: European Voyagers and *Tatu* / Tattoo in Polynesia, 1595-1800," tattoos serve as an armor of sorts. Douglas claims, "Recently, anthropologists have argued that, in this fraught milieu, tattoo served to 'empower' and 'reinforce' the bodies of Marquesan men by providing a kind of 'visual armour' that sealed them against physical and spiritual harm" (47). But Tommo only sees the marks through the lens of his own experience and he decides that the bars represent "bars of a prison window" that keep a malevolent source inside, away from the "outside" arena of civilization (83). "Civilization" consists of strict boundaries, codes and mores that are reinforced through Western symbolic language. Kory-Kory, as a native who is other – aligned with nature, femininity and sexuality (or what is deemed abject) threatens the symbolic code. Hence, Tommo perceives the bars across Kory-Kory's face from a Western perspective that seeks to "bar" the semiotic and what is abject from that which respects boundaries.

After commenting upon Kory-Kory's puzzling physique, Tommo describes the loyalty and attentiveness of his servant. He notes that Kory-Kory brings him and Toby food and "as if I were an infant, insisted upon feeding me with his own hands" (88). After taking on a rather maternal role, the servant tucks the two men into bed and

counsels them to "(eat plenty, ah! sleep very good)" (88). The generous servant also insists upon transporting his master upon his back to a lake where he bathes the surprised master. Tommo remarks, "the honest fellow regarding me as a froward, inexperienced child, whom it was his duty to serve at the risk of offending, lifted me from the rock, and tenderly bathed my limbs" (89-90). Again, Melville uses infantile imagery to describe the relationship between Kory-Kory and Tommo. It has often been argued that Kory-Kory assumes a *paternal* role in his care-taking of Tommo, yet I would argue that instead, Melville depicts Kory-Kory as a feminine mother. Other scenes between the two further illustrate this pre-lapsarian, womb-like relationship the two share. Chapter fourteen continues to describe Kory-Kory in this same vein, remarking upon the servant's efforts to wrap Tommo in a blanket of tappa to ward off insects and light his pipe for him. Kory-Kory anticipates Tommo's every whim and desire. Speech is unnecessary as the two share a semiotics of their own.

Yet, this symbiosis between Tommo and Kory-Kory takes on an entirely new dimension when the former describes the latter's attempt to start a fire. In a much cited passage, Tommo paints a vivid picture of Kory-Kory's belabored effort:

> The islander, placing the larger stick obliquely against some object, with one end elevated at an angle of forty-five degrees, mounts astride of it like an urchin about to gallop off upon a cane, and then grasping the smaller one firmly in both hands, he rubs its pointed end slowly up and down…At first Kory-Kory goes to work quite leisurely, but gradually quickens his pace, and waxing warm in the employment, drives the stick furiously

> along the smoking channel, plying his hands to and fro with amazing rapidity, the perspiration starting from every pore. As he approaches the climax of his effort, he pants and gasps for breath, and his eyes almost start from their sockets with the violence of his exertions…The next moment a delicate wreath of smoke curls spirally into the air, the heap of dusty particles glows with fire, and Kory-Kory almost breathless, dismounts from his steed. (111)

Critics have commented upon this particular scene as a metaphorical depiction of masturbation and homoeroticism. Edwards suggests that "the sexual images that Melville uses in this scene suggest autoerotic behaviour on Kory Kory's part, which stands in for a deferral of his sexual desire for Tom" (68). Edwards' conclusion regarding this scene hits the nail on the head (forgive the pun) in that throughout the novel, Kory-Kory has functioned as Tommo's manservant (tending to his toilette, bathing, etc.) and he has evinced jealousy on several occasions when Tommo's energies are directed elsewhere (whether it be to Fayaway or Marnoo). This scene serves as the culmination of Kory Kory's long awaited, unrequited love affair with Tommo. Here, he releases sexual tension (metaphorically of course!) and allows Tommo to assume the position of voyeur. Ivision makes a direct comment about Tommo's positioning within this scene when he notes that it is Tommo who "passively watches as Kory-Kory masturbates" (165). In this particular passage, Tommo takes on a rather passive, submissive, dare we say feminine role while witnessing Kory Kory's "fire starting." Yet, the reader must remember that it is Tommo who narrates the scene, it is he who layers Kory Kory's attempts to start a fire

with the metaphor of masturbation and in that sense, he controls the reader's perception of this scene. Again, Tommo (and I think it is safe to say, Melville as well) has found a way to confront his own sublimated homosexual desires (again, he expresses this through the native character of Kory-Kory, that which is considered feminine, other, abject) through narrative. Another critic who has commented upon this rather bawdy scene is Gerard M. Sweeney. In his article, "Melville's Smoky Humor: Fire-Lighting in *Typee*," Sweeney comments that "the portrait of the popeyed masturbator, panting and gasping for breath 'as he approaches the climax of his effort,' is wonderfully ribald, the humor arising not only from the exaggerated arduousness of Kory-Kory's endeavors, but also from the well-managed tension between the literal and sub literal and so between an anthropological description and voyeurism" (373). While Sweeney notes the distinction between the "literal and sub literal" readings of the scene to extrapolate the humor found within, I would like to suggest that beneath the humor lies the narrator's (and Melville's) struggle to depict a confrontation with the abject. Again, as suggested previously by Kristeva, "The writer, fascinated by the abject, imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it and as a consequence perverts language--style and content. But on the other hand, as the sense of abjection is both the object's judge and accomplice, this is also true of the literature that confronts it" (*PH* 16). I am suggesting that within this scene, Melville attempts to project Tommo's (and perhaps his own) voyeuristic desires onto the page by sublimating drives and desires through the veil of tongue and cheek language. Obviously, Melville's description of the "fire-lighting" serves as a somewhat veiled attempt to express sexuality - a sexuality that remains outside of the acceptable discourse of civilization, yet well within the tradition of the sexual double-entendre. While the acts

of tattooing and cannibalism function as veiled sexual signifiers, nowhere in the text is sexuality more vividly expressed than through this particular passage. The metaphor is complete with Kory-Kory masturbating, reaching climax and then dispersing seed or in this case, "smoke" that dissipates into the thin air. Despite Tommo's "romantic" relationship with Fayaway, Melville chooses to reveal Tommo's sexuality, in a physical sense, through his depiction of the Westerner as an erotic voyeur. I would suggest that because this particular form of physical expression (sex between two men) is so taboo (specifically in our own culture), Melville felt compelled to layer the abject act in the "masculine" activity of starting a fire.

Melville's first novel, *Typee*, leads the reader on a journey into the feminine abject. Through the character of Tommo and his encounters with the natives, Melville struggles with the abject specifically as it relates to nature, the body and ultimately sexuality. By drawing upon strands of ecofeminism and Kristeva's concept of the abject, I have attempted to convey the ways in which Tommo (like Melville) is drawn to the abject in the sense that it represents the object of his desires and drives (safely veiled within the erotic description of nature and "primitive" peoples), yet when confronted with *acting* upon these feelings he recoils in horror. The fact that perhaps the most disturbing drive for Melville (sexuality) is projected onto and acted out through native characters only, reveals his own reluctance to participate and actually fulfill his own desires of the flesh.

CHAPTER 3: *MARDI*

After the success of *Typee* (1846), Melville followed up with yet another sensationalist travel narrative, *Omoo* (1847). This second novel continued the narrative of *Typee* and gave eager readers yet even more adventure, cannibalism and exoticism. Melville's third book, *Mardi* (1849), departed from the popular themes of his previous books and delved into the realm of the romantic quest for the unconscious. This abrupt shift in his writing reveals Melville's desire to flex his artistic muscle and craft a text that crossed the boundaries of distinct genres and addressed issues of a more personal nature. Another factor that contributed to the reflective nature of *Mardi* was Melville's personal life. During the composition of his third novel, Melville had just recently married Elizabeth Shaw and was living with his mother and extended family in New York. Charles Haberstroh Jr., in ""Melville, Marriage, and *Mardi*," has discussed how Melville's anxiety over his relationship with his new wife affected the composition of *Mardi*. Haberstroh claims that Yillah represents Melville's idealized image of Elizabeth as a woman who is innocent and pure while Hautia symbolizes the threat of a physical relationship with his wife. He speaks of "ambivalent familial and sexual feelings in the newly-wed Melville" and claims that "Whatever Melville's affection for Lizzie, therefore, *Mardi* still indicates that the balm Melville's marriage may have initially seemed to offer him turned out in part to be salt in old psychic wounds" (249). Haberstroh adds that "If one can see Taji as a figure representative of some of Melville's deepest wishes and fears, the Hautia material can be viewed as creating an allegorical picture of Melville's own fear of sexual surrender, and of his puritanical confusion over the whole idea of physical involvement with women" (252). I agree with Haberstroh's

interpretation, but would like to suggest that this idealization of Yillah and fear of Hautia goes back a step further than his anxiety over his recent marriage to Elizabeth. In the Kristevan sense, the primary "source" of this conflict emerges from man's struggle to separate from the mother in order to maintain a sense of autonomous identity. With that said, it is altogether likely that Melville's relationship with Elizabeth might have brought these issues to the surface. While man must separate from the idealized chora, he will always long for a return to that place of a symbiotic relationship where his every need/want is fulfilled before he ever has the chance to verbalize it. After leaving the womb, he desperately seeks to recreate that jouissance with someone else despite the implausibility of this feat. And, this attempt to reconnect with an "other" mother is thwarted by man's initial abjection of the mother. In order to break from the mother, man must abject her (spit her out / reject her) and this abjection of woman, particularly of her body, transfers over into his relationships with other women such as his own wife. Within the context of Melville's text, when Taji depicts Hautia as a sexually threatening woman this fear is a manifestation of his own fear of the abject mother.

My goal in this chapter is to suggest that Melville's relationship to the chora and the abject is further developed in *Mardi* as evidenced by his portrayal of Yillah as a semiotic bearer of the chora and Hautia's role as the abject mother. Perhaps most interesting, though, is the evolution of Melville's writing style that becomes more fluid and semiotic as the novel progresses. The deeper Taji travels into the seas of Mardi, the closer he comes to the chora and his own abjection of it through the characters of Yillah and Hautia. This shift into a more semiotic style of writing is indirectly reflected upon through the figure of Yoomy, the poet in the novel. Yoomy is depicted as an effeminate

bearer of the semiotic and forced to defend himself and his writing much like Melville would later have to do when critics attacked his epic meta-narrative.

Mardi begins much like Melville's earlier adventure novels. The lead character and some of his mates jump ship and travel to exotic locales and encounter "colorful" natives. *Mardi* begins in this manner only to later diverge from it and metamorphose into a poetic journey into the unconscious. Yet, before this rupture occurs, it is necessary to discuss the figure of Samoa since he functions as an abject character and also helps to establish the first portion of *Mardi* as a travel narrative of sorts similar to *Typee* and *Omoo*.

Samoa – The "Incomplete" Man

While the character of Samoa, a native the narrator encounters on board the *Parki*, is not as well-developed as that of Kory-Kory in *Typee*, the former is still worth examining in terms of Kristeva's theory of the abject. Very little criticism has focused on this character or the character of his wife, Annatoo. Eleanor Simpson briefly discusses the native in "Melville and the Negro: From *Typee* to "Benito Cereno." She claims, "Though at first depicted comically as her [Annatoo's] henpecked husband, Samoa soon acquires an individualized personality of considerable dignity and, with it, the narrator's increasing respect" (22). She adds that "Although the narrator's description still retains a hint of condescension...Samoa is on the whole characterized primarily in terms of the noble savage, but with some attempt at individualization" (22). I agree that on the surface, Samoa's character seems drawn to mimic that of the noble savage; however, the narrator's unease and latent disgust with the "abnormal" physicality of Samoa, reveal quite another story. Throughout the novel, Melville portrays Samoa as a grotesque

hybrid of sorts – part man, part beast – who marries an even more grotesque creature in the form of Annatoo. Both of these minor characters serve as representations of the abject.

We first meet Samoa on board the *Parki* – the ship where he and his wife, Annatoo, have stowed away. The narrator's attention is quickly drawn to Samoa's deformity or "the stump of his mutilated arm" (66). Later in the text, the narrator ponders over the existential meaning (or absence of it) behind this arm. The narrator asks,

> Now, which was Samoa? The dead arm swinging high as Haman? Or the living trunk below? Was the arm severed from the body, or the body from the arm? The residual part of Samoa was alive, and therefore we say it was he. But which of the writhing sections of a ten-times severed worm, is the worm proper? For myself, I ever regarded Samoa as but a large fragment of a man, not a man complete. (78)

Samoa's deformity creates a crisis within the narrator over his own perceptions of the body and its significance. Because Samoa is missing a limb, the narrator considers him to be incomplete. This attachment to the perceived relationship between a "whole" physical man and the "whole" idea of man is so important to the narrator because it upholds and respects the proper boundaries of the flesh as well as the accepted idea of what a man *should* look like. In *Powers of Horror*, "Waste-Body, Corpse-Body," Kristeva notes, "A decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred

between the inanimate and the inorganic, a transitional swarming, inseparable lining of a human nature whose life is undistinguishable from the symbolic—the corpse represents fundamental pollution" (109). While Samoa is most certainly *not* a corpse in the literal sense, his missing arm *is* dead and the absence of this once living matter now infects the rest of his body metaphorically and makes him a *defect* in the eyes of the narrator. And, in Kristevan terms, the aberration of Samoa's "stump" shows the narrator "what I permanently thrust aside in order to live…There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border" (*PH* 3). In order to preserve the sanctity of his own flesh and sense of identity, the narrator must ab-ject the islander whose body transgresses and exceeds his own interpretation of what a "normal" body should look like.

The narrator further portrays Samoa as "less than human" in his comparisons of the native to various animals or "beasts." As Taji enlists various animal traits and names to more accurately describe Samoa, he reveals his own motives to be the demi-god, the man who assigns meaning to the "other." Lori Gruen, in "Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connection Between Women and Animals," provides some specific commentary on the function of the association between women and animals. She claims, "The categories of 'woman' and 'animal' serve the same symbolic function in patriarchal society. Their construction as dominated, submissive 'other' in theoretical discourse (whether so stated or implied) has sustained human male dominance" (61). Gruen emphasizes the implied connection between femininity and submission. Gruen's idea of the other, specifically a feminized other as being submissive and animalistic, might also be extended to include that of the native as well.

Taji, the narrator and white male protagonist of *Mardi*, who befriends Samoa, uses animal imagery to portray the native as a submissive, "hen-pecked" husband. The narrator combines both of these portrayals in chapter twenty-nine where he describes the native: "Then, wild buffalo that he was, tamed down in the yoke matrimonial, I could not but fancy, that if upon no other account, our society must please him, as rendering less afflictive the tyranny of his spouse" (97). Here, Samoa is described as an unruly "wild buffalo" that Annatoo "tames" with the "yoke" of matrimony. This comparison of Samoa to a "wild buffalo" might serve as an allusion to the Plains Indians who were recognized primarily by their reliance upon buffalo as a source of food, clothing, etc. The wild buffalo became synonymous with the Plains Indians and functioned as a mascot of sorts much like the character of Samoa is a mascot or representative of his native island. Roy Harvey Pearce discusses the ways in which native peoples are transformed into a symbol – that of the savage – in *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*. He explains that "The Indian who was important to Americans setting out to make their new society was not the person but the type, not the tribesman but the savage, not the individual but the symbol" (73). Taji's description of the "wild buffalo" - like figure of Samoa—plays upon the idea of the buffalo as a symbol of the Plains Indians and their "uncivilized," savage hunting culture that must become domesticated. Like the Mother land of America vigilantly watched over her native children, the character of Annatoo supervises and chides her charge, Samoa.

Then, in the very next passage, the narrator notes, "For a hen-pecked husband, by the way, Samoa was a most terrible fellow to behold. And though, after all, I liked him; it was as you fancy a fiery steed with mane disheveled, as young Alexander fancied

Bucephalus; which wild horse, when he patted, he preferred holding by the bridle" (97). Again, the narrator refers to Samoa not as another human, but as a wild animal that must be brought under the dominion of a "tamer" (in this case, Annatoo). Interestingly enough, Taji's comparison of Samoa to a wild horse could be yet another indirect reference to the Plains Indians whose livelihood later came to depend on these animals. The "wild buffalo" as well as the "wild horse" were both animals that were intimately linked with the Plains Indians. In fact, the wild horse figured so prominently in their culture and survival that they waged wars on Mexico attempting to steal their horses[9].

Yet another reference is made to Samoa's animalistic appearance in chapter thirty, entitled "Hints for a full length of Samoa." When describing the nail Samoa sports between the cartilage of his nose, the narrator surmises that the native resembles a "Newfoundland dog carrying a cane" (98). This image of Samoa is far less threatening than some of the previous metaphors applied, but it too bears significance in that it further supports the narrator's perception of the native as less than a "real man." Also, we are informed that this particular piercing was made by Samoa's *mother*. For my purposes, this seemingly innocuous bit of information is important because it further aligns Samoa with the body and demonstrates (indirectly) the role of the Mother (in Kristevan terms) in ordering the body and its drives.

Aside from Samoa's physical deformity and his piercings, the narrator is also puzzled by the islander's tattoos. The narrator says of Samoa's tattoos that they:

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[9] See Brian Delay's "The Wider World of the Handsome Man: Southern Plains Indians Invade Mexico, 1830-1848." *Journal of the Early Republic* 27.1 (2007): 83-113.

> …seemed rather incomplete; his marks embracing but a vertical half of his person, from crown to sole; the other side being free from the slightest stain. Thus clapped together, as it were, he looked like a union of the unmatched moieties of two distinct beings; and your fancy was lost in conjecturing, where roamed the absent ones. When he turned round upon you suddenly, you thought you saw some one else, not him whom you had been regarding before. (99)

This description of Samoa's tattooing offers an extensive visual representation of the native as a hybrid, an "incomplete" man-beast. Interestingly enough, the tattoo pattern Melville describes here is most similar to that of the Hawaiian people, *not* the Samoans. The Samoans wore what were called "breeches" by visiting Europeans. These "breeches" were tattoos that covered the men from the waist down to the knee and looked very much like a piece of clothing. Yet, Melville's description of Samoa is actually more similar to that of a Hawaiian warrior. Specifically, Melville might inadvertently be referring to the tattoos of chief Kahekili on the island of Oahu. While Bronwen Douglas' work, "'Cureous Figures': European Voyagers and *Tatu* / Tattoo in Polynesia, 1595-1800," is an ethnological study of Polynesian tattoos, a few of his observations might offer some insight into the patterns of Samoa's tattoos and their similarity to those of chief Kahekili. Douglas mentions an encounter between chief Kahekili and David Samwell, the surgeon who sailed with George Vancouver and James Cook during the years of 1791-1795. Samwell says of chief Kahekili that "He had 'elected' to have half

his body 'tattooed black,' like the two of the incarnations of the god Kane, and was aped by his closest followers – 'a type of soldier new to Oahu called "Cut in two" (pahupu'), strange-looking men tattooed black from top to toe'" (49-50). This reference to the chief's tattoos as the "incarnations of the god Kane," (Douglas 50) is strikingly similar to Melville's description of Samoa's tattoos as "a union of the unmatched moieties of two distinct beings" (*Mardi* 99). There is no documentation, to my knowledge, suggesting that Melville might or might not have previously known about the symbolism behind the tattoo he describes, but it raises an interesting question as to the extent of Melville's knowledge of Polynesian culture. Douglas also relays yet another depiction of men who appear to be tattooed very similarly to the character of Samoa. Three Hawaiian warriors were on trial for killing two of Vancouver's colleagues. Vancouver offers a thorough description of the lead suspect and his accomplices:

> One half of his body, from his forehead to his feet, was made jet black by punctuating; the other two men were marked after the same manner, but not with the same regularity. These appearances alone would not have been sufficient to have identified their persons, as we had seen many…disfigured after the same barbarous fashion; which I understood had been adopted in the late wars, for the purpose of increasing the ferocity of their appearance, and striking their enemies with terror. (50)

This historical passage offers an even more detailed description of the vertical tattooing Melville describes in *Mardi* and it also accounts for the "meaning" behind this particular type of tattoo. For Melville, this tattoo provides a striking image and suggests Samoa's status to be that of a warrior.

The folklore behind Samoan tattooing further explains its significance. This "story" of the origin of tattoo has been noted by several anthropologists, one of whom is Sean Mallon in "Samoan *Tatau* as Global Practice." Mallon explains that "According to stories and songs recorded in the nineteenth-century, two sisters, Taema and Tilafaiga, who were Siamese twins, brought the first tattooing tools to Samoa" (148). They were taught the art of tattoo by the Fijian Filelei and Tufou and were told to bring the practice back to their native land of Samoa. They were instructed to "'tattoo the women and not the men'" and in order to remember this advice they sang this phrase over the course of their journey. Yet, they became distracted by a beautiful shell and transposed the lyric to read "'Tattoo the men and not the women'" (148). This folkloric origin of Samoan tattooing intimates that the bearers, those held responsible for the history of the tattoo, are women. This lore coupled with the fact that the tattoo could serve as a marker of sexuality as well as of one's position within the tribe aligns the tattoo with what could be deemed abject by Westerners in particular.

In Alfred Gell's text, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia*, he claims that Polynesian tattooing "was a species of political gesture which marked the body, tortured it, ceremonially prepared it for war and sexuality, and which made it emit signs" (3). While tattoos had various meanings dependent upon tribal affiliation, Gell offers one particularly interesting meaning associated with the body of the mother. He notes:

> In non-hierarchical societies (for which Martens includes all tribal or archaic societies) body-painting and tattooing are expressions of the original unity of the fusional body. The coat of paint, or pattern of tattoo markings, envelops the body and is integral with it, recapitulating the original fusion between own body / enveloping maternal body. At the same time these body-markings are exteriorizations of the inner hidden self. (25)

This idea of the tattoo (and/or body paint) as a second skin that envelopes the native's body provides a striking visual representation of man's relationship to the abject mother. Even though man is no longer *physically* attached to his mother, he cannot escape her influence. And, as Gell describes, for many natives this metaphorical fusion with the mother's body is actually revered and engraved upon their very skin! Gell adds, "Tattoos and mutilations serve as 'lived' signs of common participation in the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth; they provide permanent insignia of renunciation, scar-tissue left where the original splitting of the fusional body took place" (26). These "'lived' signs" or bodily scars, serve as a visual reminder of a man being split in two – the tattoos serve as jagged seams that once physically united mother and infant. In an especially Kristevan passage, Gell surmises:

> The idea here is that tattooing, by providing an extra skin, over the skin, a wrapping for the person which is not separate, but integral, permits the recapitulation of the original situation of an unmediated single-skin relationship with the mother while at the same time—and somewhat paradoxically—marking the final stage of renunciation of that original relationship. (32)

Tattoos, in this context, acknowledge the abject mother as well as the "paradoxical" position of being one yet separate from the mother. Samoa's tattoo, which is literally split in half, offers an overt re-presentation of a man who is separate from yet still part of the (m)other. And Taji's declaration that Samoa's tattoo served as "a union of the unmatched moieties of two distinct beings" (Mardi 99), provides an intriguing potential reference to the aforementioned purpose of tattooing – that of illustrating on the body, the fusion and separation of man from the abject mother.

Annatoo Opens Pandora's Box

While the narrator finds Samoa's body to be abject, he finds the native's wife, Annatoo, to be not only abject but repulsive as well. Annatoo's personality and the manner in which she interacts with her husband represent everything the narrator (and probably Melville as well) fears in a matrimonial relationship. Several critics have briefly commented upon the relationship between Samoa and Annatoo[10]. Most agree that

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[10] M. Niemeyer in "The Deception of Reality: Blackening the Woman in Melville's *Mardi*," *Imaginaires* 2.1 (1997): 169-77 discusses the negative portrayals of women in this text. He offers a paragraph or so on the relationship between Annatoo and Samoa, claiming that their tumultuous relationship is the most extensive portrayal of marriage included in the text. Mildred K. Travis, in "*Mardi*: Melville's Allegory of Love," *The Emerson Society Quarterly* 43.1 (1966): 88-94 comments rather extensively on the character of Annatoo. She notes that Annatoo is a "nature woman" who is closely aligned with animals and she also refers to the woman as a parody of a "noble savage" and the act of marriage itself (89).

the narrator fears being dominated by a termagant himself. Elizabeth Renker, in "Herman Melville, Wife Beating, and the Written Page," explores the figure of Annatoo as representative of Melville's perception of his wife, Elizabeth Shaw. The bulk of Renker's argument focuses on Melville's abuse of his wife and how that violence served as a manifestation of his own frustration over writing. She argues that "The Melville's domestic sphere—populated by women and children—is the site of Herman's textual production, and its 'girls' are his factory operatives" (136-37). Renker notes that it was during the composition of *Mardi* that his wife and children first began acting as copyists for his work. While Melville desperately needed the women to assist him in the production of his work, Renker claims that "Herman's simultaneous dependence on and resentment of Elizabeth and the other Melville women constitutes the secret 'madness & anguish' of his writing…" (139). In regards to *Mardi*, Renker suggests that Melville's writing Annatoo out of the script was a metaphorical attempt at removing a specific type of blockage – that of the meddling woman. While Annatoo may indeed serve as a caricature of Elizabeth Shaw, I find that the narrator portrays Annatoo as a powerful, outspoken, sexually active woman who he deems abject.

We first learn that Annatoo is "a native of a far-off, anonymous island to the westward" (68). The indistinct location of Annatoo's origin suggests she could represent any woman/wife from anywhere. One of the first pieces of information we are given regarding Annatoo is that she is no longer a virgin. Melville writes, "By chance it came to pass that when Annatoo's first virgin bloom had departed, leaving nothing but a lusty frame and a lustier soul, Samoa, the Navigator, had fallen desperately in love with her" (68-69). He also refers to her as "a discarded fair one" (69). Annatoo assumes the role of

the abject woman for she is tossed aside (metaphorically and literally in her death scene) or expelled from the realm of respectability. She is tainted because she is sexed.

This denigration of Annatoo's sexuality might reflect Melville's own feelings towards his wife, Lizzie. Taji's reference to "the discarded fair one" could indirectly characterize Melville's perception of his own wife and her loss of chastity upon their marriage. The narrator also comments upon Samoa's choice of a wife and reveals that in his opinion, Samoa "meditated suicide—I would have said, wedlock—and the twain became one" (69). The narrator equates marriage to Annatoo with death and a willing death at that. Taji's comparison of Samoa and Annatoo's wedlock to suicide might offer further insight into Melville's own perception of his marriage to Lizzie. As Renker observes and biographies reveal, the couple's relationship quickly deteriorated into a taxing working relationship whose primary focus was on the completion of Melville's works. Renker discusses how Melville needed Lizzie to assist in copying his manuscript (*Mardi*) yet also resented her intrusion into his work. This suicidal relationship Taji speaks of could mirror Melville's anxiety and frustration over having to rely on his wife throughout the writing process. The Melville's kept a rigorous schedule that revolved around Herman's writing. This rigid schedule is described in a letter dated December 1847 to Lizzie's stepmother (Delbanco 109). Lizzie details how Herman rises at eight each morning to take a walk while she sees to the domestic chores and clears off his writing desk. The two break for lunch, receive callers and then Herman returns to his writing while Lizzie makes herself "as bewitching as possible" to meet her husband for dinner. In the evenings Herman shares his work with Lizzie and has her read it back to him since his eyesight is poor (Delbanco 110). Later, on August 3rd, 1851, Lizzie would

write another letter to her stepmother complaining, "I cannot write any more – it makes me terribly nervous – I don't know as you can read this I have scribbled it so" (Delbanco 138). It is rather clear from this excerpt that Lizzie is exhausted from acting as Herman's right hand literally and metaphorically.

The idea of Lizzie as Melville's right hand, so to speak, is replicated in the scene where Taji describes Annatoo's role in severing Samoa's arm which had been previously injured in a fight and was now infected. The narrator explains that as Samoa prepared to remove his own arm with an axe "for some reason distrusting the precision of his aim, Annatoo was assigned to the task" (78). Despite the fact that Samoa *allows* Annatoo to play surgeon, it is nonetheless intriguing that *she* becomes responsible for the removal of his appendage. The removal of Samoa's arm is a metaphorical castration in the eyes of the narrator because this missing limb is what makes Samoa a "large fragment of a man, not a man complete" (78). Similarly, by assisting Melville in the production of his text, Lizzie intrudes upon the sacred sphere of the male author. She crosses the boundary between the domestic realm and that of the predominately male practice of textual production. Similar to Lizzie, Annatoo egregiously transgresses her role as the female domestic and attempts to manage the activities of the ship. She is also responsible for literally slicing off Samoa's arm! This removal of Samoa's arm and his resulting fragmentation parallels Melville's frustration and anxiety over Elizabeth's intrusive yet necessary role of copyist. She removes a portion of his arm and hand in textual production and hence serves as an emasculating threat to Herman's perception of himself as "The Author".

This continued fascination with "fragmented" man resurfaces later in *Moby-Dick* in the form of Ahab. In the chapter entitled, "Ahab and the Carpenter," the former goes to see the latter about chiseling a replacement for the loss of his first peg-leg. As the carpenter works, Ahab asks him about what are now known as "phantom pains" in amputees and whether or not he can "cure" that ailment. He challenges the carpenter, "Look, put thy live leg here in the place where mine once was; so, now, here is only one distinct leg to the eye, yet two to the soul. Where thou feelest tingling life; there, exactly there, there to a hair, do I. Is't a riddle?" (513). While we never really know how Samoa feels about his amputated arm (we are only given Taji's perception of it), in Ahab, Melville draws a character who divulges his own perceptions about the lost leg and attempts to reconcile his experience with reason. He continues:

> How dost thou know that some entire, living thinking thing may not be invisibly and uninterpenetratingly standing precisely where thou now standest; aye, and standing there in thy spite? In thy most solitary hours, then, dost thou not fear eavesdroppers? Hold, don't speak! And if I still feel the smart of my crushed leg, though it be now so long dissolved; then, why mayst not thou, carpenter, feel the fiery pains of hell for ever, and without a body? Hah! (513-514).

Similar to Taji's philosophical ponderings over Samoa's severed body parts and what and how that means in relation to the image of a whole, live man, Ahab wonders about the

somewhat self-described "paranoid" feeling he has that the amputated leg is actually still in its place and "alive." As Taji contemplates Samoa's amputated arm he asks, "The residual part of Samoa was alive, and therefore we say it was he. But which of the writhing sections of a ten-times severed worm, is the worm proper?" (78). This question of residuals perplexes Ahab as well as Taji. Ahab continues to "feel" the residual presence of a leg that is now absent. And, for Taji, he wonders which part of Samoa *is* the residual - the man standing in front of him, or the amputated arm. Kristeva addresses the idea of residuals in the section of *Powers of Horror* entitled, "The Remainder: Defilement and Rebirth." She claims that "Remainders are residues of something but especially of someone. They pollute on account of incompleteness" (76). Samoa's amputated arm functions as a remainder or residue in Kristevan terms. Taji addresses the crisis Kristeva speaks of when one can no longer neatly separate that which is abject from himself. While one might assume that the amputated arm is the waste or by-product that must be abjected, the character of Taji asks which is "the worm [or body] proper?" (78). What exactly *is* the abject in this case? This crisis of the body is reflected as a crisis of the ego or identity as well. Kristeva suggests that "*corporeal waste*" forces us to question "the objective frailty of symbolic order" (*PH* 70). Samoa's fragmented body exposes Taji's anxiety over the body and its relation to our own identity. Taji begins to question his friend's relation to the abject and consequently, begins to question his own relation to it as well.

In Samoa's situation, the fact that his wife was responsible for creating this crisis of meaning about the body and what it means to be alive contributes to Taji's further distrust and demonization of her. Annatoo fulfills the role of the abject woman in that

she transgresses traditional gender roles and disrupts Taji's notion of who and what a woman should be. To further develop this idea of Annatoo as an abject woman, the narrator provides a laundry list of unfavorable adjectives and phrases to describe her. We are told that she has "little idea of feminine adaptations" (80); that she is one "Who, being sinewy of limb, and neither young, comely, nor amiable, was exceedingly distasteful in my eyes. Besides she was a tigress" (90). Aside from being physically unattractive, rude and animalistic, Annatoo is "distasteful" to the narrator, which suggests a person's reaction to that which is abject. We seek to "spit out" the abject, compelled to declare "'I' want none of that element, sign of their [mother and father] desire; 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it" (3). The narrator feels more repelled the longer he is in Annatoo's presence. He refers to her as "ugly" (99); "possessed by some scores of devils, perpetually inciting her to mischief on their own separate behoof, and not hers" (113); a "woman unendurable' who forces the narrator to plead, "deliver me, ye gods, from being shut up in a ship with such a hornet again" (115). The narrator "almost believed, that there was malice enough in the minx to give us our henbane broth" (115). And, finally, as if Annatoo weren't enough of a nuisance, she's also a cunning kleptomaniac (80).

Annatoo's kleptomania seems a rather bizarre condition to include in a supposed romance. While Melville might have included this disorder so that he might comically exaggerate the stereotypical female who is obsessed with money and trinkets, there might have been a more substantial reason for mentioning a woman's compulsion to steal. If Annatoo and Samoa's marriage does indeed serve as an exaggerated caricature of Melville and Lizzie's relationship, then the importance of Annatoo's kleptomania might

have further significance. As Renker mentioned, Melville needed yet also resented Elizabeth's assistance when composing *Mardi*. Renker also reveals a reference made by Walker Cowen in Melville's *Marginalia* that suggests Elizabeth's duties as copyist might have extended to include that of a censor as well. Cowen examines "the frequency of misogynous markings and annotations among Herman's marginalia" (127) and goes on to propose that several of the comments were erased most likely by Elizabeth and/or the other women in the house (128). If indeed this was the case, Elizabeth might have fulfilled the role of a female censor to Melville's work and this affront could be likened to a stealing or removal of the author's ideas.

Taji's solution to the "problem" of Annatoo and her kleptomania is rather extreme. He decides to lock her in the hull of the ship. Taji's desire to banish Annatoo to the hull of the ship and safely "contain" her might again reflect Melville's own desire to banish Elizabeth from his writing process – to shut her out or at least restrict her movement within his artistic process. Perhaps by hurling Annatoo into the hull of the ship the author was relegating his wife deep down into the realm of his unconscious.

Before throwing Annatoo into the hull he contemplates how to discipline her and make her aware of her transgressions which include stealing from the ship and simply being present on board what should be an all male vessel. Taji makes the following declaration:

> Nevertheless, it was indispensable that she should at once be brought under prudent subjection; and made to know, once and for all, that though conjugally a rebel, she must be nautically

> submissive. For to keep the sea with a Calmuc on board, seemed next to impossible. In most military marines, they are prohibited by law; no officer may take his Pandora and her bandbox off soundings. (91)

This quote reveals the narrator's (and perhaps Melville's as well) belief in the division between the sexes especially when a man is at sea – a locale Melville frequently associates with males and masculinity. The idea of Annatoo being one who must be "brought under prudent subjection" might also apply perhaps on an unconscious level to Elizabeth as well. Both women have made transgressions into the masculine sphere (that of the ship and of writing) and must pay the repercussions. While Annatoo is disciplined by being locked up in the hull of the ship, Lizzie faces verbal and physical abuse (as documented by Renker). Renker as well as a few other critics have found evidence via letters from Elizabeth to various family members that suggested abuse. One particular incident Renker mentions that is eerily reminiscent (in my opinion) of Taji locking Annatoo in the hull occurred when Melville supposedly threw Elizabeth down a flight of stairs[11]. These images of forcing women *down* (a flight of stairs in the Melville home or a flight of stairs leading to the hull of the ship) – seem to reinforce the man's position of superiority (both physically and symbolically).

To return more specifically to the narrative involving Annatoo and her tenuous position on board the ship, it is important to note that the separation of the sexes on board

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[11] In Elizabeth Renker's "Herman Melville, Wife Beating, and the Written Page" (1994) the author notes "In his comments Paul Metcalf, Eleanor's son and Herman's great-grandson, reports having been told by Charles Olson that Herman came home drunk on brandy, beat Elizabeth up, and threw her down the stairs" (127).

ship is also in keeping with the maritime tradition of prohibiting women at sea. In "Liberty Beneath the Jolly Roger: The Lives of Anne Bonny and Mary Read, Pirates," Marcus Rediker discusses two female pirates of the nineteenth century, but also adds information about why women were prohibited at sea in general. He notes that the two primary reasons women weren't allowed were the sheer physical strength needed to run a ship, as well as the temptation their sexuality might offer male sailors. Moreover, "Many sailors saw women as objects of fantasy and adoration but also as sources of bad luck or, worse, as dangerous sources of conflict, as potential breaches in the male order of seagoing solidarity (9). This fear of women being sources of "bad luck or, worse, as dangerous sources of conflict" is fully realized in Melville's depiction of the character of Annatoo. She muddles Samoa's thinking, makes him weak and submissive – in short, she makes Samoa a less effective sailor. Again, the parallel between Annatoo and Elizabeth seems to resurface here as well. Melville's reliance on his wife as a copyist for his work might have left him feeling weak or less of a man/author since he had to ask a female to assist him.

Kristeva comments explicitly on the division between the sexes in *Powers of Horror*. Kristeva refers specifically to those societies where the "ritualization of defilement is accompanied by a strong concern for separating the sexes, and this means giving men rights over women. The latter, apparently put in the position of passive objects, are none the less felt to be wily powers, 'baleful schemers' from whom rightful beneficiaries must protect themselves" (70). The exclusion and repression of this cunning female sex rests upon the woman being deemed abject – both in a physical sense and a moral one as well. However, "…the masculine, apparently victorious, confesses

through its very relentlessness against the other, the feminine, that it is threatened by an asymmetrical, irrational, wily, uncontrollable power" that must be suppressed (70). This idea of protecting oneself from the unreasonable, irrational woman is played out in *Mardi* in the chapter entitled, "Ah, Annatoo!" Upon discovering a wooden box chock-full of goodies Annatoo stole from the ship, the narrator informs Samoa that "there was no safety for us except in the nightly incarceration of his spouse" (114). Annatoo must be contained because her feminine wiles make her a dangerous threat to the narrator and the rest of the male crew. She is Pandora and her box of secrets holds the power to annihilate men so she must be kept under lock and key. Melville makes another specific reference to the effects of a woman's presence on board ship when he refers to Pandora's "bandbox." Margaret S. Creighton notes in "Davy Jones' Locker Room: Gender and the American Whaleman, 1830-1870," that the prohibition against women was so strict that men could only bring along a *box* full of tokens to remind them of their wives or girlfriends back home; and, even this tangible reminder could only be opened once a week. She explains, "Sailors literally lifted the lid on women once a week. On Sundays, foremast hands opened these chests in a ritual they termed the 'sailor's pleasure.' They took out their 'longtogs'—their shore clothes—and their photographs and letters, and they 'trimmed' (organized) their ditty boxes" (128). The Pandora's "bandbox" Melville refers to is most likely a reference to the "ditty boxes" Creighton speaks of.

Additionally, Melville's comparison of Annatoo and all women to the mythical figure of Pandora is telling. As Bulfinch notes in his *Mythology*, Pandora's curiosity leads her to open the forbidden jar and once she does this "Forthwith there escaped a multitude of plagues for hapless man, - such as gout, rheumatism, and colic for his body,

and envy, spite, and revenge for his mind, - and scattered themselves far and wide (13-14). Annatoo threatens to disturb the patriarchal construct and order of the ship. Like one of the many boxes she opens on board ship to garner trinkets, she herself *is* Pandora's Box – the receptacle for the abject.

Yillah the Unattainable

Contrasting the noxious character of Annatoo is the narrator's leading lady, Yillah. Similar to Fayaway in *Typee*, the character of Yillah in *Mardi* is heralded for her great beauty and inseparable connection to a chora-like nature. Just as Tommo becomes obsessed with his own idealized version of the nymph-like Fayaway, so does Taji become enraptured with the flower child Yillah. Another similarity between the two women is that they both speak a language similar to that of Kristeva's semiotic. Yillah's character is most often discussed in terms of her relationship to Hautia. While most critics agree that Yillah represents the white, innocent, pure, idealized woman, and Hautia serves as the dark woman aware of her sexuality and a threat to masculinity, Yillah also has an erotic dimension as the semiotic and sublime chora.

Readers are given their first glimpse of Yillah in chapter forty-three, "The Tent." Melville captures the sexual tension between Taji and Yillah in the moments leading up to Yillah's unveiling. He writes of Yillah's tent, "By means of thin spaces between the braids of matting, the place was open to the air, but not to view. There was also a round opening on one side, only large enough, however, to admit the arm; but this aperture was partially closed from within" (136). He adds, "As I divided this lacing with my cutlass, there arose an outburst of voices from the Islanders. And they covered their faces, as the interior was revealed to my gaze" (136). The parting of the tent can be read as a sexual

metaphor for penetration. One critic in particular who has commented rather extensively on this particular scene is Michael Berthold, in "'born-free-and-equal': Benign cliché and Narrative Imperialism in Melville's *Mard.*" Berthold views *Mardi* as a collection of captivity narratives, one of which includes the story of Yillah and her captor Aleema. Yet, as Berthold points out, by re-visioning Yillah as some romantic ideal before he even meets her, Taji ultimately perpetuates the cycle of captivity by imagining he alone can possess her and save her from her cruel fate. Additionally, Berthold keenly explicates another way in which Taji seeks to master Yillah, by parting the folds of her tent with his sword. He claims that the separation of the tent symbolizes a "metaphorical penetration of the [Yillah's] hymen" (20). And he adds that "Taji's swordplay is paralleled by his narratological tampering with Yillah's story, the fetishized female body closely connected with a male production of meaning. In both instances, the sword/phallus/pen compulsively fills and remedies what is perceived as some void or lack in Yillah" (21). To further extend Berthold's somewhat Lacanian reading by coupling it with the Kristevean concept of the abject, it becomes evident that this "threatening space that is Yillah's tent/vulva/unwritten story" (21) could serve as a metaphor for the abject womb. While Kristeva's concept of the womb implies its connection to the chora, it also represents that which the child must eventually ab-ject in order to formulate his own identity. The drives and emotions Yillah arouses in Taji (actually the *idea* of Yillah, since he hasn't even seen her at this point) and Hautia's "emasculating 'vortex that draws all in' (M, p. 650)" are both representative of the desire to conquer or in Berthold's language "colonize" the locus of these abject feelings…the womb or the mother. Again, the "undefinability" and "void or lack in Yillah" Berthold mentions could actually be an

excess of meaning instead of a void that Taji's own symbolic patriarchal language tries to penetrate.

Yillah's first words are described in terms that could be labeled semiotic. Taji speaks to her in English assuming she will understand since she seems "of another race" (or white). He even believes that she recognizes his native tongue when she "started, and bending over, listened intently, as if to the first faint echo of something dimly remembered" (137). Yet, the woman responds in her own tongue. Taji recounts, "At length she slowly chanted to herself several musical words unlike those of the Islanders; but though I knew not what they meant, they seemed vaguely familiar" (137). Similar to the native women in *Typee*, Yillah's language is described as chanting – a form of song-speech that is lyrical and highly semiotic. Kristeva notes in *Revolution in Poetic Language* that "Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, the space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax" (38). I quote this excerpt from Kristeva because it suggests the musicality of the semiotic and the difficulty in "understanding" it or assigning it a meaning that is based upon a symbolic language. The idea that Yillah's semiotic language resonates with Taji ties in with Kristeva's idea that men too can access the semiotic. In a 1996 interview with Ross Guberman, Kristeva explains:

> The semiotic is transverbal: it is made up of archaic representatives of drives and the senses that depend on the mother and biology. Both men and women, in different ways according to

> their psychic structures and their histories, combine these components to become 'different' and 'universal,' singular and compatible. (*Julia Kristeva Interviews*, 268-69)

Noelle McAfee explicates a portion of this passage by claiming that "Insofar as we all – men and women – are born of mothers, we are each privy to the chora and will signify semiotically as well as symbolically" (*Julia Kristeva* 122). This idea of men as well as women being able to "connect" with the chora and speak a language of the semiotic is played out to a certain extent in the previously mentioned scene in *Mardi* where Taji claims that Yillah's chants are "vaguely familiar to him" (137). Yet, while he vaguely recollects this sonorous language, he becomes "impatient" (137) with it and tries to address Yillah in Polynesian instead. He quickly learns that she speaks "broken" Polynesian and he is able to decipher bits and pieces of her story. Several critics have commented upon Taji's co-optation of Yillah's origin myth and his manipulation of her fantastical tale to his own advantage[12]. Ultimately, Taji inserts himself into her mythical origin tale and convinces her of his goodwill and trustworthiness. He stresses his similarity to her and encourages her to learn his own native tongue of English.

In chapter forty-nine, Taji marvels over Yillah's curiosity and penchant for the English language. He proclaims that "Often she entreated me to repeat over and over again certain syllables of my language. These she would chant to herself, pausing now

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[12] See Michael C. Berthold's "'born-free-and-equal': Benign cliché and Narrative Imperialism in Melville's *Mardi*." *Studies in the Novel* 25.1 (1993): 16-27 for extensive analysis on how Taji alters Yillah's narrative and makes her a captive of his interpretation of her history. Also see M. Niemeyer's, "The Deception of Reality: Blackening the Woman in Melville's *Mardi*." *Imaginaires* 2.1 (1997): 169-77 for his interpretation of Taji, as the "god-like, phallocentric narrator [who] has made his conquest of the angelic maiden" (173).

and then, as if striving to discover wherein lay their charm" (152). Here, Yillah is depicted as the willing, capable pupil to the Western teacher and his subject of symbolic discourse. *She* is a noble savage who may *become* "civilized" with the proper training, and even more importantly, she yearns to do so. Her "chanting" of the English language seems to illustrate a fusion of semiotic and symbolic language. Yet Taji is most focused upon her unique capability with the English language which is unlike her fellow natives. When describing Yillah's affinity for the English language, the narrator notes that "In her accent, there was something very different from that of the people of the canoe. Wherein lay the difference, I knew not; but it enabled her to pronounce with readiness all the words which I taught her; even as if recalling sounds long forgotten" (152). Taji makes sure to stress that the maiden's accent is not just "different," but "very different" from Aleema's crew. The idea that Yillah might be "recalling sounds long forgotten" further establishes her likeness to her Western counterpart. Yillah is a linguistic hybrid in that she possesses the ability to speak a semiotic language that is always already infused with the symbolic.

Yillah's difference is further emphasized when Taji relays the fantastical tale of Yillah's origin to the reader. In a fairy tale that combines the myths of Daphne and Aphrodite, Yillah is captured by the bowers of a vine and changed into a blossom that was "snapped from its stem; and borne by a soft wind to the sea; where it fell into the opening valve of a shell; which in good time was cast upon the beach of the Island of Amma" (137). Aleema then releases the bud and it travels through the air as a mist that distills into the essence of Yillah. While Fayaway is compared to the luscious fruit of the arta tree and all of its sexual connotations previously discussed, Yillah is the fresh virgin

bud, plucked by the "dark stranger" and transformed into a rosy cheeked maiden. For both of these leading ladies, Melville relies upon imagery from nature, specifically fruits and flowers, to convey the women's appearance and sexuality. He will also do this with the characters of Hautia and her heralds.

After providing the reader with Yillah's version of her own life story, the narrator proceeds to enlighten the reader as to the actual "facts" surrounding the woman's life. Taji explains that priests (like Aleema) often hide infants in their temples and groom them to "be" or believe themselves to be oracles who must always remain hidden and sequestered. Ultimately, these young women would be led unwittingly to their doom and sacrificed to the gods (139). While the reader is more than likely repulsed by this apparently barbarous custom, the narrator reassures the reader that he alone will act as Yillah's "deliverer" (140). In a scene where the Occident meets and "saves" the Oriental (to borrow Edward Said's terminology from *Orientalism*), the great white savior delivers the helpless young, white maiden from the savage customs of the natives. He even goes so far as to persuade Yillah that he is a "demi-god" from Oroolia, her birthplace. Additionally, he lies to the maiden and informs her that Aleema "had been dispatched," when in actuality the priest died at the hands of the "savior." And, ultimately, Taji tries to convince Yillah that he is "better and wiser than Aleema the priest" and that he alone holds her best interest because he is like her in that he also is white (142). He desperately pleads, "'Think not of him [Aleema], sweet Yillah,' I cried. 'Look on me. Am I not white like yourself? Behold, though since quitting Oroolia the sun has dyed my cheek, am I not even as you? Am I brown like the dusky Aleema? (142-43). Taji also attempts to recreate false memories of the time that he and Yillah supposedly "shared" in Oroolia.

He goes on to detail very specific incidents and gambols the two used to take amidst the valley. And, to seal the deal, Taji pulls out all of the "stops" in that he appeals to their shared "race." Mentioning their shared race creates a sense of commonality amongst Taji and Yillah, yet more insidiously, it is meant to support the notion that the narrator's intentions are "pure."

Taji separates his intentions from Aleema's by trying to denigrate the native's character. He accomplishes this by aligning Aleema's "dark deeds" with the color of his skin. He associates Aleema's skin tone, the "brown" and "dusky Aleema" with the priest's kidnapping of the young maiden. In *Orientalism*, Said notes that "Theses of Oriental backwardness, degeneracy, and inequality with the West most easily associated themselves early in the nineteenth century with ideas about the biological bases of racial inequality" (206). He adds, "To these ideas was added second-order Darwinism, which seemed to accentuate the 'scientific' validity of the division of races into advanced and backward, or European-Aryan and Oriental-African" (206).

Additionally, the priest's name, Aleema, further reveals his contorted relationship with the young maiden. According to Said's *Orientalism*, "*Alemah* in Arabic means a learned woman. It was the name given to women in conservative eighteenth-century Egyptian society who were accomplished reciters of poetry. By the mid-nineteenth century the title was as a sort of guild name for dancers who were also prostitutes…" (186). If Melville was indeed relying on the mid-nineteenth-century Arabic etymology of the name "Alemah" as a substitute for "Aleema," then it might suggest that Aleema's relation to Yillah could be likened to that of a sheik and a member of his harem.

After berating the "dusky Aleema," Taji reiterates the validity of his own "memories" of the two young (assumed) lovers and even claims to possess a lock of Yillah's hair before it turned "golden" (143). In a passage that deftly paints a picture of two long-distanced lovers who have finally "found" one another, Melville relies upon a conventional romantic apostrophe where Taji exclaims, "'Oh Yillah, little Yillah, has it all come to this? am I forever forgotten? Yet over the wide watery world have I sought thee: from isle to isle, from sea to sea. And now we part not…' Sweet Yillah was mine!" (143).

Taji further fleshes out his impression of Yillah as the romantic ideal when he asks excitedly, "Was not Yillah my shore and my grove? my meadow, my mead, my soft shady vine, and my arbor? Of all things desirable and delightful, the full-plumed sheaf, and my own right arm the band?" (145). With this passage, Yillah and Taji are depicted as two lovers who complement one another. Caught up in the romance surrounding Yillah's origin story, the narrator decides to sail towards Tedaidee and eventually end up on the "fairy isle" of Oroolia. Spell-bound, the narrator yearns to linger at sea a bit longer with Yillah and languor in an atmosphere suspended from time and the landlocked world.

In Chapter Forty-Seven, entitled, "Yillah, Jarl, and Samoa," we learn of each crew member's impression of the maiden and her semiotic language. Further fostering the image of Samoa as a noble savage of sorts, Taji claims that the native shrank from the fair maiden who "appealed to all his native superstitions, which ascribed to beings of her complexion a more than terrestrial origin" (146). He goes on to further describe Samoa's reaction to Yillah claiming, "When permitted to approach her, he looked timid and

awkwardly strange; suggesting the likeness of some clumsy satyr, drawing in his horns; slowly wagging his tail; crouching abashed before some radiant spirit" (146-47). In this passage, Melville yet again aligns Samoa with nature, or more specifically, a mythical hybrid between a man and a beast. Samoa, in a show of deference and possibly awe, cautiously approaches the maiden. Most importantly, Melville's depiction of Samoa is one of *submission* to the great white goddess. This beast of a man even follows Yillah's commands when she persuades him to temporarily remove his piercings (one of the more obvious accoutrements that labels him as "savage", "native", "other"). While the narrator attempts to praise and align himself with Samoa's reverence for Yillah the white goddess, he is careful to remind the reader of the difference between the two men's idolatry of Yillah – Samoa is a pagan satyr who worships Yillah as a deity while Taji is a demi-god who worships her love.

Jarl, an old mariner and one of Taji's companions, holds a much less favorable opinion of Yillah than Samoa. Convinced that the maiden will most certainly distract Taji and bring misfortune to the crew, Jarl considers her an "intruder, an Ammonite siren, who might lead me astray" (147). This reference to an "Ammonite siren" most likely refers to Solomon's Ammonite wives who convinced him to build "high places" or monuments to honor the Ammonite idol named Molech or Milcom (Kg2 23:13). Even more specifically, one of Solomon's Ammonite wives named Naamah bore him his only son, Rehoboam, who ruled over Jerusalem for seventeen years and incited rebellion against Israel (Ch2 12:13-14). The influence Solomon's Ammonite wives held over him coupled with the evil acts of Naamah's son, Rehoboam, suggest the pivotal roles these women held in leading their husband astray. Jarl's description of Yillah as an

"Ammonite siren" is most likely an allusion to the aforementioned biblical passage and further supports his concern that Yillah will occupy Taji's thoughts and affect his ability to concentrate on his tasks on board the ship.

Yet, in no way does Taji perceive of Yillah as a threat. In fact, his description of the maiden and her homeland resembles Kristeva's concept of the chora before it becomes abjected. His physical description of the landscape of Ardair resembles that of Tommo's impressions of the land of Typee. Both places are extraordinarily beautiful and seem to be untouched by man or time. The narrator of *Mardi* claims that "In the verdant glen of Ardair, far in the silent interior of Amma, shut in by hoar old cliffs, Yillah the maiden abode" (154). Supposedly, Yillah was taken from the island of Oroolia and placed in the Edenic-like paradise of Ardair. Melville stresses the remoteness of the location and its silence. Ardair, like Typee, is a land of hills and valleys laced with sexual imagery that is somewhat like the landscape in "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids". Taji describes, "So small and so deep was this glen, so surrounded on all sides by steep acclivities, and so vividly green its verdure, and deceptive the shadows that played there; that, from above, it seemed more like a lake of cool, balmy air, than a glen: its woodlands and grasses gleaming shadowy all, like sea groves and mosses beneath the calm sea" (154). Similar to the crag Tommo and Toby crawl down into for shelter in *Typee*, this glen is nestled and recessed into the hollows of a steep cavernous mountainside. The glen that is "green in its verdure," signifies the fertility and life that might possibly inhabit the womb. Also, in an intriguing comparison between land and sky, Taji comments upon the depth of the glen and its ability to mimic a smooth lake complete with "sea groves and mosses" (154). The deep glen whose

"woodlands and grasses gleaming shadowy all, like sea groves and mosses beneath the calm sea" summons images of fluidity which could possibly stand in for the womb's bodily fluids.

Another scene that invokes womb imagery occurs when Taji describes one of Yillah's favorite pastimes, that of taking a bath in one of the pools beneath the cliffs. He describes the scene in detail:

> Aerial trees shot up from its [the rock's] surface; birds nested in its clefts; and strange vines roved abroad, overrunning the tops of the trees, lying thereon in coils and undulations, like anacondas basking in the light. Beneath this rock, was a lofty wall of ponderous stones. Between its crevices, peeps were had of a long and leafy arcade, quivering far away to where the sea rolled in the sun. Lower down, these crevices gave an outlet to the waters of the brook, which, in a long cascade, poured over sloping green ledges near the foot of the wall, into a deep shady pool. (155)

This depiction of the basin in which Yillah bathes could also be considered a metaphor for the womb just as the cavernous landscape of Typee resembles the nexus of life. The vegetation that overhangs and surrounds the basin is lush with sensual imagery. The "strange vines" that undulate like serpents and the emphasis placed upon "peeping" into the "leafy arcade" that quivers seem ripe with sexuality to me. The word "peeping" suggests voyeurism and the "quivering" of the leaves seems to suggest eroticism or more

specifically, sexual tension. Also, this reference to vines and serpents again conjures images out of the Garden of Eden and Eve's fatal sin of eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. This indirect reference could be Taji's method of exploring the threatening sexuality of Yillah's character somewhat like Jarl's observation of her and his comparison of her to an "Ammonite siren" (147). The closer Taji gets to the locus of the semiotic – the womb – the more anxiety arises over the maternal sexualized body. Yillah is most appealing to Taji because she represents the beauty and music of the semiotic. Yet, when Taji descends into the chora-like landscape of Ardair, her homeland, he comes face-to-face with the physicality of the chora – the womb with all of its messy bodily configurations. Yillah is the missing, mystic, semiotic mother Kristeva refers to as the driving force behind abjection. We reject the (M)other so that we can form our own sense of identity, yet, at the same time, each of us longs for a return to the Mother or the semiotic place/space where all of our desires are met before we even speak. Yillah, for Taji, represents this longing to return to or possibly to re-connect with a semiotic chora. Perhaps, she represents this for Melville as well in that she serves as an ideal for a semiotic language – a language that relies less on the symbolic structure of letters and more on drives, emotions, etc.

Yoomy's Semiotic Language

Yoomy, one of the members of Taji's crew who acts as resident poet, is also closely aligned with a language of the semiotic. Through his role of poet and translator Yoomy is also the only character capable of deciphering the cryptic messages sent from Hautia's heralds. The heralds are female apparitions that appear throughout the novel and try to lure Taji to Queen Hautia's bower on the island of Flozella. It is Yoomy who

first hears the heralds' approach and informs Taji that they seek him. He alone may translate the messages each flower holds. Yoomy, as poet, speaks in lyrics and songs. He functions as the male artist who struggles to convey the semiotic through a marriage of words and sound.

Melville provides an extensive character sketch of Yoomy that is revealing in its portrayal of the poet as a young man who is quite in touch with his "feminine" side. Yoomy comes across as a rather effeminate young man. Melville refers to him as the "Warbler" and describes him as:

> A youthful, long-haired, blue-eyed minstrel; all fits and starts; at times, absent of mind, and wan of cheek; but always very neat and pretty in his apparel; wearing the most becoming of turbans, a Bird of Paradise feather its plume, and sporting the gayest of sashes. Most given was Yoomy to amorous melodies, and rondos, and roundelays, very witching to hear. But at times disdaining the oaten reed, like a clarion he burst forth with lusty lays of arms and battle; or, in mournful strains, sounded elegies for departed bards and heroes. (197)

Based upon the above description, Yoomy seems to fulfill the role of the gentle, kind-spirited fop or court jester of a bygone era. Despite the Oriental turban and gay sashes, Yoomy is undoubtedly of the Western "persuasion" with light blue eyes and a "wan" cheek. He is "pretty," emotional and *lyrical*. Taji's description of him continues, "He

was so capricious a mortal; so swayed by contrary moods; so lofty, so humble, so sad, so merry; so made up of a thousand contradictions, that we must e'en let him depict himself as our story progresses. And herein it is hoped he will succeed; since no one in Mardi comprehended him" (197). Here, more is said of Yoomy's disposition. He is not only emotional, but also *moody* and full of "contradictions". The words assigned to describe Yoomy's character are most often aligned with the "feminine" or women more specifically. One last revealing clue that further associates Yoomy with femininity is the idea that not only is he a walking contradiction, but he is also incomprehensible. His language is more closely aligned to that of Kristeva's semiotics – a language that is fluid and transgresses boundaries – in short, it is lyrical.

Very little has been written on the character of Yoomy and his lyrical poems. However, Nathalia Wright analyzes Yoomy's verses in her article, "The Poems in Melville's *Mardi*." She never examines them from the perspective of the semiotic or écriture féminine, but she does suggest that "the stanzaic patterns are highly varied. Most are indeed songs or chants" (84). She also observes that none of the poems or songs are recited until after the crew meets Yillah (84). Obviously, I am most interested in Wright's identification of Yoomy's poems as "songs or chants" because this observation further supports the notion of the poems as examples of the semiotic as expressed by a male poet.

One other critic who has examined Yoomy's verse is Bryan C. Short in "'The Redness of the Rose': The *Mardi* Poems and Melville's Artistic Compromise." Short claims that "In *Mardi*, verse and its spokesman Yoomy demonstrate a sincerity and flexibility which place them in increasingly serious opposition to the singlemindedness of

Taji" (101). I would add that the "singlemindedness of Taji" is indebted to his own immersion in the language of the symbolic – where words are supposed to "mean" and represent a specific "thing." In opposition to this is Yoomy's belief that words are meant to be expressions of bodily drives and sensations.

Yoomy himself does a rather fine job of describing how his lyrics are semiotic. In the chapter, "A flight of Nightingales from Yoomy's Mouth," he prepares to sing a song he crafted about Yillah. But, before bursting into song, he tries to describe the way the song and its composition make him *feel*. He addresses King Media, "--My lord, I deem these verses good; they came bubbling out of me, like live waters from a spring in a silver mine. And by your good leave, my lord, I have much faith in inspiration. Whoso sings is a seer." (558-59). This physical description of poetic inspiration embodies the poet's jouissance over the semiotic. Yoomy's emphasis upon the fluidity of his verses and the creative process resembles that of the semiotic and its emergence into symbolic language. The semiotic – full of drives and energies, "bubbles" out from Yoomy and spews forth into verse. Then, the philosopher of the text and fellow crew member, Babbalanja, asks the poet if his lyric passes the "test" of being a good poem: "'Tingling is the test…Yoomy, did you tingle, when that song was composing?'" (559). To which Yoomy replies, "'All over, Babbalanja…And infused into a song…it evermore causes it so to sparkle, vivify, and irradiate, that no son of man can repeat it without tingling himself. This very song of mine may prove what I say.'" (559). Here, Yoomy emphasizes the importance of song in bringing the poem to life. Kristeva says of the physical manifestation of the semiotic that we are able to "…specify the *semiotic* as a psychosomatic modality of the signifying process" (*RPL* 28). Semiotic language

encompasses the entire body, focusing particular intensity on the orifices of the body. The bodily response Yoomy refers to when discussing his poetry and its composition serves as a physical or psychosomatic manifestation of the semiotic. Kristeva cites the example of Mallarme as one who understands the "semiotic rhythm within language" (*RPL* 29). She claims, "Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax" (*RPL* 29). Another example of this "semiotic rhythm within language" Kristeva speaks of can be found in Whitman's "Song of Myself." In chant five of his poem he muses, "Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat, / Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the / best, / Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd voice" (1006). This emphasis upon the "lull" or the bodily "hum" that emits from the body, devoid of symbolic language, is that which is sought after by the poet. Whitman's characterization of the voice as "valvèd" further suggests musicality by implicitly comparing the larynx to a pipe or reed whose valves are pressed to produce sound. Whitman's description of a semiotic utterance and his desire to reach that language based on drives and energies can be likened in a sense to Yoomy's desire to craft a lyrical poem that "bubbles" out of him "like live waters from a spring in a silver mine" (558).

Contrary to these such celebratory responses, this indifference to language or symbolic language in particular and emphasis on semiotic language surfaces as a source of anxiety for some since language is *supposed* to *mean*. After Yoomy recites the

poem/song about Yillah that makes him "tingle," Babbalanja criticizes the work for a lack of "meaning." He rails:

> Mysticism!...What, minstrel; must nothing ultimate come of all that melody? no final and inexhaustible meaning? nothing that strikes down into the soul's depths; till, intent upon itself, it pierces in upon its own essence, and is resolved into its pervading original; becoming a thing constituent of the all embracing deific; whereby we mortals become part and parcel of the gods; our souls to them as thoughts; and we privy to all things occult, ineffable, and sublime? Then, Yoomy, is thy song nothing worth. Alla Malolla saith, 'That is no true, vital breath, which leaves no moisture behind.' I mistrust thee, minstrel! that thou hast not yet been impregnated by the arcane mysteries… (561)

Not only is Yoomy's song blasphemed for its lack of meaning, it is criticized for its lack of *divine* meaning. Babbalanja seeks the song inspired by the breath of "gods" that connect mortals to the almighty ones. Kristeva comments upon the relation of the semiotic to religion. She claims that "Mimesis, in our view, is a transgression of the thetic when truth is no longer a reference to an object that is identifiable outside of language; it refers instead to an object that can be constructed through the semiotic network but is nevertheless posited in the symbolic and is, from then on, always verisimilar" (*RPL* 58). Here, Kristeva is suggesting that mimesis, which is "the

construction of an object, not according to truth but to verisimilitude" (*RPL* 57) is still a part of the thetic, or the "break which produces the positing of signification" (*RPL* 43) because it is spoken or signified. However, while the thetic (in the theological sense) always relies upon the transcendent signifier, that which is "outside of language," mimesis recognizes that objects are constructed from the semiotic even though they are "posited" or spoken in the symbolic. Mimesis exposes the tenuous idea that words "mean" something and are representative of particular truths. Yoomy's poem about Yillah, according to Babbalanja, lacks this desired "meaning" and is considered of little or no value.

This devaluing of the semiotic occurs previously in the text of *Mardi* as well. Taji and his crew set sail for the island of Diranda with Media, King of Odo, who decides to accompany the men on their journey. While sailing, Media asks Yoomy to recite a military "battle chant" (435) but then becomes disgruntled with the poet and exclaims, "Your war chants make men fight; your drinking songs, drunkards; your love ditties, fools. Yet there thou sittest, Yoomy, gentle as a dove.—What art thou, minstrel, that thy soft, singing soul should so master all mortals? Yoomy, like me, you sway a scepter" (437). To this charge Yoomy responds with, "…we minstrels but sing our lays carelessly, my lord Media" (437) which further prompts Media to respond, "Ay: and the more mischief they make" (437). Media continues to express anxiety over the "harm" that may come from Yoomy's innocent lays. Media shrewdly acknowledges the verisimilitude of poetic language and its transgression of the transcendent signifier to create alternative, potentially "dangerous" new ideas or "truths." Yoomy's semiotic poems and songs are dangerous, potentially "harmful" and full of "mischief" precisely

because they are veiled in the language of the symbolic (they are uttered, ushered into the symbolic and the social). Media claims and rightly so, that Yoomy's words/songs allow him to "sway a scepter" and "master all mortals" (437). His scepter in this case, is his pen, out of which flows a poetic language full of semiotic drives and energies seeking to sway people's beliefs and actions.

Another way in which semiotic language is "dangerous" is in its connection to and association with the feminine. After Media finishes his tirade over Yoomy's use of a semiotic or poetic language that is "harmful" and "mischief-making," Yoomy claims, "My lord, my lord!...The air that [sic] breaths my music from me is a mountain air! Purer than others am I; for though not a woman, I feel in me a woman's soul" (438). Yoomy openly admits his "feminine soul" is the reason behind his lyrical language and it is also the reason why he is misunderstood. Yoomy proclaims, "They comprehend us [he and Babbalanja] not" (438).

Yoomy's "contradictions" and incomprehensibility seem mentioned not only because of his use of semiotic language, but also to support his questionable gender. Yes, Yoomy is biologically (as far as we know) of the male sex, yet his gender is marked as feminine. If we add to these observations the fact that Yoomy's role in this drama is that of a performer, it becomes plausible to assume that Melville is most definitely toying with how these roles and characteristics are intertwined. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) discusses the crucial distinction between sex and gender and, most importantly, offers a theory of gender performativity. She claims that "…acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the

organizing principle of identity as a cause" (173). And, she adds that "Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (173). Butler emphasizes that gender is something one performs or does, not something that is essential and synonymous with one's sex. She uses the word "performativity" to convey this idea of gender as performance and also stresses the value of repetition in reinforcing through the body via dress, gestures, etc. the façade that is gender. The narrator describes Yoomy's costume as "neat and pretty" and uses verbs to convey his manner of dress and 'prettiness.' Again, Taji claims that he is "*wearing* the most becoming of turbans, a Bird of Paradise feather its plume, and *sporting* the gayest of sashes" [my italics] (197). In addition to his apparel, Yoomy's physical appearance is groomed to reflect that of a woman in that he is described as "a youthful, long-haired, blue-eyed minstrel" (197). Outside of his role as a minstrel, Taji deems him "hard to depict" (197) and as previously mentioned he is also contradictory and incomprehensible. Yoomy's use of semiotic language and his blurring of the boundaries of gender make him an abject figure in the eyes of the narrator because he speaks the language of the M(other) and complicates the idea of gender or more specifically the idea of manhood.

This frustration over semiotic language might also reflect Melville's own struggle while composing *Mardi* to produce a popular book without sacrificing his own interest in philosophy and the semiotic. Melville was sensitive to his audience's taste and criticism much like the character of Yoomy who engaged in a dialogue with one of his own audience members (Media) over the merits (or lack thereof) of his own work. While his

first two novels were met with praise and a moderate stipend, *Mardi* was considered a failure of epic proportions by many critics and the reading public alike. As his writing career progressed, his novels became even more immersed in subjects that could be deemed "abject" (motherhood, homosexuality, incest, etc.). Consider for instance, the sexual overtones of his later novels that progressively became more overt (*Moby-Dick*, *Pierre*, *Clarel*, "Billy Budd," etc.). The writing in each of these novels also becomes more fluid and meandering reflecting a more semiotic approach to language.

Apparently, Melville himself was aware of a shift in his own writing since the composition of *Typee* and *Omoo*. While he never uses the word "feminine" and most certainly not "semiotic," to describe this alteration in his style and content, he does refer to *Mardi* as a romance and something wholly different from his earlier writings. In a letter dated 25 March 1848 to John Murray, an English publisher who would ultimately reject *Mardi*, Melville reveals his own opinion of *Mardi* and his hopes for it as a work of romantic fiction that diverges from his more autobiographical works. He writes, "–Well: proceeding in my narrative of *facts* I began to feel an invincible distaste for the same; & longing to plume my pinions for a flight, & felt irked, cramped & fettered by plodding along with dull common places, --So suddenly abandoning the thing alltogether, I went to work heart & soul at a romance" (qtd. in *Correspondence* vol. 14, 106). In this same letter he revels in the "freedom and invention" the genre of romance affords him and seems to accomplish this freedom of expression in *Mardi* specifically through the character of Yoomy and his poems. Melville experiments with form throughout the book, but his most overt experimentation with writing and the role(s) of the poet are demonstrated through the figure of Yoomy who claims "for though not a woman, I feel in

me a woman's soul" (438). Again, Yoomy's poetry is similar to that of a chant or song and the narrator's physical description of him is feminine. *Mardi*, like *Typee* and *Omoo* reveals encounters with the abject and the semiotic, yet this particular novel seems to go one step further in that here, Melville explores the poet's relationship to the semiotic.

Queen Hautia and Her Heralds

Yoomy's association with the "feminine" and his claim of possessing a "woman's soul" allow him to "read" the flower missives sent to Taji by Hautia's heralds. The character of Hautia, specifically her relation to Yillah, has served as the focal point for most of the recent criticism on this "dark lady." M. Niemeyer's "The Deception of Reality: Blackening the Woman in Melville's *Mardi*" addresses the split between Hautia and Yillah through the lens of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's theory of the Angel and Demon of the House. In Beverly Hume Thorne's "Taji's Yillah: Transcending the Fates in Yillah's *Mardi*," Thorne examines Yillah as the feminine, passive principle and Hautia as the aggressive masculine principle Taji seeks to escape. And, in Charles Haberstroh Jr.'s, "Melville, Marriage, and *Mardi,*" Haberstroh views Yillah as Melville's ideal woman and Hautia as the embodiment of "Melville's own fear of sexual surrender, and of his puritanical confusion over the whole idea of physical involvement with women" (252). He claims the anxiety and frustration with women in *Mardi* reflects the author's own "troubles" with his newly wedded wife, Elizabeth Shaw. My own argument will examine the characters of Yillah and Hautia in regards to their relationship to the semiotic and the abject respectively. My analysis diverges from other critics in that I am suggesting that the reason for the perceived split between Yillah and Hautia is Taij's own attempt to abject Hautia who represents the abject mother, and recreate a symbiotic union

with Yillah who he perceives to be the chora before man exits/exists outside of the mother.

Whereas Yillah served as an idealized version of the chora and semiotic language, Hautia functions as the abject (M)other from whom Taji must separate himself in order to preserve his own sense of identity and autonomy. One critic most closely aligned with this argument is Julie M. Johnson in "Taji's Quest in Melville's Mardi: A Psychological Allegory in the Mythic Mode." Johnson relies upon Erich Neumann's three "'mythological stages in the evolution of consciousness'" to explain Taji's journey (222). She summarizes three stages:

> In the first stage, that of 'Creation,' the Self is unconscious. The second stage, that of 'the Hero,' begins with the first weak struggles against Uroboros, includes the slaying of the Great Father, and concludes with the killing of the Great Mother. Provided this stage is completed, the Hero enters the final, or 'transformation' stage, in which he seizes the reward of fully attained Selfhood, a reward usually embodied by Maiden or Treasure. (222)

Johnson argues that Taji never fully reaches his own potential according to Neumann's three mythic stages of the hero because he fails to slay the "Great Mother" figure of Hautia and hence, never "seizes" the reward of Yillah, the fair maiden or "Treasure" (222). Neumann's "Great Mother" archetype is similar to but not the same as Kristeva's abject Mother figure who embodies the threatening aspects of the chora that is complete

with drives and energies man seeks to repress. Specifically, Kristeva's abjection of the chora has to do with the subject's immersion into symbolic *language*.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva explains the moment when the chora becomes abject. She notes, "…while I recognize my image as sign and change in order to signify, another economy is instituted. The sign represses the chora and its eternal return. Desire alone will henceforth be witness to that 'primal pulsation'" (14). She adds, "Abjection is therefore a kind of narcissistic crisis: it is witness to the ephemeral aspect of the state called 'narcissism' with reproachful jealousy, heaven knows why; what is more, abjection gives narcissism (the thing and the concept) its classification as 'seeming'" (14). Out of the rejection of the chora, rises narcissism. While this rejection of the chora is necessary in a sense, (in order to become autonomous subjects we each must reject it) we are never fully free from the drives, energies, etc. that comprise the chora. Yet, in order to persevere, we reject our own connection to the mother's body; we abject it.

Hautia represents the abject mother in that her body is most definitely a threatening one from Taji's perspective, since it serves as a physical manifestation of the abjected chora. The dream of Yillah's innocence and purity as an idealization of the chora before the subject's separation from it is now replaced by the nightmare of Queen Hautia's physical *presence* as a woman wielding a very "real" body complete with a powerful sexual drive. Taji remarks, "Nevertheless, in some mysterious way seemed Hautia and Yillah connected. But Yillah was all beauty, and innocence; my crown of felicity; my heaven below; --and Hautia, my whole heart abhorred. Yillah I sought; Hautia sought me" (643). Yillah's sexual passivity is countered by Hautia's sexual prowess. This connection Taji makes between the two women reflects his own

realization (perhaps on an unconscious level) that Yillah and Hautia are one in the same. Yillah's poetic, semiotic chants and innocent beauty emerge from the very same chora Hautia embodies as the abject Mother. Hautia is the flesh that these drives exude from. She is raw sexuality, she is death, she is the abject chora.

Kristeva discusses the moment when the abject is recognized as being part and parcel of the subject. She claims,

> If it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very being, that it is none other than abject. (5)

Taji pursues his ideal image of Yillah, only to confront the reality of the flesh, and raw sexuality he suppresses, in the form of Hautia. These two manifestations of the chora – that of the sublime, semiotic mother expressed through poetry and that of the abject mother we seek to escape from in order to preserve a sense of autonomy – are projected onto the figures of these two women. The moment Taji notices that "in some mysterious way seemed Hautia and Yillah connected" (643) he is faced with finding "the impossible within" (*PH* 5). The abject is located within each of these women and would he realize it, the abject itself is located within himself as well. He denies Hautia, the abject Mother, in order to separate himself from her and be constituted as a subject, yet, he may never

fully escape the source of his origin – that of the mother. And, to complicate matters even more, Taji continues his quest for the idealized Yillah as a desperate attempt to recapture the jouissance of the chora before his separation from it and immersion into language.

The contradiction the chora poses, as that from which we must escape yet forever pine for, is metaphorically manifested in the landscape of the island of Flozella. Taji describes it as a "hanging-garden" trapped between the sea and the sky. This garden is unlike others in that it is strange and contradictory. The narrator explains, "On one hand, forever glowed the rosy mountains with a tropic dawn; and on the other, lay an Arctic eve; --the white daisies drifted in long banks of snow, and snowed the blossoms from the orange boughs. There, summer breathed her bridal bloom; her hill-top temples crowned with bridal wreaths" (645). This description of the landscape suggests that in this place, seasons transgress their diurnal boundaries (even if it is just in metaphor) and that nature is in a constant state of flux.

The imagery of the landscape becomes more sexualized as the travelers near Hautia's bower. The men are entering deeper into a Garden of Eden where "The fruit hung high in air, that only beaks, not hands, might pluck" (645). Sustenance is just out of reach of human hands and man may only partake of whatever morsels might fall from a careless creature's beak. Melville's sensuous imagery of the orchards is worth mentioning in detail:

> Here, the peach tree showed her thousand cheeks of down, kissed
> often by the wooing winds; here, in swarms, the yellow apples

> hived, like golden bees upon the boughs; here, from the kneeling, fainting trees, thick fell the cherries, in great drops of blood; and here, the pomegranate, with cold rind and sere, deep pierced by bills of birds revealed the mellow of its ruddy core. So, oft the heart, that cold and withered seems, within yet hides its juices. (645)

Nature becomes personified as a lover in this passage. The voluptuous peach whose cheeks are soft as "down" is gently kissed by the sensual winds. The cherry trees, exhausted and spent, release the ripe cherries "in great drops of blood" (645). One can't help but notice the potential metaphor here for the rupture of the hymen during sexual intercourse. The next line further supports a sexualized reading of this passage. "The pomegranate, with cold rind and sere" that is "deep pierced by bills of birds" to reveal "the mellow of its ruddy core" (645), provides an even more explicit depiction of penetration. The pomegranate has a multitude of meanings some of which are relevant to this passage. This particular fruit has been referenced in several literary works including "Song of Solomon" from the *Bible*, and the myth of Ceres and Proserpine. In each of these, the pomegranate signifies temptation and fertility. In "Song of Solomon," the lover's temples are compared to the halves of a pomegranate. The verse is as follows: "Thy lips *are* like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech *is* comely: thy temples *are* like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks" ("The Song of Solomon" 4.3). This statement is lodged in between other sensual observations of the woman's lips and speech.

The pomegranate serves a more pivotal role in the myth of Ceres and Proserpine. According to Bulfinch in his *Mythology*, Ceres is told by Jupiter that her daughter might return from the underworld and Pluto's grasp as long as she abstains from taking any of the succulent food. Yet, Proserpine cannot resist the pomegranate, the fruit of the underworld, and she brings it back with her against Jupiter's wishes. After Proserpine's indiscretion, a compromise is made between Jupiter and Ceres. Proserpine is to spend half of the year with Pluto and the other half with Ceres, her mother. According to Bulfinch, "Proserpine signifies the seed-corn which when cast into the ground lies there concealed—that is, she is carried off by the god of the underworld. It reappears—that is, Proserpine is restored to her mother. Spring leads her back to the light of day" (56-57). This allegory of the seasons and the prominence of the pomegranate in this myth seem to suggest that the fruit symbolizes temptation laced with a sensuality that is dangerous. Additionally, the seeds of the fruit may symbolize, as Bulfinch suggests, the seeds that lay dormant and burst to life in the spring. Some other meanings associated with the pomegranate are described in Beverly Seaton's, *The Language of Flowers: A History*. According to Seaton, the pomegranate has been associated with "fatuity," "perfect friendship," and "foolishness or mature & finished simplicity" (188-89). And, in China, the fruit is a symbol of "fertility" (40). While these definitions differ from Melville's depiction of the pomegranate, he clearly deploys it in the above passage as a symbol of fertility and temptation. The pomegranate once again becomes a metaphor for sexuality just as it did in *Typee* when Melville compared Fayaway's mouth to the hull of the fleshy fruit. Yet in this description, Melville's imagery is more graphic and abject because it is laden with the imagery of sexual intercourse or penetration.

After describing the orchard, the narrator's gaze moves towards the plains. As Taji moves deeper into Hautia's domain, the flower imagery becomes more profuse. To enrich the meaning behind his descriptions, Melville relied rather heavily upon the nineteenth-century tradition of flower symbolism that flourished in America in the 1830s and 1840s. Beverly Seaton offers a detailed history of the Renaissance fascination with flowers and its intimate relationship to women. Seaton explains, "Flowers, in fact, were seen as the most suitable aspect of nature to represent women, or to interact with them, reflecting as they do certain stereotypical qualities of the female being: smallness of stature, fragility of mind and body, and impermanence of beauty" (17). In his first romance, Melville capitalizes upon this association between women, femininity and flowers in order to further develop his female characters. Additionally, these references to various flowers and their sentiments would have been instantly recognizable to a nineteenth-century reader, particularly a female one, since women made up the majority of readers of flower and gift books during this time (Seaton 16). According to Seaton, nineteenth-century readers had numerous flower books at their disposal, some of which included Elizabeth Gamble Wirt's *Flora's Dictionary* (1829), Dorthea Dix's *The Garland of Flora* (1829), Sara Josepha Hale's *Flora's Interpreter* (1832), Catharine Waterman Esling's *Flora's Lexicon* (1839), Lucy Hooper's *The Lady's Book of Flowers and Poetry* (1841), Frances Osgood's *The Poetry of Flowers and Flowers of Poetry* (1841) and others (Seaton 86). Seaton notes that within the language of flowers "There was an established set of color meanings which these early creators acknowledged in their material…" (118). And, she adds, "A flower's scent—invisible yet real—has long been a standard emblem of the human soul. Thus, the presence or absence of scent in a

flower usually determined whether or not it represented a favorable human quality" (118-119). This reference to the importance of color and scent to a flower and its consequential meaning proves vital to Melville's description of Hautia and the flowers that surround her.

As Taji enters the orchard his eye is first drawn to the flowers, or as he describes them, the "flowery gems:--turquoise-hyacinths, ruby-roses, lily-pearls" (645). It is helpful to note that hyacinths are associated predominately with the idea of a game or play; yet they may also mean the following: "love, chagrin/you love me and give me death" (Seaton 180-81). The roses may symbolize love or beauty (190-91) and the lily represents majesty and sometimes "purity" (182-83). Taji continues, "Here roved the vagrant vines; their flaxen ringlets curling over arbors, which laughed and shook their golden locks. From bower to bower, flew the wee bird, that ever hovering, seldom lights; and flights of gay canaries passed, like jonquils, winged" (645). The gem-like flowers dot the plain while the vines become personified as a flaxen-haired, flirtatious beauty full of vivacity and life. Even the birds are described in terms of nature's flowers – "jonquils, winged." Amidst this apparently beautiful scene seethe some rather dark connotations. Vines symbolize "intoxication," "drunkenness" and "charity" (196-97) and jonquils represent "desire" specifically, "I desire a return of affection" (180-81).

Amidst this lush backdrop, the character of Hautia emerges. Her arrival is announced by "fifty nymphs" (645) and she is bedecked in an array of flowers, each carrying its own personal message. Melville describes Hautia:

> A gorgeous amaryllis in her hand; Circe-flowers in her ears; her girdle tied with vervain. She came by privet hedges, drooping; downcast honey-suckles; she trod on pinks and pansies, blue-bells, heath, and lilies. She glided on: her crescent brow calm as the moon, when most it works its evil influences. (645-646)

Merrell R. Davis provides an extensive analysis of Hautia and each of the flowers she dons in "The Flower Symbolism in *Mardi*." He notes that the amaryllis symbolizes "haughtiness; pride," the Circe flowers represent "fascination," and the vervain around her waist suggests "enchantment" (Davis 634). He goes on to decipher the meaning attached to the rest of the flowers and vines found in this passage. The privet refers to "prohibition," the honeysuckles "bonds of love," [or as Seaton puts it in her book, "chains of love" (180)] the pinks "lively and pure affection," pansies "think of me," and lilies "purity and modesty" (634). According to Seaton, heath symbolizes "solitude" (178-79). The fact that Hautia tramples upon or "trods" on the flowers that symbolize some of the conventional phrases associated with "true love" suggests that she possesses a raw sensuous sexuality that does not adhere to the strictures of courtly love. Her sexuality is excessive and transgresses the boundaries of proper decorum – in short, it is threatening or abject.

This transgression of boundaries – specifically those that involve sexuality and a sense of immorality – is addressed by Kristeva in "Approaching Abjection" (*PH* 4). She remarks upon the danger of

> The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior…Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. (4)

While Hautia doesn't break any specific "law" as such, she does transgress the unspoken "law" of proper sexual decorum. She also premeditates Taji's potential demise when she lures him to Flozella, plies him with wine and entices him to leap into the vortex or pool to find Yillah which could ultimately result in his death. Kristeva mentions that "An unshakable adherence to Prohibition and Law is necessary if that perverse interspace of abjection is to be hemmed in and thrust aside. Religion, Morality, Law. Obviously always arbitrary, more or less; unfailingly oppressive, rather more than less; laboriously prevailing, more and more so" (*PH* 16). The law and prohibition are vital to the preservation of the abject and its denial. Through the confines of religion, morality and law we seek to isolate the abject and keep it at bay. This mention of prohibition as it pertains to the context of Kristeva's argument also applies to the character of Hautia and her lack of respect for it. She trods upon "privet" (634), which according to Davis, is symbolic of prohibition. Hautia defies the law – specifically, the unspoken "law" that governs sexuality.

Her manipulation of Taji and transgression against "morality" is made evident during the bacchanalian revelry where Hautia plies him with wine and women. He refers

to her as a "philter," or love potion and remarks upon her "wild invocation[s]" (647). Through Taji's descriptions of her, Hautia fulfills the role of bewitching sexual siren who places the unsuspecting demi-god under her spell. Later, when Taji is alone with Hautia, she invites him:

> 'Come! let us sin, and be merry. Ho! wine, wine, wine! and lapfuls of flowers! let all the cane-brakes pipe their flutes. Damsels! dance; reel, swim, around me:--I, the vortex that draws all in. Taji! Taji!—as a berry, that name is juicy in my mouth!—Taji, Taji!' and in choruses, she warbled forth the sound, till it seemed issuing from her syren eyes. My heart flew forth from out its bars, and soared in air; but as my hand touched Hautia's, down dropped a dead bird from the clouds. (650)

Here, Hautia encourages Taji to partake in "sin" or that of the abject flesh. She refers to herself as "the vortex" (650) that sucks the life out of everyone she is drawn to. This reference is crucial because it offers a metaphorical depiction of Hautia as the abject mother. Through powerful imagery, Hautia becomes the all encompassing mother who holds the power to drown the autonomous subject and figuratively return him to a sea of abjection or in this case, specifically a sea of death.

The image of the vortex arises again later in *Moby-Dick*. In the chapter entitled, 'The Chase-Third Day," the Pequod is sucked into a swirling vortex after Ahab hurls one last spear at the great whale and is dragged overboard. The scene is described as follows:

"And now, concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lancepole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight" (*MD* 623). This passage emphasizes the circular nature of the vortex and its sheer strength. While the sea harbors life in its belly, it also harbors death as well – the fatal return to the vortex or metaphorical womb.

Hautia's vortex in *Mardi* also seems to serve as a literary manifestation of the womb which serves as the locus for the abject. Yet, the vortex in *Mardi* is an extension of Hautia herself and is therefore layered with tinges of the erotic and sexualized. To begin, Hautia savors Taji's name as she would a "berry" that is "juicy" in her mouth (650). The reference to Taji's name or more aptly, Taji himself, implies that the Queen plans to savor him sexually. For a frightened Taji, this consummation of the flesh and return to the womb of the abject mother represents death. She could consume Taji literally and figuratively swallowing his "identity." Figuratively, Melville sensualizes the reading of this passage not only through the suggestive content, but also through his deft use of alliteration. Through consonance, he seduces the reader by repeating the "s" sound (for example, "**s**he warbled forth the **s**ound, till it **s**eemed i**ss**uing from her **s**iren eye**s**" [650]) and then uses the heaviness and thud of the letter "d" to reveal that everything Hautia touches dies ("but as my han**d** touche**d** Hautia's, **d**own **d**ropp**ed** a **d**ead bir**d** from the clou**d**s" [650]). In keeping with a metaphor Melville uses quite frequently – that of the womb as cave, cavern, etc., Taji follows Hautia into "the mouth of the cavern" (650). After diving into a lake recessed in the cave, Hautia emerges with hands "full of pearls" (651). She encourages Taji to dive into the water and retrieve "Beauty, Health, Wealth,

Long Life, and the Last Lost Hope of man" (651). Yet, she adds that these riches may only be had through her. She alone appears to possess the riches and secrets to life. She is the abject Mother who can offer him anything and everything his heart could ever possibly desire so long as he dives into the liquid womb of the lake and relinquishes his own autonomy. And, she promises Taji, "I will take thee, where thy Past shall be forgotten; where thou wilt soon learn to love the living, not the dead" (651). Here, the Queen intimates the demise of Yillah and encourages the narrator to become one of her followers.

Despite Taji's vow to continue his search for Yillah, like the river of Lethe, Hautia's presence practically mesmerizes him into forgetting his purpose. He remarks:

> And nearer, and nearer, stole dulcet sounds dissolving my woes, as warm beams, snow. Strange languors made me droop; once more within my inmost vault, side by side, the Past and Yillah lay:--two bodies tranced:--while like a rounding sun, before me Hautia magnified magnificence; and through her fixed eyes, slowly drank up my soul. Thus we stood:--snake and victim: life ebbing out of me, to her. (652)

Again, alliteration of the "s" sound is used, most predominately in the first line of the passage, to convey the sense of seduction Taji feels in Hautia's presence. His resolve wavers and Hautia's presence is undeniable, like that of a "rounding sun" that "magnified magnificence" (652). Taji's inability to turn away from Hautia and the visual of her as a

snake that "slowly drank up my [Taji's] soul" is similar to Kristeva's comment that we "do not cease looking, within what flows from the other's 'innermost being,' for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body" (*PH* 54). Hautia's mystical power over Taji is the power of the abject mother whom he is drawn to yet also repelled from as he tries to preserve his own autonomous identity or "soul" (652).

Once Taji's conscience reminds him of his quest for Yillah, he pleads with Hautia to reveal the fate of his beloved. Once he realizes that she is drowned he warns Hautia, "Back, shining monster!—What, Hautia,--is it thou?—Oh vipress, I could slay thee!" (653). Taji begins to realize that Hautia might be responsible for Yillah's death and seeks revenge. He longs for the idealized, romanticized Yillah or maternal chora only to realize that it has been swallowed up by the abject mother figure of Hautia. Kristeva comments upon the tension between the abject and the chora. She refers to the abject as a:

> *symptom*: a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumor, a cancer that the listening devices of the unconscious do not hear, for its strayed subject is huddled outside the paths of desire. *Sublimation*, on the contrary is nothing else than the possibility of naming the prenominal, the pre-objectal, which are in fact only a trans-nominal, a trans-objectal. In the symptom, the abject permeates me, I become abject. Through sublimation, I keep it under control. The abject is edged with the sublime. (*PH* 11)

Hautia, as the all encompassing, threatening "monster" (*Mardi* 653) mother, serves as the symptom of the abject that must be sublimated so that the subject might preserve his identity.

The abject is that part of the mother, the chora, we must reject in order to separate from her and craft an autonomous identity. Despite this separation, there is always a longing to return to the chora and recreate the symbiosis of mother and infant before physical birth. Taji tries to embody this idealized perception of the chora in the character of Yillah. Aside from the fact that man can never return to the womb or chora, Yillah further complicates his efforts with the sexual tension she arouses in him. When Taji realizes that Yillah and Hautia are connected, he momentarily acknowledges that even the sublime is always, already tinged with that of the abject.

Upon hearing that Taji plans to seek out Yillah, Hautia warns him, "Go, go,--and slay thyself: I may not make thee mine;--go, --dead to dead!—There is another cavern in the hill" (653). Fleeing the abject, Taji seeks solace in finding Yillah, the idealized, maternal chora that surrounds the infant before his immersion into symbolic language. Yet, Hautia shrewdly observes that Taji is bent on a suicide mission of sorts. He is chasing an illusion, something, someone he may never fully return to. And, in this fruitless search, he sacrifices his own life. Hautia proclaims, "dead to dead!" and intimates that Taji, one who seeks the "pure" ideal will never embrace it fully for he fails to embrace the abject and act on his drives and desires both sexually and otherwise.

This ceaseless search of Taji's for an unattainable ideal and his supposed "escape" from the abject Mother is similar to an endless quest Kristeva discusses in "An Exile

Who Asks, Where?" She ponders, "The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing" (*PH* 8). Taji is indeed a "stray" of sorts who wanders from island to island searching for the unattainable, idealized Yillah. His encounter with Hautia has made him aware to a certain extent of the abject within himself, that which "he divides, exludes" (*PH* 8). Yet, he sublimates the abject and in the case of Hautia, literally tries to separate himself from it in order to stray after an "autonomous" identity and idealized woman that is always already abjected because she too is an other. Kristeva adds, "A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines—for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject—constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh" (*PH* 8). Taji's quest is endless because he seeks to stray from that which is within.

Mardi begins as a travel narrative, similar to the likes of *Typee* and *Omoo*, but mid-way through it meanders into a romantic quest to reconcile what can be understood as the semiotic chora with the abject body it issues from. Taji seeks to isolate the chora and possess it in the form of Yillah. Simultaneously, he unsuccessfully tries to wreak vengeance upon the abject, sexualized body manifested by the character of Hautia. The story climaxes when Taji realizes that both Yillah and Hautia are one and the same; at that moment he confronts his worst fear only to try and suppress it by venturing after the elusive chora-like figure of Yillah. Taji's anxiety over Hautia and what she represents – the body, sexuality and death—proves too much for him and he wanders all over the globe seeking that which he can never have.

Similarly, Melville, like Taji, seeks the semiotic chora. After the success of his first two travel narratives he decides to try his hand at a romance. Through the figure of Yoomy the poet, Melville expresses his own desire to produce a more romantic, semiotic form of language. Yet, he also emphasizes his own anxiety over this monstrous undertaking. He fears criticism and failure. And, his fear of a form of writing that could be deemed feminine resonates as well. The semiotic emerges from the body – its drives and desires. Melville's own anxiety over the body as a receptacle for the abject further complicates his desire to write from it and discuss subjects associated with it (most prominently sexuality). Finally, the mother's body (as the locus for both the chora and the abject) seems to create the most anxiety for Melville. This is evidenced by his womb-like descriptions of the landscape as well as his depiction of the swirling vortex that sucks the life out of men. According to Renker, Melville made a startling comment about his mother. He said simply that "She hated me" (127). This statement further reveals why the abject is something Melville *must* write about. While much of this discourse is sublimated, it seeps through and transgresses the text itself. *Mardi* has been criticized for its rambling, fluid form yet perhaps this style is a mere extension or reflection of the artist's attempt to work through a semiotic language that is harbored in the abject.

CHAPTER 4: *MOBY-DICK* – AN INTERLUDE

While I have chosen *Pierre* to represent Melville's continuing fascination with the abject, I would be remiss not to mention a few particular scenes from *Moby-Dick* where this idea is addressed as well. Melville enlists several "island" or native characters in this novel that follow the same characterizations as the native characters in his earlier works. Some examples of these stock characters include Queequeg, Tashtego, Daggoo, Fedallah and Pip to a certain extent. Queequeg in particular seems reminiscent of Kory-Kory from *Typee* and Samoa from *Mardi*. Yet, Queequeg and Ishmael's relationship is much further developed than the relationships between native and Western characters in Melville's previous novels. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville attempts to embrace the abject through his depiction of Queequeg and Ishmael's relationship. I would like to briefly examine the infamous bridegroom "bedroom" scene involving Queequeg and Ishmael. Additionally, I will address the chapter, "A Squeeze of the Hand" because it further establishes Melville's evolving relationship with the abject and finally, I will examine Ahab's pursuit of the whale as a metaphorical quest to kill the abject mother.

Embracing the Abject

In keeping with his own established tradition of including a native companion for the wayward Westerner, Melville creates the character of Queequeg to serve as a "helpmate" to Ishmael. Similar to Tommo and Taji, Ishmael provides an extensive description of the islander that aligns him with the abject. Upon encountering Queequeg, Ishmael remarks, "what a sight! Such a face! It was of a dark, purplish, yellow color, here and there stuck over with large, blackish-looking squares" (23). Repulsed, Ishmael

erroneously assumes that the poor brute must have been beaten up. Ishmael notes Queequeg's near baldness and explains that there was "nothing but a small scalp-knot twisted up on his forehead. His bald purplish head now looked for all the world like a mildewed skull" (24). This "mildewed skull" suggests physical decay which is closely aligned with the abject. Queequeg is further aligned with the abject because of his tattoos and heathenistic religion. While Queequeg prays to his idol, Ishmael is astounded by the worshipper's "strange antics" that "were accompanied by still stranger guttural noises from the devotee, who seemed to be praying in a sing-song or else singing some pagan psalmody or other…" (25). The "guttural sounds" and "psalmody" Ishmael refers to reflect the semiotic nature of Queequeg's language. His chants, like those of the natives in *Mardi*, resemble a language that is rooted in the body replete with its drives and energies.

After overcoming his own anxiety over sleeping with another man – and a likely cannibal at that – Ishmael wakes up in Queequeg's embrace. Ishmael reports, "I found Queequeg's arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife" (28). This scene of the infamous "bridegroom clasp" (30) has been much debated. Leland Person offers a helpful summary of criticism that addresses gender and sexuality in *Moby-Dick* ("Melville's Cassock"). He cites Robert Shulman and T. Walter Herbert for their contribution to examining how "Melville uses phallic and homosexual references to satirize social, political, and religious values" (2). And, he credits Robert K. Martin who "finds Melville contesting the 'power of the patriarchy' with the 'radical social potential' of homosexual relationships" as well as Joseph Allen Boone for examining the novel as a "'powerful critique of the male ethos

ruling American society'" (2-3). Similar to Martin, I view this scene as a homosexual or at the very least a homosocial encounter between the two men; yet I would like to add that this embrace between Queequeg and Ishmael is actually Melville's attempt to embrace the abject.

When Ishmael arrives at the Spouter Inn he is told that there are no other single rooms available and he will have to share a bed with an islander named Queequeg. Ishmael reluctantly agrees to share a bed with the harpooner and attends dinner before retiring for the night. At dinner, he learns that this harpooner is of a "dark complexion" and likes to eat his steaks "rare" (16). After the dining hall clears out, Ishmael begins to change his mind about sleeping with this man. As he waits for the arrival of his bed mate, he contemplates, "No man prefers to sleep two in a bed. In fact, you would a good deal rather not sleep with your own brother" (17). Despite the fact that sailors slept in close quarters while at sea, Ishmael seems averse to this practice. He emphasizes his need for privacy during sleep. He muses to himself that sailors sleep in one small compartment but insists that they each still have their own bed, adding, "you have your own hammock, and cover yourself with your own blanket, and sleep in your own skin" (18). This idea of sleeping "in your own skin" is intriguing and quite revealing at the same time. Being in your own skin on a literal level might mean not touching anyone *else's* skin. At the very least, this idea seems to imply some anxiety on Ishmael's part over touching another man's skin and may even suggest the threat of sexual penetration as well. Sleeping two men to a bed transgresses the boundaries of acceptable social space between men. One might have one's own skin rub up against another's thus violating the boundaries of proper decorum.

The fact that Queequeg is a man of another race further escalates Ishmael's anxiety. Since Queequeg's homeland is Kokovoko, an imaginary island, it is most likely that Melville is commenting on race in general instead of a specific "race" of people or tribe. Because of his race, Ishmael worries that Queequeg might be dirty (he's not the "tidiest"). In a revealing slip, Ishmael exclaims, "—how could I tell from what vile hole he had been coming?" (18). Ishmael is most likely speculating on the nature of the "dive," or "hole," Queequeg was at before coming home to the inn. However, the word "hole" has sexual connotations as well. Specifically, it could refer to Ishmael's anxiety about the idea of anal sex between two men. After expressing this revealing concern, Ishmael declares to the landlord that he has changed his mind about the harpooner and will sleep on a bench downstairs. After realizing that the bench is far too short and that the dining room is far too cold, Ishmael reconsiders his sleeping arrangement again. He demands to know more about the harpooner before making a "connexion…which is an intimate and confidential one in the highest degree" (20). Ishmael is also extremely uncomfortable with Queequeg's nakedness once the two actually room together. He asks Queequeg to put on his pantaloons "as soon as possible" (31).

Nevertheless, after spending some time with Queequeg, Ishmael begins to feel more comfortable around him. He remarks, "Wild he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those same things that would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets that thus drew me" (57). In psychoanalytic terms, this idea of being drawn to that which repels one is exemplified by Julia Kristeva through the lens of the abject. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva notes that "There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed

against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside" (1). She adds that while the subject is revolted by the abject, "simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it [the abject] literally beside himself" (1). This quotation perfectly captures the meaning behind Ishmael's perception of Queequeg. After the initial shock of the "other," Ishmael finds himself attracted to it.

In the chapter, "The Counterpane," Ishmael likens the sensation he feels towards Queequeg to an experience he had as a young child. He explains that as a young boy, his stepmother sent him to bed early for misbehaving. Ishmael recounts the draining experience of lying in bed waiting for the hours to pass. Once he finally dozes off he has a somewhat supernatural experience when he awakens to a room that is now wrapped in darkness. In that moment of disorientation he panics: "Instantly I felt a shock running through all my frame; nothing was to be seen, and nothing was to be heard, but a supernatural hand seemed placed in mine" (29). He feels a presence lying beside him, holding his hand. He adds, "For what seemed ages piled on ages, I lay there, frozen with the most awful fears, not daring to drag away my hand; yet ever thinking that if I could but stir it one single inch, the horrid spell would be broken" (29). Ishmael notes that he still can't find an explanation for this bizarre and unsettling experience. Of his experience sleeping with Queequeg and waking to find the native's arm thrown over him, Ishmael relays, "Now, take away the awful fear, and my sensations at feeling the supernatural hand in mine were very similar, in their strangeness, to those which I experienced on waking up and seeing Queequeg's pagan arm thrown around me" (29).

While the "awful fear" is gone, the supernatural "strangeness" persists. Also, once Queequeg awakens and begins to dress, Ishmael makes note of the "indecorous figure that Queequeg made" standing next to the window as he dressed. Ishmael anxiously asks the native to speed up his toiletry as quickly as possible. Despite Ishmael's tenuous relationship to Queequeg as an abject figure, the former grows more accustomed to the latter.

In fact, the two men become bosom buddies and this friendship is described in detail in the chapter "Nightgown." After Queequeg declares the two men "married" (in the sense of being the closest of friends), Ishmael relates how he and the native stayed up all hours of the night "chatting and napping" (59). Ishmael illustrates the intimacy between Queequeg and him by describing how the native would "affectionately" throw his leg over Ishmael's (59). On an especially cold morning, Ishmael remarks that "We felt very nice and snug, the more so since it was so chilly out of doors; indeed out of bed-clothes too, seeing that there was no fire in the room" (59). Ishmael has grown so accustomed to Queequeg that his nakedness no longer bothers him. Despite the intimate picture we are given of both men, their relationship is not really addressed much beyond these first initial chapters.

Robert Sattelmeyer, in "'Shanties of Chapters and Essays': Rewriting *Moby-Dick*," offers an intriguing explanation as to why Queequeg and Ishmael's relationship is not directly referenced again throughout the text. He suggests that throughout *Moby-Dick*, there are several "shanty" chapters and passages that were written "to reconcile or explain inconsistencies and changes of course that, when isolated, allow us to draw inferences about both the original elements of the novel and Melville's reasons for

changing them" (217). According to Sattelmeyer, one of the major influences that affects Melville's revision of the text is his relationship with Nathaniel Hawthorne. He claims that the relationship between Queequeg and Ishmael was part of a later phase of composition (235). And, he suggests that after having written "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Melville exuded "an almost giddy happiness at the profound spiritual friendship he felt for Hawthorne himself" (235). Despite his use of the term "friendship" to describe the relationship between Queequeg and Ishmael, Sattelmeyer acknowledges Robert K. Martin and Leland S. Person's depiction of this scene as a form of "homoerotic attraction" and, he concludes by stating that "if the sexually charged imagery of the Ishmael Queequeg friendship was a later addition to the plot, then it seems natural to infer that Melville's powerful feelings of friendship (or something stronger) for Hawthorne provided the stimulus of this portrait" (236). Sattelmeyer's recognition of the influence Hawthorne had on Melville while he was composing and revising *Moby-Dick* is helpful to my own argument in that it suggests a crucial turning point for the author. In the "bridegroom" scene, instead of having Ishmael reject Queequeg, whom he first deems abject, he embraces him instead. This twist in the plot coupled with Melville's fascination with Hawthorne (that I would argue is indeed homoerotic) perhaps suggests the author's desire to recognize that the abject is something we each hold within us and struggle to come to terms with. The shame, guilt, and even disgust each of us harbors within over our sexuality is tempered by our attempts to maintain a successful intimate relationship.

Kristeva speaks of how the abject is entwined with sexuality ("Confronting the Maternal," *PH*). She claims that "devotees of the abject, she as well as he, do not cease

looking, within what flows from the other's 'innermost being,' for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body" (54). To summarize, we seek out a sexual partner or companion in an attempt to reclaim our connection to the physical mother. While Kristeva emphasizes heterosexual couplings as the primary example of this attempt to reconnect with the mother, I think it may be applied to homosexual relationships as well. She questions whether "The eroticization of abjection, and perhaps any abjection to the extent that it is already eroticized, is an attempt at stopping the hemorrhage: a threshold before death, a halt or respite?" (55). This hemorrhage is the separation between mother and infant – that moment when he/she realizes the separation that exists between the two. For Ishmael, he momentarily finds "respite" from abjection in his embrace of Queequeg.

While Melville's depiction of Annatoo and Samoa's marriage in *Mardi* is one of trial and tribulation – something to be *endured* – the relationship between Queequeg and Ishmael seems to be the epitome of a perfect marriage. Intimacy seems to be the key to this "marriage's" success. One such scene that demonstrates this intimacy between Ishmael and Queequeg is when the two share a pipe in bed. As Sattelmeyer notes, "—in the spirit of real taboo violation—they smoke together in bed" (237). He explains this passage as representative of the intimate time Hawthorne and Melville spent together. By referring to one of Melville's letters, Sattelmeyer gleans that Melville "anticipates getting Hawthorne 'up in [his] snug room…& discussing the Universe with a bottle of brandy & cigars' (*Correspondence*, 180)" (237). He adds that on one occasion, while Hawthorne's wife was away, the two smoked cigars in his sitting room which was deemed "strictly off-limits to tobacco" (237). The idea that Melville might indirectly include a reference

to his smoking sessions with Hawthorne in the scene between Ishmael and Queequeg further supports the notion that the author felt a sense of intimacy with the man of the "The Mosses."

While Melville found a kindred spirit to say the least in Hawthorne, his marriage to Elizabeth functioned more like a working relationship instead of one based on love and intimacy. The one situation where Melville can most truthfully capture a successful, intimate relationship is when it's between two men. Yet, the likelihood of this relationship being further realized is snuffed out by Queequeg's death. The object of an abject sexuality complete with drives and sensations must die so that the abject might be kept under "control." Through Ishmael, Melville confronts the abject sexualized native character of Queequeg only to write him out of the text a few hundred pages later.

Yet, the abject emerges sporadically on an unconscious level throughout the text. For instance, the abject seeps into the text by way of the creatures from the deep. Ishmael's description of a giant squid practically epitomizes the abject. He refers to it as "A vast pulpy mass…of a glancing cream-color" (301). He characterizes it as "an unearthly, formless, chance-like apparition of life" (301). The squid is grotesque, indefinable and *formless*. Its massive, bulbous body transgresses form –it is a messy, pulp-like mass that resembles the womb or even more specifically, the afterbirth or placenta. And, to complete the impression, Ishmael describes the sucking sound the squid makes: "As with a low sucking sound it slowly disappeared again" (301). This squid or afterbirth-like substance emerges from the deep womb of the sea and is then sucked back up again. The image of the squid is crucial because it provides a visual

representation of the abject (much like the whale itself). It cannot be known; its meaning cannot be penetrated and like Kristeva's "bodily fluids" it cannot be contained.

The Abject is in the Eye of the Beholder

Another scene that is an even more graphic representation of the abject is found in the chapter "A Squeeze of the Hand."[13] In this scene the men are squeezing the cooled, congealed whale spermacetti back into liquid form. Kristeva's classification of sperm as an abject substance is rather vague and somewhat confusing. When discussing bodily fluids she states, "Urine, blood, sperm, excrement then show up in order to reassure a subject that is lacking its 'own and proper self'" (*PH* 53). Here, she seems to imply that sperm is considered abject, yet in a separate passage, she claims that sperm is not a polluting substance. She clarifies, "Neither tears nor sperm, for instance, although they belong to the borders of the body, have any polluting value" (*PH* 71). This distinction Kristeva makes between sperm being considered a fluid that transgresses the boundaries of the body without polluting it complicates her argument. Some critics such as Calvin Thomas argue that sperm in particular is a substance that may or may not be considered abject depending upon the individual and context. Thomas suggests that

> If semen, the putative essence of biological maleness, is potentially feminized at the moment when it is given over to representation, feminized and hence devalued by virtue of its visibility—if semen in its very movement from invisibility to visibility undergoes a change in value that corresponds to the movement from the hyperbolic self to the

[13] For a discussion of nineteenth-century perceptions of sperm see Leland Person's "Melville's Cassock: Putting on Masculinity in *Moby-Dick*." *ESQ* 40.1 (1994): 1-26.

> exuberantly discarded self—then the money shot functions to assuage male anxiety about the lack of value, lack of power, and lack of masculinity that accrue to the hyperbolic act of ejaculation at the very moment of the ejaculate's self-shattering appearance (*Male Matters*, 22).

Here, Thomas explains that once sperm becomes visible (i.e. isn't used for reproductive purposes) then it loses its "potency" metaphorically speaking, and becomes feminized or exposed unless it has a "target" or "other" to "assuage male anxiety about" its perceived "lack." While my argument approaches the substance of sperm and its "value" from a slightly different angle (that of Ishmael's perspective of it) I think it is vital to stress, as Thomas does in the above passage, that sperm becomes or does not become abject based upon the individual's perception of it within the context of the situation.

The squeezing of sperm on board the *Pequod* might appear to be an abject process to readers, but from *Ishmael's perspective*, this activity is most definitely *not* an abject experience but a positively enjoyable one. He relishes in the sensation the sperm gives him as it slips through his hands and brings them to life. He declares, "After having my hands in it for only a few minutes, my fingers felt like eels, and began, as it were, to serpentine and spiralize" (455). Enraptured by sensory overload, Ishmael relays, "…I bathed my hands among those soft, gentle globules of infiltrated tissues, woven almost within the hour…they richly broke to my fingers, and discharged all their opulence, like fully ripe grapes…" (455). Ishmael's senses seem to explode much like the "gentle globules" that discharge their "opulence." The eroticism of the remainder of this passage seems to reference the "afterglow" of great sex. Ishmael compares the sperm to "ripe

grapes" that have released their "wine" and he reveals "I snuffed up that uncontaminated aroma,--literally and truly, like the smell of spring violets; I declare to you, that for the time I lived as in a musky meadow…" (455). Ishmael inhales an aroma that not only is "uncontaminated" but also especially pleasing.

The word "uncontaminated" reveals quite a bit about the narrator's perception of the sperm. And, this word further separates sperm (in Ishmael's mind) from the abject. In fact, the sperm is magically transformed into a substance that binds the men together. Ishmael proclaims, "Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules" (456). The emphasis Ishmael places upon "melting" into the sperm or becoming one with it coupled by the frenzied "insanity" that comes over him further reveals the physical and mental effect the substance has on him. Aroused, Ishmael goes from "unwittingly" squeezing the men's hands to "continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say-…Come, let us squeeze hands all around; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness" (456). Ishmael begins intentionally squeezing the other men's hands and likens this experience to a moment of transcendence where he and the men become "one" with the sperm or milk of human kindness. He creates a scene of blissful communion amongst the men, yet one has to remember that this "scene" is being told from only one point of view. Ishmael longs to verbalize his feelings to the other men but he *doesn't*. Before he commences his ode to sperm he claims to look into the other men's eyes "*as much as to*

say" (my italics) (456). He never verbalizes this deep well of feeling because more than likely he realizes his ship mates would think him ludicrous and perhaps a bit creepy. While the sperm is most definitely not abject to the narrator, one might doubt the other men enjoyed it as much as Ishmael or likened it to an expression of brotherly love. Even if the sperm itself wasn't a threat to the other men and their masculinity, Ishmael and his feelings towards them could most certainly be deemed abject.

In the chapter, "The Cassock," that follows "A Squeeze of the Hand," Melville tackles yet another taboo subject in the form of the great whale's cassock or penis. Aside from being quite humorous, this chapter celebrates, to a deliberately ridiculous extent, the male genitalia. Melville opens the chapter by describing the cassock. He claims it to be an "unaccountable cone,--longer than a Kentuckian is tall, nigh a foot in diameter at the base, and jet-black as Yojo, the ebony idol of Queequeg" (459). In the next few sentences Melville traces other idols throughout various centuries that share the same form of the cassock.

Then he turns his focus to describing the task of the "mincer" or the fellow whose job it is to clean and prepare the cassock so that it might be worn as a coat of sorts to protect him from the elements and other aspects of his job. Ever ready to crack a joke, Melville declares, "The mincer now stands before you invested in the full canonicals of his calling. Immemorial to all his order, this investiture alone will adequately protect him, while employed in the peculiar functions of his office" (460). And, to complete the analogy between a priest wearing his vestments and the mincer wearing the whale's cassock, the author concludes, "Arrayed in decent black; occupying a conspicuous pulpit; intent on bible leaves; what a candidate for an archbishiprick, what a lad for a Pope were

this mincer!" (460). Aside from the apparent humor of this brief chapter, Leland Person notes that "Much as the mincer turns the foreskin of the whale's severed penis inside out in order to put it on and inhabit it, Melville tries on or "tries out" various masculinities that men—even sea-men—can 'put on'" ("Melville's Cassock," 2). For Person, the cassock scene serves as a metaphorical representation of the "various masculinities" Melville constructs through the different characters in his text, in a manner reminiscent of Judith Butler's concept of performativity in *Gender Trouble*. While Melville fleshes out multiple characters with multiple masculinities, he epitomizes this performativity in the visual representation of the cassock scene where the mincer literally "tries on" the phallus. Melville also seems to be "thumbing his nose" at those who consider the cassock or penis to be abject, something to "hide" or be ashamed of in terms of the conventions of nineteenth-century ideas of sexuality. His documentation of the various uses of the phallus in religious ceremonies or idol worship serve as "evidence," so to speak, of the positive connotations associated with the organ. In a book that struggles with ideas of masculinity and homosexuality, this intentionally humorous chapter provides a release of sorts.[14]

Ahab's "Queenly Personality"

While Ishmael "tries on" a masculinity that is more feminine in description than perhaps any other character in the text, the figure of Ahab has been considered by many to be an example of a hypermasculinity that ultimately leads to his destruction.[15] Ahab,

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[14] For an analysis of Melville's use of humor in this passage, see the following: Walter E. Bezanson's "*Moby-Dick*: Work of Art." *Moby-Dick Centennial Essays*, ed. Tyrus Hillway and Luther S. Mansfield. (Dallas, 1953), p. 39; Perry Miller's *The Raven and the Whale*. (New York, 1956); and Howard P. Vincent's *The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick* (New York, 1949), p. 313.

[15] See Nancy Fredericks, "Melville and the Woman's Story." *Studies in American Fiction* 19.1 (1991): 41-54; and Kim Long's, "Ahab's Narcissistic Quest: The Failure of the Masculine American Dream in *Moby-Dick*." *Conference of College Teachers of English Studies* 57 (1992): 42-50.

however, is actually a character who struggles with his own abjected self and seeks to kill the whale or the metaphorical receptacle for the abject. He is a character who loathes himself (most importantly, his fragmented body) and seeks to kill the source of his "corporal animosity" (*MD* 200) which is indeed Moby Dick. While the sea serves as a metaphorical womb, the whale is the "pasteboard mask" or impenetrable, unknowable, unstoppable abject mother figure that Ahab lost a part of himself to. Ahab must kill so that he can live and regain his autonomy and masculinity.

The character of Ahab is marked as an abject figure of the "other" in multiple ways. The first few references to Ahab's appearance address the narrator's overall impression of him. Ishmael notes of Ahab's body: "He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness" (134). This gruesome description of Ahab's body emphasizes fragmentation and decay.

Ahab's missing leg, in particular, is aligned with the abject because it serves as a reminder that he is no longer physically whole. The mangled leg is similar to the pollutants Kristeva speaks of in *Powers of Horror*. She notes that "Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death" (*PH* 71). The missing leg serves as a constant reminder to Ahab of the threat from without – this threat is manifested in the form of Moby Dick. Although Ahab is still alive, a portion of himself is literally dead (his leg). While Ahab physically loses a part of himself to the great Mother Whale, he psychically loses a portion of his identity or manhood as well (the leg is after all somewhat of a phallic symbol).

In addition to disturbing Ahab's identity, the loss of his limb also forces him to question the symbolic. Noelle McAfee succinctly summarizes Kristeva's use of the term "symbolic" as "a way of signifying that depends on language as a sign system complete with its grammar and syntax" (*Julia Kristeva* 17). She adds that the symbolic is meant to "express meaning with as little ambiguity as possible" (17). Kristeva notes that *corporeal waste*, menstrual blood and excrement, or everything that is assimilated to them, from nail-parings to decay, represent—like a metaphor that would have become incarnate—the objective frailty of the symbolic order" (70). Ahab's frustration over his fragmented body mirrors his frustration over a lack of boundaries and order that the symbolic supposedly provides.[16]

While Ahab desires to obtain the Truth and a language composed of essential signifiers, he also struggles with his own relation to the abject mother and the semiotic. His own speech patterns further reflect this. Of the man himself, Ishmael refers to him as "full of riddles" (139) and Stubb's dream likens him to "a pyramid" (142). Ahab is difficult to decipher and understand. He is the "other" who is unknowable. His language confuses his crew. At times he speaks in semiotic utterances. In the "Quarter-Deck" chapter when Ahab mentions the doubloon to his crew Ishmael notes, "without using any words [he] was meanwhile lowly humming to himself, producing a sound so strangely muffled and inarticulate that it seemed the mechanical humming of the wheels of vitality in him" (176). This hum issuing from Ahab aligns him with the semiotic utterance that emerges from his body and its energies, drives or "vitality."

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[16] David Mitchell and Doran Larson discuss Ahab's loss of access to the symbolic but not Ahab's own ambivalent connection with the abject and semiotic language. See Mitchell's "'Too Much of a Cripple': Ahab, Dire Bodies, and the Language of Prosthesis in *Moby-Dick*." *Leviathan* 1.1 (1999): 5-22. See Larson's "Of Blood and Words: Ahab's Rhetorical Body." *Modern Language Studies* 25.2 (1995): 18-33.

In a more revealing scene, entitled "The Cabin-Table," we find Ahab lamenting to the crew over the loss of his leg to Moby Dick. The narrator informs us that the captain "shouted with a terrific, loud, animal sob, like that of a heart-stricken moose" (177). Again, Ahab's attempt at a purely symbolic language fails him. He cannot contain his own bodily desires, urges, etc. and ends up being compared not just to an animal, but a "heart-stricken moose" (177). Similar to Kory-Kory in *Typee* and Samoa in *Mardi*, Ahab is physically and linguistically characterized as a beast. Melville seems to use animal imagery amongst not only the native characters but also with Ahab to convey man's will to vocalize semiotic urges.

Shortly after this pitiful depiction of Ahab as a sobbing animal mourning the loss of his leg, he tries to describe what the whale represents or "means" according to his own experience with it. In the infamous paste-board mask scene, Ahab reveals to Starbuck that the reason for the voyage is actually so that the captain might seek revenge on the great whale. He explains his obsession with the whale to an incredulous Starbuck:

> All visible objects, man, are but as paste-board masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the White Whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes, I think there's naught beyond. (178)

The mask functions like a mirror of sorts that reflects the abject and self-loathing found within each man. This desire to thrust through the wall is a desire to dissolve the abject or kill it. As Kristeva suggests, in order to create an identity that is autonomous from the mother, man must reject her and everything she represents including her language, that of the semiotic. Metaphorically, he must kill her or spit her out so as to preserve his own identity and the farce of symbolic language. For Ahab, the whale and specifically its mask must be penetrated and killed so that he might become "whole" again physically, mentally and linguistically. Ahab says it best when he declares "The prophecy was that I should be dismembered and—Aye! I lost this leg. I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer" (183). Ahab, who is figuratively and literally fragmented, vows revenge. The severance of his leg physically signifies, in the Kristevan sense, the sense of fragmentation each man carries with him once he realizes he is no longer physically connected to the mother. And, amidst this feeling of fragmentation and rejection, he tries to create his own autonomous identity. Yet, he can never escape his own body and the abject he carries within himself just as he can never fully escape the semiotic. Ahab desperately tries to kill the abject mother manifested in the figure of the whale—he seeks "to dismember my dismemberer" (183). Strikingly, Ishmael illustrates the mysterious connection between Ahab and the whale. He notes that the most curious trait that separates Moby Dick from other whales is his "peculiar snow-white wrinkled forehead, and a high, pyramidical white hump" (198). This reference to the pyramid hearkens back to Stubb's description of Ahab as a "pyramid" (142). The pyramid is the mysterious, puzzling link between mother and son. It is the riddle that will never be "solved" or explained away.

In the chapter, "The Candles," amidst a raging typhoon, Ahab declares that the lightening "lights the way to the White Whale" (550). In a revealing passage, Ahab challenges the whale, "I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here. Though but a point at best; whencesoe'er I came; wheresoe'er I go; yet while I earthly live, the queenly personality lives in me and feels her royal rights" (550-51). Critics have grappled with Melville's decision to characterize Ahab's personality as "queenly."[17] I believe that the "unconditional, unintegral mastery in me" Ahab refers to is the influence of the abject "queenly" mother upon the wayward son. Though physically separate from her, he can never fully escape the bodily drives, energies, etc. that once were a part of her. Trying to validate and bolster his own sense of autonomous identity, he exclaims, "a personality stands here" (550-51). This phrase is so powerful because it signifies man's universal struggle to establish a distinct sense of self. What makes Ahab's description of autonomy so fascinating is that he labels his personality "a queenly" one. I take this to mean that Ahab recognizes the influence of the great mother upon his own ego (even though he later tries to kill the abject body). A few lines later, the narrator notes that "The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung" (200). Ishmael's description of the whale as the incarnation of "all those malicious agencies" further establishes the whale as the source of the abject mother. She

[17] See Sanford E. Marovitz's "Ahab's 'Queenly Personality' and Melville's Art." *Melville Society Extracts* 65 (1986): 6-9. Marovitz links this phrase to Hawthorne's influence upon Melville during the early 1850s and "oddly enough, to Melville's later interest in Palestine, which he toured in January of 1857, and in Judaism" (6).

is responsible for his fragmented existence. She is the one who has left him "living on with half a heart and half a lung" (200).

While Ahab rails against the whale and at times the sea as well, in the chapter "Symphony," he reveals his desire to be comforted by the maternal entity of nature. As Ahab leans over the railing of the ship, Ishmael informs us that

> the step-mother world, so long cruel—forbidding—now threw affectionate arms round his stubborn neck, and did seem to joyously sob over him, as if over one, that however willful and erring, she could yet find it in her heart to save and bless. From beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop. (590)

This description of the sea as a forgiving mother, yet one who may also at times be "cruel—forbidding" (590) offers a glimpse into the complex relationship between mother and son. And, this passage exposes the individual's desire to return to the sublime chora of the mother despite his own abjection of her.

Yet, in the end Ahab fails to master or come to terms with his own loathing of the abject as he succumbs to the great whale or metaphor of his own sheer hatred and disgust, the "thing" or great mother that fragmented his body and mind. He declares, "Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale! to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee" (623). In a final statement that is quite Kristevan in the sense that one "spits out" or rejects the

abject, Ahab renounces the "all-destroying but unconquering whale" (623). He fights to maintain his own autonomous identity to the bitter end despite the fragmentation and loss the whale or abject mother figure has left him with. In a rather fitting end, Ahab is the victim of an accident that draws him down into the womb-like watery depths that drown him. He is a victim of his own obsession with and inability to reconcile himself to the great abject mother.

After Ahab's death, Ishmael comments upon the vortex that swallowed up the rest of the crew excepting himself. He alone lives to tell of his near brush with death and explains that he narrowly escaped the swirling vortex. He says of the vortex that "When I reached it, it had subsided to a creamy pool" (625). Ishmael's description of the subsiding vortex as "a creamy pool" literally refers to the foam left on the surface of the water as a result of the churning vortex. Yet, metaphorically, this "creamy" substance could symbolize several secretions from a mother's body. The first and most convincing that comes to mind is breast milk, that which nourishes and gives life to the infant, in this case, Ishmael. He has been "reborn" in the sense that his journey aboard the death dealing Pequod has come to a close and he is the sole survivor left to tell the tale and fashion a new life for himself. As he circles around the lip of the vortex, Ishmael describes the moment of his escape:

> Till, gaining that vital centre, the black bubble upward burst; and now, liberated by reason of its cunning spring, and, owing to its great buoyancy rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot lengthwise from the sea, fell

> over, and floated by my side. Buoyed up by that coffin, for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirge-like main. (625)

At "the vital centre" he is expelled, much like an infant from the womb. Ishmael is given a second chance at selfhood. He is separated from the life and death wielding m(other) who holds the power to smother his identity as it is constructed outside of the mother's body. Yet, ironically, Queequeg's *casket* is what saves Ishmael from drowning and being encompassed by the abject mother. The fact that the casket was initially built at Queequeg's request (during a time when he was ill) further supports his alignment with the abject and also implies that the abject is that which we may never escape from. The coffin bursts forth from the sea and Ishmael clings to it – that tangible reminder of everyone's eventual return to the watery womb and obliteration of selfhood in death.

CHAPTER 5: *PIERRE*

While Ahab pursues Moby-Dick to the bottom of the ocean in an effort to kill the figurative abject mother, Melville's depiction of Master Glendinning in *Pierre or the Ambiguities* (1852), offers a more overt portrayal of a young man coming to terms with a flesh and blood mother. *Pierre* is Melville's seventh book and serves in some ways as a radical departure from his previous writings, especially his earlier travel narratives. Yet, this text also serves as the culmination of Melville's efforts to grapple with and better understand the abject and more specifically, the abject mother. After the dismal failure of *Moby-Dick*, Melville became even more ambitious and wrote to Hawthorne claiming, "Leviathan is not the biggest fish; --I have heard of Krakens" (17, November 1851, p. 213). Under pressure once again to create a work that satisfied his creative instinct as well as the lining of his pockets, Melville turned his attention to a feminine audience and attempted to write a supposed sentimental romance. This decision to engage the feminine reader afforded him the luxury of exploring the role(s) of women in the family. Instead of female characters standing on the periphery, as is the case in each of Melville's earlier works, the women of *Pierre* define the leading character. In this book, Melville depicts actual relationships between mother and son, brother and sister, fiancée and lover. The body and sexuality also become vital components to the story and the characters' lives as well.

While this work has intrigued scholars as a romantic psychological thriller of sorts that marks a distinctive break in Melville's writing career, contemporary reviewers of the work weren't quite as impressed with a book whose themes included incest, murder, and

suicide. Unsurprisingly, these topics (especially the incestuous relationship between Isabel and Pierre) triggered outrage among nineteenth-century readers and critics alike. Contemporary reviews of the book were scathing and at times, insulting. Aside from being an "indecent" book, several critics thought the author had gone insane. One sampling of such a review came from the New York *Day Book* (Sept. 7) labeling "HERMAN MELLVILLE CRAZY" (Howard 380). To add insult to injury, the book sold so poorly that after the advances that had been sent to Melville before publishing, he ended up owing his publishers $298.71 (Howard 379). Despite the public's reaction to his latest work, Melville had envisioned *Pierre* to be a popular romance suitable for a feminine audience. Melville's intention of capturing a female audience is revealed in a letter he wrote to Sophia Hawthorne on January 8, 1852. He was surprised at Sophia's interest in *Moby-Dick*, a novel he considered to be a man's book. And, in the letter he tells her that "I shall not again send you a bowl of salt water. The next chalice I shall commend, will be a rural bowl of milk" (Howard 366). The "bowl of milk" Melville mentions implies domesticity and femininity when contrasted with the "bowl of salt water" or draught of masculinity found in *Moby-Dick*.

Yet, this apparently casual reference to a "bowl of milk" becomes a continuing motif throughout the novel itself. This particular substance is referenced several times throughout the novel and is most often associated with the figure of Mrs. Glendinning, Pierre's mother. I am most interested in examining Pierre's relationship with his mother and his eventual abjection of her, for as Pierre attempts to separate himself from his domineering mother and craft his own "true" or "real" identity, he simultaneously must confront his abject desire for Isabel, his putative half-sister who speaks in semiotic

language. While the character of Lucy offers Pierre the respectability of a heterosexual, non-incestuous marriage, Pierre struggles with his own physical attraction to Isabel. In a scene reminiscent of Melville's earlier work, *Mardi*, Pierre is torn between the romantic ideal Lucy represents and the abject passion and sexual fulfillment Isabel offers. In short, Yillah is replaced with Lucy and Queen Hautia is replaced by Isabel. I am suggesting that *Pierre* is Melville's most ambitious and revealing work precisely because he portrays one young man's attempt to abject the mother in order to create the sense of an autonomous identity. Yet, as shown in his earlier works, man may never fully escape the presence of the abject since it is always already a part of him. The character of Isabel, his long-lost sister, serves as a reminder of that which is abject – incest, sexuality, the body and its uncontrollable drives. Similar to Taji diving into the vortex at the end of *Mardi* and Ahab drowning in his pursuit of the great mother-whale, Pierre as well as both the female characters he cares for dies. For Pierre and possibly Melville himself, there is no escaping the abject except maybe in death.

While we will never know for sure if Melville consciously acknowledged his writing as a journey into the abject or a way to "get at" the psyche of the self, he does have moments of self-reflexivity in his correspondence. In particular, in a letter he wrote to Nathaniel Hawthorne in June of 1851, Melville makes reference to his evolving perception of himself as an author and creator. When speaking of *Moby-Dick*, he explains: "From my twenty-fifth year I date my life. Three weeks have scarcely passed, at any time between then and now, that I have not unfolded within myself. But I feel that I am now come to the inmost leaf of the bulb, and that shortly the flower must fall to the mould" (*Correspondence* 193). During the composition process of *Moby-Dick*, Melville

experiences an epiphany. He likens himself to a bulb that unfolds itself to reveal its innermost center. This unfolding from within seems to be a metaphor for the psyche and his effort to reach the center or the subconscience. As a writer, he has written his way into the psyche or the "inmost leaf of the bulb" (*Correspondence* 193). When he writes *Pierre*, he reaches the locus of his own identity – the abject mother.

Abjecting the Mother

Pierre is an intriguing character because we know so little about him other than how he interacts with the women surrounding him. We are told that he comes from a distinguished lineage, that he is an intellectual who is also athletic, and that he longs for a sister. And, we quickly learn that Pierre's relationship with his mother is highly complex and unusual. Mary Glendinning, Pierre's mother, is demanding to say the least. Pierre's mother has received limited attention from critics, but among those who do mention her, a consensus exists that she is a cold, domineering, manipulative woman who seems anti-thetical to who and what a mother should be.[18] In a portion of Ellen Weinauer's "Women, Ownership, and Gothic Manhood in *Pierre*," she addresses the ramifications of Mary Glendinning as a female owning property. She examines, "the complex and more deeply seated issue of female (and, by extension, male) personhood that the question of marital property rights foregrounds" (145). Weinauer concludes that "Mary Glendinning "wields her power like a kind of phallic dominatrix" (147), and that "For Pierre, this now-matrilineal legacy is unnatural, unhealthy, and even dangerous" (148). While

[18] See Nicholas Canaday's "*Pierre* in the Domestic Circle." *Studies in the Novel* 18.4 (1986): 395-402. He notes, "Mrs. Glendinning is the chief instrument of social authority, 'conventionalness' as Melville terms it, which shapes the domestic circle and vests its highest ranking arbiter with her power" (396). Also see Dilek Direnc's "What do These Women Want?: *Pierre* and the New World of Gender." *Melville 'Among the Nations.'* Eds. Sanford E. Marovitz and A.D. Christodoulou. Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 2001. 384-393. Direnc says of Mary Glendinning, "Instead of loving care and contact, she concentrates all her energy on acts of vengeance, control, and ego, ultimately destroying herself as well as her relationship with her son" (386).

Weinauer explains how Mary Glendinning metaphorically emasculates Pierre, Paula Miner-Quinn argues that the mother is responsible for her son's supposed homosexuality. Miner-Quinn claims that Mary Glendinning "is an uncannily accurate fictional representation of the kind of mother clinicians feel is likely to foster homosexual offspring" (115). While I take issue with the accuracy and reality of Miner-Quinn's argument, I mention it because she, along with those previously mentioned, attempts to provide an analysis of sorts of the mother.

Yet, instead of perceiving Mary Glendinning as a "phallic dominatrix" (Weinauer 147) or a mother who enables her son's supposed homosexuality (Miner-Quinn 115), I view Mary Glendinning as an exaggerated caricature of Kristeva's abject mother. While Pierre initially idolizes his mother and seeks to please her in every way possible, he eventually realizes that in order for him to develop his own autonomous identity, he must psychologically separate himself from her through the process of abjection. Kristeva explains the process of abjecting the mother in *Powers of Horror* (1982):

> The abject confronts us, on the other hand, and this time within our personal archeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as secure as it is stifling. (13)

Here, Kristeva explains that even after our physical separation from the mother, her presence is still felt. The subject must constantly try to suppress that presence in an effort to foster his own sense of autonomy. Even though Pierre clumsily breaks away from his mother in the middle of the novel, the remainder of the book depicts his efforts to assuage the "constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as secure as it is stifling" (*PH* 13).

Before examining Pierre's abjection of Mary Glendinning, I'd like to establish the symbiotic relationship between the two leading up to Pierre's rejection of her. The reader is given a great deal of information about the character of Mary Glendinning. To begin, she is an "affluent and haughty widow" with a youthful appearance (4, 5). She discourages suitors and the narrator informs us, "But a reverential and devoted son seemed lover enough for this widow Bloom" (5). Pierre and mother both seem to act as if they were a couple that had been happily married for years. As if the hint of incest between mother and son wasn't enough, the narrator also reveals that the two call one another "sister" and "brother" respectively. The narrator relays, "In the playfulness of their unclouded love, and with that strange license which a perfect confidence and mutual understanding at all points had long bred between them, they were wont to call each other brother and sister" (5). This linguistic turn of phrase further complicates the relationship between mother and son in that it allows them to play-act with one another as siblings instead of parent and child. And, in light of the incestuous overtones that color their relationship, it seems that by calling one another "brother" and "sister," Melville foreshadows the incestuous relationship between Pierre and his long-lost half-sister, Isabel. While we never witness Pierre and his mother actually commit incest, the narrator

stresses the erotic tension between the two. After describing "that nameless and infinitely delicate aroma of inexpressible tenderness and attentiveness" one experiences during "courtship, and precedes the final banns and the rite," the narrator reveals that this same feeling is "revived in the [mother's] courteous lover-like adoration of Pierre" (16). And, of Pierre, we are told that Mary Glendinning invokes "practical sorcery over his soul" (16).

In "Textual Sentimentalism: Incest and Authorship in Melville's *Pierre*," Gillian Silverman briefly mentions the nineteenth-century belief that man learns about women and courting through his relationship with his mother. Silverman draws upon the genre of advice manuals in the nineteenth-century that attempted to regulate all kinds of sexual activity and masturbation in particular. Stephen Nissenbaum's *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America* provides a detailed account of Sylvester Graham's crusade for a healthier mind and body in nineteenth-century America. Nissenbaum traces the change in perception regarding sex from the *Works of Aristotle* which claimed that sex was actually healthy and chastity was dangerous, to the tracts of the 1830s that argued that "ill health would result from sexual overindulgence" (28). Sexual reformers, and Graham in particular, sought to eradicate the cause of lust by altering one's diet (28-29). And, Graham went so far as to suggest that sex within marriage was "just as harmful to the human constitution as masturbation—especially for young men" (30). One specific follower of Graham, William Andrus Alcott, took some of his teacher's principles to the extreme (146). He wrote several tracts on marriage such as *The Physiology of Marriage* (1856) and *Moral Philosophy of Courtship and Marriage* (1857).

Silverman draws from Alcott's work to explain the conventions of courting and marriage. Silverman notes that "By encouraging men to imagine all women as their sisters, [William] Alcott attempted to channel sexual desire into fraternal protection" (354). And, she also references O.S. Fowler's recommendation: "'Every son, 'Behold thy mother!' Make love to her, and her your first sweetheart. Be courteous, gallant, and her knight-errant…Nestle yourself right into her heart, and her into yours…Learn how to court by courting her" (354). In what might be a satire of Fowler's advice, the narrator explicitly relates Pierre and his mother's relationship to that of a "courtship" which "precedes the final banns and the rite" (16). The narrator further explains that "Pierre, through the unavoidable weakness of inexperience and unexpanded youth, was strangely docile to the maternal tuitions" (16). This submission and docility to his mother's controlling personality prevents Pierre from cultivating his own personality that is unique and separate from that of his mother. Despite his primary separation from the mother at birth and induction into symbolic language, he still struggles to further separate himself from the mother and preserve some shred of autonomous identity. Pierre appears to be on the cusp of this eternal process of becoming.

Kristeva's description of the mother's power as "securing as it is stifling" (*PH* 13) resonates in several comments Mary Glendinning makes. At breakfast, during a conversation with Pierre, she informs her son, "But you, Pierre, are going to be married before long, I trust, not to a Capulet, but to one of our own Montagues; and so Romeo's evil fortune will hardly be yours. You will be happy" (18). Mary insists that her son will marry a girl of the same class and stature as that of his own family and she guarantees his happiness to boot. Ever the crafty rhetorician, Mary then turns the discussion to Pierre's

love interest and potential fiancée, Lucy Tartan. As Pierre leaves the breakfast table Mary characterizes her son as "A noble boy, and docile" (19). She also claims to "thank heaven I sent him not to college" (19). Mary prides herself on her son's submission to her and one can surmise that her hesitancy in sending her son to college involves the threat of him being away from her and developing a mind of his own. Mary continues, "A fine, proud, loving, docile, vigorous boy. Pray God, he never becomes otherwise to me. His little wife, that is to be, will not estrange him from me; for she too is docile, - beautiful, and reverential, and most docile" (20). Mary's fear of being abandoned forces her to consider yet another possible impediment to her relationship with her son—his marriage to Lucy. Yet, this threat is quickly dissuaded because Mary considers Lucy's character to be similar to her son's in that she too is "docile" (20). Mary's repetition of the word "docile" reinforces the reader's perception of her as a dominant, maternal force.

During the same passage, while Pierre and his mother sit at the breakfast table, a running dialogue ensues over how much milk Pierre wants for breakfast. He jokingly asks Dates, the butler, for three bowls of milk to which the butler replies "One bowl, sir, you mean" (18). Mary takes issue with the familiar manner in which Pierre addresses Dates and the conversation meanders back to Lucy. However, after waiting some time for his bowl of milk, Pierre complains and his mother responds "Don't be a milk-sop, Pierre!" (19). While his mother is playing on the word "milk" here, she might also be referencing Pierre's timidity and indecision over asking Lucy to marry him. So, even with this playful joke, Mary continues to exercise control over her son. Gillian Brown, in *Domestic Individualism*, argues that "In *Pierre*, Melville satirizes these domestic investments in food and proper child-rearing in the breakfast scene between Pierre and

his mother" (149). Brown summarizes from Sarah Josepha Hale's *The Good Housekeeper, or the Way to Live Well* (1844) and explains that "The mother's role in preparing for the perfection of domesticity, in guarding against 'intemperance in eating' and forming 'the habits of her children,' followed from her proper regulation of breast-feeding" (148). Brown implies that when Pierre leaves his mother and later breaks bread with Isabel, this action marks "his flight from the maternal breast with a ritual of eating which introduces the new anti-sentimental organization of his life" (149). I, of course, mention this passage because of the rich symbolism behind the "milk" that is being discussed for roughly an entire page in a novel I am suggesting is about the abject mother. Kristeva includes a rather lengthy passage about milk in *Powers of Horror*. While discussing food loathing, she states:

> When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk—harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail pairing—I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provokes tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. 'I' want none of that element, sign of their desire; 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it. (2-3)

Kristeva uses an individual's rejection of the "skin" of milk as a metaphor for the individual's abjection of the mother. Yet, Pierre, at this point, does *not* reject the milk; in fact, he asks for three bowls of it! At this point in the novel, Pierre has not contradicted his mother. In fact, like a young child he tries desperately to please his mother and win her affection. Though physically separated from the womb, he still seeks that symbiotic relationship of mother and infant. Like a good little boy, he still wants to drink his milk.

It isn't until Pierre first encounters Isabel at a sewing party held at the sisters Pennies' house that he begins to question his mother and her plans for him. While Pierre idealizes Lucy, he longs for Isabel and experiences guilt over keeping these passionate, disturbing feelings from his mother. He wonders, "What inscrutable thing was it, that so suddenly had seized him, and made him a falsifier—ay, a falsifier and nothing less—to his own dearly-beloved, and confiding mother?" (50). The narrator adds that "Pierre shrank abhorringly from the infernal catacombs of thought, down into which, this foetal fancy beckoned him. Only this, though in secret, did he cherish; only this, he felt persuaded of; namely, that not for both worlds would he have his mother made a partner to his sometime mystic mood" (51). This "mystic mood" is caused by his newly-found passion for the mysterious Isabel (whom he doesn't realize is his half-sister at this point in the novel). His feelings for her are at this juncture, "foetal fancy" because they are not fully developed or satiated yet. And, in another sense, Pierre experiences a rebirth of sorts upon encountering Isabel. Eventually, he will reject his own mother and try to cultivate/nourish his own sense of autonomous identity. But, more of that later.

Upon discovering that Isabel is indeed his half-sister, his father's illegitimate daughter with a French woman, Pierre's perceptions of his parents are drastically altered.

He begins to realize that his mother could never handle her husband having had an illegitimate daughter. He begins to see his mother's fault and weakness – pride. He declares that her fault is "her pride of birth, her pride of affluence, her pride of purity, and all the pride of the high-born, refined, and wealthy Life, and all the Semiramian pride of woman" (89). Upon this realization the narrator notes,

> Then he staggered back upon himself, and only found support in himself. Then Pierre felt that deep in him lurked a divine unidentifiableness, that owned no earthly kith or kin. Yet was this feeling entirely lonesome, and orphan-like. Fain, then, for one moment, would he have recalled the thousand sweet illusions of Life; tho' purchased at the price of Life's Truth; so that once more he might not feel himself driven out an infant Ishmael into the desert, with no maternal Hagar to accompany and comfort him. (89)

Pierre's feelings of isolation and abandonment upon realizing his mother's weakness leave him "unidentifiable" and surrounded by "no earthly kith or kin" (89).

Kristeva mentions this bewildering sense of loss when she discusses the abjection of the self in *Powers of Horror*. She claims that "Essentially different from 'uncanniness,' more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory. I imagine a child who has swallowed up his parents too soon, who frightens himself on that account, 'all by himself'" (5). After discovering his father's indiscretion and the all more pressing

problem of his mother's probable rejection of Isabel, Pierre begins to reject or ab-ject his mother and consequently, he finds himself feeling "orphan-like" (89). Kristeva further explains the abjection of the mother and its consequences upon the subject when she claims that "What he has swallowed up instead of maternal love is an emptiness, or rather a maternal hatred without a word for the words of the father; that is what he tries to cleanse himself of, tirelessly" (6). Pierre tries to access memories of childhood happiness and maternal love or "the thousand sweet illusions of Life" (89), but realizes the impossibility of retrieving these illusions now that he's abjected the mother and seeks to "cleanse himself" (*PH* 6) of her presence. Pierre, like the "infant Ishmael," wanders across a "desert" without his "maternal Hagar" (89).

Janet Gabler-Hover, in *Dreaming Black, Writing White: The Hagar Myth in American Cultural History*, explains the presence of the Hagar myth in nineteenth-century discourse. She suggests that "Recovering the Hagar heroine in domestic fiction is in fact a project of double reclamation, for it entails the recognition that not only blackness but also black womanness may be at the heart of the white literary imagination and that Hagar's presence in popular culture created a literary space for the white male hero" (32). And, of *Pierre*, Gabler-Hover explains that "Hagar is the 'lack' Pierre longs for, his 'maternal Hagar'…" (32). From a Kristevan perspective, this "lack" could be perceived as the abject mother (the mother Pierre has rejected, but still longs for). Pierre has become an exile wandering the desert in search of the abject mother.

Kristeva addresses this idea of the exile in a section of *Powers of Horror* entitled, "An Exile Who Asks 'Where?'". She argues that "The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore

strays instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing" (8). Disillusioned, rejected, abjected, Pierre begins to stray from the mother he once loved like a sister and the symbiotic relationship and identity the two once shared. This break from the mother is even represented verbally when Pierre refuses to call his mother his "sister" and instead, refers to her as "madam" (102). After hearing his mother's judgmental opinion of Delly, a local village girl who has an illegitimate child, Pierre facetiously refers to his mother as "madam" (102). He realizes that his mother's harsh opinion of Delly and the child would most likely reflect her feelings toward Isabel, were she to ever find out about her lineage. While Pierre guardedly attempts to verbalize his distaste for his mother and her opinion by referring to her as "madam" in one scene, he can't help but later retreat and call her "sister" in order to offer a truce of sorts (130). He quickly realizes that his mother will have no truce when she warns him never to cross her again. She threatens, "Beware of me, Pierre. There lives not that being in the world of whom thou hast more reason to beware, so you continue but a little longer to act thus with me" (130). Slowly, but surely, the picture of Mary Glendinning as an all-encompassing abject monster/mother emerges.

After Pierre leaves the breakfast table, Mary continues her own internal tirade: "But who can get at one's own heart, to mend it? Right one's self against another, that, one may sometimes do; but when that other is one's own self, these ribs forbid. Then I will live my nature out…Shall a mother abase herself before her stripling boy? Let him tell me of himself, or let him slide down" (131). Mary is depicted as a ruthless, controlling, smothering mother. She refuses to compromise with her own flesh and blood. Here, the abject mother is revealed through the figure of Mary Glendinning, to be

a threatening presence that continuously threatens to obliterate any shred of autonomy her son attempts to create.

After this conflict with his mother, Pierre runs into the woods and seeks out his favorite hiding spot – a huge stone. In a passage reminiscent of *Typee* and *Mardi*, we find Pierre crouching inside a womb-like space created by nature. The narrator informs us that the stone "was shaped something like a lengthened egg" (132). Aside from the obvious association of the word "egg" with fertility and the womb, we are also told that Pierre has always longed to climb *into* the crevice that is formed within the rock itself. The narrator also reveals, "A flitting conceit had often crossed him, that he would like nothing better for a headstone than this same imposing pile; in which, at times, during the soft swayings of the surrounding foliage, there seemed to lurk some mournful and lamenting plaint, as for some sweet boy long since departed in the antediluvian time" (133-34). We quickly learn that Pierre's stone has been dubbed the Memnon Stone and we are given the history surrounding the supposed monument. The narrator relays that Memnon was the "son of Aurora, and born King of Egypt" yet his life was cut short and his subjects built a "monument in Egypt to commemorate his untimely fate" (135). According to lore, the monument or stone was "touched by the breath of the bereaved Aurora," and that "every sunrise that statue gave forth a mournful broken sound, as of a harp-string suddenly sundered, being too harshly wound" (135). In light of this information, Pierre is most likely recalling this lore as he hears "some mournful and lamenting plaint" issue from the rock. Yet, when considering Pierre's argument with his mother, which served as the reason why he seeks shelter in the womb of the rock, I think

the maternal associations from the story of the Memnon Stone also reflect his own longing to return to a state of blissful ignorance and innocence within the womb.

Rejected by his own mother, loathing her and himself, he metaphorically regresses back to the chora-like womb or stone shaped like an egg. While he longs for the safety and security of the womb, he still recognizes the threat it holds as well. The narrator tells us that Pierre "slid himself straight into the horrible interspace, and lay there as dead" (134). Once the mother/womb becomes abjected, Pierre perceives it as a threat to his emerging autonomous identity. He recognizes the threat the mother poses in that "horrible interspace" (134). She holds the power to crush him. During the climax of this scene, Pierre tempts God, the Fates, whomever or whatever will listen – to crush him "if by sacrificing myself for Duty's sake, my own mother re-sacrifices me" (134). Desperately, he seeks validation for acknowledging Isabel as his sister, for facing the truth amidst his mother's denial and pride. And, he begs that his ties to his mother might not be severed for acknowledging the truth. While the rock does not crush him, the "mother" does not kill him, he still carries the abject within him and always will.

After Pierre tells his mother that he has married someone other than Lucy, she disowns him and he leaves for the city with Isabel and Delly in tow. They ultimately end up at what is locally referred to as The Church of the Apostles, an old church that has been turned into offices and apartments. There, Pierre works on writing his book and coming to terms with his newly-found independence. Later, he receives a letter stating that his mother has died. The narrator notes, "yet it was reported that an inconsolable grief had induced his mother's mortal malady, and driven her at length into insanity, which suddenly terminated in death…" (285). Upon initially hearing this, we are told

that Pierre feels immense guilt over her death and tries to recall the better times the two shared. Yet, ultimately, the narrator explains that Pierre decides to block his own grief over her death and commit "his mother to the profoundest vault of his soul" (286).

Despite Pierre's efforts to avoid coping with his mother's death, in the chapter, "The Flower-Curtain Lifted," Pierre realizes the ramifications it has had on him. He grieves the loss of his childhood and innocence. Pierre reflects upon his own journey from prepubescent child to that of a young man. He ponders,

> But, by-and-by, grown up man's estate, it shall leave the very mother that bore it, and the father that begot it…There now, do you see the soul. In its germ on all sides it is closely folded by the world, as the husk folds the tenderest fruit; then it is born from the world-husk, but still now outwardly clings to it;--still clamors for the support of its mother the world, and its father the Deity. But it shall yet learn to stand independent, though not without many a bitter wail, and many a miserable fall. (296)

The "soul" man sees after separating from his mother and father is the identity he has created in an effort to further separate from the mother in particular. Revealingly, the narrator uses the word "mother" as a simile for the "world" or the humanity an isolated individual seeks solace from. And of course the "father" serves as a metaphor for "the Deity" (296). Pierre's musings lead him to the hopeful decision that despite all of the heartache, the soul will still "learn to stand independent" (296). Yet, this hope is fleeting, for in the next paragraph and for the remainder of this passage, Pierre mourns the loss of

his mother and family. Pierre decides that "There is still another hour which follows, when he learns that in his infinite comparative minuteness and abjectness, the gods do likewise despise him" (296). Here, Pierre struggles with his own "abjectness" (296) and believes that the very gods despise him as well.

Kristeva comments that "The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being" (*PH* 5). While the individual must reject or ab-ject the mother, he simultaneously feels that he has been rejected as well. Once he acquires symbolic language and begins to build an identity for himself, he also begins to recognize the loss of his mother, or his own symbiotic relationship to the chora. And, in Pierre's case, these feelings of loss are also accompanied by his mother's disappointment with him. He begins to feel that everyone is against him – again, he is the "deject" or "stray" Kristeva speaks of who is left to wander and make sense of his own life. Pierre thinks to himself, "Now cruel father and mother have both let go his hand, and the little soul-toddler, now you shall hear his shriek and his wail, and often his fall" (296). The use of the phrase "soul-toddler" (296) seems especially Kristevan to me in that it captures the disturbing moment when a person recognizes his separateness from his mother. Though full grown, Pierre is still a "toddler" in the sense that he must find his own way and cope with the loss of the mother figure. This same idea is repeated when Pierre claims "the toddler was toddling entirely alone, and not without shrieks" (296). The repeated use of this metaphor reflects Pierre's primary struggle to reconcile his separation from his mother and his long dead father as well. Ultimately, he seeks solace in the pseudo-mother/sister figure of Isabel.

Isabel as Surrogate Mother/Lover

Isabel, the dark young girl Pierre encounters and eventually realizes is his half-sister, has been the subject of much debate. Some critics perceive Isabel as a creative force[19] while others view her as a tool Pierre uses to better understand himself.[20] Still others suggest that through the character of Isabel, Melville complicates the trope of the "dark lady."[21] One critic whose argument is somewhat similar to my own is Gillian Brown's, "Anti-Sentimentalism and Authorship in *Pierre,*" a chapter in her book, *Domestic Individualism*. Brown offers a brief analysis of Isabel as "the removal of maternal nurturance, the proof of a nonsymbiotic identity" (157). Since Isabel is Pierre's half-sister by the same father and never really knew her own mother, Brown suggests that she is the manifestation or "proof" of the "nonsymbiotic identity" Pierre craves. I agree with Brown that Isabel's literal "motherlessness" does indeed attract Pierre, a young man who has lived under the scrutiny of his mother's critical eye. But at the same time, Pierre is most drawn to Isabel's semiotic nature which emerges from the maternal chora. Through Isabel, he seeks to *recreate* the symbiotic relationship he once had with his mother before his abjection of her.

Kristeva comments rather extensively on the love object as a substitute for the abject mother in one of her later books, *Tales of Love* (1987). Kristeva claims that "The child, male or female, hallucinates its merging with a nourishing-mother-and-ideal-father, in short a conglomeration that already condenses two into one. That child, the loving

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[19] See Wendy Stallord Flory's "Melville and Isabel: The Author and the Woman Within in the 'Inside Narrative' of *Pierre*." *Melville and Women*. Eds. Elizabeth Shultz and Haskell Springer. Kent: The Kent State UP, 2006. 121-140. And

[20] See Wai-chee Dimock's "Pierre: Domestic Confidence Game and the Drama of Knowledge." *Studies in the Novel* 16.4 (1984): 396-409.

[21] Direk Dilenc's "What do These Women Want?: *Pierre* and the New World of Gender." Melville 'Among the Nations': Proceedings of an International Conference, Volos, Greece, July 2-6, 1997. Eds. Sanford E. Marovitz and A.D. Christodoulou. Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 2001. 384-393.

child, in its couple mania, tries to make two where there were three" (222). She adds, "One soon notices, however, in the last instance (that is, if the couple truly becomes one, if it lasts), that each of the protagonists, he and she, has married, through the other, his or her mother" (223). This mother figure that is projected onto the love object, is what Kristeva terms the "perverse mother: a conglomerate of good mother and almighty father, fused into one monstrous, adorable, fulfilling being" (231-32). Again, I am arguing that this "perverse mother" figure for Pierre, is none other than Isabel. This idea is further supported by Isabel's semiotic-like use of language and music to convey her desires. She is the chora-like mother Pierre seeks.

In this sense, Isabel is similar to Fayaway in *Typee* and Yillah in *Mardi*, for all of these women speak in the language of the semiotic. Yet, Isabel's connection to the semiotic seems most developed. Upon encountering Isabel for the first time at the sewing circle held at the sisters Pennies' house, Pierre describes her: "her dark, olive cheek is without a blush, or sign of any disquietude" (46). He refers to her face and its "weird inscrutableness" that "indeed almost unmans me with its wonderfulness" (49). Though Pierre is supposed to be betrothed to Lucy Tartan – a girl of respectable means and class, he feels an overwhelming attraction and sense of familiarity for Isabel. After receiving a letter from Isabel explaining that she is Pierre's half-sister by his father, Pierre goes to visit her and learn more about her story.

As Pierre approaches the farmhouse where Isabel lives with Delly Ulver and her father, the narrator provides a rich description of the landscape surrounding the area. This description of the land is similar to those found in *Typee* and *Mardi*. The narrator observes, "On both sides, in the remoter distance…rose the long, mysterious mountain

masses; shaggy with pines and hemlocks, mystical with nameless, vapory exhalations, and in that dim air black with dread and gloom" (109). Emphasis is placed upon the mystical qualities of the landscape tinged with the erotic. We are told that "from out the infinite inhumanities of those profoundest forests, came a moaning, muttering, roaring, intermitted, changeful sound: rain-shakings of the palsied trees, slidings of rocks undermined, final crashings of long-riven boughs, and devilish gibberish of the forest-ghosts" (110). Here, the landscape becomes frightening and abject.[22] Like the scene in *Mardi* where Queen Hautia welcomes Taji to her bower, nature becomes a threatening force and extension of the abject woman. Amidst this landscape, Pierre's anxiety over meeting with Isabel rises. The narrator notes that "he almost trembled when he thought that face to face, that face must shortly meet his own" (111). While waiting for Isabel to open the door, Pierre's "whole heart beats wildly" and once he sees her he "sits down, over powered with bodily faintness and spiritual awe" (112). Confronting Isabel, Pierre confronts that which he is drawn to yet also fears…the abject.

The first reference made to the semiotic-like language of Isabel occurs when Pierre first describes her voice. He notes "a low, sweet, wild power of the musicalness of the voice" (113). Pierre's emphasis on the musicality of Isabel's voice reiterates her connection to the semiotic. In *Desire in Language* (1980), Kristeva examines how music relates to the semiotic. She explains that "Children learning a language first learn the intonations including syntax structure—that is, melody or music—before they assimilate the rules of syntactic formation. Intonation and rhythm are the first markers of the finite in the infinity of semiotic process…" (172). Kristeva suggests that during language

[22] For a thorough discussion of the landscape of Saddle Meadows and how it functions as "a response to the antebellum 'picturesque project,'" (57), see Samuel Otter's "The Eden of Saddle Meadows: Landscape and Ideology in *Pierre*." *American Literature* 66.1 (1994): 55-81.

acquisition, the first step towards speech involves grasping the intonation and rhythm, or the music of language. And, this process is most closely linked to that of the semiotic. This stage must be acquired before the subject begins to understand syntax and fully master symbolic language. The fact that Isabel's speech is so marked by musicality suggests that her language is semiotic. Her utterances are musical and as she so eloquently states to Pierre, "Not mere sounds of common words, but inmost tones of my heart's deepest melodies should now be audible to thee" (113). Isabel tries to convince Pierre that her language is not strictly symbolic; instead, it is her attempt to verbalize her "heart's deepest melodies" (113). She attempts to verbalize those drives and energies that emerge from the chora. Kristeva notes that "The semiotic is articulated by flow and marks: facilitation, energy transfers, the cutting up of the corporeal and social continuum as well as that of signifying material, the establishment of a distinctiveness and its ordering in a pulsating chora, in a rhythmic but nonexpressive totality" (40). The chora, like the "inmost tones of my heart's deepest melodies" is the metaphorical locale where these drives are ordered. For Isabel, her "pulsating chora" (*DL* 40) is the rhythmic beating of her heart.

Aaron McClendon's, "'for not in words can it be spoken': John Sullivan Dwight's Transcendental Music Theory and Herman Melville's *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities*," doesn't address the relationship between the semiotic and music, but it does explain the musical climate of the antebellum era and how it influenced Melville. McClendon claims that "in accordance with Melville's well documented epistemological frustration with language and writing, it seems right that in *Pierre* music emerges as an alternative form of expression, for at that time, music was considered the ideal human

expression, the means by which to achieve the most perfect and profound philosophical utterance" (23). McClendon references John Sullivan Dwight, the antebellum period's "foremost music critic in the United States" and his contribution to the *AEsthetic Papers*: "music was thought to be a 'transcendent medium of expression' (26) related 'to our invisible and real self' (27); it was an art that embodie[d]…that inmost life…which all feel' (32)" (25). This "inmost life…which all feel" bears some resemblance to Isabel and the "inmost tones of my heart's deepest melodies" (113), or the chora.

Another factor that influences Isabel's semiotic language and her connection to the chora is her childhood. Isabel reveals to Pierre that she never knew her own mother and that she was shuffled from house to house growing up. Of each of these "homes" and families she stayed with (with the exception of one to be discussed momentarily), we are told that she was very rarely ever spoken to. When describing the first home she lived in she tells Pierre, "They seldom spoke to me" (115). She picks up a bit of French and English along her journey from home to home, but feels most comfortable conversing with nature. Perhaps the most intriguing, as well as depressing places she winds up at is an asylum. She claims she doesn't know why or how she ended up there. She offers a lengthy description of the patients at the asylum and comments about their language use as well. She remembers that "Some [the patients] harangued the wall; some apostrophized the air; some hissed at the air; some lolled their tongues out at the air; some struck the air; some made motions, as if wrestling the air, and fell out of the arms of the air, panting from the invisible hug" (121). I mention this passage because it offers a glimpse into the "language" of madness and because it does hold a place within the semiotic.

Wendy Stallord Flory's "Melville and Isabel," offers a brief commentary on Isabel's "nonverbal creative genius" and her stay at the asylum (129). Flory acknowledges "the difficulty of articulating unconscious intimations and the relationship between creative genius and insanity—or perceived insanity" (129). However, an analysis of Kristeva's passage on the chora and madness found in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), supports my argument that Isabel is not just a bearer of "nonverbal creative genius" (Flory 129), but more specifically, she is a bearer of the semiotic as it is derived from the chora. Kristeva explains that "When the signifying process strives to correspond exactly to the logic of this mobile and heterogeneous *chora*, it ultimately forecloses the thetic. But in doing so, heterogeneity itself is lost; spread out in its place is the fantasy of identification with the female body (the mother's body), or even the mutism of the paralyzed schizophrenic" (182). Kristeva suggests that when a subject attempts to "correspond exactly" (182) to the chora, a breakdown in symbolic language occurs and the subject becomes insensible or mute. Some of the patients at the asylum Isabel lives in demonstrate the dangers of attempting to live within the chora and abandon symbolic language altogether.

While Isabel's stay in the asylum is never fully explained, I think her association with it raises the question of how close she might have come to becoming one of those very same patients who failed to infuse the semiotic into symbolic language. We soon discover when Isabel is taken from the asylum and moves into yet another home that she does indeed long for a return to the mother's chora or womb. Referring to the infant that belongs to the family she is staying with, she exclaims, "Oh, how I envied it, lying in its happy mother's breast, and drawing life and gladness, and all its perpetual smilingness

from that white and smiling breast. That infant saved me; but still gave me vague desirings" (122). This "white and smiling breast" (122) illustrates Kristeva's theory of the "good breast." In *Powers of Horror* she claims "There is language instead of the good breast. Discourse is being substituted for maternal care, and with it a fatherhood belonging more to the realm of the ideal than of the superego" (45). Isabel longs to return to the womb or the infant suckling at the mother's breast. Instead of symbolic language, Isabel longs to return to the language of the mother's body – the chora. She pines to Pierre, "the lips that do now speak to thee, never touched a woman's breast; I seem not of woman born" (114). Having never known her mother, Isabel envies the symbiotic relationship of mother/infant/daughter she has missed out on.

Isabel finds a surrogate mother in the music of her guitar. She describes the first time she ever played the instrument: "Then I murmured; sung and murmured to it; very lowly, very softly; I could hardly hear myself. And I changed the modulations of my singings and my murmurings; and still sung and murmured, lowly, softly, --more and more; and presently I heard a sudden sound: sweet and low beyond all telling was the sweet and sudden sound" (125). Within the context of nineteenth-century discourse, this passage brings to mind the Romantic trope of the Aeolian harp. Susan Bernstein, in "On Music Framed," offers a concise history of the meaning behind the Aeolian harp. She cites M.H. Abrams' essay, "The Correspondent Breeze," where Abrams claims that "The wind harp has become a persistent romantic analogue of the poetic mind, the figurative mediator between outer motion and inner emotion" (74). Abrams adds that the harp explains how "mind and imagination respond to the wind" (74). Bernstein also includes Curt Sachs ideas regarding the Aeolian harp which are taken from his book, *The History*

of Musical Instruments. Sachs notes, "The supernatural, ghostly sound of these chords, changing, increasing and fading away with the wind without any player or any artificial contrivance, was wholly romantic" (74). Isabel's murmurings to the guitar and its subsequent response mimic that of the Romantic trope of the Aeolian harp.

Yet, according to Kristevan discourse, this passage also demonstrates a conversation between Isabel and her semiotic-like language and that of the guitar. Ironically, Kristeva compares the expression of semiotic language to the strings of a guitar. She claims, "all the strings on this prodigious instrument that language is are played together and simultaneously; no process is impeded, repressed, or put aside to give free reign to another" (*DL* 174). I would like to suggest that for Isabel, the guitar functions as a metaphor for the mother's chora. The reason I am suggesting this is because later in the text, we learn that the word "Isabel" is inscribed *inside* the guitar and that it initially belonged to Isabel's mother whose very name was the same as her daughter's name. Isabel's communion with the guitar is her effort to reconnect with that which is always already lost – the mother. Isabel reveals that "The secret name in the guitar thrills me…so secret, wholly hidden, yet constantly carried about in it; unseen, unsuspected, always vibrating to the hidden heart-strings—broken heart-strings; oh my mother, my mother, my mother!" (149). Like the inscription of Isabel's mother's name found in the guitar, Isabel as well carries a "piece" of her mother with her. Isabel, like Pierre, still longs for the mother's chora—for the symbiosis of mother and infant. In a truly supernatural scene, Isabel places the guitar on a bench, kneels before it and "breathed the word *mother*, *mother*, *mother*! (149). Immediately after this summons, "suddenly, to the lowest and least audible note of all, the magical untouched guitar

responded with a quick spark of melody" (149). This rather supernatural scene seems to be an attempt to capture that locale where mother and child are capable of communicating without even speaking – the locale of the chora.

Isabel's fascination with the chora and her own semiotic language are precisely what draws Pierre to her. And, in Isabel, he finds a surrogate mother/lover. After abjecting his own mother, Pierre tries to recapture the intimate symbiotic relationship of mother and infant through his relationship with Isabel. Kristeva comments rather extensively on man (and woman's) attempt to reconnect with the mother via a romantic coupling. In *Tales of Love* (1987), Kristeva includes a section entitled "Romeo and Juliet: Love-Hatred in the Couple." This section explains man's attempts to find a mother/lover (my term) through the example of Romeo and Juliet. She begins by referencing the "law" that this couple break. This law "produces a coherent set, a mainstay of reproduction, of production, or simply of the social contract" (209). She adds that "Breaking the law is the initial condition of amatory exhalation: even though the Capulets and Montagues hate one another, we are going to love each other" (211). In short, Romeo and Juliet, like Pierre and Isabel, live outside of the law. To begin, Isabel's social standing and class cannot compare to that of Lucy Tartan (the young wide-eyed innocent girl Pierre's mother wishes for him to marry). And, unbeknownst to his mother, Isabel is Pierre's half-sister by his father. On multiple levels, this ill-fated couple violates the "law" or "social contract" Kristeva speaks of (*TL* 209). As a matter of fact, as previously mentioned, Mary Glendinning refers to her son as "Romeo" and warns him that he will be married "not to a Capulet, but to one of our own Montagues" (18). Ironically, Pierre does "marry" a Capulet in that Isabel's social standing does not live up

to that of the Glendinning family; yet, in a very literal sense, Isabel *is* a Montague—she is of the same flesh and blood (at least on the father's side) as Pierre. The threat of incest, however, further places Isabel and Pierre's relationship outside of the law.

To my knowledge, Kristeva never addresses incest among *siblings* even though she does discuss a metaphorical incest that takes place when a person (male or female) attempts to recover the *mother* through a romantic relationship. In *Desire in Language* (1980), Kristeva claims that "The son's incest is a meeting with the other, the first other, the mother" (191). Pierre seeks the "perverse mother" in Isabel. She is literally of the same father and metaphorically, she represents the abject mother. I say abject because although Pierre idealizes Isabel's use of semiotic language and associates her with the chora, he can never get past the initial abjection of his own mother. No matter how hard he tries, he will never be able to fully recreate that symbiotic relationship with his mother before his abjection of her. Isabel, as a woman and an "other," is always already abject. While Pierre is attracted to Isabel for the bulk of the novel, he also makes references to moments when he is frightened of her and the effect she has on him. Even before Pierre ever officially met Isabel, he had visions of her that revealed his own anxiety. At one point earlier in the novel, he pleads, "God keep me from thee, thou other shape of far profounder gloom! I shudder at thee! The face!—the face!...Mysterious girl! Who art thou? by what right snatchest thou thus my deepest thoughts? Take thy thin fingers from me;--I am affianced, and not to thee" (41). Pierre physically shudders or recoils from his vision of Isabel. While he is mysteriously drawn to her, he is also repelled at the same time.

Unable to resist Isabel, he visits her again at the farmhouse and asks her to "marry" him (in name only). At the farmhouse, he finds her in the "dairy-wing, occupied in vertically arranging numerous glittering shield-like milk-pans on a long shelf, where they might purifyingly meet the sun" (188). Again, milk clearly plays a role in relation to the mother. The only other references to milk in *Pierre* occur when the young boy is speaking to his mother at the breakfast table scene. During the farmhouse scene, Isabel senses that Pierre has made a drastic decision and fears that he has revealed their relationship to his mother. She asks Pierre, "tell me, do I blast where I look? is my face Gorgon's?" (189). Pierre replies, "Nay, sweet Isabel; but it hath a more sovereign power; that turned to stone; thine might turn white marble into mother's milk" (189). This reference to Isabel's face having the ability to turn "white marble into mother's milk" (189), directly links her to the maternal. Pierre longs for Isabel like a child longs to be nourished by the maternal breast. Again, Kristeva suggests, "There is language instead of the good breast…" (*PH* 45). In a striking visual, Isabel, the bearer of semiotic language actually becomes the "good breast" Kristeva speaks of in *Powers of Horror*.

During this same scene, Isabel and Pierre most likely consummate their "marriage." We are told that "Over the face of Pierre there shot a terrible self-revelation; he imprinted repeated burning kisses upon her; pressed hard her hand; would not let go her sweet and awful passiveness. Then they changed; they coiled together, and entangledly stood mute" (192). The passage ends here, never fully revealing the extent of the young couple's passion. Yet, within the context of nineteenth-century discourse, this passage could definitely be read as the prelude to sexual intercourse.[23] Kristeva claims

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[23] For support of this theory see F.O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. New York: Oxford UP, 1970. 482. See also Richard Chase's *Herman*

that "The discovery of sexual pleasure…destabilizes, but it also leads, contrapuntally, to a need for (maternal?) security and nostalgia for recreating the lost paradise of the first dyad [that of mother and infant]" (*TL* 225). The effort to become one with the lover is an attempt to recreate the union between mother and child. The image of Pierre and Isabel being "coiled together" (192) illustrates this physical union and the fact that they "entangledly stood mute" (192) suggests that there is no need for words/language because the couple communicate symbiotically.

Despite the apparent refuge Isabel provides for Pierre, he continues to feel guilt over disobeying his mother's wishes for him to marry Lucy. As he travels to the city he asks himself, "Can then my conduct be right? Lo! by my conduct I seem threatened by the possibility of a sin anomalous and accursed, so anomalous, it may well be the one for which Scripture says, there is never any forgiveness. Corpses behind me, and the last sin before, how then can my conduct be right?" (206). Here, Pierre makes a rather direct reference to the incestuous relationship between himself and Isabel. While Pierre is unconscious of his own attempt to make Isabel a mother/lover, which in Kristevan terms is considered a form of metaphorical incest, he is now fully aware of the literal incest between his sister and himself. He references "Corpses," which in Kristevan terms serve as the ultimate signifier of the abject (*PH* 3), to convey the self-loathing and destruction he feels he has inflicted on others as well as himself.

This self-loathing and abjection Pierre experiences reaches its greatest height at the end of the novel when he and Isabel commit suicide. Distraught over disobeying and separating from his own mother, he seeks solace in Isabel only to ultimately realize that

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Melville: A Critical Study. New York: Oxford UP, 1949. 109. Finally, see Charles Feidelson, Jr.'s *Symbolism and American Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970. 197.

their relationship can never fully compare to that paradisiacal union between mother and infant. In an intricate linguistic turn, Pierre calls his mother "sister," and his sister "wife," who is metaphorically a failed surrogate mother – the mother he lost through the process of abjection.

Pierre indicates his frustration with Isabel and her inability to be the mother he so desperately seeks. In the final chapter of the novel, when Pierre is in jail for having murdered Glen (a childhood friend and newly-wedded husband to Lucy), and wounded Frederick (Lucy's brother), he curses Isabel. In another scene reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet*, as the two women enter the jail cell Lucy faints, but Pierre thinks she has died. He turns to Isabel and exclaims, "'Girl! wife or sister, saint or fiend!' –seizing Isabel in his grasp—'in thy breasts, life for infants lodgeth not, but death-milk for thee and me!—The drug!' and tearing her bosom loose, he seized the secret vial nesting there" (360). Pierre curses Isabel, who has become yet another abject mother. Instead of the nourishing milk that flows from the "good breast," Isabel's milk is now deemed "death-milk" (360). He blames Isabel for Lucy's apparent death, but he also blames her for ruining his life. She is *not* the mother he so desperately seeks, but instead of recognizing his own folly in trying to recapture the mother-child dyad that is now irretrievable, he abjects Isabel. She morphs from being a nurturing semiotic mother figure to a death-wielding abject mother. Unable to cope with the loss of his mother, Pierre commits the desperate act of suicide.

Kristeva explains the role of suicide in the quest for the abject mother in *Desire in Language*:

> It is, indeed the ultimate gesture, if one exists, and which is prevented only by the jouissance of regaining control—the recovery of the 'I,' this 'springing of the subject' against (as one says 'leaning against') her, the other, as well as against the others, the other in itself; against the symbolic, structuring, regimenting, protective, historicizing *thesis*—to be shifted, traversed, exceeded, made negative and be brought to jouissance. (206)

My interpretation of this rather complex passage is that suicide is indeed "the ultimate gesture" which is "prevented" or kept at bay by a person's ability to abject the mother and maintain an autonomous identity. The subject, or "I," defines itself through symbolic language in opposition to others. However, when a person commits suicide he/she is defying and negating the symbolic because the "I" is obliterated. Pierre's decision to take his own life is the "ultimate gesture," one made after failed attempts to cope with the loss of the mother and his own faltering sense of identity; it is the "ultimate gesture" because it relinquishes the "I" back to the womb or in this case, tomb of the mother.

Similar to the fate of Melville's leading protagonists in *Mardi* and *Moby- Dick*, Pierre's quest to reclaim the abject mother results in death. The fate of these characters suggests that the individual's relationship to the abject mother may never be resolved. She is a part of us at birth (literally) and remains a part of us in death as well

(metaphorically). *Pierre* appears to be a radical departure from Melville's earlier works. Yet, in actuality, I see it as a text that culminates some of his earlier, rudimentary ideas about women and the abject into a work that fully divulges the continuous threat of the abject mother. From Melville's initial forays into the abject in his earlier travel narratives, to his more overt metaphorical representations of the abject in *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*, the text of *Pierre* literally embodies the abject. Mary Glendinning functions as an exaggerated caricature of the abject mother while Isabel seems to embody the chora and speaks in a language of the semiotic. While Pierre is initially drawn to Isabel and attempts to recreate a symbiotic relationship that mirrors that of mother and infant, he quickly realizes that the relationship he seeks is irretrievable. In a fit of rage and frustration, he turns on Isabel and depicts her as yet another abject (m)other figure. Desperate, Pierre tries to escape the abject mother in death. *Pierre* is so intriguing and outrageous precisely because it chronicles a young man's continuous and at times violent struggle to reconcile himself with his mother. His story, and ultimately his fate, horrifies readers because it suggests that there is no real escape from the abject mother each of us harbors within.

CONCLUSION

Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject as expressed in *Powers of Horror* provides us with a framework through which we might better understand Melville's depiction of and relationship to the women in his texts. During Melville's literary career, he struggled to define what the women of his texts and possibly the women of his own life meant to him. Although I have tried to resist a close biographical reading of Melville's earlier works, his depictions of women and how they affect the male protagonists' sense of identity might offer some insight into the author's perception(s) of women. I have suggested that throughout Melville's works (to varying degrees) he struggles to define his relationship to the abject mother. In his earlier works, specifically *Typee* and *Mardi*, Melville engages with the abject through the employment of female and native characters that vacillate between idealized versions of the chora and metaphorical representations of the abject mother. *Moby-Dick* provides further examples of the abject but differs from Melville's earlier works in that the lead character of Ishmael begins to embrace the abject as it is manifested by the native character of Queequeg. However, ultimately, in *Pierre*, perhaps Melville's most explicit representation of man trying to reconcile with the abject mother, the male protagonist commits suicide and surrenders his identity and life to the abject mother. It seems that Melville is suggesting what Kristeva's theory of the abject confirms—there is no escape from the abject because it is always already a part of us. It is always something or someone we must guard against in order to maintain a sense of autonomous identity. A tenuous balance must be found between one's own sense of self and that portion of himself that is forever tied to the mother.

Melville's journey into the abject begins in *Typee*. In his first novel the abject is expressed in more rudimentary forms compared to his later works. In *Typee* Melville uses native characters (for the most part) as emblems of the abject. Their bodies are wrapped in tattoos and they are perceived to be cannibals and savages. The character of Kory-Kory, who is often described in animalistic terms, functions as a manifestation of the abject. Contrary, to Kory-Kory, the character of Fayaway embodies the chora. She speaks in semiotic language and is described in poetical terms of her connection to nature. Melville's use of the landscape and its ability to convey the fascination yet also the fear that accompanies the abject is also established in this novel.

While *Mardi* is a departure from Melville's earlier adventure novels, the theme of the abject persists and is further developed in this romance. This text marks the emergence of a trope Melville will use frequently in later works—that of the "light" and "dark" ladies. I have suggested that the contrast between these two types of ladies (Yillah and Hautia respectively) is meant to designate the idealized chora (before man's separation from the mother) and the abject mother (which emerges once the individual separates from the mother and crafts his own identity). The character of Yillah, the child of nature held captive and rescued by the male protagonist, Taji, is an embodiment of the chora. Her association with a land that is paradisiacal and ripe with womb imagery supports her connection to the chora. And, her use of semiotic language further aligns her with it as well. Meanwhile, the figure of Queen Hautia, the evil seductress who lures Taji practically to his death, is a manifestation of the abject mother. Hautia, like the abject mother, threatens to swallow Taji's identity and return him to the vortex or watery womb. Melville's use of the landscape mirrors his depictions of both of these women.

Yillah's homeland is described in fairy-tale terms and is full of womb imagery (as previously stated) while Hautia's bower is beautiful but deceitful and contradictory. This novel ends with Taji futilely searching for Yillah, the idealized version of the chora.

In *Moby-Dick* Melville details a most audacious encounter between the male protagonist and the abject that results in a temporary embrace of the abject. The character of Queequeg is similar to Melville's earlier abject native characters. While Ishmael initially recoils from Queequeg in the infamous bridegroom scene, he ultimately embraces the abject and sleeps with the native. Yet, after this pivotal scene the reader isn't given much information about the men's relationship until we learn that Queequeg has died. Although an embrace of the abject is depicted in *Moby-Dick*, between two men mind you, even that is short-lived. Yet, in a surprising final note, it is Queequeg's casket that emerges from the watery womb of the sea at the end of the novel that saves Ishmael's life. This casket serves as a reminder of everyone's eventual return to the abject mother in death – the obliteration of selfhood.

In contrast to Ishmael's temporary embrace of the abject, Ahab not only rejects the abject but seeks to kill it. For Ahab, the abject is manifested in the form of the great whale Moby Dick. On a literal level, the whale has made Ahab's physical body abject; and, on a metaphorical level, the whale (like the abject mother) threatens to fragment the captain's sense of autonomous identity. Physically fragmented, Ahab tries to "dismember my dismemberer" (*MD*183). He seeks to kill that which threatens his life, his masculinity, his identity. He loses the battle with the great whale because he cannot kill it – he cannot rid himself of the presence of the abject mother that haunts him and threatens his identity.

The most overt and perhaps most convincing portrayal of the relationship between an individual and the abject mother occurs in *Pierre*. After embedding rudimentary references to the abject in his earlier works, Melville's seventh novel serves as the culmination of his previous efforts to establish man's relation to the abject mother. The character of Mary Glendinning, an exaggerated caricature of the abject mother, threatens to swallow Pierre's fledgling autonomous identity. The novel captures a young man's attempt to separate literally and figuratively from the mother. By rejecting his mother's choice of mate for him, acknowledging his half-sister and moving away from home, Pierre struggles to exist outside of his mother's presence. Yet, as Kristeva show in *Tales of Love*, despite our insistence to escape the abject mother, we still long to recreate the symbiotic relationship we once shared with the mother before our abjection of her. It is through the character of Isabel, the semiotic bearer of the chora, that Pierre tries to recreate the symbiosis of mother and infant. The fact that Pierre commits suicide in the final pages of the novel suggests that the riddle of the abject mother can never be fully solved or resolved. If one can't attempt to sustain an autonomous identity while simultaneously acknowledging his tenuous relation to the abject mother, life becomes unbearable. In an effort to escape the tension of being separate from yet still a part of the abject mother, Pierre kills himself. Ironically, as previously noted, Kristeva views suicide as the "ultimate gesture" when man relinquishes his identity and obliterates his selfhood. He rejoins the abject mother in a deathly embrace.

After tracing Melville's depictions of the abject and man's precarious relation to it, I think it's safe to say that one's relation to the abject mother is never fully resolved – except maybe in death. And, with that said, man's identity is never secure. This tension

between wanting to be an individual and wanting to be a part of the mother and experience an intimacy and language beyond/before words is something each individual must cope with. Yet, it is the poet, the "deject," the "stray" (*PH* 8) who seeks to reclaim the language of the mother – the semiotic.

Perhaps most interestingly, Melville seems to espouse (at times) a celebration of the semiotic through language. The sheer number of characters throughout Melville's earlier works that speak in the semiotic support this idea. Characters such as Fayaway in *Typee*, Yillah in *Mardi*, Ahab (at times) in *Moby-Dick*, and Isabel in *Pierre* speak from the chora and entrance the leading protagonist of each novel. The character of Yoomy (who ironically is the poet in *Mardi*), actually crafts a defense of the semiotic during an argument with King Media. Yoomy explains, "My lord, my lord!...The air that [sic] breaths my music from me is a mountain air! Purer than others am I; for though not a woman, I feel in me a woman's soul!" (438). This reference to a "woman's soul" being the reason for Yoomy's propensity for poetic language echoes Kristeva's theory of the semiotic issuing from the chora.

Melville's propensity for semiotic language was not lost on Kristeva. In *Desire In Language* she briefly references *Moby-Dick* as a prime example of what she terms a "polylogue". She defines a polylogue as a text that "emphasizes music above all and, through it, the mute matter of language…The polylogue destroys any symbolic 'thesis' that it preserves by pelting it with a music that revives the deafened, if not ruptured eardrum of socialized, educated, phrasemongering man…" (180-81). The polylogue is a text that allows the semiotic to erupt into the symbolic and disturb the 'thesis' or fixed meaning through music. Kristeva actually cites *Moby-Dick* as an example of a polylogue

and explains that this text is "taking you toward the dissolution of symbolic linking, toward the dissolution of rhythm after that of the sentence, toward empty and mute instinctual drive, toward the clashes of matter" (178). Although Kristeva's mention of *Moby-Dick* is brief, what she says about it is quite revealing. From her perspective, *Moby-Dick* serves as a viable example of the semiotic—that language that seeks to convey the energies and drives that reside in the chora.

Upon reading Melville's earlier works in succession, the semiotic becomes more pronounced with each novel. Starting with *Mardi*, Melville made a conscious decision to abandon the constraints of the adventure novel and try his hand at romances. This interest in the romance allowed him more freedom both to delve into the unconscious and to play with language and in doing so, his language became more poetic and semiotic. As previously mentioned in chapter two, Melville reveals his longing to write something original in a letter he wrote to John Murray dated 25 March 1848. He writes, "I have long thought that Polynesia furnished a great deal of rich poetical material that has never been employed hitherto in works of fancy; and which to bring out suitably, required only that play of freedom & invention accorded only to the Romancer & poet…" (*Correspondence*, 106). He decides to explore this "play of freedom & invention" in *Mardi*. And, as a result, his writing becomes more semiotic and his content becomes more attuned to issues of the chora and the abject.

Kristeva examines the writer's role in conveying the abject in *Powers of Horror*. She suggests, "The writer, fascinated by the abject, imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it, and as a consequence perverts language—style and content" (16). This "perversion" is the perversion of symbolic language. The semiotic seeps through

the text just as the abject itself is brought to the surface of the text. She adds "Writing them [texts that explore the abject] implies an ability to imagine the abject, that is, to see oneself in its place and to thrust it aside only by means of the displacements of verbal play. It is only after his death, eventually, that the writer of abjection will escape his condition of waste, reject, abject" (16). Here, Kristeva acknowledges the effect of writing about the abject on the author. It is through language that the abject is confronted yet kept at arm's length.

Melville's reflections upon the abject as expressed through his writing reveal a glimpse into man's struggle to reconcile his own identity with that of the great abject mother – the ultimate source of all that is abject. While I have tried to refrain from a biographical reading of Melville's works, I think it would be naïve not to suggest that the body of his work discussed here must reflect, at least to some extent, his relationship to not only the abject but women as well. The women of his texts are similar in that they are frequently presented as dichotomies to one another. These women who seem to embody either the chora or the abject mother are one and the same. This idea is referenced in *Mardi* when Taji panics and realizes, "Nevertheless, in some mysterious way seemed Hautia and Yillah connected. But Yillah was all beauty, and innocence; my crown of felicity; my heaven below;--and Hautia, my whole heart abhorred. Yillah I sought; Hautia sought me" (643). Man, but even more specifically the poet, pursues the chora, the semiotic, while the abject mother that has been thrust aside seeks him. Yet, as Taji notices, these two women, these two presences are one and man must learn to accept this ambiguity and live within it.

Melville's engagement with the abject does not end with *Pierre*. His relationship to the abject should be further explored in regards to some of his later, short fiction, most possibly, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," *Clarel*, *Billy Budd*, etc. "The Tartarus of Maids," published three years after *Pierre*, in 1855, especially deserves attention when considering the abject in Melville's writing. This short story, so often noted for its rich sexual symbolism and painful childbirth imagery, begs for a Kristevan analysis of the abject mother and her threatening body. From the landscape coded with sexual imagery to the animal-like machine that "births" foolscap, the abject female body threatens the male protagonist. This short story tackles the messy process of childbirth, the transgression of boundaries, the moment when the "fetus" is no longer literally *a part* of the mother, but exists *apart* from her and becomes its own entity. It grows from something "not unlike the albuminous part of an egg, soft-boiled" ("Tartarus of Maids 2665) to something that is pressed out "inch by inch; all the time the main sheet growing more and more to final firmness" (2666) that is ultimately snipped "as of some cord being snapped" and falls from the great mother-machine "still moist and warm" (2666). The narrator recoils from the childbirth imagery because it reminds him of that which he has had to ab-ject in order to maintain his own autonomous sense of identity. Some criticism suggests that the childbirth imagery in "The Tartarus of Maids" was influenced by Elizabeth Shaw's frequent and complicated pregnancies (footnote 1, page 2651). This biographical examination of the text draws convincing parallels between Melville's depiction of women in his text and the women in his life, specifically his wife.

I think it would be worthwhile to include a biographical reading of more of Melville's works and examine how his relationships to the actual women in his life might

contribute to his perception and depiction of the abject in his writings. I would like to see more criticism that examines the ways in which Melville feminizes the women, natives and landscape in his works. Contrary to popular belief, there is an abundant presence of women, the abject and the semiotic in his writings. Most importantly, instead of commenting on the lack of female characters in his works and what this means or doesn't mean, I hope more attention will be paid to the women that do populate his texts.

In addition to examining the role of women in Melville's texts, more study is needed to determine the roles that various women played in the author's own life. Specifically, analyses that address *both* biographical criticism of the women in Melville's life and the fictional women in his texts might reveal a deeper understanding of the complexities women posed for the author as well as the man. While it might be easy to assume, based on his abject depictions of women, that Melville was a misogynist, and/or a sexually frustrated straight or gay male, I don't think the "answer" is quite that simple. Instead, these portrayals of women and their interactions with male protagonists suggest Melville's evolving relationship to the abject mother. The unconscious quest to embrace the abject mother lies at the heart of Melville's conflicting perceptions of himself and the women in his life. Perhaps the greatest story Melville tells is that of a man trying to maintain a sense of identity amidst the vortex of the great abject mother that threatens to subsume him.

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