"Toward the Western Sea":
Science, Culture, and Narrative in the American Pacific

By

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ABSTRACT

*"Toward the Western Sea": Science, Culture, and Narrative in the American Pacific*

Katharine A. Rodger

*"'Toward the Western Sea"* examines the rise and evolution of the literature of the American Pacific from 1840 through 1950. The particularities of the coastal environment and the communities that form along and within the Pacific Rim helped define a major western U.S. literary tradition, intermingling science, aesthetics, and social theory. These representations of human communities and environmental isolation continue to influence 20th- and 21st-century U.S. literature. I examine the work of five seminal writers who engage with contemporary scientific and cultural discourses to interpret the conditions of communal interdependence and social isolation as both human and environmental phenomena. Richard Henry Dana, Jr. viewed the Pacific and California as a frontier that held both degenerative and regenerative possibilities for individuals and the nation, and his narrative envisions the region as a site of personal and communal discovery. Herman Melville found potent metaphor in the insularity of island life for his critique of the isolating impact of capitalism on individuals and communities both in the Pacific and at home in the U.S., and the ultimate failure of democracy. The writing Jack London produced in and about the Pacific captures the ideological dialectic that he struggled with throughout much of his life—between the individual and the collective—and is elucidated especially in his consideration of disease and medical science in those texts. Robinson Jeffers's narrative poems of the 1920s are the foundation of his philosophy of Inhumanism, a holistic paradigm conceived of the poet's rhizomatic thinking about

astronomy and principles of California geology, set against the backdrop of the Pacific. Finally, John Steinbeck's ecological explorations of Monterey and the Gulf of California are identified as the foundation of mid 20th-century literary conceptions of the Pacific Rim region as a macroecosystem.

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## *Introduction:*
## *"It's Always Ourselves We Find in the Sea"*[1]

"We must resist the reductionism of the very concept of the Pacific: the Pacific is as much a realm of fragmentation as of unity, which therefore deprives any effort to describe it with the narrative unity that might lend a guise of comprehensiveness to an otherwise diffuse subject. Definitions of the Pacific are part of the very struggle over the Pacific they seek to describe."

--Arif Dirlik's "Pacific Contradictions" (3)

With the publication of his fourth novel, *The Pilot* (1824), James Fenimore Cooper is commonly acknowledged as inventing the American sea narrative, and more than a third of his thirty-two novels use the sea as principal setting and metaphoric canvas. In its ensuing short history prior to 1840, the sea narrative was composed almost wholly of Atlantic accounts. Along with Cooper's fictions, there were numerous marine diaries and journals of exploration, but the publication of Richard Henry Dana Jr.'s *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840) extended the literary genre and brought the first glimpse of the Pacific Ocean and California landscape to many American readers. The book was a hybrid, combining travelogue with cultural and anthropological observations of sailors, Pacific Islanders, and Californians, offering a layman's view of an ocean and region few Americans had seen, but about which they often fantasized. Dana's energized anecdotes, his mingled sense of wonder and doubt, captured Eastern readers and inspired subsequent generations to look westward at a seascape that was still mythic and exotic.

To examine how the Pacific Ocean and the Ring of Fire—the volcanic island arcs embracing it—were defined in the popular imagination, I consider major Pacific narratives by a handful of significant American writers since 1840. The evolving sense of

[1] E.E. Cummings, "maggie and milly and molly and may."

the dimensions of and emphases on the Pacific Ocean in 19th and 20th century American literature—and in the American imagination more broadly—was shaped by landmark scientific, anthropological, and historical research. Along with Dana, Herman Melville, Jack London, Robinson Jeffers, and John Steinbeck were influenced by and reflect this work in their narratives, making major contributions to American images of the Pacific. Fascinated by the seminal thinkers and intellectual tides of the time, each acted on his particular fascination with the sea and undertook Pacific journeys, writing from his impressions and discoveries. Among the most complex and powerful of these were the Pacific communities each writer encountered. From the cannibals on Nuka Hiva to the cannery workers in Monterey, we find a wide range of "native" populations represented in the works of these writers, all of them rich with metaphorical and literal significance. When we examine London's leper colony on Molokai and even Jeffers's isolated cliffs above Carmel, we see how each writer struggled to negotiate the dichotomous realities of community and autonomy in his own historical and literary moment. Doing so, collectively these writers extended the intellectual currents of their times, shaped American sea and travel narratives, and defined the unknown and exotic Pacific in a popular imagination that seemed unquenchable.

As our westernmost American border, the Pacific Ocean has always been distant and fascinating. Before the Panama Canal cut the distance from New York to San Francisco from 14,000 to 6,000 miles in 1914, few Americans had ready access. Those who made the arduous journey around Cape Horn—primarily sailors—found themselves in the midst of the largest of the earth's oceans, covering one third of the planet, and hosting approximately 25,000 islands, most formed either by volcanic extrusion or

coralline building (uplifting of coral reefs). The striking, unfamiliar, and sometimes dangerous landscapes that an American sailor encountered were often populated with indigenous people with exotic cultures and languages, at once both alluring and potentially perilous. What seemed to be a tropical paradise might harbor fever and disease, and the most sexually liberated society might also practice cannibalism—at least according to some of the tales and legends that made their way back to the United States. American cultural history is rife with such anecdotes and yarns about the Pacific Ocean, many of which predated the first formal, published sea narratives; quite simply, it has always drawn American eyes and imaginations westward.

Dana, Melville, London, Jeffers, and Steinbeck individually represent the shifts in unique, American, literary perspectives of the Pacific Ocean from the mid nineteenth through the mid twentieth centuries. Beginning with Dana's voyage around Cape Horn, we follow Melville to islands in the Marquesas and Galápagos, London in his Pacific adventures aboard the *Snark*, Jeffers as he stands on the continental precipice, and Steinbeck collecting in the tidepools. Individually, each author presents a distinct Pacific locale that has personal significance; collectively, these authors define a narrative of the evolving sense of the dimensions of and the emphases on the Pacific Ocean not only in literature, but also more broadly in prevalent intellectual and popular American attitudes.

For Richard Henry Dana, Jr., that evolution translated into a cultural narrative of exploration of a young, upper-class, educated New Englander with the Pacific, as he sailed before the mast in 1834-36 from Boston, around the Horn, to mid-California. Dana's vivid descriptions of his voyage, his impressions of Hawai'ians and South Pacific Islanders, and his first sighting of the wild California coastline and the majority

Californios created a sensation while feeding American fascination with the Pacific Ocean. He viewed the region—both sea- and landscape—as a frontier that held both degenerative and regenerative possibilities for individuals and the nation, and his narrative envisions the Pacific as a site of personal and communal discovery. Dana's account often reads like an imperialist's account of a newly colonized territory, and thus it represented the United States in the early nineteenth century—a still-emerging country expanding its boundaries westward.

Like Richard Henry Dana Jr., Herman Melville found his voice in going to sea, first to the Atlantic, and then in 1841 to the Pacific Ocean. *Typee*, *Omoo*, and "The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles" are among the earliest American narrative treatments of the Pacific Ocean and island groups, specifically the Marquesas and Galápagos. Both of these distinct archipelagos were well-known marine ports of call, but they were exotic to sailors and naturally became the object of artistic interest and the sort of conversations that brought nineteenth century travelers in multitudes. They were especially resonant for Melville, and I trace the trope of islands in his writing from their early literal manifestations in *Typee* to their more symbolic representations in later works like *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby*, positing that the writer found potent metaphor in the insularity of island life for his critique of the isolating impact of capitalism on individuals and communities both in the Pacific and at home in the U.S., and the ultimate failure of democracy.

Jack London, likewise, traveled extensively among various Pacific islands, and his representations follow in Melville's interdisciplinary wake—literary amalgams combining journalistic observations and narratives of the Hawai'ian Islands and the open

sea with a strong philosophical and cultural fascination. Always attuned to American popular opinion, London's Pacific writings represent the nation's somewhat paradoxical attitude toward the Pacific itself at the turn of the twentieth century: as both an untouched edenic paradise, as well as a frontier ready for transformation and profit. The novels, stories, and essays he wrote in and about the Pacific also capture the ideological dialectic that he struggled with throughout much of his life—between the individual and the collective. As a self-made success, proud of his physicality and virility, London embodied American individualism, though he became an advocate for socialism. His Pacific vision is marked by the tension between these two opposing, seemingly contradictory extremes—individual drive and collective weal—and some of the most lucid and provocative examples of his thinking about the nature of man and the American social body are evident in his Pacific writings, including *Martin Eden* and *The Cruise of the* Snark.

If Melville and London were both driven to explore the wide Pacific concerned—albeit differently—with representations of human communities in the Pacific Ocean, poet Robinson Jeffers stood firmly on the mid-Pacific California coast, writing eloquently of the pulse of tide on granite and the site as a tragic end-point for Manifest Destiny. He was troubled by the encroachment of the industrialized world on nature—and the stretch of the Pacific Ocean that was his backyard for more than three decades, in particular—and felt that human history must be situated within a more complex, biocentric, far-reaching view of the world and universe. Indeed, he turned his gaze away from all that was explicitly human-centered, concentrating instead on a new perspective, which he termed "Inhumanism," informed by both natural history and science, both of which he studied

intently throughout his life. I trace the emergence of Jeffers's Inhumanism in three narrative poems written in the 1920s—*Tamar*, *The Women at Point Sur*, and *Cawdor*—set "on this future-ridden coast," especially the ways he used contemporary geology, astronomy, and physiology to reconcile the relationship between humans and the natural world against the backdrop of the Pacific.

John Steinbeck shared Jeffers's keen interests in science and the Monterey Peninsula, but espoused a markedly different viewpoint about the Pacific Ocean in his own writing. By the time he and collaborator Edward F. Ricketts traveled to the Sea of Cortez in 1940, Steinbeck had adopted an biological view of the world—expressed in novels such as *The Grapes of Wrath*, *In Dubious Battle*, and *Of Mice and Men*—and was ready to extend the ecological models of interdependence he and Ricketts observed from the microcosmic arena of the tidepools to the macroscopic view of villages and the world as ecosystems. Their Sea of Cortez expedition was central to Steinbeck's thinking about ecology, and like Jeffers, London, and Melville before him, the Pacific became a literal and metaphorical site for his conceptualization of the world. The trip widened his gaze and he found even larger connections between the micro and macro, or in this case the Gulf and the Pacific Rim region and even the Pacific Ocean itself—and he ultimately realized that human communities were not *like* tide pools, but an integral part of them. Thus Steinbeck became the first American writer to envision the Pacific Rim from an ecological stance, he understood it not as a geopolitical or economic entity, but as a single macroecosystem.

The five writers in this study all undertook Pacific journeys and brought the issues and influences of their time to bear on how they experienced that ocean and culture,

helping define the Pacific Ocean and peoples in the popular American imagination. In this study I investigate how each writer conceptualizes his ideas about individuality and community through his experiences in and representations of the Pacific. From dystopic isolation to ecosystemic interdependence, a wide range of depictions of communal life in the Pacific seascape—or lack thereof—become metaphors for American society, and further unify the selected texts and writers in this study. What ultimately emerges is not, however, a monolithic or "comprehensive"—to use Arif Dirlik's phrase—portrait of the Pacific, for "the Pacific is as much a realm of fragmentation as of unity" (3). Yet here, assembled for the first time, are the seminal American writers, who together have shaped the foundational body of literature of the Pacific Ocean.

## *Chapter 1*
## *"The Region Far Beyond Our Sight"*
## *Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s Pacific Frontier*

"My design is, and it is this which has induced me to publish the book, to present the life of a common sailor at sea as it really is,—the light and the dark together."
--Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast,* 38

Richard Henry Dana, Jr. set out to capture the life of "a common sailor at sea as it really is," but accomplished much more in his narrative of two years before the mast that marks the formal commencement of American literature of the Pacific Ocean. A sensation among American (and eventually European) readers, his book brought the first glimpse of the Pacific Ocean and California landscape to the east coast—offering up Dana's blend of incisive and naïve observations of what was yet an unknown and mythic seascape in the American imagination. Prior to the publication of *Two Years Before the Mast* in 1840, most accounts of the Pacific and California were pieced together from rumors and tall-tales related by sailors returning from whaling and naval voyages. Dana brought Americans the first true cultural narrative of exploration, dramatizing the shipboard encounters of an upper-class, educated young New Englander with the Pacific and its peoples, from Tierra del Fuego to mid-California. The Pacific, and California especially, was an unsettled frontier that challenged the young man's ideology and sensibility as he encountered exotic and savage communities—at sea and on land. In his interactions with sailors and those he met ashore, Dana found evidence of the degenerative possibilities of the frontier—exploitation and miscegenation in particular—but also the potential for regeneration as he came into adulthood. Ultimately, the Pacific became a mirror through which he saw and subsequently reshaped his thinking about

himself and his country, and *Two Years Before the Mast* signaled the start of a fresh body of literary depictions of the Pacific by American writers who would do the same.

By his own account, Dana went to sea for two primary reasons: to cure his failing eyesight and to find adventure. Unlike many of the writers who followed in his wake, he was not initially drawn to the Pacific Ocean specifically, but nonetheless found himself irrecoverably affected by his experiences at sea and along the California coast. His literary depiction of the Pacific oscillates between unschooled realism and a predilection for the romantic, as it depicts the initiation of a young gentleman into an altogether foreign society of seamanship. Yet the book transfixed readers, for Dana did not seek scientific invention or philosophic respite in his travels, but instead sought to accurately represent what he saw and experienced in an altogether foreign land and seascape. The result was an accessible, engaging narrative that, for many, painted the most vivid picture to date of the far West and the sea beyond. He also conveyed his wonder, awe, excitement, and disgust for the diverse experiences he had, and readers reveled in the first-hand account that *Two Years* offered. Dana's Pacific, therefore, was not a new map but a mirror for personal discovery in which the "light and dark" of his own identity was revealed.

The time Dana spent on the California coast between San Diego and San Francisco—approximately one year collecting and curing cattle hides, called the "California banknote"—did more than just awaken a young man into adulthood, and *Two Years* eclipses classification as solely a *bildungsroman*. As he traveled up and down the coast, observing the major ports and the sparse populations of each, he became more than a sailor and an observer, but an unconscious fledgling colonial, and his experiences

illustrate the impact of the frontier on an impressionable colonial mind. Dana's repeated distinctions between California and "America," for example, reflect prevalent attitudes of many nineteenth century Americans toward the wild territory and peoples not yet part of the United States. As freshly observed as it is, *Two Years Before the Mast* often reads like a youthful imperialist's account of a colonized land, and as a writer, Dana features a number of rhetorical strategies that are often attributed to colonial representations of non-Western people and locales. Thus his narrative established him as an individual subject of privilege and power, able to observe and interact with the communities that remained separate from him. In many ways he represented the nation itself in the 1830s, as it pushed its boundaries further west and often profited from the exploitation of those peoples already there.

Yet Dana's encounters and relationships with individual Kanákas, Californians, Mexicans, and Pacific Islanders sometimes reveal his rejection of that colonial paradigm, as he often found redemptive respite in these friendships and experiences. He also became increasingly sympathetic to the dangers and abuse many sailors faced at the mercy of both environment and law, which led him to advocate later as a lawyer for workers' and seamen's rights—despite his novice beginnings he became regarded as an expert in maritime law. The Pacific, therefore, was a site of contradiction for Dana, who struggled to reconcile its "light and dark" possibilities and their effect on his own identity and, in turn, its relationship as an unsettled frontier to the still-evolving nation.

**Dana's Early Life and the Impetus to go to Sea**

"I was a noted wanderer; was frequently picked up at incredible distances from home," begins Dana, recounting his childhood in his "Autobiographical Sketch" (5). His urge to explore continued through his life, taking him around the world in his travels from his hometown of Boston. Born to Richard Henry and Ruth Charlotte Smith Dana in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1815, he was brought up in one of Boston's most influential families. By the 1820s, they were "still recognized as the first family of the town" (Philbrick, "Introduction" 9), despite financial difficulties resulting from Dana Sr.'s decision to shift from a flourishing law practice to pursue a career as a writer and critic. He was a co-founder of the influential *North American Review* and contributed essays to the journal until 1819, closing his law practice that same year. In 1822, when Dana, Jr. was six years old, his mother Ruth Dana died (likely of tuberculosis), leaving him and his brother and two sisters devastated. It was a loss that haunted Dana and likely played a role in his decision as a young man to leave Boston to seek adventures abroad.

As an adolescent Dana was educated primarily at boarding schools in New England, and it was at the one such school, at the age of seven, that he first witnessed corporal punishment. "The master was a thin, dark complexioned, dark haired & dark eyed man, with a very austere look, & by the side of the door stood a chest in which I knew was kept the long pine ferrule with which all punishment was inflicted" ("Autobiography" 6). Writing his memoir in 1842 at age twenty-seven, and after his experiences at sea, it is no surprise that such acts of physical discipline were recorded in vivid detail, as one year earlier Dana had opened his own Boston law practice and quickly became known for his expertise in workers'—especially seamen's—rights. At sea he witnessed severe floggings he considered unfair and, at times, illegal abuses of

power, and as a lawyer he dedicated himself to defending the common sailor. Yet Dana appreciated discipline as a child and an adult, and his memoir praises those teachers who could wield their authority without violence. In spring 1826 he became a pupil of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "a very pleasant instructor […] although he had not system or discipline enough to ensure regular & vigorous study," and who may have sparked Dana's support in the abolition of slavery—another fight he would pursue in his career ("Autobiographical Sketch" 13).

Entering Harvard in August 1831, Dana excelled in plane geometry, Latin, and Greek. In the summer after his sophomore year, he fell ill with measles during a visit with friends in Plymouth, and was left with markedly weakened eyesight. Unable to read, he fell into psychic unease, left Harvard, and hatched a plan to recover at sea. His decision brought him a sense of excitement and relief:

> [I] lingered about at home, a useless, pitied & dissatisfied creature. My father was at this time embarrassed in his pecuniary condition, & I felt that I was a burden upon him. This consideration added to the loss of all employment & any prospect of advancement in life, added to a strong love of adventure which I had always with difficulty repressed, upon making a long voyage, to relieve myself from ennui, to see new places & modes of life, & to effect if possible a cure of my eyes, which no medicine had helped & which but a change of my system seemed likely to ensure. […] I knew well that I should be [more] tempted to use my eyes as a passenger at sea, than when living on shore, & indeed, that a passenger's life would be insupportable without books. Partly from these considerations, but

> aided very much by the attractiveness of the romance & adventure of the thing, I determined to go before the mast, where I knew that the constant occupation would make reading unnecessary, & the hard work, plain diet & life in the open air, away from coal fires, dust and lamp-light, would do much to give rest to the nerves of the eye, & would, above all, make a gradual change in my whole physical system. ("Autobiographical Sketch" 26-7)

Dana first sought work aboard the *Japan* bound to India, but after befriending one of the ship's owners, J. Ingersol Bowditch, he was invited as Bowditch's companion and guest, not as a sailor. Dana refused—determined to gain experience before the mast—and soon procured a berth in the brig of the 180-ton *Pilgrim* bound for California as a foremasthand, or common sailor, among a crew of fifteen men. "I undertook this voyage because it was difficult to get any other that would be long enough, at that time, & because California was represented to be a very healthy coast, with a fine climate, & plenty of hard work for the sailors" (27). Signed on for a two-year journey to the Pacific and California frontier, Dana prepared for the voyage that would take him far outside of what he knew about himself and about life.

**To the Pacific and California**

As it was atypical for a man of Dana's social standing to aspire to sail as a common seaman and not as an officer, his decision to go to sea before the mast signified the take on of a literal and metaphorical risk. Indeed, it seemed "there was something suicidal about the decision to commit himself to a long voyage before the mast," as

Thomas Philbrick asserts, "it was, as Melville's Ishmael says of his own voyaging, a substitute for pistol and ball" ("Introduction" 11).

His turbulent initiation into life at sea began almost immediately on the *Pilgrim*. As they pulled away from Boston and the safety of the harbor, they sailed into a night time storm that triggered his first bout of sea sickness: "I was just beginning to feel strong symptoms of sea-sickness, and that listless and inactivity which accompany it […] In a few minutes the slide of the hatch was thrown back, which let down the noise and tumult of the deck still louder, the cry of 'All Hands, ahoy! tumble up here and take in sail,' saluted our ears, and the hatch was quickly shut again" (*Two Years* 45). Arriving on deck, he found the wind and rain had loosed the rigging, and within minutes he was ordered aloft to reef the topsails: "How I got along, I cannot now remember. I 'laid out' on the yards and held on with all my strength. I could not have been of much service, for I remember having been sick several times before I left the topsail yard" (45-6).

With this violent episode Dana began to face the difficulties and dangers familiar to the novice sailor, and immediately started to gauge his experiences: "I had read of the nautical experiences of others, but I felt as though there could be none worse than mine; for in addition to every other evil, I could not but remember that this was only the first night of a two years' voyage" (46). Dana uses the trope of the "two years' voyage" figuratively and repeatedly in *Two Years Before the Mast* to maintain his physical and intellectual separation from the crew. He frequently reminds himself and his readers that his identity as a sailor is temporary and that he will shortly return to Boston society. Such assertions construct the colonial gaze that enables Dana to straddle the line of identity—keeping part of himself firmly "at home" while the other freely explores the shipboard

community. His narrative is punctuated by moments of self-awareness in which he reflects, somewhat superficially perhaps, on this duality. Musing over the evening sky, for instance, he writes, "However much I was affected by the beauty of the sea, the bright stars, and the clouds driven swiftly over them, I could not but remember that I was separating myself from all the social and intellectual enjoyments of life. Yet, strange as it may seem, I did then and afterwards take pleasure in these reflections, hoping by them to prevent my becoming insensible to the value of what I was leaving" (44). Here and elsewhere, Dana shows he arrived on the *Pilgrim* mindful of the risks and rewards of his decision to leave the bourgeois restraints of Boston society.

The passage was full of firsts and initiations. As the physical challenges of life on the *Pilgrim* continued, he quickly learned from his fellow sailors. The cook advised pitching all "sweetmeats overboard, and turn[ing]-to upon good hearty salt beef and sea bread," which proved effective and within a short time, Dana was "a new being" (*Two Years* 48). He mastered the ship's routine, describing scrubbing and swabbing the decks, scraping rust from chains, and overhauling and repairing the rigging, all of which was punctuated by his scheduled four-hour watches. On October 1, 1834, as the *Pilgrim* crossed the equator, Dana expressed boyish satisfaction in having traveled so far, "I now, for the first time, felt at liberty, according to the old usage, to call myself a son of Neptune, and was very glad to be able to claim the title without the disagreeable initiation which so many have to go through" (59). The "King Neptune ritual" ceremony—initiating sailors crossing the equator for the first time—typically began with veterans waking or surprising their novice counterparts, bringing them on deck, and subjecting them to the "features of baptism, shaving, and the dispensations of paternal advice" in a

theatrically staged "King Neptune's court" (Creighton 535). That he avoided the ritual is significant, and it represented a symbolic delay in a rite of passage into manhood and the brotherhood of seamen, as if Dana were not yet ready to surrender himself to a new identity.[2]

About a month later, on November 4, he sighted Cape Horn, and within ten days, was in the Pacific Ocean heading north. The stormy passage around the Cape was notoriously precarious, and it represented a life-threatening induction into sailing life. In his first voyage in 1769, Captain James Cook described the area as "those seas so much dreaded for hard gales of wind […] that the doubling of Cape Horn is thought by some to be a mighty thing" (*Two Years* 32). Dana's experience rounding the Horn on the *Pilgrim* was fairly typical: after several "false starts," the ship successfully passed from the Atlantic into the Pacific. On Wednesday, November 5, 1834 Dana describes their harrowing first attempt:

> 'Here comes Cape Horn!' said the chief mate; and we hardly had time to haul down and clew up, before it was upon us. In a few moments, a heavier sea was raised than I had ever seen before, and as it was directly ahead, the little brig, which was no better than a bathing machine, plunged into it, and all the forward part of her was under water; the sea pouring in through the bow-ports and hawse-hole and over the knightheads, threatening to wash everything overboard. […] the brig was laboring and straining against the head sea, and the gale was growing worse and worse.

[2] Dana's extant writings give no indication that the Neptune ritual took place aboard the *Pilgrim* at all. Creighton's research found that approximately one third of voyage records she obtained spanning 1830-70 mention the ritual, suggesting perhaps that it was not a mandatory initiation among sailors (534).

> At the same time sleet and hail were driving with all fury against us. (66-7)

Eight days later, they were still trying to complete the "doubling," as the passage around the Cape was often called, and Dana notes that a physical and metaphorical numbness had set in upon the crew: "We had now got hardened to Cape weather, the vessel was under reduced sail, and everything secured on deck and below, so that we had little to do but to steer and to stand watch. Our clothes were all wet through, and the only change was from wet to more wet" (71).

Despite the detail he devotes to describing the long and terrible days rounding the Cape, when they finally cross into the Pacific, Dana's first comments about this new seascape are surprisingly abbreviated. On Friday, November 14 he writes, "We were now well to the westward of the Cape, and were changing our course to the northward as much as we dared since the strong southwest winds, which prevailed then, carried us in towards Patagonia" (73). Successfully rounding Cape Horn marked a clear rite of passage, but it took the death of one of his shipmates to finally induct him fully into adult sailing life.

In his entry for Monday, November 19—the first time he references being in the Pacific Ocean—Dana describes the tragic death of George Ballmer, a young English sailor, who fell overboard from the heights of the ship's top-mast-head. The cry of "man overboard," brought every hand on deck, and he recalls that "it was not until out upon the wide Pacific, in our little boat, that I knew whom we had lost" (76). Despite their efforts to rescue Ballmer in small skiffs, the young man was never found. The entry triggers reflective thoughts on the differences between death on shore and at sea, and the power of

the latter to haunt survivors long after: "When a man falls overboard at sea and is lost, there is a suddenness in the event, and a difficulty in realizing it, which give to it an air of awful mystery" (77).

That Dana's initial association of the Pacific Ocean with death is significant in several ways. First, it evidences his awareness of the sheer physical force of the sea, a marked shift from a naïve view of nature as majestically beautiful, to see it instead as an immediate threat to life. In an early meditative passage in *Two Years* in which Dana comments on the sea prior to Ballmer's death, his insights foreshadow the dangers to come:

> I stood in the waist on the weather side, watching the gradual breaking of the day, and the first streaks of the early light. Much has been said of the sun-rise at sea […] There is something in the first grey streaks stretching along the eastern horizon and throwing an indistinct light upon the face of the deep, which combines the boundlessness and unknown depth of the sea round you, and gives one a feeling of loneliness, of dread, and of melancholy foreboding, which nothing else in nature can give. (47)

These early comments were likely inserted for literary tension and form, and as much of the original journal and manuscript material Dana kept during his trip were subsequently lost, scholars cannot document which events and meditations were actually recorded during his voyage or were added later for publication.[3]

[3] Upon disembarking the *Alert* in Boston, Dana's cousin, Francis Dana, failed to retrieve the trunk that contained Dana's extensive journal and all of his memorabilia from the trip—these items were never recovered.

The death of George Ballmer also represents a symbolic death and the shedding of Dana's former self. Immediately after reporting the event, he offers a philosophical conclusion: "Yet a sailor's life is at best but a mixture of a little good with much evil, and a little pleasure with much pain. The beautiful is linked with the revolting, the sublime with the common-place, and the solemn with the ludicrous" (78). Ballmer's loss delivers the dichotomous nature of sailing life first-hand, and he echoes his early assertion that it combines "the light and the dark together," but now with a newly won sense of the personal darkness. The realization took Dana beyond the life he left behind in east coast society, transforming him from a Brahmin voyager to a young colonial adventurer eager to plumb the depths of an altogether foreign frontier.

Yet he was ambivalent about the degree to which he could immerse himself in his new career. Dana's narrative is punctuated with anxiety, evident usually when a setback or difficult experience has occurred. On arriving in California to collect and process cattle hides, for instance, he learns that the length of their voyage would extend considerably beyond the two-year tenure for which he had planned:

> Here we were, in a little vessel, with a small crew, on a half-civilized coast, at the ends of the earth, and with a prospect of remaining an indefinite period, two or three years, at most. […] This was bad enough for them; but still worse was it for me, who did not mean to be a sailor for life; having intended only to be gone eighteen months or two years. Three or four years would make me a sailor in every respect, mind and habits, as well as body—*nolens volens*.[4] (141-43)

[4] Latin, "Whether willing or unwilling."

Dana is uneasy at the prospect of being trapped in this frontier, afraid of a degeneration of self that may irrecoverably alter him. Yet for many of the early months aboard the *Pilgrim*, he relished his newfound identity, as evident in the increasingly confident tone in passages about ship-board matters. Arriving in Monterey Bay, for example, he expresses satisfaction in successfully "sending down a royal-yard," or taking down a light sail just above a top-gallant or large main sail—his "first act of what the sailors will allow to be seamanship." He continues,

> I had seen it done once or twice at sea, and an old sailor, whose favor I had taken some pains to gain, had taught me carefully everything which was necessary to be done, and in its proper order, and advised me to take the first opportunity when we were in port, and try it. […] Accordingly I was called upon, and went up, repeating the operations over in my mind, taking care to get everything in its order, for the slightest mistake spoils the whole. Fortunately, I got through without any word from the officer, and hear the "well done" of the make, when the yard reached the deck, with as much satisfaction as I ever felt at Cambridge on seeing a "*bene*" at the foot of a Latin exercise. (119)

Thus early on, we find a growing fissure between the "light and dark" of the frontier in which Dana struggled to define himself.

Yet in certain ways, Dana never fully abandoned his past, particularly when his formal education could serve him. Later during the evening of Ballmer's death, he found himself in the galley with the superstitious cook, who revealed a racist belief that Finns "are wizards, and especially have power over winds and storms" (80) and went on to

relate a tale about a sailor who created a strong headwind after arguing with his captain. Though the cook called in another sailor, John, who "was the oldest, and at the same time the most ignorant, man in the ship," to corroborate his story, Dana scoffed, attempting "to reason with him about it" (80). In frustration, the cook sent him away saying, "You think, 'cause you been to college, you know better than anybody. You know better than them as 'as seen it with their own eyes. You wait till you've been to sea as long as I have, and you'll know" (81). The tension between knowing and not knowing carries through the text as Dana grapples with wanting to fully embrace life as a sailor while struggling against the notion of submerging himself within that identity entirely and suffering a degeneration of self.

The events of Monday, November 19—George Ballmer's death, his burial at sea, and Dana's conversation with the cook—are all grouped together as Chapter VI in *Two Years Before the Mast*. Significantly, this is the first chapter dedicated to the events of a single day, and it is no coincidence that Dana's tone shifts remarkably from this point in the narrative forward, becoming ever more confident in his ability to survive emotionally, socially, and physically at sea. Though Ballmer and Dana were not close friends, Ballmer's death—the first experience Dana has with mortality at sea—brings him closer into the fold the ship's community. The series of initiations—crossing the equator, rounding Cape Horn, and face-to-face encounters with death and superstition at sea—together mark both a crisis of identity and a rite of passage for the novice sailor whose reflections reveal a closing of the gap between "self" and "other." Prior to these events, his descriptions of his fellow sailors maintained a distant objectivity in which Dana himself was clearly—and comfortably—assuming the role of the observer, the outsider.

But his full participation in the events and aftermath surrounding Ballmer's death brought him into the fold of the ship's community, reducing—at least for a time—the psychological and social distance between him and his shipmates.

A week later that distance closed further when the captain allowed Dana to move from the steerage—a small area between the ship's decks that was a make-shift living space—to the forecastle, where the rest of the sailors were quartered. The forecastle itself was a cramped area in the forward part of the ship, below the decks, but for Dana, it was where

> You heard sailors' talk, learn their ways, their peculiarities of feeling as well as speaking and acting; and moreover pick up a great deal of curious and useful information in seamanship, ship's customs, foreign countries, &c., from their long yarns and equally long disputes. No man can be a sailor, or know what sailors are, unless he has lived in the forecastle with them—turned in and out with them, eaten of their dish and drank of their cup. (95)

This move brought Dana into the physical space of the shipboard community and from this point on, he related fewer experiences of feeling outside of that microcosm. He had a place in the brotherhood of sailors, but his identity was manifestly dualistic—while he would never abandon his east coast social place and sensibility, he had been inducted into a new shipboard society and a Pacific setting governed by laws and cultures unlike any he knew previously. As Dana entered the Pacific frontier, the true subject of his voyage became the struggle between these opposing sides of his identity, a tension that he himself termed as "the light and the dark together."

**California and the Pacific Ocean**

Dana's first descriptive remarks about the Pacific Ocean proper are brief. In January 1835, he writes, "We continued sailing along in the beautiful temperate climate of the Pacific. The Pacific well deserves its name, for except in the southern part, at Cape Horn, and in the western parts, near the China and Indian oceans, it has few storms, and is never either extremely hot or cold" (*Two Years* 96-7). On January 14, one hundred and fifty-two days after leaving Boston, he stepped ashore in California at Santa Barbara. Dana arrived in the last days of Spanish California, when cattle hide and tallow were the principal business of the ranchos, and American and European economic interests in the region were evident in the presence of dozens of ships cruising California ports for this valuable cargo.

Santa Barbara was one of the busiest of these major ports, centrally located between the southernmost port of San Diego and the northernmost, San Francisco, in "Upper California," or what is present-day California. Though not the hub of cattle hide trade—the Pueblo de los Angelos was notoriously "the best place on the whole coast for hides" (148)—Santa Barbara boasted a town of about one hundred houses, a Presidio and a mission. "The town is certainly finely situated," Dana notes, "with a bay in front, and an amphitheatre of hills behind" (101). His initial reactions to the port and town were excited, and he was eager to go ashore: "I shall never forget the impression which our first landing on the beach of California made upon me. The Sun had just gone down; it was getting dusky; the damp night wind was beginning to blow, and the heavy swell of

the Pacific was setting in, and breaking in loud and high 'combers' upon the beach" (101-02).

These first impressions of the Pacific and of California are typical of Dana's depictions of the physical environment in which he lived and traveled for the ensuing eighteen months. He repeatedly marveled at the soil, climate, and topography of the physical landscape and found many of the ports and towns he visited pleasing—notably Monterey, which he describes as "decidedly the pleasantest and most civilized-looking place in California" (129). His writing expresses awe of a new and exotic frontier typical of a young colonial. Yet such praise often gives way to more critical responses as his emotional and physical energies dwindled under the burden of work and fatigue; in these passages, evidence of his fear of the degenerative nature of the frontier is evident.

While in San Pedro, for instance, Dana experienced the most traumatic event of the voyage: the flogging of two shipmates. He notes that the captain "seemed very much out of humor" when they arrived in the port, displeased especially with a sailor called Sam. "This man hesitated in his speech, and was rather slow in his motions," Dana writes, "but was a pretty good sailor, and always seemed to do his best; but the captain took a dislike to him, thought he was surly, and lazy" (151). Unprovoked, the captain became enraged with Sam and ordered him flogged. Another sailor, John the Swede, questioned the captain's motives and in turn was likewise restrained. Dana describes the horrifying series of events that followed:

> The captain stood on the break of the deck a few feet from [Sam], and a little raised, so as to have a good swing at him, and held in his hand the bight of a thick, strong rope. The officers stood round, and the crew

> grouped together in the waist. All these preparations made me feel sick and almost faint, angry and excited as I was. A man—a human being, made in God's likeness—fastened up and flogged like a beast. A man, too, whom I had lived with and eaten with for months, and knew almost as well as a brother. The first and almost uncontrollable impulse was resistance. […] Swinging the rope over his head, and bending his body so as to give it full force, the captain brought it down upon the poor fellow's back. Once, twice,—six times. (153-54)

John the Swede's penalty was no less violent, and Dana relates that "the man writhed under the pain, until he could endure it no longer, when he called out, with an exclamation more common among foreigners than with us—'Oh, Jesus Christ! Oh, Jesus Christ!'" (155).

The violence of the flogging was a literal tear in the fabric of the ship's community. Forced to watch the captain execute his punishment, Dana and the other sailors were damaged by the blows that their mates receive, until Dana himself could not bear it: "I could look on no longer. Disgusted, sick, and horror-struck, I turned away and leaned over the rail. And looked down into the water" (155). In the act of turning away, Dana attempts to shield himself from the violence and, in turn, mitigate its effect on his psyche. It also reinforces the distance he strives to preserve between himself and the frontier—in this case the shipboard community itself—though the psychological damage of the flogging is unavoidable.

The next day, Dana found himself ashore in the port that served the Pueblo de los Angelos and the nearby several southern California missions while the captain and a

small group of shipmates collected a load of hides. Ordered to stay behind while the others returned with the goods to the *Pilgrim*, he was left to wander and meditate on the events of the previous day. While gazing at a small island offshore that had a "peculiar and melancholy interest" for him, he notes,

> [O]n top of it were buried the remains of an Englishman, the commander of a small merchant brig, who died while lying in this port," he reports. "It was always a solemn and interesting spot to me. There it stood, desolate, and in the midst of desolation; and there were the remains of one who died and was buried alone and friendless. Had it been a common burying-place, it would have been nothing. The single body corresponded well with the solitary character of everything around. It was the only thing in California from which I could ever extract anything like poetry. (158)

There is no question that the "solitary character" of the place reflects the feeling of isolation that every man aboard the *Pilgrim* experienced immediately after the captain's act of tyranny, but more importantly it represents Dana himself, who finds in its beauty a poetic kinship of sorts. A week later, the mood aboard the ship had scarcely lightened, "everything went on regularly, each one trying to get along as smoothly as possible; but the comfort of the voyage was evidently at an end. […] The flogging was seldom if ever alluded to by us, in the forecastle. If any one was inclined to talk about it, the others, with a delicacy which I hardly expected to find among them, always stopped him, or turned the subject" (160-61).

This dark period gave Dana ample time to consider the flogging analytically and, significantly, he correlated the savagery of the act with the new territory of California

itself. Though he does not explicitly cite the frontier as a cause of the violence, he unquestionably finds such acts endemic to the region that lies beyond the nation's established borders. From his arrival in Santa Barbara, Dana began observing not only the landscape around him, but also the communities and people he encountered, initially finding much fault and relatively little to redeem those he observed. California was not yet a state in the union, and he often emphasized the primitiveness and lawlessness of this "foreign" land. Through his critiques of the region—the people and environment itself—during his travels there in 1835-36, Dana struggled to maintain (or at times even create) his identity in stark contrast to what he saw around him. Hours after the flogging of his shipmates, still disgusted by what he had seen, he expresses resolve about how he personally can enact justice:

> I thought of our situation, living under a tyranny; of the character of the country we were in; of the length of the voyage, and of the uncertainty attending our return to America; and then, if we should return, of the prospect of obtaining justice and satisfaction for these poor men; and vowed that if God should ever give me the means, I would do something to redress the grievances and relieve the sufferings of that poor class of beings, of whom I then was one. (157)

Dana equates the captain's tyranny with the "character" of California and juxtaposes both to the "justice and satisfaction" that might be found in the U.S., once again contrasting the degenerative nature of the frontier to the civilized nation.

His time at sea and in California also brought Dana into close contact with the unfamiliar and often shocking habits, language, and lifestyles of common sailors. Perhaps

the most interesting license Dana took with the facts of his voyage concerns those incidents and habits pertaining to decorum. Throughout the text, he repeatedly laments the negative effects of seafaring life on his behavior and expresses fear that his sensibilities have been irrecoverably damaged from the "brutishness" of his experiences. Dana's Pacific and California adventures had a complex effect on his life both during and after the voyage itself. His book conveys his often ambiguous and contradictory reactions and emotions as he navigated a place that became crucial in shaping his identity and helping him to define his concept of nationhood. Though so often invigorating, Dana's experience before the mast was fraught with anxiety and fear—though these simultaneously became catalysts for powerful intellectual growth. Many of his fears did not immediately dissipate when he returned to Boston, and he notes in his "Autobiographical Sketch," "While on my California voyage I had fallen into all the bad habits of sailors, & profanity among the rest. […] Not a man in my ship was more guilty in God's sight than myself" (32-33).

Several commentators have speculated on the unseen and unspoken—Dana's sexual experiences during his trip, ranging from assertions that "During months spent ashore at San Diego Dana consorted with Indian girls" (Starr, *Americans and the California Dream* 41) to hints that he witnessed or even participated in homosexual encounters while at sea. His own papers yield little information beyond the scope of what was published in *Two Years Before the Mast*, with one exception. Biographer Samuel Shapiro uncovered a letter written by Dana's former shipmate, B.G. Stimson, after the publication of *Two Years* in which Stimson—who had also been college educated—teases Dana for neglecting to mention:

> *[T]he beautiful Indian Lasses*, who so often frequented your humble abode in the *hide house*, and rambled through those *splendid groves* attached thereto [or] the happy hours experienced rambling over those romantic hills, or sitting at twilight on those majestic rocks, with a lovely Indian Girl resting on your knee. (qtd. in Shapiro 9, emphasis Stimson's)

This fragment is the only textual evidence of Dana's sexual activities during his voyage, and it emphasizes the issue of editorial license and how much was left out of his narrative. Likewise, it hints at the issue of sexual desire absent from Dana's account, and I would suggest that his engagement in sex—in whatever form it took—was especially abhorrent to the young man, as it was clear evidence of the degenerative effect of the frontier on him.

**Dana's Colonial Rhetoric**

Richard Henry Dana Jr.'s view of California in 1835-36 as brutal and wild represented the latest incarnation of colonial attitudes toward the region held by centuries of Anglo explorers and settlers. Early European encounters with Alta California date from the sixteenth century, when Portuguese explorer Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, representing Spain, arrived in San Diego on September 28, 1542 and took a small expedition ashore (Cleland 11). A steady stream of European voyagers continued to arrive in the region—including Sir Francis Drake and Captain James Cook—some making only cursory stops along the coast while others accessed and surveyed the interior. The Spanish empire claimed California as a colonial province from 1769 to 1821

when Mexico won independence. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries Spanish and Mexican Californians began trading cattle hides with Yankee ships for goods from the east coast. The hide and tallow industry grew up out of primarily American—and also European—market demands, and much like India's silk and tea and Africa's slaves and diamonds, was heavily exploited by European and American companies that viewed California itself as if it were a colonial territory. In 1821 Bryant, Surges & Co., the firm that owned the *Pilgrim*, placed a permanent agent in California to oversee the collection and transportation of hides for New England (Casey). By the time Dana arrived fourteen years later, these and other companies had established a system of heavy exportation, and "the hide and tallow trade came to be a powerful factor in arousing American interest in California and in laying the foundation for the ultimate annexation of the province by the United States" (Cleland 138).

Though it would be incorrect to say that California was a true colonial territory of the United States, the hide trade industry there was similar to the fur industry, and both sped up colonization of the Pacific Northwest. California and the Pacific itself were frontier that the U.S. was eager to conquer. In as early as the mid eighteenth century, Russia and Spain had begun to export sea otter pelts from the region, ranging from Vancouver Island to the Aleutian Islands. Yet efforts by both nations to establish permanent colonies were unsuccessful.

When Captain James Cook explored the region searching for a Northwest Passage to the Orient, Britain—and soon Spain—started more systematic expeditions to the Pacific Northwest, mapping and claiming territories for colonial expansion. Between the 1770s and early nineteenth century, Britain and Spain struggled for the area, but in 1819

Spain formally surrendered its claims, ceding to the United States all regions north of the 42º latitude line. Soon thereafter, Britain's presence began a rapid decline, due to the logistics of trading and financial pressures at home (Barman 28).

With the economic exploitation of cattle hides and tallow came attitudes typical of colonial paradigms—California was viewed as a site of immediate, available resource and supply for the North American east coast with little regard for future sustainability. "Thus the United States, like other colonial powers, found in its colonies a protected market for its own manufactures and a source of needed raw materials," notes Julius W. Pratt in his description of the patterns of economic exploitation of some of the country's colonies (241). By the 1830s it was typical to find 30 or more Yankee and European trading ships along the coast at any given time; a single ship could store and transport 40,000 hides, and took an average of two to three years to fill to capacity. Like most booms, the hide industry had an unfortunate by-product: the market for hides and tallow soon far exceeded that of beef. "Therefore, typically the animal carcasses, after being skinned and having the renderable fat removed, were left to rot. Tens of thousands of tons of beef simply went wasted in this way, much of it abandoned on beaches near where the longboats had loaded the usable portions" (Casey). Dana did not personally note evidence of such waste during his travels along the California coast, likely because he did not travel to the interior grazing regions of the state.

Dana's first encounter with Californians—in this case those of Spanish and Mexican heritage—took place aboard the *Pilgrim* amidst the business of economic trade, and his impressions were not kind: "The Californians are an idle, thriftless people, and can make nothing for themselves. The country abounds in grapes, yet they buy bad wine

made in Boston and brought round by us, at an immense price, and retail it among themselves at a *real* (12 ½ cents) by the small wine-glass" (*Two Years* 125). Neither Dana's initial intent, nor his subsequent journey was ever based on an explicit colonial agenda—Robert L. Gale sees Dana's views reflecting an "essentially provincial attitude" (125)—yet here and in other early observations, he enters into a rhetorical power dynamic that is in many ways colonial. *Two Years Before the Mast* includes a number of rhetorical modes[5] that deem it one of the earliest—if unconscious—examples of a North American colonial treatment of California.

In describing Californians of various national and racial identities, Dana assumes the role of a witness, exercising his gaze without hesitation or censorship. His comments demonstrate a kind of "surveillance" in which the observer maintains power in the representation of the objects of his gaze, as he is free to inspect and write about those around him without their consent or knowledge. Within this dynamic, "the privilege of inspecting" (Spurr 13) excludes, or separates, Dana from the Californians and their culture. As with his early shipboard experience of being outside of the veteran seamen's society, in most of his initial interpersonal interactions on land, he remains apart from the community, isolated because of his own inability and unwillingness to participate with it.

His first interactions with "natives" are the result of being "continually engaged in transporting passengers with their goods, to and fro" from the *Pilgrim* for trade, and focus primarily on the Californians' physicality with an authoritative tone and assertive "knowing" characteristic of a colonial observer:

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[5] In *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, an Imperial Administration*, David Spurr identifies twelve distinct rhetorical devices or "modes" distinct to colonial non-fiction writing. I draw from his work in my assessment of Dana's writing.

> Their complexions are various, depending—as well as their dress and manner—upon their rank; or, in other words, upon the amount of Spanish blood they can lay claim to. Those who are of pure Spanish blood, having never intermarried with the aborigines, have clear brunette complexions, and sometimes, even as fair as those of English women. […] They can be told by their complexions, dress, manner, and also by their speech. (*Two Years* 126-27)

Declarations of fact based almost exclusively on limited surveillance repeatedly complicate Dana's narrative, as it creates a virtually insurmountable distance between the people he meets and himself, and leads to questions of his credibility as an author.

He does not limit his surveillance to Spanish and Mexican Californians, and the narrative is a harsh critique of virtually all residents of the territory, especially Native Americans. Dana prides himself on his quick study of languages, noting that he learned Spanish within weeks and "got the name of a great linguist" from his captain and crew. From this self-professed position of expertise, he writes harshly of the native language of the California Indians he encounters in San Diego[6]:

> The language of these people, which is spoken by all the Indians of California, is the most brutish and inhuman language, without any exception, that I ever heard, or that could well be conceived of. It is a complete *slabber*. The words fall off of the ends of their tongues, and a continual *slabbering* sound is made in the cheeks, outside of the teeth. It

[6] It is unclear whether Dana encountered Native Americans from various tribes. At the time, however, there were upwards of "seventy to eighty language groups" in Native American California (Starr, *California* 304).

> cannot have been the language of Montezuma and the independent Mexicans. (173, emphasis Dana's)

As this passage reveals, Dana's attempt at objective realism fails, resulting in generalizations and discrimination that read like a colonial treatment of an inferior people. He is quick to preserve—or possibly impose—class distinctions as he differentiates between the "inhuman" Indians and the Aztecs and Mexicans who he seems to consider nobler. I suggest that Dana's critique serves also to maintain a distance between himself and the Native Americans who, to him at least, represent an uncivilized, degenerative presence in the frontier.

His treatment of the Hawaiians, or Kanákas, however, is quite different and he is uncharacteristically generous in his observations of them: "they were the most interesting, intelligent, and kind-hearted people that I ever fell in with" (205). But despite his proximity to the Kanákas—he lived with four Hawaiian natives in a shack called "the oven" in San Diego harbor for four months while curing hides for the *Pilgrim*—his relationship with them is never equitable. The gaze reveals an "economy of uneven exchange," (Spurr 14) in which Dana is free to bestow praise, but in doing so repeatedly refigures the Kanákas and their culture into familiar terms through comparisons to American culture:

> Their customs, and manner of treating one another, show a simple, primitive generosity, which is truly delightful; and which is often a reproach to our own people. Whatever one has, they all have. Money, food, clothes, they share with one another; even to the last piece of tobacco to put in their pipes. […] This principle they carry so far, that

> none of them will eat anything in sight of others, without offering it all around. (*Two Years* 207)

Though his conclusions are based on months of personal experience, here he lapses into a description rife with inequality. In refusing—or being unable—to move rhetorically beyond surveillance and fully participate with those he observes, Dana embodies the colonial subject that "becomes an accomplice to the very system of authority, of control, and of surveillance that causes him so much anguish and that removes him from those people whose lives he would attempt to understand" (Spurr 14).

A supporting incident occurs months later, after Dana has been away from San Diego and his Kanáka friends while aboard the *Alert*, the ship on which he ultimately returned to Boston. Arriving again at "the oven" with hopes of spending a pleasant evening, he finds two of the Hawaiians gravely ill:

> It has been said, that the greatest curse to each of the South Sea islands, was the first man who discovered it; and every one who knows anything of the history of our commerce in those parts, knows how much truth there is in this; and that the white men, with their vices, have brought in diseases before unknown to the islanders, and which are now sweeping off the native population of the Sandwich Islands, at the rate of one fortieth of the entire population annually. They seem to be a doomed people. The curse of a people calling themselves Christian, seems to follow them everywhere; and even here, in this obscure place, lay two young islanders, whom I had left strong, active young men, in the vigor of health, wasting away under a disease, which they would never have known but for their

> intercourse with Christianized Mexico and people from Christian America. (*Two Years* 322-23)

Dana sounds remarkably sympathetic and aware of the devastating impact of colonial contact in the Pacific. Yet even at his most compassionate moment, as he describes one of the men—named Hope—whom he "preferred […] to any of [his] own countrymen," he maintains a critical reserve: "Hope, was the most dreadful object I had ever seen in my life" (323). Describing Hope as an "object" dissociates him from his friend, enacting once again the distance between colonial subject and object.

Dana's criticisms are not limited to the non-white populations in California and he harshly condemns many white American settlers he meets in the region. Describing two such men, he refers to the first—who "spent his own money and nearly all the stores among the half-bloods upon the beach"—as "a desperate 'loafer,'" (326) and the second as "a more amusing specimen" (327). In fact, Dana uses the term "specimen" repeatedly in his descriptions of these white Californians, though the scientific vocabulary surely meant to emphasize objective detachment fails rather ironically. For in his attempt to create a point of reference for his observations in a recognizable scientific method, he inadvertently falls into the rhetorical trap Michel Foucault identifies as the principle of specificity in his "The Discourse on Language":

> [A] particular discourse cannot be resolved by a prior system of significations; […] we should not imagine that the world presents us with a legible face, leaving us merely to decipher it; it does not work hand in glove with what we already know; […] We must conceive discourse as a

> violence that we do to things, or at all events, as a practice we impose upon them. (229)

Attempting the vocabulary and system of scientific classification, Dana ultimately accentuates, not alleviates, the distance between himself and those he observes.

A second, perhaps more evident, rhetorical mode of colonialism present throughout Dana's text is "debasement," through which specific, negative qualities of an individual are reflected more generally in a larger society, often represented in literature through synecdoche and metaphor (Spurr 76). When an appalled Dana describes witnessing one Indian man murder another in public after the former killed the latter's horse, for instance, he concludes with condemning remarks about the entire race:

> In their domestic relations, these people are no better than in their public. The men are thriftless, proud, and extravagant, and very much given to gaming; and the women have but little education, and a good deal of beauty, and their morality, of course, is none of the best […] The women have but little virtue, but then the jealousy of their husbands is extreme, and their revenge deadly and almost certain. (*Two Years* 236)

Dana often makes assertions about larger groups based on limited observations and interactions with individuals—sometimes for the better, as with the Kanákas—always with the result of creating distance between himself and the objects of his gaze.

He employs similar rhetorical strategies in describing the California landscape as well. Dana completes his more descriptive, general remarks about Californians before the midway point in *Two Years*, suggesting perhaps that he feels enough attention has been devoted to the region's residents:

> Such are the people who inhabit a country embracing four or five hundred miles of sea-coast, with several good harbors; with fine forests in the north; the waters filled with fish, and the plains covered with thousands of herds of cattle; blessed with a climate, than which there can be no better in the world; free from all manner of diseases, whether epidemic or endemic; and with a soil in which corn yields from seventy to eighty fold. In the hands of an enterprising people, what a country this might be! we are ready to say. Yet how long would a people remain so, in such a country? The Americans (as those from the United States are called) and Englishmen, who are fast filling up the principal towns, are getting the trade into their hands, are indeed more industrious and effective than the Spaniards; yet their children are brought up Spaniards, in every respect, and if the 'California fever' (laziness) spares the first generation, it always attacks the second. (237)

Dana's harsh condemnation of California is inextricably linked to his negative opinions of the region's people, and he tempers his compliments of the physical landscape with reductive detractions based on perceptions of its residents—emphasizing once again his fear of the frontier as a degenerative, and of the possibility that he might be corrupted by it.

**Return to Boston**

Approximately a year and two months after arriving in Santa Barbara, in May 1836, Richard Henry Dana, Jr. set sail for Boston. He secured passage on the *Alert* after

trading his place on the *Pilgrim* with a sailor—a "harum-scarum lad" named Harry Bluff, to whom Dana promised an undisclosed sum of "cruising money" and all of the clothing he could spare—enabling him to leave California two years before the latter would have returned. As they sailed southward down the coast and he caught his final glimpses of those shores where he had spent much time and had many adventures Dana's feelings were unmixed, reflecting his eagerness to leave:

> As I bade good-by to each successive place, I felt as though one link after another were struck from the chain of my servitude. Having kept close in shore, for the land-breeze, we passed the mission of San Juan Campestráno the same night, and I saw distinctly, by the bright moonlight, the hill which I had gone down by a pair of halyards in search of a few paltry hides. "Forsitan et hæc olim,"[7] thought I, and took my last look of that place too. (*Two Years* 335-36)

Dana was unabashedly relieved to escape the frontier and return to civilized America, and though he was ready to leave his Pacific experiences behind, he later found it impossible to do so—he channeled the savagery and injustice he witnessed into a law practice devoted to defending seamen's rights.

The journey home on the Pacific Ocean was difficult and unpleasant, as they encountered winter weather in the southern hemisphere around stormy Cape Horn. At the same time, Dana suffered with a terrible toothache that left him nearly incapacitated for a

[7] Editor Thomas Philbrick notes the full quotation as "Forsan et hæc olim meminisse iuvabit," from Virgil's *Aeneid*: "Perhaps someday it will be pleasant to remember even this" (*Two Years* 493n).

portion of the voyage. In a rare poetic passage from this leg of the trip, Dana recounts being called on deck to witness a once-in-a-lifetime sight:

> And there lay, floating in the ocean, several miles off, an immense, irregular mass, its top and points covered with snow, and its centre of a deep indigo color. This was an iceberg, and of the largest size, as one of our men said who had been in the Northern ocean. As far as the eye could reach, the sea in every direction was of a deep blue color, the waves running high and fresh, and sparkling in the light, and in the midst lay this immense mountain-island, its cavities and valleys thrown into deep shade, and its points and pinnacles glittering in the sun. (388)

It seems fitting that his last view of the Pacific Ocean includes a rare and majestic sight that becomes a metaphor for the magnitude of the Pacific's impact on Dana.

In mid-September the *Alert* approached Boston Harbor. Despite his eagerness to leave California five months before, Dana expresses ambivalence about returning to his life in America:

> [B]y one of those anomalous changes of feeling of which we are all the subjects, I found that I was in a state of indifference, for which I could by no means account. A year before, while carrying hides on the coast, the assurance that in a twelvemonth we should see Boston, made me half wild; but now that I was actually there, and in sight of home, the emotions which I had so long anticipated feeling, I did not find, and in their place was a state of nearly entire apathy. […] There is probably so much of

> excitement in prolonged expectation, that the quiet realizing of it produces a momentary stagnation of feeling as well as of effort. (459-60)

After many months of physical activity and hardship, the "momentary stagnation of feeling" Dana felt was likely a kind of catharsis in which the overwhelming stress of "prolonged expectation" gave way to a temporary emotional numbness. When he stepped off the ship, however, he was pleased to see friends and family, though he found them strikingly pale in complexion after months of living among sun and wind-burned faces, "If I had been [told] that there had been a famine or a fever in the city & that these persons were recovering from its effects, I should have said that their appearance indicated it plainly enough" ("Autobiographical Sketch" 28). He sensed himself tempered, perhaps even forged in the Pacific. After a short tour of visits among friends and relatives, Dana fully resumed his life in Boston, rejoining the senior class at Harvard in 1836—his own original class had graduated in 1835—and set about rigorous study.

In the reflective "Concluding Chapter" of *Two Years Before the Mast*, we see glimpses of the impact of his journey on Dana's life and career since his return. He contrasts the quixotic and realistic perceptions of sailing life, revealing the need for a balanced understanding of the true life of the sailor:

> The romantic interest which many take in the sea, and in those who live upon it, may be of use in exciting their attention to this subject, though I cannot but feel sure that all who have followed me in my narrative must be convinced that the sailor has no romance in his every-day life to sustain him […] There is a witchery in the sea, its songs and stories, and in the mere sight of a ship, and the sailor's dress, especially to a young mind,

> which has done more to man navies, and fill merchantmen, than all the pressgangs of Europe. […] No sooner, however, has the young sailor begun his new life in earnest, than all this fine drapery falls off, and he learns that it is but work and hardship, after all. This is the true light in which a sailor's life is to be viewed. (462-63)

He likewise addresses the importance of legal redress for those who suffer under the cruelty of their captain and officers writing, "The question is, what can be done for sailors, […] for whom laws must be made and executed" (463).

Upon entering Harvard's Dane Law School Dana expressed hesitation about his future career: "I had had a dread of the profession from a boy, received from my father, & looked upon it as hard, dry uninteresting, uncertain & slavish" ("Autobiographical Sketch" 37). Yet his uncertainty was short-lived, and soon he was fascinated by every aspect of his legal studies. Dana completed law school in a timely manner, but his experiences aboard Pacific ships were not forgotten: while he embraced the family profession and his place in Boston society, he devoted himself to maritime law and made it his life's work.

The opening of Dana's law practice coincided with the release of *Two Years Before the Mast* in fall of 1840 and the book "brought [him] in a good deal of maritime business. His "Autobiographical Sketch" reveals that Dana hoped for that outcome prior to publication,

> This [publishing] I determined upon, not because I supposed the book could be of much benefit to me in a literary or pecuniary point of view, but because I thought it would be of some use to me in Boston in securing to

> me a share of maritime business, in insurance & other maritime cases, & because I believed it would also do something to enlighten the public as to the real situation of common seamen in the merchant service. (44)

Biographer and family friend Charles Francis Adams, Jr. recalls, "In those days, and indeed long afterwards, his office was apt to be crowded with unkempt, roughly dressed seamen, and it smelled on such occasions much like a forecastle" (1: 27). The success of his book combined with his passion for calling attention to the "tyrannies" sailors endured—inspired by his ever-present memories of the brutal flogging he witnessed on the *Pilgrim* years before—led Dana to "become a prominent authority on admiralty and international law" (Philbrick "Introduction" 14).

His principle defendants were not limited to sailors, and by 1850, he was actively involved in defending both violators of the Fugitive Slave Act and their defense attorneys as well. In many ways, Dana viewed slavery as he did the Pacific frontier when he was a young man—as a potential threat to both individuals and the nation—yet he did not waver in his condemnation of slavery for, unlike with his experiences in the Pacific, he found no exception to the degenerative nature of the violation of human rights. By early 1851 he made headlines as a lawyer for a number of fugitive slaves, including Frederick "Shadrach" Minkins, who ultimately escaped to Canada. Of Minkins, Dana later wrote, "How can any right minded man do else than rejoice at the rescue of a man from the hopeless, endless slavery to [which] a *recovered fugitive* is always doomed" (qtd. in Philbrick, "Notes" 882, emphasis Dana's). Dana considered the Fugitive Slave Law unconstitutional and quickly became known for his speeches and arguments about human

equality, and though he hoped to parlay his notoriety and association with slave cases into a political career, he was never to do so.

***Two Years Before the Mast***

The publication of *Two Years Before the Mast* in 1840 marks the formal start of the American literature of the Pacific Ocean. The book was a popular and critical success and also an inspiration for other writers who traveled or lived in the region, as the other authors in this study attest.

As I note earlier, the detailed journal Dana kept during his 1834-36 travels in the Pacific and California was lost upon his return to Boston, but he had access to many of the letters he had written to his family, as well as an abbreviated, short journal of major events and incidents of his trip. Scholars agree that Dana always intended to reconstruct an account of his trip, and he ambitiously began doing so while in law school. Robert F. Lucid determines that Dana finished a complete draft of his manuscript by Christmas, 1838:

> On the basis of a detailed examination of the manuscript […] Lucid concludes that the composition probably proceeded in three stages: a rapid written draft with deletions; then, after a rereading, more deletions and also interleavings; and, finally, a minor touching up. Dana evidently relied only on his memory, probably a few of his letters saved at home, and his ten-leaf sea journal, in the margins of which he penciled notes reminding himself of topics to be written up when he felt that they should be worked

> in. […] Most of Dana's deletions and marginal additions appear […] in the direction of propriety rather than raw honesty" (Gale 58-9)

The loss of his original journal was undoubtedly devastating, but may also have liberated him to shape his narrative with less restraint and concern for literal, journalistic reportage. The result was a book accessible to east coast audiences clamoring to learn more about California and the wild Pacific.

Dana's organization of events in *Two Years* is well-paced—devoting ample time to descriptions of his journeys to and from California as well as the to his adventures there—though he sometimes takes liberties with chronology and breaks linear time for the sake of variety and interest. Chapter three, for example, is devoted to the detailed description of duties the sailors performed traveling southward toward Cape Horn. In explaining his decision to provide this detour he writes, "I have here gone out of my narrative course in order that any who read this may form as correct an idea of a sailor's life and duty as possible. I have done it in this place because, for some time, our life was nothing but the unvarying repetition of these duties, which can be better described together" (*Two Years* 56). A colloquial tone carries through much of the text, though he is prone to nearly impenetrable, jargon-laden passages, as when he describes the process of "picking up cables," for instance:

> Coming a little to windward of our buoy, we clewed up the light sails, backed our main topsail, and lowered a boat, which pulled off, and made fast a spare hawser to the buoy on the end of the slip-rope. We brought the other end to the capstan, and hove in upon it until we came to the slip-rope, which we took to the windlass, and walked her up to her chain, the

> captain helping her by backing and filling he sails. The chain is then passed through the hawse-hole and round the windlass, and bitted, the slip-rope taken round outside and brought into the stern port, and she is safe in her old berth. (112)

Yet such passages have captivated many readers over the years, and the book has remained "perennially appealing to all kinds of readers" (Gale 124).

The book's popularity maybe credited, in part, to "the manifest authenticity of Dana's narrative" (Philbrick "Introduction" 22) and its immediate accessibility. Dana's audience included not only a wide public readership but also many American seamen: "[T]he most immediate and evident consequence [of its popularity] was the appearance of a succession of more or less factual accounts of the lives and sufferings of old tars, any one of whom could put Dana's paltry two years of ordeal to shame" (22). Nicholas Isaccs's *Twenty Years before the Mast* (1845), William Nevens's *Forty Years at Sea* (1845), and even James Fenimore Cooper's *Ned Meyers; or, A Life before the Mast* (1843) were all influenced by Dana's book, but did not experience its level of success.

Reviews of the book were almost exclusively positive and most focused on it as a social critique. "The success of the book was instantaneous," Robert F. Lucid writes,

> and the praise which was heaped upon it made it clear this was no ordinary factual voyage narrative: critics found *Two Years* to be thrilling, sometimes lyrically beautiful, always classically simple in style; but, most consistently, they found it to be a social documentary of devastating power. (392)

Indeed many saw the book foremost as a testament to the plight of common seamen. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Dana's former teacher, agreed, writing in the first volume of *The Dial*, "It will open the eyes of many to the conditions of the sailor […] It will serve to hasten the day of reckoning between society and the sailor, which, though late, will not fail to come" (qtd. in Lucid, "Propaganda" 392). Edward Tyrell Channing, one of Dana's Harvard professors described *Two Years* in the *North American Review* as "a successful attempt to describe a class of men, and a course of life, which, though familiarly spoken of by most people, and considered as within the limits of civilization, will appear to them now almost as just discovered" (qtd. in Philbrick, "Introduction" 19). Lucid wisely argues, however, that critics and reformers who quickly championed the book as a kind of labor exposé "distorted the evidence that Dana provided. The total design of the book does not tend to bring into relief the working conditions—as such—of the seamen, whether good or bad" (395). Though he is technically correct that Dana intended to do much more than focus exclusively on sailors' working conditions, without question, this was an integral and immediate initial goal of Dana's book.

Over the years, scholars have compared *Two Years Before the Mast* to works by Melville, Thoreau, Twain, and Hemingway, and it remains, as historian Kevin Starr notes, "a minor but enduring American classic" (*Americans* 39).

**Return to California**

The impact of the Pacific and California frontier on Dana continued to surface long after his return to Boson in 1836. The dual successes of *Two Years Before the Mast* and his law practice could not curb his urge for adventure, and he made a number of

significant voyages in the latter half of his life. In a letter written to his wife on September 3, 1854 he states:

> I believe I was made for the sea, and that all my life on shore is a mistake. I was intended by nature for a general roamer and a traveler by sea and land, with occasional edits of narratives, and my duties as lawyer, scholar and publicist are all out of the way. To me the sea is never monotonous. Whether in calm or blow, in fog or clear sky, it is full of interest and variety" (qtd. in Adams 1: 332).

The passage suggests that despite his professional achievements, he continued to search for something—perhaps intangible or inexplicable—through travel and exploration.

In 1859, he journeyed to Cuba by steamship, returning to write and publish the moderately successful *To Cuba and Back: A Vacation Voyage* (1859). The book is a straightforward account of the trip and twelve-day exploration of the island, with highlights including visits to Havana and a sugar plantation. Though unremarkable as a travelogue, the book includes long meditations on the institution of slavery, as Dana witnessed it in Cuba, that lend further insight to his own thinking about the subject. In particular, he details the Cuban laws that "favor emancipation"—a marked difference from U.S. legislation—but ultimately adheres to his belief in the immorality of the system:

> But the reflecting mind soon tires of the anecdotes of injustice, cruelty and licentiousness on the one hand, and of justice, kindness and mutual attachment, on the other. You know that all coexist; but in what proportion

> you can only conjecture. You know what slavery must be, in its effect on both the parties to it. (257)

With the exception of this and similar passage, *To Cuba and Back* is unlike *Two Years Before the Mast* annd Dana reflects little on himself, as he seems content to assume the role of passenger and passive observer for the duration of the sojourn.

A month after his return, Dana endured the illness and death of his uncle, Edmund Towbridge Dana, with whom he shared a close relationship. In his journal, he writes of his uncle, "He is the last of those connected my youth with Europe & Art & the great men & great events of 50 years ago" ("Voyage Round the World" 835). Soon after, Dana became ill from grief and overwork, noting "my physician is satisfied, & so am I that my system is out of order, both nervous & bilious, & that I need long rest & recreation. Of all plans proposed, none suits me so well as a voyage round the world. This has been the dream of my youth & maturer years, & I am actually happy in being able to realise it" (836). On July 20, 1859 he set out from New York—without his wife and children—on a journey that would take him back to California for the first and last time since his 1834-36 trip before the mast.

Dana's return to the Pacific and California brought a young one-time explorer back to the frontier he had viewed with an unconsciously colonial gaze—and he found that the intervening twenty-four years had brought significant change both to California and to himself. His mode of transportation marks the first evidence of such change, as he sailed from New York aboard the steamship *Star of the West*, bound for Panama. Though steam powered engines were developed in the early eighteenth century, the influx of emigrants inspired by the discovery of gold launched the first regular steamship service

between California and New York in 1849. Contemporaneously, the United States negotiated transit routes across the Isthmus of Panama, and the Panama Railway was complete by 1855 (Pratt 11-12). The trip was dangerous and travelers "ran grave risk of contracting malaria, yellow fever, or some other tropical disease" (Cleland 243). Despite the convenience of steamship travel, Dana preferred to sail, noting in a journal entry, "Enjoy highly life in a sailing vessel—so much better than a steamer. No noise, no smell of oil, no tremor, as still as country after city, & the int[erest] in the sails, winds, duties of seamen, &c." ("Voyage" 857). On August 1, 1859—his birthday—he arrived on the eastern coast of Panama, where he quickly traversed the isthmus by train. His journal entry is brief: "On my birth-day cross a Continent. In morning, afloat on Atlantic, in evening afloat in Pacific" (842). Back in the Pacific Ocean after more than two decades, he boarded the steamship *Golden Gate* and began the second leg of his trip—San Francisco bound.

As with his previous travels, Dana kept a journal of his voyage, recording both highlights as well as mundane details of the people and places he encountered, and scholars agree that he likely intended to publish an account of his trip much like *To Cuba and Back* (Gale 162). As such, Dana's journal is not a polished, literary account like *Two Years Before the Mast*, and the text appears and reads like a true log, with abbreviated entries, incomplete sentences, and little development beyond overall sketching.

Despite the brevity of many entries, Dana's observations of California convey the startling changes that have occurred in the once savage region that had recently become the 31st state. Arriving in San Francisco on August 13, he begins a comparison of the region he knew in 1835-36 to the one he was witnessing more than two decades later. His

initial reaction is quite neutral: "Make headlands off San Francisco. Enter 'Golden Gate' by moonlight. Lighthouses, large shipping, great Clippers at anchor, large city of 80,000 people. Contrast with the S.Fr. of 1836, in the Alert—not one house—a solitude" ("Voyage" 843). His opinions of the California citizens he meets are markedly less critical than those from his first encounter with local residents, and such entries appear truly objective when compared to those in *Two Years*: "Jews & Chinese very numerous here. Jews, a business & political power. Chinese disfranchised, but very numerous—chiefly in the lighter labors & in trade" (846). It would seem that his gaze became less critical and his writing more neutral, perhaps influenced by his many years away and the changed political status of California itself. I also suggest that his advocacy for sailors' and fugitive slaves' rights likely matured his empathy with others—the residents of the former frontier no longer represented a danger to his morality or sense of self.

When Dana writes of the California landscape, however, we find comparatively elegant and descriptive prose that conveys an appreciation for the region that was absent from his original attitudes and observations of it. Now free from the servitude of his sailing duties, he looks at California with nostalgia, as well as keen interest in its current development. Visiting one of his former haunts he writes:

> San Diego. Familiar scenes. The great point (Loma), now Lighthouse on it, the little point, the beach, & the hills behind. All the hide houses gone! Also the Kanaka Oven. In their place, two or three shanties for use of people now there. […] Landed alone, & spent 2 or 3 hours wandering on beach & hills, in meditation. Causes eno' for reflection. 23 years ago, curing hides, cutting wood—4 houses full of men—all gone—most dead.

> Found site of Kanaka oven, few bricks. Wandered over hills. ("Voyage" 848)

Dana was particularly curious about the interior—having seen very little beyond the major seaside ports during his first trip—and was adamant about visiting the state's mining regions and famed natural wonders:

> After full consultn., start for the mines & Big Trees & Yosemite Falls. Steamer to Stockton. […] At Stockton take coach for Bear Valley & Mariposa All day fr. Stockton to little Sp[anish] mining town of hornitos. […] Windmills everywhere, to raise water—only mode—whether for house use or for irrigation. Artif[icial] irrig. fr. May to October. (850)

His journal entries are snapshots of the industrialization and development of the moment and make striking contrasts to observations in *Two Years Before the Mast*.

Dana stayed in California, traveling up and down the coast and interior by ship and train, until September 10, 1859 when he boarded the *Mastiff* bound for Hawai'i. Believing he is departing San Francisco for the final time, he writes, "Last view of S.Fr. hills, islands, forts, lighthouses, Golden Gate—& its fogs & strong N.E. winds" (857). Little did he realize that he would see San Francisco again in just three short months. For just five days into the Pacific voyage, a fire broke out aboard the *Mastiff* and within hours, the ship sank; almost unbelievably, a British ship was within sight, and came to help rescue the crew and passengers. All were saved with the exception of one Chinese passenger. Dana and the other *Mastiff* survivors arrived in Hawai'i aboard the *Achilles* twelve days later. He enjoyed traveling among the Hawaiian islands, but was anxious to continue his journey to China and beyond. By mid November he was forced to recognize

the fact that no ships were scheduled to arrive in Hawai'i bound for China for months—his best bet was to return to San Francisco and book passage from there.

On December 11, 1859 Dana landed back in California. "Arrive at S. Francisco," he writes, "Pass 'heads' at sunrise, beat in ag[ainst] strong head winds. Noble bay, & striking points—yet no wish to see it again" (895). He remained in California for exactly a month, and his journal reveals that he spent most of that time furthering his exploration of the state's inland regions. Among the entries from this leg of his trip are some of the most thoughtful observations of Californians, evidence, perhaps, that the colonial tinge had been erased from his views. In one such passage, he remarks about the character of state's citizens as they are now, officially, part of the United States:

> All over Califor., the Americans hail from some state. All are emigrants. Men & fam. are described as fr. Va., Carolina, Missouri, Illinois, or from the New England states. State feeling very strong, yet the usual repugnancies of N. Engl. & the North [against] the South, & *vice versa*, are softened by intercourse, intermarriage, & tie of common int. in the new State.
>
> State pride of Californians very strong. Remote. Severed by Ocean & Rocky Mountains fr. rest of the world, & have a peculiar climate, & peculiar habits & history. (908)

It seems that in this, one of his final statements about Californians, it is fitting—and somewhat ironic—that Dana saw the diversity of the region's people with objectivity and understanding once they are "officially" also Americans.

As he finally left the state for the last time, however, Dana expressed relief to be finally bound for the Pacific Ocean once again:

> We sailed fr. S. Fr. Wed. night, Jan. 11th, about midnight. As this was my 8th time of passing the Golden Gate, I did not care to see it […] waked up next day, (Thursd.) abt. 7 o'ck. with gentle rolling of the ship, to find myself at sea, the Golden Gate in sight, & the hills of the Coast Range. […] Next morning, Friday, out of sight of land, & glad am I to see the last of California, & to be on the broad Pacific. (912)

**Conclusion**

By his own account, Richard Henry Dana, Jr. went to sea for two primary reasons: to cure his failing eyesight and to find adventure. Unlike many of the writers who would follow in his wake, Dana was not initially drawn to the Pacific Ocean specifically, but nonetheless found himself irrecoverably affected by his experiences there an along the California coast. His depiction of the Pacific Ocean and California in *Two Years Before the Mast* oscillates between his desire for realism and his tendency toward romanticism, and the result is an account that transfixed readers. For Dana did not seek scientific invention, anthropologic study, or philosophic respite in his travels—but instead wanted to accurately represent what he saw and experienced in an altogether foreign land and seascape. Dana's Pacific frontier, therefore, may be seen as one of personal discovery in which the "light and dark" of his own identity, as well as that of the Pacific itself, was revealed.

## *Chapter 2*
## *"In the Wide Waters"*
## *Herman Melville's Pacific Islands*

"The impression they [the Encantadas] give to the stranger pulling close up in his boat under their grim cliffs is, that surely he must be their first discoverer, such, for the most part, is the unimpaired … silence and solitude."
--Melville's *The Encantadas*, 32

On September 15, 1835 Charles Darwin first sighted the Galápagos Islands in the Pacific Ocean, located off the west coast of South America. "This archipelago consists of ten principal islands, of which five exceed the others in size," he notes in the journal he kept aboard the H.M.S. *Beagle* from 1831-36 (332). In a single sentence, he establishes the neutral tone of scientific exploration and discovery that characterizes the entirety of his account of the Galápagos and of the Pacific Ocean more broadly. In his initial observations, Darwin exclusively described the physicality of the islands' volcanic landscapes and rarely revealed what, if any, impressions they may have had upon him personally. His language is forthright and clear and the few superlative interjections are reserved for his praise of the islands' geologic formations:

> I scarcely hesitate to affirm, that there must be in the whole archipelago at least two thousand craters. These consist either of lava or scoriæ, or of finely-stratified, sandstone-like tuff. Most of the latter are *beautifully* symmetrical; they owe their origin to eruptions of volcanic mud without any lava: it is a remarkable circumstance that every one of the twenty-eight tuff-craters which were examined, had their southern sides either much lower than the other sides, or quite broken down and removed. (332, emphasis mine)

Arriving in the Galápagos in six years later, Herman Melville was equally impressed with the ashen appearance of the islands. Yet unlike Darwin, his interest in them was not scientific but instead as a site of reflection and metaphor—evident in the first section of *The Encantadas*, the series of sketches he composed about the islands:

> Take five-and-twenty heaps of cinders dumped here and there in an outside city lot; imagine some of them magnified into mountains, and the vacant lot of the sea; and you will have a fit idea of the general aspect of the Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles. A group rather of extinct volcanoes than of isles; looking much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration.
>
> It is to be doubted whether any spot of earth can, in desolateness, furnish a parallel to this group. Abandoned cemeteries of long ago, old cities by piecemeal tumbling to their ruin, these are melancholy enough; but, like all else which has but once been associated with humanity, they still awaken in us some thoughts of sympathy, however sad. (21-22)

The islands are immediately connected with humans through the repetition of the image of cities, though the connotation is negative as he envisions them burned out and abandoned—figures of desolation and isolation like the Encantadas themselves. The Galápagos and the other Pacific islands he visited as a young man embodied a world far apart from the one he knew in New England, at first exotic and romantic, yet the trope of the island evolved in his writing to represent the isolation Melville believed was endemic to human existence.

Despite their very different responses to the Galápagos Islands, both Melville and Darwin ultimately shared a keen interest in how the insularity of island life impacted island dwellers—from the finches that so captivated Darwin to the indigenous South Pacific Islanders that Melville idealized. The significance of the Galápagos to Darwin's studies of natural selection and evolution is widely recognized, though their "immediate importance" has been sometimes exaggerated by scholars. But it was in fact there that "he saw that the plants and birds had an affinity to those of the American mainland while each island had its own distinct but related mockingbirds and tortoises. Although the implications of those ideas are not fully worked out in his diary, the germs of many are clear" (Jones, "Introduction" xvii). Darwin's fascination was not limited to just the species themselves, but extended to their interactions with the diverse environments in which he observed them. Likewise, "germs" of Melville's own thinking about human relationships—both between individuals and communities, as well as between humans and their environments—took root in the Galápagos, especially piqued by his fascination with their isolation and their inhabitants.

This thinking evolved as Melville traveled among various Pacific archipelagos and continued to write prolifically about the region. His observations of Pacific islands—especially the Galápagos, Nuku Hiva, and Tahiti—as well as the insularity of shipboard life that he likened to a kind of island influenced his writing long after his adventures at sea ended. But long after his Pacific travels concluded, they informed his metamorphosing critique of the impact of capitalism on communities and individuals—a critique that would first center on the devastation it wreaked on communities, and later

how it destroyed individuals—as islands became the trope through which he examined capitalism and, ultimately, the failure of American democracy.

Melville's travels in the Pacific Ocean spanned 1841 to 1844 and yielded no fewer than half a dozen texts based directly on his adventures there, and an equal number indirectly influenced by those experiences. In this study I consider his Pacific oeuvre divided into three distinct phases, each distinguished by Melville's manner of use of islands as a literary device. The first includes *Typee* and *Omoo*, mostly non-fictional accounts of the literal landscape and people Melville encountered on Nuku Hiva and Tahiti. There he saw the relatively early impact of Western contact and missionary settlement on the natural environment and native populations in the South Pacific. In *Typee* and *Omoo* he criticized the arrival of capitalism and industrialization, finding the islands to be enclaves of paradisiacal respite from American society on the verge of contamination. Thus in this first phase, Melville's islands were literal sites embodying the threat of capitalism, evidenced by its effect on the human communities he observed.

The second phase dwells on Melville's growing interest in metaphor, as evident particularly in *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*. In these "centerpieces" of his Pacific canon, Melville increasingly finds correlations between the failures of American democracy and the troubled psyche of the individual. At this point his narratives still explicitly depict sea and landscapes, but within those settings he experimented liberally with the figure of the island and islanders both as allegories and as symbols. For Melville, life at sea on a tossing wooden ship was much like life upon an island. The insularity of a whaleship resulted in the formation of a new and unique society that supported an altered hierarchy—in which Queequeg and the other "savage" harpooners assume positions of

honor in the captain's cabin, for instance—while simultaneously harboring a more extreme risk of segregation, resulting in isolation and, potentially, death, as seen in Pip and Ahab himself. *Moby-Dick* especially is a critique of capitalism, which Melville often juxtaposes to communalism, in which both communities and individuals are left destroyed by injury, insanity, and/or death.

The third and final phase of Melville's Pacific islands is found in those works in which he moves fully into an exploration of human isolation as a metaphorical island state. Drawing upon his time in the Galápagos Islands, *The Encantadas* and *Bartleby* represent Melville's ultimate fixation on what he saw as the collapse of American democracy and subsequent disconnection from others intrinsic to the human condition. With these, his Pacific islands morphed from the literal locales that he explored to the wholly allegorical spaces in which he grappled with and conceptualized the human isolation he believed was parallel to island existence. This phase of Melville's work addresses the degree to which individuals are able to evolve in such "island" habitats—the writer most often exploring the inability, or failure, of individuals in this kind of evolution; Melville became increasingly wary of the (in)ability of man to adapt to and to thrive within an ever-more industrialized and stratified society, as depicted most explicitly in *Bartleby*.

**Melville's Early Life and the Draw of the Pacific**

By the time Herman Melville first saw the Pacific Ocean at twenty-one in April 1841 he was already a fairly experienced sailor.[8] At least to a degree, the Melvill family

[8] The *Acushnet* rounded Cape Horn on April 15, 1841 (Parker 1: 193).

could be considered a sailing clan and many relatives had careers at sea.[9] Born August 1, 1819 to Allan and Maria Melvill (the family would change the spelling to "Melville" after Allan's death in 1832) in New York City, Herman Melville grew up the third child in a large family of eight. Allan Melvill's early success as a merchant devolved into a series of unsuccessful business ventures in the mid 1820s, and he struggled with debt and financial failures until he died of fever and dementia in 1832, leaving his wife and children to eke out a living any way they could. For thirteen-year-old Herman, this meant a succession of jobs ranging from store clerk and bank attendant to, later, a series of teaching positions. It appears that Herman Melville, surrounded by a family often gripped by panic and anxiety, possessed a rather cool demeanor. Little family documentation accounts for him except for casual references in letters.

Working and continuing his studies at school intermittently, Melville spent the next few years reading voraciously whenever he could. According to biographer Herschel Parker, he "read along behind [older brother] Gansevoort" (Parker 1: 110), including works such as James Fenimore Cooper's *Red Rover*, John Lloyd Stephens's *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petræ, and the Holy Land*, and Washington Irving's *Sketch Book*. Of Cooper's books, Melville noted years later in a letter, "his works are among the earliest I remember, as in my boyhood producing a vivid, and awakening power upon my mind" (*Letters* 145). Much of his energy in the late 1830s was devoted to the Philo Logos Society, a debate club, which served as an intellectual outlet and distraction from his family's continued financial woes.

[9] Most notably his grandfather, Thomas Melvill, who participated in the Boston Tea Party and was later rewarded for his patriotism with a naval appointment by George Washington himself (Parker 1: 3).

Melville set to sea for the first time in June 1839 as a cabin boy aboard the merchant ship *St. Lawrence*, bound for Liverpool, England. One of the fragmentary hints we find about his mindset at this time comes from a letter written just a day or so before the *St. Lawrence*'s departure by his mother Maria to his brother Gansevoort, in which she simply states, "Herman is happy but I think at heart he is rather agitated" (qtd. in Leyda 1: 86). Little first-hand information exists about this first tenure at sea and scholars have typically turned to passages in *Redburn* (1849) to infer biographical inferences about Melville's shipboard experiences.

Relying on fiction for biographical information can be tenuous, but *Redburn* does, in fact, offer insights about how Melville may have first perceived his first experience before the mast. By the time he wrote *Redburn* he was the author of three books about the South Pacific—*Typee*, *Omoo*, and *Mardi*—which trio had established him as a credible sea writer. Yet these were viewed by many as rollicking island adventures, full of colorful characters and exotic locales; they were not necessarily revered as sailing narratives, *per se*. In one of his first references to *Redburn*, Melville recognized this, noting in a letter:

> I have now in preparation a thing of a widely different case from "Mardi":--a plain, straightforward, amusing narrative of personal experience—the son of a gentleman on his first voyage to sea as a sailor—no metaphysics, no conic-sections, nothing but cakes & ale. I have shifted my ground from the South Seas to a different quarter of the globe—nearer home—and what I write I have almost wholly picked up by my own observations under comical circumstances. (*Letters* 86)

Though in this excerpt Melville himself suggested his new book would be lighter in tone—"nothing but cakes & ale"—in truth *Redburn* was an attempt both to record the sober and genuine impressions of a young man at sea and to expose the mistreatment of the American sailor at sea.

The first half of the book chronicles young Wellingborough Redburn's journey, from the decision to enlist before the mast to his arrival in the port at Liverpool. The parallels to Melville's own life seem evident, beginning with Redburn's family circumstances:

> I was then but a boy. Some time previous my mother had removed from New York to a pleasant village on the Hudson River, where we lived in a small house, in a quiet way. Sad disappointments in several plans which I had sketched for my future life; the necessity of doing something for myself, united to a naturally roving disposition, and now conspired within me, to send me to sea as a sailor. (3)

From a biographical standpoint, the novel presents a number of seemingly prescient observations about the author's own early success as a writer. While these are less remarkable when we remember that some of that very success had come by the time penned *Redburn*, nevertheless they perhaps lend some insight to Melville's reasons for having gone to the Pacific years before:

> [A] continual dwelling upon foreign associations, bred in me a vague prophetic thought, that I was fated, one day or other, to be a great voyager; and that just as my father used to entertain strange gentlemen over their wine after dinner, I would hereafter be telling my own adventures to an

> eager auditory. And I have no doubt that this presentiment had something to do with bringing about my subsequent rovings. (8)

The novel quickly moves on to Redburn's departure and his initiation aboard the merchant ship *Highlander*. Though many of these early chapters are the standard fare of shipboard coming-of-age narratives, the similarities between *Redburn* and Richard Henry Dana Jr.'s *Two Years Before the Mast* are striking. Melville obtained a copy of Dana's book in 1840 and "read some or all of the newly published book with intense feelings, remembering his own experiences at sea the year before, and wondering what it would be like to round the Horn himself and sail on the Pacific, the ocean that already haunted his imagination" (Parker 1: 181). When he later met Dana in July 1848, he was clearly affected by the opportunity to be acquainted with on of his literary mentors. In an 1850 letter to Dana he noted, "I am specially delighted at the thought, that those strange, congenial feelings, with which after my first voyage, I for the first time read 'Two Years Before the Mast,' and while so engaged was, as it were, tied & welded to you by a sort of Siamese link of affectionate sympathy […] this is indeed delightful to me" (*Letters* 106).

Melville's reverence for *Two Years Before the Mast* is apparent in *Redburn*, as he seems to model many of his chapters after Dana's own. Early on, for instance, both men respectively find both splendor in the sea as well as sadness for what they have left behind. Dana writes:

> I felt for the first time the perfect silence of the sea. […] However much I was affected by the beauty of the sea, the bright stars, and the clouds driven swiftly over them, I could not but remember that I was separating myself from all the social and intellectual enjoyments of life. (44)

Similarly, Melville describes Redburn's initial feelings:

> Never did I realize till now what the ocean was: how grand and majestic, how solitary, and boundless, and beautiful and blue; […] I could not help calling to mind my little brother's face, when he was sleeping an infant in the cradle. […] I almost felt grieved, as we sailed. (74)

There are also comparable passages about experiencing seasickness, going aloft in the darkness, and learning the names of the ship's many ropes and lines.

Yet Dana and Melville's initial voyages took them to very different destinations—California and Liverpool, respectively—and thus the latter parts of their narratives are markedly dissimilar. While Dana's travels along the California coastline led to observations that were often a young colonist's in a conquered territory, Melville's rovings in Liverpool result in the noteworthy reflections of a frustrated idealist, especially in those passages concerning race:

> In Liverpool indeed the negro steps with a prouder pace, and lifts his head like a man; for here, no such exaggerated feeling exists in respect to him, as in America. […] Being so young and inexperienced then, and unconsciously swayed in some degree by those local and social prejudices, that are the marring of most men, and from which, for the mass, there seems no possible escape; at first I was surprised that a colored man should be treated as he is in this town; but a little reflection showed that, after all, it was but recognizing his claims to humanity and normal equality; so that, in some things, we Americans leave to other countries

> the carrying out of the principle that stands at the head of our Declaration of Independence. (*Redburn* 234)

These rather incendiary remarks about inequality in the United States were undoubtedly also fanned by Melville's time in the Pacific, where he saw island societies that better exemplified the democratic principles that he believed were failing in America. Though *Redburn* revealed some insights about young Melville's early life and first experience at sea, the book was composed nearly a decade after that initial voyage and subsequent to his extensive travels in the Pacific, all of which had direct impact on his novel.

Melville returned to the United States in October 1839 and almost immediately took a job teaching at the Greenbush & Schodack Academy. His mother Maria noted in a letter, "I feel cheered by Hermans [sic] prospects—he appeared to be interested in occupation—he has a great charge, & deep responsibility is attached to the education of 60 Scholars, which I understand is the number usual during the greater part of the year" (qtd. in Leyda 1: 98). Melville was to help support his mother and family with part of his salary but was not paid by the school for teaching in the winter. In May 1840, Maria Melville described her son's situation as dire, "Hermans [sic] School is to be discontinued next week for want of funds until the winter—he thinks of going far-west, as nothing offers for him here" (qtd. in Leyda 1: 104). No doubt his frustration and lack of other options combined with the allure of Dana's *Two Years* to draw him to the Pacific.[10] Sometime in late 1840 Melville decided to go to sea aboard a whale ship and he signed onto the *Acushnet* on December 26, 1840.

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[10] Scholars have been divided over the extent to which Melville may have been inspired by Dana's book. In his seminal *Melville in the South Seas* Charles Roberts Anderson argues, "To assume that [Melville] arrived in New Bedford at the end of December,

**Melville's Pacific Travels, 1841-1844**

Though Herman Melville first glimpsed the Pacific Ocean aboard the *Acushnet* in 1841, he did not write about the brutal rounding of Cape Horn and subsequent awe he likely felt entering "the wide-rolling Pacific" until a decade later in *Moby-Dick*. "I […] greeted my dear Pacific with uncounted thanks," he wrote, "for now the long supplication of my youth was answered; that serene ocean rolled eastwards from me a thousand leagues of blue" (555). Without question, the eloquent and extended tribute to the Pacific in chapter 111 of *Moby-Dick* must reflect Melville's own impressions as he observed it:

> There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath […] for here, millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming, still; tossing like slumberers in their beds; the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness.
>
> To any meditative Magian rover, this serene Pacific once beheld, must ever after be the sea of his adoption. It rolls the midmost waters of the world, the Indian ocean and Atlantic being but its arms. The same waves wash the moles of the new-built Californian towns, but yesterday planted by the recentest of race of men, and lave the faded but still

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1840, with a carpetbag under one arm and a copy of Dana's book—just two and a half months off the press-tucked under the other is unconvincing, though picturesque" (12). From my own research of the publication history and public reception of *Two Years Before the Mast*, however, I believe Dana was, in fact, an influence on young Melville and may be given due credit as part of his impetus to go to the Pacific before the mast.

> gorgeous skirts of Asiatic lands, older than Abraham; while all between float milky-ways of coral isles, and low-lying, endless, unknown Archipelagoes, and impenetrable Japans. Thus this mysterious, divine Pacific zones the world's whole bulk about; makes all coasts one bay to it; seems the tide-beating heart of earth. (555-56)

The scope of this passage mirrors his own Pacific vision: from the "milky-ways of coral isles" to the "mixed shades and shadows," Melville would spend virtually all of his life grappling with the literal and symbolic Pacific—especially its islands—that he encountered as a young man.

The *Acushnet* crossed into the Pacific in April or May, 1841, and in a letter written by his brother Gansevoort, we find one of the few traces of Melville's own mindset at this point in the voyage: "I am in receipt of a letter from my brother Herman dated August [?] 1841 at Santa Martha,[11] coast of Peru—He was then in perfect health and not dissatisfied with his lot. The fact of his being one of a crew so much superior in morale and early advantages to the ordinary run of whaling crews affords him constant gratification" (qtd. in Leyda 1: 119). From what has been pieced together of the *Acushnet*'s passage, this stop in Peru was one of just four or five made between its initial departure from New Bedford on January 3, 1841 and its arrival in the South Pacific islands in late June 1842. Hence it can be no surprise that his feelings of satisfaction, as expressed to his brother, were short-lived.

[11] This passage contains two errors on Gansevoort's part. Hershel Parker notes that the August date was "apparently an error for late June or very early July," and "Santa Harbor" was likely misread as "Santa Martha" by the elder Melville brother (1: 193).

The known stops made by the *Acushnet* in the first eighteen months of her voyage were: Rio de Janeiro in March 1841; Santa Harbor, Peru in June 1841; Tombez, Peru in December 1841; and the Galápagos Islands (Bryant "Introduction", Parker vol. 1). Though Melville and the *Acushnet* crew spent a month in the Galápagos—October 30 through November 25, 1841—and returned there briefly in January 1842, whether he spent substantial time ashore is unclear. Yet the Galápagos were the first Pacific islands Melville experienced, and their barren aspect—"looking much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration" (*Encantadas* 21)—affected him profoundly. The contrast between this South American archipelago and the tropical island groups he encountered in the South Pacific embedded itself in Melville's imagination, and he would return to and grapple with these dichotomous environs for decades.

By the time they arrived at the Marquesas Islands on or about June 23, 1842 Melville and the *Acushnet* crew were fervent in their desire to reach land of any sort. The ship's food supply had dwindled and, with the exception of other whaling crews with which they had met and "gammed" at sea, the men had been completely isolated from society of any kind for months. This extended period of seclusion likely shaped Melville's later depiction of the insularity of life aboard the *Pequod* in *Moby-Dick*, a novel that would begin to shape some of his most potent metaphors about human loneliness and isolation. Not insignificantly, the Marquesan archipelago is the farthest from any continent on earth; thus their arrival was truly like reaching a promised land. Melville's narrator in *Typee*, Tommo, expresses the enthusiasm that Melville himself undoubtedly felt:

> The Marquesas! What strange visions of outlandish things does the very name spirit up! Naked houris—cannibal banquets—groves of cocoa-nut—coral reefs—tattooed chiefs—and bamboo temples; valleys planted with bread-fruit-trees—carved canoes dancing on the flashing blue waters—savage woodlands guarded by horrible idols—*heathenish rites and human sacrifices*. Such were the strangely jumbled anticipations that haunted me during our passage. (*Typee* 5, emphasis Melville's)

Tommo's initial impressions of the Marquesas reveal Melville's idyllic and often naïve view of the island inhabitants he encountered after deserting the *Acushnet* on its arrival at port. *Typee* is the fictional memoir of Melville's adventures among the island's feared tribe—the "celebrated warriors [who] appear to inspire the other islanders with unspeakable terrors" (24). "Their very name is a frightful one," Melville writes, "for the word 'Typee' in the Marquesan dialect signifies a lover of human flesh" (24). Despite such foreboding signs, Melville's own month-long experience living among the Typees—July 9 to August 9, 1842 (Heflin 143)—proved far less threatening; in the embellished rendering of his island sojourn, however, his fictional alter-ego, Tommo faces number of perilous circumstances during his four month stay with the tribe.

Melville left Nuku Hiva aboard the Australian whale ship *Lucy Ann*, having signed on as an experienced sailor. Whether his departure from the Typees was as contentious and harrowing as he depicted it in *Typee* is unclear, though "the extensive records of the [*Lucy Ann*'s] voyage fail to mention it" (Heflin 161). On board, Captain Henry Ventom's authority had diminished, and Melville soon found himself surrounded by increasingly mutinous shipmates. When the captain fell ill and ordered his mate to

steer for Tahiti, the crew—expecting relief—was infuriated when Ventom had the ship was anchored outside the harbor at Papatee, and went ashore himself for medical assistance.

Before turning to Melville's time in Tahiti, a brief but noteworthy passage in *Omoo*, his sequel to *Typee*, merits attention here. In chapter seven he describes the *Lucy Ann*'s encounter with the Coral Islands located "a day's sail" east of Tahiti. Though the crew did not anchor or go ashore, Melville was affected by the small archipelago as they passed by in close proximity. By his own account, the islands are "perhaps the most remarkable and interesting in the Pacific," in part because of how they were formed:

> The origin of the entire group is generally ascribed to the coral insect.
>
> According to some naturalists, this wonderful little creature, commencing its erections at the bottom of the sea, after the lapse of centuries, carries them up to the surface, where its labours cease. Here, the inequalities of the coral collect all floating bodies; forming, after a time, a soil, in which the seeds carried thither by birds germinate, and cover the whole with vegetation. Here and there, all over this archipelago, numberless naked, detached coral formations are seen, just emerging, as it were from the ocean. These would appear to be islands in the very process of creation—at any rate, one involuntarily concludes so, on beholding them. (56)

While questions of Melville's accuracy for this and other "scientific" passages in both *Typee* and *Omoo* have been debated, most agree that he was, "for a nonscientist, remarkably accurate, specific, and up-to-date" (Foster "Another Note" 486). Yet this

moment is most exceptional in revealing his fascination with islands as places potentially untouched by humans altogether: "No living thing was seen, and for aught we knew, we might have been the first mortals who had ever beheld the spot. The thought was quickening to the fancy" (*Omoo* 58). These and other brief passages scattered throughout his early narratives presage the mounting interest Melville came to have with islands as sites of isolation from human society.

The *Lucy Ann*, anchored off the coast of Tahiti, was visited by an English doctor residing on the island who instructed Captain Ventom, to recover ashore, and a mate was promoted in his place. In the ensuing days, Melville and a handful of the crew refused to serve under this proxy captain and, ultimately, they were sent ashore as prisoners of the local calaboose (or calabooza) or makeshift jail. He spent about three weeks there—stretched to twice as long in *Omoo*—during which time he and the other prisoners were afforded considerable freedoms. Shortly after October 19, 1842—his last recorded visit with the local doctor—Melville and three other prisoners escaped from Tahiti.[12]

Melville's early observations of Tahiti in *Omoo* summarize the existing corpus of writing about the region at the time of his arrival:

> Of Tahiti, earlier and more full accounts were given, than of any other island in Polynesia; and this is the reason why it still retains so strong a hold on the sympathies of all readers of South Sea voyages. The journals of its first visitors, containing, as they did, such romantic descriptions of a

[12] Their escape from the calaboose was not harrowing, as their jailer—an islander affectionately known as Captain Bob—allowed them almost complete freedom to come and go during the day, and did not always confine them at night. Thus the escapees simply walked away and took a boat to the nearby island of Imeeo (*Omoo* 187-88).

> country and people before unheard of, produced a marked sensation throughout Europe. (60)

Somewhat ironically, just before writing this, Melville had included his own "romantic description" of his first glimpse of Tahiti:

> Seen from the sea, the prospect is magnificent. It is one mass of shaded tints of green, from beach to mountain top; endlessly diversified with valleys, ridges, glens, and cascades. Over the ridges, here and there, the loftier peaks fling their shadows, and far down the valleys. At the head of these, the waterfalls flash out into the sunlight, as if pouring through vertical bowers of verdure. Such enchantment, too, breathes over the whole, that it seems a fairy world. (*Omoo* 59)

This passage, much like its counterpart from *Typee* cited above, illustrates Melville's propensity for idealization of the South Pacific islands he encountered.

After "escaping" the calaboose, Melville and his companion, John B. Troy (former steward of the *Lucy Ann*), went first to Eimeo (or Moorea), an island ten miles west of Tahiti where they worked in the valley of Maatea as field laborers. They explored the island thoroughly, spending time—and avoiding other white men out of fear of being seized and returned to Tahiti—in Tamai, Papetaoi, Taloo, and Loohooloo, consorting with natives and savoring the island's beauty. Melville savored his island adventures though he never completely lost sight of the evidence around him fortelling the changes and "corruptions" that the arrival of westerners were bringing to the Pacific. He found himself present in a rare moment of equilibrium in which the delicate balance of indigenous and foreign cultures had not tipped and destroyed the former. Though these

adventures span months in *Omoo*, by early November 1842, approximately one month after his actual arrival, Melville signed aboard the whaler *Charles and Henry* and left Society Islands altogether.

The *Charles and Henry* took to the Off-Shore Ground—a Pacific region known for abundant sperm whale populations (Heflin 73)—and continued to roam the sea in search of sperm whales for months. Captain Coleman had apparently suffered a stretch of bad luck, as the ship's owners demanded he limit his hunting to well-known—and therefore highly competitive—waters. During Melville's tenure aboard, the *Charles and Henry* took approximately 150 barrels of sperm—a respectable, but not superlative, yield. Though little information about Melville's time aboard exists, he later noted in a letter that his whaling experience included "two years & more, as a harpooner"—an exaggeration at best (qtd. in Heflin 178). His formal whaling career ended unceremoniously, however, when the *Charles and Henry* came to anchor at Lahaina, Maui on April 27, 1843, after almost six months at sea.

Melville spent three weeks at Lahaina, mostly exploring the small town of about 3000 natives and its outlying area. On May 18, he boarded the *Star* for Honolulu. While aboard, he encountered a number of seasoned sailors, each of whom had experienced rather shocking adventures that directly impacted Melville's later Pacific writing—one man had seen a mate "taken out of a whaleboat by a foul line and drowned, as is Captain Ahab of *Moby-Dick*," while another was seized by natives who "would not permit him to return to his ship," much like Tommo in *Typee* (Heflin 189). Arriving at Honolulu, Melville immediately sought employment and reportedly worked for a time setting up pins in a bowling alley, among other odd jobs. In mid-August 1843 he enlisted as an

ordinary seaman aboard the warship *United States*, marking the official end of his whaling experiences.

The *United States* sailed from Honolulu on August 20, 1843. During his first day aboard, Melville witnessed the flogging of several seamen—the event was ingrained in his mind, and surely caused him to consider the prudence of his decision to sign on for a three-year stint with the U.S. Navy. The flogging affected him much as it did Richard Henry Dana, Jr. aboard the *Pilgrim* in 1835, and in the fictional account of his service aboard the *United States*, *White-Jacket: Or, the World in a Man-of-War*, Melville devotes four chapters (33-36) to a critique of the practice: "A Flogging," "Some of the Evil Effects of Flogging," "Flogging not Lawful," and "Flogging not Necessary."

Though it depicts his final cruise in Pacific waters, *White-Jacket* does not explicitly document the land- and seascapes Melville observed during his naval tenure. But the book does offer the subtle metaphor of a warship as a floating island that Melville saw as free from the scrutiny and accountability of homeland America. In commenting upon the flogged seaman, for instance, he writes, "As a sailor, he shares none of our civil immunities; the law of our soil in no respect accompanies the national floating timbers grown thereon, and to which he clings as his home for him our Revolution was in vain, to him our Declaration of Independence is a lie" (144). Here and in other passages Melville expresses frustration about the unequal distribution of civil rights and protection—a frustration that only grew after his naval discharge, as he became increasingly concerned with such inequalities among American citizens at home.

The *United States* arrived at Nuku Hiva on October 6, 1843, though Melville did not go ashore during the two days she was anchored there. On October 12 they arrived in

Tahiti, and once again he stayed onboard the ship. It would seem Melville's lust for island antics and adventure had abated, and he left the South Pacific for the final time on October 19 when the *United States* lifted anchor and turned toward South America. The journey to Valparaiso, Chile took about a month and in late July they rounded Cape Horn into the Atlantic Ocean. With that, Herman Melville's Pacific journey was complete. The *United States* arrived in Boston Harbor on October 3, 1844, marking the end of Melville's sea adventures.

**Phase One: Island Utopias and Threatened Communities**

The history of European exploration of and contact with the Marquesas is a story of miscommunication and misunderstanding—perhaps foretelling of the strife that Melville would see glimpses of in the nineteenth century. Located approximately 3100 miles southwest of the Galápagos Islands, the islands were discovered by Spanish explorers in 1595 with the arrival of Alvaro de Mendaña—a meeting marked by tension and violence. Mendaña's pilot, Fernández de Quirós recorded that the Spaniards "did not understand [the natives], and to this may be attributed the evil thing that happened, which might have been avoided, if there had been someone to make us understand each other" (qtd. in Dening, *Islands and Beaches* 9). The "evil thing" was, by Quirós's own account, the murder of more than two hundred of the islanders after the initial curiosity shown by them toward Mendaña's party "became annoying" (9-10). The Spaniards' stay was bloody but brief, and they left the newly named Las Marquesas de Mendoza after barely a week.

Captain James Cook was the next European to visit the Marquesas, nearly one hundred and eighty years later and, like his Spanish predecessors, he stayed just days. Cook's visit proved far less violent—the British killed only one islander[13]—though he departed the islands largely because he could not trade satisfactorily with the indigenous people. After Cook's visit in 1774, Europeans visited the Marquesas more frequently, though most were "on their way to somewhere else" (Dening 115). In 1811, however, Captain William M. Rogers discovered sandalwood on Nuku Hiva and ships began a heavy trade route to and from the islands. The exploitation of sandalwood—ships often took between forty to sixty tons per trip (Dening 120)—peaked between 1813-1821 and in many ways parallels the hide and tallow trade Dana observed in California. In both cases, local people and landscapes were ravaged for colonial profit with no regard for the sustainability of either.

These early interactions with the Marquesan people and natural environment embody the cultural ignorance that continued to characterize the attitudes of Europeans toward them for hundreds of years. Greg Dening describes this dynamic in *Islands and Beaches*:

> They came in the islands of their own ships or they made islands of their own in mission stations and forts or, if they were beachcombers, they let the beaches between their new islands and their old islands run down the middle of their lives. Confronted by what was different, exotic and to them bizarre, as well as bewildered that their own "natural" world was

[13] In his journal Cook records the incident in which a native stole a stanchion from his ship: "I told the officers to fire over the Canoe till I could get round in the Boat, unluckily for the thief they took better aim than I ever intend and killed him the third Shott" (*The Journals* 340).

> now unnatural and all their obvious symbols were meaningless, they played out their own cultural systems in caricatured charades. When they tried to describe what they saw, they themselves were revealed naked. Their own values, the structures of their consciousness, the categories of their mind were present in the things they selected to describe, in the moral judgements they constantly made, in their inability to divorce themselves from their own aesthetics. (18-19)

Melville's early accounts of the South Pacific at times both perpetuated the imperialistic ideologies of his European predecessors—particularly when he imposed his own cultural paradigms upon the Typee people—and also critiqued them, most notably in his censure of the French at Nuku Hiva, which I discuss below. What emerges, however, is a portrait of an island community threatened by the growing influence of capitalism that, for Melville, reflected a similar threat facing Americans in the United States as well.

His first descriptions of Nuku Hiva in *Typee* and of Tahiti in *Omoo* are idyllic—the islands are mythic places that appear out of the Pacific, populated by equally unusual dwellers. Tommo, the fictional alter-ego he used in both books, conveys Melville's initial impressions. Arriving at Nuku Hiva he notes catching "short glimpses of blooming valleys, deep glens, waterfalls, and waving groves, hidden here and there by projecting and rocky headlands, every moment opening to the view some new and startling scene of beauty" (*Typee* 12). And of Tahiti he states, "the ineffable repose and beauty of the landscape is such, that every object strikes him like something seen in a dream; and for a time he almost refuses to believe that scenes like these should have a commonplace existence" (*Omoo* 59).

Yet Melville's first impressions of these South Pacific islands were formed *before* he ever saw or stepped foot upon them. The "naked houris" and "cannibal banquets"—mentioned earlier—that he eagerly anticipated at Nuku Hiva were, for example, among the players and scenes of tales spun by his shipmates. As such, Melville arrived in the Marquesas looking for the dreamlike and otherworldly—expectations that revealed more about Melville himself and the prevailing European view of the South Pacific as a world beyond the horizon than about the actual people and landscape he encountered. In the *Typee* chapter aptly named "Anticipations," he writes of their impending arrival at Nuku Hiva, "Such were the strangely jumbled anticipations that haunted me during our passage from the cruising ground. I felt an irresistible curiosity to see those islands which the olden voyagers had so glowingly described" (5). Of particular interest to him were the island natives who remained relatively "uncorrupted" despite the European presence that was becoming more pervasive throughout the South Pacific:

> The group for which we were now steering (although among the earliest of European discoveries in the South Seas, having been first visited in the year 1595) still continues to be tenanted by beings as strange and barbarous as ever. The missionaries, sent on a heavenly errand, had sailed by their lovely shores, and had abandoned them to their idols of wood and stone. […] But these islands, undisturbed for years, relapsed into their previous obscurity; and it is only recently that anything has been known concerning them. (*Typee* 5)

Arriving in Nuku Hiva in 1842, Melville found an island population that had, in fact, somewhat successfully resisted European colonization in general and the

establishment of a thriving missionary system more specifically. "As they met the aggrandizements of foreign governments with ferocity," notes Charles R. Anderson, "so they defeated the propaganda of alien religions with the even more effective weapons of 'indifference, levity, and licentiousness'" (86). Yet the timing of Melville's arrival aboard the *Acushnet* has since proven to be ironic, as it coincided with the occupation of the Marquesas by the French[14]. In *Typee* Melville artfully captured the juxtaposition of Nuku Hiva's pristine landscape marred only by the sight of the French fleet anchored in its bay:

> [B]old rock-bound coasts, with the surf beating high against the lofty cliffs, and broken here and there into deep inlets, which open to the view thickly-wooded valleys, separated by the spurs of mountains clothed with tufted grass, and sweeping down towards the sea from an elevated and furrowed interior, form the principal features of these islands.
>
> Towards noon we drew abreast the entrance to the harbor, and at last we slowly swept by the intervening promontory, and entered the bay of Nukuheva. No description can do justice to its beauty; but that beauty was lost to me then, and I saw nothing but the tri-colored flag of France trailing over the stern of six vessels, whose black hulls and bristling broadsides proclaimed their warlike character. There they were, floating in that lovely bay, the green eminences of the shore looking down so tranquilly upon them, as if rebuking the sternness of their aspect. To my eye nothing could be more out of keeping than the presence of these vessels; but we soon learnt what brought them here. The whole group of

[14] The islands were subsequently incorporated into French Polynesia in 1889.

> islands had just been taken possession of by Rear Admiral Du Petit Thouars, in the name of the invincible French nation. (12)

He harshly condemned the French throughout both *Typee* and *Omoo*, painting their occupation and dealings with native tribal leaders in broad, critical strokes. By his account, the French used fear and coercion to secure the tribal chiefs' allegiance:

> The islanders looked upon the people who made this cavalier appropriation of their shores with mingled feelings of fear and detestation. They cordially hated them; but the impulses of their resentment were neutralized by their dread of the floating batteries, which lay with their fatal tubes ostentatiously pointed, not at fortifications and redoubts, but at a handful of bamboo sheds, sheltered in a grove of cocoanuts! (*Typee* 16)

Though the French naval commanders were ordered to observe a policy of "conciliation et de douceur" (conciliation and sensitivity) to the island residents in an effort to curb conflict and violence (Heflin 131), Melville remained critical of the them throughout both *Typee* and *Omoo*.

In these first two books, Melville fancied himself an objective observer, "peeping" at island life without necessarily impacting it directly. Despite his vehement assessments of the effects the French had on the islands he failed—or neglected—to acknowledge his own complicity as a foreigner as well. Nowhere did he appear more guilty of the sort of cultural imperialism he accused of the French than in his violation of the Typees's taboos concerning women. As his relationship with Fayaway developed, Melville's narrator Tommo tries to find ways to circumvent the "ticklish thing" of the

taboo preventing men and women from paddling in a canoe together. Tommo consults Mehevi, the Typee chief, and implores him to allow an exception to the taboo:

> But all that he said failed to convince me: partly, perhaps because I could not comprehend a word that he uttered; but chiefly, that for the life of me I could not understand why a woman should not have as much right to enter a canoe as a man. At last *he became a little more rational*, and intimated that, out of the abundant love he bore me, he would consult with the priests and see what could be done. […] Fayaway's dispensation from this portion of the taboo was at length procured. Such an event I believe never before had occurred in the valley; but it was high time *the islanders should be taught a little gallantry*, and I trust that the example I set them may produce beneficial effects. (133, emphasis mine)

The tone of his account is dismissive, exemplifying Dening's assertion that "Their [European's] own values […] were present in the things they selected to describe, in the moral judgments they constantly made, in their inability to divorce themselves from their own aesthetics" (19). Well-intentioned as he may have been, Melville's insistence on bringing what he believed was rational and just to the Typee social system in fact eroded it. Thus his early relationship to the island communities—and to the islands themselves—was a complex and often contradictory one, and together *Typee* and *Omoo* evidence both the writer's capacity for insight and naiveté.

This first phase of Melville's Pacific islands is also notably marked by an on-going comparison of the perceived barbarism of the natives and of the civilization of Europeans. He touted the "infinitely happier" existence of "the Polynesian savage,

surrounded by all the luxurious provisions of nature," who is to be envied despite living "a less intellectual existence, than the self-complacent European" (*Typee* 124). *Typee* and *Omoo* are riddled with editorial asides glorifying the lifestyle and cultures he observed of this "New World Eden"—at one point even defending cannibalism:

> In the primitive state of society, the enjoyments of life, though few and simple, are spread over a great extent, and are unalloyed; but Civilization, for every advantage she imparts, holds a hundred evils in reserve;--the heart burnings, the jealousies, the social rivalries, the family dissensions, and the thousand self-inflicted discomforts of refined life, which make up in units the swelling aggregate of human misery, are unknown among these unsophisticated people.
>
> But it will be urged that these shocking unprincipled wretches are cannibals. Very true; and a rather bad trait in their character it must be allowed. But they are such only when they seek to gratify the passion of revenge upon their enemies; and I ask whether the mere eating of human flesh so very far exceeds in barbarity that custom which only a few years since was practiced [sic] in enlightened England:--a convicted traitor […] has his head lopped off with a huge axe, his bowels dragged out and thrown into a fire; while his boyd, carved into four quarters, was with his head exposed upon pikes, and permitted to rot and fester among the public haunts of men!
>
> The fiend-like skill we display in the invention of all manner of death-dealing engines, the vindictiveness with which we carry out our

> wars, and the miser and desolation that follow in their train, are enough of themselves to distinguish the white civilized man as the most ferocious animal on the face of the earth. (*Typee* 124-25)

Many critics were appalled by such passages, as was the reviewer of the London *Critic* who wrote of *Typee*: "The predominant and most objectionable characteristic of this book is the obtrusive earnestness with which its author supports a favourite notion that savage is preferable to civilised life. […] Seldom have savages found so zealous a vindicator of their morals" (qtd. in Higgins and Parker 15). Melville's tendency to depict the idealized noble savage has led many contemporary scholars to identify his early works as examples of romantic primitivism.

Yet I believe in the image of the noble savage corrupted by imperialism, Melville found a disturbing connection to capitalism at home, especially in its similarly corrupting effect on the American social body more broadly. In a sardonic passage comparing the Typee to Americans, for instance, he reveals his anxiety—and anger—about the effects of capitalism on the working class in particular:

> There were none of the thousand sources of irritation that the ingenuity of civilized man has created to mar his own felicity. There were no foreclosures of mortgages, no protested notes, no bills payable, no debts of honor in Typee; no unreasonable tailors and shoemakers, perversely bent on being paid; no duns of any description; no assault and battery attorneys, to foment discord, backing their clients up to a quarrel, and then knocking their heads together; no poor relations, everlastingly occupying the spare bed-chamber, and diminishing the elbow room at the family table; no

> destitute widows with their children starving on the cold charities of the world; no beggars; no debtors' prisons; no proud and hard-hearted nabobs in Typee; or to sum up all in one word—no Money! That "root of all evil" was not to be found the valley. (*Typee* 126)

It is as if Melville saw the U.S. as a lost cause, broken beyond repair, and his only consolation was found in trying to save the Typee—and the other Pacific island communities he encountered—from the same fate.

His conviction that Western civilization posed a potential threat to the island cultures that entranced him did not fade after his return to that very civilization, and he continued to be a "vindicator" of the natives of the South Pacific for the rest of his life. In a lecture he delivered throughout 1858 and 1859 entitled "The South Seas," he concluded his remarks with the following plea to preserve the integrity of those Polynesian islands that were as yet "uncontaminated":

> As a philanthropist in general, and a friend to the Polynesians in particular, I hope that these Edens of the South Seas, blessed with fertile soils and peopled with happy natives, many being yet uncontaminated by the contact of civilization, will long remain unspoiled in their simplicity, beauty, and purity. And as for annexation, I beg to offer up an earnest prayer—and I entreat all present and all Christians to join me in it—that the banns of that union should be forbidden until *we* have found for ourselves a civilization morally, mentally, and physically higher than one which has culminated in almshouses, prisons, and hospitals. (qtd. in Sealts 180)

Evident here again is the writer's frustration not only with the imperialism he witnessed in the Pacific, but the eroding effects of capitalism on the infrastructure in the United States as well.

Though a European presence in the South Pacific was firmly established by the time he arrived in 1842 and a subsequent and considerable impact on native culture—and the physical landscape—had begun to take place, Melville also encountered the unknown:

> [T]he Pacific has been principally sailed over in known tracts, and this is the reason why new islands are still occasionally discovered by exploring ships and adventurous whalers notwithstanding the great number of vessels of all kinds of late navigating this vast ocean. Indeed, considerable portions still remain wholly unexplored. (*Omoo* 30)

Melville's arrival in the Pacific allowed him to witness to both the early consequences of European colonization as well as pockets of still-pristine island life. What he found in Nuku Hiva and Tahiti influenced not only his view of imperialism in the Pacific but also his thinking about the destructive nature of capitalism on American society. From this vantage point, these two contrasting views together afforded him a utopian vision of Pacific island life—of a culture removed from the ills of civilization and of a landscape that resembled Eden: "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" (*Typee* 49).

**Phase Two: Shipboard Islands and Fractured Communities**

As Melville entered the second phase of his Pacific vision, he moved away from biographical accounts of his own island experiences toward more symbolic representations. He experimented with more abstract fictional forms into which he poured his frustrations about American society—particularly the failures of democracy—enacting them in detailed accounts of seafaring communities. *Mardi* represents Melville's first attempt to render symbolic islands in his fiction and its primary significance may be that, as many critics have noted, "it made possible *Moby-Dick*" (Foster, "Historical Note" 657). In the novel, Melville lampoons the tendency of men to compartmentalize social and political issues as if they were islands; he subtly ridicules the folly of denying the interconnectivity of the problems of the civilized world. His most condemning depictions are reserved for those islands exhibiting an "outward brightness, but dreaming not of the sad secrets [there] embowered"—a thinly veiled critique of the United States itself (611). In *Moby-Dick*, however, Melville's interest in symbolic islands shifts to a more focused exploration of the unique social microcosm of a ship and how individuals negotiate the society of "sea-brothers." In particular, he sees the *Pequod* as a shipboard community that cannot sustain itself, as its insularity fosters a potentially deadly isolation that ultimately threatens the individual men as well as the collective crew itself. In Melville's estimation, capitalism was the root cause of such destruction, and as such, *Moby-Dick* presages the portrait of Bartleby the writer would construct many years later.

After the success of both *Typee* and *Omoo* Melville strove to distance himself from the genre of memoir that, though having served him well, felt stifling and restrictive to him. In a letter to his publisher John Murray written in January, 1848 Melville explains his third book *Mardi*:

> To be blunt: the work I shall next publish will be downright & out a "Romance of Polynesian Adventure"—But why this? The truth is, Sir, that the reiterated imputation of being a romancer in disguise has at last pricked me into a resolution to show those who may take any interest in the matter, that a *real* romance of mine is no Typee or Omoo, & is made of different stuff altogether. […] I have long thought that Polynisia [sic] furnished a great deal of rich poetical material that has never been empl[o]yed hitherto in works of fancy. […] My romance I assure you is no dish water nor its model borrowed from the Circulating Library. It is something new I assure you, & original if nothing more… It opens like a true narrative—like Omoo for example, on ship board—the romance & poetry of the thing thence grow continuly [sic], till it becomes a story wild enough I assure you & with a meaning too. (qtd. in Leyda 1: 274-75)

Yet *Mardi* was a radical departure for Melville not only in terms of genre and form but also in its impetus. The many reviewers who doubted the veracity of *Typee* and *Omoo*—usually pinpointing passages of egregious hyperbole—frustrated Melville, and part of his decision to break from his routine can be attributed to the critics.

But the many positive reviews he received for his first two books likewise influenced him, inflating his ego: "As he worked through late 1847 and into 1848 Melville began to feel that he was more than a sailor who had mastered the techniques of book-craft with amazing swiftness" (Parker 1: 574). When poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published *Evangeline* in 1847 to great critical response, Melville wondered if he might achieve similar fame with his prose. Biographer Herschel Parker posits that

"there were times when, excited at what was happening in his manuscript [*Mardi*], exalted by the evidence of his achievement, he allowed himself the dangerous thought that he might be becoming a truly great writer" (574). As such, *Mardi* became a kind of "kitchen sink" book into which Melville poured every poetic, philosophical, and political idea he had at the time. The result is a rambling sea romance that has been justly criticized as disjointed; Parker notes that Melville kept his edits and cuts to a minimum, making radical narrative shifts if and when necessary:

> What follows is an island-hopping symposium in which Melville was free to bring up on a new island whatever subject he wanted to expatiate on at that moment, and free to sail off to another island and take up a new topic of conversation. […] In his rough and ready way, Melville had decided he could alter the nature of his book in what remained to be written while retaining the bulk of what he had already written. At least this decision saved rewriting. (575)

Among the "topics of conversation" that Melville incorporated into *Mardi* were critiques of two European socio-political movements that many Americans watched avidly, finding parallels to issues at home. The first was the French Revolution of 1848—also called the French February Revolution—through which a provisional, liberal government called the Second Republic secured for the working and lower classes universal (male) suffrage and relief for the unemployed and working class affected by the economic depression that began in 1846. Melville also responds to the Chartist movement of the United Kingdom, which took place primarily between 1838 and 1848. The People's Charter of 1838 stipulated specific social reforms including male suffrage,

and the end of the need for owning property to be elected into Parliament, among numerous other goals. Both the Chartists and French Second Republic interested Melville as entities fighting for social and political empowerment of traditionally disenfranchised populations—the working class and the poor. Undoubtedly, he saw the need for similar changes in the United States, and grew increasingly frustrated at the inability of certain "outcasts" of mainstream society to function and survive within it.

Hopping from island to island in the symbolic archipelago of Mardi, Melville jumps from one example of human struggle to the next. Much like his "peeps" at Polynesian life offered in *Typee* and *Omoo*, the islands he created in *Mardi* provide glimpses of island life. Not the idyllic existence he found in the South Pacific, but the increasingly fragmented life of those individuals on the margins of mainstream American and European society. Throughout *Mardi* he repeatedly condemns the political and social powers that have perpetuated this disparity.

Among his most disparaging critiques are those of the islands on which war games and slavery have decimated humanity among their respective residents. On the Isle of Diranda, two kings engaged in war games for both their personal enjoyment as well as for population control:

> [T]hose very magnificent and illustrious lord seigniors, the lord seigniors Hello and Piko, who between them divided Diranda, delighted in all manner of public games, especially warlike ones; which last were celebrated so frequently, and were so fatal in their results, that, notwithstanding the multiplicity of nuptials taking place on the isle, its population remained in equilibrio. But, strange to relate, this was the very

> object which the lord seignior had in view; the very object they sought to compass, by instituting their games. Though, for the most part, they wisely kept the secret locked up. (*Mardi* 439)

Melville's explanation that the kings came together to create these games "in order to phlebotomize [their] redundant population" (440) explicitly satirizes the recklessness with which leaders send their people to die in war.

In a later chapter he condemns not only the institution of slavery but also those who willfully avoid confronting and seeking to outlaw it:

> "[H]ere are the mines of King Klanko, whose scourged slaves, toiling in their pits, so nigh approach the volcano's bowels, they hear its rumblings? 'Yet they must work on,' cries Klanko, 'the mines still yield!' And daily his slaves' bones are brought above ground, mixed with the metal masses."
>
> […]
>
> "My lord," said Babbalanja; "still must we shun the unmitigated evil; and only view the good; or evil so mixed therewith, the mixture's both?" (611)

In *Mardi* Melville's social critiques are broad and largely impersonal; that is, his characters discuss issues and questions in detached, hypothetical terms. Critics disliked the book and the philosophical ramblings that accompanied the narrator's island-hopping. R. George Ripley called *Mardi* a "monster of the deep," in his New York *Tribune* review: "The story has no movement, no proportions, no ultimate end. […] We become weary with the shapeless rhapsody" (qtd. in Higgins and Parker, 226). But the book's primary

significance is as a transitional work—moving Melville away from the biographical, factual accounts of his South Pacific exploits toward the metaphorical allegories that have come to secure his place in the American literary canon.

Melville composed four sea narratives between 1849 and 1851: *Mardi*, *Redburn*, *White-Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick*, revealing the extent to which his island and sea adventures continued to grip his imagination. As I note earlier, *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* return to the form of autobiography, chronicling his tenures aboard the *St. Lawrence* and the *United States* respectively. If *Mardi* represents a shift toward the symbolic, then *Moby-Dick* must be seen as its full realization. The novel marks the center of Melville's Pacific vision as it signals the completion of the turn—or rounding of the Horn, so to speak—from the literal to the metaphorical.

*Moby-Dick* was Melville's major foray into complex allegory and symbol, and the novel is rich with both real and constructed islands—as Ahab takes the *Pequod* further into the Pacific Ocean, the figure of the island becomes more complex. Yet the book opens in the Atlantic, finding there very literal islands and islanders. Ishmael immediately states his desire "to sail in no other than a Nantucket craft, because there was a fine boisterous something about everything connected with that famous old island" (33). Nantucket serves as origin for both the whaling industry and for Ishmael's journey:

> Nantucket! Take out your map and look at it. See what a real corner of the world it occupies; how it stands there, away off shore, more lonely than the Eddystone lighthouse. […] [Nantucketers] are so shut up, belted about, every way inclosed, surrounded, and made an utter island of by the ocean, that to their very chairs and

> tables small tables small clams will sometimes be found adhering, as to the backs of sea turtles. (93)

Though Melville depicts the island as a lonely place, in reality nineteenth-century Nantucket was an island in constant flux, and the comings and goings of sailors kept its population at an equilibrium of sorts.

Among the many sailors passing through Nantucket was a South Pacific native and *Moby-Dick*'s foremost islander, Queequeg. Melville's initial representation of him is reminiscent of Kory-Kory in *Typee*, but as the novel progresses Queequeg becomes a more complex signal of Melville's belief in the failure of western capitalism. Both Queequeg and Kory-Kory are "hideous object[s] to look upon" (*Typee* 83): bald, with only "scalp-knots" on their heads, and faces embellished with tattoos. Similarly, both become trusted confidants of and loyal companions to the narrators of *Moby-Dick* and *Typee*, Ishmael and Tommo respectively—and each ultimately garners praise as an exemplar of friendship and humanity. In *Typee* Melville champions the "civilized barbarity" of the Typee people, and critiques the term "savage" as a misnomer wrongly applied to his "valiant" hosts (125-27); in his characterizations of Kory-Kory, however, Melville often infantilizes his "most devoted" companion and protector.

Yet in comparison, Queequeg is more fully evolved and is represented as "a creature in the transition state—neither caterpillar nor butterfly": "He was just enough civilized to show off his outlandishness in the strangest possible manner. His education was not yet completed. He was an undergraduate" (55). And unlike Kory-Kory and his Typee counterparts, Queequeg's "on-going education" compelled him to leave island life and experience Christian civilization on mainland: he did not initially want to remain at

sea, but to live in and experience mainland society: "in Queequeg's ambitious soul, lurked a strong desire to see something more of Christendom than a specimen whaler or two. […] Queequeg sought a passage to Christian lands" (85). Ultimately disillusioned with Christian society, however, Queequeg's rejection of civilized life represents Melville's conviction of the corruption of capitalist society:

> [H]e was actuated by a profound desire to learn among the Christians, the arts whereby to make his people still happier than they were; and more than that, still better than they were. But, alas! the practices of whalemen soon convinced him that even Christians could be both miserable and wicked; infinitely more so, than all his father's heathens. Arrived at last in old Sag Harbor; and seeing what the sailors did there; and then going on to Nantucket, and seeing how they spent their wages in *that* place also, poor Queequeg gave it up for lost. Thought he, it's a wicked world in all meridians; I'll die a pagan. (86).

Melville's critique of capitalism is often subtle in the novel, but he unquestionably depicts it as a negative force that, to some degree at least, drives the plot. In the first chapters of the book, for instance, as Ishmael negotiates wages for himself and for Queequeg, the writer emphasizes the economics that establish the shipboard hierarchy, all rooted in capitalism. The process of securing lays—the shares of a ship's profits allocated to each crew member—brings Ishmael to Bildad and Peleg, the principal owners of the *Pequod*. The novice sailor knows that he will receive a long lay, due to his relative lack of experience, as "these lays were proportioned to the degree of importance pertaining to the respective duties of the ship's company" (109). Expecting the 275$^{th}$ lay,

which "might pretty nearly pay for the clothing [he] would wear on it, not to speak of [his] three year's beef and board," Ishmael is angered at Bildad's offer of the 777th lay instead. Here Melville likens this negotiation of labor value to a form of wage slavery, which he also equates with capitalism, as evident in Bildad's defense of his offer:

> "Captain Peleg, thou hast a generous heart; but thou must consider the duty thou owest to the other owners of this ship—widows and orphans, many of them—and that if we too abundantly reward the labours of this young man, we may be taking the bread from those widows and those orphans. The seven hundred and seventy-seventh lay, Captain Peleg." (110)

Though he shields his comments behind the widows and orphans he says he is protecting, Bildad is unequivocally protecting profits on the backs of the sailors he hires—a process Melville knew of from his own experience and condemned throughout his life. Thus this scene also establishes an opposition between capitalism and communalism that runs through the novel as the writer constantly represents his characters as isolated from each other—unable to form a cohesive community despite their physical proximity. It is as if the forces around them, from Ahab's relentless pursuit of the whale to the physical dangers they must endure in the name of profits, keep them apart, unable to connect in any meaningful way.

In fact the novel is saturated with isolated individuals and broken communities. Even before they depart Nantucket, for example, Ishmael attends a sermon at the New Bedford Whaleman's Chapel which foreshadows how the sea and whaleships can make islands of those left behind in grief: "a small scattered congregation of sailors, and

sailors' wives and widows sat steadfastly […] Each silent worshipper seemed purposely sitting apart from the other, as if each silent grief were insular and incommunicable. The chaplain had not yet arrived; and there these silent islands of men and women sat" (63). Though a community, the sea has left each man and woman isolated in his or her private grief—each an impenetrable, closed community of sorts. In this pivotal scene Melville merges literal and figurative islands—setting a scene of human isolation within an island chapel.

From this point on, Melville's concern is primarily with figurative islands—especially in terms of the impenetrability of human communities and the men who make them or retreat to them. He uses the ship's community as his primary example of this phenomenon—thus the *Pequod* becomes an island made up of outcasts. The ship itself is described as "a rare old craft […] A noble craft, but somehow a most melancholy! All noble things are touched with that" (101-02). The melancholy Melville attributes to the *Pequod* undoubtedly emphasizes Ahab's own personality, but it also establishes the tone for his introduction of the rest of the crew. Describing the origins of the men aboard the *Pequod*, he notes that the majority hails from islands—Nantucket, the Azores, Greenland, and a number of South Pacific locales. "How it is, there is not telling, but Islanders seem to make the best whalemen," he generalizes. But of the *Pequod*'s crew specifically Melville writes:

> They were nearly all Islanders in the Pequod, *Isolatoes* too, I call such, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each *Isolato* living on a separate continent of his own. Yet now, federated along one keel, what a set these Isolatoes were! An Anacharsis Clootz deputation from all the

> isles of the sea, and all the ends of the earth, accompanying Old Ahab in the Pequod to lay the world's grievances before that bar from which not very many of them ever come back. (155-56, emphasis Melville's)

And hence the *Pequod*—a floating island itself—heads toward the Pacific populated with a veritable archipelago of island-men.

In the chapter entitled "Moby Dick," Ishmael recounts the chase in which Captain Ahab lost his leg to the whale. "For some time past, " he begins, "though at intervals only, the unaccompanied, secluded White Whale had haunted those uncivilised seas most frequented by the sperm Whale fishermen" (220). Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick took him directly into the heart of "those uncivilised seas" and particularly the whale fisheries scattered throughout the Pacific Ocean—it was there that their fateful encounter took place. "And then it was, that suddenly sweeping his sickle-shaped lower jaw beneath him, Moby Dick had reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field" (226).

Ishmael ponders Ahab's "monomania" in the aftermath of losing his leg, concluding that the captain's obsession and subsequent madness was not likely immediate. But as he headed homeward—retracing his journey through the Pacific—Ahab spiraled into lunacy:

> Yet, when by this collision forced to turn towards home, and for long months of days and weeks, Ahab and anguish lay stretched together in one hammock, rounding in mid winter that dreary, howling Patagonian Cape; then it was, that his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing, made him mad. That it was only then, on the homeward voyage, after the encounter, that the final monomania seized him. (226-27)

As he and his crew crossed back into the Atlantic Ocean, Ahab *seemed* to improve—"to all appearances, the old man's delirium seemed left behind him with the Cape Horn swells" (227)—but rather his "full lunacy subsided not, but deepeningly contracted" (227). Returning to Nantucket, he resolved to dissemble the depth of his madness, and in so doing "no Nantucketer thought him otherwise than but naturally grieved, and that to the quick, with the terrible casualty which had overtaken him" (228). Yet the madness that was borne in the Pacific remained buried within him.

In his present journey, Ahab approaches the Pacific Ocean from the west, sailing in through "one of the tropical outlets from the China waters into the Pacific" (546). Ishmael's relief at reaching the Pacific likely reflects that of the entire crew, as bad luck had followed them in their passage toward it. "I could have greeted my dear Pacific with uncounted thanks," he states, "for now the long supplication of my youth was answered; that serene ocean rolled eastwards form me a thousand leagues of blue" (555). Yet their arrival does not bring even momentary serenity to Ahab, who instead experiences a surge in the urgency for his quest as they enter the "almost final waters" of the Pacific—almost as if his return to the birthplace of his madness draws it to the surface:

> [S]tanding like an iron statue at his accustomed place beside the mizzen rigging, with one nostril he unthinkingly snuffed the sugary musk from the Bashee isles (in whose sweet woods mild lovers must be walking), and with the other consciously inhaled the salt breath of the new found sea; that sea in which the hated White Whale must even then be swimming. Launched at length upon these almost final waters, and gliding towards the Japanese cruising-ground, the old man's purpose intensified itself. His

> firm lips met like the lips of a vice; the Delta of his forehead's veins swelled like overladen brooks; in his very sleep his ringing cry ran through the vaulted hull. "Stern all! the White Whale spouts thick blood!" (556)

Ahab's vision of the blood and Moby Dick unquestionably presages their final fatal encounter, though the blood would be Ahab's, shed in his own horrific demise, and thus bringing him full circle to a watery grave in the Pacific itself.

*Moby-Dick* is a violent novel that often presents a very realistic view of the dangers of the nineteenth century whaling industry. As I noted earlier, Melville was acutely interested in—and critical of—the pressures of capitalism on the industry, and especially the subsequent physical risks and dangers that sailors faced in the name of profits. Like Dana, Melville's own experiences at sea informed his views of sailors' rights, and in *Moby-Dick* he often broke from the narrative to address his concerns to readers directly. In one of those instances, in the chapter titled "The Affidavit," he stresses the connection between the violence of whaling and American capitalism as he chastises readers for their careless use of oil:

> Though most men have some vague flitting ideas of the general perils of the grand fishery, yet they have nothing like a fixed, vivid conception of those perils, and the frequency with which they recur. One reason perhaps is, that not one in fifty of the actual disasters and deaths by casualties in the fishery, ever finds a public record at home, however transient and immediately forgotten that record. […] Yet I tell you that upon one particular voyage which I made to the Pacific, among many other we spoke thirty different ships, every one of which had had a death by a

> whale, some of them more than one, and three that had each lost a boat's crew. For God's sake, be economical with your lamps and candles! not a gallon you burn, but at least one drop of man's blood was spilled for it. (249-50)

In emphasizing American society's reliance on whale oil and the risks and dangers sailors face in its pursuit, Melville underscores the violence of capitalism and, in turn, the destructive potential of American democracy.

Equally frustrating to the writer was the wastefulness of capitalism, which he depicts in his graphic descriptions of the pursuit and processing of whales and their oil. In a chapter aptly named "The Funeral," Melville details the release of a sperm whale after it has been stripped of its monetary value, and he posits the possibility of the carcass—set adrift and buoyed by the gasses of decay—being mistaken from a mast-head for a small island:

> Espied by some timid man-of-war or blundering discovery-vessel from afar, when the distance obscuring the swarming fowls, nevertheless still shows the white mass floating in the sun, and the white spray heaving high against it; straightaway the whale's unharming corpse, with trembling fingers is set down in the log—*shoals, rocks and breakers hereabouts: beware!* For years afterwards, perhaps, ships shun the place; leaping over it as silly sheep leap over a vacuum, because their leader originally leaped there when a stick was held. There's your law of precedents; there's your utility of traditions; there's the story of your obstinate survival of old

> beliefs never bottomed on the earth, and now not even hovering in the air! There's orthodoxy! (363-64)

Here Melville's tone conveys his awe—and frustration—at the potential folly of men to first alter (through the capture and subsequent dumping of the whale) and then misread the Pacific Ocean itself. Once again he stresses the destructive nature of capitalism, in this case showing yet another way in which it creates isolation and distance between men. "Thus, while in life," he concludes, "the great whale's body may have been a real terror to his foes, in his death his ghost becomes a powerless panic to a world" (364).

**Phase Three: Metaphorical Islands and Isolated Individuals**

*Moby-Dick* marks the midway point of Melville's Pacific vision in which he increasingly moved away from the literal island-scapes of his youthful South Pacific voyages toward metaphorical renderings of islands as sites of social seclusion. His interest in islands as symbols intensified in the latter part of his career as he recognized in them potent metaphors for the isolation he believed was inherent to the human condition. In particular, he recalled his travels through the Galápagos Islands aboard the *Acushnet*, finding there a place of extreme isolation and desolation[15]—unable to nourish thriving life—and increasingly saw the archipelago as representative of the inability of humans to sustain each other.

From a historical and scientific viewpoint, the Galápagos have been a site of discovery about the impact of isolation on species, specifically regarding: evolution,

[15] Though often depicted as devoid of vegetation, the islands are actually rich in biodiversity, including nearly two hundred endemic species of plants.

relationships between island and mainland populations, and the creation of new and unique forms of life. Examining the archipelago's biota in 1835, Darwin's awe and excitement at its diversity and exceptionality was apparent—as was his growing certainty that the creation of life was not, in fact, mysterious but the result of natural selection:

> The natural history of these islands is eminently curious, and well deserves attention. Most of the organic productions are aboriginal creations, found nowhere else; there is even a difference between the inhabitants of the different islands; yet all show a marked relationship with those of America, though separated from that continent by an open space of ocean, between 500 and 600 miles in width. The archipelago is a little world within itself […] Hence, in both space and time, we seem to be brought somewhat near to that great fact—that mystery of mysteries—the first appearance of new beings on this earth. (*Beagle* 337)

Yet for Melville, the Galápagos revealed the extent to which life within human society was *not* easily established, did *not* easily evolve, and could *not* always be maintained between individuals and the larger population. That is, individuals often found themselves outcast and unable to thrive or even survive within mainstream society. Melville found the terrestrial Galápagos to be a compelling metaphor for the isolation he believed was undeniably intrinsic to human life: "Another feature in these isles is their emphatic uninhabitableness [...] the Encantadas refuse to harbor even the outcasts of the beasts. Man and wolf alike disown them" (*Encantadas* 22).

In fact, the few human residents Melville encountered while visiting the Galápagos were wounded and outcast isolates. The first mention of humans living among

the islands does not occur until the Seventh Sketch of *The Encantadas* in which Melville describes Charles's Island as "the asylum of the oppressed of all navies": "Each runaway tar was hailed as a martyr in the cause of freedom, and became immediately installed a ragged citizen of this universal nation" (43). In the following sketch he relates the story of the Chola Widow, Hunilla, abandoned on Norfolk Island with her husband and brother who subsequently perished while fishing among the reefs. The Hermit Oberlus dwelled on Hood's Isle, capturing and enslaving a small band of sailors—"Cow-Boys of the sea" (58)—until he escaped to the mainland. In the final sketch, Melville closes with the image of the Encantadas as a virtual dumping ground for unwanted sailors—both for those "abandoned to perish outright," and as "a convenient Potters Field" for passing ships to bury their dead (62, 64). The remnants of each of these groups—the abandoned huts and instruments of those forced to live on the islands, and the headstones of those who have been buried on them—are among the "signs of vanishing humanity to be found upon the isles" (63).

The Encantadas have often been cited as the cause of this "vanishing humanity," as critics point to the power of the islands as a force that severs men from civilization (and life) itself. "One and all they stagger beneath an almost unbearable weight, one and all, like the great tortoise, they bear visibly the wounds of the Encantadas" (Fogle 44). Yet from the most innocent to the most vile of the Encantadas's inhabitants, it is not the islands that inflict the deepest wounds, but the mainstream society at home—wherever that may be. For the widow Hunilla was wronged first by the French captain who swindled her and her family out of their passage back to the mainland and last by her

return to civilization and the certain martyrdom that she will endure.[16] In a similar pattern, "Fatherless Oberlus" claims to have been "a patriot, exiled from [his] country by the cruel hand of tyranny" (*Encantadas* 60), who is ultimately condemned and imprisoned in a South American jail of "the least wholesome sort" (61). Thus for Hunilla and Oberlus—and for many of the other unnamed inhabitants of the islands—the Encantadas are a site of condemnation—as a place banishment—but also as a sort of refuge for those who could not survive within the predominant communities on the mainland.

In both *The Encantadas* and *Moby-Dick*, Melville situates the metaphorical islands of human isolation within corporeal spaces beyond the boundaries of human society proper—the Galápagos Islands and the *Pequod* respectively. But in "Bartleby" he creates an allegory in which one man exists in total isolation in the midst of both an interpersonal society of co-workers, as well as within the landscape of a major American city. In his portrait of the scrivener, Melville reveals his disbelief in the evolutionary possibilities of islands, emphasizing instead the anticlimactic and tragic demise of existence—in this case a single human life—on (or as) an island untouchable by "mainland" society.

Bartleby is among the most discussed and debated characters in the American canon, but whether he is a misanthrope by nature or by nurture, he has come to embody the archetypal isolate. Within the story itself, however, Melville is not concerned with

[16] A number of scholars have viewed Hunilla as a symbol of Christian martyrdom, particularly in her associations with the Cross. Maria Felisa López Liquete notes, "In the conclusion of Sketch Eighth, Hunilla on 'the small grey ass' with its Spanish 'armorial cross' resonates with the image of Jesus riding into Jerusalem—implying not only Hunilla's faith but also her continuing crucifixion by power and injustice" (221).

causes, focusing instead on the intersection—or collision really—between society and its outcasts, represented by the narrator and Bartleby. Ultimately, the story illustrates the failure of isolated individuals and society to become integrated, and instead Melville shows the extent to which human islands such as Bartleby cannot thrive or evolve—or ultimately even exist.

As I discussed earlier in regard to the Coral Islands off the coast of Tahiti, Melville was fascinated with the formation of islands and often devoted much detail to the description of the physical landscapes of those he visited. Of Bartleby, however, his remarks are brief: a motionless young man […] pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn! It was Bartleby!" (11). Yet each descriptor is deliberate and revealing—especially the term *motionless* which emphasizes and foreshadows his inability to adapt in any way, famously verbalized in the refrain, "I prefer not to." Melville articulates Bartleby's borders as the countless walls that recur in the story, particularly those that flank his life as a scrivener: in front of his office desk "within three feet of the panes was a wall," and in death "strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones […] his dim eyes were open" (12, 45). Most significant, perhaps, is the fact that no one—especially Bartleby—attempts to bypass or raze these impenetrable boundaries that prevent true contact between him and those around him. In this we see Melville's conviction that such isolation is insurmountable. As Linda Costanzo Cahir notes of "Bartleby," "our existential alienation from one another is a reality whose cause we can never fully apprehend or overturn" (60).

Beyond existentialist and metaphorical isolation, the story is Melville's most explicit depiction of the isolation he believed was endemic in capitalist America. By nature, the work of a scrivener was solitary, and though the office in which Bartleby worked housed a small community of employees—the narrator, fellow scriveners Turkey and Nippers, and the young clerk Ginger Nut—Melville emphasized the disconnect between them all. For while it was true that the men had a casual rapport, the were most functional and productive when they were working as individuals, evident in the pattern of Nippers and Turkey's alternating schedule of morning and afternoon productivity. That is, though the office community was peaceful, it was not a true collective but more accurately a loose assemblage of individuals who did not, in fact, work collaboratively. Thus in its initial description, Wall Street is rendered as an environment inhospitable to communities.

Finding a space into which he might fit Bartleby, the narrator "procured a high green folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from [his] sight, though not remove him from [his] voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined" (12). But the narrator was incorrect in his assumption, and it was soon apparent that the scrivener was not in any way conjoined with the society beyond the screen that enclosed him—in fact Bartleby's disconnection from the office community only increases as the novella continues. The narrator is portrayed as quite attuned to Bartleby's isolation and spends considerable energy trying to understand and remedy the source of that condition. Yet as the scrivener remains impenetrable, the narrator's concerns soon return to business matters, and especially the negative financial impact the isolate is causing to his firm. Thus Melville suggests that even the most empathetic person will ultimately succumb to

the power of capitalism to keep individuals apart. Unable to convince Bartleby to leave, the narrator relocates his office to another Wall Street building, effectively discarding the man who does not—or cannot—fit into the larger capitalist system. Moreover, Bartleby serves as an icon of Melville's belief that human islands exist not just *outside* or *beyond* the limits of civilization but *within* it as well.

**Conclusion**

Herman Melville's Pacific adventures were markedly different than those of Richard Henry Dana, Jr., as he went to sea in large part of financial necessity. Likewise the sea—and the Pacific islands he encountered in particular—affected Melville differently, and though both men initially wrote about their travels from an autobiographical perspective, Melville found fiction to be a potent vehicle for more symbolic experimentation. Though he did not write about the sea explicitly in all of his stories, close examination reveals the great extent to which he did, in fact, continue to find islands to be an apt metaphor for the human condition. In each of the three phases of his Pacific writing, Melville considers the degree to which individuals and communities resemble—both literally and figuratively—the islands he encountered in the Pacific years before.

## *Chapter 3*
## *"No Lustier, Tougher, Sheet of Water Can be Found"*
## *Jack London's Pacific Body*

"*The Cruise of the* Snark is no travel book but rather a psychological—and medical—memoir."

--Jeanne Campbell Reesman (112)

Unlike Herman Melville, who went to sea due to financial necessity, Jack London did so for adventure—undertaking five major Pacific expeditions during his lifetime—and though he ultimately profited from each via stories and articles based on those experiences, more importantly his writing shaped the contemporary national vision of the region, and he remains the best-known American writer of the Pacific. Like so many Americans at the turn of the twentieth century, London held a dual view of the country's western sea, especially its exotic islands and indigenous people: the first, the Pacific as a relatively untouched garden paradise; the second, as a region with seemingly unlimited commercial potential for transformation and "harvest." As such, his Pacific writings enact the national anxiety about a region that many considered the next frontier to be explored and conquered.

For London—a man who prided himself for his physicality, instinct, and virility—the Pacific Ocean was, in fact, the ultimate frontier: vast, dangerous, and brimming with content, sublime material for writing. Much as he had done in the Klondike, London exposed himself to the extremes of the environment in his Pacific journeys, reveling in the challenges of the climate, terrain, and sea itself. Whether working as a seaman on a large ship or piloting his own small sailboat, he found the Pacific a perfect arena to test himself—to hone his own fitness and ability to survive—

and to explore the emerging pull of Social Darwinism. Yet the it also offered glimpses of the promises and perils of human communities—especially in Hawai'i—that, in turn, enriched London's thinking about the tensions between social justice and individualism in the United States. Thus his Pacific vision is a dialectic between two opposing, seemingly contradictory extremes—individual drive and collective weal—and some of the most lucid and provocative examples of his thinking about the nature of man and the American social body are evident in his Pacific writings.

In stark contrast to Richard Henry Dana, Jr., whom I identify as an "unwitting" young colonialist in the American Pacific, London was unabashedly firm in his own colonial sensibility. Informed, in part, by his studies of contemporary race theory—especially Dr. Charles Edward Woodruff's *The Effects of Tropical Light on White Men*, in which he wrote of the "zoological zones" of races[17]—London brought a clear sense of superiority with him as he traveled throughout the region. But he also brought a keen and genuine relish for discovering new people and locales, as well as the desire for truth typical of a journalist, and his depictions frequently challenge the colonial paradigm. His attitudes toward his Western predecessors, for instance, especially the missionaries that had established themselves in Hawai'i and the South Pacific, could be surprising, and in

[17] Jessica Loudermilk provides extensive analysis of London's interest in race theory, and of Woodruff's "zoological zones" thesis in particular. She notes, "Woodruff's work allowed London to continue to cast the Anglo-Saxon as a born conqueror and ruler of men, while attributing any failure in that endeavor to laws of nature and evolution far beyond human control" (13). In *"The Tools of My Trade": The Annotated Books in Jack London's Library* David Mike Hamilton writes, "London was convinced that Woodruff's thesis was correct, and that the cause of his illness in the South Seas was a direct effect of the sun's rays on his fair skin" (297).

his writing he often subverted the hegemonic dynamic between Westerners and indigenous peoples. As Jeanne Campbell Reesman notes:

> [H]is views of the Pacific's many peoples would be very different from [the missionaries'], and when he did note the missionaries' attitudes, toward "diseased" islanders, for example, he often turns this around to a perception of the missionaries as the ones who were diseased, twisted by their rigid beliefs and racial prejudices. (*Racial Lives* 119-20)

In fact, London became obsessed with the physical limitations of the human body and disease during his travels in the Pacific, and his encounters with sick natives and his own bouts with illness and injury while at sea shook his sense of certainty about the primacy of any one particular race.

Though London's Pacific vision is an amalgam of the many journeys, expeditions, and experiences he had in the region throughout his life, his travels aboard the *Snark*—1907-1909—and the time he spent during that trip in Hawai'i had the greatest influence on his thinking about the tensions between individualism and community. As I note above, the tension emerges from a dialectic in which London engaged in order to reconcile his own misgivings about, and participation in, American politics and imperialism in the Pacific. When he departed San Francisco in 1907, he was among the nation's best known authors, having quickly and adeptly mastered the form of popular writing. His own financial success complicated his public image as a socialist representative of the working class, and it seems likely that part of the impetus to sail around the world at that time was to escape that paradox. Thus setting out aboard the *Snark*—with only his second wife Charmian and an additional crew of three—London

was free of public scrutiny and could contemplate his own doubts about the American socialist movement from beyond the nation's boundaries. Ultimately, however, the *Snark* voyage—cut short abruptly due to an alarmingly rapid decline in London's health—reinforced for him the irreconcilable nature of the dialectic between socialism and individualism that, in the end, fracture both the American Dream and the human psyche.

As I mentioned, health and illness were subjects that consumed London during his time in the Pacific and throughout the *Snark* trip in particular, and the writer increasingly saw disease as a metaphor for the fracturing of both nation and psyche. The body—its strengths and limitations—was the American nation. He wrote prolifically while aboard the *Snark* and during his stay in Hawai'i, and in many of those texts we see him grapple with the tensions between individualism and communalism via the trope of disease. In *Martin Eden*, the semi-autobiographical novel he wrote while at sea in 1907-09, the protagonist develops an extreme adherence to individualism that cannot be sustained, eventually manifesting in him as psychological illness. After achieving success and renown much like London's own, Eden is irrecoverably distanced from the working class from which he came and subequently falls into despair and commits suicide.

In contrast, much of London's writing about Hawai'i focuses on the various communities he encountered there in 1907 and is not as explicitly ideological in nature. But as with *Martin Eden*, he was repeatedly drawn by the friction he saw between those communities and the individuals who comprised—and often fringed—them. Most often he focused on issues of race and class, writing about the social anxieties that existed between full-blooded Hawai'ians, those who were of mixed races, and those who had settled among them, and scholars have filled many volumes analyzing his racialist views.

Yet he was also interested in the plight of those who were ill (and/or physically impaired), and how disease affected the dialectic between individuals and the collective. As Reesman correctly notes in the passage cited above, London was quick to recognize disease as a potent metaphor for the ravages brought upon Hawai'ians by the missionaries whose goodwill was often corrupted by racism and power. But the author also came to see disease as literally and metaphorically noble, especially when he considered it in individuals he met and heard about anecdotally. In "Koolau the Leper," and "The Sheriff of Kona," and other stories composed after his visit to Hawai'i's leper colony at Molokai, for example, he praises the bravery and strength of those who refuse to be silenced and/or excluded from Hawai'ian society because of leprosy. Thus the complexity of London's view of disease, especially its effects on afflicted individuals and those communities that must cope with them, shapes the dialectic that was at the center of his Pacific vision.

**Early Travels on the Pacific**

Born in San Francisco in 1876 and raised in the Bay Area, Jack London was drawn to the sea early. He purchased his first boat at age fifteen, a sloop called the *Razzle Dazzle* on which he became an "oyster pirate" in the San Francisco Bay—a welcome and much needed escape from a working class home and the hard labor he endured working twelve to eighteen hour days at the Hickmott Cannery. After a few months and some irreparable damage to the boat, London shifted sides, joining the California Fish Patrol in Benicia as a patrolman, charged with capturing poachers—widening his experience at sea to encompass both sides of the law. Two years later, at the age of seventeen, he went to

sea aboard the *Sophia Sutherland*, a sealing schooner bound for Japan, on a seven-month trip that would bring him his first glimpse of Hawai'i. His first voyage into the Pacific Ocean beyond the protected San Francisco Bay, the trip also inspired "Story of a Typhoon Off the Coast of Japan," London's first recognized fiction.[18] Both of these experiences shaped London's early perspective of the sort of existence the Pacific could offer—one of freedom and escape from his dreary life at home.

London did not go to sea again for more than a decade, though during the ensuing years he accomplished a great deal: completing high school, exploring the Yukon and Klondike, tramping across the United States, traveling in Europe, marrying his first wife, and fathering two daughters. He also joined the Socialist Labor Party in 1896—a decision he later said derived directly from his experiences as a tramp, during which "I found myself looking upon life from a new and totally different angle" ("How I Became a Socialist" 273)—and he became a frequent public speaker on socialism in City Hall Park in Oakland, California.[19] He also wrote and published prolifically, establishing himself as one of the most productive and well-known authors in the country. His fiction intermingled memorable characters, dramatic landscapes, and satisfying storylines—a potent and profitable combination that kept him comfortable for much of his life. He also tapped into and dramatized key American conflicts and interests, including for instance, the nation's fascination with the frontier, and his collected work now reads as a kind of literary American history. Impressively, in the twelve month frenzy before he set sail on his second Pacific voyage at the age of twenty-eight, London published three books, most

[18] London was awarded first prize for the story in a contest sponsored by the *San Francisco Call*.
[19] London left the Socialist Labor Party in 1901 and joined the newly formed Socialist Party of America.

notably, *The Call of the Wild*, which sold more than ten thousand copies on the day it was issued.[20]

Accordingly, when he departed in 1904 for a second trip to Japan, he did so not as a seaman but as a writer. The Hearst Press hired him to report on the situation brewing between Japan and Russia over strategic access and control to Korea and Manchuria; war was ultimately declared by Japan in February, 1904 and lasted until September, 1905. London traveled across the Pacific aboard the S.S. *Siberia* in the company of other journalists, and was eager to be among the first to break an international new story—he planned to document what he saw in writing and in photos, and kept his camera close at hand. Not surprisingly, he was rarely the detached journalist, and his own experiences at war were as harrowing as those he was sent to observe. He was arrested for unauthorized photography in Moji after defying the strict Japanese censorship rules; and his "weapon," a Kodak folding camera, was confiscated. Wanting to be as close as possible to the action on the brink of war, London chartered a small, open boat on the Yellow Sea to take him to the Kanghway Bay, near Chemulpo where he believed the Russians and Japanese would square off. The journey was dangerous and the conditions extreme—London reveled in it, and later wrote:

> If you could see me just now, a captain of a junk with three Koreans who speak no English. … Wind howling over the Yellow Sea. Driving rain. Wind cutting like [a] knife. One man at the tiller, a man at each sheet and another man too seasick to be scared. … Driving snow squalls. Gale pounding the whole Yellow Sea upon us. So cold that it freezes salt water.

[20] The novel was serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post* prior to publication, and numerous articles praising the story preceded its release in book form.

> O, this is a wild and bitter coast. (qtd. in Southerton 57, ellipses Southerton's)

Two insights emerge in this passage: London's love of the sea, and his love of the physical challenge it presented.

This second Pacific journey was significant also because it brought London his first, brief glimpse of Hawai'i. He later wrote:

> When Hawaii was named the Paradise of the Pacific it was inadequately named. The rest of the Seven Seas and the islands in the midst thereof should have been included with the Pacific. "See Naples and die"—they spell it differently here: *See Hawaii and live*." ("My Hawaiian Aloha" 282, emphasis London's)

Earle Labor suggests that the writer's initial impressions of Hawai'i as a paradise later gave way to "Paradise Lost, a land whose economy had been commercialized, whose politics had been usurped, whose ecology had been upset, and whose beautiful natives had been contaminated by the 'civilized' *haoles*" (*Jack London* 129). Yet while London did, in fact, come to recognize the extent to which Hawai'i was "contaminated" by the West—though he never saw himself as complicit in that particular aspect of the colonial paradigm—it became, or remained, a site of redemptive possibility. As Jeanne Campbell Reesman correctly notes, "The articulate, self-possessed, multicultural society of Hawaii at the turn of the century, in which people mingled their bloodlines and traditions, provided him a startling reeducation" (*Short Fiction* 128). Though Reesman looks specifically at London's reeducation of his notions of race, his writing about Hawai'i is a reeducation more broadly, and reconsideration of his thinking about the relentless

dialectic between individual power and the well-being of the masses—rugged individualism and socialism.

Returning to California after the Russo-Japanese War, London continued to write and publish profitably, issuing both *The Sea Wolf*—the portrait of a Nietzschean superman sea captain who piloted his seal-hunting schooner across the Pacific—and *The Faith of Men and Other Stories* in 1904. Drawing from Herbert Spencer's writings on politics, biology, and philosophy—especially his notion of the "survival of the fittest," a concept explicated in *Principles of Biology* (1864)—London began shaping his early twentieth century writing with clear, if at times subtle, ideological themes pertaining to society and social organization[21]. He was especially interested in characters—like Wolf Larsen in *The Sea Wolf* and, later, Martin Eden in the novel of the same name—who enacted the failings of extreme individualism, as he viewed their rejection of Socialism akin to a dereliction of intellect. Though he achieved great popular success as a professional writer and published prolifically on a staggering range of subjects—quickly and adeptly learning to craft stories with wide readerships and market appeal—he was often criticized for the heavy-handedness of his politics, which were often misunderstood, as I will discuss in detail later.

After his return from the Russo-Japanese War, London also resumed his political activities, running unsuccessfully a second time for Mayor of Oakland in 1905 on the Socialist Party's ticket. He began speaking publicly about socialism, and later that year published *War of the Classes*, a collection of speeches and essays about his views on the

[21] London's reading of Spencer has been well documented by scholars. At this point, however, I have found no mention of *Principles of Biology* in my cursory survey of his correspondence, though it is referenced in both *Martin Eden* and *The Iron Heel*.

subject. Biographers have documented London's natural relish for learning, and he is properly recognized as a true autodidact. Growing up in a working-class family at the turn of the twentieth century, he was exposed to physical labor at a young age, and surrounded by union members and politics. Yet by his own admission, London was not attracted to socialism out of a sense of community or social involvement, but from a largely theoretical and personal—even selfish—standpoint. In an essay published in *War of the Classes* entitled "How I Became a Socialist," he describes his "conversion," emphasizing that it was labor—especially physical labor—that was as the catalyst for his ideological awakening. The essay focuses on physicality, which at first allowed him to think only of his own work, health, and basic needs, "because of all this, exulting in my young life, able to hold my own at work or fight, I was a rampant individualist. It was very natural. I was a winner" (268-69).

London attributes his conversion to socialism to experiences tramping across the U.S. after his first stint at sea. During those months he worked among men (and women) less capable, "many of whom had once been as good as myself […] sailor-men, soldier-men, labor-men, all wrenched and distorted and twisted out of shape by toil and hardship and accident, and cast adrift by their masters like so many old horses" (273-74), and found himself decidedly at the bottom of "the Social Pit":

> I saw the picture of the Social Pit as vividly as though it were a concrete thing, and at the bottom of the Pit I saw them, myself above them, not far, and hanging on to the slippery wall by main strength and sweat. And I confess a terror seized me. What when my strength failed? When I should

> be unable to work shoulder to shoulder with the strong men who were as yet babes unborn? (274-75)

London's concern with himself is most apparent in this statement. His attraction to socialism, at least initially, was not grounded in empathy or a sense of connection to others, but in self-preservation. As I note above, London claimed his conversion to socialism was born of experience, but I suggest his understanding of it was theoretical and grew from reading and study, "I had been reborn, but not renamed, and I was running around to find out what manner of thing I was. I ran back to California and opened the books. […] I was already It, whatever It was, and by aid of the books I discovered that It was a Socialist" (277-78). California historian Kevin Starr is even stronger in his critique of London's socialism, noting that the writer's adoption of socialism stemmed from his ambivalence about his working-class roots. Starr's assessment may be too harsh—he infers the writer was a poser—but provides useful insight about the London's mindset as a young man early in his career:

> Socialism had provided young London a means of organizing himself against the threat of his class background, conferring conceptual control over life and society upon a would-be intellectual of spotty education. London's socialism always had a streak of elitism in it, and a good deal of pose. He liked to play working class intellectual when it served his purposes. Invited to a prominent Piedmont house, he featured a flannel shirt, but, as someone there remarked, Jack's badge of solidarity with the working class "looked as if it had been laundered for the occasion." (*Americans and the California Dream* 215)

London did, in fact, tour the country extolling socialism in the first years of the twentieth century, but his understanding of it was largely abstract and theoretical. Drawing almost exclusively upon reading, he based his ideological paradigm—which opposed socialism with individualism—on static definitions and absolutes that had not (yet) been challenged beyond the scope of his own experiences.

When he arrived in the Pacific in 1907, however, London faced a reality—in communities and individuals—that complicated the neat world-view he had maintained prior to his trip. Western imperialism, apparent especially in the missionary presence on many islands he visited, had altered and even destroyed indigenous communities, most often via the appropriation of property, leaving many islanders disenfranchised. London witnessed further evidence of the incessant tides of colonial encroachment in the devastation of disease, particularly visible in the leprosy and elephantiasis that ravaged both individuals and entire communities. Thus the fixed ideological paradigm that I note London had constructed for himself was destabilized as he explored the Pacific. He was drawn to medical science as he sought a more tangible, reliable reconciliation of the ideological tensions with which he struggled. Even so, London's Pacific writing reveals that he did not reach universal resolution—or synthesis—but that he was subsumed in a dynamic dialectic that continued for the duration of his Pacific journey aboard the *Snark*. Each individual text—his journal from the trip and stories depicting the effects of disease in Hawai'i and the South Pacific—exemplified his current thinking about the tensions between individuals and collectives and became, in and of itself, a synthesis of his ideas in one moment. Thus together, these texts are an artistic record of London's intellectual development and represent the intricacies of what I call his Pacific dialectic.

1905 also marked a number of significant personal changes, most notably his divorce from Bessie London and subsequent remarriage—the day after the divorce was finalized—to Charmian Kittredge, who remained his wife until he died. Soon after they married, the Londons hatched a plan to sail around the world, based, in part, on their reading of Joshua Slocum's seminal *Sailing Alone Around the World*. "It began in the swimming pool at Glen Ellen," London later wrote in his account of their trip, *The Cruise of the* Snark:

> Between swims it was our wont to come out and lie in the sand and let our skins breathe the warm air and soak in the sunshine. Roscoe was a yachtsman. I had followed the sea a bit. It was inevitable that we should talk about boats. We talked about small boats, and the seaworthiness of small boats. We instanced Captain Slocum and his three years' voyage around the world in the *Spray*. We asserted that we were not afraid to go around the world in a small boat, say forty feet long.
>
> We asserted furthermore that we would like to do it. We asserted finally that there was nothing in the world we'd like better than a chance to do it. (1)

Though they initially planned to wait a three or four years before setting out—they had recently bought their ranch in Sonoma and had begun extensive renovations there—"the lure of the adventure" began to take hold.

Their itinerary, projected to span seven years, was extensive, as they intended to circumnavigate the globe via oceans and inland waterways—starting out from San Francisco, the Londons planned to stop first at Hawai'i:

> [W]e shall wander through the South Seas, take in Samoa, New Zealand, Tasmania, Australia, New Guinea, Borneo, and Sumatra, and go on up through the Philippines to Japan. Then will come Korea, China, India, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean. After that the voyage becomes too vague to describe, though we know a number of things we shall surely do, and we expect to spend from one to several months in every country in Europe. (*Snark* 6)

Accordingly, the boat they designed, the *Snark*, was built specifically both to handle big seas and to maneuver rivers. London designed and oversaw the building of the *Snark*, which was to be a forty-five foot ketch that would cost approximately $3000 to build; the boat measured forty-three feet on completion, but the cost soared to over $30,000. Regularly frustrated with the cost and problems of its construction, London took pleasure and pride in the boat from the start, noting, "[I]t was worth it. Every time I thought of the *Snark* I knew she was worth it" (11). Numerous obstacles and delays—including the 1906 San Francisco earthquake—pushed the Londons' departure further and further out, and London struggled to keep up with the many payments due to the contractors working on the boat: "the *Snark* ate up money faster than I could earn it. […] and all the time I went on working every day and sinking the earning in the venture. I worked Sundays as well, and I took no holidays" (11).

By the time London and Charmian finally departed San Francisco on April 23, 1907 bound for Hawai'i and the South Pacific, he was one of the most successful and recognized American writers in the world. Yet his letters suggest that despite his affluence and popularity, Jack London was exhausted by fame, and saw the voyage as an

escape from the pressures of public life. Beyond that, there was also the call to renewed independence and physical challenge that drove him throughout his life. Writing to a colleague a month before he sailed London mused, "But gee—think of it—achievement! Think of going around the world yourself, *taking* yourself around the world,—doing it with your own hands and head. I think that's the biggest thing of all that can be said in favor of the small boat" (*Letters* 677, emphasis London's).

Ironically, as London set out aboard a self-built boat—which was leaking, had engine problems, and needed countless small repairs that he planned to fix in Hawai'i—and began teaching himself to navigate the rugged Pacific alone, he also started work on a book intended to be a damning critique of individualism. As he later noted, "I wrote *Martin Eden*, not as an autobiography, nor as a parable of what dire end awaits an unbeliever in God, but as an indictment of that pleasant, wild-beast struggle of Individualism" (*Letters* 864). What London did not realize as he turned the *Snark* away from San Francisco toward Hawai'i was the extent to which both his faith in socialism and his "indictment" of individualism would be tested in the Pacific.

**Disease in the Pacific: Hawai'i and the Fractured Community**

"Twenty-seven days out from San Francisco we arrived at the island of Oahu, Territory of Hawaii," London wrote in his *Snark* journal (46). His impressions convey the awe the Londons experienced as they encountered a landscape and people that they found both exotic and welcoming. London continues:

> There was life everywhere, on sea and shore. We could see the masts and funnels of the shipping in the harbor, the hotels and bathers along the

> beach at Waikiki, the smoke rising from the dwelling-houses high up on the volcanic slopes of the Punch Bowl and Tantalus. […] We were like Rip Van Winkles, and it seemed to us that we were dreaming. On one side the azure sea lapped across the horizon into the azure sky; on the other side the sea lifted itself into great breakers of emerald that fell in a snowy smother upon a white coral beach. Beyond the beach, green plantations of sugar-cane undulated gently upward to steeper slopes, which, in turn, became jagged volcanic crests, drenched with tropic showers and capped by stupendous masses of trade-wind clouds. At any rate, it was a most beautiful dream. (46-7)

London's remarks are representative of a fairly predominant attitude toward Hawai'i—and of the Pacific—held by Americans at the turn of the century, an easy and naïve acceptance of the presence of Western development (ship masts and hotels) in the midst of tropical splendor (volcanic slopes and emerald breakers). Like Melville before him, London initially saw this seemingly harmonious co-existence as "a most beautiful dream," that will be proven false.

Yet the early chapters of London's *Snark* journal—serialized during the voyage and collected later—are almost entirely positive in their portraits of Hawai'i and of the people he met, both the Western settlers and the indigenous people. Of the group that came to meet them when they first arrived, for instance, London wrote,

> They were ordinary men, flesh and blood and all the rest; but they did not tend to break our dreaming. Our last memories of men were of United States marshals and of panicky little merchants with rusty dollars for

> souls, who, I a reeking atmosphere of soot and coal-dust, laid grimy hands upon the *Snark* and held her back from her world adventure. But these men who came to meet us were clean men. A healthy tan was on their cheeks, and their eyes were not dazzled and bespectacled from gazing overmuch at glittering dollar-heaps. No, they merely verified the dream. They clinched it with their unsmirched souls. (48)

Here London reaches beyond Herman Melville, who, though ultimately finding himself enamored of Fayaway and Kory-Kory in Nuka Hiva and the South Pacific, held onto the predominant Western social hierarchy that categorized indigenous people as inferior and even heathenish. London presents an inverse view, equating American capitalism with religious corruption and praising the "cleanliness" of the Hawai'ians he met. As Reesman notes, "London's vision in the Pacific, while not free from stereotype, is different from those of other whites in the region, especially those who promoted trade, development, conquest, or religious conversion. In fact, much of what he presents, whether photography, travel narrative, or fiction, directly refutes agreed-upon Euro-American cultural and scientific ideas about the tropics" (*Racial Lives* 115).

As his interest in racialism was keen even before his *Snark* voyage, it is no surprise that London was interested in the racial and ethnic stratification of Hawai'ian society. Biographer Russ Kingman believes that London found in that society a "convivial mixing of races" and so he "began to believe that a utopian society might come to pass without socialism." Kingman continues:

> The lack of racial friction was a wonder to him. The patriarchal system of the Islands seemed to be satisfactory to worker ad employer. Labor

> problems were few; everybody appeared to be happy and contented. The owners of the huge sugar and pineapple plantations were charitable and generous with their workers and there was little poverty. (268)

Kingman is too generous—or careless—in his reading of London's writing about Hawai'i, and read more deeply, these texts actually give glimpses of the contentious, forced intermingling of cultures London often observed, which he embodies and explores via miscegenation.

In London's first and most recognized story about Hawai'i, "The House of Pride," for instance, he presents a complex portrait of Percival Ford, the son of a successful missionary cum entrepreneur, who is faced with the revelation that his nemesis Joe Garland, a *hapa haole* (half Hawai'ian, half white), is his half brother. Ford is passive and weak, though not diseased—an important distinction for London at this point—"He had a good constitution, never was on intimate terms with sickness, or even mild disorders; but he lacked vitality. His was a negative organism" (24), and he lived off of his father's legacy and memory, contributing nothing directly to the world himself. In fact London describes the life of Isaac Ford in considerable detail, noting that though the elder Ford had not "coveted place and worldly wealth, […] as prime minister, and, later, as banker, he had been of greater service to the missionary cause" (25). Percival Ford was quick to embrace his father's "enormous wealth,"—dismissing public opinion of the latter as "a commercial soul-saver"—and readily believed that it had been acquired on behalf of the natives, in the name of God.

Percival Ford is a product not only of the missionary system, but also of the colonial history of the Pacific more broadly. Coming full circle—born in Hawai'i,

educated in New England, and later returning to Hawai'i to assume a position of authority—Ford is London's archetypal *kama'aina haole*, literally a local foreigner and an embodiment of the failure of community in Hawai'i. Yet the story does not focus on colonialism or the missionary system directly, but instead on Ford's treatment of Joe Garland, and without question one of the writer's objectives in doing so is to emphasize the devastating effects of those two political forces on families and individuals. Though Garland is obviously a casualty, Ford is as well—though it is difficult to empathize with him in any way—and London intentionally drew attention to the ways in which colonialism could corrupt the colonizer as well as the colonized, as if to suggest that despite the plunder to be had there, Hawai'i might take more than she could give to individuals like Ford.

What was taken from Ford—at least in his own mind—was the purity of his lineage. Miscegenation in Hawai'i came to represent for London more than just the intermingling of blood, but the cannibalization of one original culture by another, imperial presence, which he saw as a detriment and a tragedy. Thus blood quantum quickly becomes a trope in the story symbolizing the anxieties of class and race between *kama'aia haoles* and *haoles* In particular, Ford's friend and doctor, Kennedy, uses the image in an attempt to elicit compassion in the man for his sibling, stating:

> And don't forget one thing, Ford. There was a dab of unruly blood in old Isaac Ford, and Joe Garland inherited it—all of it, smoke of life and cosmic sap; while you inherited all of old Isaac's ascetic blood. And just because your blood is cold, well-ordered, and well-disciplined, is no reason that you should frown upon Joe Garland. When Joe Garland undoes

> the work you do, remember that it is only old Isaac Ford on both sides, undoing with one hand what he does with the other. You are Isaac Ford's right hand, let us say; Joe Garland is his left hand. (32)

In this powerful image, London envisions the relationship between father and sons as a single entity: two arms inseparable from their body. In turn, the body itself *is* the social unit, and London used this trope repeatedly in his Pacific writing.

But this family, this body, this society, is not healthy—it is at war with itself—as London saw it as representative of the corrupted colonial paradigm that was poisoning Hawai'i. As Kennedy cautions: "And know one thing, Isaac Ford's dab of unruly blood was remarkably small, and Joe Garland got it all. And one other thing. If your father's left hand offend you, don't smite it off" (33). Important here is the implication that it was Isaac Ford who passed the "unruliness" to his son—as if London wants to emphasize the taint the colonial system has brought to the Pacific. But Percival Ford cannot accept his father's infidelity, and broods on the physical evidence of his relationship to Garland, undeniable in the lines of the latter's face: "It was devil's work that could reproduce the austere features of Isaac Ford in the loose and sensuous features before him" (32). In the image of this diseased familial body, fighting itself hand to hand, London captures the complexities of the Hawai'ian community and also his own ambivalence about colonialism in the Pacific.

Thus "The House of Pride," written in 1907, marks a radical shift in London's thinking and writing about the Pacific, in which he reconsiders the illusory perfection of Hawai'i after observing the anxieties between indigenous and foreign individuals within various communities. The story did not sell quickly—a surprise for London who, at that

time, depended on a fast turnaround from writing to publication to paycheck to address the growing debt from his travels. As Reesman notes, "[T]he problem magazine editors had with it most likely lay in its attack on racism and critique of American colonial exploitation of Hawai'i, a stance not at all popular in the States and one that would have puzzled many London fans" (*Racial Lives* 136). But the story—undoubtedly anti-colonial in its message—represents a synthesis that reconciles his thinking *in that particular moment*. Therefore I am not suggesting that London became an opponent of the colonial system; in fact there is textual evidence that he continued to admire various achievements that he saw as exemplary progress in Hawai'i. Charmian London notes in her memoir *Jack London in Aloha-Land*, for instance, that he was particularly interested in the advances in applied agriculture:

> Instead of bemoaning this encroachment of man upon the natural beauty of the landscape, Jack hailed it with acclaim. To those who complained, he would cry:—
>
> "I love to see the good rich earth being made to work, to produce more and better food for man. There is always plenty of untouched wild that will not produce food. Every time I open up a new field to the sun on the ranch, there is a hullabaloo about the spoiling of natural beauty. Meantime, I am raising beautiful crops to build up beautiful draft-animals—improving, improving, trying to help the failures among farmers to succeed. *And*, don't you see? don't you see?—there's always plenty of wild up back. I haven't spoiled one of the exquisite knolls. And suppose I had—to me the change would be from one beauty to another; and the

> other, in turn, would go to make further beauty of animal life, and more abundance for man." (251, emphasis London's)

Evidence of yet another major shift in London's thinking about Hawai'ian communities is found in his writing about leprosy after a transformative visit to the colony on the island of Moloka'i in 1907. Soon after arriving in Hawai'i at Waikiki, London met Lucius Pinkham, president of Hawai'i's Board of Health, and an official visit to Moloka'i was scheduled. Charmian later recalled that "not only has [Pinkham] put no obstacles in our way, but seems anxious for us to see Molokai" (92). In *The Colony* John Tayman notes that Pinkham had personally undertaken the task of improving the colony's public image, as in the preceding years the international press had "rendered it 'as a place of confinement, abandoned hope, a chamber of horrors,'" (199). Tayman adds:

> At its height in 1890, the population in the Molokai colony reached 1,174, and it was arguably the most famous small community in the world. The colony commanded intense scrutiny in the American press, and became the subject of presidential inquiries, heated congressional debate, and irrational public fear. Segregation laws gave the local government the right to arrest and imprison any person suspected of having the disease, regardless of nationality, and the rolls soon included not only Hawaiians and Americans, but also individuals from Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, and China. Correspondents came from all over the globe, seeking scenes of thrilling grotesquerie. Physicians and scientists entered, some to offer help, others to indulge

> their own ambitions, an ethically suspect pursuit that led to one of the nineteenth century's most notorious episodes of human experimentation. Famous authors also secured a visiting pass: Stevenson spent seven days in the colony; London stayed six. (Tayman 3)

The Londons were accompanied on their visit by Moloka'i's superintendent, Jack McVeigh, who had been instructed by Pinkham "to make certain that London saw the settlement in a positive light" (Tayman 199). They succeeded, and London ultimately wrote an essay about the colony, "The Lepers of Molokai," which was published in the January 1908 issue of *Woman's Home Companion* and later included in his *Snark* log. The text reads like propaganda—light and cheery in tone, punctuated with only the smallest critical remarks. Pinkham and Lorrin Thurston, head of the Hawai'ian Bureau of Information, were ecstatic: "The article is highly approved by Mr. Pinkham," wrote Charmian, "and Mr. Thurston avers it is the best and fairest that has ever been written" (132).

Yet Charmian's account of the visit, recorded in her diary and later published in *Jack London in Aloha-Land*, provides a striking contrast, as she records not only the somber realities of the exile they witness but, more importantly, her husband's uncensored—and often negative—reactions to them. I believe that his article about the colony expresses London's idealized view of a successful Pacific community, but functioning as a corrective, Charmian's diary reveals the disillusionment that later permeated his short stories about that same community.

The Londons sailed on July 2 aboard a steamer carrying patients to Moloka'i from the Halihi Hospital—new residents of the colony. Though London's account of the visit does not mention the voyage itself, Charmian captures the scene in her diary:

> We are not merry, Jack and I, for what we have witnessed during the past two hours would wring pitying emotion from a graven image. And just when we would cheer a trifle, […] our eyes are again compelled by the huddle of doomed fellow-creatures amidst their pathetic bundles of belongings on the open after-deck of the plunging interisland steamer bound for Molokai.
>
> None of it did we miss—the parting and the embarkation of the banished; […] "Clean" passengers were taken aboard first, the vessel picking up at another wharf those who bore no return ticket to the land of the clean. As the "Noeau" [steamer] came alongside, the crowd ashore appeared like any other leave-taking gathering of natives, eve to the flowers; but suddenly Jack at my elbow jerked out, "*Look*—look at that boy's face!" And I looked, and saw. (*Aloha-Land* 105).

Charmian's account continues with graphic details of what they saw: the devastating effects of leprosy on the faces and bodies of those with whom they traveled.

As noted above, Moloka'i had received ample media coverage in the late nineteenth century, and London arrived bearing the representative attitude held by many Americans toward the island. And yet, obviously encouraged by Pinkham and McVeigh—who made certain the Londons saw all of the colony's "highlights"—his article paints the portrait of an ideal community. "Give us a good breeze about how we

live here," pleaded one of the residents, "For heaven's sake write us up straight. […] Just tell the world how we really are in here" (68). London wrote glowingly of the colony, documenting each "stop" on his carefully planned tour and, at times, his didacticism is heavy-handed, giving the impression that Pinkham and other officials were feeding him information to be included in his article. Charmian, however, was more candid in her diary, capturing not only the often upsetting sights in "that grave of living death, Molokai," as she called it, but also her uncensored reactions to them (*Aloha Land* 108). Describing the Kalaupapa Rifle Club, for instance, she writes,

> But fancy watching these blasted remnants of humanity, lost in the delight of scoring, their knotted hands holding the guns, on the triggers the stumps of what had once been fingers, while their poor ruined eyes strove to run along the sights…
>
> It took all our steel, at first, to avoid shrinking from their hideousness; but, assured as we were of the safety of mingling, our concern was earnestly to let them know we were unafraid of them. And it made such a touching difference. Out of their watchful silence and bashful loneliness they emerged into their natural care-free Hawaiian spirits. (111-12, ellipses Charmian's)

Finally, always conscious of appeal and marketability, London produced an article that pleased Pinkham, publishers, and his readers at home.

London's "The Lepers of Molokai" dispels the preconception of the colony as "The pit of hell, the most cursed place on earth," as he terms it, echoing his description of the working class in "How I Became a Socialist" as the "Social Pit" (*Snark* 63). In fact,

his writing about the colony at Moloka'i and the various individual lepers he depicts in his later short stories—discussed below—derives, in part, from his thinking about socialism. Much as London viewed socialism as a galvanizing movement that could unite individuals and form a strong social body, he likewise first saw—or wanted to see—the leper colony as an ideal community embodying the most successful, and perhaps idealized, aspects of socialism. While the colony at Moloka'i, did function like a socialist commune in various ways—many members of the collective participated in a self-regulated system of industry, agriculture, and commerce—London quickly realized that for many of its residents, the colony was no socialist's dream, but a prison.

London's reaction to his Moloka'i visit was clearly more complex than his article suggests, and six months after its publication he wrote the first in a series of short stories about the harsh realities of leprosy. These stories reveal not only the more graphic physical manifestations of the disease on the individual human body, but also the communal damage to the Hawai'ian social body. As each of these texts grapples with London's Pacific dialectic—attempting to reconcile individualism and socialism—they provide insight about his ever-shifting views about American identity, and in "Koolau the Leper," especially, he champions a kind of individualism that embodies the self-sufficiency and physical strength with which he prided himself.

The story opens with Koolau's address to the small band of followers who have followed him into hiding in lieu of being deported to Moloka'i. Koolau expresses the most extreme objection to the colony, stating simply and powerfully, "Molokai is a prison" (39). He goes on to condemn the *haoles* whom he blames for the decline in Hawai'ian indigenous prosperity and freedom:

> Brothers, is it not strange? Ours was the land, and behold, the land is not ours. What did these preachers of the word of God and the word of Rum give us for the land? Have you received one dollar, as much as one dollar, any one of you, for the land? Yet it is theirs, and in return they tell us we can go to work on the land, their land, and that what we produce by our toil shall be theirs. Yet in the old days we did not have to work. Also, when we are sick, they take away our freedom. (41)

Though voiced through Koolau, the frustration expressed is London's own, as he recognized the realities of the destructive legacy of colonialism on Hawai'ian society. The story also evidences more of London's (and Charmian's) own powerful and often horrified reactions to the physical effects of leprosy, witnessed during their week in Moloka'i: "They were monsters—in face and form grotesque caricatures of everything human. They were hideously maimed and distorted, and had the seeming of creatures that had been racked in millenniums of hell" (40). Such impressions were also representative of the negative stereotypes and preconceptions many Americans held toward lepers.

Yet London creates in Koolau a hero who embodies the characteristics championed by all Americans, and by himself. Once a simple man—a cowboy, in fact—Koolau is now the leader and protector of a band of rebel lepers trying to live out the remainder of their lives on their own terms and living off the land. When police first arrive and threaten to capture his people, Koolau single-handedly holds them off with his rifle, deftly shooting the sheriff and his deputies; later, however, soldiers bomb the band of lepers with shells, killing and wounding many of Koolau's comrades. "He felt a fleeting prod of pride. With war guns and rifles, police and soldiers, they came for him,

and he was only one man, a crippled wreck of a man at that" (50). Despite his strength and perseverance, however, Koolau remains humble and London artfully contrasts his individualism with the communal presence of the haoles:

> Koolau forgot where he was, forgot everything, as he lay and marveled at the strange persistence of these haoles who would have their will though the sky fell in. Aye, they would have their will over all men and all things, even though they died in getting it. He could not but admire them, too, what of that will in them that was stronger than life and that bent all things to their bidding. He was convinced of the hopelessness of his struggle. There was no gainsaying that terrible will of the haoles. Though he killed a thousand, yet would they rise like the sands of the sea and come upon him, ever more and more. They never knew when they were beaten. That was their fault and their virtue. (52)

Retreating to a comfortable pose, London champions the individual over the collective, and ends the story with the compelling, highly romanticized, image—sure to resonate with American readers—of the exiled hero clutching his rifle as he dies alone: "He half lifted his head, but it fell back. Then his eyes opened, and did not close. His last though was of his Mauser, and he pressed it against his chest with his folded, fingerless hands" (55).

In Koolau, London embodies the warring anxieties many Hawai'ians held about Moloka'i and about the colonial past and present that affected them. The story also presents another distinct synthesis in the writer's ongoing Pacific dialectic between individualism and socialism. Here he vilifies both the *haoles* and the local law (composed

primarily of native Hawai'ians) while extolling the merits of rebellion and individualism. Not surprisingly, the story was controversial with Hawai'ians—especially health and government officials—many of whom felt betrayed by the writer:

> When London finally lays lonely yet defiant Koolau to rest in a ginger blossom thicket in the Kalalau Valley, he closes one of the most controversial stories and opens one of the most bitter debates in Hawaiian *haole* literary history, a debate that kept his work off local bookstore shelves and the writer all but shunned by the white population in Hawaii. (Slagel "Political Leprosy" 173)

The events of the story were, in fact, based on real events and by the time London first heard about them, Koolau was already regarded as a revolutionary hero among many Hawai'ians.[22] Briefly, when Koolau, a respected member of a community on Kauai, was diagnosed with leprosy, he expected his wife to accompany him to Moloka'i as his *kokua* (helper). When this request was denied—it is said that it was initially granted and later reneged upon—Koolau escaped into the Na Pali valley of Kalalau with his wife, their son, and a small group of followers. Pursued by police, Kookau fought back and ultimately killed Sheriff Louis Stoltz in self-defense. For three years, the fugitives hid in the valley and Koolau and his son eventually died of leprosy there. His wife emerged from hiding and wrote down the first account of her husband's story.

London first learned of Koolau from Bert Stoltz, one of his *Snark* crew, and the son of Sheriff Louis Stoltz. Biographers have not speculated on the younger Stoltz's feelings about his father's murder—nor about his reaction to London's story after its

[22] I draw upon Jeanne Campbell Reesman's account in *Jack London: A Study of the Short Fiction* and John Tayman's *The Colony* for factual information about this incident.

publication—though it may be inferred that London's first account of Koolau was not a favorable one. But the romanticized Koolau that London created ranks among the most noble of his heroes and, to the bitter ire of Lucius Pinkham and Jack McVeigh, renewed negative perceptions of the leper colony at Moloka'i, depicted in the story as nothing short of a windowless prison cell. As Reesman notes:

> [S]urprising, given his having heard the story from Stoltz's own son and from the landowning class of *haoles* in Hawaii, is that he unambiguously takes Koolau's side in the matter. It is hard to overestimate the importance of the actual Ko'olau to the Kauaians, but it is London, a visitor, who made him known to the world and who, more than any other *malihini* (or newcomer), publicized the lives of the lepers of Molokai" (*Short Fiction* 149-50)

The story especially incensed Lorrin A. Thurston, the head of the Hawai'i'an Promotion Committee, who called London "a thoroughly untrustworthy man and ungrateful and untruthful bounder [who] made the worst out of the leprosy situation here, distorted facts, invented others when truth was not enough to suit his purpose and thoroughly misrepresented conditions" (qtd. in Tayman 203-04). London responded, stating:

> I think Hawaii is too touchy on matters of truth, and while she complacently in her newspapers exploits the weaknesses and afflictions of other lands, gets unduly excited when her own are exploited. Furthermore, the several purely fictional stories on leprosy written by me have not shaken the world at all, Hawaii's fevered imagination to the contrary. (qtd. in Day, "Introduction" 10)

Thurston and the Hawai'ian government need not have worried about London's impact on tourism, for, as Earl Labor notes, "Jack's writings about Hawaii were responsible in considerable measure for the increase in tourism over the following decade" ("Pacific World" 211). His stories and essays sold well and were read widely in the United States, and it would seem that readers embraced them as entertainment; his essay, "The Lepers of Molokai" was likewise well-received, as London hoped and predicted. Writing about the essay in a letter to F. Hayden Carruth, editor of the *Woman's Home Companion*, London noted, "While leprosy may be a distasteful subject, I think I have handled it fairly decently for your readers; and that have given a side of it that has not hitherto been given to it—namely, the happier, brighter side" (*Letters* 694).

Though London's essay and stories about leprosy together paint a complex view of the disease—as a death sentence in "Koolau" and as a manageable illness in "The Lepers of Molokai," for instance—in each of these texts the writer emphasized its impact on communities. For London, leprosy was a disease of the social, as well as the physical, body that affected individuals and entire populations. Ultimately, he came to see it as a literal and metaphorical representation of the degenerative impact of colonization in the Pacific more broadly.

Though the Londons stayed in Hawai'i for just five months in 1907, London remained enamored of the island for the rest of his life, and continued writing stories about them and his experiences there for many years. London's visit to Molokai'i was particularly resonant for him during the remaining months of his *Snark* voyage, as he saw first-hand the further devastation disease wreaked on Pacific communities they

encountered. In Typee, for instance, visiting the same locales Melville made famous in his own Pacific adventure, London noted that since his predecessor's visit:

> And now all this strength ad beauty has departed, and the valley of Typee is the abode of some dozen wretched creatures, afflicted by leprosy, elephantiasis, and tuberculosis. Melville estimated the population at two thousand, […] Life has rotted away in this wonderful garden spot, where the climate is as delightful and healthful as any to be found in the world. Not alone were the Typeans physically magnificent; they were pure. Their air did not contain the bacilli and germs and microbes of disease that fill our own air. And when the white men imported in their ships these various microorganisms of disease, the Typeans crumpled up and went down before them. (*Snark* 112-13)

Elephantiasis in particular—which he viewed much like leprosy—plagued the Society Islands, and during their visit in Raiatea London noted: "Sad to see was the elephantiasis that afflicted some of [the indigenous people]. Here would be a comely woman of magnificent proportions, with the port of a queen, yet marred by one arm four times—or a dozen times—the size of the other" (*Snark* 134).

London almost always held colonialism—the Western presence—responsible for the rampant diseases he witnessed in the Pacific, and he was quick to equate them with a legacy of Western contact and domination, evident in the political, economic, and/or ethical degeneracy within the communities he encountered. "When one considers the situation," he noted while in the Marquesas, "one is almost driven to the conclusion that the white race flourishes on impurity and corruption. […] We of the white race are the

survivors and the descendants of the thousands of generations of survivors in the war with the microorganisms" (*Snark* 113). In his *Snark* journal and in many Pacific short stories, London condemned Western colonists for bringing diseases to the indigenous population, and finds in the "disease motif" an apt metaphor for the effects of colonialism more broadly. As Reesman notes, London approaches "the island characters as individuals forced to respond to cultural crises precipitated by whites" (*Racial Lives* 114). She continues:

> London applies the disease motif to white men instead of islanders. Thus once again he presents a dual, paradoxical positioning of whiteness. His white skin gave him the wherewithal to sail his yacht around the Pacific and was the boundary between himself and the nonwhite peoples of the Pacific, as well as the boundary between one world, an inner world of will and agency, and another, a world of chance and sometimes chaos. (*Racial Lives* 114)

I would take Reesman's apt comments about London's skin further and note that as a boundary between himself and disease, it proved to be far too permeable—as he suffered almost constantly in the Pacific from illness and injury.

London and his crew fell victim to serious pain and infection from "Solomon sores," described "as excessively active ulcers":

> A mosquito bite, a cut, or the slightest abrasion, serves for lodgment of the poison with which the air seems to be filled. Immediately the ulcer commences to eat. It eats in every direction, consuming skin and muscle with astounding rapidity. The pin-point ulcer of the first day is the size of

> a dime by the second day, and by the end of the week a silver dollar will not cover it. (*Snark* 168)

The sores were, in fact, yaws, "an infection of the spirochete *Treponema pertenue*, which eats skin and flesh and sometimes bone" (Reesman, *Racial Lives* 110). Each crew member experimented with treatments for the ulcers, though London favored "corrosive sublimate"—containing high levels of mercury—and encouraged its use by all:

> Martin swears by iodoform. Henry uses lime-juice undiluted. And I believe that when corrosive sublimate is slow in taking hold, alternate dressings of oxide of hydrogen are just the thing. There are white men in the Solomons who stake all upon boracic acid, and others who are prejudiced in favor of Lysol. I also have the weakness of a panacea. It is California. I defy any man to get a Solomon Island sore in California. (175)

Some biographers surmise that the writer's generous use of corrosive sublimate likely resulted in mercury poisoning, hastening his death caused by kidney failure and stroke at the age of forty.

Yet London reached to science and specifically medicine as an anodyne to his struggle. He prided himself on his medical knowledge, and the final essay included in his published *Snark* log documents his skills as "The Amateur M.D." Among the many subjects that he studied as a young man, contemporary medicine held a particular interest for the writer—especially the theories of racialism and psychology, the latter mostly as it related to race. As he prepared for the *Snark* trip, London read extensively about diseases endemic to the Pacific regions he planned to visit, and gathered a respectable collection

of medical texts to be included in his shipboard library of over 400 volumes.[23] He also assembled medical kit with the advice of a "first-class druggist." His precautions were ultimately futile, as he and his crew suffered almost constantly once they left Hawai'i for Tahiti and beyond. "I should have been far wiser, I know now," he wrote with some humor:

> If I had bought one of those ready-made, self-acting, fool-proof medicine chests such as are favoured by fourth-rate ship-masters. In such a chest each bottle has a number. On the inside of the lid is placed a simple table of directions: No. 1, toothache; No. 2, smallpox; No. 3, stomachache; No. 4, cholera; No. 5, rheumatism; and so on, through the list of human ills. And I might have used it as did a certain venerable skipper, who, when No. 3 was empty, mixed a dose from No. 1 and No. 2, or, when No. 7 was all gone, dosed his crew with 4 and 3 till 3 gave out, when he used 5 and 2. (*Snark* 191)

"The Amateur M.D." is full of humor and London assumes an engaging, self-effacing tone in the essay as he vividly describes the rather horrifying injuries and illnesses he and his crew endured—including burns, gashes, and fevers—as well as his successes and failures as the *Snark*'s primary care provider. "I concluded that an amateur M.D. is without honor on his own vessel, even if he has cure himself," he wrote when his crew grew wary of his insistence that he could treat and cure their Solomon sores:

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[23] According to Reesman, London brought over five hundred records, a hand-cranked phonograph, and more than four hundred books on the *Snark* trip. Acting as part of the ballast, the books helped balance the boat (*Racial Lives* 119).

> The rest of the crew had begun to look upon me as a sort of mild mono-maniac on the question of sores ad sublimate. Just because my blood was impure was no reason that I should think everybody else's was. I made no more overtures. Time and microbes were with me, and all I had to do was wait. (197)

London also dabbled in dentistry, and apparently found modest respect from his crew in that service:

> I did not know anything about dentistry, but a friend fitted me out with forceps and similar weapons, and in Honolulu I picked up a book upon teeth. Also, in that sub-tropical city I managed to get hold of a skull, from which I extracted the teeth swiftly and painlessly. Thus equipped, I was ready, though not exactly eager, to tackle any tooth that got in my way. (192)

The writer gained quite a reputation for his dentistry during his travels in the South Seas—he treated a number of Western and indigenous patients as the *Snark* hopped from island to island and was known as a capable practitioner. With pride he noted, "I expect, before the voyage of the *Snark* is finished, to be doing bridge work and putting on gold crowns" (194).

Though "The Amateur M.D." undoubtedly serves as a humorous postscript to the *Snark* journey, it also evidences another facet of London's interest in medical science. In the Pacific, he saw disease challenge and destroy both individuals and entire communities, and he attributed this to the larger phenomenon of Western imperialism. As Reesman notes, "[E]vidence of brutality, savagery, and the negative effects of

colonialism combined to suggest a social climate that seemed to befit the disease-ridden physical environment" (*Racial Lives* 133). His visit to the leper colony on Moloka'i—during which he witnessed not only the effects of the disease, but also the various technologies employed in its treatment—piqued his interest in medical science, and he advocated for the funding of research for a cure: "[A] few thousands of dollars would go far in a legitimate and scientific search after a cure for leprosy, for a serum, or for some undreamed discovery that will enable the medical world to exterminate the *bacillus leprae*. There's the place for your money, you philanthropists" (*Snark* 74). Finding a cure for leprosy represented a kind of remedy for the impact of imperialism—as if in the science of Western medicine, London saw potential to mediate the degeneration of Western colonialism and capitalism in the Pacific.

Ironically, London's own physical health was jeopardized by a mysterious physical and psychological malaise that neither he nor the doctors who treated him could diagnose. While aboard the *Snark* London describes his affliction:

> With the exception of the insanity cases, I'm the worst off on board. I shall catch the next steamer to Australia and go on the operating table. Among my minor afflictions, I may mention a new and mysterious one. For the past week my hands have been swelling as with dropsy. It is only by a painful effort that I can close them. A pull on a rope is excruciating. The sensations are like those that accompany severe chilblains. Also, the skin is peeling off both hands at an alarming rate, besides which the new skin underneath is growing hard and thick. The doctor-book fails to mention this disease. Nobody knows what it is. (*Snark* 205)

London spent five weeks undergoing tests and examinations in an Australian hospital, but doctors there were unable to pinpoint his illness or find suitable treatment: "It was unknown in the literature of medicine. No case like it had ever been reported" (208). He and Charmian decided to return to California and, upon doing so, he was miraculously "cured." As he noted in "Backword," the final chapter of the *Snark* journal, "I reasoned that in my own climate of California I had always maintained a stable nervous equilibrium. So back I came. Since my return I have completely recovered" (209).

**Suicide in the Pacific: *Martin Eden* and the Fractured Individual**

London wrote prolifically during his *Snark* trip, maintaining an impressive schedule of writing and publishing in order to underwrite his expenses for both the voyage and his household at home. As I noted earlier, almost immediately upon his departure from San Francisco in 1907, he began work on a novel that would be among his most popular—and misunderstood—works. While London remained adamant that *Martin Eden* was indeed "an indictment of that pleasant, wild-beast struggle of Individualism," the novel was also part-autobiography, and portrayed Eden as the autodidact and successful popular writer that London was himself. In light of Eden's downfall and subsequent suicide, we are left to question whether London—writing aboard the *Snark* as he traveled the Pacific—saw himself headed toward a similar fate. Thus in its inception *Martin Eden* represents the paradox that, in part, drove London to the sea at that point in his life: the Pacific dialectic between individualism and socialism that he sought to synthesize again and again in each new book and story he wrote. London wrote *Martin Eden* to champion socialism, for instance, but instead created a

character that revealed the failings of both the individual and the collective, represented powerfully in Eden's willful suicide by drowning in the Pacific Ocean.

London was always at odds with his own autodidacticism, as he was both proud of his accomplishments but also highly self-conscious of his lack of formal education and his ensuing social position. By giving Eden that same biographical history, he emphasized the *choice* that one can make between individualism and socialism—that one's fate is not predetermined or even the result of circumstances, but an act of free will and strength. Eden read the texts that London had read, and yet he clung to individualism while the latter chose socialism. Thus intentionally or not, London suggests that neither extreme is necessarily more inevitable or even logical—both are human constructs and thus fallible. I believe the writer was struggling with the realization of that fallibility as he wrote *Martin Eden*; though a professed socialist when he sailed into the Pacific aboard the *Snark* in 1907, London's politics were primarily the result of observation and reading and were, therefore, challenged by the realities he encountered in various Pacific communities and I illustrated in the previous section.

Similarly, Martin Eden's education consists of both book- and experiential-learning, especially the life he had at sea that is often alluded to but rarely elaborated upon in the novel. Though he is eager to enrich his intellect, Eden's rapid accumulation of knowledge—especially of philosophy and science—often overwhelms him. London uses the rising motion of waves on the sea as metaphor for Eden's rapidly expanding intellectual horizons, imbuing the image with a disturbing quality of sea-sickness,

> Martin had ascended from pitch to pitch of intellectual living, and here he was at a higher pitch than ever. All the hidden things were laying their

> secrets bare. He was drunken [sic] with comprehension. At night, asleep, he lived with the gods in colossal nightmare; and awake, in the day, he went around like a somnambulist, with absent stare, gazing upon the world he had just discovered. (149)

It would seem that the experiences as sailor and as scholar are at odds within Eden, and as the novel continues, he is torn between them. Ultimately, the metaphorical and literal queasiness he feels grows into full-fledged psychological illness.

London maintained that his own time at sea influenced his understanding of the plights of sailors—and of the working class more broadly—and was influential on his attraction to socialism. Yet, like Eden, London could never fully embrace life before the mast, nor life in the cannery or factory. His drive for education and social ascension complicated that reality, as did his achievements—he became far too prominent and successful to claim otherwise. As such, the alienation Eden increasingly feels toward the working class from which he came—and that includes his own family and friends—represents a similar struggle that London experienced as he achieved notoriety and monetary success. Perhaps in his portrayal of Eden, London embedded some of his own feelings of superiority—and the possible sense of hubris and guilt that accompanied them—that were channeled into a kind of overcompensation in his enthusiasm for socialism. That is, wanting to deny the very real sense of individualism that enabled his personal success, London became an outspoken socialist.

Undoubtedly, the work ethic London gave Eden was his own—the ability to read and write for days at a time was a trait that the writer valued in himself. Passages recounting Eden's work habits reflect London's own, such as this description of his

ability to envision a story in its entirety before sitting down to write: "He was deliberate creative genius, and, before he began a story or poem, the thing itself was already alive in his brain, with the end in sight and the means of realizing that end in his conscious possession. Otherwise the effort was doomed to failure" (245-46). Likewise, London knew that his understanding of the public and of what kind of writing would sell was an asset for his livelihood. Yet Martin Eden expresses self-loathing in his acknowledgement of the same: "Martin worked out half a dozen stock forms, which he always consulted when constructing stories. These forms were like the cunning tables used by mathematicians […] His machine-made storiettes, though he hated them and derided them, were successful" (301, 305).

That London wrote for profit while aboard the *Snark* on a trip around the world funded entirely by his writing, is a clear example of the personal nature of the dialectic that pulled at him—of the tension between his private goals and the public persona that he cultivated for the outside world. And though he was a true champion of men—of the power of the collective—his faith in socialism was never as firm as he wanted the public to believe. London's decision to sail away into the Pacific was born of his desire to escape his realization of that truth. Yet once away, his experiences in the Pacific—both aboard the *Snark* and in Hawai'i and the South Seas—intensified the pull between these extremes and, ultimately, produced a body of writing that shows the irreconcilable nature of the dialectic between individualism and socialism that defined his life and work.

London was surprised by the many reviewers and critics whom he felt misread it. Responding to one such critic he wrote:

> Now to *my* parable, which I thought I had expounded lucidly in the pages of this novel. Being an Individualist, being unaware of the needs of others, of the whole human collective need, Martin Eden lived only for himself, fought only for himself, and, if you please, died only for himself. He fought for entrance into the bourgeois circles where he expected to find refinement, culture, high-living and high-thinking. He won his way into those circles and was appalled by the colossal, unlovely mediocrity of the bourgeoisie. […] These were the things he had found life worth living in order to fight for. When they failed him, being a consistent Individualist, being unaware of the collective human need, there remained nothing for which to live and fight. And so he died. (*Letters* 865)

Without question, London could have been describing much of his own rise to success. And yet he did not realize how convincingly he—via Martin Eden—had blurred the novel's intent and subsequent effect. As Andrew Sinclair notes,

> Unfortunately, London's character was nearer Martin Eden's than he allowed. His individualism and Nietzschean belief in the strength of the will were usually more apparent than his belief in socialism. To reconcile his beliefs in the survival of the fittest and in the aristocracy of the intellect with his compassion for his fellow workers was a task as difficult as driving forty horses abreast. Martin Eden was more consistent, living and dying an individualist[.] ("Introduction" 9-10)

Though Sinclair asserts that Martin Eden's convictions are ultimately made "consistent," the character—like London himself—more often is torn between

individualism and socialism, and his angst manifests as psychological illness as the novel progressed. From the novel's start, London emphasizes the physical and intellectual workings of Eden's brain, detailing his unique ability to process information: "His abnormal power of vision made abstractions take on concrete form. In the alchemy of his brain, trigonometry and mathematics and the whole field of knowledge which they betokened were transmuted into so much landscape" (52). As the acquisition of knowledge begins to present Eden with paradoxes and conflicts that he cannot reconcile, however, that alchemy is damaged irrevocably—portrayed by London as sickness in his "think machine" (474).

In his essay, "Divided Self and World in *Martin Eden*," George M. Spangler posits that London's protagonist is a schizoid personality, as defined by R.D. Laing in *The Divided Self* as "an individual the totality of whose experience is split in two main ways: in the first place, there is a rent on his relation with his world and, in the second, there is disruption of his relation with himself" (Laing 15). Though Spangler limits his psychological assessment to Martin Eden alone—believing that "The time has come for a different interpretive perspective, one that does not depend primarily on the terms of discourse [between individualism and socialism] London himself established many years ago" (157)—I believe there are useful connections to be made to London as well.

The writer's time in the Pacific was unquestionably one of adventure and pleasure, but as I have indicated it was also marked by serious bouts of stress, injury, and illness for London—all of which contributed to his own psychological sickness, albeit a milder one than that of Martin Eden. He was plagued by unease that came via news from home, as his debts for the *Snark* were in dispute and his ranch in Sonoma was threatened

with foreclosure. In addition, he pushed himself to write one thousand words each morning of the voyage, spending hours cooped up churning out stories and correspondence to keep his finances afloat. London's anxiety was often high, and a fissure was developing between him and the external world: he was, at times, distracted to the point that he was unable to remain fully in the present while traveling in the Pacific, but he was likewise unable to attend to matters at home in California. I believe his psychological stress ultimately contributed to his physical decline and the strange condition that ended his *Snark* voyage in late 1908.

London's condition was never fully diagnosed but according to Charmian, Australian doctors "agreed that the trouble was non-parasitic, and therefore concluded that it was entirely of nervous origin. […] [T]he one thing that would set him straight would be to return once more to his own habitat, to California, where his nerve equilibrium had always been stable" (*The Log of the* Snark 482, 483). He retreated to California to find a psychic cure, cutting his circumnavigation short in order to return to San Francisco in 1909. It seems that this termination broke something in him—though deep psychological damage had already occurred—and, as Charmian reveals in her diary, he suffered as he finished *Martin Eden* during their passage home: "Jack is sick sometimes, mentally, or he wouldn't do as he does. This reflection helps me through some hopeless, loveless times—seldom, thank God" (qtd. in Sinclair 12).[24]

Unquestionably, London's trip home to California was difficult for him, both mentally and physically, and I suggest that throughout this short period—during which he

[24] In *Jack London: A Life*, Alex Kershaw notes that London's stress at this time led him to drink heavily, which is likely what Charmian was referring to when he stated "he wouldn't do as he does" (Kershaw 196).

penned the final scenes of *Martin Eden*—he experienced the kind of "disruption of his relation with himself" Laing ascribed to one suffering from mental illness. The Londons sailed home aboard the steamship *Mariposa*, leaving Sydney on April 7, 1908 and arriving in Oakland on July 21, and it is no coincidence that Martin Eden's own fated final journey takes place on a ship of the same name. As Andrew Sinclair aptly notes, "London's sense of disgust and despair, his physical pain, and his pressing financial problems all help to explain why he pushed his hero through the porthole of a boat that he [London] was taking back to California" (12). Ultimately, the writer actualized his own conflict via his protagonist's suicide in the Pacific.

As the novel draws to a close, Eden is increasingly disconnected from the world around him and fantasizes about a quiet life on a ranch in Tahiti—unable to concentrate on matters and people before him, his retreat into thoughts of life in the Pacific reflects the disruption in his psyche that, in many ways, reflects the writer's own. London's choice of Tahiti was not accidental, as during his own visit to the island aboard the *Snark* he had encountered "the Nature Man"—an American named Ernest Darling who he described in his *Snark* log.

Darling moved to Tahiti after a physical and mental breakdown in his native Oregon that left him nearly dead, and praised the island for its healing qualities. Though London was fascinated by this tale of miracle recovery and later wrote of Darling, "there are times when I am compelled to envy you and your care-free existence" (*Snark* 128), the writer likely found in the Nature Man a kind of ideological alter ego. For Darling embodied the same conflict between individualism and socialism that plagued, and defined, London—professing his commitment to socialism while epitomizing the

independence, physicality, and self-reliance that enabled him to quite literally carve out a life for himself on a Tahitian hillside. Like London would later with his ill-fated Wolf House, Darling built his home with his own hands, using the raw materials of the land that surrounded it; he also cultivated the harsh Tahitian terrain, producing an abundance of fruits and vegetables. Thus in this manner as well, Darling mirrored London, as he profited from the sale of his crops. London unabashedly admires this and writes admiringly, "Not only had the Nature Man become self-supporting, but he was now a prosperous agriculturist with produce to sell to the city-dwellers of Papeete" (125). London's reluctance to consciously recognize the paradox of a self-proclaimed Socialist proudly capitalizing from his own independent labor illustrates the degree to which he continued to struggle with that same contradiction in himself. Perhaps this is why the writer did not—or could not—see fit to allow Martin Eden to find the same salvation and recovery in Tahiti that Darling did.

Martin Eden's "sick brain" was also a metaphor for the national anxiety many felt toward the Pacific more broadly—especially evident in the yearning to conquer, convert, and civilize that vast ocean frontier. Eden's pastoral vision of farming in Tahiti represented the American (colonial) attitude toward the South Pacific at the turn of the twentieth century, fueled in part by Melville's *Typee* and *Omoo*, which had brought readers tantalizing glimpses of the resources and possibilities therein. Without question London's own understanding of this was informed by the evidence of colonialism he witnessed in Hawai'i and the South Pacific, and in Martin Eden's growing neurosis the writer enacted what he saw as a national neurosis—the insatiable American quest to conquer the frontier, wherever it may be.

Though London returned to his life and work in California and continued to grapple with the dialectic between individualism and socialism in his writing for many years, via Martin Eden he imagines the conflict irreconcilable and fatalistically in the character's suicide. Hopeless, listless, and sick aboard the *Mariposa*, Eden is unable to sleep, write, or entertain company. Alone in his stateroom, he finds his epiphany:

> Strange that it had never come to him before. That was the meaning of it all; he had been drifting that way all the time, […] He wanted rest, and here was rest awaiting him. He glanced at the open port-hole. Yes, it was large enough. For the first time in weeks he felt happy. At last he had discovered the cure of his ill. […] Life was ill, or, rather, it had become ill—an unbearable thing. (*Martin Eden* 479, 480)

Though London claimed that Eden's death represented the failure of individualism, Carolyn Johnston correctly sees a greater complexity in the symbolism, writing, "He dies not because of his individualism, but as a result of his self-consciousness and his disgust over the pure visions he sees and cannot communicate in a materialistic society" (88). These "pure visions" arose from the recognition that ideological paradigms—whether individualism or socialism—could never fully account for the complexities of life beyond the books from which they were derived. Thus in this final portrait of Eden, as a man broken by his self-consciousness, we find a glimpse of London himself as he grappled with his realization of the failures of *both* individualism and socialism that he saw in the Pacific during his *Snark* voyage.

As such, the Pacific Ocean offers Eden—and London himself—relief from the paradoxical state of numbness and pain spawned from the endless pull that Pacific

dialectic, found in the cold, dark, and silent water. The description of Martin Eden's suicide is detailed and compelling, and the writer is careful to characterize it as an act of pure, individualistic will, calling it "the work to do" (481). In fact, Eden must overcome the human instinct to fight for life and so he swims deep down in the sea, past the point at which his body could struggle to the surface:

> His endurance was faltering, but he compelled his arms and legs to drive him deeper until his will snapped and the air drove from his lungs in a great explosive rush. The bubbles rubbed and bounded like tiny balloons against his cheeks and eyes as they took their upward flight. Then came pain and strangulation. This hurt was not death, was the thought that oscillated through his reeling consciousness. Death did not hurt. It was life, the pangs of life, this awful, suffocating feeling; it was the last blow life could deal him. (482)

There is irony in Martin Eden's death, as it represents not only an act of strong will, but of incredible physical strength—something London woefully lacked himself at the time. Shortly before leaving San Francisco bound for Tahiti, Eden sees a doctor who praises, "Physically, you are a man in a thousand—in ten thousand. Barring accidents, you should live to be a hundred" (474). London, however, had begun the steady physical decline that would continue until his death in 1916, just seven years later. We cannot underestimate the frustration that London surely felt when his trip was cut short because of illness. "Though he and Charmian treasured happy memories of the *Snark* voyage," notes Reesman, "London was disappointed in his body's failure to meet the challenges of

the South Pacific" (*Racial Lives* 110). London returned home battered with uncertainties, but in Eden he envisioned the certitude of death in the Pacific.

**Return to the Pacific: London's Final Journey**

"On November 22, 1916, following an excessive self-administered intake of morphine and atropine sulphates, normally used by him to relieve uraemic pain, London passed away on his ranch," Alfred S. Shivers notes. Shivers was among the first to challenge the popular misconception that London—following in the wake of Martin Eden and a number of his other fictional characters—took his own life. The writer's death certificate, however, cites natural causes, "uraemic poisoning, following a renal colic, having as a contributing cause chronic interstitial nephritis" (qtd. in Shivers 58), though for years both readers and critics found the notion of suicide far more compelling. London died at home, on his ranch in Glen Ellen, California but just months before, he had traveled back into the Pacific to pay a last visit to Hawai'i.

Jack and Charmian London actually visited Hawai'i twice in the final year and a half of the writer's life: March 2-18, 1915 and December 16, 1915-July 26, 1916. According to biographers, his health was relatively poor during both trips but his intellectual energy was strong. It was during these final months in the Pacific that London was able to finally find a semblance of reconciliation among the philosophies and ideas that had pulled at him for much of his life. "Individualism, socialism, racialism, even what he thought was manhood: none was ultimately fulfilling. In contrast, the concept of individuation within community challenged London's set notions of identity" (Reesman, *Racial Lives* 291). Much of the change in the writer's thinking derived from his reading

of Carl Jung, from whom he found ways to connect the individual and the communal via the notion of the collective unconscious. The concept helped him find a satisfactory integration of the realities of socialism and individualism that had seemed irreconcilable during his *Snark* voyage years before.

In one of his final Pacific narratives, "The Water Baby," for instance, published posthumously, London expresses the satisfaction of finding a balance in his ideological world-view, demonstrated in the words of the character Kohokumu, an elderly kanaka who tries to enlighten a young *haole kama'aina*, Lakana. Kohokumu—whose name means "tree of knowledge" in Hawai'ian—can be seen as Martin Eden's doppelganger, a foil that represents a new Pacific vision for London. Kohokumu has gained his knowledge of the word not through books but through living, and unlike Eden, finds in the waters of the Pacific Ocean a life-force that he continues to draw even "past seventy years of age." In stark contrast to Eden's watery suicide, Lakana describes Kohokumu catching a squid:

> He went under without splash and ripple, turned over, and swam down. I followed his progress through the water glass, which is merely an oblong box a couple of feet long, open at the top, the bottom sealed water-tight with a sheet of ordinary glass.
>
> […]
>
> The pressure at a depth of forty feet is no joke for a young man, yet it did not seem to inconvenience this oldster. I am certain it never crossed his mind to be inconvenienced. Unarmed, bare of body save for a brief

> *malo* or loin cloth, he was undeterred by the formidable creature that constituted his prey.
>
> […]
>
> But the old man was in no hurry for his natural element, the air above the water. There, forty feet beneath, wrapped about by an octopus that measured nine feet across from tentacle tip to tentacle tip and that could well drown the stoutest swimmer, he coolly and casually did the one thing that gave to him his empery over the monster. He shoved his lean, hawklike face into the very center of the slimy, squirming mass, and with his several ancient fangs bit into the heart and the life of the matter. This accomplished, he came upward slowly, as a swimmer should who is changing atmospheres from the depths. (218-19)

Most striking here is the contrast between Kohokumu and Martin Eden, as well as the evidence of London's own sea change. Whereas the Pacific represents escape and ultimately death for Eden, the old man is rejuvenated by the sea. As Eden makes his first attempt at suicide—holding himself below the water's surface—he is struck at and bitten by a bonita, emphasizing that he is not a part of the sea, but a predator or even prey for its inhabitants. Kohokumu, however, is an integral, thriving element in the sea and the image of him biting the massive octopus—though somewhat shocking—denotes his participation in a life cycle beyond human society. The wisdom and integration that mark Kohokumu's identity represent London's own at the end of his life, for he increasingly found—due, in part, to his reading of Jung—that the individual was not necessarily at odds with the collective, but instead might thrive within it and as a part of it.

Though Martin Eden is undoubtedly an autobiographical character in many ways, Kohokumu more fully embodies London's versatility and strength. In Eden London imagines surrendering to the irreconcilable nature of the Pacific dialectic that defined much of his life and work—yet the writer did not succumb to the anxiety as did his character, and instead continued to embrace life. Thus the elder Kohokumu is a truer representative of London's own vision of life and of the Pacific, as both ultimately integrated the conflicts with which they struggled. As Kohokumu states:

> When I was younger I muddled my poor head over queerer religions. […] But listen, O Young Wise One, to my elderly wisdom. This I know: as I grow old I seek less for the truth from without me, and find more of the truth from within me. Why have I thought this thought of my return to my mother and of my rebirth from my mother into the sun? You do not know. I do not know, save that, without whisper of man's voice or printed word, without prompting from otherwhere, this thought has arisen from within me, from the deeps of me that are as deep as the sea. I am not a god. I do not make things. Therefore I have not made this thought. I do not know its father or its mother. It is of old time before me, and therefore it is true. Man does not make truth. Man, if he be not blind, only recognizes truth when he sees it. (221)

In these words lie London's own realization that "Man does not make truth," an idea he came to appreciate only at the end of his life. It is no coincidence that the writer came to recognize this principle in Hawai'i, as it was there that he realized the impossibility of finding a single, monolithic ideological answer in books and theories. Instead, Hawai'i

and the Pacific reinforced the need to synthesize the extremes of socialism and individualism.

At the same time, in his final writing and speeches the writer identified and argued for the importance of the Pacific Rim as a global region that was already altering cultural notions of identity and nation. Not surprisingly, London first came to see Hawai'i as a site in which various cultures might successfully blend; he joined both the Hands-Across-the-Pacific Club and later the Pan-Pacific Union, both organizations dedicated to promoting peace among Pacific Rim nations while simultaneously fostering a cultural exchange. During a talk he gave for the latter in 1915 he articulated what he called "the language of the tribe," or a common language that might serve as "the world language—the cosmic language" ("The Language of the Tribe" 118). London stated:

> [W]orld language has no better chance for a start than right now, here in our Hawaii, where the people of all the countries that rest around the edge of the Pacific meet. Until you learn to understand the people about you, you will never make them understand you. ("The Language of the Tribe" 119)

The notion of a universal language—a vision of understanding among people—was born out of the dialectic that burdened London for most of his life. The inability to see the connection between individuals within a community, while simultaneously allowing for their individuality, plagued him and defined much of his writing for many years.

**Conclusion**

Jack London began his Pacific adventures as a teenage oyster pirate, stealing a harmless species for fun and profit in and around the San Francisco Bay. As his travels and explorations took him further into the Pacific, his encounters with communities—especially those in Hawai'i—challenged the ideas he held about socialism and individualism that defined much of his writing up to that point. For in the Pacific London saw the impact of imperialism, and he viewed the devastating effects of disease as a physical embodiment of its degenerative legacy on the social body. In each of his texts, he grappled with the dialectic between individuals and the collective being played out before him in island communities ravaged by Western disease and capitalism—never arriving at one monolithic conclusion, but instead finding each text as a synthesis of his current thinking, in and of itself. Somewhat ironically perhaps, London suffered physical and psychological illness himself while in the Pacific, and increasingly viewed medical science as a paradigm that might quell—and potentially cure—his own body as well as the American and Pacific body politic as well.

## *Chapter 4*
## *"Gazing at the Boundaries of Granite and Spray"*
## *Robinson Jeffers's Pacific Boundaries*

"Science usually take things to pieces in order to discover them; it dissects and analyzes; poetry puts things together, producing equally valid discovery, and actual creation. Something new is found out, something that the author himself did not know before he wrote it; and something new is made."

--from Jeffers's *Themes in My Poems* (Hunt, *Collected* 4: 416)[25]

"Often I have the feeling that Jeffers is more than an equal of Balboa, for he too has discovered the Pacific Ocean. And to discover something as big as the Pacific Ocean, after others have discovered it, requires eyesight and navigation ability requisite to the business of being a poet."

--Carl Sandburg (qtd. in Bennett 123)

In 1941, Robinson Jeffers gave two rare public talks—first at Harvard and then at the Library of Congress—in which he spoke "of certain characteristic themes" in his poetry. Despite having appeared on the cover of *Time* in 1932, he remained an elusive figure in American letters; a recluse who rarely left the stone castle he built on the shores of Carmel. Prior to these public appearances, by his own admission, Jeffers had "never addressed an audience, nor recited my verses to a single person, until a few days ago" (Hunt, *Collected* 4: 407). The opportunity to hear him speak about his poems—and to hear him read aloud—was virtually a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence. Toward the end of the presentations, he turned from his own work to comment on poetry more generally, offering his view of "poetry at its best":

> It seems to me that *great poetry* gathers and expresses the whole of things, as prose *never can*. Its business is to contain a whole world at once, the

[25] All citations of Jeffers's work refer to Tim Hunt's definitive, multi-volume *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, unless otherwise indicated. See bibliography for full citation.

> physical and sensuous, the intellectual, the spiritual, the imaginative, all in one passionate solution. Thus it becomes a means of discovery, as well as a means of expression. Science usually take things to pieces in order to discover them; it dissects and analyzes; poetry puts things together, producing equally valid discover, and actual creation. Something new is found out, something that the author himself did not know before he wrote it; and something new is made. (Hunt, *Collected* 4: 416, emphasis Jeffers's)

Of course, he was describing his own work as well.

Of particular importance in the passage above is the connection between science and poetry—a relationship that dominated much of Jeffers's thinking during the course of his career, and one that has been of increasing interest to contemporary readers and scholars. Yet Jeffers maintained that he was not interested in the specifics of science as metaphor or subjects *per se*, but saw them as one part of the impetus for his themes and methodology more broadly; thus in this study I will examine his engagement of various scientific fields as foundations for his poetry. In a piece entitled "The Rhythm," published in the local periodical the *Carmelite* in 1928, Jeffers notes that science—among other "sources"—provides a rhythm for his verse:

> I want it rhythmic and not rhymed […] My feeling is for the number of beats to the line: there is a quantitative element too in which the unstressed syllables have part; the rhythm is from many sources—physics—biology—the beat of blood, the tidal environments of life to which life is

> formed—also a desire for singing emphasis that prose does not have. (qtd. in Hunt, *Collected* 5: 1048)

In addition, Jeffers found the rhythms he sought directly in the Pacific tides pounding the shores of Carmel where he lived from 1914 until his death in 1962. "I should say that this rocky coast is not only the scene of my narrative verse, but also the chief actor in it" (Hunt, *Collected* 4: 414). He was immediately taken in by the beauty and raw energy of the region. During his first few years in Carmel, Jeffers spent hours every day walking and exploring the coast, which at that time was sparsely populated. He venerated the isolation of the locale, removed from the noise and chaos of the war's impact. If initially drawn to Carmel as a boundary of sea and land, by 1919 Jeffers increasingly looked beyond that border to the vast Pacific Ocean itself for answers and resolutions for the problems he saw around him. And as he literally turned his back on the world behind him and examined the western seascape, he found that the ocean embodied what he saw as the need for "a clear shift of meaning and emphasis, from man to what is not man" (Hunt, *Collected* 4: 421). Jeffers ultimately articulated this idea most concisely in 1948 as his notion of "Inhumanism"—"the devaluation of human-centered illusions, the turning outward from what is man to what is boundlessly greater […] the noble elements, earth, air and water" (Jeffers, *The Double Axe* 171, 105).

Critical studies of Inhumanism have flooded Jeffers scholarship for decades and emphasize its correlation to Jeffers's own response to the World Wars—seeing Inhumanism as a result of the poet's frustrations with human conflict and violence. Like his modernist contemporaries, post World War I life provided Jeffers with a striking contrast to the Romantic mode and sensibility in which certainty and order prevailed. He

rejected the self-conscious subjectivism and Nature-centered view of his romantic predecessors, turning instead to question the extent of human complicity in the "elemental," or natural, world. He abhorred imitation—a method he admitted to as a young poet—and strove instead for originality, "without which a writer of verses is only a verse-writer" (Hunt, *Collected* 4: 385). Thus the highest purpose of poetry is achieved when "Something new is found out, something that the author himself did not know before he wrote it; and something new is made" (Hunt, *Collected* 4: 416).

Yet Jeffers did not join the rising movement of his modernist contemporaries who he felt were, to some degree at least, following in the wake of Mallarmé, "renouncing intelligibility in order to concentrate the music of poetry":

> […] ideas had gone, now meter had gone, imagery would have to go; then recognizable emotions would have to go; perhaps at last even words might have to go or give up their meaning, nothing be left but musical syllables. Every advance required the elimination of some aspect of reality, and what could it profit me to know the direction of modern poetry if I did not like the direction. It was too much like putting out your eyes to cultivate the sense of hearing, or cutting off the right hand to develop the left. These austerities were not for me; originality by amputation was too painful for me. (Hunt, *Collected* 4: 385)

A harsh condemnation perhaps, but one formulated with the benefit of hindsight, in some respects. Writing in 1935, Jeffers was able to look at the work of the modernists—especially Ezra Pound, who he specifically names earlier in the same introduction—as part of an established, identifiable movement in the United States and Europe. Pound's

cry to "Make it new" and Eliot's *The Waste Land* had appeared a decade earlier, while Jeffers struggled to find his own new voice as he moved away from the rigid formality of early poems in *Flagons and Apples* (1912) and *Californians* (1916) toward the more organic free formed verses that would distinguish his work from *Tamar* (1924) onward. He concludes, "I was doomed to go on imitating dead men, unless some impossible wind should blow me emotions or ideas, or a point of view, or even mere rhythms, that had not occurred to them. There was nothing to do about it" (Hunt, *Collected* 4: 386).

The new direction for his work was Inhumanism, which is best understood as his articulation of a new, holistic paradigm and world-view. "It is based on a recognition of the astonishing beauty of things," he wrote in the "Preface" to *The Double Axe*:

> and on a rational acceptance of the fact that mankind is neither central nor important to the universe; our vices and abilities are insignificant as our happiness. We know this, of course, but it does not appear that any previous one of the ten thousand religions and philosophies has realized it. An infant feels himself to be central and of primary importance; an adult knows better; it seems time that the human race attained to an adult habit of thought in this regard. The attitude is neither misanthropic nor pessimist nor irreligious, though two or three people have said so, and may again; but it involves a certain detachment. (Hunt, *Collected* 4: 418)

Jeffers continues, noting that Inhumanism "came to me at the end of the war of 1914, and has since been tested in the confusions of peace and a second world-war, and the hateful approach of a third; and I believe it has truth and value" (Hunt, *Collected* 4: 418). Scholars have too often overlooked the impetus and "testing" of Inhumanism—put into

motion more than three decades before Jeffers coined the term itself—which were deeply entwined with his connection to the Carmel coast and the Pacific Ocean beyond. Thus the 1920s mark the formal period of experimentation in which Jeffers began to test and assemble this newly-ordered, inhumanistic universe, and the poems he composed during this decade represent stages in that process.[26] Furthermore, the shape or structure of his project of Inhumanism is best understood as rhizomatic, both in design and in execution—an experiment that took Jeffers through a non-linear progression of interconnected intellectual and stylistic iterations.

Jeffers himself later noted—somewhat cryptically, perhaps—that the three major narrative poems he wrote in the 1920s formed a Pacific trilogy, set "on this future-ridden coast." Together, they represent his first experiments with Inhumanism, seen specifically in his growing interest in holism, or a more symbiotic relationship between humans and the natural world—which he envisioned initially at the boundary of the Pacific:

> I think of *Cawdor* as making a third with *Tamar* and *The Women at Point Sur*; but as if in *Tamar* human affairs had been seen looking westward, against the ocean; in *Point Sur* looking upward, minimized to ridicule

[26] In *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of Inhumanism*, Arthur B. Coffin identifies "three distinct periods" of Jeffers's work, the first of which "is of experimentation, and encompasses the 1920s (8). "It is this philosophical attitude of Inhumanism," Coffin notes, "which had been announced as early as *Roan Stallion*, that provides the continuum against which the three periods of Jeffers' production must be compared. Jeffers' longstanding preference for the 'not-man' part of the world and his awareness of the shortcomings of human nature were examined and variously tested in the first period, in the light of Nietzschean doctrine, modern science, and constraining religious orthodoxy" (15). Thus while I concur with Coffin's thesis, my own focus is on Jeffers's implementation of science specifically as a methodology for his thinking and poetry, and how his 1920s work utilizes the Pacific Ocean as not only a geographical setting, but also a literal and metaphorical boundary between humanity and nature.

> against the stars; in *Cawdor* looking eastward, against the earth, reclaiming a little dignity from that association. (qtd. in Powell 11)

In these three poems—*Tamar* (1924), *The Women at Point Sur* (1927), and *Cawdor* (1928)—and in various shorter lyrics published along side of them, Jeffers enacted the extremes of human violence and passion, set in and around the Carmel region he knew intimately. Each poem represents an early phase in the development of Inhumanism—phases in which Jeffers reconciled the relationship between humans and the natural world. In envisioning his narratives against natural boundaries, first by the sea, then the sky, and then the land itself, he drew upon his own studies of and interests in the sciences—particularly geology, astronomy, and physiology—and found in them a new methodology and language for understanding the role of humans in nature.

Yet it is not my contention that Jeffers saw science alone as the answer; in his estimation it was *poetry* that provided the aforementioned rhythms necessary for not only originality and creativity, but for life itself. In an unpublished preface he composed for *Tamar*, he expands upon this, emphasizing yet again the importance of rhythm:

> [P]oetry must be rhythmic. By rhythm I do not mean the dissolved and unequal cadences of good prose, nor the capricious divisions of what is called free verse, (both these being sometimes figuratively spoken of as rhythmic), but a movement as regular as meter, or as the tides. A tidal recurrence, whether of quantity or accent, or of both, or of syllables and rhyme as in French verse, or of syllables and rhyme and tone as in Chinese verse, or of phrase and thought as in old Hebrew verse, has always been the simplest and inevitably one of the qualities of poetry. A reason is not

> far to seek. Recurrence, regular enough to be rhythmic, is the inevitable quality of life, and of life's environment. Prose belongs rather to that indoor world where lamplight abolishes the returns of day and night, and we forget the seasons. Human caprice, the volatile and superficial part of us, can only live sheltered. Poetry does not live in that world but in all the larger, and poetry cannot speak without remembering the turns of the sun and moon, and the rhythm of the ocean, and the recurrence of human generations, the returning waves of life and death." (Hunt, *Collected* 4: 380-81)

Without question, Jeffers's poetic philosophy is firmly rooted in his life on the boundary of the Pacific Ocean, "gazing at the boundaries of granite and spray."

**Early Life: Science and the Pacific**

Robinson Jeffers's Pacific vision diverges sharply from those of Dana and Melville as he did not experience the sea via adventures before the mast, but from a vantage point perched on the cliffs above Carmel. Jeffers came to see the Pacific Ocean as both muse and metaphor for his considerations of the failings of human society—but more importantly it represented the literal boundary at which civilization and nature collided. It was the site at which man's ineffectuality was most evident. Yet Jeffers, like both Dana and Melville, was born on the east coast and thus would first come to know the Pacific as a young man.

The son of a professor of Old Testament literature and Biblical history, Robinson Jeffers revered the power of nature from an early age. At sixteen he was irrecoverably

moved by the natural resources and landscape he encountered in California when he and his family relocated there in 1903. Though his education at Occidental College was governed by a rigorous study of literature and the classics, he excelled in the geology and astronomy courses he took as well, and spent time (with other members of his class) at observatories on Mount Wilson and Echo Mountain (Bennett 32). Jeffers hiked and camped frequently, and the earliest poems he published—in the student magazines *The Aurora* and *The Occidental*—reflect his appreciation with the natural landscape he increasingly admired. Not insignificantly, "The Measure," perhaps the very first of Jeffers's published pieces, expresses the conviction of nature's primacy over man that would distinguish his poems decades later:

> According to the measure all is great
> Or small, as man may wish. Old mother Earth,
> Beside those things to which she giveth birth,
> Seems huge and almost boundless. Situate
> Amid the depths of space, where suns elate
> In power of speed and glory, and the girth
> Of glowing nebulae, like a giant's hearth,
> Revolve, her greatness somewhat doth abate.
>
> And those, her progeny, the mighty men,
> Swaying her things in comradeship with Fate,
> Seem but as worms upon a little clod.
> So naught so great but that it may again

Be measured by a greater. Truly great

Alone are Space, Eternity and God. (Hunt, *Collected* 4: 3)

Graduating with his Bachelor of Arts degree from Occidental at age eighteen, Jeffers began a Master's degree at the University of southern California with an emphasis in literature. He soon met his future wife, Una Kuster, an undergraduate two years older than he, who was at that time married to another man. They formed a fast friendship—as biographers have noted—that quickly grew into an undeniable passion that obsessed them both and ultimately led to Una's divorce. After completing his graduate degree in 1906 (in one academic year), Jeffers spent time in Europe and then returned to the university to begin medical school in September 1907. His relationship with Una intensified during the next few years, and in 1910 Jeffers took a break from medical school—and from the scandal that was swirling around them—to study forestry at the University of Washington.

His interest in forestry was genuine, motivated in part by his frustration over deforestation caused by logging, and he became well-versed in current research in biology and natural history. His studies were engaging, and Jeffers's mother notes in a letter that he even considered a career in the U.S. Forest Service: "[H]e has thought about forestry as a profession, off and on, for a good while. It is hard to say what he will make out of it; if he had a little less cleverness and a little better capacity for work, his future would look brighter" (qtd. in Bennett 48). Jeffers did, in fact, enjoy his classes in silviculture (the science of managing forest health and growth), forest utilization, botany, and surveying, but he was frustrated with the emphasis on mathematics that dominated the field as a whole—he withdrew from the program in the spring of 1911 (Powell 14).

Yet his tenure in Washington helped focus his vision on how science itself could offer him the natural world, and even the universe, that existed beyond the boundaries of human contamination. Science afforded him a degree of detachment from the human abjectness that seemed inescapable in daily life.

Upon his return to California, Jeffers focused on his poetry—leaving the medical program altogether—and continued his relationship with Una. In December 1912 he self-published *Flagons and Apples*; the book went unnoticed, the only known contemporary review written by Jeffers himself.[27] In early 1913 Una obtained a divorce from her husband and married Jeffers in August of that year; the couple lost their firstborn child—a daughter named Maeve—after just one day, in May 1914. Hearing about the beauty and privacy of the small town Carmel, they visited the Monterey Peninsula for the first time in September 1914. They quickly rented a cabin and began exploring their new home. "There was housework, and continual woodchopping to fill the maw of the great fireplace in our drafty cabin," Una recalled years later in an article she wrote for *The Carmel Pine Cone*:

> We bought simple textbooks on flowers, shells, birds, and stars, and used them […] with books and maps and local gossip we have tried to piece together a fairly complete picture of this region: its treasures of natural beauty and vivid human life have been inexhaustible. (qtd. in Bennett 71)

[27] "Jeffers not only published his first book but also reviewed it, at the invitation of a friend who worked at the *Los Angeles Times*. Willard Huntington Wright signed his name to 'The Subtle Passion,' an essay written by Jeffers and published in the 8 December 1912 edition" (Karman "Introduction" 6).

Jeffers himself captured their reaction to the place that would shape his thinking and writing for the rest of his life in "Dream of the Future," later published in his second volume, *Californians*:

> Faithful and loved, you know when at first we came
> Out of the too-bright land, from a shore without trees,
> Though mighty of rocks, and clothed with the same blue wave,--
> You know how our hearts were moved at looking down
> From the high peninsular yoke; the breath of the morning
> Hung in the pines; and this, we felt, was our home;
> This, the narrow bay; the promontories;
> The islands, each one rock; the capes beyond,
> To the left, of Lobos, and yonder of Pescadero.
> We were glad; we had found our place. (Hunt *Collected* 4: 178)

**"Looking Westward, Against the Ocean": *Tamar* and the Pacific**

Settling into life on the shores of Carmel, Jeffers quickly published his second book, *Californians*, in October 1916—the poems are quite formal and bear clear evidence of the heavy influence of such idols as Swinburne, Coleridge, and Shelley, among others. The volume garnered modest attention and the *Anthology of Magazine Verse for 1916 and Yearbook of American Poetry* noted, "California is now to have its part in the poetry revival. Robinson Jeffers is a new poet, a man whose name is as yet unknown, but whose work is of such outstanding character that once he is read he is sure of acceptance" (qtd. in Bennett 78). A month later, in November 1916, Una gave birth to twin boys, Donnan

and Garth. Energized by his artistic success and the birth of his sons and inspired by the splendor of Carmel where, he noted, "for the first time in my life I could see people living—amid magnificent unspoiled scenery," Jeffers sought a new and more authentic voice for his poems: "By this time I was nearing thirty, and still a whole series of accidents was required to stir my lazy energies to the point of writing verse that seemed to be—whether good or bad—at least my own voice" (Hunt *Collected* 4: 393). It was at this time that he also turned to unrhymed narrative verse—the form that would dominate his major achievements from the 1920s on. As he noted later in his 1938 "Foreword" to *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*:

> Long ago, before anything included here was written, it became evident to me that poetry—if it was to survive at all—must reclaim some of the power and reality that it was so hastily surrendering to prose. […] It was becoming slight and fantastic, abstract, unreal, eccentric; and was not even saving its soul, for these are generally anti-poetic qualities. It must reclaim substance and sense, and physical and psychological reality. This feeling has been basic in my mind since then. It led me to write narrative poetry, and to draw subjects from contemporary life; to present aspects of life that modern poetry generally avoided; and to attempt the expression of philosophic and scientific ideas in verse. It was not in my mind to open new fields for poetry, but only to reclaim old freedom. (Hunt *Collected* 4: 391)

Thus the 1920s marked a major shift in Jeffers's work in terms of both form and subject matter—the freedom of the poetic narrative afforded him the creative space in

which to explore those "aspects of life that modern poetry generally avoided," namely the reconciliation of humanity's place in nature. *Tamar and Other Poems*, published in 1924, was his first in-depth study of the volatile relationship between humans and nature, and shorter lyrics—including "Natural Music," "Not Our Good Luck," "The Cycle," "Salmon-Fishing," and "Continent's End"—as well as the narrative title poem together plot his emerging sense of how human life may be understood as a function of, or as a part of, nature. As such, they signal Jeffers's first formal experiments with the concept of holism, or the notion that a whole—in this case the natural world itself—is more than the mere sum of its component parts. In this volume and in those that followed in the 1920s, Jeffers reached out for metaphors and paradigms through which he could articulate his thinking about the interconnectedness between humans and the environment, creating a rhizomatic network of symbols and language that would ultimately lead him to conceptualize Inhumanism.

The *Tamar* poems repeatedly employ the Pacific as image, symbol, and setting for Jeffers's thinking about "permanent things," namely his belief that nature may be best understood as an end in and of itself—that is, despite human attempts to dissect it, to conquer it, and even to destroy it, nature always subsumes humanity, and not vice versa. In the much-anthologized and analyzed lyric "Natural Music," Jeffers presents what scholar Tim Hunt calls a "vision of a comprehensive, living nature" ("The Problematic Nature" 91). Here nature does, in fact, offer examples and lessons for humans; Jeffers implies that the human world—and civilization in particular—is yet separate from nature, a place where the speaker and other humans (represented in the poem as "we") dwell apart from nature itself: "The old voice of the ocean" and "bird-chatter of little rivers" are

contrasted with "the storm of the sick nations," and "the rage of the hunger-smitten cities" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 6). Though the poem's speaker suggests that nature provides an ideal toward which humans may strive via "listen[ing] without / Divisions of desire and terror," Hunt's assertion that Jeffers's nature in this poem is "comprehensive" and therefore inclusive of humans seems unjustified. Instead, the division of the human and natural worlds represents an early phase in the poet's thinking about how humans might rightfully fit into the very sort of comprehensive paradigm of nature that Hunt suggests—though Jeffers does not fully realize that vision at this point.

Similarly, "Not Our Good Luck" also hints at Jeffers's more mature articulation of Inhumanism that would come later. In this poem he collapses human time—the past and future—as well as the physical boundaries of earth in his suggestion that God and nature are one, manifested in Beauty itself:

> Not our good luck nor the instant peak and fulfillment of time gives us to see
> The beauty of things, nothing can bridle it.
> God who walks lighting-naked on the Pacific has never been hidden from any
> Puddle or hillock of the earth behind us.
> […]
> Far-flown ones, you children of the hawk's dream future when you lean from a crag of the last planet on the ocean
> Of the far stars, remember we also have known beauty. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 12-13)

Jeffers suggests that humans, both now and in the future ("far-flown ones"), remain unable to truly comprehend God/nature—men are unable "to see the beauty of things." Thus humans maintain a conscious separation from nature, emphasized though Jeffers's invocation of the Pacific which he uses as a literal and symbolic image of power to strike contrast between humanity and God/nature.

Jeffers likewise employs the Pacific as setting and symbol in both "The Cycle" and in "Salmon-Fishing." In each poem he refers to the Pacific as a pasture—in the first case as a conquered space criss-crossed by human migration and history, and in the second case as a "wild" space, the domain of salmon and sea creatures. "The Cycle" presents a troubled picture of the human presence in the Pacific as Jeffers writes, "now all day long the steamers / Smudge the opal's rim; often a seaplane troubles / The sea-wind with its throbbing heart" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 14). Though he concedes that such evidence of human violence will later diminish—creating part of the cycle of human history the poem describes—Jeffers's resignation to this pattern is reluctant and there is no indication that he finds comfort of any kind the cycle itself. In fact he concludes the poem with reference to his own ghost, "one temper with the granite, bulking about here," as if the Pacific itself is haunted by a kind of petrified humanity.

In contrast, the Pacific pasture depicted in "Salmon-Fishing" is a safe haven for wildlife; the salmon leaving the sea to "race up into fresh water" of the river encounter the anglers, "pitiful, cruel, primeval, […] Dark silent forms, performing / Remote solemnities in the red shallows / Of the river's mouth" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 6). Though the human presence of the fishermen may be seen as destructive, Jeffers is more accepting of it here than he was in "The Cycle." The poem is comprised of two sentences: the first

describing the salmon beginning their winter migration from ocean to river; the second the anglers poised "in the red shallows/ Of the river's mouth […] Drawing landward their live bullion" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 6). That Jeffers's description of the latter follows the grammatical pattern of the former—a single enjambed declarative sentence—shows that he views both the salmon and fishermen as equals. Here he does not privilege one above the other, but sees them both as components of a whole. As Hunt accurately notes, "The poem figures nature as an organism comprehending human life as one of its many elements (albeit a particularly problematic one" ("The Problematic Nature" 89).

As each of these poems suggests, at this point in his thinking Jeffers struggled to see a "comprehensive nature" in which humans were not a problematic element. Yet in *Tamar and Other Poems* Jeffers most fully realizes the image of an integrated human and natural universe in "Continent's End," the final poem in the collection. The poem—perhaps the most anthologized and recognized of Jeffers's lyrics—encapsulates his 1920s Pacific vision, defined by his experience living at "the boundaries of granite and spray." The poem situates the narrator on that boundary, gazing westward at "the established sea-marks" while simultaneously "[feeling] behind me / Mountain and plain, the immense breath of the continent." The narrator addresses the Pacific directly, personifying it as a mother entity that has "forgotten us" after humanity "crawled out of the womb and lay in the sun's eye on the tideline." The passage of millennia has created a rift between the sea and humans, as the latter "have grown proud since then and you have grown bitter," gesturing toward Jeffers's own beliefs about human folly and hubris (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 16). At this point—at the start of the sixth stanza—the poem turns and the narrator defers to an even great power than that of the Pacific, to nature itself:

> The tides are in our veins, we still mirror the stars, life is your child, but there is in me
> Older and harder than life and more impartial, the eye that watched before there was an ocean. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 16)

As he stands on the boundary facing the ocean with full mass of the continent behind him, the narrator recognizes that *all*—the sea, the earth, and humanity—are all phases of a larger holistic cycle or entity, one

> That watched you fill your bed out of the condensation of thin vapor and watched you change them,
> That saw you soft and violent wear your boundaries down, eat rock, shift places with the continents. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 17)

This passage suggests Jeffers's knowledge of the theory of continental drift. Most notably articulated by German geologist Alfred Wegener in 1912, the theory posited that the earth's continents were "drifting" due to the movement of the plates that make up the planet's lithosphere. In 1915 Wegener's *The Origin of Continents and Oceans* (*Die Entstehung der Kontinente und Ozeane*) was published; its English translation was published in 1922. Though continental drift was not fully accepted until the 1960s with the subsequent interest in plate tectonics—its reception was often quite hostile, in fact—it garnered significant attention world-wide, and it is possible that Jeffers was aware of it, even if anecdotally.

Whether or not he knew of continental drift, life in Carmel—poised between the erosive strength of the Pacific and the volatile strength of California's coastal range—showed Jeffers the power of nature through earthquakes. Shaun Anne Tangney compiled

a history of the earthquakes that Jeffers likely experienced from 1916 to 1962, which included eight temblors of "significant" magnitude, from 5.5 to 6.1 on the Richter Scale (8). "Geology would have appealed to him on the scientific level, to be sure," Tangney notes, "but an earth that speaks its own language was his complete poetic and philosophical argument" (9). The final stanza of "Continent's End" exemplifies this statement as it emphasizes once again Jeffers's vision of nature as subsuming humanity—a facet of his emerging theory of Inhumanism:

> Mother, though my song's measure is like your surf-beat's ancient rhythm
> I never learned it of you.
> Before there was any water there were tides of fire, both our tones flow
> from the older fountain. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 17)

If the lyric verses in *Tamar and Other Poems* together outlined the shape of Jeffers's early 1920s thinking about the relationship between humans and nature, the volume's title narrative poem probed it through a story about the "rhythms" of human virtue and vice, which he came to see as inevitable as the ebb and flow of the ocean's tides. As I note earlier, Jeffers wrote years later that *Tamar* was a consideration of "human affairs seen looking westward, against the ocean," suggesting perhaps that the events of the poem—including the most heinous of human taboos, incest—were illuminated in some valuable way when set at the boundary of the Pacific Ocean itself.

*Tamar* is the story of a family's destruction, begun as Young Cauldwell and his horse fall from the cliffs to the shoreline below. After his return home and recovery from his injuries, he is seduced by his sister, Tamar, who later likewise seduces their father—who once committed incest himself with his own sister. The poem closes in fiery climax

as Tamar burns the family house with the family inside. The poem evidences Jeffers's recognition of the parallels between the cycles of destruction and renewal inherent both in nature and in human life. "The human world, though," as Tim Hunt aptly notes, "is often blind to its own status and thus dooms itself to play out the cycles in a n unnecessarily perverse, violent, and empty manner" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: xxiv). Though such cycles in the human world mirror those in nature, Jeffers emphasizes the inability of humans to recognize that very connection—and hence their own personal connections—to nature itself. From the start, Jeffers describes nature as an unyielding entity in which humans struggle to enact their lives:

> The night you know accepted with no show of emotion the little accident
>
> […]
>
> the slow pulse of the ocean
>
> Beat, the slow tide came in across the slippery stones;
>
> […]
>
> With a gush of liquid noises
>
> The wave covered him head and all, his body
>
> Crawled without consciousness and like a creature with no bones, a seaworm, lifted its face
>
> Above the sea-wrack of a stone; then a white twilight grew about the moon, and above
>
> The ancient water, the everlasting repetition of the dawn. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 18-19)

Nature, and the Pacific in particular, is a living, cyclic entity that cannot be disrupted by humans. Thus as Jeffers seeks to understand human folly and recklessness—in this case Young Caldwell's drunken fall—the animate Carmel coast is an ideal setting for his narrative.

Yet the poem does not simply stage the characters against the Pacific Ocean as a two-dimensional backdrop, but emphasizes the interconnection of the landscape and its inhabitants. In his early description of the poem's protagonist, the troubled Tamar, Jeffers suggests her relationship to the environment is familial:

> Was it the wild rock coast
> Of her breeding, and the reckless wind
> In the beaten trees and the gaunt booming crashes
> Of breakers under the rocks, or rather the amplitude
> And wing-subduing immense earth-ending water
> That moves all the west taught her this freedom? (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 25)

From the start, Tamar is wild, even less-than-human in her desires and actions; the poet never once depicts her as explicitly "unnatural," as he is always able to locate her in the broad realm of nature. Yet Jeffers's depiction of her reveals a kind of spectrum that may have existed in his thinking about humanity, on which he might move an individual (Tamar) further away from the choking confines of civilized order, embedding her more fully in the natural world. There the poet might experiment with and observe how humanity might be figured as an *element* within nature instead of a *force* acting outside of it.

In light of this, many have been troubled by Jeffers's intentions with the poem, as Tamar's seduction of her brother and father would clearly excise her from any sort of accepted "natural order." But it seems that this very question—as to whether the most unnatural of human vice can, in fact, find its place in nature—is at the heart of the poet's project in *Tamar*. The opening lines of Part V of the poem may most closely represent Jeffers's own voice and intentions as he invokes nature itself to inhabit the characters and narrative he has created—as if to turn over his experiment in order to see how nature reconcile it:

> O swiftness of the swallow and strength
> Of the stone shore, brave beauty of falcons,
> Beauty of the blue heron that flies
> Opposite the color of evening
> From the Carmel River's reed-grown mouth
> To her nest in the deep wood of the deer
> Cliffs of peninsular granite engirdle,
> O beauty of the fountains of the sun
> I pray you enter a little chamber,
> I have given you bodies, I have made you puppets,
> I have made idols for God to enter
> And tiny cells to hold your honey,
> I have given you a dotard and an idiot,
> An old woman puffed with vanity, youth but botched with incest,
> You that make signs of sins and choose the lame for angels,
> Enter and possess. Being light you have chosen the dark lamps,
> A hawk the sluggish bodies: therefore God you chose

Me; and therefore I have made you idols like these idols

To enter and possess. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 32-33)

As the poem continues, Tamar seems to be accepted into the new paradigm Jeffers envisions, seen in this passage in which she finds a sort of comfort at the shoreline of the Pacific:

Holding by a jag of the cliff

She drew herself to full height. God who makes beauty

Disdains no creature, nor despised that wounded

Tired and betrayed body. She in the starlight

And little noises of the rising tide

Naked and not ashamed bore a third part

With the ocean and keen stars in the consistence

And dignity of the world. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 48)

Yet her comfort is short-lived, and after miscarrying the child she conceived with her brother—no doubt evidence that while nature may find a place for Tamar, it cannot accept the living product of incest—she becomes ill. Here the landscape and Tamar are conflated, as both reflect the turmoil of her condition:

The afternoon

Was feverish for so temperate a sea-coast

And terribly full of light, the sea like a hard mirror

Reverberated the straight and shining serpents

That fell from heaven and Tamar dreamed in a doze

She was hung naked by that tight cloth bandage

Half-way between sea and sky, beaten on by both,

Burning with light. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 60)

As the poem approaches its climax, the mounting turmoil and tension evident in Tamar and the landscape are emphasized as her madness and sins increase. After seducing her own father, Tamar attempts to dissuade her brother from going to war, and aligns herself with both the "quiet" Pacific and with fire, emphasizing the conflicting duality of impulses that dictate her actions:

There is the great and quiet water
Reaching to Asia, and in an hour or so
The still stars will show over it but I am quieter
Inside than even the ocean or the stars.
Though I have to kindle paper flares of passion
Sometimes, to fool you with. But I was thinking
Last night, that people all over the world
Are doing much worse and suffering much more than we
This wartime, and the stars don't wink, and the ocean
Storms perhaps less than usual. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 72)

Once again, nature remains unfazed by human affairs, and even war itself may do no more than cause a slight variation in the ocean's storms. Though *Tamar* was composed after the formal end of the Great War, Jeffers remained fixated on war as the extremity of the human capacity for violence, which he ultimately considered akin to a "natural disaster." In a penciled noted found among his papers after his death he writes (using the third person as was sometimes typical of his personal meditations), "He regards war with horror and disgust but believes it to be inevitable—and claims that he sees, at a certain

level of contemplation, the tragic and the spectacular beauty of war, as of a storm or other natural disaster" (qtd. in Bennett 86).

In many ways, Jeffers's broad view of humanity in the early 1920s might similarly be expressed as a "tragic and spectacular beauty" that is also best understood as a natural disaster. As *Tamar* concludes, the Cauldwell family—along with Tamar's lover, Bill Andrews—is destroyed by fire. Though her brother tries to escape the flames and save himself and his lover/sister, she refuses to leave and holds Young Cauldwell back, sealing both of their fates. Reminiscent of "Continent's End," fire is both violent and transformative, and though the Cauldwell home is eradicated in flames, nature continues on unscathed:

> Grass grows where the flame flowered;
> A hollowed lawn strewn with a few black stones
> And the brick of broken chimneys; all about there
> The old trees, some of them scarred with fire, endure the sea-wind. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 89)

Thus the final image of charred trees "endur[ing] the sea-wind" evokes the Pacific, out of sight, perhaps, but undeniable and ever-present for Jeffers.

**"Ridicule Against The Stars": *The Women at Point Sur* and Astronomy**

*Tamar*—with its fiery conclusion that presaged more frequent and meaningful fire imagery in Jeffers's work of the 1920s—was a transformative spark that fueled his thinking and writing about humanity's place in the natural world. As I note earlier, the poem's title character illustrates the poet's earliest notions about the limitations of human

vice and virtue and how those forces might be refigured and comprehended in nature—in this case "against the ocean." In his next major narrative experiment *The Women at Point Sur*—the second poem in what I designate as his Pacific trilogy—Jeffers focused *inward* on the psychology of the human mind, which he found to be self-corrupting and ailing. Simultaneously, he shifted his gaze *outward*, past the sea toward the boundary of the sky where he attempted to reconcile human civilization, "looking upward, minimized to ridicule against the stars." The poem is, in many ways, a satire but it more importantly evidences his interest in the science of astronomy through which he could render the next phase of his burgeoning theory of Inhumanism. As an autodidact, Jeffers found in his own studies of contemporary astronomy—influenced through his relationship with his brother, a renowned astronomer—a collection of techniques for the examination of the human capacity for violence and immorality, both of which he believed disconnected human society from nature.

*The Women at Point Sur* traces the spiritual and psychological fall of a preacher, the Dr. Reverend Barclay, after he renounces his pulpit and professes a desire to find truth: "I am going off alone and gather my mind, I have something fiery / Here that will burn the world down to significance" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 251). As the narrative progresses and his madness increases, Barclay proclaims himself to be God, rejects his wife, rapes his adult daughter, professes to be his own dead son, and gathers a following of real and hallucinated disciples before ultimately dying alone in the desert. As such, *The Women at Point Sur* emphasizes Jeffers's frustration with organized religions, which he notes in a letter "have been necessary to society in the past, and I think remain necessary whether we like it or not" (*Selected Letters* 117). In Barclay he enacts the

detrimental influence—which he refers to in the same letter as "a 'private impurity'"—that a morally or spiritually corrupt individual can have when exercising power over a sect.

In the poem's opening section Barclay leaves his congregation, claiming "I have nothing for you" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 249). Yet he continues on, proselytizing his newfound beliefs and chastising his followers for their still-blind faith in Christianity:

> Thought is not easy, and I am giving you ten years'
> Thought in a moment's words. It is not possible
> To know anything while you eat lies: you half-believers, fog-people: leave
> that, wash the eyes, and who knows
> Now the earth draws to maturity, has taken the bloody
> Initiation of coming of age, you also grown adult
> May fish some flaming gleam of knowledge out of the netted ocean, run
> down some deer of perception
> In the dark wood[.]
> […]
> I have been on the verge, these years. You with your monkey hubbub
> crossed me when I touched it.
> When it lay in my hands: you with your marriages and your burials, your
> newspapers, the noise you keep up
> Under the stars, your national quarrels and your observances,
> Flags, fireworks, songs to dead Gods: from moment to moment
> While it knocked for entrance. I am going off alone and gather my mind,

and I have something fiery

Here that will burn the world down to significance. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 250-51)

Amidst the striking and disjointed imagery, Barclay implores his people—"fog-people"—to dispel their blind faith and to seek the truth, following him as he retreats to the hills above Point Sur.

This opening passage establishes Jeffers's vantage point as he condemns human society for its self-centeredness. Barclay's disgust is Jeffers's own as he challenges and ridicules the the interpersonal and national rituals that bind civilization, suggesting that the preacher's rejection of his faith and position might initially be seen as worthy by the poet. Also evident here is Jeffers's reference to stars which establishes his methodology in the poem more broadly: he attempts to gain an objective view of humanity's place in the universe by minimizing human society—or relegating its significance to the periphery—while simultaneously magnifying nature, as if observing it through a telescope. In this interplay of juxtaposing perspectives, he achieves a kind of spatial taxonomy through which he repositions humans within a more rhizomatic model of nature. In the passage above, therefore, those events that define much of civilization's infrastructure are dismissed—or diminished—as merely "the noise you keep up under the stars."

Barclay's madness is an ever-shifting element in the narrative, and though Jeffers himself characterizes him as a "lunatic," the preacher does, in fact, espouse tenets of the

poet's own worldview.[28] In particular, some of Barclay's early meditations denying the supremacy of a single, human-created and -centered deity clearly reflect Jeffers's own thinking:

> I cannot think what it was that I was trying to discover, to find out something,
>
> I wrote it on paper yesterday. Here it is: Oh, these:
>
> First, whether there's any … what the vulgar call God … spirit of the universe.
>
> But a spirit's a more contaminated word than the other. Life then, one life
>
> Informing … no, being: whether it's one being … why, this is evident.
>
> Second, is anything left after we die but worm's meat? Third, how should men live? (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 253)

The final questions posed in the passage are among those central to Jeffers's own thinking at this time, though in his depiction of Barclay's violent and impure behavior he paints a vivid picture of humanity failing itself. Yet the passage hints at the holistic life entity Jeffers began to articulate during the 1920s, in which God, nature, and humanity were one.

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[28] After the publication of *The Women at Point Sur*, Jeffers described it in an August 1927 letter to friend and patron Albert Bender:

> The book concludes a train of thought that began with Tamar; it was meant to complete the ideas but also to indicate the dangers and abuses of them, which it does pretty thoroughly. Just as Ibsen wrote the Wild Duck to show how his ideas could be perverted by a fool: I set a lunatic to work with the same object in mind. It puzzles people; but will be understood eventually. (*Selected Letters* 118)

Though he had high hopes for poem's reception—telling his publisher it would become "the Faust of this generation" (*Selected Letters* 105)—Jeffers correctly predicted the confusion of his readers and critics.

The concept of holism—as understood in the field of ecology—centers on the notion of nature as "a single indivisible unity" encompassing all things, animate and inanimate. The idea derives, in part, from the biological and philosophical idea of organicism, which scientifically denotes the idea that the whole of an organism is greater than the sum of its parts. The doctrine was developed in 1919 by William Emerson Ritter, a professor of zoology at the University of California, Berkeley. One of Ritter's protégés, C.V. Taylor, included the concept in his course in general zoology, offered in the early 1920s at Stanford University's Hopkins Marine Station in Pacific Grove—just miles from Jeffers's home in Carmel. The poet's interest in contemporary science might have brought him into contact with the ideas of organicism and biological holism, which were popular among local scientists and artists in the Monterey region at the time.

Thus *The Women at Point Sur*—despite its condemnation of humanity's distortion of life and faith—expresses Jeffers's growing awareness of and interest in holism. In this passage, an increasingly deranged Barclay delivers a sermon to the landscape before him—addressing the inanimate as if it lived:

> There are those among you that neither breathe nor feed, limestone fire-hardened, old lava,
> Granite with the wet sea's growth; others that breathe through leaves and through roots
> Milk the earth; those able to wait millenniums and these many green centuries: I am speaking to the one consciousness,
> Modulated through wood and through stone, through the nerves of man, the flesh of cattle[.]

> […]
>
> The one consciousness: the one breath of the organ blown through
>
> innumerable
>
> Conduits of sound; blessed are the ears that hear eternal music. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 277)

Jeffers compresses both matter and existence—integrating the earth and sea, humans and beasts across the span of geologic time—and ultimately finds a single entity, "one consciousness" that emerges as a whole.

Jeffers's growing interest in holism did not reflect a *newfound* interest in science itself, but merely a more philosophical direction in his ongoing consideration of it. As he notes in a letter, science was an integral part of his life from childhood:

> I cannot remember what were the first scientific books that made an impression on me. My father was a clergyman but also intelligent, and he brought me up to timely ideas about origin of species, descent of man, astronomy, geology, etc., so that progress was gradual, none of the viewpoints of modern science came as a revelation. Studies in university and medical school gave me more room to move in, more points of support, but never, that I remember, any sudden readjustment. […] In my writing I have tried to avoid the special vocabularies of science (which would seem pedantic in verse) while accepting its influence." (*Selected Letters* 254-55)

Though in the 1920s Jeffers did increasingly utilize scientific vocabulary as part of his effort to move toward a more objective understanding of the interdependence between

humans and nature, *The Women at Point Sur* and other lyrics from this period reveal that he was seeking an entirely new paradigm through which to study the intersections of human society and nature.

Thus in "Prelude," the poem he composed as a short introduction to *The Women at Point Sur* he posits the need for a new language to describe this new thinking:

> Culture's outlived, art's root-cut, discovery's
> The way to walk in. Only remains to invent the language to tell it. Match-
> ends of burnt experience
> Human enough to be understood,
> Scraps and metaphors will serve. The wine was a little too strong for the
> new wine-skins… (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 240-41)

It was not via scientific terms and vocabulary that Jeffers attempted to "invent the language" necessary to express "the way to walk in," but in the scientific methodology of discovery itself. In turning away from culture and art as the primary mediums of human self-representation, Jeffers embraced an entirely new model and method for his thought and poetry. As he noted years later in a letter, "It seems to me that for the thinker (in the wider sense of the word) a scientific basis is an essential condition" (*Selected Letters* 254).

In "Prelude" Jeffers experiments with one "scrap and metaphor"—in his repetition and variations of the concept of *strain*—that illustrates his newly invented method. "Strain is universal in the world of the poem," notes Tim Hunt. "The characters are caught by the strain of their emotional confusions; the oil in the storage tanks at Monterey strains to burn and release the energy compressed in its molecules"

("Afterword" 202-03). While Hunt accurately perceives the literal tensions—in terms of emotional and physical pressure—evident in the poem, he overlooks the scientific connotation. Simply stated, strain, as defined in physics is the measure of how much an object will stretch when subjected to pressure; in astronomy it is the result of gravitational attraction between bodies in orbit. As such, Jeffers likely intended an astrophysical allusion in the following passage:

> The enormous water straining its bounds, the electric
> Strain in the cloud,
> […] the strain of the spinning
> Demons that make an atom, straining to fly asunder,
> Straining to rest at the center,
> The strain in the skull, blind strains, force and counter-force,
> Nothing prevails… (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 244)

As a recurring metaphor in both "Prelude" and *The Women at Point Sur*, strain represents not only the interpersonal friction and opposition of Jeffers's characters, but also—and most importantly—a *condition* of pressure and pull among the humans, the environment, and God himself that Jeffers believed was as inevitable as it was undeniable.

As such, "Prelude" presages the methodology Jeffers will adopt (and adapt) in *The Women at Point Sur:* the basic methodology of astronomy—the initial observation of an object from a great distance followed by analysis, calculation, and study of its component parts. Thus Jeffers repeatedly shifts his viewpoint from the omniscient to the first person—oscillating between an objective narrative description of Barclay and his actions to more intense scrutiny of his own role within the text. Section XII is one

instance of the latter in which he analyzes the significance of the characters and events he has created in order to better understand humanity itself:

> [T]hey are woven in the nerve-warp.
> One people, the stars and the people, one structure; the voids between
> stars, the voids between atoms, and the vacancy
> In the atom in the rings of the spinning demons
> Are full of that weaving; one emptiness, one presence. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 289)

This excerpt again emphasizes the holistic view of a rhizomatic universe in which interconnectivity is paramount.

In the first scholarly study of Jeffers's interest in science, Hyatt Howe Waggoner emphasized the exposure the poet had to astronomy, in part, through his younger brother, Hamilton Jeffers, an astronomer at the University of California's Lick Observatory in the Diablo mountain range east of San Jose:

> Jeffers's knowledge of astronomy and his visits to Lick Observatory provide him […] with some of the most effective passages in his poetry. […] The telescope, the spectroscope, and the speculative imagination of the scientists have extended Jeffers's poetic vision far beyond the range of the naked eye and the lay mind. (280)

Writing decades later in "The Inhumanist," Jeffers paradoxically stated, "[A]stronomy is the most noble science: is the most useless" (Hunt, *Collected* 3: 291). Despite its contradictory nature, this statement accurately surmises his belief that humans increasingly used science improperly. "Science is not to serve but to know," he writes in

the same passage. “Science is for itself its own value, it is not for man, / His little good and big evil: it is a noble thing, which to use / Is to degrade” (Hunt, *Collected* 3: 291). In *The Women at Point Sur* Jeffers attempts to use scientific methodologies in order to gain knowledge—whether he would have seen his own use of it as degradation, however, cannot be known.

Yet Jeffers admired scientific work and his biographers note that though he rarely left Tor House and the Carmel coast, when he did so he frequently visited the Lick Observatory where his brother worked as astronomer from 1924 until he retired in 1961. Hamilton Jeffers—six years younger than his brother—was renowned for his work on positional astronomy, and he conducted extensive research on comets, minor planets, and double stars. The younger Jeffers was an expert on double stars—he conducted studies of them throughout his career—and he supervised the *Index Catalogue of Visual Double Stars, 1961*, a massive volume published by Lick Observatory in which over 64,000 double stars are listed (Shane, “Obituary” 70). Double stars are pairs of stars that appear close together either because they are in mutual orbit or because they are gravitationally bound to each other. Not insignificantly—nor coincidentally—Jeffers’s poetry is rife with images of astronomical imagery, and of stars in particular.

As noted, Jeffers later wrote that his intention with *The Women at Point Sur* was to consider humanity “looking upward, minimized to ridicule against the stars,” it can be no surprise that stars are a dominant trope in the poem. And much as he used the boundary at the Pacific Ocean as more than mere backdrop for the action in *Tamar*, here Jeffers draws on stars not just for two-dimensional or secondary imagery; paired deliberately with the concept of strain, their signification evolves as the narrative

progresses, moving from an initial representation of the characters' interpersonal relationships toward a final critique of the corrosive effect of power on the human psyche.

This evolution is enacted through Barclay, and begins with the encounters he has with the women at Point Sur. In particular, he intuits the complicated homoerotic relationship between the young Mrs. Morhead and her boarder Faith Heriot; discerning the relationship, Barclay muses, "It's hard to hear the rustle and slip of the changing stars / Under a roof" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 261). Barclay's analogy likens the women's attraction to the movement between two stars, and may reflect Jeffers's understanding of the gravitational pull between the double stars that his brother studied. In fact, all of the characters at the Morhead farmhouse—where Barclay takes a room after leaving his church and congregation—are subjected to, or caught within, the strain that threatens to pull them toward psychological and spiritual collisions.

When Barclay's daughter, April, comes to convince him to return to her ailing mother, Audis, he struggles to perceive her identity in the midst of the powerful energy that surrounds him, a force that clouds his mind and sanity throughout the narrative:

> "Father." (I new her when she was a baby, I fed her milk from the bottle.)
> "You've come to see me?" Straining to adjust his mind
> To new experience, and the actual reality her presence[.]
> […] the infinite between them,
> The infinite distance. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 269)

Though she resists, April is quickly overtaken by the same pull of the strain that has affected her father's sanity. As he did in his conversation with Mrs. Morhead, Barclay

tells April that he has realized that "the laws / Are abolished," and there is "No distinction of persons," indicating his belief that the order and natural laws observed by society are—in his own mind at least—void. "[This knowledge] has changed me," Barclay tells his daughter, "From a cold stone to a star: all the relations of the world have been changed in a moment, mine to her, / Yours to me April" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 271). Disappointed and frustrated with her father's refusal to come home, she turns away from him. Yet the energy—the strain—that has infected her father pulls at her as she tries to leave and she feels the "multitude" of "spectral disciples" with which he has surrounded himself:

> Though his voice as not raised
> It made her shudder, his confidence of a multitude
> Under the snake-limbed oaks leaning up canyon,
> By the ruinous barns in the light of the bronze hills
> Sun-beaten from seaward: though there was no one she also
> Felt the spectral disciples gathered[.] (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 271)

Soon after this encounter, believing himself justified by his knowledge that relationships "have been changed in a moment," Barclay rapes April, telling her, "God has come home to you" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 295). The act destroys the young woman's psyche and she is left ruined; yet she remains caught in the energy surrounding her father—as if the two have become a double star, two bodies trapped together by the power of gravity that subsumes them both. Looking at her mother after the rape, April thinks,

> […] "We have shared

> Knowledge of a man, were virgin under one violence,
>
> We harem-sisters," the explosive corruption
>
> Straining the polished vault-stones.
>
> But the chief strain, the strain,
>
> Was lower than consciousness, her mind was filmed over with it. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 304)

Likewise, April and her mother are now bound together in the energy of astrophysical—and metaphysical—strain that Jeffers uses not only as a metaphor but as a catalyst that effects change and, in turn, conflict among characters.

Jeffers's use of incest in *The Women at Point Sur* and a number of his other poems has been the subject of much scholarly discussion.[29] Its symbolism in both *Tamar* and *Point Sur* is related, however, as he sought a jarring metaphor for the narcissistic "human turned-inwardness" that Jeffers believed was at the root of human vice and moral corruption. Both Tamar and Barclay are guilty of not only breaking taboo, but of what the poet described as an "excess of introversion" that was unnatural and destructive. Barclay in particular is characterized by not only his insanity but also his ego, and Jeffers strove to make explicit the connections he saw between the preacher's narcissism and his lack of morality—both of which stemmed from this kind of introversion, and both potentially fatal. In a 1927 letter to friend and publisher James Rorty, Jeffers articulates six distinct points about *The Women at Point Sur* and his intentions with it, the first of which includes more insight about this introversion he believed was so insidious:

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[29] Notable treatments of incest in Jeffers's poetry include: Robert Zaller's "Robinson Jeffers, Narrative, and the Freudian Family Romance"; Robert J. Brophy's "'Tamar,' 'The Cenci,' and Incest"; and Harold Watts's "Robinson Jeffers and Eating the Serpent." See bibliography for full citations.

> [T]he book was meant to be an attempt to uncenter the human mind from itself. There is no health for the individual whose attention is taken up with his own mind and processes; equally there is no health for the society that is always introverted on its own members, as ours becomes more and more, the interest engaged inward in love and hatred, companionship and competition. These are necessary of course, but as they absorb all the interest they become fatal. All past cultures have died of introversion at last, and so will this one, but the individual can be free of the net, in his mind. (*Selected Letters* 116)

Through his depiction of Barclay, Jeffers could discover the limitations of the human mind pushed over the brink of insanity. Not insignificantly, the poet chooses a preacher for his subject, hoping to simultaneously explore and critique the intersections of radicalism, psychology and religion—the combination of which Jeffers believed was volatile.

In the same letter, Jeffers also indicates his interest in examining the role of morality in human individuals and in society and the need to "indicate the destruction" that immorality may wreak on "the social organism":

> You remember a couple of letters ago I spoke of the morality—perhaps I said old-fashioned morality—implied in "Point Sur." "Tamar" seemed to my later thought to have a tendency to romanticize the unmoral freedom, and it was evident a good many people took it that way. That way lies destruction of course, often for the individual but always for the social organism, and one of the later intentions of this "Point Sur" was to

> indicate the destruction, and strip everything but its natural ugliness from the unmorality. (*Selected Letters* 115-16)

Barclay unquestionably embodies the "unmorality" Jeffers believed to be so destructive, and it seems clear that the poet's greater interest centered on the corrosive power and impact such an individual could subsequently have on society more broadly. Jeffers's comments here and in other letters about the implications and connections between his poems and society are further evidence of his increasingly holistic worldview—indicating his belief that the microcosm (a poem) might yield insights about the macrocosm (society, nature, the universe).

Yet Jeffers did not consider holism a monolithically remedial force in the tense interplay between humans and nature. As the narrative comes to a smoldering end via complex and unresolved images in the poem's final scenes—reminiscent of those in *Tamar*—he envisions the universe as an unceasing cycle in which humans, God, and nature are all simultaneously creators and destroyers. Barclay, after witnessing his daughter's suicide and the fragmentation of his motley congregation, retreats eastward into the desert. Gripped fully by his delusion, he conflates himself with God completely, and as the last of his followers drop away he proclaims:

> […] Never believe
> That God sitting aloof inflicts on other flesh than his own experience and wounds. But at length
> I grow weary of discovery. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 366)

Here Barclay, and the poet himself, suggests that the wounds and accompanying pain he (God) has inflicted have been to himself—inward, rather than or in addition to,

outward—implying the inseparability of men and God and, in turn, nature itself. Amidst such convoluted imagery Jeffers shows once again the non-linear, non-hierarchal model of existence in which all entities co-exist.

As Barclay continues to decline he becomes ever more aware that it is through pain that discovery is possible, though it would seem that he has finally exhausted himself and thus has "grow[n] weary" of it. The notion of pain as a catalyst for discovery is developed further as the poem draws closer to its conclusion:

> Pain's […] the foundation. I have turned to love men.
>
> I have gathered the souls already, you've not a soul among you.
>
> Automatisms and gusts of the nerves
>
> Plague you, but think on the nothing
>
> Outside the stars, the other shore of me, there's peace. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 367)

In this cryptic and convoluted statement Barclay makes his final claim that all of his actions have been inspired by love—by a newfound knowledge that "there is nothing wicked in the world, no act is a sin" (262). Yet the final statement in which he hints at a peace that exists "outside the stars" reflects Jeffers's perspective of a vast and unyielding universe that remains unaffected by the actions of men and/or of God.

That belief in the universe as a force beyond God—that perhaps existed even before God himself—informs the final lines of the poem. As Barclay lies dying at the "mouth of the black pit" of an abandoned coal mine:

> I want creation. The wind over the desert
>
> Has turned and I will build again and that's gone down.

I am inexhaustible. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 367)

Critics have debated Jeffers's intent in the lines, some positing they are best read as the poet's own words about himself and his art. Tim Hunt sees the final images of the poem as reflection of Barclay's physical, spiritual, and psychological decline, claiming, "The situation seems one of entropy and not transcendence or discovery" ("Afterword" 208). Yet these final words are best understood *not* as a description of either poet or preacher, but as Jeffers's vision of a holistic universe that remains impervious to the demands of humanity. Jeffers did not, however, champion the notion of a holistic universe, *per se*, but that he valued the recognition of it as a necessary component of reconciling his own worldview—particularly the interplay between humanity and nature.

In the aforementioned letter to Rorty, Jeffers notes that *The Women at Point Sur* was "meant to be a tragedy, that is an exhibition of essential elements by the burning away through pain and ruin of inertia and the unessential." Most important here is the notion of identifying "essential elements" via the act of burning. This was Jeffers's way of describing the process of discovery, which Hunt rightfully notes was paramount to the poet's poetic project. "The poem is not meant to summarize the Inhumanist perspective," Hunt writes, "but to involve the reader in the psychically volatile conflicts of being human and in the world so that the reader may […] attain vision" ("Afterword" 212). Again, the kind of vision in which Jeffers was most interested can be likened to astronomical observation—initial inspection of objects (or humans) from a distance, followed by up-close calculation and analysis. And in *The Women at Point Sur*, he conducts these observations on the bluffs above the Pacific boundary, holding humanity up to view with the stars themselves.

**Jeffers's 1920s Holism and *Roan Stallion***

Before moving on to the third narrative in Jeffers's Pacific trilogy, *Cawdor*, I must briefly supplement my discussion of the poet's interest in holism. After its initial publication in 1924, *Tamar* was quickly reissued by a new publisher in the expanded *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems* in 1925; "Roan Stallion" and the additional poems Jeffers selected provide additional insight about his early foray into holistic thinking, derived specifically from his interest in science. Like his work of the 1920s discussed thus far, the lyric poems in this 1925 volume once again critique the folly of "introverted man" and the subsequent disconnect Jeffers saw between humans and the environment, but they also articulate a comprehensive view of the universe in which humans are present, if de-centered.

The collection shows a range of attitudes about the major subjects and themes that occupied Jeffers's thinking throughout the decade, especially science, human progress, and the interplay between humans and nature. In poems such as "Science" and "Shine, Perishing Republic," Jeffers condemns the hubris and narcissism of humans—presaging his portrait of Barclay in *The Women at Point Sur*—and emphasizes the ever expanding chasm between "corrupted" civilization and the indifferent universe that encompasses it. Despite his own abiding interest in the earth sciences, he denounces its misuse in "Science" claiming,

> Man […] having crossed
> In passage and but a little with the nature of things this latter century
> Has begot giants; but being taken up

> Like a maniac with self-love and inward conflicts cannot manage his hybrids.
>
> […]
>
> Now he's bred knives on nature turns them also inward[.]
>
> […]
>
> A little knowledge, a pebble from the shingle,
>
> A drop from the oceans: who would have dreamed this infinitely little too much? (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 113)

Most significant here is Jeffers's assertion of humans' inability to "manage [its] hybrids." Though he does not elaborate and the term does not appear regularly in his poems, I posit "hybrids" denotes the figure of the scientist—the embodied cross of objective (or omniscient) observation with personal interest and ego. Thus as he wrote in *The Double Axe* "Science is not to serve but to know / Science is for itself its own value, it is not for man" (Hunt, *Collected* 3: 291). As is evident in virtually all of his work of this period, Jeffers's disillusion with humans' capacity for self-centeredness often gave way to outright disgust.

This disgust is evident in the tone of "Shine, Perishing Republic," a poem in which Jeffers laments the corruption and decadence of the west, likening its inevitable demise to the cyclic processes of nature: "the flower fades to make fruit, the fruit rots to make earth" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 15). While the poem has been criticized for its sweeping generalizations and abstractions, it stands apart as one of the few poems in which Jeffers addresses his sons directly, in this case cautioning them about the insidious human "introversion" that so occupied his thinking at this time:

> While this America settles in the mould of its vulgarity, heavily thickening to empire,
>
> […]
>
> But for my children, I would have them keep their distance from the thickening center; corruption
>
> Never has been compulsory, when the cities lie at the monster's feet there are left the mountains.
>
> And boys, be in nothing so moderate as in love of man, a clever servant, insufferable master.
>
> There is he trap that catches noblest spirits, that caught—they say—God, when he walked on earth. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 15)

Both "Shine, Perishing Republic" and "Science" reiterate same paradigm of alienation between humans and nature that likewise characterize both *Tamar* and *The Women at Point Sur*. Yet other lyrics in *Roan Stallion, Tamar, and Other Poems* reveal a more optimistic world-view in which he envisions a holistic equilibrium.

In poems such as "Phenomena" and "Boats in a Fog," for instance, Jeffers conflates the workings of humans and the natural world into a single entity, emphasizing both the necessity and value of "creatures [human and animal] going about their business among the equally / Earnest elements of nature" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 110). "Phenomena" provides a small glimpse of Jeffers's own local Carmel environment, in which gulls, "the dingy freightship," sea-slime, and the Point Pinos lighthouse are all given equal consideration and description (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 118). In his juxtaposition of the human and natural, Jeffers finds a balance—"Great-enough both accepts and subdues; the great

frame takes all creatures"—in a holistic view of the world more broadly (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 118).

The cornerstone of Jeffers's early holistic thinking is found in "Roan Stallion," the poem that shocked critics and readers in its depiction of the heroine, California, and her love for a stallion. Though she initially betrays her husband, finding in the animal a connection that she did not share with another human, California ultimately destroys the stallion suggesting that despite the lack of interpersonal affiliations, the bonds of humanity are undeniable to any lone individual. In a penciled fragment from 1944 Jeffers describes "Roan Stallion" more thoroughly:

> A poem like any other event is to be understood by each person in his own way. The writer's interpretation has no particular authority. Personally I think the woman fell in love with the stallion because there was no one else she could fall in love with: and then because the love was physically impractical and the stallion seemed infinitely superior to any man she had known she identified him half-consciously with God. First with the God she had heard religious stories about […] and then with the more real God—not a human invention but the energy that is the universe. She was glad to sacrifice her husband to him—for whatever the man was worth. But at the end she slipped back into ordinary life, "obscure human fidelity"—an animal had killed a man—she must kill the animal. (qtd. in Bennett 112)

Here Jeffers hints at the philosophical crux of the poem—the identification of "the energy that is the universe" as a power greater than God.

Jeffers articulates this power in the poem just before California's consummation of her desire, terming what is arguably his own working thesis for the 1920s, as "breaking through":

> Humanity is the start of the race; I say
> Humanity is the mould to break away from, the crust to break through, the coal to break into fire,
> The atom to be split.
> Tragedy that breaks man's face and a white fire flies out of it; vision that fools him
> Out of his limits, desire that fools him out of his limits, unnatural crime, inhuman science,
> Slit the eyes in the mask; wild loves that leap over the walls of nature, the wild fence-vaulter science,
> Useless intelligence of far stars, dim knowledge of the spinning demons that make an atom,
> These break, these pierce, these deify, praising their God shrilly with fierce voices: not in a man's shape
> He approves the praise, he that walks lightening-naked on the Pacific, that laces the suns with planets,
> The heart of the atom with electrons: what is humanity in this cosmos? For him, the last
> Least taint of a trace in the dregs of the solution; for itself, the mould to break away from, the coal

To break into fire, the atom to be split. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 189-90)

This passage marks the strongest assertion of Jeffers's desire—or perhaps even his need—to turn away from human-centerdness towards the "not-man" paradigm that he would later articulate in *The Double Axe*. Writing in 1923 or '24, the poet discovered a term for the process of not only rejecting the long-standing history of humanity, but for destroying it completely; by freeing humanity from itself, a holistic existence with nature and the universe could be attained.

Not insignificantly, that very term—"breaking through"—came not from Jeffers's own imagination, but from his wife. Una and Robinson Jeffers met in 1906 at the University of Southern California; Una completed her M.A. in philosophy in 1910, writing at thesis entitled "The Enduring Element of Mysticism in Man," which she undoubtedly discussed with Jeffers. Though biographers have noted the general influence she later had on her husband, little critical attention has centered on Una's own intellectual pursuits and their subsequent effect on Jeffers's poetry. Many passages in Una's thesis uncannily signal the direction of Jeffers's thinking and writing in the 1920s, especially his growing interest in holism. Here she suggests that humans may in fact find a more productive and harmonious relationship with nature via exploration:

> Men began to inquire whether the Natural world was really a resistless unmeasuring force from which they must separate themselves as far as flesh and body would permit, —whether it is not rather a divine enigma which one may solve, will one but search the key. (39)

In Chapter VII of Una's thesis, she includes a passage that Jeffers unquestionably read and wrestled with. Though a handful of scholars have noted the connection between this and "Roan Stallion," they make little of it. She writes:

> [I]n certain centuries, the souls of men seem to be stirring and wakening after long sleep, and tentatively trying in a thousand ways to break through the crust of the material, which encompasses them: at such time we see men restless, troubled, striving for they scarcely know what; they begin to hear the Inner Voice but are too unaccustomed, too frightened to understand. This state characterized the nineteenth century and now in the twentieth, we are beginning to sit quietly at home in this new world of silence and beauty, to rearrange our former standards of judgment, to try to traverse this new country of boundless horizons. We realize that the only important things for us are to ponder those matters of the soul, half-veiled, always mysterious, unseizable [sic], but after all the only Reality that can exist for many of us. (69)

The direct correlation between Una's articulation of this turbulent condition of humanity and how Jeffers embodies it in "Roan Stallion" fifteen years later is undeniable. Not only does Jeffers use Una's term "break through" verbatim in his verse, but he further expounds on it in his major narrative poems of the 1920s. In the excerpt cited above, Jeffers captures the essence of the problem at that precise historical moment—the anxiety between humanity and nature symbolized in the splitting of the atom—and finds the only solution in holism.

**"Looking eastward, against the earth": *Cawdor* and Physiology**

Jeffers continued to publish quickly and prolifically into the late 1920s, and in 1928 saw three volumes of his poems come into print: *Poems*, *An Artist* (a privately printed pamphlet), and *Cawdor and Other Poems*. In contrast to the critical controversy and objection *The Women at Point Sur* received, *Cawdor* was met with considerable praise, and has remained one of the more acclaimed narrative poems of his oeuvre. Recalling once again Jeffers's description of the works that comprise his Pacific trilogy, we contemplate *Cawdor* as the piece in which he considers humanity "looking eastward, against the earth, reclaiming a little dignity from that association." In refocusing his gaze on the eastern boundary, the poet examines civilization—and American society in particular—anew, finding there a new clarity in light of his previous experiments in *Tamar*, *The Women at Point Sur*, *Roan Stallion* and the lyrics he composed throughout the decade. In *Cawdor* Jeffers turns to physiology and the biological workings of the human body and mind—a science of considerable interest to him both during and after his tenure in medical school—for a deeper understanding of the interplay between human beings and the natural world. As with his other narrative poems of the 1920s, *Cawdor* emphasizes the Inhumanist devaluation of man in favor of a more inclusive holistic worldview, yet in the figure the poem's title character Jeffers finds a glimmer of redemption in the human subject, as Cawdor ultimately turns away from the detrimental introspection that the poet believed condemned humanity and instead assumes full responsibility for his actions and their consequences.

The poem adapts Euripides's *Hippolytus*, setting events on a farm near Big Sur, nestled in the redwoods of a deep canyon bordered by the Pacific. When a fire drives

Fera and her burned and blinded father, Martial, westward from the interior, Cawdor reluctantly takes them in and quickly marries the girl, more than thirty years younger than he. Fera and her father settled into the Cawdor farm, living with two of Cawdor's own children—George and daughter Michal—and a few farm and house hands. When Cawdor's third child—the estranged son and hunter Hood—returns home, fearing his father has died, Fera pursues him relentlessly. Ultimately, after Hood's repeated rejections, Fera lies to Cawdor, claiming the younger man raped her, inciting the father to murder his son in vengeance. Like *Tamar* and *The Women at Point Sur*, the narrative closes with striking images of violence: Fera confesses, leaving Cawdor to reconcile his guilt and grief, enacted through Oedipal self-mutilation as he gouges out his eyes.

In re-envisioning mythic themes and characters in this third phase of his Pacific trilogy, Jeffers grounds his consideration of human relationships—both interpersonal and with nature—in physicality. Despite Fera's sometimes paranoid mindset, Jeffers limits her thoughts and actions to the realm of possibility and does not subject her to the metaphysical extremes of insanity and psychological strain evident in Tamar and Barclay. Whereas Tamar believes herself to be an elemental force of nature itself and Barclay proclaims his own divinity as God, Fera is not plagued or haunted by circumstances or forces beyond her control, but experiences extraordinary physical and emotional pain that Jeffers explicates in detail. When she and Martial first arrive at the Cawdor ranch, she observes the house maid, Concha Rosas:

> Fera with private thoughts
> Watched the Indian-blooded woman about her work
> Pass in the dooryard, and go after a moment,

[…]

and Fera said carefully:

"She has a child with blue eyes and she is an Indian.

She and the boy had their rooms in the house

When we came here, but Mr. Cawdor has moved them

To the old adobe out-building where Acanna

Lives with his wife." (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 412)

In this early scene Fera observes evidence of the former affair between Concha Rosas and Cawdor—the man Fera will marry the following day. By her own admission, Fera later admits that her jealousy contributed to her pursuit of Cawdor's son Hood, thus her own actions and betrayals may be seen, in part, as the result of this interpersonal relationship.

After her father's death, Fera lures Hood into a secluded oak grove to help cut boughs for her father's gravesite. Once alone, she attempts to seduce him: "She embraced his thighs, kneeling before him, he felt her breasts against him, her head / Nuzzling his body" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 464). Yet as he begins to succumb, he arrests himself through an act of violence critics often liken to self-castration:

He thought of the knife in the leaves

And caught it toward him and struck the point of the blade into the muscle of his thigh. He felt no pain

A moment, and then a lightning of pain, and in the lit clearance: "I am not your dog yet," he said easily,

"I am not your thing." (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 464)

Hood's wound not only symbolizes his resistance, but will become the physical mark that dooms him. When she later realizes that Hood will never yield to her, Fera tells Cawdor that Hood has raped her, claiming his leg wound—which he had hidden, though his limp had been noted by his father—as proof of her resistance. This physical evidence sanctioned Cawdor's revenge and sealed his son's fate.

As mentioned, the poem emphasizes the relationships among humans and those of humans with nature, most perceptible in Michal's care for the wounded eagle. Confined to a cage overlooking the hillside family gravesite, the eagle is the embodiment of nature itself, maimed and rendered impotent by an act of human violence. Michal has nursed the animal, shot before Hood had left home, and daily traps live rodents for its feed:

> Against a cypress, a wide wire-screened box; no perch in it
>
> But a wood block, for the bird's wing was broken.
>
> […]
>
> She laid the squirrel inside and opened the trap.
>
> The girls, their arms lacing each other's shoulders,
>
> Set their faces against the wire to watch
>
> The great dark-feathered and square-shouldered prisoner
>
> Move in his corner One wide wing trailed through filth
>
> Quickening a buzz of blow-flies; the dark eyes
>
> Had dropped their films, "He'll never be tame," Michal said sadly.
>
> They watched the squirrel begin to drag its body
>
> On the broken fore-paws. The indomitable eyes
>
> Seemed never to have left the girls' faces but a grim hand

> Came forward and gathered its prey under its talons. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 413-14)

In this brief exchange, Jeffers articulates the disconnect between humans and nature, represented in Michal's wish to tame the eagle and its own—and, in turn, nature's—"indomitable" aspect. Yet the poet portrays Michal's naïvete as noble, and throughout the poem the girl mediates not only intersections between humans and nature, but also the interpersonal conflicts within her own family.

The poem's tone—established particularly by diction, symbolism, and character—is one of acceptance toward the limitations of human relationships. As with *Tamar* and *The Women at Point Sur*, the poet interjects his own voice at times during the course of the narrative, but in this case it is not the voice of an artist explaining his craft, but as an active observer of the events that transpire, as seen in the first line of the poem: "In nineteen-nine a fire swept our coast hills" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 409). Likewise, Jeffers aligns himself with his characters—and in doing so breaks from the more critical view of those in his previous narratives—finding in this set a degree of humility worthy of understanding and redemption. Immediately following Cawdor's proposal to Fera—in which the man concedes, "I think that I am the one being made of"—Jeffers defends that very foolishness, acknowledging it as part of human nature:

> Blue kingfisher laughing, laughing in the lit boughs
> Over lonely water,
> Is there no man not duped and therefore you are laughing?
> No strength of a man
> But falls on folly before it drops into dust?

> […]
>
> The man who'd not be seduced, not in hot youth,
>
> By the angel of fools, million-worshipped successs,
>
> The self-included man, the self-armored,
>
> […]
>
> Now in his cooled and craglike years
>
> Has humbled himself to beg pleasure: even power was better.
>
> Laugh kingfisher, laugh, that is their fashion.
>
> Whoever has discerned the vanity of water will desire wind. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 417)

Though he stresses the inevitability of human folly—even in those "self-included" individuals—there is an acceptance of this aspect of human nature expressed at the end of the passage. Not insignificantly, Jeffers seems to urge the kingfishers—representatives of nature—to likewise accept, or at least to acknowledge, this as well.

As indicated in the passage above, central to *Cawdor* are the relationships between Cawdor and his family, and among the various supporting characters. In explicating these, and in his on-going project of discovering a holistic balance between humans and nature, Jeffers focuses on the physicality of the characters in his poem. Most notable of these portrayals are the three deaths that punctuate the narrative—Martial, Hood, and the eagle—each of which is described physiologically. In the first two, Jeffers emphasizes the destruction and decomposition of the brain and the subsequent end of the human mind. Dying of age and illness, Martial's death appears to be sleep, yet Jeffers

delves not only into the dimming of his consciousness, but also the life-giving force of his decomposing body:

> Sleep and delirium are full of dreams;
> The locked-up coma had trailed its clue of dream across the crippled
> passages; now death continued
> Unbroken the delusions of the shadow before.
> […]
> The brain growing cold
> The ream hung in suspense and no one knew that it did. Gently with
> delicate mindless fingers
> Decomposition began to pick and caress the unstable chemistry
> Of the cells of the brain; […] the nerve-cells, by what would soon destroy
> them, were stirred
> To a gentle whispering. Or one might say the brain began to glow,
> […]
> So gently the dead man's brain
> Glowing by itself made and enjoyed its dream.
> […]
> But then the interconnections between the groups of the brain
> Failing, the dreamer and the dream split into multitude. Soon the altered
> cells became unfit to express
> Any human or at all describable form of consciousness.
> […]

the nerve-pulp as organ of pleasure
Was played to pieces in a few hours, before the day's end. Afterwards it
entered importance again
Through worms and flesh-dissolving bacteria. The personal show was
over, the mountain earnest continued
In the earth and air. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 449-51)

Unlike the old man, Hood dies abruptly and violently. Deceived by Fera, Cawdor hunts down his son, hiding in the shelter of the Rock, a landmark in the hills above the family ranch, and pushes Hood over the edge. Cawdor feels no guilt, as he believes he has truth and therefore justice on his side, though he does experience "a hollow unbearable sadness." When Michal comes searching for her brother, Cawdor lies, saying he scared Hood away, believing his actions done—their outcome complete. Yet he remains unaware that below, his son's body still pulsed, if only in the final moments of life giving way to death:

The bone vessel where all the nerves had met
For counsel while they were living, and the acts and thoughts
Been formed, was burst open, its gray and white jellies
Flung on the stones like liquor from a broken flask,
Mixed with some streamers of blood.
The vivid consciousness
That waking or dreaming, its twenty years, infallibly
Felt itself unitary, was now divided:
Like the dispersion of a broken hive: the brain-cells

And rent fragments of cells finding

After their communal festival of life particular deaths.

In their deaths they dreamed a moment, the unspent chemistry

Of life resolving its powers; some in the cold star-gleam

Some in the cooling darkness in the crushed skull.

But shine and shade were indifferent to them, their dreams

Determined by temperatures, access of air,

Wetness or drying, as the work of the autolytic

Enzymes of the last hunger hasted or failed.

Yet there appeared, whether by chance or whether

From causes in their common origin and recent union,

A rhythmic sympathy among the particular dreams.

A wave of many minute delicious enjoyments

Would travel across the spilth; then a sad fading

Would follow it, a wave of infinitesimal pains,

And a pause, and the pleasures again. These waves both lessened

In power and slowed in time; the fragments of consciousness

Beginning to lapse out of the frailties of life

And enter another condition. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 479-80)

In the descriptions of both Martial and Hood's deaths, Jeffers emphasizes the connection between brain cells and the how in death that unity is severed. In the first passage, he notes that the "interconnections between the groups of the brain" have been "altered," leaving the elderly man incapable of consciousness or dream; in the second,

"After their communal festival of life," Hood's brain cells experienced "particular deaths" as individual units. In both cases, Jeffers details the time that elapses before death is final, underscoring the continued—though diminishing—flow of energy between the cells for a short period. Jeffers's years of medical training—almost three years at the University of Southern California's medical school, 1907-1910—undoubtedly piqued his interest in the physiological workings of the human body and, as biographer Lawrence Clark Powell rightly states, "Chemical states of the body draw Jeffers as much as do states of mind, and he is perhaps unique among poets in the extent to which he has distilled poetry from physiology, biology and chemistry" (72).

In contrast to the men's deaths is that of the caged and wounded eagle. After Fera admits she deceived Cawdor—that she was not, in fact, raped by his son—his guilt consumes him; Michal foresees his coming decline, telling her brother George, "I think that father […] is going to be sick. / Our lives perhaps will change, I'll not have time / For trapping squirrels" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 510). She asks George to shoot the eagle. Jeffers's description of the act itself is brief:

> At the one shot
> The great dark bird leaped at the roof of the cage
> In silence and struck the wood; it fell, then suddenly
> Looked small and soft, muffled in its folded wings. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 510)

As with the aftermaths of the prior deaths, a long narrative of the transition between life and death here ensues. Yet in this particular instance Jeffers compares the death of the

eagle to those of the men, finding in the creature both a symbol and the embodiment of a transcendent, holistic life:

> The nerves of men after they die dream dimly
> And dwindle into their peace; they are not very passionate,
> And what they had was mostly spent while they lived.
> […]
> The unsocial birds are a greater race;
> Cold-eyed, and their blood burns. What leaped up to death,
> The extension of one storm-dark wing filling its world,
> Was more than the soft garment that fell. Something had flown away.
> […]
> This burned and soared. The shining ocean below lay on the shore
> Like the great shield of the moon come down, rolling bright rim to rim
> with the earth. Against it the multiform
> And man-canyoned coast-range hills were gathered into one carven
> mountain, one modulated
> Eagle's cry made stone, stopping the strength of the sea.
> […]
> [A]nd time relaxing about it now, abstracted from being, it saw the eagles
> destroyed,
> Mean generations of gulls and crows taking their world: turn for turn in
> the air, as on earth
> The white faces drove out the brown.

[…]

It saw men learn to outfly the hawk's brood and forget it again; it saw men
cover the earth and again
Devour each other and hide in caverns, be scarce as wolves. It neither
wondered nor cared, and it saw
Growth and decay alternate forever, and the tides returning.

[…]

[L]ife was more than its functions
And accidents, more important that its pains and pleasures,
A torch to burn in with pride, a necessary
Ecstasy in the run of the cold substance,
And scape-goat of the greater world.

[…]

Pouring itself on fulfillment the eagle's passion
Left life behind and flew at the sun, its father. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 510-13)

Though he depicts the eagle's death with less biological detail, Jeffers is nonetheless still focused on the physicality of its existence, referring to "Its prison and its wound" as "shrewd / Cautery of pain on the stumps" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 513).

Yet most evident—and significant—are his descriptions of the creature's transcendence beyond the limits of its body and of the physical world. The eagle's spirit or consciousness departs its body and, in turn, "its emptied prison," rising above the immediate landscape of Cawdor's ranch: "spired / Higher still, and saw the mountain-

dividing / Canyon of its captivity (that to Cawdor / Almost his world) like an old crack in a wall" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 511). Not insignificantly, and despite the great height from which the eagle observes all below, he discerns Cawdor:

> A speck, an atomic
> Center of power clouded in its own smoke
> Ran and cried in the crack; it was Cawdor; the other
> Points of humanity and neither weight nor shining
> To prick the eyes of even an eagle's passion. (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 511)

As I noted earlier, of all of Jeffers's 1920s protagonists, Cawdor garners the most respect of the poet himself, largely because of the character's humility and responsibility for his actions and their consequences. That the one human figure visible in the vast landscape below is Cawdor cannot be overlooked nor underemphasized.

In the final passages about the eagle's transcendence, Jeffers returns again to his experiments in forming a holistic worldview, in this case subsuming human events to the undeniable cycles of nature: "It neither wondered nor cared, and saw / Growth and decay alternate forever, and the tides returning," and "Yet the great Life continued; yet the great Life" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 513). Life continues for Cawdor as well, albeit tragically, as the realization of his son's innocence as well as how his own pride and anger contributed to Hood's death overwhelms him. As the narrative closes, unable to face the judgment, shame, and pity in his daughter Michal's eyes, Cawdor

> Faced the hill so that his back was toward them and drove
> The point of the flint through fold and flesh of each eye,
> Drawing sidewise on the stroke, so that his sight

Was burst, and blood and water ran down to his feet. (109)

Despite the symbolic import of his actions, Cawdor views them as failure: "It was mere indulgence. / These punishments are a pitiful self-indulgence. / I'd not the strength to do nothing" (Hunt, *Collected* 1: 520). For Jeffers, however, they are evidence of the possibility for redemption in a human race that he so often despised.

**Conclusion**

Thus in *Cawdor*, Jeffers most fully realizes a satisfactory balance between humanity and nature—one in which men exist *within* the boundaries and processes of the natural environment, while living without the destructive hubris or the kind of selfish introspection so loathed by the poet. In representing this most successful incarnation of Inhumanism in the 1920s, he situates humanity "looking eastward, against the earth, reclaiming a little dignity from that association." Just as Cawdor turns inland, facing the hill behind his ranch to steady himself as he atones for his sins, Jeffers sees the earth that butts up against the Pacific Ocean as a site of equilibrium between humans and nature—a "boundary of granite and spray" that offers a balance between human life and the natural world beyond.

## *Chapter 5*
## *"Let the Stories Crawl in by Themselves": John Steinbeck's Pacific Ecology*

"The Pacific is my home ocean; I knew it first, grew up on its shore, collected marine animals along the coast."
--John Steinbeck, *Travels With Charley* (161)

"One who was born by the ocean or has associated with it cannot ever be quite content away from it for very long."
--John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts, *Sea of Cortez* (138)

In 1960 John Steinbeck embarked on a journey that brought him home to the Pacific coast. "I [had] discovered that I did not know my own country. I, an American writer, writing about America, was working from memory, and the memory is a best a faulty, warpy reservoir" (*Charley* 5). Married to his third wife, Elaine, he had become a New Yorker, ensconced in a winterized summer cottage in Sag Harbor on the Atlantic Ocean.[30] Steinbeck felt disconnected from the places that offered comfort and vision, and from the American people that had been his subject for more than three decades. He mapped a trip across the country and back—traveling west via northern states and returning east through the south. California and the Pacific was the midway point—the literal and metaphorical center of his journey. He approached his mission with typical humor: referring to the trip as Operation Windmills, naming his truck Rocinante.[31]

Not surprisingly, his return to California was fraught with mixed emotions—he had not seen Monterey in twenty years, and was overwhelmed by changes, from the

[30] During the 1940s Steinbeck had lived in New York with his second wife, Gwyn. By 1955 he and Elaine owned three New York residences: the Sag Harbor cottage, as well as a townhouse and apartment in New York City.
[31] As was also typical, Steinbeck's humor was borne of his extensive preparation for his impending trip. As he prepared for the journey across America, he was reading *Don Quioxote* in Old Spanish (Benson 880).

missing presence of lost friends to the new onslaught of mass tourism. "I find it difficult to write about my native place, northern California," he later wrote. "It should be the easiest, because I knew that strip angled against the Pacific better than any place in the world. But I find it not one thing but many—one printed over another until the whole thing blurs" (*Charley* 173).

Yet out of this blur emerged a clear picture of Steinbeck's view of the nation and its people—a distinctly biological vision reminiscent of those found in his works of the 1930s and 40s, and one which suggests that his gasp on the social health of America might have weakened but had not entirely slipped. Traveling through San Francisco with Charley, he was asked in an impromptu interview with a *Chronicle* reporter about his forthcoming, *Winter of Our Discontent*; his response emphasizes the connection he felt between the strength of individuals and the subsequent strength of their community as a whole:

> A nation or group or an individual cannot survive being soft, comforted, content. The individual only survives well when the pressure is on him. The American people are losing their ability to be versatile, to do things for themselves, to put back in. When people or animals lose their versatility they become extinct. (qtd. in Benson 886)

Steinbeck harks back to a complex relationship between the individual and the group, similar to the notion of the phalanx he articulated in the 1930s. He first used the term to describe the phenomenon of what he called group-man in a 1933 letter, "The greatest group unit, that is the whole race, has qualities which the individual lacks entirely. It remembers a time when the moon was close, when the tides were terrific. […] The

human unit has none of these memories" (*Letters* 75). Speaking in 1960, his focus on the "human unit" and its inability to adapt undoubtedly reflected his view of both himself and the United States more broadly at the time.

Thus in one sense, Steinbeck's "search for America," the subtitle for *Travels With Charley*, was a search for rediscovery—a search for the individuals and communities that exhibited the strength and versatility of those he knew and wrote about in the 1930s and 40s: the Okies in California, the paisanos in Tortilla Flat, the bums and whores in Cannery Row. In these first two decades of writing, Steinbeck explored the world around him with an ecological eye, creating a portrait of *both* the people and their environment in a series of visionary novels and stories that distinguished him among his contemporaries. His strength was in the familiar; he wrote about the California communities he knew best—from the farms of the Salinas valley to the cannery district of Monterey. But moreover he wrote from *within* those communities, as a resident and participant in all aspects of life there, and early in his career his work was nuanced by science, especially biology and ecology. Fundamental to his writing (and thinking) was his desire to render truth, and early in his career he looked to scientific observation, objectivity, and theory as means to accomplish this.

Steinbeck studied science throughout his life, and scholars have recognized the significance of two experiences on his understanding and use of it: a course in general zoology completed at Stanford University's Hopkins Marine station in 1923, and his friendship and collaboration with Ed Ricketts from 1930 until Ricketts's death in 1948. Steinbeck fancied himself an amateur scientist, and even fantasized about "turning professional" soon after the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939. His laboratory

was the Pacific Ocean, and he spent considerable time in the tide pools and along the coast; his knowledge of the North American Pacific from California to Baja was impressive for both a writer and a scientist. Yet within the microcosm of local beaches and bays emerged connections to the macrocosm of the Pacific Rim, which he began to conceptualize as a kind of macroecosystem. As he later wrote, "It is advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again" (*Log* 179).

Paradoxically, though much of Steinbeck's thinking about the Pacific was shaped in the 1930s, during that decade he wrote primarily about the interior of California, publishing the novels that would secure his place in American letters. Yet as scholars have shown, virtually all of his writing from this period—including the "labor trilogy" *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*—had roots in his studies of biological science, especially in his understanding of relationships. Without question, his knowledge of animal aggregations and organicism, for instance—underlying elements in each of these novels—sprang from time spent observing and collecting along the Pacific coast. Ecology was more than metaphor and/or theme in Steinbeck's writing: it shaped his worldview and informed his understanding of human interactions between individuals and with the environment. Through years of conversation with Ricketts—who shared Steinbeck's interest in the human implications of animal ecology—the writer saw increasing correlations between the tide pools and human communities. And as he expanded his familiarity with the Pacific coast from Monterey to the Baja Peninsula and Gulf of California, he recognized the Pacific Rim as a unified region—a global ecosystem—in which human communities played out the same struggle for survival as their tide pool invertebrate counterparts.

Considerations of the literary dimensions of the Pacific Rim have grown since the 1970s, and American/U.S. writers have typically been criticized for rendering the region as colonialists or imperialists (or both). Many U.S. writers have fetishized the region—both its people and environs—primarily via "first had accounts" and stories that profess an intimacy with it that reinforces the hegemonic disparity between observer and object. Steinbeck, however, is not thought of as a writer of the Pacific Rim, primarily (and correctly) because he did not travel and/or write about the region as a whole. Yet he is, in fact, a pivotal figure in the literary history of the Pacific Rim precisely because he was the first—and perhaps only—American writer to envision it as a whole, as a vast and diverse ecosystem in which humans played a small role.

In *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck sees life in Monterey as life in a tide pool, likening the stories of the town's residents to the moments of marine life oozing and crawling among the rocks. He wrote the novel quickly in 1944 after a short but traumatic stint as a war correspondent in Europe; he was nostalgic, and hoped to lose—or find—himself in a place that he understood, a place that was familiar and known. The book's structure is deceptively lax, as Steinbeck professed to "open the page and to let the stories crawl in by themselves," like marine life in the tide pools (*Cannery Row* 7). Yet he was deliberate in his method: consciously writing what may be the best example of an ecosystemic novel—that is, a novel that in both subject *and* form represents the relationships between sentient beings and their environment. *Cannery Row* is the culmination of more than twenty years of Steinbeck's writing about the Pacific Ocean, and, though it depicts Monterey in the 1930s, is a direct result of the expedition to the Gulf of California he and Ricketts took in 1940. That trip brought Steinbeck to a new segment of the Pacific Rim to

which he could apply the ecological ideas he and Ricketts had practiced in and around the Monterey Bay region during the 1930s. *Sea of Cortez*, a travelogue and phyletic catalog of all the men saw, collected, and discussed during their six-week journey, remains one of the best scientific accounts of the region, and includes the most detailed record of the writer's thinking about science—ecology in particular. Together, *Sea of Cortez* and *Cannery Row* represent Steinbeck's vision of the North American Pacific, and reveal how he conceptualized the Pacific Rim as an ecosystem through which human communities might be better understood.

**Early Life: California and the Pacific Coast**

John Steinbeck is best known as a California writer. Born in Salinas in 1902, he lived in and around the Monterey Peninsula region for most of his adolescence and young adulthood. He was a loner of sorts, socially awkward for much of his youth, but spent a great deal of time outside—working and exploring. In high school he worked periodically as a "cadet," a school program implemented during World War I, which at times sent students to help in the fields of the Salinas Valley. He enjoyed hiking, hunting, and fishing along the Salinas River, and came to know the region's geography intimately.

Steinbeck enrolled at Stanford University 1919 and for the next six years dropped in and out, taking whatever classes seemed of interest and only completing a portion of them. While in high school he had decided on a career as a writer, and he took a number of English and writing classes in college. The few rather romantic and embellished short stories and poems published as a student bear little resemblance to the more straightforward style and subjects for which he would later be known.

As I note previously, one of Steinbeck's most formative experiences occurred in 1923 when he enrolled at Stanford's Hopkins Marine Station in Pacific Grove for the summer session. Though he signed up for several classes—including two in English—it was the general zoology course taught by C.V. Taylor that had the greatest impact on his thinking about science. Taylor was influenced by Berkeley Professor William Emerson Ritter and his notions of "organismal nature (or nature) of life" and the "superorganism" (Astro, "Introduction" xi). Ritter proposed that a group becomes a separate entity from the individuals of which it is composed: "wholes are so related to their parts that not only does the existence of the whole depend upon the orderly cooperation and interdependence of its parts, but the whole exercises a measure of determinative control over its parts" (Ritter 307). Ritter's theory applied to all organisms in nature, and Steinbeck was most interested in its implications for human individuals and communities.

From this seed grew his "phalanx theory" of the early 1930s, which explored the dynamic between the group and the individual. His clearest statement about it is found in a letter to friend George Albee in 1933:

> [An] arrangement of cells and a very complex one may make a unit which we call a man. That has been our final unit. But there have been mysterious things which could not be explained if man is the final unit. He also arranges himself into larger units, which I have called the phalanx. The phalanx has its own memory—memory of the great tides when the moon was close, memory of starvations when the food of the world was exhausted. [. . .] And the phalanx has emotions of which the unit man is

> incapable. Emotions of destruction, of war, of migration, of hatred, of fear. These things have been touched on often.
>
> Religion is a phalanx emotion and this was so clearly understood by the church fathers that they said the holy ghost would come when *two or three were gathered together*. You have heard about the trickiness of the MOB. Mob is simply a phalanx, but if you try to judge a mob nature by the nature of its men units, you will fail as surely as if you tried to understand a man by studying one of his cells. (*Letters* 79-80, emphasis Steinbeck's)

Mobs are one type of phalanx, which Steinbeck later depicted in his short story "The Vigilante," *In Dubious Battle*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Steinbeck's interest in group man continued throughout the 1930s, and his novels from that decade forward clearly show evidence of his abiding interest in the phalanx. Danny and his friends are together in *Tortilla Flat*, for instance, and they "became one thing [. . .] a unit of which the parts are men" (1), and individuals' characteristics are muted as the group's own personality emerges. In the short story "The Leader of the People," Jody's grandfather describes "westering" as the movement of "a whole bunch of people made into one big crawling beast" (*Long Valley* 224), an image that recurs in *The Grapes of Wrath* in Steinbeck's depiction of the migrants moving westward on Route 66. In Chapter Fourteen of the novel, his description of individuals merging into group man resonates with Ritter's theories:

> One man, one family driven from the land; this rusty car creaking along the highway to the west. I lost my land, a single tractor took my land. I

> am alone and I am bewildered. And in the night one family camps in a ditch and another family pulls in and the tents come out. The two men squat on their hams and the women and children listen. Here is the node, [. . .] this is the zygote. For here "I lost my land" is changed; a cell is split and from its splitting grows the thing you hate—"We lost *our* land." [. . .] This is the beginning—from "I" to "we." (206)

The movement from "I" to "we" echoes throughout the novel: from Casy inspiring Tom's interest in workers' rights to Ma guiding Rose of Sharon out of adolescent self-centeredness into a selfless woman who nurses a dying man for the greater good of "the people." Similarly, in his war novel, *The Moon Is Down*, the townspeople act collectively to subvert enemy control, an idea Dr. Winter articulates: "'The flies have conquered the flypaper'" (112). Steinbeck's 1923 summer in Pacific Grove was a high point in his education about ecology that had lasting effect on his writing.

In the fall of 1926, after leaving Stanford for the last time in June, Steinbeck began a stint as a winter caretaker for an estate on the shores of Lake Tahoe. The job afforded a long season of seclusion for writing and it seemed that Steinbeck recognized the importance of embracing such solitude as necessary for his success as a writer. In a letter he wrote to friend Webster "Toby" Street, he admitted:

> Do you know, one of the things that made me come here, was, as you guessed, that I am frightfully afraid of being alone. The fear of the dark is only part of it. I wanted to break that fear in the middle, because I am afraid much of my existence is going to be more or less alone, and I might as well go into training for it. (qtd. in Benson 102)

Winter passed slow and cold, and Steinbeck found that he could not write seriously. Instead, he wrote long letters and read, and explored the quiet and sparsely populated section of alpine Tahoe nearby. By chance, he met was a young Fish and Game Department employee, Lloyd Shebley, who worked at the Tallac Hatchery catching spawning trout and harvesting their eggs for fertilization. Shebley hired Steinbeck to help remove some fallen trees that blocked the spawning area of the local creek, and the two worked closely together for a few weeks. Through this experience and others he had during that winter, Steinbeck absorbed the landscape, the locals, and most of all, Shebley's thinking, all of which framed his interest in the "local."

Steinbeck returned to Fallen Leaf Lake the following summer and again stayed on through the winter as caretaker, though he was markedly more productive as a writer during this second season. By fall 1927 he was working on two major projects: the manuscript of what would be his first published novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929), and a kind or revised adaptation of a play by Street, "The Green Lady," that later emerged as *To a God Unknown* (1933). "He had imposed a sharp discipline on himself," notes biographer Jackson J. Benson, "making sure that he wrote every day, and he recorded the number of words he wrote at the end of each session in order to develop a habit of steady progress" (113). His dedication paid off in 1927 when he published his first short story, "The Gifts of Iban," in *The Smokers Companion* under the pseudonym John Stern.

Life in Tahoe suited Steinbeck, and in 1928 he decided that he might reside there permanently. He envisioned working for Fish and Game and writing in his spare time, and so he asked Lloyd Shebley to find him a job. Shebley secured them both jobs at the Tahoe City hatchery, and Steinbeck brought his characteristic humor to the workplace

when he hung a sign on the door of tank room office that read "Piscatorial Obstetrician" (Benson 132). The job was to prove life-altering. Steinbeck met his first wife, Carol Henning, when she wandered into the office one day looking for Shebley, who she had met the summer before. The couple felt a mutual attraction, and began dating seriously. They married in January of 1930, beginning their life together on the Monterey Peninsula, a region that would have a seminal influence on Steinbeck's view of California and the Pacific Rim.

**Edward F. Ricketts: Ecology and Collaboration**

In 1930 Steinbeck and Carol moved to his family's summer cottage in Pacific Grove. Like most residents, they lived modestly, but well. The cottage property included a garden in which they grew food year-round, and, as Steinbeck recalled years later in "A Primer on the '30s," they made use of the great benefit of the Pacific intertidal that nourished his work and their table: "In the tide pools of the bay," he wrote, "mussels were available and crabs and abalones and that shiny kelp called sea lettuce. With a line and pole, blue cod, rock cod, perch, sea trout, sculpin could be caught" (*America and Americans* 21). The couple quickly integrated themselves into the community, finding a network of artists, writers, and bohemians in and around Monterey with whom they formed an extended family:

> There was a fairly large group of us poor kids, all living alike. We pooled our troubles, our money when we had some, our inventiveness, and our pleasures. I remember it as a warm and friendly time. Only illness frightened us. You have to have money to be sick—or did then. And

> dentistry also was out of the question, with the result that my teeth went badly to pieces. Without dough you couldn't have a tooth filled. (21)

The Steinbecks' friends also knew Ed Ricketts, a young marine scientist and collector who was well-known in Monterey. An apocryphal story describes John Steinbeck's first encounter with Ricketts in a dentist's office, but it is more likely they met through mutual friend Jack Calvin, a graduate of Stanford University who knew Steinbeck, if only casually.

A Chicago native, Ricketts migrated to the area in 1923 with a wife and young son, and established Pacific Biological Laboratories, a supply house aspiring to provide specimens to schools across the country. "PBL" was the first of its kind in the area, and, as Anna (Nan) Maker Ricketts notes in her memoir "Recollections," "the townspeople were very puzzled about what the Pacific Biological Laboratories were" (23). Neighbors and locals were so baffled by the newcomers, that Ricketts and his partner Albert Galigher were stopped on one occasion by the police. "They said they were collecting specimens," continues Nan, "which meant nothing to the policeman. Ed and Albert explained that they would preserve the specimens and send them to schools and universities for studies" (23).

Ricketts had studied animal ecology at the University of Chicago with Warder Clyde Allee (1885-1955)—a major early pioneer in the field of ecology—who devoted most of his career to studies of animal aggregations, the tendencies of individuals to group together. What interested Allee most was why and how animals come together into groups; he believed cooperation was fundamental to virtually all species, mediated by the concepts of independence and natural selection, as most notably expressed by Darwin.

"We may conclude," he writes in *Animal Aggregations*, "that the mutual interdependence, or automatic co-operation, of which we are speaking is a fundamental and important principle in biology [… and] that the two great natural principles of struggle for existence and of co-operation are not wholly in opposition, but that each may have reacted upon the other in determining the trend of animal evolution" (360-61). This was a radical notion at the time, as Darwin's theories had come increasingly under critical scrutiny. To acknowledge the "survival of the fittest"—the term coined by Herbert Spencer—as a "natural principle" was a deep insight and courageous intellectual position. Allee was interested in applying his studies and ideas to both animal communities but to human society, as he saw the two linked inextricably.

He likely influenced Ricketts to move to California; he was well aware of the rich diversity of marine life on the west coast, later writing in *Animal Aggregations* "along the seashore, in such favorable locations as part of the California coast, the supply of animal life is appalling. One cannot step on the rocks exposed at low tide without crushing sea urchins, sea anemones, barnacles, or mollusks" (358). Ricketts left the Midwest shaped by Allee's ideas, and, as marine biologist and Ricketts's friend Joel W. Hedgpeth asserts, "Ed took to these ideas, kept them, and thought them over for the rest of his life" ("Philosophy" 93).

The geography of the Monterey Bay itself—defined by the largest and deepest submarine canyon in the North American Pacific, teeming with marine life—was still virgin scientific territory. When Ricketts and his partner arrived in 1923, there was no handbook about the region or catalog of specimens to be found, so Ricketts observed and recorded as much as he could on his own. The men spent their time collecting, seeking

first the more common, plentiful animals that they could sell to high school and college labs, but also those that were rare. "Ed began to collect unknowns," writes Hedgpeth, "He sent specimens to the Smithsonian and to other specialists for identification. He also observed the creatures' ways in the tidepools. He found in the seashore the most abiding love of his life" (*Shores* 1: 6), and was thus on his way to becoming the foremost authority of the region.

When John and Carol Steinbeck settled into their new home in Pacific Grove in 1930, Ricketts was a local fixture, often found collecting in the tidepools or drinking a beer at his lab. Steinbeck fell into a routine, spending most days writing at the kitchen table of their cottage while Carol worked day jobs to provide for the two of them, including a brief stint as Ricketts's secretary at PBL. After long days of work, Steinbeck sought conversation and companionship, and it was during this time his friendship with Ricketts deepened, as Benson describes:

> [Steinbeck] started stopping by to see Ed for a few minutes now and then, and gradually it became a habit. If Ed was busy, sometimes John would stand by and watch. As they got to know each other better, John might help with some task that was under way, and occasionally he would go out with Ed on a collecting trip. After a while, he brought his daily writing with him, and if there was an opportunity, read it aloud. […] What brought them together originally was probably a mutual interest in biology. What kept them close friends for so long was that each discovered that the other had a boundless curiosity about almost everything, and that their personalities meshed so well. (196-97)

Steinbeck enjoyed Ricketts the man, and relished the contact with an expert on the biology of the region; but their friendship was anchored on shared philosophies.

Understanding this friendship Ricketts and Steinbeck is the key to any analysis of the men and their subsequent work. Accounts of their relationship reveal the great extent to which Ricketts's own ideas and interests influenced those of his friend, particularly regarding science. As we have seen, however, Steinbeck's love of and fascination with marine biology and ecology pre-dated his introduction to Ricketts, likely beginning with the class he enrolled in at Hopkins Marine Station in 1923 and his exposure to Ritter's idea of the "organismal conception." They grew as the men shared long discussions about the similarities and differences between Allee and Ritter's proto-ecological theories. In a typed fragment found among his papers from the mid 1930s, Ricketts reveals insights about how Steinbeck's fiction issued from the scientific ideas that absorbed them:

> I have been especially interested in John Steinbeck's notions because they develop widely the holistic concepts being felt specifically in modern biology. The zoologist Allee must be interested in these enlarged horizons which might very easily (although I happen to know they couldn't) have sprung from the germ of his animal aggregation concept. Many workers in the vanguard of science and the arts achieve independently expressions of the same underlying ferment.

Ricketts accurately suggests that Steinbeck's "enlarged horizons" were not derived directly from Allee's theories, but grown more independently. Yet there is little doubt that concepts like the "phalanx theory" were, in fact, fundamentally rooted in the ideas of

both Allee and Ritter, as well as the discussions Steinbeck shared with Ricketts and others at the time.

Yet Steinbeck undoubtedly did encounter a number of intriguing ideas for the first time from Ricketts. Throughout the 1930s, parallel to on-going scientific projects, Ricketts also developed his "unified field hypothesis," the term he borrowed from contemporary physics to describe his world-view. He used it to describe a perspective that integrated the ecological and the spiritual—an expansion from its original scientific meaning. In 1940 he described this perspective:

> I may be able to understand, in a moment of enlightenment, and to formulate, a unified field hypothesis, but to fulfill it is another thing. And to fulfill it constantly is an impossibility; that would be the perfect Tao that leads to or that is Nirvanah. Or for anyone else to use that formula is difficult, although it may be correct for me, and objectively correct, too. A child may not be able to use an algebraic theorem despite its objective correctness. ("Verbatim transcription")

Ricketts had begun to piece together the concept in a series of three philosophical essays that articulated the components of his holistic world-view. "The Philosophy of Breaking Through" grew from his interest in transcendence and his studies in Zen Buddhism and Taoism. In "A Spiritual Morphology of Poetry," his second essay, he explored poetic verse as a potential "vehicle" for breaking though. "Essay on Non-Teleological Thinking"—the third and best-known of his essays—develops Ricketts's notion of "*is* thinking," which attempts "at most to answer the questions what or how,

instead of why." Steinbeck read drafts and revisions of each of these essays throughout the 1930s, and was deeply affected by them.

At about the same time he met Steinbeck—in 1930—Ricketts settled on the idea of writing a book of the Pacific littoral of the California coastline, describing specimens in their natural habitats—an unusual endeavor for a scientist of the time. "There were very few people thinking in ecological terms," notes University of California, Santa Cruz ecologist and evolutionary biologist John Pearse, "Most marine ecology at the time was focused on fisheries and then on single species. There were only a few people who were concerned with patterns of plant-animal assemblages, such as intertidal zonation" (Email August 16, 2004). With few contemporary texts as models, Ricketts was undeterred, and he asked friend Jack Calvin to join the project as a collaborator, assisting with collecting specimens, taking photographs, and writing text for what would become *Between Pacific Tides*.

The project was one of Ricketts's earliest collaborative efforts, the first of a number that followed over the years, and he thrived in such relationships. A crucial part of his process of developing ideas—whether scientific, philosophical, or emotional—was discussing them in a wide circle and generating dialogue with friends, family, and colleagues. Steinbeck and other friends often accompanied him to the tidepool, and he was known to be a patient listener who enjoyed explaining the intricacies of marine animals and their interactions. "Ed gave his ideas freely," notes Hedgpeth, "[…] He was pleased to see people follow lines of inquiry he suggested" (*Shores* 1: 9). Though he kept to a rigorous schedule while completing the book, he remained social, finding inspiration in discussions about his progress. Working together diligently, by 1931 Ricketts and

Calvin had assembled a draft of *Between Pacific Tides*.

But as seminal as we now regard the work, the process of publishing the book was long and difficult due, in part, to its unfamiliar ecological organization. Strict linear taxonomy was the accepted scientific premise, but Ricketts wanted to describe animals in their natural shore habitats. He wrote in the Preface to the first edition, "The treatment [of animals] is ecological and inductive; that is, the animals are treated according to their most characteristic habitat, and in the order o their commonness, conspicuousness, and interest" (vii). Such a structure was simply not considered appropriate by Ricketts's more formal scholarly contemporaries, who regarded taxonomic organization as the only true scientific approach. In 1931 he and Calvin sent a draft of the book to Stanford University Press for consideration. The manuscript was forwarded to W.K. Fisher, director of Hopkins Marine Station in Pacific Grove, for evaluation. Fisher's response was not enthusiastic:

> The method of taking up the animals from the standpoint of station and exposure on the seashore seems at first sight very logical but from the practical standpoint it seems to me not particularly happy […] Certain zoological keys could be inserted which might overcome to a large extent this difficulty. After all, the end and aim of a book of this sort is to answer the question "What is it?". After this the reader is concerned with habits, etc. […] In any event I think the manuscript should be carefully read by a professional zoologist. It must be remembered that neither of the authors can be classified in this category, although Mr. Ricketts is a collector of considerable experience. (December 2, 1931)

Joel W. Hedgpeth aptly notes, "It was an odd quirk of fate that Ed should establish himself in a community where there was so little intellectual stimulation for a field naturalist, despite the presence of a marine station" (*Shores* 1:28). But over the years, Ricketts won the respect of Hopkins Marine Station scientists and graduate students with whom he exchanged ideas, information, and research. Indeed, Ricketts's reputation spread among colleagues throughout the world. His correspondence reveals that a wide circle of scientists and specialists sought his expertise regarding the North American Pacific intertidal throughout the 1930s and 40s—with an eye to applying these new theories to their own work. His own ongoing studies of the region in the 1930s likely informed revisions of *Between Pacific Tides*, and he and Calvin resubmitted the work to Stanford University Press in 1936. The revision won acceptance—though begrudgingly—from Fisher.

*Between Pacific Tides* was eventually published in 1939, receiving acclaim in the scientific community. In a review by Albert Campbell in the *Monterey Peninsula Herald*, a converted W. K. Fisher is quoted, saying, "we intend to have it in our library here at the Marine Station and to use it for instruction." Steinbeck reveled in his friend's success, noting the book's importance in a letter to friend and book reviewer Joe Jackson:

> I'm sending you Ed Ricketts' [sic] new book. It is unusual and I think valuable. There have been handbooks describing the marine life of the littoral, none has been like this. The receptions of the book in scientific and university circles has been very fine but it strikes me that it is valuable to those people who just wander along the beach and wonder what that thing is. This book not only shows the thing's picture but gives its

> common name, its enemies, housing habits and food. Anyway, I think it is a good and valuable book. (qtd. in Benson 396)

*Between Pacific Tides* is still in print today, and continues to be used in college classrooms, and Ricketts is now recognized as an innovative scientist, whose thoughts, as oceanographer James C. Kelley notes, "contain all of the primary elements of what 'New Age' writers, thinking they have found something new and revolutionary, call 'deep ecology'" (28).

1939 also saw the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*, which, like *Between Pacific Tides*, marked the greatest achievement of its author to date. Steinbeck composed the epic in one hundred working days, from May to October 1938. He began each day by writing in his journal as a way to both "warm-up" and to clear his mind. On 31 May 1938 (Day #2) he writes:

> Here is the diary of a book and it will be interesting to see how it works out. I have tried to keep diaries before but they don' t work out because of the necessity to be honest. […] I shall try simply to keep a record of working days and the amount done in each and the success (as far as I can know it of the day. Just now the work goes well. It is nearly the first of June. That means I have seven months to do this book and I should like to take them but I imagine five will be the limit. I have never taken long actually to do the writing. I want this one to be leisurely though. That is one of the reasons for the diary. (*Working Days* 19-20)

The diary reveals that Steinbeck poured himself into the book, both in terms of content and form. He drew from his past writing experiences, recognizing that he was surpassing

his own prior achievements with the scope of *Grapes*—both technically and thematically. "My life isn't very long and I must get *one* good book written before it ends," he notes in his journal. "The others have been make shifts, experiments, practices. For the first time I am working on a real book that is not limited and that will take every bit of experiences and thought and feeling that I have. And so to work" (*Working Days* 26). The disciplined writer worked long days for approximately five months, and during this time he saw little of Ricketts, as Steinbeck had left Pacific Grove and was living on a ranch in the Santa Cruz mountains. Yet there were visits back and forth, and after on such meeting Steinbeck noted, "Read Ed some little parts of this book and he finds them moving for which I am glad" (*Working Days* 38).

Despite the obvious categorical differences between them, *Between Pacific Tides* and *The Grapes of Wrath* share key elements, especially their attention to how animals—invertebrate or human—respond to stress. One of the major studies Ricketts conducted during the 1920s and 30s concerned the impact of wave shock on intertidal habitats: the potential for waves to batter and potentially dislodge marine life. He recognized the connection between this phenomena and the resulting distribution of animals in particular zones of the shore, concluding that, along with other factors, "[it] is the most significant distribution factor for the Pacific coast littoral" ("Notes and Observations"), and as such, wave shock was one of the major organizing principles of *Between Pacific Tides*.

Similarly, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck focuses on the actions and reactions of humans under stress—treating his subjects biologically, much like animals under stress in various environs. Much like a tidepool exposed to extreme wave shock, the Oklahoma of Steinbeck's opening scene is a battered ecosystem:

> To the red country and part of the gray country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth. […] The weeds grew darker green to protect themselves, and they did not spread any more. The surface of the earth crusted, a thin hard crust, and as the sky became pale, so the earth became pale, pink in the red country and white in the gray country. (3)

Thus from the onset, *The Grapes of Wrath* is a scientific account of animals displaced from their habitats, humans forced to migrate from a dying world to a more welcoming environment.

And though the major narrative traces the movement of those in search of a hospitable place to live and work, Steinbeck also observes those left behind to endure the ravaged Midwest landscape, represented via the character Muley Graves. Though his family left for a better life in California, Graves remains in Oklahoma, ekeing out the barest existence amid the abandoned homes and dusty fields. He explains his decision to stay:

> I know this land ain't much good. Never was much good 'cept for grazin'. Never should a broke her jup. An' now she's cottoned damn near to death. If on'y they didn' tell me I got to get off, why, I'd prob'y be in California right now a-eatin' grapes an' a-pickin' an orange when I wanted. But them sons-a-bitches says I got to get off—an', Jesus Christ, a man can't, when he's tol' to! (64)

Graves's statement evidences Steinbeck's knowledge that the crisis facing the Midwest was of both environmental and economic origins, as, along with drought, intensive

farming practices and industrialization also contributed to the dustbowl phenomenon. These factors impacted humans much as wave shock did the marine communities Ricketts observed, and passages in the scientist's notes could likewise describe Steinbeck's subjects as well: "wave shock would slow down the progress of those not equipped to withstand it, so that only strays would be found, with the likelihood that the race would be unable to colonize there, unless specially adapted to survive this hazard" ("Notes and Observations").

Despite its critical and popular success, *The Grapes of Wrath* exhausted Steinbeck, both during its production and reception, and in the aftermath the writer seriously considered turning away from fiction. In an oft-quoted letter he explained, "I must make a new start. I've worked the novel—I know it as far as I can take it. I never did think much of it—a clumsy vehicle at best. And I don't know the form of the new but I know there is a new which will be adequate and shaped by the new thinking" (*Letters* 194). Almost simultaneously, in mid-1939, Ricketts started work on a handbook of the most common intertidal species in the San Francisco Bay area, at Stanford University Press's request in the wake of the completion of *Between Pacific Tides*. Steinbeck eagerly signed on, seeing it as a stepping-stone of sorts for him into marine biology, hopefully the first in a series of collaborative projects. On October 16, 1939 he wrote in his journal:

> That part of my life that made the *Grapes* is over. I have one little job to do for the government, and then I can be born again. Must be. I have to go to new sources and find new roots. I have written simply for simple stories, but now the conception and the execution become difficult and not simple. And I don't know. I don't quite know what the conception is. But I

> know it will be found in the tide pools and on a microscope slide rather than in men. (*Working Days* 106)

But Steinbeck expressed uncertainties about the San Francisco book to friend and agent Elizabeth Otis: "I have a terrific job of reading to do. Ricketts is all right but I am a *popular* writer and I have to build some trust in the minds of biologists. This handbook will help do that" (*Letters* 196, emphasis Steinbeck's). They would write the book together, each man composing material, including essays on general principles of ecology and animal descriptions, that Steinbeck would then edit into a handbook for high school students and general enthusiasts. By early 1940 they had each completed partial drafts that revealed the book's format would mirror the ecological arrangement of *Between Pacific Tides*, but delve even deeper, finding connections between human and intertidal communities.

For instance, in the "Zoological Preface" to the San Francisco book he drafted, Ricketts writes, "Even the two chief philosophies of human society are paralleled on the shore: those dedicated to the principle that the individual serves the state, chiefly as a unit or cog in that supra-personal social organization that is the colony; and those based on the democratic principle that the state serves the all-important individual." Here Ricketts widens the scope of his burgeoning ecological gaze from the tidepools to human interactions.

Steinbeck, living in Los Gatos at the time, also worked at text for the book, and his journal reveals periodic feelings of inadequacy: "Came down here [to Pacific Grove] to try to work on the tide pool hand book," he writes on January 4, 1940. "I discover that there are no easy books to write and that this may well be one of the hardest" (*Working*

*Days* 109-10). He finally completed a draft of the preface, "Second try at Opening Preface," which argues for the importance of a holistic approach to intertidal life, in which he writes:

> It is as though one [peers] into a city like New York and choose[s] one family for study. Surely there is enough in a family for a life to study, but there remains the city as a whole. And in tide pool or exposed rock there is a similar association—the whole which is ecological symbiotic, commensal, and sociologic. It is a whole which has been little dealt with for the beginning observer and more than that, probably the least investigated field in biology.

He asserts the need for more ecological considerations of marine life, and the preface includes some of the most concise statements Steinbeck ever wrote about human ecology. It was later revised and included in the 1948 edition of *Between Pacific Tides*.

In these two short prefaces, we see both Steinbeck and Ricketts articulating the concept of the macrosystem—the larger picture encompassing tidepools, human societies, and the entire universe. As I mentioned earlier, Steinbeck's concept of the phalanx, or group man, issued from his studies in marine science and as he and Ricketts began drafting outlines for their San Francisco handbook, the writer's continued interest in the correlations between human nature and animal behavior is evident.

While they started work on the San Francisco Bay Area Handbook in late 1939, Steinbeck and Ricketts also began planning an extensive trip to the Gulf of California for the spring of 1940. They bought and outfitted a truck ideal for collecting, described by Steinbeck in a letter to friend and editor Pascal Covici: "a tiny pump, a small refrigeration

plant, small aquaria, and a beautiful new microscope, bookcases and typing stands. All mounted in the truck. Very pretty. Insignia is $^{\pi}\sqrt{-(R+S)^2}$. Don't think about this too much. It will drive you crazy" (qtd. in Benson 428). Their plan was to drive around the Gulf, collecting at frequent stops. In his "Post Fire Notebook VII"—a journal spanning September 28, 1939 through March 27, 1940—Ricketts recorded the events leading up to the Sea of Cortez expedition:

> Because I will probably be interested in the factual history of this later on, at a time when I may be unable to reconstruct it, I will try now to delineate the rapid workings out of this thing.
>
> Jon has been saying that his time of pure fiction is over, that he'd like next to portray the tidepools, that his next work will be factual. He came down [to the lab] this time depressed and unconfident, headed for a long walk or a bus ride. He said that in Febr. he and Crl would go to Mexico. I said if they'd wait until Mch I'd go along; that I wanted to go, that I'd rather go with someone who knew the ropes, and that I'd rather go with them. He said "Fine, that maybe too we could get in a little collecting." I said if I had any gumption I'd get busy first and get well started on the [account] of SF Bay invertebrates that Stanf[ord] suggested I should do. Then Jon said "Why don't we do that book together?" We talked it over a while and it began to seem to me quite feasible. So we began to lay plans for it, work to start immediately. Then somehow or other we got to talking about the Mex. trip; it changed around more and more from the idea of a motortrip down to Mexico City, to the idea of,

> primarily, a Gulf of Calif collecting trip. (Jon said "If you have an objective, like collecting specimens, it puts so much more direction onto a trip, make it more interesting.") Then he said "We'll do a book about it that'll more than pay the expenses of the trip." and as we considered it we got more and more enthusiastic about the whole thing.
>
> We started at once to lay out plans, to write down lists of things to do, to get, to take, to plan our itinerary and activities, and went down to Chev[rolet] that next morning (Wed Nov 29) to look up station wagon. There happened to be one coming in and Jon just about closed with him that same day. Then the idea of the book loomed up more and more as the significant feature of the whole thing. We both became quite sure that it could be a great thing, maybe very great, a modern Odyssey. (69-70)

A few pages later, Ricketts writes that he and Steinbeck would go to the Sea of Cortez suspending work on the San Francisco Bay Area Handbook. The reasons for this sudden shift were many—backlash from *The Grapes of Wrath* continued and Steinbeck's marriage to Carol was deteriorating. Both men were ready to get away.

**Sea of Cortez, Holism, and the Pacific Rim**

"We have a book to write about the Gulf of California," Steinbeck and Ricketts later wrote in *Sea of Cortez*. "We could do one of several things about its design. But we have decided to let it form itself: its boundaries a boat and a sea; its duration a six weeks' charter time; its subject everything we could see and think and even imagine; its limits—our own without reservation" (1). *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and*

*Research* is the greatest evidence of the men's collaboration and also of Steinbeck's own thinking about holism. They focused on the notion of non-teleological thinking, a concept that Ricketts articulated in an essay that he shared with Steinbeck (and others) during the 1930s. In short, non-teleological thinking is notion of "*is* thinking," which attempts "at most to answer the questions what or how, instead of why," and articulates a key tenet in Ricketts's unified field hypothesis or world-view—the method to achieve transcendence and deep participation in life. The term "non-teleological thinking" itself is awkward and suggests Ricketts was reaching beyond what language could bear. As he points out, "Because it involves more than thinking, that term is inadequate. Modus operandi might be better—a method of handling data of any sort" ("Non-Teleological" 131).

Steinbeck's own interest in non-teleological thinking surpassed a mere curiosity, as evidenced in the bulk of his writing of the 1930s. *Of Mice and Men*, for example, the story of the tragic friendship between two migrant farm workers in California, was originally titled, "Something That Happened," reflecting the writer's desire to depict life as it really is, and not "building too carefully for an event [or] reducing everything to its simplest design" (qtd. in Benson 331). Thus when he and Ricketts set out on an expedition to the Gulf of California in 1940, Steinbeck was eager to "let it form itself."

As modus operandi for the journey and their book, non-teleological thinking shaped the way Steinbeck and Ricketts observed everything they encountered—and they believed it was the method used by the "true biologist":

> We sat on a crate of oranges and though what good men most biologists are, the tenors of the scientific world—temperamental, moody, lecherous, loud-laughing, and healthy. […] The true biologist deals with life, with

> teeming boisterous life, and learns something from it, learns that the first rule of life is living. (*Log* 25-26)

The true biologist was a holistic figure, able to see broadly and to value life in its living form—as opposed to the "dry-balls" who preferred to limit observation to captured and preserved specimens. Steinbeck and Ricketts sought to enter the Gulf of California as unobtrusively as possible, in order to encounter life as it was, hoping to learn about the intricacies of the intertidal ecosystems found there.

Yet Ricketts and Steinbeck both remained acutely aware that their mere presence altered the environment—that by stepping on shore they were at once an inextricable interruption in the tidepools and beaches they had come to see. "We could not observe a completely objective Sea of Cortez anyway," they explain, "for in that lonely and uninhabited Gulf our boat and ourselves would change it the moment we entered. By going there, we would bring a new factor to the Gulf" (*Log* 2). Steinbeck scholar Susan Shillinglaw notes that "As ecologists, both Ricketts and Steinbeck thus rejected an anthropocentric universe and stressed the interconnectedness of humans with nature […] That profound ecological awareness was somewhat unusual for a Depression-era scientist, even more so for a writer of fiction" ("Introduction" *Cannery Row* xii). They practiced more than traditional ecology in the Sea of Cortez, blending philosophic holism with scientific discovery.

Steinbeck scholar Louis Owens extends the approach a step further: "It is hard to see why we might need a better articulation than this of what today we term a philosophy of deep ecology," he writes of *Sea of Cortez*. "It is an argument that demands the most acute sense of our interrelatedness with all of existence, not merely what we customarily

term 'life,' and not merely what we term 'humanity'" ("Ways Out" 17). Formally articulated in the 1970s, deep ecology inbues traditional environmentalism with philosophic and spiritual perspectives. "The essence of deep ecology," write Bill Devall and George Sessions in their seminal *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, "is to keep asking more searching questions about human life, society, and Nature as in the Western philosophical tradition of Socrates [...] Thus deep ecology goes beyond the so-called factual scientific level to the level of self and Earth wisdom" (65). Ricketts and Steinbeck explored the Sea of Cortez hoping to better understand both the natural and metaphysical realities of life, at times experiencing moments of epiphanic breaking through—another of Ricketts's own terms, indicating a kind of transcendence. As a result, *Sea of Cortez* is difficult to classify and is unquestionably more complex than its subtitle—*A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research*—suggests, and it is more accurately seen as a hybrid literary narrative of blended scientific and philosophical discovery.

Steinbeck likened their work to Darwin's, and scholar Brian Railsback notes the influence of the *Beagle* voyage (1831-36) on the writer, who was fascinated with "Darwin's methods and theories, as well as his contribution to holistic thought. […] Of all the biologists and scientists that Steinbeck read, only Darwin inspired such personal affection" (36-7). To identify Darwin as a holist in the 1930s was radical and presaged the resurgence in interest in his work by ecologists in the 1960s. Steinbeck emphasized his affinity with Darwin as a naturalist specifically:

> He wanted to see everything, rocks and flora and fauna; marine and terrestrial. We came to envy this Darwin on his sailing ship. He had so

> much room and so much time. He could capture his animals and keep them alive and watch them. He had years instead of weeks, and he saw so many things. […] This is the proper pace for a naturalist. Faced with all things he cannot hurry. We must have time to think and to look and to consider. And the modern process—that of looking quickly at the whole field and then diving down to a particular—was reversed by Darwin. Out of a long consideration of the parts he emerged with a sense of the whole. (*Log* 51)

Steinbeck's repeated references to Darwin also indicate his awareness that their Sea of Cortez research was connected to a more comprehensive understanding of the Pacific specifically and oceans in general. Much like Darwin would extrapolated the theory of natural selection from his observations of finches in the Galápagos, Steinbeck sought to recognize the interconnection between the costal environs along the Pacific Ocean and human societies on the mainland.

Evidence of Steinbeck's thinking about interconnectivity can be found throughout *Sea of Cortez*, in his considerations of both marine life and humans. He and Ricketts were committed to learning about the life "as it is," and did not, therefore, seek out rare or unusual specimens. Instead, they concentrated on those animals and habitats that were most common, and in these observations lie some of their most explicit connections between the animal microcosm and the human macrocosm:

> The rare animal may be of individual interest, but he is unlikely to be of much consequence in any ecological picture. The common, known, multitudinous animals, the red pelagic lobsters which litter the sea, the

> hermit crabs in their billions, scavengers of the tide pools, would by their removal affect the entire region in widening circles. The disappearance of plankton, although the components are microscopic, would probably in a short time eliminate every living thing in the sea and change the whole of man's life, if it did not through a seismic disturbance of balance eliminate all life on the globe. For these little animals, in their incalcuable numbers, are probably the base food supply of the world. But the extinction of one of the rare animals, so avidly sought and caught and named, would go unnoticed in the cellular world. (*Log* 178)

This passage hints at the more explicit statements Ricketts would later make in support of the need for conservation measures in the sardine fisheries of California. His studies of plankton began in the 1920s and shortly before his death in 1948 he wrote a series of essays in which he pointed to the human and environmental factors affecting the species and, in turn, the ecosystems that depended on it. Steinbeck was aware of Ricketts's research and himself had a firm grasp on the concept of the ecosystem and of the balance of food chains and populations within.[32]

Steinbeck and Ricketts likewise believed that the most common—or local—animals and habitats yielded information, insights, and potential applications to better understanding human relationships, both within human communities and within the natural world. In many ways, their view echoes Jeffers's "Inhumanistic" view of nature in which humans have been "de-centered" from a heirarchal chain of being. This

[32] In *Beyond the Outer Shores*, Eric Enno Tamm rightly states that Ricketts never used the term "ecosystem" in any of his writing. The word was first published in a 1935 paper by British ecologist A.G. Tansley, and there is no evidence that Ricketts ever read it. "And yet he seemed to be coming to similar conclusions," Tamm notes (255).

extended excerpt is a prime example of their method of non-teleological thinking during the expedition, moving from observation to consideration to philosophical conclusion:

> Our own interest lay in relationships of animal to animal. If one observes in this relational sense, it seems apparent that species are only commas in a sentence, that each species is at once the point and base of the pyramid, that all life is relational […] One [species] merges into another, groups melt into ecological groups until the time when what we know as life meets and enters what we think of as non-life: barnacle and rock, rock and earth, earth and tree, tree and rain and air. And the units nestle into the whole and are inseparable from it. Then one can come back to the microscope and the tide pool and the aquarium. But the little animals are found to be changed, no longer set apart and alone. And it is a strange thing that most of the feeling we call religious, most of the mystical outcrying which is one of the most prized and used and desired reactions of our species, is really the undertanding and the attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality, known and unknowable. […] all things are one thing and that one thing is all things—plankton, a shimmering phosphoresence on the sea and the spinning planets and an expanding universe, all bound together by the elastic string of time. It is advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again. (*Log* 178-79)

In their view, humans could best be understood as animals in an ecosystem—living and interacting with other animals and with nature—though the capacity for rational thought and complex emotion often clouds that reality.

Steinbeck and Ricketts were both aware that the United States—and the world—were on the brink of war in 1940, and in *Sea of Cortez* they contrast the structure of the tide pool to that of the military. They note that the "pattern" or organization of the military is delicate, maintained by power and the "thoughlessness" of the soldiers who would endanger the system if they "permitted [themselves] to think" (*Log* 35). Unlike the ecosystem, which is dynamic enough to sustain anomalies and fluctuations, in the military "The pieces must stick within their pattern or the whole thing collapses and the design is gone."

Steinbeck and Ricketts do not condemn human thought, but recognize it as a factor that may affect a community and system much like waves shock. And just as wave shock may disrupt and even destroy the balance of a tide pool ecosystem, so might rational (or irrational) thought destroy human communities. The men continue this trajectory wondering, "whether in the present pattern the pieces are not straining to fall out of line; whether the paradoxes of our times are not finally mounting to a conclusion of ridiculousness that will make the whole structure collapse" (*Log* 35).

Not insignificantly, Steinbeck and Ricketts encountered a Japanese fishing fleet during the course of their journey, which gave them further opportunity to consider the impending war. But more importantly it signaled the presence of a global economy in this small outpost that Steinbeck recognized as a destructive human element in the macroecosystem of the Pacific Rim. Steinbeck and Ricketts saw that local Mexican

fishermen resented the Japanese shrimpers, in part because of their superior equipment, and also because of the environmental—and subesquent economic—damage that blind technology wreaked on the life in Gulf of California. "Why the Mexican government should have permitted the complete destruction of a valuable food supply is one of those mysteries which have their ramifications possibly back in pockets it is not well to look into," they posit (*Log* 205). But the real problem for Steinbeck and Ricketts was in the destruction of the ocean floor and the waste of marine life caused by the dredging practices:

> The big scraper closed like a sack as it came up, and finally it deposited many tons of animals on the deck—tons of shrimps, but also tons of fish of many varieties: sierras; pompano of several species; of the sharks, smooth-hounds and hammer heads; eagle rays and butterfly rays; small tuna; catfish; *puerco*—tons of them. And there were bottom-samples with anemones and grass-like gorgonians. The sea bottom must have been scraped completely clean. […] Nearly all the fish were in a dying condition, and only a few recovered. The waste of this good food was appalling, and it was strange that the Japanese, who are usually so saving, should have done it. (*Log* 205)

This experience did not resonate with Steinbeck as economic *per se*, but instead he viewed it as an ecological matter. Though he would always hold strong opinions about national and world politics—and economic and social matters, in turn—as he watched the Japanese shrimpers in the Sea of Cortez in 1940, Steinbeck saw the big picture in terms of the environment, and the Pacific Rim region especially. Thus his criticism of the

episode had little to do with the nationality of the fishermen, but instead centered on the problem of "invasive" humans destroying an ecosystem of which they were an integral part:

> They were good men, but they were caught in a large destructive machine, good men doing a bad thing. […] If it has not already been done, catch limits should be imposed, and it should not be permitted that the region be so intensely combed. Among other things, the careful study of this area should be undertaken so that its potential could be understood and the catch maintained in balance with the supply. (*Log* 206, 207)

In this short passage, Steinbeck and Ricketts presage the later-twentieth century call by conservation biologists to curb human destruction of animal populations.

Not coincidentally, Steinbeck found immediate parallels to the United States's own history of environmental and resource mismanagement, and he condemned the country for its wasteful practices. His line of reasoning suggests that he envisioned the North American Pacific coastline—from the Gulf of California and Baja to the Monterey Peninsula—as part of one ecosystem in which humans too often disrupted the balance of the food chain and supplies. He wrote:

> We in the United States have done so much to destroy our own resources, our timber, our land, our fishes, that we should be taken as a horrible example and our methods avoided by any government and people enlightened enough to envision a continuing economy. With our own resources we have been prodigal, and our counry will not soon lose the

> scars of our grasping stupidity. But here, with the shrimp industry, we see a conflict of nations, of ideologies, and of organisms. (*Log* 207)

As such, his vision of the Pacific Rim grew ecological, and he understood it best not as a geopolitical or economic entity, but as a single macroecosystem (and part of larger systems) in which humans must endure environmental and man-made stressors in order to thrive.

After six weeks of collecting, drinking, and talking, Steinbeck and Ricketts left the Sea of Cortez and turned toward home. In the final few pages of *Sea of Cortez* Steinbeck indicates that there was still thinking to be done about all they had seen and experienced: "We could not yet relate the microcosm of the Gulf with the macrocosm of the sea" (*Log* 223). But in these words he suggests that he already recognized the connection between the micro and macro, or in this case the Gulf and the Pacific Rim region and even the Pacific Ocean itself. In his final observations Steinbeck reiterates the interconnection between humans and the tide pool ecologies they studied, ultimately recognizing that human communities are not *like* tide pools, but are an inegral part of them:

> What was the shape and size and color and tone of this little expedition? We slipped into a new frame and grew to be a part of it, related in some subtle way to the reefs and beaches, related to the little animals, to the stirring waters and the war brackish lagoons. This trip had dimension and tone. *It was a thing whose boundaries seeped through itself and beyond into some time and space that was more than all the Gulf and more than all our lives.* (*Log* 223, emphasis mine)

**Disagreement, War, and the Pacific Rim**

Steinbeck and Ricketts returned from the Sea of Cortez exhausted but pleased. Ricketts had disembarked in Los Angeles, opting for a smoother ride home by car, and the *Western Flyer* docked in Monterey on April 20, 1940 after covering more than four thousand miles in just six weeks. Eager to collate scientific data gathered on the trip, he immediately began sending specimens to experts for identification. Steinbeck—increasingly interested in documentary films—shifted to work on a project of his own, *The Forgotten Village*, and departed Monterey for Mexico City in May, 1940. Together for almost two months, the felt a strain growing between them, and Richard Astro aptly notes that "Ricketts would have preferred that the novelist remain in Monterey and complete the narrative" based on their trip (*Shaping* 136). Sorting, studying and identifying the more than five hundred specimens they collected was a daunting task for Ricketts, and he was frustrated when Steinbeck left town. Yet the author often needed time to process experiences before writing them and, as such, his decision to turn to another project as his artistic unconscious worked was not out of character.

Steinbeck asked Ricketts to join him in Mexico City, driving down the Steinbeck's station wagon to use in the film. Ricketts reluctantly agreed, and his letters reveal friction between the two. "I received a not very warm welcome," he writes to friends Ritch and Tal Lovejoy. Yet he concludes the letter with intentions to make the best of the situation, "being good natured and not holding grudges very much makes it not bad at all […] I'm certainly getting to know Mexico City better" (*Renaissance Man* 59). Additional letters indicate Ricketts spent much of his time exploring the city and

working on the phyletic catalogue and bibliography for *Sea of Cortez* in the library of the Mexican Academy of Sciences. He also occasionally helped Steinbeck's film crew transport and set up equipment at various locations, and apparently rarely saw his friend.

The rift between them deepened to a sharp disagreement over the thesis of *The Forgotten Village*. The film was a collaboration between Steinbeck and documentary filmmaker Herbert Kline. Focusing on a poor Mexican family, it portrays the conflicts that arise when modern technologies and traditional customs clash. The village faces an epidemic caused by bacteria in the well water, and as young children become ill and die, the story's protagonist, a boy named Juan Diego, turns away from the traditional medicine offered by the village's curandera and seeks help from a city doctor. Steinbeck champions Juan Diego's actions, underscoring what he sees as the inherent right of all people to advances in science and medicine. Ricketts did not agree.

The film triggered the anxieties Ricketts felt toward the growing breech between humans and their connection to the environment, which he saw manifested in the increasing desire for technology (even "life-saving" medical intervention) at the expense of a sense of individual and communal indigenous spirituality. Ricketts felt the curandera and her role within the community were not to be dismissed as backward and old-fashioned. In characteristic fashion, he organized and "worked through" his ideas through writing—composing what he called "Thesis and Materials for a Script on Mexico which shall be motivated oppositely to John's 'Forgotten Village.'" In this "anti-script" he points out the disparity between the "outer or intellectual-material things" and the "inward things," revealing his frustration with modernity. During both of their 1940 trips to Mexico—to the Sea of Cortez and then to Mexico City—Ricketts compared the

"native" people and culture he encountered to their American counterparts, concluding that simpleexposure to many aspects of modern society, technology in particular, would erode their natural communities and degrade their indigenous spirituality. In a typed fragment from this period, titled "What's wrong with the world," Ricketts elaborates, emphasizing the "overbalance" of mechanization in human societies that produces results similar to the environmental stresses found in tidepools:

> We are an engineering world, overbalanced on the mechanical side, and the very mathematic that could help us, goes instead into computing statistics, and atom smashers, and production for victory.
>
> […]
>
> These correspond in marine animals to stresses of their various environmental factors. Differentials in wave shock, in type of bottom, in temperature, in intertidal level exert stress on shore animals individually and in communities, the social factor being an added variable.
>
> […]
>
> Wherein does human society differ? And if it does, how? And how much? I say very little. I say the difference is only in degree, and not much of that!

Ricketts ultimately believed that to bring a doctor to the Mexican village—even common drugs like penicillin—would disrupt the natural, or in this case indigenous, balance between humans and their environment. Steinbeck wholeheartedly disagreed.

Though heavy-handed at times, Steinbeck's vision in *The Forgotten Village* is similar to that in *The Grapes of Wrath*: the plight of a particular family in a specific time

and locale which ultimately reveals universal truths about humanity. "But somehow," notes Astro, "one does not feel the same way about the Mexicans villagers as one feels about the Joads […] And because the doctrine of medical reform in *The Forgotten Village* is not supported by a network of principles conveying sound philosophical truths, the brunt of Steinbeck's social argument lacks force " (*Shaping* 139-40). Yet the film underscores the writer's commitment to championing human perserverence in the face of both environmental and—as in the case of this Mexican village—man-made stressors.

And as it did for Ricketts, the film helped Steinbeck work through his thinking about some of their Sea of Cortez experiences—including his encounter with the Japanese shrimp fishing fleet. Much as he recognized catch limits as a means to preserve a food source for human inhabitants of the Pacific Rim region, he likewise saw the dissemination of medicine and technology in the Mexican village as a way to improve the quality and span of the villagers' lives. The film underscores Steinbeck's interest in the human connections to and applications of science, as he believed that scientific progress and innovation could be catalysts for social and political change. As biologist Wesley N. Tiffney, Jr. notes, "Ricketts and Steinbeck were progenitors of the present defintion of 'environment,' […] both men were advanced early ecologists, not only evaluating organisms in relation to the physical environment, but also considering living populations, including man, in relation to each other" (4). Thus the *The Forgotten Village* helped Steinbeck refine his vision of the Pacific Rim as a macroecosystem in which all humans were interdependent.

*Sea of Cortez* was released just days before the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and, like most publications of that time, was soon forgotten in the

aftermath of the attack. Steinbeck himself moved quicly into the war effort as a correspondents, and he bore witness to combat in 1943 during his travels through England, Africa, and Italy. Not surprisingly, he viewed war as a biological phenomenon:

> Perhaps it is right or even necessary to forget accidents, and wars are surely accidents to which our species seems prone. […] The next war, if we are so stupid as to let it happen, will be the last of any kind. There will be no one left to remember anything. And if that is how stupid we are, we do not, in a biological sense, deserve survival. Many other species have disappeared from the earth through errors in mutational judgment. There is no reason to suppose that we are immune from the immutable law of nature which says that over-armament, over-ornamentation, and, in most cases, over-integration are symptoms of coming extinction. (*Once There Was a War* 1-2)

As Steinbeck scholar Susan Shillinglaw aptly notes, the brutality and senselessness of the war was an "incomprehensible" experience for the writer, from which he returned home disheveled and seeking order amidst the social and political chaos he had seen ("Introduction" xix).

Steinbeck found some degree of satisfaction in helping Ricketts with another war time project that occupied much of the scientist's energy during the early 1940s: a handbook about the Mandated Islands off the coast of Japan. Ricketts thought and wrote extensively about the dawning war as early as 1940, though his interest was more sociological than political. He struggled to understand the function of conflict within a larger sociological and ecological framework, and he compared war to competition

within and between species. After Pearl Harbor, Japan became a primary focal point for the United States, and Ricketts began collecting scientific literature—books, reports, maps, and studies—of the regions contiguous to that country, finding interesting information about the Mandated Islands, specifically the Palau (or Palao) Islands, located in westernmost Micronesia. Studying detailed documents about the geography, topography, tides and currents of these islands—all published in English by Japanese scientists at work well before war was officially declared—he gathered material he thought useful to the United States government and military effort. Steinbeck used his military connections in the Army to try to help Ricketts deliver the material to the government, but to no avail. When Ricketts later proposed a book on the region aimed at general American readers—he felt certain that understanding how the Japanese and native people thought and lived would help both civilian and military Americans respond to the war—Steinbeck again tried and subsequently failed to use his connections to find a publisher for the project.

Steinbeck's involvement with Ricketts's project expressed his belief that even amidst the destruction of war one could find an element of understanding and connection between humans, a viewpoint likewise articulated in his war dispatches. Like Ricketts, he now saw the Pacific Rim as a distinct region that merited further study, and genuinely hoped that it would promote a sense of perspective that might alleviate some of the anxieties of the war. As Steinbeck later/earlier wrote: "If you understand each other you will be kind to each other. Knowing a man well never leads to hate and almost always leads to love" (qtd. in Shillinglaw *Of Mice* "Introduction" vii). Moreover, he recognized the connections between Palau, Japan, and the Pacific Rim region itself—envisioning the

Pacific Ocean and its adjacent island and continental nations together as increasingly important in global politics, economics, and scientific innovation.

To the best of his ability, Steinbeck applied the non-teleological methodology he and Ricketts implemented in the Sea of Cortez to his thinking about humans, conflict, and war in the early 1940s. Scholars have suggested that his stint in the war brought a new perspective to his writing—a paradoxical blend of deterministic detachment and colorful sentimentality—most evident in *Cannery Row*.[33] The novel has been identified as ecological in its subject and form, showcasing Steinbeck's knowledge of principles such as niche, cooperation, and wave shock via representations of the motley residents of Monterey and their interactions. Yet *Cannery Row* is also the culmination of Steinbeck's thinking about the Pacific Rim, as he focuses on the local (or microcosm) in order to fully envision the entire Pacific (or macrocosm).

### *Cannery Row* and Mohole: From microcosm to macrocosm

By 1944 Steinbeck was working on a book borne from his experiences in Mexico (both the Gulf of California and Mexico City), frustration with the war, and nostalgia for Monterey and the 1930s. Writing to college friend Carlton "Dook" Sheffield in September of that year, he stated: "I finished the book called Cannery Row. It will be out in January. […] I don't know whether it is effective or not. It's written on four levels and people can take what they can receive out of it. One thing—it never mentions the war—not once" (*Letters* 273). Susan Shillinglaw asserts that the novel was born out of loss and

[33] Jackson J. Benson and Susan Shillinglaw both provide insights about how the war influenced Steinbeck's subsequent writing, in *John Steinbeck, Writer*, and the "Introduction," to *Cannery Row*, respectively.

that part of Steinbeck's goal in writing it was to regain a sense of order in both his everyday life and in his understanding of the human condition more broadly. "As an artist," she writes, "Steinbeck literally conflates the *economy* of ordinary life with the *ecology* of nature" (*Cannery Row* "Introduction" xix).

The book was also an extended homage to Ricketts, as the protagonist, Doc, is a mirror of the man himself. Though the most visible evidence of Ricketts is in Steinbeck's characterization of Doc, a more subtle—and I would argue more significant—presence is found in the ecological subtext of the novel. Ricketts spent much of the 1930s and early 1940s developing his ideas about ecology, both in practice and in notes he drafted and habitually circulated among friends and colleagues. As he hoped to collaborate again with Steinbeck on an expedition in the late 1940s—they ultimately planned a 1948 trip and book about the Outer Shores region off the coast of Vancouver Island—I posit that Ricketts was sharing some of these ideas and documents with the writer during the period in which *Cannery Row* was written.[34] In turn, evidence of a number of Ricketts's own ideas do, in fact, permeate the novel.

Though he rarely used the term "ecology" in his early writing, by the mid 1940s Ricketts devoted considerable energy to defining it. In a typescript he prepared largely for Steinbeck—to ready the writer for the collecting trip to the Outer Shores—Ricketts articulated an astute description of the discipline and its goals:

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[34] The voluminous correspondence between Steinbeck and Ricketts—the two were said to exchange frequent letters throughout the 1930s and 40s—was almost entirely destroyed by Steinbeck days after Ricketts's untimely death in 1948. The incident has been well documented by Hedgpeth, Benson, and me. As such, there is little direct evidence to prove what the two were discussing, though indirect inferences may be made based on other documents and the few extant letters.

> Ecology is the science of relationships. Of living relationships. There are 3 or 4 approaches. The first is the most superficial. But it's also the most primitive. And it's more or less what I'm doing now: cataloguing the beasts of a given region; but doing it quantitatively with regard to the environmental rather than the taxonomic aspects. Thus it's not only important what occurs (tho that has to be known first), but where it occurs physiographically as well as geographically, in what quantities, and, so far as can be determined with our poor present methods, with what other animals. In such a method, the region is the large unit, and the type of shore, tidal level, etc, the immediate unit. ("Outer Shores" 259)

He goes on to identify three additional ecological "methods", including: "studies of aggregations," "natural history," and "niche." University of California, Santa Cruz marine and evolutionary biologist John Pearse notes that the "superficial" work Ricketts undertook is now some of the most essential research that must be conducted in ecological surveys: "[T]he first thing you do when you go into a system is look at habitat. But it's not what ecologists, professional ecologists, do anymore […] One of the things that has some of us upset is that often it's skipped by ecologists today […] and people who are doing marine ecology today need to have the kind of information, knowledge, or appreciation […] that Ricketts laid down" (Interview August 20, 2004).

As I've mentioned, Ricketts typically worked on a single idea over the span of years or even decades, honing and revising while experimenting and talking things over with friends and colleagues. Though the typescript cited above was ultimately composed for Steinbeck in early 1948 for their impending summer trip—cut short by Ricketts's

tragic death in April of that year—it is clear the writer was well aware of his friend's thinking about ecology years earlier, and that *Cannery Row* reflects, in part, Steinbeck's application of that thinking.[35] Furthermore, I would argue that *Cannery Row*'s explicit metaphor of human life in Monterey as a tidepool is Steinbeck's paramount statement about the Pacific Rim—that in the details of the microcosm emerges a broad understanding of the macrocosm. Steinbeck's rendering of the citizens and of Cannery Row itself is both a non-teleological portrait in which "the stories crawl in by themselves," and also an ecosystemic portrait of the inhabitants and environment of a segment within a larger Pacific region that he saw as interconnected.

As such, *Cannery Row* is an extension of *Sea of Cortez* in which Steinbeck applies the cool gaze of an objective scientist to the specimens before him to extrapolate meaning about the world beyond. In *Cannery Row* he observes his characters as if they were marine animals in the Gulf, watching their interactions in an effort to understand more about what he saw as the buried, paradoxical nature of humans—described initially in a passage in *Sea of Cortez*:

> Thus, man in his thinking or reverie status admires the progression toward extinction, but in the unthinking stimulus which really activates him he tends toward survival. Perhaps no other animal is so torn between

[35] In a 2004 discussion of Ricketts's "levels of ecology" at Stanford University's Hopkins Marine Station, Susan Shillinglaw posited that the four levels Ricketts articulated might correspond directly to the four levels in *Cannery Row* Steinbeck mentions in his 1944 letter to friend Carlton "Duke" Sheffield. Shillinglaw has done rather extensive, and persuasive, close readings of both documents—Ricketts's typescript and Steinbeck's novel—analyzing the extent to which Steinbeck incorporates Ricketts's four-part definition in his book. Though she has spoken publicly about these connections and has collaborated with other scholars and students in her thinking about them, Shillinglaw has not published her conclusions at this time.

> alternatives. Man might be described fairly adequately, if simply, as a two-legged paradox. He has never become accustomed to the tragic miracle of consciousness. Perhaps, as has been suggested, his species is not set, has not jelled, but is still in a state of becoming, bound by his physical memories to a past of struggle and survival, limited in his futures by the uneasiness of thought and consciousness. (96)

Yet Steinbeck recognized that the most effective way to examine human nature—as well as interactions among individuals and with the environment—was to write about it. As Jackson Benson notes, "He came to realize that the best means of expression, in terms of both the nature and material itself and his own talent, was poetic rather than expository" (556). Thus in the opening lines of the novel, Steinbeck begins to unravel the paradox—and in doing so finds that reality itself is, by nature, paradoxical:

> Cannery Row in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream. […] Its inhabitants are, as the man once said, "whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches," by which he meant Everybody. Had the man looked through another peephole he might have said, "Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men," and he would have meant the same thing. (*Cannery Row* 5)

Of the ecological ideas evident in novel, the concept of niche most explicitly elucidates Steinbeck's view of the Pacific Rim as a macroecosystem that can be studied, in part, by close examination of the Monterey Bay. In the Outer Shores typescript mentioned earlier, Ricketts defines niche as the fourth "significant method" of ecology, one he believed in the mid 1940s "hasn't even been suggested so far as I know":

> [T]he "feeding-habitat-niche" or the "reproductive-habitat-niche" or the "protective- habitat-niche" or the "hibernation—(resting stage)—niche"; I suppose habitat and niche are redundant. I've noticed, [for] instance, that wherever I've been on the completely open rocky shore, one starfish, usually no more than one urchin, one or two barnacles, etc, have established themselves as sort of an ecological niche. Different animals have solved this in different parts of the world, but the animals themselves, tho widely separated, are strikingly similar morphologically, and of course they occupy an identical niche. ("Outer Shores" 260)

David Quammen defines an ecological niche as, "the set of resources, physical conditions, and behavioral possibilities within which a population of organisms lives. Every species must have its own niche. Some dictionaries describe the niche as a place, but that's wrong; it's more like a role" (218). The idea that certain animals in one region occupy a rank, or role, in the ecosystem that is occupied by a different (though often similar) animal in another region is reiterated in a *Cannery Row* conversation between Doc and Row resident Richard Frost. Observing Mack and the local vagrants, Doc admires their complacency as strength of character. Frost questions whether it is worth the price of wealth and food, to which Doc responds:

> "Oh, it isn't a matter of hunger. It's something quite different. The sale of souls to gain the whole word is completely voluntary and almost unanimous—but not quite. Everywhere in the world there are Mack and the boys. I've seen them in an ice-cream seller in Mexico and in an Aleut in Alaska." (*Cannery Row* 135)

In addition to the admiration with which Steinbeck regards Mack and the boys, he recognizes that they are not necessarily unique, but represent a role or position—or niche—that exists beyond Cannery Row and the Monterey Bay. For both Steinbeck and Ricketts, the major significance of niche derives from its role in *relationships*—as Ricketts writes in his Outer Shores Transcript:

> [A]n integration of all this would give a true picture of ecology. But all these things could be tied in together by a true ecology in which the important thing is neither the region, or the association, or the animal itself […] or its various stages or needs, or even the ecological niche, but in which the unit is the relationship. ("Outer Shores" 261)

Writing *Cannery Row* after his Sea of Cortez expedition and his stint in the war as a journalist was an exercise in re-envisioning relationships—those between individuals, between environments, between ethnic groups, and between nations. It also reveals his thinking about relationships between the part and the whole, between the microcosm and macrocosm, and between Cannery Row and the Pacific Rim.

Though *Cannery Row* is considered Steinbeck's major treatment of both the Monterey Bay and of ecology, Steinbeck was not done, returning to the material later in his career. In *Sweet Thursday* (1954) he revisits Cannery Row, finding a mate for the explicitly vulnerable and isolated Doc. Critics agree that he wanted to write a happy(ier) ending for the character than that which befell his friend. Ricketts died on April 11, 1948, three days after his car was struck by a train in Monterey. Steinbeck arrived just hours after his friend's death and was devastated that he did not have the chance to say goodbye. *Sweet Thursday* was the writer's chance to rewrite Ricketts's fate. The book

derived, in part, from Steinbeck's libretto, *Pipe Dream*, likewise set in Cannery Row, which was acquired by Rodgers and Hammerstein and ran on Broadway for eight months in 1955-56.[36] Thus throughout the 1950s he was never far from the Pacific Ocean, in terms of his writing at least, despite the fact that he was living in New York City for most of that decade.

One of Steinbeck's most extraordinary—if abbreviated—experiences on the Pacific occurred in 1961 when he was asked to be the historian for Project Mohole, a project funded by the U.S. government and private corporations to drill through the earth's crust off the coast of San Diego and Baja, Mexico, and collect core samples of the mantle beneath.[37] This was not the first time he had been asked to serve in such a capacity on a marine study, as soon after he married his third wife, Elaine Scott, in 1950, he turned down an invitation to serve as historian on a survey of the Marianas and the Great Barrier Reef (Benson 893). By this time, Steinbeck's reputation as a writer with intimate knowledge and experience of the Pacific Ocean and of scientific matters was considerable—due, undoubtedly, to both *Sea of Cortez* and *Cannery Row*.

The scientist in charge of Project Mohole was Willard Bascom, a research engineer at Scripps Institute of Oceanography in La Jolla, California. How Bascom decided upon Steinbeck for the position of historian on the project is not known, but as Steinbeck mused in a letter, "I was picked as historian of the expedition not because I am

[36] Though it was nominated for nine Tony awards, *Pipe Dream* was the shortest running play for Rodgers and Hammerstein and is considered the "flop" in their oeuvre.
[37] For a thorough history of Project Mohole and Steinbeck's involvement in the endeavor, I rely on Robert E. Morsberger's "Steinbeck under the Sea at the Earth's Core." See bibliography for full citation.

a superb oceanographer but simply because I seem to be the only American writer who is one at all" (*Letters* 694). He was excited about the project and wrote in the same letter:

> This is a most fascinating job, a whole world being discovered for the first time. With these cores and some more in the future, we will know much more about what the earth is made of, how old it is and what has happened to it during its five billion years, how long life has existed and very possibly how it came to be at all. (694-95)

His late friend and collaborator was never far from Steinbeck's mind as he prepared for Mohole, as evident in a letter to his agent Elizabeth Otis in which he stated simply, "Ed Ricketts would have loved it" (qtd. in Benson 893).

In March 1961, Steinbeck joined the crew of the drilling barge, *CUSS I*, in San Diego, ready to observe and write an article about the project commissioned by *Life* magazine. He planned to keep a log of the trip, as though he had "a long-time interest in oceanography and some small experience in matters of the sea," he knew he would be unable to comment on the specifics of the submarine geology conducted aboard ("High Drama" 111). He described the ship and its equipment with precision and admiration, and was fascinated by the team aboard, describing them in *Life* as "an elite and motley crew," and in personal letters as "the toughest crew of oil riggers you ever saw. They look like murderers and have the delicate movements of ballet dancers" (*Letters* 695). Steinbeck marveled at the project and conveyed his awe of its significance in "High Drama of Bold Thrust Through Ocean Floor":

> The suboceanic terrain is a dark mystery to us in its nature, its components, its history and its riches. This expedition will cost less than

> one single glittering missile blasting from the launching pads at Canaveral, and yet this project is as surely an adventure toward the discovery of a new world as were the three little lumbering ships of Columbus. And this new world is here—not a million miles away. ("High Drama" 118)

Yet he also captured the excitement of discovery for discovery's sake while hinting at the possible—and more practical—benefits that could be reaped as well:

> If, as seems probable, the greatest part of the world's material wealth is under the sea, there will have to be a re-examination of international spheres of ownership and controls. Twelve miles off almost any coast now belongs to anyone who can get there. The only reason the seas have been free is because no one wanted them except for transportation and defense. Available riches may change all that. ("High Drama" 118)

His tone in "High Drama" is reminiscent of that in *Sea of Cortez*—a blend of curiosity and non-teleological musing—and like the Gulf expedition, Steinbeck saw Mohole as an opportunity to wonder about the mysteries of the sea itself: "Everything is new about this, everything a discovery. We find that the deep currents are moving at less than one knot and in a slow circle. Why? No one knows yet" ("High Drama" 120).

Despite bad weather and a few technical setbacks with equipment, the crew was able to collect several core samples. Steinbeck notes in that though he asked for a piece of the "basalt, stark blue and very hard with extrusions of crystals exuding in lines," he was refused by the scientists who guarded it "like tigers." By his own confession he stole a small piece, "And then that damned chief scientist gave me a piece secretly. Made me feel terrible. I had to sneak in and replace the piece I had stolen" ("High Drama" 122).

Ultimately, Steinbeck's stay aboard the *CUSS I* was cut short by a painful hernia torn during the expedition—he left on the Monday after Easter.

But his interest in the project did not wane, and when its federal funding was halted in 1966, Steinbeck appealed to legislators and the public in an open letter published in *Popular Science* entitled "Let's Go After the Neglected Treasures Beneath the Seas: A Plea for Equal Effort on "Inner Space" Exploration." In this piece, published just two years before his death, we find one of Steinbeck's most passionate arguments for the need to use science and technology to benefit humanity—a position articulated most clearly decades before in *The Forgotten Village*. The letter evidences the writer's foresight about the dwindling supply of natural resources and in suggesting the environmental—and economic—benefits to be gained by funding science, he once again presages the formal establishment of conservation biology. He notes that oceanography "is slow, undramatic, and singularly unrewarded," but argues, "the gifts it can bring to us are measureless and will soon be desperately needed" ("Let's Go" 87).

Though Steinbeck was, unquestionably, an early environmentalist—envisioning the world as a biological and holistic system—his world-view was finally and firmly human-centered. That is, his interest was always first in human relationships, whether between individuals, groups, or with the environment itself. At times Steinbeck's belief that science and technology should be made available to all people seems exploitive and thus problematic, as he sometimes ignores the destruction such innovation can have on the environment. In the *Forgotten Village*, for instance, he saw only the benefits of bringing modern medicine into a remote Mexican village, while Ricketts recognized that it would signal the arrival of modernity itself, and with it the "progress" and technologies

that would irrecoverably alter the indigenous culture. Writing in 1966 about the need to fund "inner space" study of the ocean, Steinbeck once again sees only the benefits of such progress and, at times, his plea seems exploitive:

> We must explore our world and then we must farm it and harvest its plant life. We must study, control, herd, and improve the breeds of animals, because we are shortly going to need them. And we must mine the minerals, refine the chemicals to our use. Surely the rewards are beyond anything we can now conceive, and will be increasingly needed in an over-populated and depleting world. ("Let's Go" 87)

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, Steinbeck's involvement in the Mohole project shows that his interest in the sea did not diminish after he left California or after Ed Ricketts's death. Instead it reveals the progression of his thinking about the sea—and the Pacific in particular—in the years following *Cannery Row*, especially the connections he saw between the microcosm and macrocosm. That is, as he stood aboard the *CUSS I* 220 miles off the coast of San Diego, Steinbeck knew that the discoveries made there in the Pacific would impact the Pacific Rim and the entire globe. In that moment he once again knew that the best way to truly see and understand was "to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again" (*Log* 179).

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