

**“Us Lone Wand’ring Whaling-Men”: Cross-cutting Fantasies of Work and Nation in Late
Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century American Whaling Narratives**

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My project takes up a variety of fictional and non-fictional texts about a kind of work which attracted the attention of American novelists Herman Melville, Harry Halyard, and Helen E. Brown; historian Obed Macy; and journalist J. Ross Browne, among others. In my Introduction, I argue that these whaling narratives helped to further develop and perpetuate an already existing fantasy of masculine physical labor which imagines the United States’ working class men to be ideal, heroic Americans. This fantasy was so compelling and palpable that, surprisingly enough, the New England whalers could be persistently claimed as characteristically and emblematically American, even though they worked on hierarchically-stratified floating factories, were frequently denied their Constitutional rights by maritime law, and hardly ever spent any time on American soil.

In my second chapter, I scrutinize the emerging assumption of an ideological fantasy of masculine physical labor that was specifically American and interrogate how certain kinds of physical labor, farming and whaling among them, were cast as particularly American in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Chapter 3 demonstrates that there was something about the work of whaling that resisted these kinds of nationalistic appropriations, and I present a close analysis of Crèvecoeur, Cooper, and Melville’s whaling narratives. My fourth chapter further explores this resistance, and I read Melville’s *Moby-Dick* alongside J. Ross Browne’s *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*, arguing that both Melville and Browne—despite their texts’ formal differences—share an intellectual project of configuring certain aspects of the collective, physical labor of whaling as artistically generative. Chapter 5 addresses both reactionary and progressive depictions of whaling wives with regard to domesticity and nationality. My last chapter examines how some separatist-minded Nantucket Islanders demonstrated that federalism was contested not just in the antebellum South, but in other areas of the United States as well. Taken together, all of these chapters address different aspects of the complex and multifaceted identity of the American whalers, but they also show how a particularly resilient ideological fantasy of masculine American labor develops and gains power, perpetuating itself across time.

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PREFACE

This project first began as an outgrowth of a seminar paper which I wrote for a graduate course about late nineteenth-century American periodical literature. Curious about what lingering and nostalgic representations of the declining whaling industry might remain in the turn-of-the-century American imagination, I set out to track down a sample grouping of texts from the University of Pittsburgh's nineteenth-century periodical collection. I found only four articles which dealt with the whaling industry, most of which were published in popular periodicals such as the *Century* and the *New England Magazine*.¹ However, this handful of lengthy articles contained a wealth of interesting material, dealing with particularly enduring nineteenth-century configurations of work identity, national identity, and gender identity. These pieces valorized the New England whalemens, holding them up as examples of what every American could and should aspire to be. They credited whalemens with being some of the first hardy souls to venture into the Pacific ocean, exploring unknown territory and contributing much to the stores of scientific and geographic knowledge. These articles depicted whaling wives as highly liberated women, who insisted on leaving the safety and sanctity of their homes so that they could sail around the world with their husbands on the ships that had heretofore solely been the realm of men. And they intimated that it was on the New England whaleships that the system of industrial capitalism got its start, for they claimed that the whalemens were the ones who invented the assembly line as a means of efficiently organizing workers. While these articles provided me with more than enough material for a seminar paper, I knew that four texts would not be enough to form the backbone of the larger project upon which I wanted to embark. Needing more

¹ These four articles were: James Temple Brown's "Stray Leaves from a Whaleman's Log," published in the *Century* in 1893; Gustav Kobbé's "The Perils and Romance of Whaling," published in the *Century* in 1890; George F. Tucker's "New Bedford," published in the *New England Magazine* in 1896; and an excerpt from Frank T. Bullen's longer narrative *The Cruise of the Cachalot: Round the World After Sperm Whales*, published in *Scientific American* in 1899.

whaling narratives for my sample grouping, I set out to explore representations of the whaling industry which appeared during the heyday of whaling—the early to mid nineteenth century.

Prompted by a desire to know more about the extracts which constitute the opening sections of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, I used Melville's list of whaling narratives as a starting point for my research. As I soon discovered when I turned to these narratives themselves, this diverse array of extracts—taken from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Owen Chase's narrative of the *Essex* disaster, and the writings of Thomas Jefferson, among other sources—only addresses a modicum of the myriad issues and concerns that emerge from the full texts. For the most part, Melville seems to have selected his quotations with an eye towards emphasizing the grandeur and impressive size of whales as well as the dangers inherent in working in the whaling industry—note the quotations from Joseph C. Hart's *Miriam Coffin* and Harry Halyard's *Wharton the Whale-Killer!*—but delving deeper into texts such as these yields even more complex configurations of work, national identity, masculinity, and domesticity than these short quotations reveal on a surface level.

I found Melville's extracts to be quite helpful in that they provided me with a sample set of narratives with which to begin my research, but I am also indebted to a significant body of relatively recent historical scholarship which has taken up whaling and representations of the whaling industry as a subject of analysis. Both Nathaniel Philbrick's *In the Heart of the Sea* and Lisa Norling's *Captain Ahab Had a Wife* helped to broaden the scope of this project by filling in some of the gaps in Melville's text selection. Rarely, if ever, did Melville include whaling narratives written by, about, or for women and children. Philbrick's book points out that Owen Chase's narrative of the *Essex* disaster was so popular that it made its way into various schoolbooks for children, and Lisa Norling's scholarship makes quite clear that whaling wives, too, had quite a bit to say about their husbands' work. Informed by this research, I was able to round out my sample grouping of whaling narratives and include women's writing as well as precautionary and scientific stories about whaling and whales written for children.²

In order to constitute my sample grouping of whaling narratives, I turned to the Morse whaling collection at Brown University and the whaling collection at the Providence Public

² In my appendix, I have provided a bibliography of relevant whaling narratives as well as information as to where these texts might be found. The appendix does not constitute a complete survey of all of the whaling narratives in the archives, but it does contain all of the relevant texts which informed my study.

Library in Providence, Rhode Island, both of which contain a significant number of manuscripts, personal journals, and other writings about the whaling industry. A simple search on whaling in the online catalogue of the Providence Public Library yields 164 results, and the Morse Collection contains approximately 1,100 whaling narratives. These two archives were not my only resource, however, for, along the way, I discovered that whaling narratives are collected by many history buffs and fans of nautical literature. These narratives may or may not have been popular when they were originally published, but collectors in this field seem to have an insatiable appetite for anything ever written about the New England whale fishery, and their interest in whaling narratives has resulted in various republications of whaling narratives which were previously available only in archival collections such as the one at Brown University. Many whaling journals were passed down as family heirlooms through the generations, and several twentieth-century descendants of whalers have published narratives written by their ancestors. Both Nelson Cole Haley and William Henry Nichols' journals are now readily available to the general public, in large part because of the efforts of their descendants. Therefore, I was able to find many narratives—in their original print versions and twentieth-century reprints—in bookstores across the country which specialize in rare and collectible texts.³ What's more, I thought it important to read selections from the various other kinds of nautical literature that appeared in America and England throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and I found that the subject of whaling often made its way into texts not centered squarely on the industry. Despite the fact that the American whaling industry was quite regionally specific, writings such as James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pilot*, Frederick Douglass's "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?," and J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* all make reference to whales and whaling.⁴ Employing all of these modes of research, I managed to amass a fairly significant grouping of whaling narratives from all sorts

³ Most bookstores, including Barnes & Noble and Borders, separate their literature according to genre or subject and each have separate sections dedicated to nautical writing, but one in particular, The Newport Bookstore in Newport, Rhode Island, has created a separate sub-category of nautical fiction comprised solely of whaling narratives. Internet websites such as abebooks.com made it possible to search the catalogues of many used bookstores at once and made it much easier to track down and purchase many of the whaling narratives I have included in this study, no matter where the stores, themselves, were located.

⁴ Some of these narratives take up whaling more thoroughly than others. Frederick Douglass mentions whaling in passing in his list of the kinds of work that African Americans perform in the United States. Crèvecoeur devotes five sections of *Letters from an American Farmer* to whaling, and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pilot* contains a single whaling episode.

of different genres, some that have garnered more critical attention than others, some written by women and some by men, and some that have enjoyed far more popularity than others.

It is important to point out that my study of the whaling industry is not intended to be an exhaustive or completely comprehensive survey of all texts ever written about whaling. When dealing with such a massive array of texts, it is necessary to cull them down to a manageable number. I have extracted a series of representative texts from these collections in order to closely examine the kinds of ideas and modes of expression about whaling that have appeared from roughly the late eighteenth century, when the whaling industry was first achieving some degree of prosperity and recognition, up through the late nineteenth century, when the whaling industry was rapidly declining. My methodological approach is similar to that of Michael Denning in *Mechanic Accents*, for he found it impossible to examine every one of the tens of thousands of dime novels produced in nineteenth-century America. Instead, he used a set of smaller representative samples—each arranged according types of plot and the motifs common to them—to examine certain trends and modes of expression which were common to the group as a whole, all the while maintaining his primary focus, working-class issues.⁵ I have assembled texts written by and about both men and women, narratives written by industry outsiders and industry insiders, novels which take up diverse facets of the industry, pieces which praise and condemn the industry's labor organization, and selections which include some which were quite popular when they were published, some which were not very popular, and some which were never published at all. Since the topic that all of these narratives have in common is a particular kind of work, I, like Denning, have maintained a particular focus on intersecting issues of work, gender, and class.

Although publication history has not necessarily been a primary concern of mine, as it is for Michael Denning, I have attempted to pay careful attention to the circumstances surrounding the contemporary appearance and reception of these texts where it has been relevant to my analysis. Recognizing that versions of national and working identity manifest themselves in different ways depending on the kind of narrative or its intended audience, I have noted in places the level of popularity of something like Owen Chase's sensational narrative of the *Essex* disaster and Roger Starbuck's dime novel, *The Golden Harpoon*. For the most part, I have relied more heavily upon published narratives rather than the many personal journals that lie in relative

⁵ Denning's chapters, in turn, variously address female factory workers, tramps, detectives, the Irish, and outlaws.

obscurity in the Morse Collection. This choice was largely based upon my interest in the public circulation of nationalized fantasies of physical masculine labor, but I refer to these personal journals, by both men and women, at times as a means of gauging how these ideological fantasies make their way into the lives of everyday citizens.

Having read *Moby-Dick* and Marcus Rediker's *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* and *The Many-Headed Hydra* (which Rediker co-authored with Peter Linebaugh) prior to any of these other whaling narratives, I came to this grouping of texts expecting to see an international focus rather than a national one. Given that the New England whalers traveled further and spent more time away from U.S. soil than the merchants and pirates Rediker discusses, I was convinced that these whalers, and the wives who sometimes sailed with them, would see themselves as cosmopolitan world travelers and would write about themselves as such. I discovered, however, that embedded in almost all of these narratives was an intense and somewhat surprising preoccupation with nationality on behalf of both industry insiders and outsiders. Authors of all kinds were posing the questions: What did it mean to be an American who never lived on American soil? How did working in this industry, or being married to someone who did, make one more or less of an American? Thus, I had to re-think my approach and question my own preoccupation with globalization. It was only once I put aside my preconceived ideas that I could take this sample grouping of texts and develop an argument that seemed to explain the disjuncture between what I had thought I would see and the kinds of concerns and configurations of identity I saw emerging from the texts: a particularly American fantasy about the value of masculine physical labor that developed, during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, into an ideology that was so powerful and compelling that it brought all kinds of workers, whalers among them, into its explanatory currents.

I would like to thank a number of individuals without whom this project would not have been possible. The staff at the John Hay Library were immensely helpful, gracious, and patient in locating various whaling narratives in their archives and granting me access to them. Susan Smith's graduate seminar in nineteenth-century periodicals introduced me to both the rewards and frustration inherent in conducting archival research. My dissertation advisor, Nancy Glazener, has provided me with her valuable insights and suggestions from the very beginning of this project, and she carefully read and commented upon various drafts of each chapter. Generous offering their insights, Jean Carr and Susan Andrade, members of my committee,

certainly contributed greatly to the shaping of this work. Kirk Savage, too, was kind enough to share his opinions on the chapters; his interdisciplinary perspective has been quite informative. Jeff Hole and Adam Johns, fellow Melville enthusiasts, provided mutual support and challenging commentary on portions of the chapters and asked careful and thought-provoking questions about the direction of the project and Melville's role in it. Colleen Donovan's scholarly inquiries into the nature of British national identity suggested many interesting counterpoints to my discussion of American national identity. My invaluable friend, Stacy Lucas never failed to remind me about what is really important, and her words of wisdom always kept me grounded and focused. I would especially like to thank my parents who first took me to the New Bedford Whaling Museum a long, long, long time ago and who have provided incredible amounts of support and encouragement over the years. Finally, I would like to express my immense gratitude to my "dear and loving" husband, Matt, whose staunch and unwavering belief in me made the completion of this project possible; he helped make the process easier in more ways than he will ever know, and for all this and more, I thank him.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

August! Thou has not kindly been
To us lone wand'ring whaling-men:
Thou'st ta'en away from us the whales,
And left us, in their stead, strong gales,
 Rough seas, and squalls, and rain.
Let me invoke thy end may savour
Of winds and weather more in favour,—
That thy departing days may bring
(The oil to which our hopes did cling)
 Two hundred barrels gain!

In 1837, an anonymous sailor about the whaleship *Elizabeth* took advantage of a lull in the day-to-day business of catching and processing whales to compose the above poem in his personal journal, a poem in which he described himself and his companions as “us lone wand'ring whaling-men” (qtd. in Miller 151).⁶ What this one phrase represents in its author's particular choice of words is an attempt to grapple with a set of cross-cutting, familiar identities—the collective identity of the workers suggested by the pronoun “us”; the sense of individualism and isolation conveyed by the word “lone”; the rootless, homeless, nation-less life of a whaleman in the adjective “wand'ring”; and the primary characterization of these men as specific kinds of workers, as “whaling-men.” While the poem cited above focuses more on the globe-trotting aspects of a whaleman's life, the other six poems in the series, which cover the entire duration of

⁶ Pamela A. Miller's book, *And the Whale is Ours: Creative Writing of American Whalemen*, contains a wide variety of pieces of writing extracted from the personal journals and logbooks written by New England whalemen. With an eye towards gathering together the creative and artistic writings of the whalemen, she focuses primarily on poetry, but she also includes several examples of non-fiction prose. Her impressive compendium of sample texts is arranged according to the kinds of subjects about which whalemen tended to write: love, death, home, travel, and work. She also provides brief analyses of these pieces, some general information about the history of the whaling industry, and the archival locations of these logbooks and journals. Although somewhat limited in scope in terms of its emphasis on poetry, Miller's book is an excellent resource for those interested in the writings of actual whalemen, especially since her survey of the journals includes the writings of ship captains, common foremast hands, mates, and harpooners.

the *Elizabeth's* voyage, demonstrate this particular sailor's intense pre-occupation with home, with America. The apostrophe which begins the second poem, "Oh, whales! Sperm Whales! Come, pray come!" desperately cries out to the heretofore scarce whales, pleading with them to come to the ship so that the men can hunt them, fill the ship's hold with oil, and return home. Furthermore, this poem concludes by yearning for favorable winds that will hurry the ship towards New England: "Ev'ry cloth shall woo the breeze,/While it bears us o'er the seas,/To our dearest native shore,/To our home, 'Sweet home'!" (qtd. in Miller 151). The final poem, written near the end of the expedition, even goes so far as to suggest that this "lone wand'ring whaling-man" would gladly give up whaling if only he could return home: "Haste, Time! Oh, haste! and let us taste a kindly welcome home/By those we love – and to them prove no more the main we'll roam" (qtd. in Miller 152).

Taken in its entirety, this series of poems suggests that a whaleman's identity was quite multi-faceted: he was both a citizen of the world and an American, a proud laborer and a disgruntled employee, a lonely individual and a part of a collective group. Moreover, these components of a whaleman's identity could be very fluid, shifting in importance depending on a wide variety of circumstances such as distance from home, time away from home, scarcity of whales, bounty of whales, etc. Structuring these poems, and many other whaling narratives for that matter, is a complex set of antinomies having to do with national identity, working identity, gender identity, and forms of isolation and collectivity. Authors of all kinds, perhaps informed by the great nineteenth-century debate about slave labor, were interested in exploring the question of how various kinds of physical labor functioned in American culture as key components of national identity, and almost all of them were enmeshed in a fantasy of masculine physical labor which was so palpable and compelling that it continued to perpetuate itself across time.

All of the texts in my archive take up the subject of whaling, but this study actually addresses this set of antinomies, which were not clearly-defined positions held by actual whalers. Rather, the antinomies provide retrospective frameworks we can use to analyze troubling and conflicting oppositional identities. I argue that the identities which make up these antinomies vie for importance in narratives written by and about New England whalers. What eventually emerges from these antinomies is a dominant conglomerate identity, a powerful ideological fantasy capable of generating genuinely strong emotions in the imaginations of many

Americans. This conglomerate identity and its variations were all socially produced, not subjectively invented by individual whalers, and they were hence publicly circulating, socially legible identities. Because they were subjectively experienced, they were also lived or worn by individuals or made part of the personal fabric of fictional characters.

Some understandings of identity assume that an identity—or the kind of self-knowledge that one would use to make an identity—is formed prior to its emergence in a historical, social, or cultural context, that individuals already possess some sense of their identity before they make some imagined choice of roles. This assumption forecloses the possibility, outlined by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, that individuals are always, already enmeshed in cultural contexts and that the development of their identity is impacted, from the very beginning, by the different kinds of meaningful socially legible identities offered to them as possibilities. I have found Judith Butler's "reconceptualization of identity as an *effect*" to be one of the best ways of articulating my conceptualization of the identities I discuss in the whaling narratives (187). As she argues, "For an identity to be an effect means that it is neither fatally determined nor fully artificial and arbitrary" (187). This opens up a middle ground—where identity is neither externally imposed nor freely chosen—and helps, I think, to more accurately characterize the kinds of socially significant identities manifested in the whaling narratives. I examine, in the ways in which these socially legible identities cross-cut in the whaling narratives, how "the culturally enmeshed subject negotiates its constructions, even when those constructions are the very predicates of its own identity" (Butler 182). In particular, I will explore some of the ways in which American whalers and those writing about them addressed the antinomies inherent in familiar constructions of nationality, work, and collectivity.

Butler's claim that identity is "produced or generated" is very similar to that of Benedict Anderson, who, in *Imagined Communities*, argues that a nation (the grounding for a citizen's sense of national identity) is "an imagined political community" (6). While the two terms "produced" and "imagined" are very similar, and both Butler and Anderson are attempting to get at the same issue—how versions of identity come into being—Butler stresses the power of repetitive, material practices to *subvert* dominant meanings, whereas Anderson emphasizes the imaginative power of dominant meta-narratives of national identity to *organize* the material world. This distinction is important in reference to the whaling narratives because they imagine and produce versions of identity which simultaneously perpetuate the dominant and interrupt it—

the poles of the antinomies tend to oscillate in power. Combining Butler's approach with Anderson's and keeping in mind that dominant narratives of national identity are just as produced or imagined as subversive ones, then, helps to explain the interplay of these identities once they emerge into publicly and socially legible forms.

As I mentioned above, whalemens were both world travelers and Americans; these terms constitute my first antinomy. What I have called being "a citizen of the world" involves two dimensions of worldliness, for sailors were part of a shipboard international community of men, and sailors were travelers, working-class tourists visiting various international ports around the world. As Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, Marcus Rediker's *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, and Margaret Creighton's *Rites & Passages* have argued, all sailors, whatever their race, ethnicity, or nationality, were a part of an international life on the seas, whose transnational character was evidenced by the fact that they were able to forge bonds with one another that superseded those of nationality. Because skilled labor was in such short supply and the conditions aboard many whaleships were so insufferable that many men deserted their posts at the first available opportunity, ship owners and captains fairly consistently hired Africans and African Americans, Native Americans, Portuguese, and Pacific Islanders.⁷ Thus, whalemens were exposed to cultural diversity, not just in foreign ports, but in the very forecastles in which they ate, slept, and lived. As several of the whaling narratives suggest, these sailors were especially familiar with a wide range of ways of life and were capable of embracing transnational, cosmopolitan lifestyles. Most whalemens who wrote about their experiences were not intellectual cosmopolitans like Francis Allyn Olmsted, a Harvard-educated passenger on a whaleship, who reveled in traveling around the world and recording his experiences both aboard ship and ashore in Hawaii. Thus, it is important to qualify the kind of cosmopolitanism that whalemens experienced as a kind of working-class cosmopolitanism.

While the writings of merchant sailors and navy men illustrate what life was like in various exotic ports of call around the world, whaling narratives too display a familiarity with foreign places such as the Azores, the South Pacific, Zanzibar, St. Helena, etc. In fact, almost

⁷ Briton Cooper Busch in "*Whaling Will Never Do for Me*": *The American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century* dedicates an entire chapter to the issue of desertion. He describes the atrocious working and living conditions which tempted many whalemens to desert. Busch also discusses the various punishments for desertion and the ways in which captains attempted to recruit new sailors on the Pacific Islands. His book also provides additional information about the racial and ethnic makeup of the crews of nineteenth-century American whaleships.

every whaling narrative—those of J. Ross Browne, Nelson Cole Haley, Thomas Nickerson, and Mary Chipman Lawrence, among others—contains ethnographic and travel narrative sections which detail the particulars of what these places and the people living in them were like. Not surprisingly, these travel narrative sections in most of the whaling narratives written by men focus on descriptions of the native women, emphasizing their exotic beauty and how they entertained the sailors during their time ashore. And women’s writing tends to focus on the activities of missionaries and shoreside social events with the missionaries wives and the American diplomats working in the consuls—precursors to embassies—in these various foreign ports. While there is a fair amount of ethnocentrism in these travel narratives, many authors make concentrated attempts to understand the exotic cultures they encountered on their own terms, and they often joke about the cultural misunderstandings that occurred between the sailors and the people native to these places. J. Ross Browne relates, with some humor, a story about the confusion that ensued when one of his fellow sailors attempted to converse and barter with a native of Bembatooka Bay, near Madagascar. Since neither one understood the other’s language, or what the other wanted, they began shouting at each other, and the American sailor eventually stomped off, incredibly disappointed that all of his efforts to trade one of his knives for some alcohol failed.

What’s more, whalemens understood themselves to be a part of an international community of men, a “brotherhood of sailors,” who had things in common with each other that they did not have with national citizens living ashore.⁸ Before they could become a part of this shipboard community, “green hands” often had to undergo a series of elaborate initiation rituals, in order to prove their mettle as sailors. Nelson Cole Haley’s narrative describes the traditional Neptune ritual which typically took place when ships crossed the equator for the first time on the voyage. In this case, all of the experienced sailors, including the captain, joined the fourth mate, who disguised himself as “old Neptune,” in making sport of one gullible green hand, verbally harassing and haranguing him and ultimately dumping him overboard to make sure that he could

⁸ Although not working specifically with whalemens, Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* and Marcus Rediker in *The Many-Headed Hydra* describe the different kinds of bonds of “brotherhood” that existed between various different kinds of sailors.

swim.⁹ Whalemen also bonded with each other by gathering together to spin yarns, oral histories of life on the high seas. Both J. Ross Browne's *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* and Harry Halyard's *Wharton the Whale-Killer!* describe how sailors would temporarily put aside their racial, ethnic, and national differences and gather together to hear each other spin these fantastic yarns, and these texts re-tell many of these stories, accompanying them with vivid illustrations. The kind of kinship among sailors that these rituals and gatherings created did give them the opportunity to share a bit of their lives—however exaggerated—with each other and form bonds with each other that crossed national lines.

Most whaling narratives tend to emphasize the fact that these whalemen were also Americans, and even if they were not American citizens, they were working in an American industry that was centralized in New England and brought millions of dollars into the United States economy.¹⁰ As I described it above, as the category of the working-class cosmopolitan refers not only to the facts of global travel but also to the ways in which these experiences were imaginatively understood in the whalemen's lives. Similarly, being an American was not just a matter of being a national citizen, but of possessing an imaginative, emotional relationship of belonging to America. Both Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* and Lauren Berlant in *The Anatomy of National Fantasy* emphasize the roles that imagination and fantasy play in configurations of national identity. Neither Anderson nor Berlant argue against the idea that national identity is materially constituted; rather, what they focus on is the idea that national identity is simultaneously capable of generating emotive responses in the imaginations of its citizens. As Berlant quite simply claims, "Nations provoke fantasy" (1). These fantasies often make their way into social forums where they are legible and recognizable, available for interrogation, critique, and commendation. National identity registers both cognitively and emotionally with national citizens, and it is this double significance of national identity—its ability to say something about both the internal experience and external labeling of national

⁹ Margaret Creighton's chapter, "Crossing the Line: Fraternity in the Forecastle," in *Rites & Passages* provides more details about the Neptune ritual and the other kinds of bonding and initiation rituals which took place aboard many whaleships.

¹⁰ For statistics on just how much money the New England whaling industry was bringing into the United States see Obed Macy's *History of Nantucket*, Francis Allyn Olmsted's *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage*, and Alexander Starbuck's *The History of Nantucket*. Olmsted's statistics for the year 1841 claim that the whaling industry earned over 6.5 million dollars.

citizens—that I am emphasizing here. For me, then, national identity is a fantasy, an internalized relationship to a category that is externally produced and hence socially legible.

National fantasies are ultimately ideological in nature because they are affected by a host of power relations. While there can certainly be subversive/resistant/minority fantasies of national identity, I am interested in attempts by whalemens and whaling authors to conscript whalemens for dominant fantasies of national identity and vice versa. What is so interesting about the national fantasy of the manly American laborer, and its ideological nature, is that it tends to reinforce predominant power relations, rather than subvert them, and in the process it makes these power relations seem natural. Tempted by the possibility of locating, naming, and critiquing a coherent American identity and its ideological components, Myra Jehlen in *American Incarnation* and Sacvan Bercovitch in *The American Jeremiad* both set out to grapple with the ideological nature of dominant conceptions of “American-ness”—its artifice and non-empirical nature—and explain how it is that these versions of American national identity continue to circulate across time. While both Bercovitch and Jehlen are highly critical of the ideological nature of these narratives of national identity, they are interested in examining their enduring qualities and have observed that even though many ideologies of American national identity are flawed, they somehow manage to live on in the imaginations of Americans. I want to emphasize, as Bercovitch and Jehlen do, that an ideology can be immensely powerful in its social and psychological effects even if it can easily be empirically disproved or discredited. As Myra Jehlen argues in reference to “the idea of America,” “Denunciations of the reality of life in America as a travesty of the idea, or even the idea itself as a travesty, need not impair the idea’s capacity to organize the world for those who continue to believe. Indeed, the idea can even continue, as the converse of belief, to organize the thinking of those who abjure it” (43). Here, Jehlen touches on the paradoxical nature of ideological fantasies of American national identity, namely that even deeply flawed or unrealistic ideologies tap into very real emotions. Culturally dominant ideologies pertaining to nationality can manage and mask social contradictions. They continue to persist because, I would argue, they create such palpable and compelling feelings in the lives of those they touch.

In this analysis of whaling narratives, I will not be examining the vast number of ways in which American-ness was understood during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rather, I am interested in describing particular ideological fantasies of laboring identity, some of which

coalesce in these texts in the form of a dominant national identity, and some of which have the potential to disrupt the dominant national identity. As Eric Hobsbawm's scholarship on nationalism in *The Invention of Tradition* and *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* suggests, "we cannot assume that for most people national identification – when it exists – excludes or is ever superior to, the remainder of the set of identifications which constitute the social being. In fact, it is always combined with identifications of another kind, even when it is felt to be superior to them" (*Nations and Nationalism* 11). It is this combinatory aspect of national identity that he argues most needs future critical attention, because he maintains that it has been sorely neglected by critics who have been more interested in singling out national identity as a master-identity (*Nations and Nationalism* 11). Bearing this caution in mind, I have set out to explore, taking the set of whaling narratives as a fixed point of reference, how the dominant terms emerging from the antinomies I named above impacts the way in which American whalers understood themselves, their world, and their position in it.

The second antinomy locates whalers on an axis that extends from proud laborers to disgruntled employees. These poles represent two contradictory features of the work of whaling. On the one hand, it was possible to be proud of performing this physically demanding kind of skilled labor. On the other, it was possible to be thoroughly disgusted with the oppressive hierarchy of the workplace. Although whalers might sometimes be tagged as unskilled laborers, and ship owners often hired green hands with no prior experience, whaling actually required a set of specific skills, such as harpooning and flensing (the process of stripping a whale's carcass of its blubber), which could only be acquired over the course of several voyages.¹¹ In other words, what might appear to be unskilled manual labor was actually incredibly physically taxing skilled labor, which gave these sailors a sense of personal pride in

¹¹ Whalers worked with a set of specific tools, such as harpoons and lances, which were unfamiliar to those individuals working in other sectors of the American economy. As such, most whaling narratives, J. Ross Browne's *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* and Francis Allyn Olmsted's *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage* among them, contain specific descriptions or illustrations of these implements and the skills required to use them efficiently. These texts also provide etchings and lithographs of the men at work, and Robert Cushman Murphy's *A Dead Whale or a Stove Boat: Cruise of Daisy in the Atlantic Ocean June 1912 – May 1913*, a later whaling narrative, includes photographs of the crew members as they catch, kill, and process whales. Almost all contemporary historical studies of the whaling industry describe in some detail the set of skills needed to work in the whaling industry and provide illustrations of the tools employed in this kind of work. One of the most informative of these texts is Richard Ellis' *Men and Whales*. For those interested in seeing for themselves what the tools of the trade were like, the New Bedford Whaling Museum contains a model replica of a whaleship and its smaller whaleboats as well as an impressive collection of the tools the whalers used.

their muscular prowess and physical capabilities. Sustaining this kind of job and succeeding at it also meant that these men had to be reliable—ready to hunt a whale and help sail a ship through a storm at a moment’s notice—and disciplined—dedicated to learning and developing the set of skills necessary to kill whales and process the blubber into oil. At the same time, these laboring employees were subject to the dictates of their managers, ship owners, captains, and mates. Like their land-based counterparts, these laborers had to negotiate their wages with these managers, but the former individuals could occasionally escape from their places of employment and go home, while the latter, because their place of work was their home, were enmeshed in a powerful and static hierarchy which affected both their working conditions and their living conditions. To a large degree, for the whalemens, pride in their physical and independent capabilities was constrained by their experience of structural inferiority and the fact that their ability to make independent decisions was severely restricted by this hierarchy.

Authors of whaling narratives admire these whalemens’s physical strength, their skills and knowledges specific to the business, their courage, dedication, stubbornness, and self-possession. I have already named some of the physically challenging features of the kinds of labor the whaling industry required of its workers, but it is also important to note that whalemens had to be brave. Even though industrial work in factories was quite dangerous and many employees suffered debilitating injuries at the hands of the machinery with which they worked, whaling put its workers even more at risk.¹² Whalemens often sailed through severe storms and other violent weather conditions, they sometimes contracted deadly tropical diseases as they traveled around the world, and they battled the largest creatures on earth with the tiniest of weapons. Whalemens, by necessity, had to conduct themselves with a certain degree of self-possession, for the hierarchies of the ship required them to obey commands, even if they disagreed with them, and this ability to sustain a structurally inferior position in the ship’s hierarchy was absolutely essential to being a successful whalerman. And all the while, they managed to sustain some kind of pride in themselves as laboring American men. Being a proud laborer was one key component of a conglomerate identity which had everything to do with the whalemens’s sense of themselves as Americans, workers (meaning both laborers and employees), and men. All these

¹² Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States* describes many of the horrendous working conditions those laboring in America’s factories endured and how these workers negotiated for particular rights and benefits. For his perspectives on this, see his chapters entitled, “The Other Civil War,” “Robber Barons and Rebels” and “The Socialist Challenge.”

characteristics taken together merge into an ideological fantasy of masculine physical labor which was available to be appropriated for national purposes. The fantasy was partly the link to masculine and American identity, but it also had to do with a certain aesthetic-emotional investment in these men and their labors.

For themselves and for others, whalemens sometimes embodied a composite American identity: an American, masculine, working identity. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur positioned whalemens and farmers as emblematic of the American spirit, because they were courageous, dedicated American men who were independent, self-reliant individuals as well as subordinates in the hierarchy of the business. For him, whalemens were working-class American heroes because they possessed both the knowledge and skills to kill the whales and the wherewithal to promote themselves up the nautical hierarchy. He pointed to the system of lays, which invested each man in the voyage because each one was paid a certain percentage of the final profits, as an ingenious invention on the part of ship owners, a reason why they were so worthy of admiration.¹³ Industry outsiders were not the only ones who saw the New England whalemens as symbols of America, for whalemens, such as Nelson Cole Haley among others, were attracted to these kinds of descriptions of themselves. Owen Chase was also quite heavily invested in this idea, and even though his own whaling career ended in disaster—he was mentally and emotionally destroyed by the *Essex* catastrophe—he persists in describing the New England whalemens according to this fantasy.

As disgruntled employees, whalemens often used their laboring pride and their knowledge of the business and their workplace to express their disgust with their managers—captains, mates, and owners—and their living and working conditions. This management was composed not just of individuals, but of a whole host of rules, regulations, and laws that were meant to reinforce and protect the hierarchy on board individual ships as well as the hierarchical system of labor by which the entire industry was organized. Mutinies, then, threatened to tip the balance of power toward the subordinates in the hierarchy.¹⁴ The fact that a whalerman's workplace was his

¹³ Crèvecoeur was not the only author who was interested in the lay system, for this method of payment is also an issue for Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*. What's more, this system of labor organization was not always as fair as Crèvecoeur perceived it to be, and as the nineteenth-century progressed it became quite exploitative. For more information on the lay system and how oppressive it could be, see Briton Cooper Busch's "*Whaling Will Never Do for Me*" and Margaret Creighton's *Rites & Passages*.

¹⁴ Perhaps the most famous mutiny in all of nautical history was that which occurred on the British vessel the *Bounty* during its voyage from 1788-1789. The story of the *Bounty* is referred to in many whaling narratives, and in *Mutiny*

living place, and that all the men, laborers and managers alike, were thrust together in extremely close quarters amplified the danger posed by mutinies. Thus, well before the development of labor unions in America's factories, mutinies represented a kind of labor movement which threatened to destroy the very foundations of the organizational structure of the workplace, and it is important to note that the incendiary potential of both mutinies and labor unions were reacted to with both extreme intolerance and severe violence.

For whaling captains and mates, maintaining the balance of power was a tricky balancing act, because they lacked the sheer numbers needed to forcibly quell revolts if they happened. Management styles differed according to the captain or the mate, but some like Ahab attempted to intimidate their crews and rule with an iron fist, while others like Thomas Williams tried to earn the admiration and respect of their men by being as fair as possible to everyone and demonstrating their own willingness to set out in the whaleboats to harpoon and kill whales themselves. While they never actually took part in the process of stripping the blubber off the whale's carcass and boiling down the oil, these captains did attempt to show their crewmembers that they were willing to "get their hands dirty," and as the narratives show, these tended to be the captains who were the most admired. Whatever management strategy captains or mates adopted, however, they relied on the strict anti-mutiny laws which were enacted to protect them. The punishment for mutiny, or mutinous sentiments, was death, and it was ultimately this threat that prevented many foremast hands from taking over the ship.¹⁵

There is reason to believe that many men employed as laborers aboard whaleships often felt a particularly masculine sense of entitlement, and this sentiment fueled a few critiques of the

on the Bounty, Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall recount how Fletcher Christian managed to overthrow Captain Bligh, take command of the ship, and live for a time on the island of Tahiti. This was not the only famous mutiny, however, for in 1824, a whaleman named Samuel Comstock, seized control of the *Globe* in a bloody mutiny. When the mutineers landed on an atoll in the Marshall Islands, they violently revolted against Comstock, killing him, and they spent some time living amongst the natives of these islands until they were eventually rescued. There were two popular nineteenth-century narratives of these sensational events: Lay and Hussey's *A Narrative of the Mutiny, on Board the Ship Globe, of Nantucket, in the Pacific Ocean, Jan. 1824. And the Journal of a Residence of Two Years on the Mulgrave Islands; With Observations on the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants* and William Comstock's *The Life of Samuel Comstock, the Terrible Whaleman*. Incidentally, extracts from both of these narratives are included in Melville's *Moby-Dick*. There was another unpublished version of the *Globe* mutiny, written by George Comstock entitled, "Narrative of the Mutiny capture and transactions on board of the Ship Globe of Nantucket after Sailing from Edgartown." For a historical analysis of the events of the *Globe* mutiny and a comparison of these narratives see Thomas Farel Heffernan's *Mutiny on the Globe: The Fatal Voyage of Samuel Comstock*.

¹⁵ Briton Cooper Busch's chapter, "Crime and Punishment," in "*Whaling Will Never Do for Me*" describes the ways in which whalemens were punished for a variety of different offences including mutiny. He also includes statistical tables about flogging and its prevalent use as a means of disciplining sailors in the whaling industry.

American system of capitalism upon which the whaling industry was grounded. Narratives like J. Ross Browne's *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* which engage in this kind of protest do not typically sever a connection with America, or reject the idea of America. Rather, in what Sacvan Bercovitch would call a jeremiad-like move, they attempt to correct inconsistencies in the idea of America by fulfilling the promise of America.¹⁶ Browne argues that, as American citizens, these whalers are denied the basic rights that the Constitution guarantees all men. In order to fulfill the promise of the Constitution, then, these men must be given their freedoms and rights. Critiques such as Browne's were few and far between, however, and most authors, such as Nelson Cole Haley, Owen Chase, and Thomas Nickerson, preferred to claim that the hierarchy of the whaling industry was entirely just and fair.

What prevented more protests such as Browne's from erupting was the ideological fantasy itself. Many whalers who participated in this fantasy and who saw themselves as working class heroes, embodiments of masculine American productivity, apparently did not think much about the injustices inherent in the nautical hierarchies in which they worked. Thus, many of them were effectively distracted from protesting against the realities of life aboard a whaleship. However, it is important to note that these individuals were not just naïvely believing in an ideology that masked the social contradictions aboard ship. Fredric Jameson claims that "we cannot fully do justice to the ideological function of works like these [products of mass culture such as *Jaws*] unless we are willing to concede the presence within them of a more positive function as well: of what I will call...their Utopian or transcendent potential" (144). Jameson's argument about mass culture might be extended to all cultural products when he claims, "The works of mass culture, even if their function lies in the legitimation of the existing order—or some worse one—cannot do their job without deflecting in the latter's service the deepest and most fundamental hopes and fantasies of the collectivity, to which they can therefore, no matter in how distorted a fashion, be found to have given voice" (144). Therefore, men might believe in ideologies of American-ness which transform the hard-working physical laborer into the very embodiment of core national values and attitudes, because they tie into an incredibly compelling utopian vision of America. The emotive component of this utopian

¹⁶ In *The American Jeremiad*, Bercovitch argues that there was nothing more American than protesting against injustices inherent in American society in an effort to fulfill the ideals that the Constitution promoted. In this way, "John Brown could join Adams, Franklin, and Jefferson in the pantheon of Revolutionary heroes when it was understood that he wanted to fulfill (rather than undermine) the American dream" (160).

fantasy of the masculine-worker-American-whaleman generates palpable feelings about the important bonds among fellow human beings who work together as well as the value of significant forms of individuality which enable humans to confront elemental forces and creatures of nature.

What is incredibly important to note is that both a whaleman's identity as a proud laborer and his identity as a disgruntled employee were completely and implicitly masculine. The laborer's pride was contingent on his possessing a masculine body which could demonstrate great physical prowess. J. Ross Browne keeps track of the development of his muscularity as his voyage progresses, and while he comes from a Southern plantation and is at first determined to travel the world as "a gentleman of leisure," he becomes more and more fascinated with and proud of his body as he gets stronger, more tanned and weathered, and more muscular. As I observed above, this sense of rugged masculinity and independence was often held in check by the hierarchical management of the ship. In this configuration, being restricted as an employee could be figured as emasculation, for these men were subject to the commands and dictates of those above them—they were not fulfilling a romantic masculine dream of being in total command of themselves and their own destinies. There was no reason why the experience of being a subordinate had to be gendered in this way, but it was. This paradox was resolved in any number of ways. As I mentioned, many whalers, Owen Chase, Nelson Cole Haley, and Thomas Nickerson, among them, were quite heavily invested in the idea that the hierarchy aboard ship was fair: that it evaluated each man according to the level of his physical prowess, and that only the best men could survive it and work their way up to better positions. Haley and Nickerson admitted that the odds were stacked against them, but they emphasized that it was possible for a man to begin his career as a cabin boy and eventually attain the rank of captain. After all, they had done it. Others believed that even the men occupying subordinate positions such as harpooners could garner a certain amount of respect. Although they were below the mates in rank, and although many harpooners were often racially, nationally, and ethnically different from their crew members, they were often lauded for their superior skills and were quite well-regarded aboard ship. It was precisely their physical prowess and knowledge of the business of whaling which recommended them to crewmembers who otherwise might have despised them because of these racial, national, and ethnic differences.

Perhaps one of the most interesting ways in which shipboard masculinity was stabilized, though, manifests itself in whaling narratives written by and about whaling wives. To a certain degree, definitions of masculinity, like other cultural identities forged in binaries, depend on definitions of its opposite, femininity. Working in the whaling industry or being married to someone who did dangerously reconfigured culturally dominant ideas of what it meant to be a man or a woman. Not only was the hierarchy aboard ship potentially emasculating, but so was domestic life, for sailors, by necessity, had to take on the tasks that women on land traditionally performed for them, such as sewing, cooking, and cleaning.¹⁷ The blurring of these gender lines threatened constructions of normative heterosexuality for men. Although it remains unspoken in most whaling narratives, except for *Moby-Dick*, there was also the potential for homoeroticism to erupt on these all-male ships. Perhaps this is why so many whalers were famous for their promiscuous behavior during shore leave and why so many of them told stories about the vast number of “girlfriends” that they had around the world. Because of the absence of their husbands, women ashore were forced to take on the management of all household affairs, even those traditionally assigned to men. What is so interesting about narratives by and about whaling wives is that they seem to insist on imposing conventional and culturally dominant gender prescriptions onto their lives as a way of offsetting the dangers that their atypical gender roles presented. Joseph C. Hart’s *Miriam Coffin* punishes all of the independent women in the novel for assuming roles that are not conventional, and Helen E. Brown’s *A Good Catch* stresses that even though a whaling wife might travel with her husband around the world, she must never leave her cabin, her tiny domestic sphere, and never challenge her husband’s judgment or fraternize with the common sailors.

The last antinomy is the opposition between the isolation and collectivity that were both part of shipboard life. Whalers were torn by the fact that they were absent from home, and American soil, for so much of their lives, but they were also part of a closely-bonded group of laborers. While whaling did require the collective efforts of the group, success or failure often depended on the efforts of particular individuals, such as harpooners. Nelson Cole Haley records that when he first achieved the post of harpooner, the pressure on him to perform was so great that he was told that he would be removed from his duties if he missed a whale even once.

¹⁷ Margaret Creighton’s *Rites & Passages* elaborates on the division of labor aboard ship and examines the different kinds of “women’s work” that sailor’s had to perform.

Bearing the burden of this responsibility could be quite isolating, but part of the loneliness associated with being a whaler also results from the fact that whaling voyages lasted for years at a time. These men traveled all over the globe to many places where the sailors did not speak the local language and were complete foreigners. They had difficulty connecting with their families at home in the United States, for it was difficult to get letters back and forth from home, and they often felt as though they had been ripped away from any land-based affiliations. The fact that they were sailors—confronting the ocean—also had something to do with the profound sense of loneliness which marks many of the narratives. After all, of all of the natural elements, it was the ocean which most often inspired “the sublime” because it was so tremendous in scope and changeable in mood that it boggled the human mind and thwarted any attempt to make sense of it. As the example of Ishmael demonstrates, the men who chose this form of work were typically those who could withstand the isolation, and who even enjoyed it. Many sailors sought out the sea both for their own personal motives and as an escape from life on land. In fact, whaleships employed a significant number of runaway slaves who sought out the isolation of the sea as a place where they could enjoy a certain degree of freedom without fear of being sent back into slavery on the Southern plantations.¹⁸

Loneliness can be a side effect of individualism, which forms a familiar combination with American-ness and masculinity. Interestingly enough, both *Moby-Dick* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which to varying degrees praise individualism, open with scenes which emphasize the melancholy nature of the isolation of Ishmael and Huck, respectively. Ironically, as individuals trapped in “civilization” they both experience profoundly depressing loneliness, and it is only once they escape the constricting binds of “civilization,” on the sea and on the raft, that they revel in their own individuality. As Alexis de Tocqueville observes, “Individualism is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of his family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself” (506). The problem of

¹⁸ Elizabeth Schultz’s chapter entitled, “African-American Literature,” in Haskell Springer’s *America and the Sea: A Literary History* mentions that “Escaped slaves as well as free blacks also found that the sea provided various means of employment. By 1859, of the twenty-five thousand native-born American seamen working out of New Bedford, more than half were blacks, with twenty-nine hundred serving in the whale fishery, the others in the navy or merchant service” (237). Also noteworthy is the fact that Frederick Douglass spent several years working off and on in the shipping industries in New Bedford. See *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* for more on the time he spent there.

individualism, then, is that “each man is forever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart” (508). Rather ironically, individualism generates loneliness, which in turn, can stimulate people to form a smaller collective group.

American whalemens did indeed form powerful affiliations with each other, as I have noted above. All men aboard a whaling ship were part of a collective venture whose success did depend to some degree on the efforts of all involved. In spite of the division of labor and the fact that some tasks aboard whaling vessels required more skill than others, whaling required the skills and talents of all men aboard ship. This interdependence, in turn, could create ties that bound all men aboard ship, regardless of their position in the hierarchy, together as one collective unit. Thus, everyone from the captains to the cabin boys could feel as though they were playing integral roles in the voyage, everyone doing their part to contribute to the success of the venture, thereby earning more money and bringing them home faster. Coupled with popular metaphors that compared the national community to the shipboard community, as in ship of state, these bonds provided a way of seeing the ship as a microcosm of the nation. Non-whalemens, industry outsiders, could see these bonds as symbolic of the more abstract bonds of national community, while the whalemens themselves, industry insiders, could see these bonds as concrete proof of their American-ness. It is important to note, though, that the strongest bonds aboard ship occurred among those who were lowest in the hierarchy. More often than not, it was the physical laborers, not the managers, who enjoyed these connections with their fellow workers, and this helps to explain why writers like Crèvecoeur were so ideologically invested in them in particular.

An added dimension to this last antinomy has to do with the fact that many whalemens, including the “lone wand’ring whaling-man” discussed above, were both working-class physical laborers and creative and reflective thinkers. Whalemens both engaged in *collective* physical labor and *individually* composed poetry, wrote and sketched in their journals, and carved intricate pieces of scrimshaw. What was difficult for the whalemens to reconcile about these two aspects of their identity was that this kind of thinking—especially writing—connected their intellectual activities to those of traditional intellectuals and scholars. The latter category of thinkers belonged to the upper and middle classes, and they overvalued formal, institutionalized education, and undervalued the kinds of practical and experiential knowledges the whalemens

possessed. The danger for these whalers was that, by engaging in these kinds of creative and reflective thinking, they were investing themselves in a value system which belonged to another class. This investment had the potential to undermine their pride in their laboring bodies, their working-class identity. As I discuss in Chapter 4, Melville's *Moby-Dick* focuses on condemning the isolated nature of traditional intellectual activity and valorizing the collective and intellectually generative nature of the physical labor of whaling in order to reclaim the kinds of reflective, creative thinking in which the whalers were engaged as part of their working-class identity.

While the following chapters focus primarily on the antinomies that I have outlined which are explicit in the writings of the anonymous "lone wand'ring whaling-man," I want to note that there is yet another antinomy implicitly embedded in his poems, and it has everything to do with race. By and large, the men and women writing about the whaling industry in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were white, but there were a whole host of Native Americans, African Americans, Africans, Portuguese, and Pacific Islanders working in the American whaling industry. Even if they were not writing about their experiences—and these immigrant, native, and foreign non-whites almost always occupied subordinate positions in the ships' hierarchy—they appear quite frequently in almost all whaling narratives; take Queequeg, Dago, and Tashtego, the famous harpooners from *Moby-Dick*. They join Driko, the Pacific Islander from *The Golden Harpoon*; Vera, the Portuguese harpooner from "Stray Leaves from a Whaler's Log"; and the many men Frederick Douglass indicates when he says, "we [African Americans] are...capturing the whale in the Pacific" (1888). The kinds of whalers valorized in the narratives for their physical prowess and their exceptional American spirit were typically white, while foreign, immigrant and native workers who were not white were usually vilified according to the racial and ethnic prejudices of the day; thus, their presence aboard ship was managed, regulated, and subordinated to that of whites. However, I would point out that some racial and ethnic groups, such as the Portuguese, over time eventually came to count as "white." In 1846, J. Ross Browne describes the Portuguese sailors with whom he shares the forecabin as devilish and heathenish, but, by 1893, James Temple Brown describes Vera as an embodiment of white masculine selfhood. The process by which this occurs is very similar to that which Noel Ignatiev describes in *How the Irish Became White* in reference to Irish immigrants in America. What is perhaps even more interesting is a process I describe in the last section of Chapter 3—

namely, the re-imagining of someone like Queequeg such that his threatening savage, pagan, and cannibalistic identity is neutralized, and, in Ishmael, Bildad, and Peleg's hands, he becomes a "George Washington cannibalistically developed," a "Quohog," and an American, in a manner of speaking.

My point in describing these sets of structuring alternatives is to point out that as I began to analyze all the possible combinations of these various identities, one in particular consistently emerged as an especially powerful and identifiable dominant conglomerate identity. Of each of the opposing terms, one almost always appeared to be more dominant, and it was these dominant terms, taken together, that created the conglomerate identity of white, American, masculine, individual laborer. This composite identity was one that could be lived, practically speaking, but it was also an ideological fantasy with powerfully compelling emotive components. Moreover, even though particular terms in the sets of antinomies I have named emerge as dominant, that does not mean that the others disappear. The dominant terms both subordinate and require their opposing counterparts; they manage and subdue them, not eclipse them or erase them. Thus, a whaleman was an individual who was a world traveler, who spent very little time on American soil and knew a great deal about the rest of the world, but he was most importantly an American, linked imaginatively, symbolically, and emotionally to America. A whaleman may have been living on a whaleship which was largely devoid of the company of women, and he may have been performing all of the tasks which women normally did, but he was masculine, perhaps even hyper-masculine. This masculinity required the suppression of feminine characteristics, which might help to explain why whalemens took such great pride in reaffirming their heterosexuality, and it also required possessing a wife who was installed in a stable domestic sphere. In the case of the third antinomy, it is difficult to tell which identity is more dominant. It could be argued that the solitary and individualistic character of the whalemens closely associated them with familiar configurations of American national identity which appeared more often in reference to the frontier pioneers of the West, but it could also be argued that the bonds of fellowship and solidarity that they formed aboard ship somehow metaphorically represented the bonds of American national identity. No matter which term of the antinomy emerged as dominant—and this depended largely on the author and the narrative—it is important to note that each one could further reinforce familiar narratives of American national identity. Finally, this dominant conglomerate identity was primarily a white one, and all of the other races, nationalities, and

ethnicities working aboard ship were somehow subordinated, managed, and regulated such that their foreign racial and ethnic characteristics simply reinforced whites' self understandings.

The goal of my study of these whaling narratives is then to trace the persistence of this dominant conglomerate identity—which could be lived by both real and fictional whalers and which deployed a set of well-worn ideological fantasies—that controlled, suppressed, and even capitalized on some of the other identities that could have challenged it. My task is to explore the enduring qualities of this composite identity, while keeping track of all of the ways in which it was threatened by both the empirical challenges posed by the material circumstances of whaling and these subordinate identities. I explore the tricky balancing act required to keep these identities from moving into greater prominence and forming other kinds of conglomerate identities. After all, a disgruntled employee who was part of a collective group might become a proto-Marxist anti-capitalist. Feminine identifications and collectivities might erupt into homosociality and homoeroticism, precisely what Ishmael enjoys in the spermaceti scene in *Moby-Dick*. Thus, I am interested in the perpetuation of this dominant conglomerate identity, this ideological fantasy of masculine, American physical labor, as well as the ways in which these subordinated identities impinged on it.

Bringing together both literary and social history, my scholarship uses some of the approaches employed by Michael Denning in *Mechanic Accents*, Wai-chee Dimock in *Empire for Liberty*, and David Reynolds in *Beneath the American Renaissance*. What all of these texts have in common with mine is close attention to historical detail and popular nineteenth-century forms of literature. Furthermore, both Denning and I are especially interested exploring the impact of the social history of labor upon nineteenth-century patterns of thought, which were manifested in particular kinds of literary productions. I have sought to focus on describing how imaginative texts—including those which might be classified as creative non-fiction—were shaped and molded by their social and political surroundings. Like Denning, I offer a materialist attention to the work and history of whaling as well as the variety of forms of print culture and the modes in which they circulated. What differentiates my project from the projects of Denning, Dimock and Reynolds is that I am juxtaposing canonical texts with non-canonical texts in a way that makes the canonical texts resonate in new and different ways. Both Dimock's and Reynolds's quite well-researched and insightful projects describe historical currents of thought and popular literary forms in order to laud the artistic complexity of the works of Melville and

other authors of the American Renaissance. Denning looks at dime novels as an independent literary genre. I have sought to understand how Crèvecoeur, Cooper, and Melville's writings about American national identity joined those of their contemporaries in order to comment on how ideological fantasies of American-ness persistently reproduced themselves across time. My scholarship presents a new view of the textual landscape in which all of these whaling narratives appeared, and, in so doing, I contribute to the study of the power relations inherent in particular understandings of American national identity as it intersected other identities.

I am also building on work in Atlantic and globalization studies about seafaring life and its trans-national qualities. Following the scholarship of Paul Gilroy, Marcus Rediker, and Peter Linebaugh, I have set out to examine the bonds that sailors, particularly whalers, forge with each other and how that relates to their national self-understanding. My focus on the national has not been to dispute Rediker and Gilroy's claims about the very real trans-national kinship affiliations sailors shared, but to demonstrate the complexity of the dominant conglomerate identity in which some kinds of sailors, such as whalers, were enmeshed. My scholarship, then, helps to explain one of the fairly significant problems within Marxist thought and nationalism studies—the persistence of nationalism in the face of increasing globalization, and the fact that truly international labor movements never developed. In his essay, “The National Imagination,” Gopal Balakrishnan critiques the claim that Eric Hobsbawm makes at the end of *Nations and Nationalism* that nations are historically outmoded institutions, that they are no longer as historically viable as they once were, and that their power to organize the world is on the decline (198). Balakrishnan correctly remarks that nations have remarkable staying power and that much of Marxist scholarship has ignored the tenacious interdependency of nationalism and capitalism. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx predicted that a revolution of workers would begin at the local level, spread to the national level, and then the global level, but this has never happened.¹⁹ I would argue that this is because some ideological fantasies of American national identity, the ones I have been discussing above, perpetually reinforce the power structure of American capitalism. These ideologies help keep workers in check by giving them a sense of laboring pride which helps to distract them from the problems inherent in their workplace, and they also promote loyalty to American workers and the commodities they

¹⁹ Upton Sinclair too believed in the potential of a world-wide revolution of workers, and he discusses this in some detail and with some optimism in the later chapters of *The Jungle*.

produce. In this formulation, then, capitalism needs America, and America needs capitalism, and it is the ideological nature of particular fantasies of American national identity that continue to perpetuate this symbiotic relationship. This, then, is why it is so important to understand how these ideologies of national identity come into being and how they live on in the imaginations of Americans.

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 form two halves of a closely connected argument. In Chapter 2, I examine the cultural and historical origins of the idea that physical laborers were somehow characteristically American. With regard to farming, the appropriation of particular facets of working identity for national purposes has a long cultural and historical genealogy, but other kinds of physical labor such as whaling were more difficult to cast according to this ideological fantasy of masculine American identity. Using Thomas Jefferson's writings about agriculture, I argue that his effort to define American farmers as "the most virtuous and independent of citizens" capitalized upon this fantasy in order to describe the American character as exceptional and to differentiate the citizens of this fledgling nation from their European counterparts. I then break down the composite identity of American manly labor into its constituent parts and discuss how certain socially legible, dominant narratives of national identity were imagined and adjusted over time. Describing the characteristics of the American work narrative, I describe how the ideological projects in which these texts were invested helped to make work identity an integral part of American national identity.

In Chapter 3, I then move towards an analysis of how unsuitable whaling was for these nationalistic appropriations, how the other identities subordinated by the dominant conglomerate identity threaten to move into greater prominence. I examine how J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's admiration of the hierarchical structure of the whaling industry ignores many of its empirical realities and how James Fenimore Cooper's investment in specific kinds of American individualism effaces the physical labor needed to process killed whales. I conclude by demonstrating how various characters in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* attempt to make Queequeg into an American, rendering his potentially dangerous, racialized identity largely invisible. Taken together, these whaling narratives suggest that this dominant conglomerate identity was so powerful and had such compelling emotive components that it was able to subdue the other kinds of combinatory identities which threatened it and continue to perpetuate itself across time.

In Chapter 4, I demonstrate that American national identity—as an integral piece of the combinatory identity I described above—was not always its dominant constituent, for other kinds of identity might take precedence over it. I take up the antinomy between isolated individualism and collective labor and explain how Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* and J. Ross Browne’s *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* link each one of these identities to cosmopolitan intellectual and artistic endeavors, not American-ness. I read these two whaling narratives alongside one another, arguing that both Melville and Browne are working on intellectual projects which describe the host of socially significant meanings that isolated and collective identities can possess. Both authors are heavily invested in working out the relationship of the isolated intellectual to the sociable and collective group of laborers aboard ship, how a whaleman manages these conflicting aspects of his identity. Browne privileges the former, because he sees more potential for thinking, writing, and sketching in the time he spends isolated from the crew, while Melville favors the latter, because Ishmael is far more intellectually generative when he is laboring in the company of his fellow crewmembers than he is when he is alone. These narratives’ refusal to link the work of whaling to American national identity both puts further stress on the dominant conglomerate identity and provides additional evidence for Hobsbawm’s claim that nationalism is not always the most important socially significant identification in the lives of individuals and that others can be equally important, if not more so.

Chapter 5 poses a set of questions about why male writers reacted to the unconventional domestic arrangements adopted by whaling wives with such alarm and consternation and how these women wrote about themselves. I argue that the answer to the reactionary qualities of the men’s writings lies in the fact that the lives these women led, either ashore while their husbands were absent or at sea in the company of their husbands, had the potential to subvert the familiar ideas about domesticity and gender roles advocated by the cult of domesticity. Part of what made the ideology of the cult of domesticity so strong and compelling was that it fused domestic identity together with national identity, and it assigned both men and women conventional roles which were thought to stabilize and strengthen the family unit, which would, in turn, stabilize and strengthen the nation. Because definitions of masculinity and femininity very much depended on each other, increasing the independence of women and giving them more masculine roles decreased the power of men and gave them more feminine roles and vice versa. In contrast, whaling wives who traveled with their husbands—and other women writing about

them—used their unconventional domestic arrangements to develop their own fantasies about the oceanic landscape in which they found themselves. At first, these women try to describe their world in the same ways that men would, but they eventually give this up and ultimately describe the realm of the Pacific, not as a masculine world of ships and manly confrontation with the elements, but as a huge domestic realm, an entire community of closely connected traveling whaling wives.

While my other chapters all argue that the subordinate identities in the antinomies often threaten to rise into greater prominence, this last chapter claims that the component identities of the conglomerate could often shift in importance over time. At times, being a proud laborer—a proud whaler—could supersede being an American, most significantly when the economic policies of the federal government wreaked havoc on the whaling industry. During the American Revolution and the War of 1812, the profitability of the Nantucket whaling industry was often threatened by forces the Islanders could not control on their own, and they were seriously concerned that without the support of their federal government, their livelihoods would suffer. When their appeals to the United States government for financial subsidies and military protection failed, they began to independently negotiate treaties of neutrality with the British government. What the narratives from this period demonstrate is the instability and volatility of the relationship between the different identities composing the dominant conglomerate identity. Ultimately, this speaks to the potential instability of Americanized ideological fantasies of physical masculine labor, and, perhaps, suggests ways in which they might be dismantled, their power diffused. Historically speaking, the behavior of the Nantucket Islanders in these instances represent important pre-cursors to what the South did before and during the Civil War and raises important questions about the overall strength of antebellum federalism in the nation. However, the fact that Nantucket did not secede and the fact that Nantucketers were able to argue that their independence was somehow part of their quintessential American character—as Southerners did after the Civil War—are indeed testaments to the enduring qualities of this ideological fantasy.

Taken together, what all of these chapters show is the range of ideas that a variety of authors meditating on the same subject—in this case, the work of whaling and its connection to American-ness—can generate. *Moby-Dick* is not the only whaling narrative that had a unique approach to the topic or the only text that grappled with sophisticated configurations of work and national identity. Approaches to this novel have typically involved either singling it out from the

archive of whaling narratives as a special object of analysis or using these other texts to show what *Moby-Dick* does that is unique and differentiates it from its contemporaries.²⁰ To some degree, these are all valid approaches, because what is difficult about examining *Moby-Dick* alongside something like J. Ross Browne's *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* is that the former seems progressive, modernist, and experimental, while the latter seems overly sensational in places, an overall artistic failure, and a source for scant elements of the far superior *Moby-Dick*.²¹ The problem is, though, that these kinds of readings judge both narratives by the same criteria—artistic merit, complexity, etc.—, and I would argue that it is necessary to read them both on their own terms, taking into account each one's configuration of fantasies of masculine labor, because, as Edward W. Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism*, “a work of art...begins as a work, begins *from* a political, social, cultural situation, begins *to do* certain things and not others” (Said 316). Recognizing this makes it possible to read *Moby-Dick alongside*, not through or against, other whaling texts, and this opens up the opportunity to examine the particularities of the “contested terrain” these narratives represent: the range of approaches to and perspectives on the interplay of the particular configurations of physical labor and American national identity.²² All of these authors, no matter what their canonical status, are addressing and commenting on the operations and limits of American national identity and its intimate and fragile connection to the work of whaling, and their narratives *do* something—often in spite of themselves, they help to fulfill a suspect need to define the American project as exceptional, and contribute to the perpetuation of these fantasies of masculine physical labor. This is precisely the importance of scholarship that incorporates discussions of hyper-canonical texts like *Moby-Dick*, with more moderately canonical pieces such as *Letters from an American Farmer* and *The Pilot*, and other non-canonical narratives. Moving between literary and paraliterary texts permits me to read Melville alongside the anonymous sailor of the *Elizabeth*: the former famously describing the *Pequod*'s crew as the “meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways,” and the latter including himself among “us lone wand'ring whaling-men.” There is a subtle yet significant difference

²⁰ This is precisely what Casarino's *Modernity at Sea* claims to do.

²¹ The fact that *Moby-Dick* did not always receive such praise from critics and that it was read with ambivalence by many nineteenth-century Americans tends to further emphasize the need to avoid such evaluative criticisms. For nineteenth-century reviews of *Moby-Dick* see the first volume of Jay Leyda's *The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville 1819-1891*.

²² I have drawn the term “contested terrain” from Michael Denning's scholarship in *Mechanic Accents*. He uses this term to refer to dime novel, which he maintains do not support or subvert dominant cultural practices; instead, he maintains that this “contested terrain” is where a wide variety of different ideas play out.

between being one of the “meanest mariners,” a freelance common sailor, and being a “whaling-man,” a skilled journeyman with a trade, just as there is a noteworthy difference between being “a castaway,” a Crusoe-like “*Isolato*,” and being part of a “lone” and “wandr’ing” group of Americans who long to return to their “native shore,” their “Sweet home.” It is only by juxtaposing the two phrases that the political, emotional, and rhetorical repertoire of the whaling narratives comes into focus, and this, in turn, creates a sharper image of the symbiotic, yet strained, relationships among physical labor, masculinity, and American national identity.

2.0 CHAPTER 2

“The most virtuous and independent citizens”: Manly Physical Labor and American National Identity

In 1787 in his book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson cautiously remarked that it would be better for the fledgling United States to avoid potentially disastrous conflicts with European nations by abandoning nautical pursuits, because the ocean was the place “whereon we shall be principally exposed to jostle with other nations” (175). What is particularly interesting about Jefferson’s writings is that both here and elsewhere, he lays out utilitarian solutions for solving the problem of defining the new nation’s economic identity in a figurative manner, which, in this case, casts the ocean as a crowded meeting place—like a cosmopolitan city street—where ships of all nations “jostled,” bumping into one other, jockeying and competing for economic success and military might. In order to promote peace and avoid wars that the United States, with its limited military resources, could not possibly win, Jefferson’s political purview was consciously and decidedly local, not global, and he suggested that it would be better to “turn all our citizens to the cultivation of the earth,” because “cultivators of the earth are the most virtuous and independent citizens” (175). The impact of these statements upon the way Americans saw themselves and developed their own sense of nationality was both lasting and manifold because of the way in which Jefferson casts farmers as “the most virtuous and independent of citizens,” thereby helping to represent masculine physical labor in the agricultural arena as somehow quintessentially American.

Although Jefferson did write about the whaling industry, and his essay, “Observations on the Whale Fishery” offers his doubtful predictions about the economic efficacy of federally supporting the development of this business, I begin with Jefferson’s remarks about agriculture because they emphasize farmers’ masculinity, physical labor, and nationality. Even at this early stage in its development, the fantasy of manly American physical labor both ignored many of the

social contradictions inherent in performing the physical labor necessary to till the earth and generated tremendous admiration for the people who confronted the elemental forces of nature, whipped them into submission, and gathered the harvest. Eventually, this fantasy was applied to other laborers, who also used their sheer physical capacities to subdue nature and extract from it valuable commodities, including whalemens. Analyzing the manly American physical laborer as an ideological fantasy requires an examination of how this particular fantasy developed first in relation to farming—how the physical labor of tilling the earth accrued such value—and how it then could be used to describe the exceptional character of almost all laboring Americans.

Agricultural work seemed to naturally lend itself to nationalistic appropriations because there was already in existence a long genealogy of thought that held farming as integral to the development of civilization and its modern integer, the nation. Republican, agrarian strands of Enlightenment philosophy, which heavily influenced Jefferson, emphasized that living close to nature and working the land as an independent farmer brought one closer to his fulfillment of his potential as a Natural Man. More importantly, if the central institution of civilization was private property, the key to transforming land into private property was to farm it. As John Locke maintains in *The Second Treatise of Civil Government*:

As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property. He by his labor does as it were enclose it from the common. Nor will it invalidate his right to say, everybody else has an equal title to it; and therefore he cannot appropriate, he cannot enclose, without the consent of all his fellow-commoners, all mankind. God, when He gave the world in common to all mankind, commanded man also to labor, and the penury of his condition required it of him. God and his reason commanded him to subdue the earth, *i.e.*, improve it for the benefit of life, and therein lay out something upon it that was his own, his labor. He that in obedience to this command of God, subdued, tilled, and sowed any part of it, thereby annexed to it something that was his property, which another had no title to, nor could without injury take from him. (398)

I have quoted Locke at length here because this passage helps to explain how farming acquired so much meaning—why this particular kind of physical labor was so attractive to writers like Jefferson who were interested in describing the American character. Locke argues that mankind, following God’s directives, invests the only thing that he owns, his labor, in the land, thereby

transforming it into private property, which was the basic organizational unit of civilization. Cultivation of the soil differentiates “civilized men” from nomadic peoples who did not conceive of labor and private property in this way. Because their political structure did not possess the institution of private property, and they did not cultivate the earth, these hunter/gatherer societies were often dismissed as “uncivilized savages.” Locke also derives his line of reasoning from Biblical sources which reinforced the idea that investing physical labor in the land is a moral and virtuous activity. In this line of thought, God’s expectation that men would labor meant that they would transform wilderness into private property, civilize it, and organize it into towns, cities, and nation states.

By drawing on this foundation of philosophical ideas, Jefferson is able to argue that there is a great deal of moral value in performing this particular kind of physical labor. The Bible and Enlightenment philosophy provide him with the means, in the form of an already existing ideological fantasy of physical labor, to connect an agricultural identity to national identity, transforming farmers into ideal national citizens, the most moral, virtuous, and independent citizens a nation could possess. While the long popularity enjoyed by these political and philosophical beliefs does help to explain why Jefferson chose to define American character via farming, the problem with this formulation of national identity is that it is available to any nation possessing an agricultural economy. How can performing this kind of physical labor make a person an ideal American when there were independent, moral, and virtuous farmers in other countries such as England, France, Ireland, and Germany? All of these agricultural workers should possess the same exemplary national character, and all agricultural nations should be equally exceptional. The fact that this mode of defining Americans and American-ness persisted, despite its flaws in logic, demonstrates both the attractiveness of this fantasy of masculine physical labor and the strength of the rather suspect but keenly felt need to explain what differentiated this nation from its European counterparts and what made its political project so exceptional. Ultimately this version of American national identity—which became dominant—is a combinatory one, one which was fused with a working identity that had everything to do with laboring pride, marked as specifically masculine. In order to understand how America, labor, and masculinity come together in the American imagination despite the fact that there were aspects of these identities that resisted this fusion, it is necessary to separately

explore the need to define the exceptional nature of the American project and the intense investment many Americans had in masculine physical labor.

2.1 SECTION 1

Imagining Dominant Narratives of American National Identity

It is most important to recognize, first and foremost, that the early impetus toward national self-definition in the United States arose out of a set of specific historical and cultural concerns having to do with life in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America. After all, nations, themselves, are historically and culturally bound phenomena, or as Benedict Anderson would say, “cultural artifacts of a particular kind” (4). National self-definition was a practice engaged in self-consciously by a variety of different kinds of individuals. Some, such as Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, were Revolutionaries; some such as J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, were immigrants; and some, such as James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville, were artists. What they all had in common, with the possible exception of Melville, was that they wanted to show what was different and exceptional about life in the United States, why people had traveled so far to reach the Americas, and why revolutionaries had struggled so hard to free themselves from the rule of the British monarchy. Certainly, some of this self-conscious desire to define the nation stemmed from a need to justify the violence of the American Revolution, which the Declaration of Independence accomplished by claiming that “it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them...” (Sec. 1). As the above passage suggests, then, the need to define the new nation came partly from the logical need to explain why it was necessary to dissolve the first political bond in the first place and what replaced it “in Order to form a more perfect Union” (US Const., Sec. 1).

But according to Richard Slotkin, in *Regeneration Through Violence*, differential self-definition in the New World began from the moment that the European colonists arrived in the Americas. He argues that “Their [the European colonists’] new circumstances forced new

perspectives, new self-concepts, and new world concepts on the colonists and made them see their cultural heritage from angles of vision that noncolonists would find peculiar” (15). Slotkin goes on to claim that because the most obvious difference between the colonists and the noncolonists was geographic location, they defined themselves according to and against both the wilderness in which they lived and the native peoples already living in the New World. What I find most compelling about Slotkin’s argument is his claim that, even before the American Revolution, the colonists were self-consciously and consistently preoccupied with a need for self-definition from the very moment they set foot in the New World. He maintains that this need was not necessarily one for *national* self-definition—as it was during the American Revolution—but “the colonists’ own need to affirm—for themselves and for the home folks—that they had not deserted European civilization for American savagery” (15). Throughout the book, Slotkin suggests that this basic need for self-definition stems from a combination of the universal human desire to explain the world in terms of myths and the specific historical circumstances of the time period, but I think it is more important to concentrate on the latter, because Slotkin’s claim about the operations and limits of national identity marks a shift away from specificity towards a vaguer and universalist conceptualization of identity. This understanding of identity formation places greater emphasis on the ways in which *all* human beings make sense of their world, as opposed to the historical and cultural particulars of certain time periods and groups, which I think has more of an impact on the ways in which versions of national identity operate.

Richard Slotkin’s argument that Americans—both before the American Revolution and well after—defined themselves according to their complex relationships with the wilderness of the New World and the native peoples already living there is one very persuasive way of explaining why the myth of the frontier made its way into dominant narratives of American national identity and why men like Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett became national heroes. However, like all other communities, nations are “imagined communities,” in Benedict Anderson’s phrase, and there are many ways of imagining what the national community is like. Anderson’s scholarship helps to explain how a set of material circumstances is understood and experienced, how it is interpreted and made meaningful. To emphasize the role of the creative process in the formation of national identity, Anderson says that “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6).

I would argue further that there is not just *one style* or mode of imagining a nation but many *styles* or modes for any one nation. Defining American-ness in terms of the frontier marks one style of imagining what it means to be an American, a style which actually co-existed with numerous others, including those having to do with physical labor. Furthermore, any narrative of American national identity could join together a host of different identities, all imagined according to different styles, in its service. Almost all narratives of American national identity tend generate conglomerate identities, including ones having to do with the frontier and physical labor.

Modes of imagining national identity can be divided into two basic types—those which are designed to legitimate the state, and those which are designed to provide a unifying identity for the people who live in a nation. Jefferson’s writings take both forms, for his role in composing the founding documents, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, helped articulate American nationality in terms of state interests and concerns, and his other writings, such as *Notes on the State of Virginia*, helped generate cultural narratives of American identity. Eric Hobsbawm, in *Nations and Nationalism*, and Lauren Berlant, in *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, both emphasize the importance of recognizing these two intertwined forces—the interests of the state and those of its citizens—in the construction of American identities. Using a class-based mode of analysis, Hobsbawm maintains that “...they [nations] are, in my view, dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people...” (10). In other words, there are versions of national identity generated and promoted by the ruling parties in the state and those developed and endorsed by “ordinary people.” Furthermore, Hobsbawm points out that these categories of national identity are not mutually exclusive, for states often try to create, promote, and control a tide of national interest on the cultural level of the ordinary citizen, a tactic which works with varying degrees of success depending on the nation (93). In this book, he does not discuss the creation or perpetuation of versions of national identity, but according to his work in *Invented Traditions*, narratives of national identity often take the form of “invented traditions,” symbols and histories which, while they may not be authentic, imply some form of “continuity with the past (1). What I would emphasize here is that it is important to recognize that Jefferson “invents” or imagines

the metaphorically symbolic connection between farming and American national identity, giving Americans a history and a way of understanding themselves as citizens of an agricultural nation.

Berlant argues that the interaction between official, centralized powers and more diffuse national populations is based not so much on class distinctions as on the interplay of the Foucaultian category of “counter-memory” and what she calls the “National Symbolic” (6). She uses the term “counter-memory” to “refer to the residual material that is not identical with the official meanings of the political public sphere,” but she clarifies further that “official memory and popular memory do not, however, necessarily oppose each other. Their relation represents the dispersal of experience and knowledge that constitutes the realm of the ‘social’ ” (6). What is important here is not so much the fact that the official memory impacts the popular memory, or that the two forms of memory sometimes oppose each other, but that narratives of national identity often have a great deal to do with state interests. However, once they reach the realm of the social, these narratives are re-framed, re-interpreted, and perpetuated for any number of other reasons—often having little to do with their political origins. Some of these narratives of national identity become part of what she calls the National Symbolic:

the order of discursive practices whose reign within a national space produces, and also refers to, the ‘law’ in which the accident of birth within a geographic/political boundary transforms individuals into subjects of a collectively-held history. Its traditional icons, its metaphors, its heroes, its rituals, and its narratives provide an alphabet for a collective consciousness or national subjectivity... (20)

Ordinary people might legally be national citizens because they were born within a particular geographic space, but they experience nationality as lived belonging in a community and are somehow inserted in national narratives. For Berlant, the realms of the National Symbolic and of counter-memory are not mutually exclusive, and the two work together to give individuals a sense of their national identity. Likewise, Jefferson helped to invent a connection between work in his writings and agricultural American national identity which, once it left his hands and made its way into the “counter-memory” of the American public, took on a life of its own and adapted itself, not just to the work of farming, but to a wide variety of other kinds of physical labor in other arenas.

What is particularly useful about Berlant’s understanding of the operations and limits of the National Symbolic and the counter-memory is that it helps to explain how particular

narratives of national identity might be adjusted across time. Berlant, though, is ultimately interested in the possibility of resistance: how citizens ensnared in the dominant narratives of American national identity might free themselves from these networks of power/knowledge and re-imagine their identity. Thus, her scholarship does not provide an explanation for why some of these dominant narratives of national identity continue to perpetuate themselves across time as ideologies. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen, quite rightly, observe that many definitions of American-ness are ideological in nature, and Fredric Jameson provides a way of understanding why so many of them have such staying power when he describes their Utopian qualities.²³ His discussion of “works of mass culture” is also applicable to other manifestations of ideologies. As I mentioned in the “Introduction,” Jameson insists that “works of mass culture cannot be ideological without at one and the same time being implicitly or explicitly Utopian as well: they cannot manipulate unless they offer some genuine shred of content as a fantasy bribe to the public about to be so manipulated” (144). I would highlight Jameson’s use of the word “genuine” here, for it is especially important to note that ideologies would not be believable if they did not possess palpable and compelling emotive components, which are felt to be quite real. It is not that those who continue to believe in implausible ideologies of national identity are just easily duped or un-intelligent. Rather, they do so because ideologies of national identity generate such strong feelings, and these feelings help to perpetuate them across time. Writers interested in generating dominant narratives of American national identity became so invested in defining Americans via physical labor because ideological fantasies of masculine physical labor already possessed quite compelling Utopian components, which gave these men an intense sense of laboring pride that was available to be appropriated for national purposes.

2.2 SECTION 2

Fantasies of Physical Masculine Labor and American Work Narratives

²³ I am referring to Bercovitch’s *The American Jeremiad* and Jehlen’s *American Incarnation*.

As I noted above, moral and virtuous farmers lived in many nations around the world, not just in America. One way of keeping agriculture American was to argue that American farmers were *better* than their European counterparts, that there was something about American agriculture or the opportunities that America gave to its farmers that made this nation and this kind of work far superior to others. The other was to search for another kind of work at which Americans excelled that Europeans did not. The former required moving from appropriating particular kinds of work for national purposes to describing a particular mode of working which all Americans had the opportunity to exercise, while the latter meant closely examining all of the kinds of work that Americans performed. Thus, in reference to the former, Jefferson's idea about farmers was generalized because a shift occurred in the way the meaning of work was interpreted. As Sacvan Bercovitch's *The American Jeremiad* and Max Weber's *The Protestant Work Ethic and the "Spirit of Capitalism"* demonstrate, the spiritual value of work had a long history in Puritan theology. As Weber argues, although Puritans and Protestants did not consciously adopt this strategy, they nonetheless dedicated themselves to their work in order to keep themselves focused on their spiritual salvation and living a moral and just life. Because the material rewards it was possible to earn from this work were so impressive and admired, it was only a matter of time before that idea became secularized and applied not just to Puritans and Protestants but to a range of other kinds of workers. What the secularization of the Protestant work ethic meant was that it was possible to argue that almost all American men, whether they were Protestants or not, whether they were farmers, whalers, blacksmiths, coopers, printers, or chandlers, had the opportunity to gain material wealth and social standing if they dedicated themselves to developing and improving the techniques that their specific crafts required, if they were willing to spend the time and energy that it took to learn and perfect these skills, and if they made a concerted effort to produce and sell commodities in both American and foreign marketplaces. Physical labor, because of all of its Biblically-derived associations with morality and virtue, had an especially important place in these configurations of American national identity, for it was physical laborers, specifically men, who were valorized above managers and employers.

The search for a kind of work that Americans performed better than Europeans coupled with the need to define American workers as particularly exceptional fueled a kind of writing I

will classify as work narratives, texts which focus their primary attention on the kinds of work in which various Americans are engaged. Empirically, these narratives attempt to describe the various particulars different kinds of physical labor—such as mining, farming, whaling, blacksmithing, carpentry, etc.—but many of them are also invested in attempting to describe American exceptionalism according to the ideological fantasy of masculine physical labor, which first arose in reference to farming.²⁴ While all kinds of authors of American work narratives unabashedly praise physical laborers as ideal Americans and claim that they can achieve material success if they only work hard enough, other work narratives point out that this ideology obscures the empirical realities of American capitalism, which tends to keep money in the hands of those who are already wealthy. Following Michael Denning, I'd like to claim that the genre of the American work narrative, which includes whaling narratives, represents a kind of “contested terrain” in which dominant ideologies of American-ness are imaginatively created, developed, presented, re-presented, and critiqued (3). What is remarkable and quite uncanny about this way of imagining American national identity is that even though authors fairly consistently attacked and dismantled its ideology, pointing out flaw after flaw, it continued to function, albeit imperfectly, recurring as a subject of conversation and debate in over three centuries of work narratives. What plays out, then, in the whaling narratives—and this has a bearing on many other American work narratives—is the story of how ideological fantasies of masculine physical labor managed to persist in spite of the fact that many of the material conditions of this labor resisted nationalistic appropriations.

Because work has been and remains such an integral component of American national identity, the genre of the American work narrative developed early in the history of American literature and has persisted up through the present. While most work narratives take up a particular kind of work and focus on it for the duration of the piece, I would observe that American novels and writing of all kinds contain what I am calling “work narrative moments” in which the texts break from the primary subject of the narrative, which might be anything at all, in order to discuss a specific kind or arena of work. For example, James Fenimore Cooper's

²⁴ In his “Preface” to Olmsted's *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage*, W. Storrs Lee describes the proliferation of narratives about the kinds of work Americans performed in the nineteenth century. He lists the various kinds of work described by these narratives and explains how they addressed the arenas of work they take up. Lee does not address the link between work identity and national identity. Instead, he prefers to focus on the practical subject matter of these texts.

novel, *The Pilot*, which is first and foremost about the Revolutionary War exploits of John Paul Jones, offers a moment in which the American military men take a break from the fighting to chase and kill a whale. At first, this scene seems oddly placed in the novel, because it is a strange intrusion of a random event that has nothing to do with the rest of the plot. Interpreting this scene as a work narrative moment, though, makes it possible to see that this event further characterizes the admirable qualities American men possess because of the kinds of work that they do. By considering both work narratives and other texts which contain work narrative moments, it is possible to get a better idea of how work has been and remains so important to the American imagination.

Work narratives cut across all time periods in American literary history and address all sectors of the American economy, but there are several characteristics which are common to almost all of the texts in this genre. Significantly, few if any work narratives were written about middle managers or employers, and most of them address a specific kind of physical labor, like that of whaling, farming, or factory work, vividly describing the details of what that work is like, how it is performed, and what tools are involved. These narratives represent more than just an empirical catalogue of the different kinds of work Americans performed; rather, they serve to cast manual labor as skilled labor and invoke a sense of awe in the physical capacities it required. In other words, these texts maintain that not just anyone could be a blacksmith, a factory worker, a whaler, or a farmer. Crèvecoeur spends a great deal of time explaining how immigrant farmers apprentice themselves to American farmers more knowledgeable than they, in order to learn the particulars of agricultural work in America. J. Ross Browne emphasizes in *Etchings from a Whaling Cruise* that before he could become a proficient whaler, he had to learn a set of particular skills having to do with rowing the boats, cutting into the whales, and sailing the larger ship, and what's more he had to develop his bodily musculature such that he was physically capable of performing all of these tasks. Representing manual labor as skilled labor and praising the practical knowledges that these laborers possess effectively sets up an anti-intellectual value system which, in these texts, downplays the importance of book-learning and formal education—a value system which had political reverberations because it enabled both Davy Crockett and Abraham Lincoln, among others, to claim that because of their simple, rural roots, they better represented the majority of Americans and, therefore, would make better public servants. Walt Whitman, too, another great champion of America and its working classes,

emphasizes the importance of practical knowledge over formal education, and in “The Song of the Open Road,” he claims that “Wisdom is not finally tested in schools” (300). While this tendency in American literature has a number of implications, a few of which I have hinted at above, I raise it here because it privileges the set of skills needed to perform physical labor, and it is partially this configuration of knowledge and ability which gives these workers their quite strong sense of laboring pride.

American work narratives do more than cast physical labor as skilled, though. They play upon the idea that there was something honorable and dignified about working with one’s hands and the rest of one’s body, and argue that these workers represent the soul of America—or, in bodily metaphor, its backbone. The emotions that this figuration generates are precisely what continually perpetuate ideological fantasies of masculine physical labor. This ideological attachment relies partly on the figuration of agricultural work as virtuous and moral, which I described in the Introduction. God instructed man to labor, to till the earth, not to manage each other and to exploit each other according to capitalist hierarchies. The admiration of physical workers was built on appraisals of their skill sets, but it also involved the idea that these laborers were producing commodities which served their families, their fellow Americans and their national economy. Many of these laborers were supporting families, and, as men in a patriarchal culture, they felt a specific sense of pride in that they were able to use their bodies to provide for their wives and children. Take for example, Jurgis Rudkus, the main character of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, who initially takes great pride in his muscularity and physical prowess, his ability to successfully compete with his peers for work and support his family with just his own income. More than just sustaining their families, though, these men served all Americans by building the railroads which enabled others to travel into and settle the Western frontier, and these men produced the food other Americans ate, the clothes they wore, the tools they used, and the everyday creature-comforts they enjoyed. In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair emphasizes that the immigrant laborers working in the Chicago meatpacking plants provided food, albeit contaminated food, for the rest of the world. Whalemens were often lauded for the fact that it was their labor which produced the whale oil that kept the streets and homes of America well-lit and cheery. Not only did they improve other Americans’ quality of life, but these laborers also helped to build the economic might of the United States. The tables and sets of statistics contained in Francis Allyn Olmsted’s whaling narrative show just how much money the whaling

industry was bringing into the United States economy, upwards of six million dollars a year in 1841. As laborers at the bottom of the proverbial capitalist totem pole, then, these men were not exploiting anyone other than themselves and their bodies, and they were giving back to the world, not taking away from it. Herein lies much of the dignity and value associated with physical labor.

Changing social conditions had the potential to destroy this compelling ideological fantasy of masculine physical labor, but, as many of the work narratives show, it somehow managed to adapt itself and continued to perpetuate itself. In the nineteenth century, increasing industrialization and technological improvements threatened to make some kinds of physical labor and the ideological fantasies surrounding them obsolete. If machines could perform these tasks as well as human beings, if not better than humans, then perhaps this kind of labor was not as skilled as these work narratives argued it was, and perhaps there was not so much honor in it. One way of understanding how work narratives responded to these threats is suggested by Michael Denning's scholarship in *Mechanic Accents*, which calls attention to "a single tale, a master plot" which "existed in nineteenth-century working-class culture" and was a fixture in nineteenth-century dime novels (73). He goes on to suggest that "This plot was made up of nationalist, class-inflected stories of the American Republic, inter-related, if sometimes contradictory tales of its origins and the threats to it" and that these stories were "a part of a peculiarly artisan variant of republican ideology – the fusion of the emblems and political language of the Republic with the labor relations and social traditions of the crafts" (73). As other work narratives, such as the story of John Henry, show, though, this plot and its accompanying ideology extended beyond artisans and their labors, and it could be used to describe other kinds of manual labor which were threatened by increasing technology. It is also important to note that this plot informs just one pole of the antinomy—laboring pride.

Work narratives responded to this technological threat in a number of ways, but it was primarily the utopian component of the ideological fantasy—the palpable belief that physical labor was incredibly dignified and valuable—that contributed to its survival. The legend of John Henry and his personal contest against the steam drill claimed that the power of men was still far superior to that of machines, for it was the man of mythic proportions, his sheer physical strength and his laboring body, who was able to beat the drill in a competition that was, in effect, a duel to the death. This folk legend is both a story which reinforces the idea that physical labor is

honorable, and a cautionary tale which suggests that the costs of forcing men to compete against machines are too great.²⁵ After all, John Henry and his legendary hammer did complete the railroad tunnel before the steam drill did, proving that machines could never replace real men with honest hearts, souls, and skills, but his *heart* gave out as soon as he was done. The most impressive aspect of this story is precisely its emotional currency, the way in which it values the honor inherent in physical labor, and it was this which gave it incredible longevity and helped it live on in the American imagination up through the twentieth century. In 1962, Johnny Cash recorded a version of the story entitled, “The Legend of John Henry’s Hammer,” which plays upon many of these same emotional components. It is not so much the fact that the story itself survived that is important, but that the ideological fantasy it reinforces continued to perpetuate itself.

While all American work narratives that are centered squarely on physical labor make use of the idea of laboring pride, the texts comprising this genre can be broken down into two groups: those that attempt to show that physical labor is meaningful and can result in material success and those that demonstrate that physical labor, because it is exploited by the powers that be, most often amounts to nothing. Many of the whaling narratives and those that address other kinds of work maintain that Americans who work hard, struggling through adversity, will eventually achieve monetary success and prestigious positions in their industry. Told in retrospect by a ship captain, *Whale Hunt: The Narrative of a Voyage by Nelson Cole Haley Harpooner in the Ship Charles W. Morgan 1849-1853* explains how a mere boy, who went to sea a penniless harpooner, steadily worked his way up the intensely hierarchical ranks of the whaling industry. The problem Haley encounters when he casts his life as the success story of a hard-working, virtuous man is that the whaling industry was not really a meritocracy, and an individual could not usually achieve success based upon hard work and virtue alone. What is so revealing about this text is that even though Haley did develop into a skilled harpooner over the course of the voyage, he often engaged in unethical behavior, lying to his captain and first mate,

²⁵ Throughout the nineteenth century and up into the twenty-first century, cautionary tales about the dangers of mechanization became increasingly extreme and pessimistic and manifested themselves in various kinds of post-apocalyptic works of science fiction. In these films and books, the very same machines which men developed to improve their quality of life and make their work easier take over and threaten to eradicate the entire human race. Take for example, the three *Terminator* movies, in which men are destroyed by the very robots they created, and the three *Matrix* movies, in which a small group of humans struggle for survival in a world dominated by computers and computer systems.

to get ahead. It is important to note that Haley's narrative is not typical of those which were invested in this kind representation of the ladder of success offered by the whaling industry. Crèvecoeur and Thomas Nickerson are not quite so honest about what it takes to climb succeed, and most often they ignore the problems inherent in the hierarchies of the industry. The irony of these kinds of work narratives is that promotion effectively transforms the common physical laborer into a middle manager—the honest hard-working man ironically becomes one of the exploitative employers with whom he struggled. In Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, the main character, Clyde Griffiths, after being promoted to manager of a department store, uses his standing to begin a rather exploitative relationship with one of the shop girls whom he oversees. Instead of dealing with this irony as Dreiser does, though, most work narratives stop short of describing the transformation in full, and like Haley's narrative, they trace the individual from his humble beginnings to the point at which he achieves some success and shy away from describing the kind of man he becomes. For these kinds of narratives, work means something because it is capable of earning material wealth and social standing for those willing to invest themselves in their work, and what is so attractive about this formulation of work is that it suggests that class categories are not as static as they might appear to be—an individual worker is not doomed to forever toiling away in the same class position, for his destiny is in his own hands.

Just as common as the success via hard work stories are those that undermine that very idea. These latter authors observed that no matter how hard some individuals worked, they were never able to succeed, and in fact, their stories often ended in tragedy. In these texts, cruel ship captains, plantation owners, factory managers, and bankers are all stock characters, who provide roadblocks to the success of physical laborers who struggle to maintain their survival on a day-to-day basis. In these pieces of social protest, writers claimed that all of the sweat and energy men invested in their physical labor meant nothing because they could not support themselves, never mind their families. These work narratives were more popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the period of naturalism. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Rebecca Harding Davis' "Life in the Iron Mills, or the Korl Woman," Frank Norris's *The Octopus*, and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* all depict the hardships inherent in working in America's factories and on America's farms and the impossibility of achieving success through hard work alone. However, there are some earlier examples, such as Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s *Two Years*

Before the Mast, which describes the cruel and oppressive sea captain who subjected his men to immense suffering as they worked in the fur trade off the coast of California, and J. Ross Browne's *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*, which emphasizes that the common sailors working aboard the *Styx* were lucky if they were able to avoid starvation and flogging, and that earning wealth and riches was far from their minds as they struggled just to return home alive.

Interestingly enough, almost all of the work narratives that either praise or condemn American capitalism center their discussion on the contentious relationship between work and American national identity. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur maintains that men working in the whaling industry and the agricultural arena are ideal examples of American citizens because they have the opportunity, provided by the laissez-faire policies of the United States government, to work hard, exercise their natural ingenuity, and achieve material success. Their success is uniquely American because only this country provides them with the tools necessary to achieve what they are capable of when they dedicate themselves to their livelihoods. J. Ross Browne argues that in a country that promises basic human rights and freedoms to all, men should not be treated as despicably as they are in the whaling industry, and John Steinbeck, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, demonstrates that no matter how hard some men might work, they are doomed to a life of poverty because of the way capitalism works. In these latter instances, there is no way to achieve any kind of success via hard work and dedication to one's tasks.

Thus far, I have positioned the whaling narratives within the context of the genre of the American work narrative, but I also want to highlight a few of the empirical facets of the whaling industry that made it both so attractive to and problematic for those who wished to claim its work identity for the national. Whaling, in particular, was available for these kinds of national appropriations because this kind of work bore several important similarities to agricultural work—already a part of the national imagination—and because, in some ways, the ocean possessed the same qualities as that of the Western frontier. Whaling involved extracting commodities from nature just as farming did, and just as God gave man instructions to subdue the earth, he also gave him “dominion over the fish of the sea” (Gen. 1.28). Indeed, American nautical and American frontier writing use symbiotic metaphors to mark their connection. Herman Melville often uses frontier images in *Moby-Dick* to describe both the sailors aboard the *Pequod* and the moods of the ocean, while both James Fenimore Cooper and Francis Parkman, Jr., employ nautical imagery to describe the landscape of the Great Plains. Gigantic waves were

often described as mountains while their troughs were referred to as valleys, and the undulating landscape of the Great Plains was described variously as a sea or ocean of waving grass. Covered wagons thus became “prairie schooners.” If, as Slotkin and Myra Jehlen argue, Americans defined themselves according to the landscape of the continent’s interior, then this metaphorical interchange suggests that they also defined themselves according to the oceanic landscape, and furthermore, they tended to gender both similarly. Annette Kolodny, in *The Land Before Her*, claims that “the myth of the woodland hero necessarily involves a man...and a quintessentially feminine terrain apparently designed to gratify his desires” (5). Thus, the land was gendered as feminine, making it available to be conquered and subdued by the men traversing it. As Haskell Springer observes in the Introduction to *America and the Sea: A Literary History*, much of nineteenth-century American nautical writing shows that the ocean was similarly gendered as feminine, making it available for the same purposes (18-19). In this way, the whaling narratives represented the whalers’ relationship with the ocean as quite confrontational, as amplified versions of the contests between man and nature which occurred on the frontier, because the ocean was so much more vast, mind-boggling, and frightening than the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains.

Whaling resisted nationalistic appropriations because it was not regarded as a very respectable profession by the vast majority of sailors, and most experienced sailors refused to set foot on whaleships. In *Two Years Before the Mast*, Richard Henry Dana, Jr., dubs whaleships “spouters,” or floating tubs, operated by inexperienced “hayseeds,” who never had to learn how to trim the sails with the efficiency of skilled merchantmen (281-82). His opinion is supported by evidence from other texts which comment on how ugly whaleships were in comparison to merchant vessels, beautiful crafts built for speed. Also, the stench of whalers—a result of processing the whale oil from the carcass—reputedly contaminated the air for miles. Whaling was such an undesirable profession for many sailors that at the mid-point of the nineteenth century, when the business was the most prosperous, owners found it so difficult to recruit seasoned men that they were forced to advertise in local newspapers and hire anyone who was interested.²⁶ Apparently, there was a lack of *skilled* labor because very few sailors who had any experience would sign on for such a voyage. Owners did not have much trouble filling the berths on the ship with naïve men who responded to false promises of quickly-gained riches,

²⁶ This is how J. Ross Browne joined the crew of a whaleship.

exotic world travel, and wild adventure, but this meant that they were often forced to employ non-New Englanders, journeyman sailors, and immigrant Americans—Pacific Islanders, the Portuguese, the Irish, and Africans.²⁷ These hiring practices meant that the ideal Americans who worked in the whaling industry and who represented the best that America had to offer often were not American citizens by birth, since many of them were immigrants who did not enjoy citizen status or foreigners who had no wish to become Americans.

Unlike other kinds of work, the whaling industry simultaneously employed both residual and emergent business practices in which older forms of labor organization co-existed with newer ones.²⁸ For example, whalers worked according to both guild models, which emphasized apprenticeship and advancement according to skill level, and factory models, which assigned workers specific mundane repetitive tasks like those on an assembly line. This historical layering is further complicated, in the narratives, by the problem of perspective because aspects of the industry—like the share system—which writers such as Crèvecoeur regarded as special innovations were actually historically residual practices that had been largely abandoned in most sectors of the American economy.²⁹ The key to understanding why the whaling industry employed both guild and factory models of labor organization is that the work of whaling required two very different kinds of physical labor: the spotting, catching, and killing of the whale, and the cutting, boiling, and processing of the whale to render the oil. In the former, men were trained according to a guild model—especially in the early years when the industry was centered on Nantucket—where they progressively learned the skills of spotting whales, rowing the boats as part of a team, harpooning the whale, and lancing it. Success

²⁷ For more information on advertising practices and the composition of a whaler's crew see Margaret Creighton's *Rites & Passages*.

²⁸ I have taken the terms "residual" and "emergent" from Raymond Williams's work in *The Country and the City and Culture & Society: 1780-1950*.

²⁹ Many whaling narratives, in addition to Crèvecoeur's, comment on the lay system. *Moby-Dick*, Nelson Cole Haley's narrative, and J. Ross Browne's *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* also all discuss this particular organization of labor. Historical studies of the whaling industry, such as Briton Cooper Busch's "*Whaling Will Never Do For Me*," Edouard A. Stackpole's *The Sea-Hunters: The Great Age of Whaling*, and Margaret Creighton's *Rites & Passages* are excellent resources for learning more about the lay system as well as other particulars about whaling. Stackpole's study tends to laud the New England whalers and the industry in which they worked, and he is not as critical of some of the industry's practices as Busch and Creighton, but his study is valuable for learning about many of the whalers' accomplishments and contributions of science and exploration. Both Creighton and Busch provide a great deal of information about the history of the New England whaling industry, its organization of labor, and the specific tasks whalers performed. They also furnish various perspectives on the relationships these whalers had with women—both wives at home and the women they met in their travels. And many of them comment on the ways in which the whaling industry managed the racial and ethnic makeup of its labor forces.

depended on the collective efforts of every man in the boat since there was no room for error. Clumsy oarsmanship, lack of attention to duty, and panic could result in instant failure and even death for all involved. Therefore, every aspect of the process was organized according to a strict hierarchy in which young men began their careers as rowers and were expected to learn the trade and work their way up the system as they grew older and more experienced. If they were successful at moving up the ranks, they became harpooners, the men who threw the first irons at the whale; mates, the men who managed the crew of each individual whaleboat and lanced and actually killed the whale; and eventually captains, the men in charge of the entire ship.³⁰

The guild model thrived because the technology for killing whales remained largely the same throughout both the rise and decline of the industry. Whalers never experienced the problem that John Henry did, being replaced by a machine, because bomb lances and explosive harpoons were not introduced until the end of the nineteenth century, and most whalers found that using these innovations was more trouble than it was worth.³¹ The new implements were awkward and prone to failure; thus, while the men were willing to try them, they did not find them adequate to their needs, and they usually fell back to using simpler harpoons and lances. Because of this lack of technology, whaling remained a highly skilled type of physical labor that needed to be learned in successive stages, and whalers could fairly consistently be praised for their physical capacities and practical knowledges. After all, not just anyone could toss a harpoon into a whale and be successful. A whaler had to know how to balance himself in the whaleboat, what parts of the whales' anatomy were the best to strike, and how to time the toss.

As the narratives demonstrate, whaling's demand for prowess and skill gave writers of whaling narratives a way of likening the whalers to frontier heroes, the pioneers of the interior United States. Not only was the ocean landscape similar to that of the frontier, but the men working in both areas had many things in common. In the narratives, this comparison almost always co-exists with a sense of nostalgia about the industry. I would liken this to the same sense of nostalgia about the English countryside that Raymond Williams observes in his book,

³⁰ This upward mobility is what Crèvecoeur describes in the whaling chapters of *Letters from an American Farmer* and what Haley discusses in his personal narrative of his whaling career. Busch and Creighton both explain how static this system actually was, however.

³¹ Many of the later narratives emphasize that whaling was still practiced according to these older methods and that technological developments failed to help the whaling industry. Robert Cushman Murphy claims in *A Dead Whale or a Stove Boat* that even as late as the voyage he discusses (which took place from 1912 to 1913) that "the craft and methods of whalings under canvas had seen almost no change during a century" (i). He goes on to say that the only change that had occurred was in the racial composition of the crew, for "Yankee crews had vanished" (i).

The Country and the City, in which authors long for a more innocent past where men worked closely with the earth, tilling it and cultivating it. He points out that there was no such earlier period of perfect bliss, innocence, and simplicity; rather, there was always a longing to go back to a prior epoch, a non-existent Golden Age. In the rapidly industrializing United States of the nineteenth century, many writers wanted to see whaling as an industry—still existing in the present—that harked back to a past in which men confronted nature with the simplest of weapons, classically carving out a living in the most honest of ways. In a world in which there was a widespread sense that industrial capitalism required people to make their living at the expense of others, this perspective was an attractive fantasy of primitive subsistence and made use of many already-entrenched ideas about the value of individualism and self-reliance. Many narratives, such as those of James Fenimore Cooper, represent whalers as ruggedly self-reliant because they traverse and explore unknown parts of the world, living closely with the fickle elements of nature, the terrifying and sublime ocean. Cooper's writings, for the most part, do not contend with the economic infrastructure of the whaling industry; instead he effaces the work and describes the whalers as enmeshed in a complex romantic relationship with nature, living with it, enduring its harsh conditions, and confronting its largest creatures with the simplest of tools.

While the act of hunting and killing whales might have made the American whalers seem praiseworthy because they resembled the much-admired, rugged pioneers of the West, processing the whale once it was killed was sheer drudgery, and the men in charge of this process were actually more like the much-exploited factory workers of the late nineteenth century. Cutting up the carcass and boiling down the oil required physical labor which was organized according to an assembly line, an important precursor to those which appeared later in many industrial factories.³² Because this form of labor organization had not yet been widely used in America at the time he was writing, Crèvecoeur could call this system and the industry that employed it quite progressive. Methods of rendering whale oil continued to change and develop throughout the duration of the industry due in part to technological improvements which

³² Melville's chapter "The Try-Works" in *Moby-Dick* describes in particularly vivid images the process of rendering the oil from the whale's blubber. Interestingly enough, George F. Tucker's article, "New Bedford," appearing in the *New England Magazine* in 1896, makes much of how New Bedford transitioned from a whaling town to an industrial factory town. Other literary critics, such as C.L.R. James and William Spanos among others, have also noticed the similarities between how factories and whalerships organized their labor forces.

helped to make this process easier. When whales were plentiful off the Nantucket coastline, the carcasses were towed to shore so that they could be cut up and the blubber processed on the beach. As the whaleships wandered further and further afield in search of increasingly scarce whales, methods of processing the oil on board ship were developed. Gigantic trypots and furnaces were adapted so that they could be lit at sea—without setting the ship on fire—, and strategies were devised for making the whale fast to the ship and cutting it up on the open ocean.³³ These inventions were why whaleships became “floating tubs” instead of aesthetically pleasing sailing ships. They were made for stability, to support both the weight of the try-works and the unprocessed whales that were attached to the ship. At home, inventors were developing patents for making longer lasting spermaceti candles and for further refining the oil to make it burn more efficiently. All of these jobs—both at home, on land, and at sea, aboard ship—were organized according to a factory system that predated the industrial model that appeared much in nineteenth-century America and gave rise to a number of protests about the whaling industry—which bear many similarities to the dime novels about factory work that Michael Denning discusses in *Mechanic Accents*—and how it abused the physical endurance and capacity of its workers.

Interestingly enough, some aspects of the industry could be viewed as both emergent and residual. Among writers of whaling narratives, there was much dispute about the share system that evolved as a method of financially compensating the men for their labors. Instead of earning a set salary for a voyage, a whaleman was paid, according to his abilities and experience, a certain percentage of the final proceeds of the voyage. Crèvecoeur and Thomas Nickerson suggest that this system was an ingenious and fair invention, a novel idea, on the part of the ship owners; however, Melville and Browne point out how exploitative it was. Despite Crèvecoeur’s claims, though, historical evidence suggests that this model of organizing payment for services rendered was not new. In fact, Eric Hobsbawm, Marcus Rediker, and Cesare Casarino all demonstrate that the share system was derived from the practices of merchants doing business before the development of capitalism.³⁴ Wage labor was actually a relatively new phenomenon

³³ Stackpole’s *The Sea-Hunters* elaborates upon the historical development of the whaling industry with regard to these kinds of technological inventions and the increasing duration of the voyages.

³⁴ See Casarino’s *Modernity at Sea*, Hobsbawm’s *Industry and Empire*, and Rediker’s *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* for more on this subject.

in late eighteenth-century America, whereas the share system was a more traditional practice which had largely been abandoned by merchants doing business at this time.

Taken together, the history of the whaling industry in terms of how it organized and re-organized its labor forces sheds some light on why the work of whaling was so often Americanized as well as how it resisted these appropriations—how whaling narratives helped to develop and capitalize upon a dominant conglomerate identity that had to do with masculinity, physical labor, and American-ness. The fact that the hunting of whales was often singled out as an act of individual confrontation with nature and likened to pioneering and exploring the West helps to explain why writers such as James Fenimore Cooper described the American whalers as ideal national citizens, and the fact that the processing of whales resembled factory work gave writers such as Crèvecoeur and Browne, respectively, a basis upon which to praise these innovations in labor organization or to criticize the hierarchical and exploitative labor practices of ship captains and owners. What remains to be seen is just how authors who sought to nationalize the work of whaling grafted onto whalers the dominant conglomerate identity of American manly laborer.

3.0 CHAPTER 3

“In a land where sobriety and industry never fail to meet with the most ample rewards”: Manly Physical Labor and American National Identity, Continued

I began the last chapter with Thomas Jefferson’s comments about virtuous and independent farmers in order to demonstrate how he transforms agricultural identity into an American national identity, and I launch this one with J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s statement about the Nantucket whalemén because of the parallels inherent in the language employed by both. For Crèvecoeur, in *Letters from an American Farmer*, “the land” is the land of America, the realm of possibility inhabited by the moral and the virtuous, the sober and industrious. This nation is where any individual man who possesses these qualities can achieve material success. Much like Jefferson, Crèvecoeur attempts to appropriate working identity for national purposes, defining Americans by both their virtues and the work that they do. Thus, he helps to apply a particular dominant conglomerate identity—already firmly entrenched in the American imagination and already being used to describe American farmers—to the Nantucket whalemén.

What differentiates the statements of Jefferson and Crèvecoeur and what is important to notice about them is that Jefferson saw something about the work of farming that was inherently moral; therefore, he was able to claim that farmers made better national citizens because of the virtues that they already possessed. For Crèvecoeur, whalemén were not automatically made moral by their occupation. He could not claim that they were because their work did not have the long history that agricultural work did. After all, men had been farming for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, while, at the time Crèvecoeur was writing, men had been whaling on Nantucket for approximately a century. Whaling had been in existence in the colonies before the American Revolution, but it had not accrued the genealogy of thought and wealth of meaning that farming had. Thus, Crèvecoeur is forced to argue that whalemén are ideal Americans not because they are virtuous people, but because the country in which they live always rewards

virtuous behavior with monetary success and material wealth. He works backwards from this adjusted formulation of America and American national identity, and claims that because the Nantucket whalers live in the United States and because they have been able to achieve such wonderful success in the face of adversity, they are exemplars of the American spirit.

Crèvecoeur's description of the Nantucket whalers as ideal Americans indicates that simply taking the national role farmers enjoyed and transferring it to other American physical laborers, namely the whalers, was no easy task. This dominant conglomerate identity required adjustment, and it was not just because whaling had not been in existence as long as farming. There was something about whaling that resisted being appropriated for national purposes. The best way to explain this is to turn back to the sets of antinomies I described in the introduction, the troubling sets of oppositional identities that required subordination and management. A dominant conglomerate identity—"manly laboring American whaler"—did emerge from these antinomies, and it was similar to the "manly laboring individual farmer." The problem is that, for whalers, the identities which put pressure on the dominant ones were far more difficult to manage than they were for farmers, and they always threatened to disrupt the dominant conglomerate identity. As I noted in the introduction, whalers were both world travelers and American citizens, but American farmers lived most of their lives on American soil. Therefore, writers who wanted to argue that the whalers were ideal Americans had to find a way to cope with the fact that these men could form bonds with each other that transcended nationality. This chapter will focus on the rhetorical maneuvers required to subordinate and capitalize upon the other identities whalers possessed in order to uphold a particular kind of nationalized fantasy of masculine physical labor.

In the previous chapter, I explained how this combinatory identity came into being in reference to farmers, and I unraveled some of the individual identities of which it is composed in order to explain why it has enjoyed such a long life in the American imagination. However, it is important to turn to specific whaling narratives in order to explore just how they describe this particular dominant ideological fantasy of American-ness. Here, I mean to examine how individual authors coped with the empirical aspects of work in the whaling industry. Every individual brand of physical labor has its own material realities, and those of the whaling industry often threatened to dismantle the ideology that performing physical labor contributed to the exemplary character of American men. Therefore, I address the whaling narratives of

Crèvecoeur alongside those of James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville in order to explore how each author dealt with these challenges. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur attempts to transform the whalers into ideal national citizens by concealing several of the empirical realities of working in this industry. By paying careful attention to which facets of the work of whaling Crèvecoeur highlights and which he ignores, it is possible to explain how a dominant conglomerate identity emerges at the expense of the other identities of which it subordinates. Analyzing the work narrative moment of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pilot* demonstrates how the dominant conglomerate identity can still continue to function, albeit flawed and imperfectly, when some of its constituent identities are missing: in this case, when the physical labor of whaling is effaced and this work is described as an entertaining activity. Finally, the example of Queequeg in *Moby-Dick* shows how, in Ishmael, Bildad, and Peleg's hands, some of the subordinate identities—for example, Queequeg's racialized identity—might be manipulated so that they mesh with the dominant conglomerate. I argue that the Americanization of Queequeg, his re-naming, neutralizes his “savage,” cannibalistic identity, blends him seamlessly into the rest of the crew and almost entirely erases his presence from the rest of the novel.

3.1 SECTION 1

“Here...human industry has acquired a boundless field to exert itself in—a field which will not be fully cultivated in many ages!”: J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*

At first glance, the epigraph above, taken from J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*, might seem to be referring to agricultural work.³⁵ However, it actually

³⁵ In fact, most contemporary scholarship on Crèvecoeur tends to focus on what he appears to be discussing here, agricultural work, not the Nantucket chapters of *Letters from an American Farmer*, which focus on the work of whaling. Thomas Philbrick's *St. John de Crèvecoeur* does discuss these latter sections, but he claims that they are subordinate to the larger project of *Letters*, namely the description of the American character. For interesting readings of how Crèvecoeur describes the American character via agriculture and slavery see Nancy Ruttenburg's *Democratic Personality: Popular Voice and the Trial of American Authorship* and Myra Jehlen's *American Incarnation*. Gay Wilson Allen and Roger Asselineau's biography of Crèvecoeur, *St. John de Crèvecoeur: The Life of an American Farmer*, is also a good resource for learning more about Crèvecoeur's background and his interest in farming.

appears in the last of the five sections of the text devoted to the Nantucket whalers, and it refers to their mode of existence and their ingenuity in eking out a living, and a prosperous one at that, on what amounts to a sandbar off the coast of Massachusetts (109-10). Crèvecoeur's choice to use land-based imagery to depict the ocean is not unique, for, as I noted in Chapter 2, much late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American writing describes the ocean using the language of the land and vice versa. However, what differentiates Crèvecoeur from these other authors is that he is not describing the ocean itself, but the work performed on it by the Nantucket whalers. In Crèvecoeur's formulation, the work of whaling is figuratively akin to the work of farming—the oceans are transformed into a “boundless field” which the whalers have only to “cultivate” by harvesting the whales, an almost inexhaustible resource.³⁶ To a certain extent, this comparison is a logical one given that the rest of the text addresses the work of farming, and, like his contemporary, Thomas Jefferson, Crèvecoeur thought that the nautical and agricultural sectors were the two most important arenas of employment for American citizens.³⁷ However, this paradigmatic metaphor is forced on an industry that really had very little in common with farming. Because they spent so much time on the ocean, the Nantucket whalers might have had an intimate connection with nature like farmers, but whaling did not foster the more symbiotic relationship with nature that the farmers arguably had; the whalers's relationship with nature was quite confrontational. I say “arguably” because much agricultural literature does discuss subduing the wilderness, transforming untamed, wild spaces into cultivated fields. But farmers ultimately worked to *grow* crops before they harvested them; whereas, the whalers violently *took* from nature what they wanted, without a thought as to whether or not this was a productive use of natural resources. In terms of the labor they performed, these whale hunters had far more in common with the fur traders of the Western frontier, men who, according to Crèvecoeur, lived so far from civilization that they were morally degraded and were more savage than they were human. This one example represents the larger problem of the entire Nantucket section of *Letters from an American Farmer*, because Crèvecoeur, in his attempt to make the

³⁶ This is obviously Crèvecoeur's mistaken opinion because sperm whales did eventually become quite scarce. At first, it became difficult to find whales in close proximity of Nantucket, and the whalers were forced to expand their voyages into the North Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Arctic Oceans. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was no longer economically feasible to outfit whaling voyages because it took so long to find enough whales to fill the ships' holds with oil.

³⁷ Note that Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787) and Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) were both originally published in England roughly five years apart.

Nantucket whalemens into ideal Americans by tapping into already existing ideological fantasies of physical, masculine labor, consistently forces his descriptions of their business into paradigms that do not quite fit.

Crèvecoeur was not shy about critiquing what he perceived to be the degenerative personality characteristics of frontier pioneers and Southern plantation owners, so why was he so generous in his description of the Nantucket whalemens? A partial answer lies in the fact that Crèvecoeur was already so enamored of New Englanders that he could not help but admire them. He also respected the fact that they were laborers themselves, not lazy idlers like the pioneers, or cruel abusers of slave labor like the Southern plantation owners.³⁸ *Letters from an American Farmer* has long been considered a foundational text in the description of the American character, for, after all, it describes the United States as the proverbial “melting pot,” a place which accepts all immigrants and grants them equal opportunity, freedom, and independence. Crèvecoeur gave Europeans a vision of America celebrating the best characteristics of the nation and its citizens and downplaying some of the flaws and contradictions already apparent in the new nation. One of the reasons why Crèvecoeur was so fascinated by the Nantucket whalemens was because he already had a strong predisposition towards New Englanders:

The eastern provinces must indeed be excepted as being the unmixed descendents of Englishmen. I have heard many wish that they had been more intermixed also; for my part, I am no wisher and think it much better as it has happened...I respect them for what they have done; for the accuracy and wisdom with which they have settled their territory; for the decency of their manners; for their early love of letters; their ancient college, the first in this hemisphere; for their industry, which to me who am but a farmer is the criterion of everything. (68)

In this section, Crèvecoeur hierarchically and categorically ranks the various groups of American immigrants according to their nation of origin. For him, each type of nationality possesses certain essential personality characteristics, which determine whether or not they will be successful even before they reach American soil. Englishmen are at the top of the list because of their “wisdom,” “decency,” and “industry,” while the Irish are towards the bottom because “they love to drink and to quarrel; they are litigious and soon take to the gun, which is the ruin of everything” (85). This shorthand method of assessing the quality of national character is not

³⁸ This is Crèvecoeur’s description of frontier pioneers and his perception of the kind of labor they performed.

unusual; however, I want to point out that Crèvecoeur's predilection towards New Englanders makes it possible to ignore the darker side of the region's and the peoples' history, such as the racial and religious intolerance of the early years of the Massachusetts Bay colony. Possessing such a high degree of esteem for New Englanders—based on their genealogical origins—makes it possible to find so much to praise about the Nantucket whalemens, as well as so much to ignore.

In Crèvecoeur's text, though, defining American national identity via the national origins of American citizens is eventually replaced by focusing on the specific kinds of productive physical labor American men performed and the exceptionally moral and virtuous manner in which they worked. I say "productive physical labor" because, with the possible exception of the yeoman farmer, who did not actually till the field and harvest his own crops, almost all of the kinds of labor which Crèvecoeur attempts to appropriate for nationalist purposes involved the use of specifically physical toil to produce some kind of commodity. Crèvecoeur found the Nantucket whaling industry perfectly suited to these purposes partially because he highly respected New Englanders already, but primarily because whale oil was a highly valued commodity, which required a great deal of dangerous physical labor to gather. Like many authors of work narratives who praise the exceptional qualities of Americans who perform physical labor, Crèvecoeur sets out to describe all the particulars of the whaling industry: its origins and development, the kinds of labor required of the men, and the dedication they have to their work.

Right from the very beginning, however, he seems to realize that his readers might find these Nantucket chapters to be rather oddly placed in a work narrative that otherwise focuses on the more widespread and accepted practice of farming. At the time that Crèvecoeur was writing, the whaling industry was centralized in Nantucket, and other port cities were involved in diverse mercantile maritime activities. Whaling was hardly an arena which employed a significant number of Americans, even if it did generate a significant amount of income for the island of Nantucket. In order to justify making broad generalizations about an entire nationality by examining such a small segment of the population, he explains that there are many places in America, rich in natural resources, that make successful development rather easy. These are not places that interest Crèvecoeur because individuals in these places do not have to display any special talents or characteristics; he is more interested in what Americans can do when confronted with adversity:

I have a spot in my view, where none of these occupations [farming, logging, etc.] are performed, which will, I hope, reward us for the trouble of inspection; but though it [Nantucket] is barren in its soil, insignificant in its extent, inconvenient in its situation, deprived of materials for building, it seems to have been inhabited merely to prove what mankind can do when happily governed! (108)

Here, Crèvecoeur links American-ness to both already existing and developing ideologies of working identity having to do with the nationalization of physical masculine labor, but also to political governance in terms of the kind of government all Americans enjoy. He elaborates upon this comment a bit later in the text, explaining that the benignly negligent economic policies of the United States' government, regarding limited taxes and trade restrictions, allows its citizens to pursue whatever avenue of successfully making a living they choose.

As I observed above, Crèvecoeur's strategy here is to show how this outcast population, faced with extreme adversity, living on the outermost limits of the nation, perfectly embodies American values and personalities. This synecdoche, using Nantucketers as representative Americans, is a rhetorical move which depends upon what Sacvan Bercovitch calls, in reference to jeremiads, "an effort to impose metaphor upon reality" (62). In other words, if the Nantucketers appear to possess the same virtues, the same work ethic and the same ingenuity, as all other Americans, then it does not matter that they live in a geographically remote region of the nation and work in a business that exists only on their island. Synecdochic representations of the nation based upon smaller segments of its population abound in American literature both before and after the time at which Crèvecoeur was writing, and their transformation into national ideologies has been the subject of much critical attention in both Sacvan Bercovitch's *The American Jeremiad* and Warren Motley's *The American Abraham*. What I want to focus on in reference to Crèvecoeur is, taking a cue from Bercovitch, the rhetorical effort required to impose this metaphor upon reality, for the problem with Crèvecoeur's synecdoche is that he ignores the fact that these whalemens were not just isolated geographically; they worked in an intensely hierarchical industry which stratified the population into relatively static classes of individuals, some of whom enjoyed more dominance and prosperity than others. What's more, Nantucket Islanders were primarily Quakers, a group who, depending on the time period, could be either highly esteemed or severely persecuted.

Crèvecoeur does concede that the whaling industry operates according to a fiction of meritocracy, and not everyone is successful, because the maritime industries, by necessity, did create classes of individuals, some of whom occupy the lower levels. Whaleships had only one captain, and they needed a whole host of mates, harpooners, foremast hands, and cabin boys, who were all designated ranks and privileges based on their respective positions aboard ship. Even though this admission threatens to damage his argument, Crèvecoeur makes the claim that every sailor has an equal opportunity for success as long as he *works hard* to improve himself: “The sea which surrounds them is equally open to all and presents to all an equal title to the chance of good fortune” (126). In Crèvecoeur’s estimation, it is primarily the fault of the laborer if he remains at the bottom of the nautical hierarchy, because his class position is determined by his own abilities and personal work ethic. Even though an individual laborer’s lack of ability might hinder his progress, a whaleman could always develop his skills and work harder. Even though the whaling industry could and did operate according to the more static class system of industrial capitalism, which trapped mid to late nineteenth-century factory workers into positions that they could not change no matter how hard they worked, Crèvecoeur prefers to describe the hierarchy of the whaling industry in terms of the older, guild model of labor organization—still in use in the colonies at the time he was writing—in which young men apprenticed themselves to ship captains to learn the trade and then moved up the ranks accordingly. He maintains that “They [young sailors] then go gradually through every station of rowers, steersmen, and harpooners; thus they learn to attack, to pursue, to overtake, to cut, to dress their huge game; and after having performed several such voyages and perfected themselves in this business, they are fit either for the counting-house or the chase” (129). By describing the labor system of the whaling industry in terms of this older model of organization, Crèvecoeur can maintain that the class positions necessary to operating a whaleship are not completely static. Instead, sailors appear to slide up the scale in proportion to the number of voyages they take and the amount of work they are willing to invest in terms of learning the trade. He never mentions that some men, especially Native Americans and other ethnic minorities, who composed a significant portion of the workforce, could spend their entire lives toiling away without any hope of achieving the higher stations in the hierarchy like first mate or captain.

Perhaps the aspect of the whaling industry which Crèvecoeur admires the most in terms of his economic analysis is the system of lays which the owners of the whaleships developed to

provide incentives to the men. Instead of likening it to older models of labor organization in the shipping industries—which it actually was—he describes it as an ingenious, novel invention on the part of the Islanders: “They [the whalers] have no wages; each draws a certain established share in partnership with the proprietor of the vessel, by which economy they are all proportionally concerned in the success of the enterprise and all equally alert and vigilant” (134). Crèvecoeur again plays on the fact that the arrangement of the labor forces of the whaling industry was composed of both residual and emergent business practices, and he clearly admires this system because he suggests that it makes all the sailors personally invested in the proceeds of the voyage. What he ignores, however, is just how exploitative this system actually was, for, as Margaret Creighton maintains in her book, *Rites & Passages: The Experiences of American Whaling, 1830-1870*, ship owners, during the time at which Crèvecoeur was writing, received about 1/16th of all the profits of a typical voyage and the common hands about 1/36th (22). In addition to their low shares, foremast hands risked injury and death far more than their captains, replaced lost gear and worn clothing from the ships’ stores at extremely marked-up prices, and often returned home owing money to the ship’s owners rather than earning any.

Crèvecoeur’s investment in American capitalism runs the risk of overvaluing the material success of the Islanders, and he counters this emphasis on the value of economic success with a description of the moral character of Nantucketers. In his formulation, capitalism and Christianity require each other; in other words, they are check and balance for each other. Essentially, it is both the Nantucket Islander’s shrewd business sense and their dedication to cultivating moral virtues which make them exemplary Americans. Crèvecoeur was not alone in observing that while capitalism does encourage healthy competition and a strong work ethic, it also promotes greed and an all-consuming obsession with material gain; this is also a subject of concern for James Fenimore Cooper in *The Sea Lions* (1860), and, oddly enough, they both have the same solution, Christianity. The main problem with Crèvecoeur’s argument—and Cooper’s for that matter—is that he juxtaposes several conflicting concepts about work, morality and American-ness, forcing them to operate together. In other words, Crèvecoeur admires the atmosphere of religious freedom and tolerance existing on the Island, but he wants to make the moral argument on religious grounds—attributing the work ethic which makes the Islanders so virtuous to their Protestant belief systems.

Religious identification is an apparently un-American solution to the potential evils of capitalism run amok, given the ways in which the Constitution attempts to separate church and state, and, as a result, Crèvecoeur is forced to perform a series of rhetorical gymnastics in order to endorse it. He thus focuses not on the virtues of belonging to any particular sect of Protestantism, but on the moral benefits of possessing the work ethic common to them all. As Max Weber argues, the Protestant work ethic was not an acknowledged tenet of faith, but it was an unconscious secular translation of Protestantism, through which members of many sects defrayed their anxiety about not knowing whether they were pre-destined for heaven or hell. What Crèvecoeur does is further participate in the secularization of the Protestant work ethic and help to raise it from the level of the unconscious to the conscious, transforming it into an ideology of American-ness.

While Nantucketers were actually for the most part either Quakers or Presbyterians, Crèvecoeur commends them for the religious freedom that reigns over the island, because the islanders, instead of fighting amongst themselves or persecuting each other for their religious beliefs, leave everyone free to worship in his or her own way (149-50). Religion, any Protestant religion, apparently gives its practitioners a healthy sense of right and wrong and guides them through their daily lives such that instead of becoming greedy and materialistic, they work hard and live humble lives. This argument assumes, though, that religion is essential to the development of morality and is an essential component of national identity. What's more, Crèvecoeur's sense of the concept of the freedom of religion remains rooted in Christianity: "I wish I had it in my power to send the most persecuting bigot I could find in ——— to the whale fisheries; in less than three or four years you would find him a much more tractable man and therefore a better Christian" (150). Working in the whale fishery, makes the individual not a better human being, but "a better *Christian*," which will, rather ironically, make him a better American.³⁹

To further complicate matters, Quakers, who constituted a significant portion of the population of Nantucket at the time Crèvecoeur was writing, were a religious group which—with the partial exception of some of those living in Pennsylvania—endured a remarkable amount of religious persecution dating back to their first arrival in New England in the late seventeenth century. In *Quakers in the Colonial Northeast*, Arthur J. Worrall writes that Quakers who were

³⁹ Emphasis mine.

caught preaching their beliefs and spreading their doctrines in the Massachusetts Bay Colony were either exiled or punished by having their ears cut off or holes punched through their tongues (11). As the eighteenth century progressed, Quakers did not experience the degree of intolerance that they had in the early colonial period, but they were still subject to the persecutions of those who did not understand them or agree with them, especially during times of war, when Quaker pacifists refused to take up arms and join local militias. What is so remarkable about Crèvecoeur's attempt to transform the Nantucket Quaker whalemens into ideal Americans is that in 1777—a scant five years before he published *Letters from an American Farmer*—John Adams helped to compose a list of individuals, primarily consisting of Quakers, whom he considered to be spies for the British (Kafer 2). According to Peter Kafer in *Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution and the Birth of American Gothic*, the evidence against these Philadelphia Quakers was either quite thin or non-existent, but they were quickly arrested and, without explanation or trial, summarily exiled to the Virginia frontier, where several of them died and left their families in Philadelphia destitute and poverty-stricken (Kafer 5).

Given these historically contemporary instances in which Quakers were severely oppressed and harassed by other Americans who mistrusted them, Crèvecoeur's claim that these Quaker whalemens perfectly represented the American spirit seems rather odd. But while Quaker pacifism may have been problematic during the Indian Wars and the American Revolution, in the nineteenth century, they came to be admired by some in the Northeast for their stance against slavery, their sense of moderation and humility, and their belief that all human beings—women, Native Americans, and African Americans, included—were fundamentally equal in the eyes of God. Crèvecoeur's strategy is to focus on some of these latter tenets of the Quaker belief system, not on the history of abuse and suspicion that Quakers endured in the Americas from the time of their arrival, and he maintains that because of their moderate and humble temperaments, Quakers are not fanatical religious zealots. Of the Nantucket Quakers, he says, "Every one goes to that place of worship which he likes best, and thinks not that his neighbour does wrong by not following him; each, busily employed in their temporal affairs, is less vehement about spiritual ones, and fortunately you will find at Nantucket neither idle drones, voluptuous devotees, ranting enthusiasts, nor sour demagogues" (150). What Crèvecoeur discourages is obsession with either capitalism or religion; the Islanders' secular devotion to their capitalist enterprises balances out and modifies their religious fervor such that both manage to co-exist in harmony. Because

Nantucketers have practical affairs to consider, they have no time for extreme religious ardor, and this creates the sense of tolerance on the Island which Crèvecoeur celebrates. In this way, Crèvecoeur takes this largely Quaker population and attempts to fit them seamlessly into the mainstream body of American citizens. These are moral, hard-working, moderately-inclined individuals, ingeniously making a successful living in the “land of opportunity,” and they come to synecdochically represent all Americans.

What *Letters from an American Farmer* reveals is just how strong and persuasive the desire to define American national identity via fantasies of masculine physical labor was even at this early stage in the development of the United States. Because of the significance of agriculture for many eighteenth-century economic and political theorists, farmers might have been relatively easy to cast as exemplars of the American spirit. But, as I have suggested in my critique of Crèvecoeur’s rhetorical strategies, other kinds of work, such as whaling, resisted these appropriations and raised questions about the efficacy of these ideological fantasies of working and national identity. My point is that even though it required a great deal of rhetorical maneuvering, Crèvecoeur, via the artfulness of his writing, did manage to make the American whalemens seem like ideal Americans. What’s more, the way in which later writers protested against this positioning of the American whalemens is testimony to the strength of his argument. Both J. Ross Browne and Herman Melville ironically observed that in a country that promised freedom and opportunity to all of its workers, the whaling industry was allowed to exploit immigrant and foreign laborers and trap men in hierarchical lives of slavery and drudgery, but, interestingly enough, these critiques never fully managed to reform the whaling industry or dismantle the idea that performing this kind of work made one an ideal American. The ideological fantasy of this kind of masculine physical labor was so compelling that it proved to be highly resistant to such attacks, for in a speech sponsored by the Old Dartmouth Historical Society in 1916, Francis Barton Gummere was able to claim that “now we are ready to immortalize the types of nation-builder so finely embodied in these simple-hearted heroes of the sea” (qtd. in Lindgren 181). Thus, time and time again, even though the whaling industry was critiqued for its oppressive labor practices, the work of whaling was upheld as the most American of pursuits. The issue of labor reform only disappeared when the American whaling industry collapsed because whales became scarce and replacements for whale oil were found, but images of its workers as ideal Americans continued to live on in the American imagination.

3.2 SECTION 2

“‘Tis an awful waste of property”: The Whaling/Work Narrative Moment in James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pilot*

Cooper’s first nautical work, *The Pilot* (1824), which otherwise describes the Revolutionary War exploits of John Paul Jones off the coast of Great Britain, contains a curious chapter in which the intrepid sailors of the United States Navy seize the opportunity presented to them by a break in the fighting to capture and kill a whale. One way of understanding this seemingly superfluous digression is to view it as a “work narrative moment” which attempts to define American-ness via the work of whaling. After all, there is no apparent reason why the soldiers should attempt to kill this whale. They have more lofty goals in mind, and the threat of an attack from British cruisers is imminent, making this endeavor very dangerous. What’s more, they have no way to process the oil and bring it to market; killing this whale is, indeed, “an awful waste of property” (205). However, I would argue that no matter how odd this episode might appear to be, it is no mere digression to add improbable excitement to the novel; rather, it establishes a difference between the American men and the British soldiers, which hinges on the fact that whaling was an activity at which Americans were particularly adept. This moment in the narrative attempts to define American national identity via work—even though the actual work is effaced and is turned into a ritualistic form of sport.

In recent critical discussions of James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*, both Jane Tompkins and Doris Sommer have made the argument that these novels function as “social criticism written in an allegorical mode” (Tompkins 103).⁴⁰ For both scholars, Cooper’s novels are allegories of national identity in which stock, stereotypical characters embody specific national characteristics, and their interactions speak to the promise Cooper saw in America as well as his fears about what America might become. They take their analyses in different directions which ultimately have little to do with what I am suggesting about *The Pilot*. What is useful about their work is the way in which they recognize the allegorical nature of Cooper’s

⁴⁰ Most Cooper scholarship focuses on the *Leatherstocking Tales*, his land-based fiction, as the sections in Tompkins’s *Sensational Designs* and Sommer’s *Foundational Fictions* do. In the nineteenth-century, Cooper’s nautical fiction was at least as popular as his land-based fiction, though. For a nice overview of Cooper’s nautical novels and their relationship to nineteenth-century American nautical fiction, see Thomas Philbrick’s *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction*.

novels, providing a way of understanding the work narrative moment of *The Pilot* in terms of what it has to say about American-ness.⁴¹ As Tompkins argues, Cooper's novels have often been misread by contemporary scholars who do not realize that Cooper's characters are allegorical types of a particular kind—something his nineteenth-century readers would have recognized. What is useful about her claim is that it points out that for any kind of national allegory to be successful, readers must be aware of what the characters represent, otherwise the national allegory loses all of its force. This problem of representation and identification is precisely the difficulty Cooper encounters in *The Pilot*, for his American and British sailors are ostensibly racially, ethnically, and culturally quite alike. Throughout the body of the novel, the sailors, whether they be British or American, seem to be interchangeable, except for the fact that some of them support the American cause and others, the British crown. For Cooper, then, what is crucial to the success of this national allegory is making distinctions between these two very similar groups of men so that his readers might realize that they are indeed quite different.

In order to make these distinctions clear, Cooper works to describe the American sailors according to still developing narratives of national identity. The accident of their birth in the New World does some of this work for him, but Cooper, like Crèvecoeur, also creates a specially admirable identity for them based on the physical labor many of the sailors used to perform whaling. What makes Cooper so different from Crèvecoeur, though, is that he does not describe the sailor's dedication to their work as particularly American or the United States as a special place which enables these men to achieve material success. Instead, he transforms the work of whaling into what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger would call an "invented tradition" of American nationality. For Cooper, this invented tradition helps him to establish what is perceived to be an authentic history for the fledgling United States based upon the kind of work some of its citizens perform. The importance of national historicity to the process of nation-building is not to be underestimated, for as Benedict Anderson argues, "If nation-states are

⁴¹ Tompkins goes on to claim that the power of a novel like *Last of the Mohicans* rests in the way in which Cooper articulates the chaos and fears of an American society comprised of individuals from different races and ethnicities. According to her, Cooper's characters represent allegorical types, and the ways in which they interact throughout the novel demonstrate the dangers that Americans felt about miscegenation. This is why Cora must die and the marriage at the end of the novel occurs between two white, Anglo-Saxon characters: Alice and Duncan. Elaborating on this reading, Doris Sommer extends Tompkins' analysis of Cooper, but her emphasis is on locating "an erotics of politics, to show how a variety of novel national ideals are all ostensibly grounded in 'natural' heterosexual love and in the marriages that provided a figure for apparently nonviolent consolidation during internecine conflicts at mid-century" (6). She uses Cooper to launch this argument which she applies to her main interest: how Latin American writers read Cooper and used many of his allegorical techniques in their own writing.

widely conceived to be ‘new’ and ‘historical,’ the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future” (11-12). It is the invented traditions of nationality that help to establish this past and this future for the nation. Obviously, whaling was not invented by Cooper, and, in this sense, it represents a kind of invented tradition that is somewhat different from the ones Hobsbawm and Ranger discuss, but it is a kind of work that Cooper *claims* as uniquely American in order to allegorically define the specifically exemplary American character traits these men possess—the brave, courageous, and intelligent *whalemen* come to symbolize brave, courageous, and intelligent *Americans*. Whaling had a long history in the New England colonies, and ritualistic whale-hunting both links back to that past and projects into the future the exceptional personality of Americans and what they can achieve as a result of their exceptional character.

By the time Cooper wrote *The Pilot*, the American whaling industry was an incredibly successful one—as Owen Chase notes in his roughly contemporary narrative, the best in the world. Because the whaling industry was developed largely, although not exclusively, by the United States, it gives Cooper an authentic historical background for his men. This generation is not just the offspring of the old British loyalists. They are a brilliant people who have a unique history all their own. Unlike Crèvecoeur, who details the unique local history of Nantucket with an eye towards establishing the whalers’ American identity, Cooper largely ignores any and all local associations his sailors might have with particular geographic regions of the colonies. These men are Americans, not Americans hailing from Nantucket or elsewhere. He only says that Captain Barnstable was raised from a young age in the whaling industry, and he learned everything he knows about sailing on whaleships. Even though he was born at sea, Tom Coffin, another veteran of the trade, bears the name of one of the original founders of the colonial settlement on Nantucket and the name of one of the most famous and successful whaling families on the island.

It is this background that makes the men long to chase the whale even though the British soldiers are fast approaching, but what is perhaps more important is that Cooper makes this communal effort to hunt the whale into an individual confrontation with the brute forces of nature. In this way, Cooper plays off of and reinforces the dominance of one of the most important identities which compose the conglomerate identity of the American whalemen. Cooper’s description of these men makes them seem akin to frontier pioneers such as Natty

Bumppo, Daniel Boone, and Davy Crocket, men who became national heroes for the way in which they were self-reliant, powerful, rugged individuals who paved the way for the civilization of the frontier and the expansion of the nation. Cooper suggests that “The temptation for sport, and the recollection of his [Barnstable’s] early habits, at length prevailed over his anxiety on behalf of his friends, and the young officer inquired of his cockswain [Coffin]— ‘Is there any whale-line in the boat, to make fast to that harpoon which you bear about with you in fair weather or foul?’” (184). Barnstable’s personal history and his character, which displays the masculine “temptation for sport,” makes him long for adventure. The men are off on the chase, which they execute with great skill and bravery: “The cockswain poised his harpoon, with much precision, and then darted it from him with a violence that buried the iron in the blubber of their foe” (185). These are the rituals of hunting whales that Cooper claims as specifically American traditions. Clearly, these men, Barnstable and Coffin in particular, are daring individuals who enjoy the sport of fighting with one of the largest creatures in the ocean, even if it places them in grave danger from the English boats. From this episode, it is not especially clear that these are particularly American traits, but Cooper depends on his readers to recognize that the whaling industry was one at which Americans were especially adept and one which required its workers to confront the powers of nature in the same way as other American heroes.

However, Cooper’s representation of the identity of the American whalers is missing something which is integral to the dominant conglomerate identity and plays an important role in almost all of the other whaling narratives and work narratives, namely, physical labor. For Barnstable and Coffin, hunting, chasing, and killing this whale is excitement, a form of recreation that provides a diversion from their more serious military maneuvers, but the fact that they have no means to try out the oil and bring it to market suggests that they killed this whale just for the sheer joy of the hunt. This episode does emphasize the bravery and skill of the young Americans, which is in itself admirable, but by effacing the physical labor of processing the whale oil, Cooper also casts them as wasteful and impractical. After they have succeeded in killing the whale, Barnstable asks, “‘What’s to be done now...He will yield no food, and his carcass will probably drift to land and furnish our enemies with the oil’” (187). And at the end of the next chapter when the whale’s body reappears, Tom Coffin remarks that “‘it’s enough to raise solemn thoughts in a Cape Poge Indian, to see an eighty barrel whale devoured by shirks— ‘tis an awful waste of property!’” (205). Both men actually recognize that what they have done

was not only dangerous in terms of exposing them to the gunfire from the British cruisers in the area, but incredibly wasteful, because by impetuously killing the whale for the sheer sport of it, they have destroyed any commodity value the whale might have had. Tom Coffin is the only one who seems to be aware of this wastefulness, for he “fastened his eyes of the object of his solicitude, and continued to gaze at it with melancholy regret, while it was to be seen glistening in the sunbeams, as it rolled its glittering side of white into the air, or the rays fell unreflected on the black and rougher coat of the back of the monster” (205). Unlike his coxswain, Barnstable quickly turns his attention to the task of navigating his crew to the safety of shore and immediately forgets about the carcass of the whale.

Over the course of the events of the rest of the novel, this wastefulness in no way comes back to haunt the young American sailors, and the excitement of the whale hunt quickly passes away and is forgotten. In other words, the sailors are never punished for their wastefulness, largely because Cooper is not interested in the market value of this whale, American capitalist enterprises, or the laboring pride Americans were supposed to possess. Ultimately, he is more invested in describing the bravery and skill that it takes to whale. Capturing whales could be understood as the ultimate, primitive conflict between man and beast, and it is only this aspect of whaling that is important to Cooper. Like the self-reliant, courageous men of the *Leatherstocking Tales*, these Americans appear to possess all the character traits necessary to establish and people a new nation, but effacing work and transforming it into excitement comes at a high cost for Cooper because how can these impetuous, wasteful, and impractical men be considered ideal Americans? This question remains unresolved in *The Pilot*, because this novel is more involved in explaining what was exemplary about the Revolutionary political project, but it does set the stage for Cooper’s critique of American capitalism in his last nautical novel, *The Sea Lions* (1849). For in this text, Cooper argues that American capitalist enterprises—and by extension, American national citizens—have been corrupted by wastefulness, greed, and selfishness. The sense of optimism about the potential of the American project which appears in *The Pilot* in 1824 metamorphoses into the profoundest pessimism in *The Sea Lions*, for, by 1849, Cooper comments that Americans compete too much and too hard for material possessions, neglecting their spiritual development and becoming fanatical devotees of the system capitalism: “Speculation and profit are regarded as so many integral portions of the duty of man; and, as our

kinsmen of Old England have set up an idol to worship in the form of aristocracy, so do our kinsmen of New England pay homage to the golden calf” (155).

3.3 SECTION 3

“In all these cases the native American liberally provides the brains, the rest of the world as generously supplying the muscle”:
Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*

Ishmael’s now famous comment about the racial and ethnic makeup of the labor force of the whaling industry maintains that “the Native Americans,” white, native-born men like Starbuck and Ahab, occupy the positions at the top of the hierarchy of the industry, whereas men like Queequeg, Tashtego, and Dago are forced to fill out the lower ranks. In Ishmael’s description, “Native Americans” work in the managerial positions and supply “the brains” for directing the voyages of the ships and the activities of the crew. Meanwhile, all of the tasks that require “hard labor” and physical strength are performed by immigrants, who were born elsewhere and emigrated to the United States in the hopes of making a better life for themselves. C.L.R. James, in *Mariners, Renegades & Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In*, reads this passage as Melville’s direct critique of the whaling industry’s exploitative labor practices and his subversion of this hierarchy of labor in which he positions the non-white workers as the real heroes of the novel (18-19). Most modern scholars, such as William V. Spanos, approach this section of the novel similarly.⁴² However, there is another way to read this passage, one that helps to explain how many of the other whaling narratives address the issues of race, labor, and nationality, how they neutralized the racial identity of many non-white whalers in order to make the group as a whole seem like exemplars of the American spirit.

At this point in the novel, Ishmael shies away from specifically commenting on whether or not this practice is exploitative because he never mentions how the common laborers are treated—he simply says that they supply the “muscles” for the grand productions of American

⁴² Spanos’ *The Errant Art of Moby-Dick* argues that Ishmael is profoundly critical of the way in which American capitalism exploits its workers.

private business ventures. Ishmael's moment of hesitation in which he fails to completely condemn this racial and ethnic hierarchy of labor suggests another way of reading this passage: that he is praising "native Americans" for achieving these positions at the expense of others, that "native Americans" are intellectually superior to "the rest of the world" and that this superiority gives them a distinct advantage over other peoples from other nations. Although this is decidedly not the reading of the passage I would adopt, I do think that it is possible that some nineteenth-century readers, those possessing strong racial and ethnic prejudices, would be more likely to endorse the latter reading of Ishmael's statement than the former. Melville's more direct and scathing critique of Western imperialism in *Typee* would suggest that Ishmael's comment is more sarcastic than not, but observing that the passage could be read as praising the racial hierarchy of the American project is important because this kind of reading is more typical of the way other whaling narratives describe the presence of foreign laborers. Many of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century whaling narratives downplay the importance of these workers, vilify them based on nineteenth-century racial stereotypes, or metaphorically attempt to transform these foreigners into Americans. What is most noteworthy about Ishmael's comments is that the distinction that he makes between immigrants and "Native Americans," between "muscles" and "brains," between physical and intellectual labor, raises several underlying questions about why immigrant labor provides the brawn, while native labor provides the brains. And how could an industry that employed so many foreign workers be considered so emblematically American by so many authors of whaling narratives?

A possible answer to these questions is suggested by the variety of ways in which these racial and ethnic groups of physical laborers were represented in the whaling narratives. As Briton Cooper Busch remarks in *'Whaling Will Never Do For Me': The American Whalemen in the Nineteenth Century*, race relations in the whaling industry were quite complex, for American whaleships employed quite significant numbers of African-Americans, Africans, Portuguese, and Pacific Islanders; however, these immigrant workers tended to be segregated as much as possible from whites and rarely achieved positions at the top of the industry's hierarchy (33). In the narratives, representations of these exotic laborers are equally complex and range from the highly romanticized to the racially prejudiced. While J. Ross Browne's *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* consistently vilifies the Portuguese sailors aboard the *Styx* and describes them as dirty, idol-worshipping savages, James Temple Brown's "Stray Leaves from a Whaleman's Log" (1893)

characterizes Vera, a Portuguese harpooner who suffers a tragic death in the mouth of a whale, as spirited, intelligent, and vivacious (508). In Roger Starbuck's *The Golden Harpoon* (1865), Driko, a Pacific Islander, is one of the most feared and malicious leaders of the mutiny aboard the *Montpelier*, whereas Queequeg in *Moby-Dick* becomes Ishmael's closest companion and bosom friend, vowing to stay with him until death parts them. Some of the differences in how these workers were represented may have to do with changing nineteenth-century attitudes toward race; however, what is at stake in all of these narratives is how to position these exotic individuals working in an industry that was fairly consistently claimed as being so American. The often contradictory array of representative strategies which authors of American whaling narratives used in order to describe the roles of these workers mirrors broader nineteenth-century concerns about immigrant labor and how the physical labor these men performed fit into still evolving dominant narratives of American national identity.

The number of immigrant workers employed by the American whaling industry put some strain on nationalistic appropriations of this kind of work, although it did not completely subvert it, for authors of the whaling narratives developed several rhetorical strategies for coping with the presence of these individuals. Some writers, such as those giving speeches at the opening of the New Bedford Whaling Museum, "whitewash" the industry and completely ignore the role immigrant labor played in the development of American whaling. Others, such as J. Ross Browne and Roger Starbuck, downplay the significance of these exotic immigrant workers by characterizing them as lazy, grotesque, and dangerous, and as such they composed a negligible portion of the workforce of the whaling industry. In these texts, these authors seem to suggest that the American whaling industry succeeded in spite of the presence of these men, not because of their contributions. For example, Browne maintains that there was a great deal of discord among the crew members living in the fore-castle of the *Styx* because white sailors resented being thrust into such close proximity to African-Americans, Portuguese, and Pacific Islanders, and Starbuck suggests that Pacific Islanders, because of their savage nature, were more likely to disrupt the hierarchy of the ship and mutiny than white sailors. One other strategy—that used by Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* and James Temple Brown in "Stray Leaves from a Whaleman's Log"—was to configure them as Americans, force them into a cultural and social paradigm that effaced their other origins and allegiances. Brown's portrayal of Vera transforms him into a Natty Bumppo-esque hero, while Ishmael and several other characters in *Moby-Dick*, confronted with

Queequeg's often confusing and frightening exoticism, all attempt to metaphorically transform him into an American—a George Washington, a Benjamin Franklin, a quahog—in order to diffuse their fear and make him a more acceptable companion and crewmember.

At this point, I want to turn to *Moby-Dick* and, more specifically, the character of Queequeg because of the way in which his exotic identity is simultaneously claimed as American—by Ishmael, Peter Coffin, Peleg, and Bildad—and is resistant to this appropriation.⁴³ A Pacific Islander curious about Western culture, Queequeg freely chooses to leave his native island of Kokovoko and embark on a voyage in an American whaling vessel. As Ishmael explains, Queequeg was an island Prince, and his decision to leave Kokovoko had everything to do with wanting to learn about Christianity in order “to make his people still happier than they were” (56). But Queequeg quickly learns that Christianity is not what he thought it was, and his native status as a prince is not respected by his whalemens companions, who put him in the forecabin and relegate him to the status of a common foremast hand. What's more, Ishmael adds that Queequeg “was fearful Christianity, or rather Christians, had unfitted him for ascending the pure and undefiled throne of thirty pagan Kings before him” (56). Thus, Queequeg, having left his island, places himself squarely on the margins of both Western culture and his own—he does not fit in either one. This story is not a unique one, for it has a long history in the minority literature of the Americas and has pre-occupied American authors for many, many years. Much of nineteenth- and twentieth-century African American literature is filled with bi-racial characters who are rejected by both the society of blacks and whites. While Queequeg is a transplant to America and many of these other characters are not, they both experience what it is like to not belong to any one culture or society. William Wells Brown's *Clotel or, The President's Daughter* (1853) and Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) both tragically describe the prejudice endured by bi-racial women who attempt to shuttle back and forth between the highly segregated worlds of whites and African Americans. If Queequeg's story was simply one of how difficult it is to live on the margins of both cultures and gain acceptance, it would, perhaps, for the purposes of this analysis, be enough to say that because of his liminal status, Queequeg will

⁴³ Much scholarly criticism has been written about the figure of Queequeg and the role of Pacific Islanders in Melville's writing. Geoffrey Sanborn's *The Sign of the Cannibal: Melville and the Making of a Postcolonial Reader* provides an excellent analysis of the Melville's treatment of cannibals and cannibalism in *Typee*, *Moby-Dick*, and “Benito Cereno.” And T. Walter Herbert, Jr.'s *Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilization* casts Melville's novels against the nineteenth-century travel narratives of various other missionaries and colonists, as well as the ethnographies of twentieth-century anthropologists.

never be an American in spite of the kind of work he chooses, and this puts pressure on national fantasies of masculine physical labor. But what makes Queequeg's story so different from those I mentioned above is the fact that it is not one of difficulty, hardship, and emotional anguish. Furthermore, *Moby-Dick* is told from Ishmael's perspective not Queequeg's. Thus Queequeg's own understanding of his identity is subordinated to his symbolic significance for Ishmael.

I would cast Queequeg, not as an individual torn between two radically different cultures, but as a kind of working-class cosmopolitan figure. He is a world traveler; he is able to form bonds with other individuals that transcend nationality; and he is able to sample and try on different cultural identities. This figuration of Queequeg's identity seems to privilege the subordinate term in the antinomy I described in the introduction having to do with American-ness; however, it is important to note, as Bruce Robbins does in his introduction to *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, that:

Like nations, cosmopolitanisms are now plural and particular. Like nations, they are both European and non-European, and they are weak and underdeveloped as well as strong and privileged...Like nations, worlds too are 'imagined.' For better or worse, there is a growing consensus that cosmopolitanism sometimes works together with nationalism rather than in opposition to it. (2)

Quite rightly, Robbins claims that nationalism and cosmopolitanism often depend upon and require each other—even when one or the other identity becomes more dominant, its opposing term in the antinomy never fully disappears and is never fully subordinated; rather, it is managed. I have described Queequeg's brand of cosmopolitanism as a kind of working-class cosmopolitanism in order to differentiate him from those world travelers who were formally educated and took pleasure in the intellectual pursuits of reading, learning, and thinking about the exotic cultures they met of their travels. Furthermore, as Robbins suggests above, there is more than one kind of cosmopolitanism and all of them are imagined, just as many other kinds of identity, including national identity, are imagined.

Queequeg is a "citizen of the world" in the sense that he does not have a home—except perhaps for the whaleships he sails upon—and he travels around the world learning from, adapting to, and sharing with the individuals he meets in the various places he visits. However, he is indelibly marked by his Pacific Island background, and he remains embedded in that cultural framework, no matter how much he moves around the world. Queequeg's version of

working-class cosmopolitanism is so remarkable in that he is so accepting of other cultural belief systems and that he is so willing to learn from and engage in the customs of others. Ishmael, too, could be considered a cosmopolitan figure in that he, too, travels the world, learning from his experiences, but his version of cosmopolitanism is imagined quite differently from that of Queequeg, and it is in a state of flux, particularly in the early sections of the novel. Even though he does not admit it, Ishmael is much more rooted in Western cultural traditions, and he is extremely hesitant and fearful about exposing himself to individuals from cultures other than his own. Ishmael eventually takes great pleasure in walking the streets of New Bedford alongside Queequeg, enduring the stares of those who are shocked to see a white man in the company of a Pacific Islander and priding himself on his rejection of the racial prejudices inherent in American society. But when he stumbles into the African American church on his first night in New Bedford, he is horrified and reacts with a mixture of fear and contempt, saying to himself, “Wretched entertainment at the sign of ‘The Trap!’” (10). And when he first meets Queequeg, he reacts with the same amount of revulsion, that is until he adopts the strategy of metaphorically comparing Queequeg’s head to that of George Washington, forcing the identity of the Pacific Islander into an oddly inappropriate, albeit complementary, paradigm. Thus, Ishmael’s cosmopolitanism is one that works much more in conjunction with nationalism than not. He learns from and about other cultures, but he is unable to understand them on their own terms and ultimately views them through Western eyes, describing them using Western images, rendering them safe and palatable, and diffusing the danger he feels about exposing himself to other cultural modes of being and existing in the world.

Because cosmopolitanisms can be so different, it is especially important to more specifically describe the kind of cosmopolitan figure Queequeg represents in the novel. As I observed above, Queequeg’s version of cosmopolitanism is quite different from that of Ishmael, and I would further characterize it as a kind of working class “rooted cosmopolitanism.” According to Kwame Anthony Apia in his essay “Cosmopolitan Patriots”:

...the cosmopolitan patriot can entertain the possibility of a world in which *everyone* is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different people. The cosmopolitan also imagines that in such a world not everyone will find it best to stay in a natal patria, so that the circulation of people among

different localities will involve not only cultural tourism (which the cosmopolitan admits to enjoying) but migration, nomadism, diaspora. (91-92)

In this formulation, rooted cosmopolitans not only possess their own “cultural particularities” and bring something of their native culture with them, which they share with those they meet in their travels, but they also learn from and participate in the local cultures of the places they visit. A cosmopolitan identity is also a conglomerate identity, and viewing Queequeg as a rooted cosmopolitan, who both attends Father Mapple’s sermon and worships the idol, Yoyo, helps to explain why he is so content to live and work on the margins of both Western and non-Western culture. From his marginal position he is able to engage in both cultures, taking from each what he chooses and forming his own conglomerate identity. It also helps to differentiate his cosmopolitanism from that of Ishmael, and explain why Ishmael so often chooses to metaphorically characterize Queequeg with Western images.

As I noted above, Queequeg is able seemingly happily to pick and choose facets of his identity from both cultures and fuse them together. Even though he does not feel that he can return to Kokovoko at the present time, Ishmael explains that “by and by, he said, he would return,—as soon as he felt himself baptized again. For the nonce, however, he proposed to sail about and sow his wild oats in all four oceans. They had made a harpooner of him, and that barbed iron was in lieu of a sceptre now” (56). In his description of Queequeg, Ishmael both romanticizes the whaling industry—Queequeg’s harpoon is on par with a king’s scepter—and employs the Christian imagery of baptism. What it would take for Queequeg to become “born again” as a Pacific Islander is left unclear, but what is clear is the Ishmael’s characterization of Queequeg superimposes Western images on top of Island images, that tribal scepters and paganism are transformed into whaling harpoons and Christianity. Queequeg’s tone, filtered through Ishmael, is not one of regret about leaving his native culture behind, and his words do not seem to be filled with the pain of living on the margins of both cultures. Rather, he seems to believe that it is only a matter of time until he can return to claim his throne, and in the meantime, he seems quite happy to travel and experience the world on a whaleship. Just as he replaces his sceptre with his harpoon, Queequeg combines aspects of both of his cultural worlds—the one in which he was raised and the one he occupies after leaving—such that he seems to adapt to living on the margins quite well. He even seems to enjoy his liminal status, for it enables him to enter into the realm of capitalist business ventures like the good Nantucket

Islanders Crèvecoeur discusses. Queequeg does so on his own terms, however, and he exploits his exoticism to sell shrunken heads from the Pacific Islands on the New Bedford commercial market.

None of this maneuvering between the two cultures appears to cause Queequeg any consternation, but it does cause difficulty for the other characters who attempt to understand him and interpret his identity. Limited by their Western purview, Peter Coffin, Ishmael, Bildad, and Peleg, all try to describe him using metaphorical Western imagery and rename him with symbolic American names. While this clearly shows the ethnocentrism of native-born Americans, it also demonstrates how complex the association of work and American national identity is. Queequeg works in an American industry, fraternizing with Americans and carrying his harpoon with him as a constant reminder to others that he is an American worker, but he ultimately resists classification as an American—partially because he deliberately resists this to a certain degree, himself, but also because his exotic foreign identity is impossible to completely describe as American. In the end, all of Peter Coffin, Ishmael, Bildad, and Peleg’s attempts to make Queequeg into an American seem rather ridiculous because none of their respective descriptions of him as a devotee of Benjamin Franklin, a “George Washington cannibalistically developed,” and as a Quahog are at all applicable (18, 50, and 88).

The opening sections of the novel explore Queequeg’s relationship with the capitalist world into which he has quite willingly entered, and Ishmael presents him as a man exploited by the racial prejudices of an entire nation, but who, in turn, exploits Americans and their fascination with the exotic by selling shrunken heads on the New Bedford market.⁴⁴ Despite his initial fear and hesitation, Ishmael establishes a particularly intimate relationship with Queequeg, but he notes that not all Americans are as generous with their friendship as he is. Whenever he and Queequeg walk about the streets of New Bedford, they endure a great many stares, which Ishmael oddly enough seems to enjoy—perhaps because Ishmael finds mainstream American culture, of which he is ironically a product, quite distasteful. Ishmael also observes the incident aboard the packet ship to Nantucket, in which Queequeg catches a country bumpkin making fun of him, describing how Queequeg picks him up, throws him in the air, and catches him before he

⁴⁴ Queequeg’s marketing of his own exoticism and his cultural artifacts makes him a precursor to contemporary Native Americans in New Mexico and Arizona who sell turquoise jewelry and kachina dolls at tourist attractions, Papua New Guineans who play on their reputation as cannibals in order to charge tourists for photographs on “cannibal tours,” and Africans who export their traditional carvings to art collectors around the world.

lands on the deck. While he does have to tolerate a large degree of racial prejudice, Queequeg finds a way to exploit his exoticism to his own advantage. When Ishmael first hears of Queequeg at the Spouter Inn, the landlord, Peter Coffin, tells him, “generally he’s an airley bird—airley to bed and airley to rise—yes, he’s the bird what catches the worm.—But tonight he went out a peddling, you see, and I don’t see what on airth keeps him so late, unless may be, he can’t sell his head” (18). Naturally, Ishmael is baffled by this explanation for Queequeg’s odd behavior, and the landlord further explains, “That’s precisely it...and I told him he couldn’t sell it here, the market’s overstocked...With heads to be sure; ain’t there too many heads in the world?” (18). At this point, the landlord does not reveal much about Queequeg; he does not even tell Ishmael his name. This, of course, is a practical tactic, good for his business as an innkeeper, because he does not know if Ishmael will be willing to bunk with a foreigner from the South Pacific—Queequeg’s name would betray this—, and his words not only serve to mask Queequeg’s racial and ethnic identity, but transform him into a good American capitalist—whom Ishmael assumes to be white.

What is particularly striking about the landlord’s description of Queequeg is his use of Benjamin Franklin’s aphorisms from *Poor Richard’s Almanac*: “Early to Bed and early to rise makes a Man healthy, wealthy, and wise” and “the early bird catches the worm” (217). This is the same Franklin who Max Weber claims epitomizes “the spirit of capitalism,” because of the ways in which he advocates utilitarian morality as way of achieving material success, and the same Franklin who promotes this himself in his somewhat tongue-in-cheek autobiography (11). Walter Isaacson notes in the first chapter of his biography, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*, that Franklin and the image he created for himself has long been extolled as a classic example of the practical, virtuous, hard-working self-made, American man (2-3). Thus, before Ishmael even meets Queequeg, the latter is Americanized by Peter Coffin.

However, Franklin’s presence hovering behind this section of *Moby-Dick* cannot be read solely in this way, because while Ishmael might believe that Queequeg is a good, honest American because of Peter Coffin’s description of him, this passage is shot through with irony and is actually a pointed critique of Franklin and his advice to his fellow Americans. As evidence from Melville’s other work suggests, Melville regarded Franklin as more of a hypocrite than as a viable role model for success. Even though Franklin is never actually mentioned in the short story, “The Lightning Rod Man,” his connection to the confidence man who travels the

world trying to sell his lightening rods to gullible individuals is obvious. Also, Franklin, himself, makes an appearance as a buffoonish character in *Israel Potter* where he gives Israel a great deal of “sound” moral advice to help him become successful, none of which ever works. Similar to Israel Potter, Queequeg apparently follows Franklin’s advice, believing that these proverbs will guide him to success in his capitalist venture, but he is frustrated because he does not understand one of the simple laws of capitalism—that of supply and demand. Of course, Peter Coffin’s remark about the overstocked market for heads is a joke at Ishmael’s expense, but it also works on a more serious level. Queequeg specializes in selling exotic objects, for which there is a market in the United States; however, he does not realize that in a shipping town, the market is flooded with such curiosities. Even if he is able to find buyers for his wares, he may have to settle for lower prices than those which he might earn were he to be selling them elsewhere. Clearly, Franklin’s advice does not work for absolutely everyone, and it proves to be too simple—just getting up early does not ensure that one will “catch the worm,” because the system of capitalism is a complicated one, and in order to be successful, individuals need more than just a copy of *Poor Richard’s Almanac* in their pockets.

Ultimately, Queequeg’s marketing of his own exoticism and his attempts to use his “savage” identity for his own personal gain conflicts with those who try to Americanize him for their own purposes, and he effectively launches a high stakes power struggle over identity, where both sides desperately vie for control. Because Ishmael, Bildad, and Peleg find Queequeg’s savagery so frightening, they try to contain it and manage it, but Queequeg and his identity resist containment. Interestingly enough, Queequeg is not the first, nor the last, of Melville’s characters to trade on this fear of “the other” as a means to a more desirable end. In order to be left alone on the island, the Typee establish a reputation for themselves as cannibals, banking on the fact that Westerners will be so terrified of being eaten that they will restrict their colonial enterprises to the fringes of the island.⁴⁵ To a certain degree, this tactic works until Tommo discovers that he has nothing more to fear from the Typee than the Happar—the tribe on the island friendly to Westerners. The leader of the slave revolt in “Benito Cereno,” Babo, uses his race to exploit both the stereotype that Africans are less intelligent and more subservient than

⁴⁵ Geoffrey Sanborn’s *The Sign of the Cannibal* outlines how some Westerners doubted the truth of reports that there were indeed cannibals living on the Pacific Islands because they suspected that “cannibalism was an act with an audience in mind, intended to induce terror” (61).

whites and the stereotype that Africans are savage cannibals capable of any sort of violence. Because Captain Delano believes the former stereotype, he is completely deceived about what is really going on aboard the *San Dominick*, and because Cereno firmly believes in the latter, he is rendered helpless by Babo's constant threats. What all of these situations have in common—and what is particularly important for Queequeg—is that these foreign, exotic individuals are only partially in control of what is said and believed about them. They can, to a certain degree, exploit the way in which they are perceived by Westerners and turn these stereotypically-based attitudes to their own advantage, but they do not always win the struggle for self-definition and this can have drastic consequences. Having been found out by Tommo, the Typee will most likely be subject to the same fate as the Happar, and Babo comes to an especially violent end, along with his slave revolt.

The strategy of reading “the other” in Western terms is one used by all of the individuals who encounter Queequeg in the early sections of the novel. Ishmael, himself, is not immune to this tendency, and he constantly metaphorically re-characterizes Queequeg in order to find common ground with him, allay his fears about him, and comprehend the man. To Ishmael, Queequeg is an entirely inscrutable individual—his unfathomable and labyrinthine tattoos, which no one in the novel can interpret, symbolize the complexities of his identity. As such, Ishmael fears him because he fears the unknown: “It was now quite plain that he must be some abominable savage or other shipped aboard of a whaleman in the South Seas, and so landed in this Christian country. I quaked to think of it. A peddler of heads too—perhaps the heads of his own brothers. He might take a fancy to mine—heavens! look at that tomahawk!” (22). Ishmael makes much of the contrast between the familiar, the civilized, and the Christian, and the unknown, the savage, and the non-Christian, both here and later on in the novel. Queequeg is not necessarily completely non-Christian, however, for Ishmael does see him make an appearance at Father Mapple's sermon. Ishmael attributes Queequeg's interest in attending the service to curiosity saying, “Affected by the solemnity of the scene, there was a wondering gaze of incredulous curiosity in his countenance” (36), and he later observes that Queequeg leaves before Father Mapple gives his benediction, but his very presence, whatever his motivation, is what is significant. This is what the rooted cosmopolitan does—take in the cultural practices of the places he visits and explore other kinds of cultural belief systems. Queequeg, then, engages in a conscious cosmopolitan project, for he is a chameleon of sorts, attempting to both blend in

with his surroundings and learn from them, despite the fact that his outward appearance is so different from other white Americans.

Not insignificant is all of Ishmael's references to heads whenever he mentions Queequeg. It is the head that is the rational, thinking part of a man—that "hive of subtlety" from "Benito Cereno"—and Ishmael soon finds a way to re-configure Queequeg's head in terms he can understand, American ones:

With much interest I sat watching him. Savage though he was, and hideously marred about the face—at least to my taste—his countenance yet had something in it which was by no means disagreeable. You cannot hide the soul. Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart; and in his large, deep eyes, fiery black and bold, there seemed tokens of a spirit that would dare a thousand devils. And besides this, there was a certain lofty bearing about the Pagan, which even his uncouthness could not altogether maim. He looked like a man who had never cringed and never had had a creditor. Whether it was, too, that his head being shaved, his forehead was drawn out in freer and brighter relief, and looked more expansive than it otherwise would, this I will not venture to decide; but certain it was his head was phrenologically an excellent one. It may seem ridiculous, but it reminded me of General Washington's head, as seen in popular busts of him. It had the same long regularly graded retreating slope from above the brows, which were likewise very projecting, like two long promontories thickly wooded on top. Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed. (49-50)

The tattoos, particularly about the face, make Queequeg's character inscrutable and indelibly mark him as a cannibal from the South Sea Islands of the Pacific—this is what Tommo, in *Typee*, feared would happen to him if he were to have his face tattooed—but in Ishmael's eyes, the shape of his head is more important, and he re-characterizes him in terms that he knows. In order to overcome his fear, Ishmael plays with Queequeg's identity and re-makes it. After all, George Washington is a highly revered individual, the first president of the United States and a famous general in the Revolutionary War. Playing with the pseudoscientific fad of phrenology, Ishmael appropriates and recreates Queequeg's identity, "rescuing" him from his status as a cannibal and making him into someone to be respected. Another interesting aspect of Ishmael's characterization of Queequeg is that his character sketch is full of phrases that could be drawn

from the advice given to potential businessmen in *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Queequeg appears to possess a “simple honest heart,” he “looked like a man who had never cringed and never had a creditor.” All of these are qualities that Franklin certainly would admire and would suggest cultivating. Thus, even though following Franklin’s adages does not help Queequeg sell his heads, possessing the characteristics Franklin endorses recommends him to Ishmael and helps the two become fast friends. Later on, after Ishmael learns Queequeg’s story, he seems more accepting of Queequeg’s identity on its own terms—although he does decide to call Queequeg’s fast, his Ramadan, without ever finding out exactly what he is doing—however inscrutable they might be to him. Ultimately, he adjusts the way in which he imagines himself as a cosmopolitan and comes to the conclusion that it is perhaps better to befriend Queequeg and learn from him. Instead of trying to understand him in Western terms, he openly walks about the streets of New Bedford with him, proudly aware of the fact that even though others might stare and think their friendship odd, he knows that their connection is a deep and natural one.

Peter Coffin and Ishmael are not the only ones who attempt to re-make Queequeg in the image of America, though. The men responsible for recruiting sailors for the *Pequod*’s upcoming voyage, Peleg and Bildad, transform Queequeg into a Native American when they somewhat reluctantly hire Queequeg as a harpooner. Initially, Peleg is upset to discover that Queequeg is a Pacific Islander and a non-Christian because he maintains that the owners of the *Pequod* do not hire pagans. However, as the ensuing events show, when given a choice between hiring a highly skilled and incredibly talented non-Christian laborer and an unskilled green Christian worker, Peleg and Bildad choose the former. In fact, the hypocrisy of this rule is clearly demonstrated by the fact that all three of the *Pequod*’s harpooners, Queequeg, Dago, and Tashtego, are all non-Christian. Ishmael spends a great deal of time arguing with Peleg about how all religions are essentially the same; however, he could have saved his energy because what really matters to the recruiters is the financial success of the voyage, not the religious character of the crew. Ishmael may not recognize this, but Queequeg knows what he does not, and once Queequeg demonstrates his skill with a harpoon, he is immediately signed on to the voyage.

Like Ishmael, Peleg is filled with both fear of Queequeg based on his racial prejudices and admiration for him stemming from his display of his talents. Because he wants Queequeg to sail on the *Pequod* so badly, he must overcome his fear and in order to do so, he re-names

Queequeg with two different appellations: Hedge-hog and Quahog. Obviously, this is a humorous section of the novel in which Peleg has some difficulty pronouncing Queequeg's exotic name, but it is also one which is quite serious because it shows how little Peleg actually cares about Queequeg or his name in the first place—he does not bother to make any effort whatsoever to pronounce the name correctly. The names, themselves, though are quite significant. The fact that he gives him an animal name, not a human name, and names him after an animal with spines says a great deal about how Peleg views Queequeg. The name Peleg eventually selects for Queequeg is even more telling, though. Finally, Peleg settles on Quahog as a name for Queequeg, the Native American name for a kind of small clam. Since he perceives him to be a pagan, the fact that Peleg takes both of Queequeg's new names from nature is not all that surprising; however, it is significant that the latter one, the one he signs on the ship's paper, is a Native American name. This re-makes Queequeg in the image of the absent population of local Native Americans, who once lived on Nantucket, surrendered their lands, relocated, and eventually all died as a result of epidemic diseases brought by the white settlers. It is interesting to note that while Queequeg is an important presence in the novel up until this point, he largely disappears from the rest of the text—disappears like the doomed Native Americans he has been named after.⁴⁶ Once Queequeg's savagery is contained, and made American, his individuality vanishes, and he blends in with the rest of the crew, only appearing in a few of the novels many remaining chapters.

The act of re-naming is here not a complimentary one like Ishmael's, but an invidious one, based on ideologies of racial prejudice. Melville's point here is that this is what happens to the exotic peoples Westerners encounter. Instead of attempting to understand exotic cultures on their own terms, they insist on explaining "the other" in terms they can understand no matter how ill-fitting they may be. While Queequeg's presence is largely erased from the rest of the novel, he is, in this particular scene, resistant to all of this re-making of his identity, and the final representation of Queequeg that appears on the ships' papers is a copy of one of the incomprehensible tattoos on his arm—rendered as a cross in the text.

⁴⁶ In *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism*, Wai-chee Dimock uses the image of the *Pequod*—and the fact that it was named after a tribe of extinct Native Americans—to characterize the "narrative of doom" in *Moby-Dick* (115).

The figure of Queequeg is just one of a whole host of other exotic foreign workers who make appearances in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American whaling narratives. As I have argued above, many other whaling narratives attempted to cope with the presence of these foreign workers in an American industry by transforming them into Americans, describing them according to the personality characteristics that they possess that make them more American than not. Ultimately, the physical labor that Queequeg performs has thrown him into contact with Americans, but it does not make him American, no matter how much the other characters wish to see him in these terms. The desire to make Queequeg into a prototypical working American seems to exist solely in the minds of the American characters, and this recasting of Queequeg's national identity stretches the limits of the imagination. To call a man a quahog or a "George Washington cannibalistically developed" is to create humorously disjunctive images that diminish Queequeg's dignity as a human being, and ultimately this descriptive technique says more about the other characters and their prejudicial need to re-make him into an American, than it does about Queequeg's identity. The point of this section of the novel, though, is not just that Americans are incredibly ethnocentric or that work and American national identity have a persuasive and problematic connection, but that living on the margins of two distinctively different cultures opens up a world of possibility for the individual. Queequeg, as a rooted, working-class cosmopolitan, is not restricted by one culture or the other, and it does not seem to bother him that he is not fully accepted by either one; rather, he travels the world learning from it and taking from it what he needs, adapting himself as best he can to each different situation and each different individual he meets. It is only when Ishmael learns about the potential of living on the margins of society from Queequeg, when he adjusts the way in which he imagines his own cosmopolitan identity, that he is able to accept him on his own terms and exchange his feelings of melancholy for the satisfaction that comes from the close and genuine bond of friendship he forms with Queequeg.

Taken together, what Crèvecoeur, Cooper, and Melville's whaling narratives suggest is that despite the fact that whaling resisted nationalistic appropriations, many writers sought to make these men seem emblematic of the American spirit. Crèvecoeur's rhetorical manipulations of various material facets of the work of whaling transform the citizens of Nantucket into ideal American citizens, and, in his hands, the business they established on the island becomes one which is an example of what hard-working, moderate Christians can do when their *laissez-faire*

government gives them the ability to freely engage in their own capitalist ventures. The vision of the quintessentially American community that Crèvecoeur describes on Nantucket was further perpetuated by Cooper's figuration of the whale hunt as one of the best examples of man's confrontation with the forces of nature. In this way, Cooper generates a representation of the American spirit which distinguishes the American Revolutionary soldiers from their otherwise very similar British counterparts. Because they possess the same racial and ethnic background, there is very little to distinguish the American men from the British, but Cooper maintains that many of the American navy men acquired their superior nautical abilities from working in the Nantucket whaling industry, an American industry, and it is the skills, strength, and bravery they learned there that makes the American mariners superior to the British.

While Melville's *Moby-Dick* can be read as being more critical of American fantasies of physical masculine labor, the very fact that these ideologies surface as a subject of debate in the novel would suggest that Crèvecoeur and Cooper's nationalistic appropriations of the whaling industry still carried some social currency. Very little had occurred to detach the whaling industry from its connection to American-ness, and even though writers such as J. Ross Browne had gone on to claim that the exploitation of common foremast hands working in this industry was very un-American, there were a whole host of other narratives such as Owen Chase's narrative of the *Essex* disaster (1821) and Joseph C. Hart's *Miriam Coffin* (1834) which reinforced Crèvecoeur and Cooper's claims that the Nantucket whalers were indeed ideal American citizens. In this context, Melville's critique of Ishmael's attempts to metaphorically transform Queequeg into an American can be recognized as his critique of the strategy employed by other authors of whaling narratives who claimed that the industry was quintessentially American despite the fact that so much of its labor was performed by immigrants and non-Americans. In *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael, Peter Coffin, Bildad, and Peleg's efforts to metaphorically transform Queequeg into an American seem to be oddly inappropriate and seem to diminish his humanity, but this descriptive technique was certainly used by other authors to configure exotic immigrant workers as American. I would argue that Melville ultimately uses the opening sections of the novel to show the development of Ishmael's character, to show how he reimagines his cosmopolitan perspective, eventually adopting one that more resembles Queequeg's. What Ishmael realizes is that Queequeg's brand of working-class, rooted

cosmopolitanism has more potential than the one that he already possesses which is much more bound by Western/American ethnocentrism.

Nationalistic appropriations of the whaling industry were ultimately made possible by a rather suspect need to define American national identity. As I have shown, authors such as Thomas Jefferson, who were quite heavily invested in describing what was exceptional about Americans and American-ness, settled on working identity—particularly ones that had to do with forms of physical labor—as a means through which to do so. Once the dominant conglomerate identity which fused national identity, masculine identity and laboring identity emerged, other forms of physical labor became available for the purposes of nationalization. However, as I have shown, the material constraints of some kinds of work, such as the work of whaling, and some of the components of the working identity associated with the whaling industry put some strain on this mode of defining American national identity. The pressure points I have enumerated above were not the only ones, however, for, as the next chapter argues, this ideological fantasy of masculine physical labor was available for artistic appropriations in addition to nationalistic ones. Thus, it was not only the case that the dominant conglomerate identity was stressed because its component identities did not always perfectly fit together, but because there were other ways of writing about the whaling industry which had nothing whatsoever to do with American national identity. Thus, it is even more remarkable that this method of defining American national identity thrived and continued to perpetuate itself up through the nineteenth century and beyond.

4.0 CHAPTER 4

“Poetry of *Incident*”: The Art of Physical Labor and the Whalemen Poet

In *Etchings from a Whaling Cruise*, J. Ross Browne rather curiously used the above phrase to describe the yarns told by one of his fellow crewmembers, John Tabor. For Browne, Tabor was a particularly remarkable whaleman, because he was “a hardy, stout-built little fellow, who had spent twenty years of his life at sea, and had seen a great deal of the world...He had endured every species of hardship, and he bore upon his face and body scars which he had received in various encounters” (166). Despite the fact that he was short in stature, Tabor was physically impressive because his body was sturdy and weathered, scarred by the trials of life aboard a whale ship, the hard living and physical toil he experienced. More than just a physical laborer, though, Tabor was a kind of poet, an artist, traveling the high seas, using his experiences to spin the yarns that Browne called “poetry of *incident*” (195). In Tabor’s hands, stories about ordinary incidents aboard ship took on special meaning because of the poetic way in which he described them. Browne was all the more amazed by Tabor’s artistic ability, for he had never had any kind of formal schooling whatsoever—he had not been trained in the poetic use of language, and he had never read any other poetry. In fact, Browne went on to claim that “...could he have received the benefits of education, without impairing the original vigor of his mind—could he have preserved the freshness of his language with the addition of a cultivated intellect, few men would have ranked higher in the literary world” (195). This bold statement suggests that there was something about Tabor that Browne admired other than his laboring body or his knowledge of the practical skills a whaleman necessarily had to possess. It was Tabor’s innate artistic ability, however rough or unrefined it was, that made him such a noteworthy whaleman.

When coupled with the fact that many whalemen were also writers—memoirists, diarists and poets—Tabor’s example reminds us that the American whalemen were more than just

physical laborers, who based their sense of identity on laboring pride. After all, the anonymous whaleman who penned the phrase, “us lone wand’ring whaling-men,” was also a poet, and as the abundance of personal journals in the archives demonstrates, there were many, many others. Whaling’s capacity to foster intellectual and artistic activity might be attributed to the way in which the work of whaling required periods of intense physical labor punctuated by periods of rest and leisure. Once whales were sighted, a whaleship turned into a flurry of activity as men rushed into the boats to harpoon and kill them, and once the carcasses were tied onto the side of the ship, the whalers raced against the clock to process the blubber into oil before it began to decay and spoil. But whaleships often spent days or weeks at a time cruising the whaling grounds before they found any whales, and often ships at sea were becalmed for long periods of time, unable to move, because of lack of wind. While these empirical circumstances gave the whalers plenty of time to write in their journals, compose poems, or carve intricate pieces of scrimshaw out of whalebone, their interest in artistic production was more than just a way to pass the time and alleviate boredom. Many whalers were quite heavily invested in these projects, and they obviously took great pleasure in their various artistic pursuits.

What this indicates is that whalers were invested in another pairing of identities, one which had to do with their identity as a physical laborers and the other which had to do with their identity as creative, reflective thinkers. While both identities co-existed with each other, they did impact each other insofar as this activity of thinking—particularly writing—served to connect whalers to the activity of more traditional thinkers, intellectuals and scholars. This intellectual activity was typically associated with the upper and middle classes, not the working classes. As many whaling narratives point out, these classes overvalued institutionalized education and undervalued informal and experiential forms of knowledge acquisition. Being creative, reflective thinkers had the potential to threaten the whalers’s sense of themselves as proud working-class laborers because they were investing themselves in a value system that belonged to other classes of Americans. There was actually nothing about the act of engaging in writing, thinking, reflecting, or making art that was inherently threatening to laboring pride, but these activities were increasingly institutionalized and marked as upper-class activities.

The whalers were exemplars of the American spirit for writers such as J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, James Fenimore Cooper and Owen Chase because of their physical capacities—their bravery and strength—and their practical wisdom—their knowledge of the

habits of whales and the set of skills necessary to harpoon and kill them. This practical wisdom was usually described in terms that differentiated it from the forms of artistic and intellectual work promoted in formal schooling and valued by higher classes. As Cooper remarks in *The Sea Lions*, “Few things give a more exalted idea of the courage and ingenuity of the human race than to see adventurers set forth in a mere shell, on the troubled waters of the open ocean, to contend with and capture an animal of the size of the whale” (174). Ingenuity, for Cooper, has everything to do with practical knowledge, the impressive set of skills these men have developed in order to hunt and kill whales, and he specifically chooses to emphasize this quality alongside courage. For Owen Chase, “...the post of danger be the post of honour; and...merit emanates from exemplary private character, uncommon intelligence, and professional gallantry” (17). Here again is the valuation of courage and bravery, and even though Chase credits whalers with “uncommon intelligence,” this intelligence was characterized as practical, not connected with the intelligence of writers or scholars.

While Cooper and Chase do not specifically denigrate intellectual development and artistic ability, the class-based, anti-intellectual spirit of the ideological fantasy in which they were enmeshed is somewhat more apparent in Harry Halyard’s sensational novel, *Wharton the Whale-Killer!*, where the common sailors aboard ship are suspicious of Wharton’s motives. They think he possesses a “wicked looking eye,” because his speech patterns, his vocabulary, and his slight, pale body mark him as belonging to a particular class of well-educated gentlemen, not experienced physical laborers (9). Wharton appears to be a dangerous person, a somewhat suspect and effeminate hero in the early pages of the novel, precisely because he has obviously been highly educated and has no experience with physical labor—he has not developed the muscular capacities needed to go whaling—and it is only after he demonstrates, by killing a whale, that he is not just a sissified member of the upper classes that he earns the respect of his fellow crewmembers. What is so interesting about this novel is that even though Wharton is the title character, his role seems secondary to those of the common foremast hands. The novel is punctuated throughout by sailor’s yarns, which have nothing to do with the main plot, and three out of the novel’s four illustrations depict scenes from these extraneous stories.⁴⁷ Thus, while

⁴⁷ I have already mentioned above that whaling narratives use illustrations in a practical way to demonstrate what tools whalers used, but there are a whole host of other texts which use sensational drawings of whaling scenes to illustrate the dangers of working in the whaling industry. *Wharton the Whale-Killer!* is not alone in this respect, for Harry Halyard’s other whaling novel, *The Doom of the Dolphin* also possesses similar illustrations. Frank Bullen’s

the novel subordinates Wharton's gentlemanly qualities to the physical capacities possessed by the other sailors, it still places a high value on these folk tales, this "poetry of incident."

Wharton the Whale-Killer! was only one of a number of whaling narratives which struggled to position the class-marked values of creative, reflective thinking and physical labor. Whalers and those writing about them were grappling with a particular ideology of masculine physical labor that subordinated intellectual development via formal education to muscular and cognitive development via strenuous physical labor. For the whalers, embracing their artistic side had the potential to put their particular form of masculine laboring pride at risk, because they were engaging in something that upper-class, educated individuals did. It threatened to disrupt the construction of working-class masculinity as the most potent form of masculinity, in relation to which men in offices and parlors could be cast as weak, constrained, and even effeminate. Independently, though, fantasies of masculine physical labor and upper-class intellectual production could be appropriated for national purposes. I have already demonstrated how many of the whaling narratives claim physical labor as American, and Emerson's essay on the "American Scholar" clearly figures some kinds of upper-class thinking as national. However, as the whaling narratives show, American national identity was not always important to those writers who were more interested in describing the relationship between physical labor and creative thinking. Although Herman Melville and J. Ross Browne are intrigued by American national identity and are somewhat invested in it, its importance falls by the wayside in *Moby-Dick* and *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*.⁴⁸ Much more than Browne, who tends to value

Cruise of the Cachalot, Roger Starbuck's *The Golden Harpoon*, and Francis Allyn Olmsted's *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage* all use such illustrations. Whaling and whales also inspired a whole host of paintings, etchings, lithographs, scrimshaw, and drawings. Margaret Creighton's *Rites & Passages* includes several examples of scrimshaw carvings which depicted scenes from the whalers' lives. Richard Ellis' *Men and Whales* and Stuart Frank's *Herman Melville's Picture Gallery* are both good starting places for those wanting to see more visual representations of the world of whaling. The New Bedford Whaling Museum also has a fine collection of pictures, murals, paintings, and scrimshaw carvings.

⁴⁸ The degree to which Melville was invested in the American project has been the subject of some debate ever since the Melville Revival of the 1930's, when *Moby-Dick* was claimed by many to be the great American novel. Clare Spark's book *Hunting Captain Ahab: Psychological Warfare and the Melville Revival* provides a good overview of much of this scholarship and challenges its perspectives, claiming that it was the cultural and historical circumstances of the Cold War that generated these readings of Melville's work. After the Melville Revival, Melville scholarship has tended to emphasize his anti-American stance; see C.L.R. James' *Mariners, Renegades & Castaways*, William Spanos' *The Errant Art of Moby-Dick*, and Donald Pease's *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* for good examples of this approach. To some degree, Melville was interested in defining and producing specifically American literature, and his essay, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," proclaims that Americans are steadily improving their literary productions and shaking off the influence of European authors, producing something quite novel that might be called, American literature (1164). Browne protests against

isolation and moments of leisure because they afford him time to meditate and think, Melville emphasizes the emotive power of social, collective labor to inspire the intellect.

Ultimately, both Melville and Browne do not subvert ideological fantasies of physical labor which endow it with American character-building power and robust masculinity. Indeed, their texts contribute to the further development of genealogies of thought that claimed the working classes and the physical labor they performed as important artistic subjects. Writing about working-class men and women was an important part of the project of the British Romantic poets (and of Whittier, Whitman, and some other Americans influenced by them) and made their work strikingly different from the courtly poetry of many of their predecessors. In 1800, in the Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth claimed, “Humble and rustic life was generally chosen [as a poetic subject], because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity” (321). For Wordsworth, writing about these “common” men had tremendous artistic potential because he saw something about the essential human condition in them and their relationship with nature. While Wordsworth did not go so far as to suggest that these men were poets themselves, or that the poet should live as a common man and perform physical labor himself, many American writers did.

The farmer who supposedly writes Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* does not have a great deal of confidence in his literary ability, but he writes anyway because he is convinced by the argument his minister makes: “After all, why should not a farmer be allowed to make use of his mental faculties as well as others; because a man works, is he not to think, and if he thinks usefully, why should not he in his leisure hours set down his thoughts?” (46). In the minister’s formulation, the intellectual task of writing is set apart from that of physical labor, but the process of thinking and generating ideas occurs while he is laboring in the fields: “I have composed many a good sermon as I followed my plough. The eyes not being then engaged on any particular object leaves the mind free for the introduction of many useful ideas” (47). Performing physical labor is not particularly generative, here, because what is important about it is that it is mindless labor—the task itself does not require much intellectual concentration, and it allows the thinker’s mind to focus on subjects other than the one at hand. This thought is also

the oppressive working conditions aboard ship in jeremiad-like fashion, attempting to fulfill the promise of America, by granting the freedoms and rights the Constitution guarantees to those who have been denied them, namely sailors.

made possible by the fact that this farmer is a land-owner with no supervisor. He is free to think and do as he wishes because he has no supervisor to keep him on task or critique his laboring practices, as the whalemens did. Importantly, Crèvecoeur does not describe the whalemens in this way, for they did not enjoy the same freedoms as the autonomous farmer, and he is more interested in the fact that they are always working, never idle.

In addition to Crèvecoeur, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, among others, all argued that physical labor and artistic/intellectual activity were inextricably bound together. The writings of these later authors demonstrate that there was still a keen need to describe what was superior about the American project, for they, too, appropriate physical labor for national purposes. Because physical labor was already invested with so much meaning and already a part of versions of American national identity, it was quite attractive to them, but their fantasy of physical labor is quite different from Crèvecoeur's. Emerson, in particular, claimed that performing physical labor was integral to the development of the American intellectual. In "The American Scholar," he explains why performing physical labor is so important: "It [labor] is the raw material out of which the intellect moulds her splendid products. A strange process too, this by which experience is converted into thought, as a mulberry leaf is converted into satin. The manufacture goes forward at all hours" (43). Experience, or more specifically, experience performing labor, is what gives the American scholar food for thought, what gives him the ability to create art and what transforms him from "Man" into "*Man Thinking*," a superior state of being (38). While this is a somewhat condescending and patronizing view of the value of physical labor because it tends to obscure the painful realities of the experiences of the working classes, its democratic impulse—its attempt to level the playing field and erase class distinctions—was quite compelling. Versions of Emerson's idea eventually made their way into other texts such as *Moby-Dick* and *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*.

Published in 1851 and 1846, respectively, *Moby-Dick* and *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* take part in this process of exploring the importance of physical labor to intellectual/artistic production, and even though they were not as interested as Emerson in explaining how American scholars were superior to intellectuals from other nations, they did also help physical labor to accrue more meaning. Because both Browne and Melville saw performing physical labor as artistically generative, they helped laboring pride to become more than just pride in physical

capacities and thereby contributed to American ideological fantasies of masculine physical labor. Importantly, this laboring pride was anti-intellectual in the sense that it rejected the value of formal education, but it did not reject the importance of introspective thinking. Despite their lack of formal schooling, these laborers could and did reflect interestingly on their circumstances and produce art. Emerson's American scholars were traditional intellectuals who sampled another class's life to try to understand it, but whalers who gathered stories, carved scrimshaw, and wrote about their experiences were actually embedded in the working classes. Whalers were some of the first working-class poets in American literature, and they helped pave the way for Jack London, Billy Joel, and Bruce Springsteen, among others.

Melville and Browne present whaleman/artist figures, but *Moby-Dick* and *Etchings* frame these figures differently. Both Ishmael and Browne are highly-educated individuals, rather atypical for whalers, who sign on to whaling voyages as common foremast hands, and they both perform a great deal of intense physical labor while simultaneously struggling to find a way to be intellectually generative. Admittedly, Ishmael and Browne are quite different from men like Tabor; their class positions have shifted, either electively or by circumstance, and they are more educated.⁴⁹ Both men are whaleman artists, though, and their struggle with their conflicting identities is significant, precisely because it bears upon the experiences of other whaler artists like Tabor and highlights just how important physical labor was to working-class masculinity. The danger for both Ishmael and Browne is not so much that they will not be able to take pride in their laboring bodies if they engage in modes of creative and reflective thinking. The problem lies in the ideological binary at work here: intellectual work is solitary, upper-class work, but “unthinking” physical work is working-class collective labor. In other words, Ishmael and Browne will be compromised because they are invested in contradictory class values. Thus, both of them need to reclaim this range of mental activities as the province of working-class men.

⁴⁹ Whether or not Ishmael chooses to abandon his position as a schoolteacher of his own free will or is forced from it by economic hardship is difficult to discern. He might have forfeited his upper-class standing in an Emersonian American Scholar kind of way, or he might have been forced—as Melville himself was by the failure of his father's business ventures—to become a member of the working classes. The first volume of Hershel Parker's compendious biography of Melville details the economic hardships the Melville family encountered, as well as its influence on Melville's writings. Browne appears to have simply fallen on hard times in that he has no desire to be a part of the working class, but his job as a stenographer in Washington, D.C. does not seem to have been able to adequately support him.

Like Browne, Ishmael is quite heavily invested in exploring questions about how isolation and sociable collective labor contribute to artistic production, and Ishmael is also interested in evaluating the emotive potential of both forms of experience. For Ishmael, much more so than Browne, isolation stymies the intellect, whereas collective labor generates some of his most inspired thinking. Ishmael finds solitude lonely, and whenever he is alone, he becomes intellectually handicapped, falling into states of deep despair that impair his ability to think and which are alleviated only when he finds companionship. As the novel opens, Ishmael is friendless, isolated from his fellow human beings and profoundly melancholy, but when he befriends Queequeg, this state of mind quickly vanishes. Later on, Ishmael is again overwhelmed with despair when Ahab's quest for vengeance against the white whale becomes irresistibly contagious, and he spends the rest of the novel caught between periods of euphoria, such as when he is squeezing sperm with the other sailors, and periods of intense melancholy, when he is consumed with Ahab's hunt for Moby Dick. Ultimately, Ishmael prefers euphoria, which typically occurs, not when he is thinking or working alone, but when he is working in the company of the other sailors. Ishmael always feels the most productively intellectual and euphoric when he is performing collective physical labor, because the emotions he experiences while laboring alongside these men give him what he needs to be creative and think generatively.

The fact that Browne chooses to use the word "etchings" in his title indicates that this is a text which attempts to make art out of the work of whaling. As the author, an educated traveler who signs on to a whaling voyage, he joins the ranks of the American scholars Emerson discusses, and he proceeds to poetically and artistically describe and depict the work of whaling in the text itself and the illustrations accompanying it. What allows Browne to create this artistic representation of the whaling industry is both the fact that he performs this labor himself and the fact that he does have some leisure time in which to write and think. Browne attempts to make clear distinctions between the time he spends laboring and the time he has to himself, but this is somewhat difficult to do because he lives in his workplace, and all of his time is ostensibly work time. Thus, he is forced to "steal" time in order to think, when he's standing in the crow's nest, theoretically keeping a lookout for whales, and when he's socializing with select crewmembers. Like Crèvecoeur's farmer, Browne multitasks; he is performing a service for his captain, but because this work is somewhat mindless, his mind is free to wander and think. For Browne, this time is valuable because it is solitary time—in the crow's nest, he is as isolated from the crew as

it is possible to be aboard a ship—which affords him the opportunity to confront and contemplate the vastness of the ocean and his position in the universe. Isolation and his position atop the ship inspire his intellect. Although Browne finds it important to engage in solitary speculation, he also suggests that engaging in social gatherings and conversing with his fellow crewmembers is integral to his intellectual and artistic well-being. This too is “stolen time” when the men are together in the rigging, isolated from their captain and mates. Although he prefers to socialize with some crew members more than others, because some have more intellectually stimulating things to say, it is not always what they talk about that is important: Browne values the emotional sustenance these gatherings afford him, the feelings of good-will and bonds of fraternity that these conversations generate. Overall, these moments of discretionary time with others mainly inspire his intellectual development, not the more intense physical labor of the work of whaling, which he primarily describes as sheer drudgery, physically and emotionally draining toil.

4.1 SECTION 1

Sociable, Laboring “Men Thinking”: Ishmael’s Intellectual Project in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*

Both Melville’s *Moby-Dick* and Emerson’s “American Scholar” have very similar goals: to outline the circumstances under which a man can become Man Thinking. What is useful about juxtaposing Emerson’s argument with Melville’s is that Emerson outlines three key influences that help to mold and shape the American scholar—nature, books, and labor—the last two of which are also very important to Melville.⁵⁰ Together with Melville, Emerson claims that these influences need to be controlled and managed in particular ways in order for man to become Man Thinking, but otherwise their projects diverge. Emerson suggests that “He then learns, that in going down into the secrets of his own mind, he has descended into the secrets of all minds” (47). In this formulation, solitary speculation is important, for it forges connections between the

⁵⁰ F.O. Matthiessen also juxtaposes Emerson’s project with Melville’s in *American Renaissance*, and provides an excellent analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of the writings of both authors.

individual and the rest of human-kind because all human beings share certain emotions and certain truths. For Ishmael, on the other hand, the intellectual potential of the work of whaling lies in collective physical work rather than isolated intellectual thinking.

Ishmael begins *Moby-Dick* by describing the Sub-Sub-Librarian, poking fun at his research methods and his project, but he also elevates the Sub-Sub's research from obscurity to a position of prominence. After all, these quotations open the novel and signal what the rest of the text is to be about. Instead of taking each extract seriously, though, Ishmael playfully lists these works as a non-exhaustive compendium of random texts that all refer to whales in some way, and he advises his readers to be cautious about how they interpret them:

Therefore you must not, in every case at least, take the higgledy-piggledy whale statements, however authentic, in these extracts, for veritable gospel cetology. Far from it. As touching the ancient authors generally, as well as the poets here appearing, these extracts are solely valuable or entertaining, as affording a glancing bird's eye view of what has been promiscuously said, thought, fancied, and sung of Leviathan, by many generations, including our own. (xvii)

Even though Ishmael warns his readers not to take his words too seriously, these quotations signal many ways of interpreting the novel. Some of these possibilities have been taken up by scholars such as F.O. Matthiessen, Lewis Mumford, and T. Walter Herbert, Jr., who have focused respectively on the Shakespearean, the epic, and the Biblical elements of *Moby-Dick*.⁵¹ These readings of the novel demonstrate the ironic and contradictory nature of Ishmael's early jocularly, for despite all his claims that these quotations are random and are only intended to be entertaining, they suggest ways of thinking productively about the novel and interpreting the events which follow.

Clearly, there is a certain amount of knowledge about the business of whaling to be gained from reading books in the archives, a certain kind of value to solitary research, but it is Ishmael's attitude toward the Sub-Sub-Librarian and his project which provides a key to understanding the intellectual project that is *Moby-Dick*. Ishmael introduces the Sub-Sub proclaiming that "it will be seen that this mere painstaking burrower and grub-worm of a poor devil of a Sub-Sub appears to have gone through the long Vaticans and street-stalls of the earth,

⁵¹ See Matthiessen's *The American Renaissance*, Mumford's *Herman Melville: A Study of His Life and Vision*, and Herbert's *Moby-Dick and Calvinism* for these readings.

picking up whatever random allusions to whales he could anyways find in any book whatsoever, sacred or profane” (xvii). There is a profound sense of pity expressed here, perhaps because the Sub-Sub is trapped in a scholarly hierarchy in which he occupies one of the lowest ranks—he is two positions below the librarian—and Ishmael tends to reject hierarchical systems and institutions of formal education in which some men are teachers and other students. But I want to highlight Ishmael’s use of the term “grub-worm” because it bears a certain similarity to Emerson’s suggestion that when men lock themselves up in libraries reading books “instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm” (40). Both of these worm images play on the suggestion that these men are buried underground, far from the light of day and the world above. Especially in Ishmael’s case, the metaphorical comparison to the grub-worm indicates that the Sub-Sub is in some kind of embryonic developmental stage—like a caterpillar that has not yet become a butterfly, although nowhere near as complimentary. As a grub-worm, or bookworm, the Sub-Sub is not really a Man Thinking, but Ishmael uses his research because he sees some value in reading and learning from books. Emerson, too, does not dismiss books altogether, and he comments that “Books are the best of things, well used; abused among the worst” (41). What is useful about Emerson’s claim here is that it provides a way of understanding how Ishmael sees the proper function of books and the value of the Sub-Sub’s project. Books do not impede the intellect: particular ways of reading them and using them do. In Chapter 10, Ishmael and Queequeg are drawn together over a book, which Queequeg “reads” through by counting pages, and he is impressed, not by the book’s subject matter, which Ishmael attempts to explain to him, but by the sheer number of pages it has. While this scene could be understood as simply another humorous depiction of the cultural differences between Queequeg and Ishmael, it actually represents one of the first collaborative intellectual enterprises in the novel, for Ishmael and Queequeg “read” this book together. Queequeg introduces Ishmael to a different way of reading a text and learning something from it; Queequeg’s manner of reading may seem somewhat ridiculous, but Ishmael is open to the idea that it might be valuable in its own right.

Thus, Ishmael carefully stakes out his intellectual terrain, which places some kind of importance on knowledge that is derived from studiously reading in the archives, but ultimately subordinates its value to that gained by the experience of actually going whaling. As C.L.R. James notes, in *Mariners, Renegades & Castaways*, Ishmael “hates authority and responsibility of any kind,” and he detests the kind of learning that is structured by some kind of authority (37).

However, Ishmael recognizes the irony that he is, in fact, writing a book which is deeply skeptical about the value of book-learning. His readers will most likely never go whaling; therefore, ironically, what they will learn about the subject will come from what he writes in the text. The intertextuality of *Moby-Dick* and its range of references to other books suggest that knowledge gained by reading is an absolutely essential part of intellectual development, but like Emerson's, Ishmael's attitude toward books would suggest that they should not be used as authoritative; rather, they should be used to suggest and inspire different ways of reading and thinking.

The Sub-Sub Librarian is not the only isolated individual in *Moby-Dick*. Ishmael's more damning critiques of Starbuck and Ahab further emphasize the dangers inherent in solitude. As a mate, Starbuck is naturally segregated from the rest of the crew by his position in the hierarchy of the ship; he eats all his meals exclusively with the other mates, Stubb and Flask, and really only fraternizes with those of the same rank as he. Of all of the mates, Ishmael characterizes Starbuck as the most isolated because he is the only one of the three who has a wife and child at home in Nantucket. Having a family separates him from the society of his fellow mates, free-wheeling bachelors who hunt whales with reckless abandon and do not understand Starbuck's sense of caution and his yearning to be back home in Nantucket with his family. What's more, the voyage itself obviously physically separates him from those individuals most important to him, his wife and son who are constantly in his mind, hovering ghost-like behind the scenes. In James' reading of *Moby-Dick*, Starbuck metaphorically represents American capitalism; he is a man for whom "money is the measurer" because that is what he needs to support his family. He embodies the "spirit" of the Protestant work ethic, as described and critiqued by Max Weber, among others, because he has dedicated himself to climbing the proverbial ladder of success in order to achieve the rank of first mate on the *Pequod*. Starbuck is careful and prudent, and he is hard working and honest—all utilitarian moral qualities which have helped him to become a successful Nantucket whaleman. Thus, Starbuck works mostly for the benefit of himself and his immediate family, not for the crew, and what is ultimately most important to him is how he can advance his rank so that he can increase his overall earnings. Thus far, in Starbuck's life, he has not needed to think much, for things have gone according to plan; however, he encounters an insurmountable problem when he meets Ahab, a man not driven by the same motivations he is.

As a result, this man finds himself in a situation in which he is confronted by difficult moral questions which require him to become Man Thinking.

In order to rescue the *Pequod's* business venture from utter financial disaster, Starbuck should seize command of the ship from Ahab, place himself in charge, and finish the voyage himself, filling up the ship's hold with oil and taking it back to Nantucket. Starbuck does consider this alternative but cannot bring himself to mutiny because he has the utmost respect for the systems—the legal system and the system of capitalism—in which he is enmeshed. As he stands at Ahab's cabin door, with gun in hand, Starbuck thinks, "But is there no other way? no lawful way?...I stand alone here upon an open sea, with two oceans and a whole continent between me and law" (515). Just like the legal system, which is almost enough to deter him, capitalism requires a respect for organizational hierarchies; therefore, Starbuck must subordinate his interest in profit motives to his regard for his position as second-in-command. He does not allow himself to consider that, in this case, mutiny may be justified. Typically, the legal punishment for mutiny—for whatever reason—was death. This was one way in which owners protected their captains, who were always outnumbered by their often angry and disgruntled crews. However, historical records do show that in some cases mutiny was permitted if the captain was deemed unfit for command, usually because of insanity, severe alcoholism, or lack of commitment to the voyage.⁵² Whether or not mutiny was justified was always determined after the fact by courts of law either on American soil or at the various American consuls established in foreign ports; therefore, potential mutineers had to be willing to risk their lives and fortunes for what they thought was right. The question with which Starbuck is confronted is: what is the greater good? Is it better to obey his commander and respect his position, or is it better to mutiny in order to save the *Pequod's* voyage from financial ruin? These are moral and ethical questions—intellectual ones—which stymie Starbuck both because he is so isolated from the rest of the crew and because he is bound to the capitalist and legal systems that require his obedience and respect. Starbuck has always worked for his own individual success according to systems which demand obedience, not autonomy, and he has no way to intellectually work

⁵² For example, one Captain Richard Veeder in command of the *William Gifford* in 1871 decided to curtail cruising for whales in the Pacific in favor of drunkenly sailing around the islands picking up native girls and entertaining them aboard ship. His crew mutinied and took the vessel to the American consul at Tahiti where it was determined that the sailors were entirely justified in their actions, and Veeder was removed from his position (Creighton 113-14).

through these questions, to become Man Thinking, precisely because he has no strong human connection with anyone else aboard ship.

Critics such as C.L.R. James have made much of the contrast between the Starbuck and Ahab, going so far as to metaphorically cast them as opposites—American capitalist and fascist dictator. What is at stake for James is a contrast between how these two kinds of nation-states organize and control their labor forces. The capitalist leader binds its workers to an incredibly oppressive system, which promises rewards to a few while reducing the vast majority to a state of abject poverty; the fascist dictator simultaneously mesmerizes and compels workers to labor for the state, using both the power of rhetoric and overt force to control and manipulate them. In this sense, the men are opposites, and James' characterization of Ahab as a dictator is quite insightful. However, it is important to note that Ahab is just as isolated from his crew as Starbuck. Holed up in his cabin, Ahab pores over maps and charts by himself, only emerging to get updates on how the quest for Moby Dick is progressing. As a dictatorial personality, Ahab forces men to labor in the service of exacting vengeance on the whale, and he attempts to dictate to them a set of beliefs about the world. In the "Quarter-Deck" chapter, Ahab makes the men swear to chase Moby Dick until the very end, but in forcing them to sign on to this quest, he also attempts to force them to see in Moby Dick what he sees, to symbolically interpret the white whale as he does. Ishmael is resistant to this lesson, for Ahab is, in effect, a dictatorial teacher—the classroom is the *Pequod* and the pupils are the crew.⁵³ The ship depends on a hierarchical organization much like that by which formal education is organized—especially in the world of the Sub-Sub's library—the world Ishmael attempted to escape by quitting his job as a teacher and embarking on this whaling voyage to experience life aboard a whaleship. Ahab's incapacitating affect on Ishmael's ability to think is apparent in the chapters titled "Moby Dick" and "The Whiteness of the Whale." In the former, Ishmael outlines more specifically what the white whale means to Ahab, and in the latter he attempts to draw some conclusions about what the Moby Dick symbolizes to him. While he experiences some intense feelings of dread, he has very little difficulty in describing the history and background of the whale and its symbolic currency for Ahab. Where he has the most difficulty is in distinguishing his own interpretation from that of Ahab. Ishmael makes a valiant attempt at beginning his own reading of the whale,

⁵³ Characterizing a ship's captain as a teacher might seem like a bit of a stretch, but the students of the movie, *Dead Poets Society*, use Walt Whitman's poem, "Oh Captain! My Captain!" to refer to their teacher.

eloquently moving through a variety of different possibilities, but he is never able to articulate just what the whale means to him. The hurried lines with which the chapter concludes suggest that Ishmael is frustrated: “And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?” (195). Ishmael might give up here because he is stymied by the reading of the whale Ahab has already forced on him or because he does not want to assume Ahab’s role and dictate to his readers how they should interpret the whale. Either way, Ishmael rejects the isolated solitary figure of the dictatorial teacher, and never again does he even come close to taking Ahab’s ideas seriously. Rather, he dismisses Ahab and refers to him as a monomaniac for the rest of the novel.

Starbuck and Ahab may be solitary individuals, but, as Ishmael sees it, almost all of the men aboard the *Pequod* are Islanders, or “Isolatoos,” joined together solely because they are all living and working on one ship:

They were nearly all Islanders in the *Pequod*, *Isolatoos* 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 Isolatoos were! An Anacharsis Cloutz 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. (121)

At this point, Ishmael describes all of the men as Isolatoos, each one living in his own little world, separated from the rest of mankind as well as each other; although, as C.L.R. James observes, the men “are bound together by the fact that they work together on a whaling-ship” (20). James goes on to add that “they owe no allegiance to anybody or anything except the work they have to do and the relations with one another on which that work depends” (20). In James’ extended reading of the meaning of work in reference to the crew of the *Pequod*, he emphasizes the anonymity of the individual crew members as they are drawn together into one laboring body, and he cites passages that beautifully and gracefully describe their collective efforts as they work in unison to kill and process the whales. The potential for intellectual/artistic production lies in the descriptions of the laboring body/bodies, for as James quite rightly notes, “There is not only physical prowess and tense emotion but spontaneous literary creation of high order [in these scenes]” (24). He is referring primarily to the speeches and exhortations Flask and Stubb make, urging their men on to confront and kill the whale, but his claim also holds true

for all of those other scenes in which Ishmael labors alongside his peers and writes about the thoughts and feelings he experiences. Thus, there is an aesthetic appeal to laboring body/bodies—something Ishmael clearly admires—but there is also something about performing physical labor in the company of others that is also capable of inspiring generative artistic/intellectual thought.

In another reading of these scenes, William Spanos in *The Errant Art of Moby-Dick* argues that by aligning the crew members of the *Pequod* into one seamless laboring group, Ishmael characterizes them “as an individuated collective body simultaneously charged to accomplish individual feats of production in behalf of the industry (what is normally called heroism) and reduced to docility by a ruthless rational and economy-oriented work ethic and the spatial geometry this ethic imposes” (215-16). Spanos adopts this reading because he sees Ishmael as extremely critical of the hierarchical system of labor organization of the whaling industry as well as the whole host of other ways in which mankind attempts to systematically organize the world. While it is true that Ishmael discusses a number of ways of viewing the world—he tries on a number of interpretive lenses, if you will—he is much more heavily invested in the emotive and artistic potential of collaborative physical labor, the bonds between men that performing this labor creates, than Spanos’s claims would suggest. Combining Spanos’ reading and James’, then, would suggest that Ishmael initially adopts certain modes of living and laboring—such as preserving his isolation—only to reject them later in favor of better ones—laboring in the company of other men—which have the ability to transform him into Man Thinking.

Perhaps Ishmael’s most damning condemnation of isolation occurs in the chapter entitled “The Mast-Head,” which is preceded by a chapter which provides a description of the captain’s cabin and concludes by saying, “in the cabin was no companionship; socially, Ahab was inaccessible” (153). Just as Ahab is completely, utterly, and totally alone in his cabin, Ishmael finds himself in a similar situation atop the main mast of the ship. At first, Ishmael appears to be outlining a description of how being in this position, alone, gives him time to meditate and think—to become an “absent-minded young philosopher” (159). This is just what J. Ross Browne and Washington Irving, among others, found so compelling about contemplating the

vastness of the ocean and the world, alone, from the highest point imaginable on the ship.⁵⁴ But Ishmael concludes this passage thusly:

There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life imparted by a gently rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God. But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch, slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Cartesian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek, you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists! (159)

The pleasantly meditative dream turns into a nightmare of falling and death—the same one that Melville described in *White-Jacket*, when his narrator literally fell from the main mast into the ocean and almost drowned because of the weight of his heavy, water-logged, white jacket. Here, Ishmael warns that men can either think or work, not do both, and what generally happens is that these “philosophers” are incapable of performing their office, looking for whales, because they are too distracted by “the problems of the universe” (158). While the rocking of the ship and the thoughts the ocean inspire thought, this thought is dangerous because it causes the individual to neglect his task at hand and lose his identity, and this has severe consequences. In other words, if one is too detached from the practical world, too isolated, one cannot think productively. Ishmael characterizes this artificially isolated view of the self vs. world as the standard philosophical view, the Cartesian one.⁵⁵ One cannot think productively about the world if one misrecognizes the shared human situation, living and laboring collectively with others, for a purely individual problem split up as a binary of perceiving self and perceived world.

Quite early on in the novel, Ishmael positions himself as a common laborer, one among many, and it is important to understand just what it is that he values about this, for he possesses a kind of laboring pride, which is integral to his perception of collaborative physical labor. Ishmael admits that the hierarchies of the ship are difficult for him to adjust to: “And at first, this sort of thing [obeying orders] is unpleasant enough. It touches one’s sense of honor, particularly if you come of an old established family in the land, the Van Rensselaers, or Randolphs, or

⁵⁴ Washington Irving’s sketch of crow’s nest philosophizing in his essay, “The Voyage,” is just one of many that appear relatively frequently throughout nautical literature.

⁵⁵ Here, Melville’s use of the term Cartesian is rather anomalous. The more standard usage is Cartesian.

Hardicanutes. And more than all, if just previous to putting your hand into the tar-pot, you have been lording it as a country schoolmaster, making the tallest boys stand in awe of you” (6). In the second sentence, which foreshadows what he will have to say about Ahab, Ishmael describes himself as an Ahab-like person, as a dictatorial teacher, making boys “stand in awe” of him. Thus, he dismisses this kind of figure in the opening chapter of the novel, laying the groundwork for his rejection of Ahab in the later chapters. Ishmael feels, to a certain degree, that his sense of honor, his masculinity, is threatened if he obeys orders, but in the next paragraph, he suggests that performing physical labor is honorable in and of itself.

As I have suggested, laboring pride in one’s physical capacities was sometimes pitted against the problem of holding an inferior position in the ships’ hierarchy and sometimes merged with pride in being able to function honorably as a subordinate in an important enterprise. Ishmael has taken on this latter sense of pride when he says, “Do you think that the archangel Gabriel thinks anything the less of me, because I promptly and respectfully obey that old hunks in that particular instance? Who ain’t a slave? Tell me that. Well, then however the old sea-captains may order me about—however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right...” (6). There is dignity here and satisfaction as well, for Ishmael is able to maintain his low position, knowing that losing some autonomy does not make anyone think less of him. And he seems quite proud that he is able to successfully endure this kind of treatment. Furthermore, Ishmael also possess a great deal of pride in the laboring body and its physical characteristics. Everywhere in the opening sections of the novel, Ishmael expresses his awe of the whalemens he encounters and their striking physical appearance. As he enjoys his breakfast at the Spouter Inn, Ishmael describes the men surrounding him as “a brown and brawny company,” and proceeds to launch into an extended discussion of the darkness of their tans:

You could tell pretty plainly how long each one had been ashore. This young fellow’s healthy cheek is like a sun-toasted pear in hue, and would seem to smell almost as musky; he cannot have been three days landed from his Indian voyage. That man next to him looks a few shades lighter; you might say a touch of satin wood is in him. In the complexion of a third still lingers a tropic tawn, but slightly bleached withal; *he* doubtless has tarried whole weeks ashore. But who could show a cheek like Queequeg? Which,

barred with various tints, seemed like the Andes' western slope, to show forth in one array, contrasting climates, zone by zone. (29-30)

This is a highly aestheticized description of a particular bodily characteristic that marks these men as physical laborers, for they would not be tanned if they were not laboring out of doors. While nineteenth-century upper class individuals, especially women, valued the whiteness of their skin because it meant that they did not work outside in the elements, Ishmael clearly values the laboring body that is transformed and marked by its labor.⁵⁶ Not insignificantly, this passage builds in intensity and culminates with a description of Queequeg, who possesses the body Ishmael admires the most and aestheticizes the most.

Ishmael has this sense of pride in laboring bodies (his own and Queequeg's) right from the beginning of the novel, and this admiration makes it possible for him to realize that mundane tasks, performed sociably in the company of other crew members, are capable of generating metaphors for how to contemplate the world. In this way, Ishmael manages to find a place for himself to think within the confines of the American capitalist system. Ishmael gives physical laborers a place to stand in the system, a way of living productively in it. Ultimately, Ishmael transforms collective masculine physical labor into something quite novel—a means through which they can become *Men* Thinking, not *Man* Thinking. Emerson believed that performing physical labor gave a man the materials and experiences necessary to truly become Man Thinking; he should perform this labor first, then think afterwards. But Ishmael finds that the thinking that he does while performing collective physical labor is what is most important, and his appropriation of physical labor for his own artistic purposes helps this kind of labor to accrue more meaning.

For example, in the chapter entitled “The Mat-Maker,” Ishmael and Queequeg are engaged in the activity of weaving a mat, which, for Ishmael, launches an extended discussion about fate and free will. In “The Monkey Rope,” Ishmael and Queequeg are tied together in order to cut up the whale lashed to side of the ship, an act that leads Ishmael to discuss the life-and-death connections between all human beings, and processing the sperm from the case motivates Ishmael's extended discussion of camaraderie, friendship, and good-feeling among

⁵⁶ Many frontier women struggled to maintain their whiteness and tried to always wear sunbonnets to protect their skin from darkening under the sun's rays. Laura Ingalls Wilder's resistance to her mother's instance that she wear her sunbonnet spans the entire series of *Little House on the Prairie* books, from *Little House on the Prairie* to *The Long Winter*.

men. What is especially important to note about these three examples is that this work is not solitary; it is sociable work, performed with others as part of a collective effort. Ishmael begins the novel just as isolated and just as angst-ridden as Ahab—in fact he has been an Ahab-like teacher—but the society of the crew members provide him with an emotional boost that lifts him from his melancholic state and gives him the ability to intellectually think more generatively and optimistically about the world.

When Ishmael begins the chapter titled “A Squeeze of the Hand,” he opens with a description of the duties of the men as they remove the spermaceti from the cavity in the whale’s head: “While some were occupied with this latter duty [baling the case], others were employed in dragging away the larger tubs, so soon as filled with the sperm; and when the proper time arrived, this same sperm was carefully manipulated ere going to the try-works, of which anon” (415). This is one facet of the business of whaling, the factory system of the ship as it processes whale oil, a precursor to the industrial model of labor employed by the New England mills throughout the twentieth century. Each man has his proper place on the assembly line of production; each task is carefully orchestrated so that it can be completed, and the next one can be accomplished in proper order. Like many of the other whaling narratives, *Moby-Dick* contrasts the excitingly laborious process of killing the whale with the drudgery the men endure as they convert the blubber into oil.⁵⁷ In these other texts, as in works about factory labor such as Melville’s own “Tartarus of Maids,” working together on the assembly line in this form of cooperative labor strips the workers of their humanity and turns them into mindless automatons, machines. For these other whaling narratives, there is a totalizing effect—which possesses its own aesthetic, as C.L.R. James quite rightly observes—as the men become one unified mechanical organism, working together in perfect synchronicity.

What is different about this section of *Moby-Dick*, though, is that Ishmael does not describe his task in these terms. For him, sociable work is unifying, but not in a mechanistic sense. Rather, this collaborative effort forges new bonds between the men and reinforces their humanity. As the crew processes the whale, Ishmael is given the task of squeezing the quickly solidifying sperm back into its liquid form:

⁵⁷ For similar representations of the work of whaling see George Tucker’s “New Bedford,” J. Ross Browne’s *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*, and Francis Allyn Olmsted’s *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage*.

It had cooled and crystallized to such a degree, that when, with several others, I sat down before a large Constantine's bath of it, I found it strangely concreted into lumps, here and there rolling about in the liquid part. It was our business to squeeze these lumps back into fluid. A sweet and unctuous duty! No wonder that in old times this sperm was such a favorite cosmetic. Such a clearer! such a sweetener! such a softener! such a delicious mollifier! After having my hands in it for only a few minutes, my fingers felt like eels, and began, as it were, to serpentine and spiralize. (415)

The task is at first described in terms of “a business” and “a duty.” It is work, the task of the men to literally sit at this tub and, with their bare hands, prevent the sperm from congealing into a solid mass. The nature of the sperm, itself, transforms this drudgery into “a sweet and unctuous duty.” This “clearer,” “sweetener,” “softener,” and “mollifier” begins to initiate disintegration at number of levels so that Ishmael's prior ideas about work and labor begin to fall apart—as does his very sense of himself—and it is this disintegration that allows the possibility of rethinking what work means. What is important to note here is that not all kinds of work open up this possibility:

As I sat there at my ease, cross-legged on the deck; after the bitter exertion at the windlass; under a tranquil sky; the ship under indolent sail, and gliding so serenely along; as I bathed my hands among those soft gentle globules of infiltrated tissues, woven almost within the hour; as they richly broke to my fingers, and discharged all their opulence, like fully ripe grapes their wine; as I snuffed up that uncontaminated aroma,—literally and truly, like the smell of spring violets; I declare to you, that for the time I lived as in a musky meadow; I forgot all about our horrible oath; in that inexpressible sperm, I washed my hands and my heart of it; I almost began to credit the old Paracelsan superstition that sperm is of rare virtue in allaying the heat of anger: while bathing in that bath, I felt divinely free from all ill-will, or petulance, or malice, of any sort whatsoever. (415-16)

In the first few sentences of this paragraph, Ishmael sets up two different ideas of labor, the first of which has to do with the “bitter exertion at the windlass.” This specific kind of physical labor is classified as being difficult and strenuous, but squeezing the sperm is not labor in this sense; rather, it is something that Ishmael enjoys doing. Ultimately, what stimulates Ishmael's reformulation of the meaning of this labor is a combination of factors. The release from the

windlass puts Ishmael “at his ease” and gives him the time to observe the peacefulness and serenity of his working environment, which he describes in highly idyllic pastoral terms. What this description of work contains is not images of the mechanistic assembly line of production, but rural peasant fantasies of collaborative labor, which are heavily laden with a sense of nostalgia for a time gone by, a “Golden Age” which, as Raymond Williams argues in *The Country and the City*, never actually existed except in the service of perpetuating this nostalgia. The task of squeezing the sperm by hand makes Ishmael’s labor more sociable by putting him in direct physical contact with his fellow workers, and the mysterious qualities of the sperm itself, its “opulence” and “uncontaminated aroma,” generate never-before-felt emotions. As a result, this specific form of cooperative labor stimulates intellectual productivity which is far more enjoyable to Ishmael than drudgery at the windlass.

As he continues to work at the sperm, Ishmael’s sense of time and space becomes severely distorted, so that time—an equivalent of money as the Franklin-esque maxim holds—flies by. Typically, in the world of wage labor, time is the measurer—how much a man is paid for his work is determined by how many hours he works and the amount of money he is paid per hour. However, Ishmael is not working in the world of wage labor or of clock time and machine pacing. He is being paid according to the lay system which dictates that the men work for however long it takes to fill the ship’s hold with whale oil. Obviously, time is a factor, since a whaleman could make more money if his voyage lasted for two years as opposed to four—then he could work on two voyages in the same amount of time and make twice as much money. However, the nature of the business was such that individual hours did not count for much, especially since there were factors affecting the length of voyages that were out of a man’s control.⁵⁸ As I noted above, a whaling voyage was characterized by long periods of inactivity and short periods of very intense activity, which is to say that the difference between the way time works in the lay system and that of wage labor allows Ishmael to regard his labor differently because he does not need to be as concerned about each individual hour and how he spends that time. As a result, work time turns into leisure time:

⁵⁸ Merchant voyages of the same period focused on transporting their goods from place to place as expeditiously as possible. However, speed was not a factor for whaleships because if a ship did not spot any whales, there was nothing they could do but continue cruising until they found one. See Richard Henry Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast* for a lengthy description of the nineteenth-century merchant marine in California.

Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say,—Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness. (416)

Not only does the flow of time alter for Ishmael as the morning heedlessly passes by, but his very identity disintegrates in the process of squeezing the sperm. Spatially, he cannot distinguish where the sperm ends and the hands of his fellow workers begin. They are united by their task, which is no longer “their business” but “their avocation,” a hobby, not drudgery, and it is a metaphor for the possibilities of the relationships that could exist among all members of the human race. It is here, in the collaborative labor and in the most euphoric moment of the novel, that new kinds of relationships between men are being formed. In Cesare Casarino’s insightful analysis of the homoerotic content of this famous passage in *Modernity at Sea*, he makes the claim that what happens both here and throughout the course of the entire novel is the development of a new kind of relationship between men—an intensely intimate form of male/male friendship—, for which there were no words in nineteenth-century American society (166-67). The strong pleasure Ishmael experiences and the thoughts he generates from laboring in this fashion with the other crew members are ultimately more valuable than what can be produced when the individual is isolated from his fellows.

In words reminiscent of Ishmael’s, Emerson says in “The American Scholar,” “I run eagerly into this resounding tumult. I grasp the hands of those next me, and take my place in the ring to suffer and to work, taught by an instinct, that so shall the dumb abyss be vocal with speech. I pierce its order; I dissipate its fear; I dispose of it within the circuit of my expanding life” (43). What is significant about the contrast between these two pieces is that this is a euphoric moment for Emerson, similarly generated by engaging in sociable work. Much more than Ishmael, though, Emerson characterizes this labor as painful, as rife with suffering, not as pleasant. In Emerson’s account, this work is important to perform only insofar as it is able to

turn the scholar inwards, giving him more experiences about which to think. Ishmael significantly turns outwards, towards his fellow crew members, and this sociability turns the labor not into something painful, but something richer, something which he finds intellectually generative.

While Ishmael's enthusiasm in this scene appears to be unbounded, I think it is significant to note that it is mediated to a certain degree by his use of the word "insanity" to describe the euphoria which comes over him. What remains unexplained and problematic about Ishmael's treatment of insanity in the novel as a whole is that he uses the term both to describe his quest and the wisdom Pip gains from looking into the depths of the ocean. I would argue that Ishmael's euphoric insanity represents a kind of thinking which he opposes to the philosophical rationality of thinkers like Descartes. Ishmael's insanity closely resembles Pip's because of the emotive effect it has on him. In a world in which capitalism equals rationality, insanity has a new role to play, a productive one in which this kind of relationship between men—no matter how insane it might be—replaces the heterosexual marital relationship in the paragraph which immediately follows:

Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm for ever! For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. In thoughts of the visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti. (416)

Here, Ishmael sets up a dichotomy between seeking happiness in intellectual pursuits or in close relationships with fellow human beings, the most intimate, and therefore the most satisfactory, of which would normatively be the marriage union. Living in a state of domestic bliss is not Ishmael's definition of felicity, and neither is solitary intellectual contemplation; therefore, he proposes a third option, squeezing sperm, sociably working with other men. Ishmael clearly wants no part of marriage or domestic life. Nowhere in the novel does he ever desire "the table, the saddle, the fire-side"; instead, he prefers attempting to satisfy his "intellect" or his "fancy."⁵⁹ After all, nothing could be more fanciful than his vision of a united mankind as he saw it when

⁵⁹ Melville's next novel, *Pierre*, will more closely explore the inadequacies of domesticity, marriage, and family life.

he was squeezing the sperm; however, it cannot be done alone, and he needs the companionship of his fellow workers.

Taken together, what the examples of Starbuck, Ahab, and Ishmael represent is a contrast between solitary men (who might, like Starbuck and Ahab, have wives and families but be cut off from the wider range of human contact) and sociable men. As the novel progresses, Ishmael contemplates and then rejects both Starbuck's and Ahab's isolated positions in order to promote his own intellectual project, which depends on his engaging in collaborative work with other men. In places, Ishmael capitalizes on various components of ideological fantasies of masculine labor, namely laboring pride, to promote this project, but he also threatens the very definitions of masculinity on which this fantasy is grounded, particularly in the sperm-squeezing sequence, where homoeroticism has the potential to erupt and disrupt the system of patriarchal capitalism in which he works. This version of capitalism, one which Ishmael opposes, presumes that the man is the main bread-winner for his family and rests on the heterosexual family formation as the normative means by which society is organized. Ishmael expands laboring pride beyond physical capacity and skill, beyond even the ability to maintain a subordinate position in the hierarchy, to participation in thought, invention and creation rooted in the shared experiences of labor. Ishmael's pride in his laboring masculinity is not routed through the most characteristic capitalist/heterosexual relay in which the subordination of the laborer's abilities at work is offset by his being in charge of a household, his lack of power and capacity compensated for by the dependency of a wife and family. Rather, *Moby-Dick* provides the aesthetic, emotional, and intellectual grounding for masculine solidarity among working men that does not automatically support capitalism or heterosexually-organized domesticity.

4.2 SECTION 2

Solitary "Man-Thinking" at His Leisure: J. Ross Browne's *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*

In "The American Scholar," Emerson ranks the different influences on the intellectual according to those which he thinks are the most important, and he places nature before both books and

physical labor. He claims, “He shall see, that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal, and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind” (39). When man engages in solitary contemplation of nature, then, he sees himself: he turns inwards, for in thinking about nature, he better understands the recesses of his own mind. Of labor, Emerson remarks, “Action [labor] is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it, he is not yet man. Without it, thought can never ripen into truth” (43). Although not as important to the intellectual as nature, labor gives man the ability to forge connections with his fellow man, but what is important to Emerson is that it gives man a better sense of himself—as a solitary individual—in the same way that nature does. Ishmael’s project in *Moby-Dick* is to describe how men can become “Men Thinking,” but Browne’s is the same as Emerson’s—to describe how man can become “Man Thinking.” The most important difference between Ishmael and Browne, though, is that Browne is much more similar to Emerson in that he is much more invested in the potential of solitary intellectual speculation, performed mostly in moments when he is not engaged in physical labor, moments that he attempts to describe as leisure. The introduction of the category of “leisure” and its primacy in the opening portions of the narrative raises important questions, pertaining especially to those men working in the nautical arena, about how both work time and leisure time are connected and defined and where intellectual activity falls into this configuration of work and leisure. Browne poses the questions: how does a sailor obtain leisure time, when he is expected to work all of the time? Is intellectual work something to be done during a worker’s leisure time? Or is it something that can be done simultaneously with physical work?

The first reference to leisure occurs in the opening pages of *Etchings* when Browne describes his travel plans: “My design was somewhat ambitious. I was determined to travel as a gentleman of leisure; though, to accomplish this object, it was necessary I should have means” (2). Here is the problem that Browne encounters throughout the narrative: in order to be able to think productively about the world, he needs to see it and find time to think about it, but he simply does not have the money to travel in this manner. Almost serendipitously, he ends up aboard a whale ship which gives him the opportunity to see the world, but not the time to be intellectually productive. Browne’s insistence that he is a “gentleman” most likely has a great deal to do with his Southern heritage. He was from Kentucky, an area of the United States, that, especially during the ante bellum years, was much more class-stratified than the North in terms

of the groups of aristocratic plantation owners, poor white sharecroppers and small landowners, and African-American slaves who all lived and worked there.⁶⁰ The main reason Browne wanted to travel was because he thought it would shed “a glorious galaxy of intellectual light...upon my boyish mind!”, and he thought that traveling as a “gentleman of leisure” would allow him to have the time to think and speculate about the places he wanted to visit (2). Browne was an educated individual—one who was immensely curious about exploring the world and learning from it:

First, I intended visiting France. If I should find nothing very attractive in Havre or Paris, I would immediately proceed to Italy, see all the curiosities, and, after touching at various ports in the Mediterranean, cut across from Constantinople to Alexandria and Cairo, visit the Pyramids, take a flying trip across the Isthmus of Suez, and return by the Cape of Good Hope. All this I intended in doing in an economical, though gentlemanly way. (3)

This is a rather humorous passage, and a rather self-deprecating one in that Browne, as a fairly well-educated, artistic, and inquisitive traveler, thinks that he might not find anything “very attractive in Havre or Paris.” His statement is quite comic, in and of itself, but its comedic tone is ultimately cemented by the lengthy list of places on Browne’s itinerary followed by his ridiculous conclusion that he can do all of this in a “gentlemanly way” on a budget. The fact that he characterizes himself as a “gentleman of leisure,” even though he clearly is not, serves as a set-up for the even more humorous scene with the whaling industry’s New York recruiter, in which he and his equally naïve traveling companion find themselves tricked into signing up for a whaling voyage. However, the early comedic sections of the narrative also show how important leisure time is to him and to the intellectual. Instead of traveling as a gentleman of leisure, he finds himself working in an industry that organized and exploited its labor forces according to a system akin to and predating that of factories ashore, and, over the course of the voyage, he decides to write on behalf of the men trapped by this system who were powerless to do anything about it. The problem he encounters is how to find the time to think about this.

Throughout *Etchings*, Browne struggles to define and resolve questions about the division of physical labor and leisure time aboard ship and place creative, reflective thinking into those realms. Historically speaking, nineteenth-century Americans ashore and at sea were

⁶⁰ William Wells Brown’s *Clotel* and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* both make much of these class differences and spend a great deal of time describing the characteristics of each of them.

struggling for the right to spend time not working but pursuing their own interests, whether those interests were spending time with their families or relaxing and entertaining themselves however they saw fit. Meanwhile, factory owners wanted to get the most out of their workers in order to earn the most profit from their investment in wage labor, for as Marx observes in *Capital, Volume One*, “If the laborer consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist” (363). Marx further observes that debates over the length of the workday were struggles: more specifically, “a struggle between collective capital, *i.e.*, the class of capitalists, and collective labor, *i.e.*, the working-class” (364). In the nineteenth century in the United States, what resulted from this conflict was indeed struggle, bitter labor and legal disputes between workers and their employers over the length of the work week and the work day, as well as the age at which children could begin to work and how much they could work. Although there were a number of intense disputes over these issues, they were fairly easily negotiated for factory workers who were paid according to the wage system, because each hour of the time they actually spent working was compensated.⁶¹ Ultimately, despite almost insurmountable opposition, factory workers were able to develop and institute unions and laws, which helped to protect them, set minimum wages, and establish a standard work day and week (Zinn 224-25).

In the nautical arena, men were contracted to work twenty-four hours, seven days a week—or whenever they were needed—and while some merchant ship owners did give sailors hourly wages, whalers worked according to the system of lays, which dictated that they receive a final share of the ship’s profits, not a specific amount of money for each hour of work.⁶² Thus, the New England whalers found themselves in a particularly difficult position: there was no clear division of work time and leisure time aboard a whaleship, because, in a manner of speaking, they were being paid for all of their time. Leisure time, or free time, had to be either granted by the captain or stolen by sailors who sorely needed a break from the daily duties of sailing a ship and hunting for whales. Farmers who owned and worked their own property were one group ashore that experienced a comparable lack of leisure time, because they had to take care of their crops, harvests, and animals all of the time during the growing seasons.

⁶¹ Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States* contains several chapters outlining the labor movements of America’s factory workers: how the labor unions negotiated for fair working conditions, developed unions, and argued for a set work day.

⁶² See Eric Hobsbawm’s *Industry and Empire* and Marcus Rediker’s *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* and *The Many-Headed Hydra* for more information on the specifics of the organization of labor in the maritime arena and how these workers formed their own labor movements like factory workers ashore.

Slaves, whose entire lives were spent laboring, were another group. Unlike sailors, though, farmers did have more leisure time during the winter when there was not as much to do on their property, and some farmers had more independence because some of them were land-owners. Common whalers had to be available to work during the middle of the night should a storm arise or if they were processing a whale. Their leisure time only came during unproductive lulls in whale-catching and when a ship stopped in port—provided the captain gave them shore leave. And what's more, they had no means to protest against their working conditions because incredibly strict anti-mutiny laws prevented them from voicing their concerns as a collective bargaining group to their captains.

In order to understand the importance of leisure time to J. Ross Browne and the other men aboard the *Styx*, it is necessary to consider the emotive aspects of what intensely laboring for an incredibly dictatorial captain does to the crew. Even though Ishmael works for an equally dictatorial captain, *Moby-Dick* does not necessarily focus on the leisure activities of the crew and precludes the kind of positive emotive human connections that leisure can provide as a release from this kind of oppression. The *Pequod* never stops at any foreign port, and the men never get to experience the joys of shore leave. Almost exclusively, the middle sections of *Moby-Dick* show the *Pequod*'s crew working, not telling stories, playing music, and dancing in the moments of spare time allowed them by Captain Ahab. Ishmael spins the yarn of the *Town-Ho*, but that story is not actually told aboard the *Pequod*. Ishmael frames the story by describing how he told the story when he was visiting Catholic dignitaries in South America. "Midnight, Forecastle," is one of the only sections of this portion of the novel that shows how the crew spends their leisure time; however, the way in which it is written—in the form of a play—serves to separate the men as opposed to bringing them together. Instead of weaving the dialogue together into a cohesively narrativized representation of the crew members and their leisure activities, Ishmael fragments it by isolating each crew member and his speech, and what emerges from this section is a nonsensical and chaotic conversation in which one man raises a random topic only to have it dismissed by another sailor, who raises another equally random topic. For the most part, the whalers in *Moby-Dick* only have leisure time between voyages, and it is only in the opening sections of the novel that Ishmael describes how they entertain themselves ashore.

Before describing how the crew of the *Styx* coped with their dictatorial captain, Browne makes sure to emphasize the tyranny and oppression to which the men were subjected. The

captain's first speech, which outlines his expectations for the voyage, provides some foreshadowing that the crew's working conditions will quickly become miserable and intolerable:

'I suppose you all know what you came a whaling for? If you don't, I'll tell you. You came to make a voyage, and I intend you shall make one. You didn't come to play; no, you came for oil; you came to work'...'When it's your watch on deck, you must stay on deck, and work, if there's work to be done. I won't have no skulking. If I see sogers here, I'll soger 'em with a rope's end. Any of you that I catch below, except in cases of sickness, or when it's your watch below, shall stay on deck and work till I think proper to stop you.' (35-36)

The thrust of the captain's speech emphasizes labor and the hard and swift punishment for not laboring, but, at first, his promises satisfy Browne that he will be treated fairly. Captain A— makes it sound as though he will be a tough commander, but a just one. In other words, the men will be expected to work hard, but only when they are fully capable of doing so. They will be punished if they shirk their duties but will be allowed to remain below in their bunks if they fall ill or are injured. Browne soon finds out, though, that the captain does not intend to keep his word, and he forces many of the men to work even when they are sick and completely incapable doing so. In fact, Browne's best friend and fellow crewmember, W—, collapses on deck and lapses into delusional fits after being forced to stand under direct sunlight at the mast-head for two hours after only partly recovering from an intense bout of seasickness. Of this incident, Browne says,

I thought it very hard that a man, really suffering from illness, should be compelled by the captain to stand two hours a day at the mast-head. It was, in this case at least, a little better than murder. W— never recovered from the effects of this fearful affliction. Better, far better would it have been for him, had he fallen from his post and found a watery grave. There are things connected with this event that weigh heavily upon my heart; things not rudely to be touched—affections tried and hearts broken. (41)

The extremes to which Browne goes in this passage—the fact that he says that it would have been better if W— had died immediately—demonstrate the excessive cruelty of the captain and the highly oppressive working conditions aboard ship. Given the fact that Captain A— promised the crew that they would not work if they could not, Browne emphasizes his deception of the

crew and his hypocrisy. And the emotive tone of this passage, colored by the horrendous treatment of W—, falls into both one of despair and outrage. This was how it felt to be working for such an unfeeling and uncaring captain.

As the voyage progresses, Browne finds himself also despairing about his own working and living conditions, quality of food, and lack of rest and relaxation. In one of the most poetically descriptive passages in the narrative, Browne discusses how he feels as he turns the grindstone to sharpen whaling spades, his job in the assembly line of processing the whale:

There I turned that grindstone, and turned on hour after hour, and turned the palm of my right hand into a great blister, and turned the palm of my left into another; turned both my arms into a personified pain; turned every remnant of romance out of my head; turned and turned till my grand tour seemed to have turned into a grindstone; round and round I turned that stone till I began to think I was a piece of the handle, and turned with it; and my head appeared to turn, and my feet to turn, and the game-legged cooper to turn, and the ship to turn, and the sea, and the whale, and the sharks, and the clouds, and all creation seemed to be turning with myself and that grindstone! (131-32)

To some degree, the style of this passage—the long flowing sentence and the repetition of particular phrases—resembles the section of *Moby-Dick* where Ishmael describes the squeezing of the sperm; however, instead of work turning into a leisurely activity, the labor turns into pain, the man becomes indistinguishable from his painful labor, and eventually the entire world becomes one that is entirely consumed with this painful labor. Time does not stop or pass heedlessly for Browne as it does for Ishmael; the flow of time becomes interminably long and unceasing. Emotively, the tone is also different, because there is no euphoria here; rather, the turning of the grindstone elicits pain both physically—in the form of blisters—and mentally—in terms of how the work de-romanticizes the voyage and causes Browne to abandon any hopes of traveling on his “grand tour.” While this is solitary labor, and Browne values isolation as stimulating to the intellect, this labor is not inspirational to his mind precisely because it is so painful and involuntary, and he is being compelled to do it; this is not a moment of leisure.

Browne quickly discovers that these periods of intense physical labor are often punctuated by periods of incredible monotony, while the ship is cruising for whales. Given his attitude toward the physical labor of processing whales, it would stand to reason that these breaks from his more difficult duties should give him some leisure time to socialize with the other crew

members and pursue his own intellectual interests. However, Browne describes these periods as insufferably boring:

The monotony of a long passage is known to every body who has ever read of the sea. Seldom is it relieved, except by a squall, a calm, a sail in sight, or some trifling adventure. Time hung very heavily on our hands, though we contrived various means to pass it away as pleasantly as possible. The chief resources I had for driving dull care away were reading, drawing, writing in my journal, eating whenever I could get any thing to eat, and sleeping whenever the Portuguese would give me a chance. (110)

For Browne, time passes very slowly on this voyage whether he is resting or laboring, and his “chief resources”—his only source of intellectual stimulation—are the few books that the other crew members brought with them. It is clear from this passage that there is very little, even in leisure time, about working on this whaleship that is pleasurable, and even though Browne tries to engage in intellectual activities and socializing with the crew members, he is unable to alleviate his boredom and feelings of oppression. I would suggest that in order for leisure time to effectively revitalize the worker and his intellect, the individual has to be able to get some distance from his work and some freedom to pursue his own interests, and the spatial orientation of the ship has a great deal to do with Browne’s unrest. Browne’s workplace is also his home, and he lives in incredibly close proximity to the man who controls every aspect of his work and his life. It is only in those few moments when Browne is able to gain both leisure time and some distance from the captain that he enjoys himself the most and is able to engage in his most productive intellectual work. Ishmael’s workplace is also his living place, but Ishmael is much more successful at transforming performing physical labor into something intellectually generative, primarily because of the society performing this labor thrusts him into.

For Browne, standing alone at the mast-head, the farthest point away from the ship he can get during the voyage, infuses him with more optimism than he usually possesses and fuels his intellectual well-being: “The mast-head was a little world of peace and seclusion, where I could think over past times without interruption. There was much around me to inspire vague and visionary fancies” (193). The mast-head gives Browne the seclusion and isolation he needs in order to engage in the kind of intellectual work he enjoys the most. Like Ishmael, who describes the same duty in a very similar manner, Browne focuses on the beauty of the ocean and the sky and the enjoyment he receives from having time to himself to think and reminisce about the past:

There was much around me to inspire vague and visionary fancies: the ocean, a trackless waste of waters; the arched sky spread over it like a variegated curtain; the sea-birds wheeling in the air; and the myriads of albacore cleaving their way through the clear, blue waves, were all calculated to create novel emotions in the mind of a landsman. (193)

Here is Emerson's Man Thinking—atop the mast-head, Browne finds Nature all around him, and he is inspired to contemplate the world and his position in it. While Ishmael warns that men who have a tendency to daydream—Platonists and Pantheists—like this run the risk of falling into the ocean and drowning, Browne is at his happiest in this position, for it is here that he does his best thinking. This is further emphasized by the regret that Browne feels when he is shaken out of his reverie by the imposition of reality on his own personal desires, the voice of the captain telling him to keep a sharp look out for whales: “To be suddenly startled from a delicious revery, abounding in those ethereal and refined fancies which Rousseau has so beautifully described as part of the inspiration derived from an elevated atmosphere...is not so romantic as one might suppose” (194). Browne never rejects the intellectual potential these daydreams possess in the same manner as Ishmael, and he clearly enjoys it. The problem for Browne is that even though he is as distanced from the captain as he possibly can be, he is never far enough to completely drive away the reminders of the reality of life aboard ship, never able to be at his leisure.

Although Browne takes great pleasure in his stolen solitary moments atop the main mast, he does also enjoy time spent socializing with the particular sailors he manages to befriend over the course of the voyage. This sociability does inspire his intellect as it does for Ishmael, but key difference is that these social moments occur, not while he is laboring, but during times of leisure:

From seven till nine o'clock we usually spent on deck, amusing ourselves at the various pastimes common among sailors. When the weather permitted, we had dancing, singing, and spinning yarns. The Portuguese had a guitar, or viola, as they called it, with wire strings, upon which they produced two or three melancholy minors, accompanying their performance with a harsh, unmusical chant. Four of them formed couples, and while one of the by-standers played the guitar, those forming the set moved backward and forward like hyenas in a cage, pawing the deck with their feet, and using their fingers by way of castanets; all chanting, in a whining tone, two or three monotonous notes, which they repeated till it became fairly distracting. While the Portuguese amused themselves in this

way, the American portion of the crew had songs, yarns, and dances after their own fashion. As all human enjoyments are comparative, so many an hour of real pleasure was thus passed on board the *Styx* by myself and others, who had seen worse times since we had left New Bedford. (46)

Browne and the other men clearly experience a real sense of enjoyment from being able to socialize during these moments of leisure; however, Browne's attitude toward the Portuguese sailors also demonstrates how segregated the crew was by race and nationality. The crew may be able to socialize and form close personal bonds with each other, but only along ethnic and racial lines. The animal imagery Browne uses to describe the Portuguese men is difficult to ignore and is further cemented by other similar passages in the narrative. In fact, much of the disgust Browne possesses towards his living conditions derives from the fact that he is forced to live in the same quarters as the Portuguese sailors, and he feels that Captain A— favors this portion of the crew. Even though he is decidedly more tolerant of other cultures in his descriptions of the natives of Zanzibar, Browne never overcomes his disgust at the Portuguese whalers, and this passage serves to show both how they men could and did enjoy these more social moments as well as divide themselves along the lines of race and ethnicity.

Because of his rank as a common seaman and because of their dictatorial personalities, Browne is not able to get close enough to the captain or the mates to establish any kind of relationship with them, and he obviously does not like the Portuguese sailors, whom he describes variously as animals, fiends, and uncouth boors. However, there are a few men like John Tabor, the working-class poet I described above, whose company he enjoys, and he says:

The only time I experienced any thing akin to real pleasure was during my night-watches, when the weather was fine. I could then find a comfortable seat, and spend a few hours in agreeable conversation with Tabor and Clifford, the only two on board who really had any idea of the pleasures of social intercourse. (194)

The three men tell stories, one of which appears in the narrative as “John Tabor's Ride,” and, along with Browne, I would call it an example of how creative the sailors could be at entertaining each other. Spinning yarns was an art at which sailors were particularly adept, and they bonded with each other as they grouped together to listen to these outlandish and highly improbable tales of life on the high seas. As the above passage makes clear, Browne is quite choosy about his friends, and the fact that he was not a typical sailor of the time most likely

accounts for his feelings of superiority towards many of the other men. But what emerges from Browne's descriptions of all of these moments of pleasure and pain, leisure and work, boredom and intellectual stimulation is a question about why the entire voyage is one to be endured instead of enjoyed. The way in which Browne weaves together scenes when the men are enjoying themselves at their leisure with many scenes when the men are suffering through their work day, begs the question of why this suffering is even necessary. Why do physical labor, working as a whaler, and working under this captain have to be so excruciatingly painful? Clearly, there is a link between this question and the goals Browne has for his work.

Ishmael's intellectual project combines self-exploration with exploration of the world fueled by the intellectual potential of physical labor, but Browne's project has everything to do with the fact that it is piece of social protest. Browne uses his intellectual activities to serve the interests of a particular class, in this case, common foremast hands working under the oppressive organizational system of labor inherent in the nineteenth-century American whaling industry. Any analysis of this text must take into account Browne's multi-faceted strategy for social change. His goal is to abolish flogging, improve American consuls abroad, and provide common sailors with the rights which the Constitution guarantees them. Browne's rhetorical strategies, I would argue, ultimately reinforce ideological fantasies of masculine physical labor. Not only does Browne strive to define and articulate a division of work and leisure, ultimately emphasizing the importance of leisure as a means of boosting the morale of the crew members, but he also attempts to use laboring pride to alter the image of the traditional nineteenth-century stereotype of common sailors as dangerous, violent, blasphemous, foolhardy drunks who were more interested in visiting dens of iniquity and chasing women than they were in going to church, saving their money, and being good citizens. In *Etchings*, the sailors gather together, bonding over good yarns, joking with each other, playing music, and telling other humorous stories about their worldwide adventures. They may be rogues, but Browne represents them as likable rogues who do not deserve to be treated as slaves to their captain, and his descriptions of them—and himself—emphasize their impressive physical strength. Browne begins the narrative more interested in gentlemanly pursuits, but he comes to possess a sense of laboring pride based upon his growing physical capacities. As he and his friend sign on to the whaling voyage the recruiter comments that he is “sorry you are not a little stouter” (10). At this point, Browne does not have the muscular development of a superior whaler, but he eventually achieves that—by

the end of the voyage, describing how well he is able to row a boat: “and as, by this time, I was as tough and muscular as my comrades, the boat danced along the water in fine style” (293). He obviously takes great pride in himself and his newfound abilities here, casting it as a new skill which enables him to row “in fine style.”

Nowhere is Browne’s attempt to characterize the sailors as likable rogues who are subject to extreme injustices more apparent than in his description of Bill Mann and his fight with the captain, which begins with observations about Mann’s body: “In person he was large and unwieldy, and possessed of great strength” (151). He continues his description of Mann, referencing one of Shakespeare’s more political plays about tyranny and oppression, *Julius Caesar*. First, Browne describes Mann as a typical sailor, saying:

According to his own account, he [Mann] had killed more whales, broken more girls’ hearts, whipped more men, been drunk oftener, and pushed his way through more perils, frolics, pleasures, pains, and general vicissitudes of fortune than any man in the known world. (152)

At first, Mann appears to be a happy-go-lucky sailor, bragging about his experiences with women, alcohol and the whaling industry with great gusto, but it becomes apparent that Mann is deeply unhappy, for he “was a great grumbler,” who highly resented the ill-treatment he received at the hands of the captain (152). Browne then proceeds to explain how Mann and another sailor received some much needed shore leave and used that opportunity to get extremely intoxicated, by selling everything they had. Mann convinced the other sailor to sell his pants, promising to pay him back when they got back to the ship. Mann’s lack of funds, which was only discovered once they both returned to the *Styx*, caused an argument between the two men, which, in turn, angered the captain, who punished Mann by threatening to flog him and sending him below to sleep off his inebriation. All the while, Mann was ranting and raving in a state of delirium in which he “fancied he was Julius Caesar, about to be murdered in the senate” (158). Browne continues the tale by describing how Mann continued to misquote lines from the play, even after he had fallen asleep in his hammock, ironically always placing himself in the lead role. It is important to note that Browne was not an extreme advocate of temperance, and he offers no damning critique of taking alcohol, which many of the other authors of whaling narratives condemned as highly immoral. Instead, he plays on the humorous qualities of the story to emphasize the humanity of Bill Mann. The fact that a common sailor, who was in such dire

straits that he had sold another man's pants in order to purchase alcohol, would compare himself to Julius Caesar is ridiculous enough, but the fact that Browne refers to a play centered on the political power of a dictatorial personality is no coincidence. The main thrust of his critique of the whaling industry is based on the fact that the captain has the ability to rule the ship as a dictator, because his power is unquestioned, and a man, even one who possesses great musculature, cannot stand up for himself or what he considers to be right. As Browne more overtly states earlier in the narrative:

A man has no right to strike his commander, however well justified he may be in so doing, according to our notions of right and wrong. Nor must he use language that can be termed insolent or mutinous. This might do ashore, where one man can meet another upon equal terms; but it can not be carried out at sea. If the captain can not manage Jack, the officers are ready to lend their aid; and, to my thinking, it would be poor satisfaction to be seized up by main force and flogged like a negro. Until masters are taught, by the severest punishment, that their little brief authority does not justify them in acts of tyranny and cruelty, poor Jack must quietly submit to all his woes! (50-51)

Here, Browne clearly states his position on authority at sea, while in the passage about Bill Mann, he more subtly advances his opinion, which is rendered more palatable by the humorous tone of the scene. In this passage, Browne employs abolitionist rhetoric as a way of protesting against flogging, and he compares the common sailors to slaves who are regularly beaten on the southern plantations for insubordination.

Throughout the entire text, *Etchings* is laden with references to slavery and the comparison of common sailors to African American slaves, but nowhere is this more apparent than the end of the text, which contains Browne's most direct and pointed attacks on the injustices of the whaling industry. It is in the last chapter that Browne's tone shifts decidedly from one of lightheartedness to one of utter disgust at American hypocrisy:

It is not a matter of surprise that those who are the most violent in their denunciation of the oppression and injustice of our Southern institutions are peculiarly sensitive about the freedom of the whole human race. Massachusetts being largely interested in the whale fishery, has constantly before her practical demonstrations of the horrors of slavery. The philanthropists of that state will, it is to be hoped, make some

grand efforts in behalf of the seamen employed in their whaling fleet, as soon as they dispose of the African race. (499)

Whereas, in prior sections of the narrative, Browne more subtly pointed out the similarities between the seamen's plight and that of slaves, here he overtly challenges the hypocrisy of an entire state of the union. Citizens of Massachusetts, well-known as abolitionists, espouse one cause, the injustice inherent in enslaving an entire race of people; however, they turn a blind eye to the near-slavery that exists right in front of them. Not only does Browne make the comparison between common sailors and slaves, but he also completely ridicules abolitionists, rather sarcastically commenting that maybe their next cause will be seamen after they have dealt with slavery.

Abolitionist rhetoric is not the only kind employed by Browne in these more didactic passages. He also appeals to his readers' sense of national pride by saying,

It is a disgrace to the American flag that the barbarous system of flogging, now permitted in our vessels, has not long since been abolished. A glorious navy is ours; a glorious whaling fleet have we when such a system is suffered to exist. What a spectacle of Republican perfection we present to the world! (496)

The tone of this passage and the angry sarcasm which concludes it express Browne's extreme outrage at the fact that this form of punishment exists in the maritime world. On land, American citizens are guaranteed by the Constitution a fair trial and just punishment for the crimes they might commit, but on the ocean, the captain is the sole judge, jury, and executioner. Thus, common sailors are denied their rights as American citizens just because they choose to work in such an industry. It is important to note that Browne's argument is formulated in jeremiad-like fashion—he attempts to rectify the wrongs of the American whaling industry by fulfilling America's promise. He makes these whalers seem worthy of his protest by playing into already existing ideologies of masculine physical labor, which configured these working class men as American heroes, and like Ishmael, he elaborates the possibilities of this laboring pride: these men, including himself, are authentic working class poets in addition to being incredible physical specimens.

What ultimately emerges from the narrative is a conflation of two threads: Browne's individual intellectual interests and his advocacy for social change on behalf of the group. Clearly, Browne's early interest in his "grand tour" demonstrates that he desires to see the world,

explore it, and learn from it, but as he travels, he realizes that there are great injustices inherent in the whaling industry that deserve to be exposed. He learns throughout the text that to become Man Thinking he must have the leisure time to engage in solitary speculation, but he is never able get that time. Hence, there is the need for social protest. While Browne's project significantly contrasts with Ishmael's, as I have shown, both Browne and Ishmael do manage to convey that not only are they themselves Men Thinking, so are many other men, like John Tabor. Neither Browne, nor Melville buy into the symbolic role of whalers as exemplary Americans, but they do put these claims to use on behalf of whalers. Because writers such as Crèvecoeur, Cooper, and Owen Chase had already established whalers as ideal Americans, writers such as Browne who were interested in the well-being of whalers could use this nationalistic appropriation of whaling for the whalers's benefit. Browne's position is that if these men are symbolic American, or examples of American workers, then they should not be working in conditions that approach slavery and deny them the protections of the Constitution. Melville is a bit more invested in the symbolic potential of whalers than Browne is, because he is more interested in exploring certain kinds of American identities via allegorical representations of Ahab, Starbuck, and "the ship of state." But Melville insists on not reducing the common foremast hands to some embodiment of their purely physical functions, and he suggests that the whalers's bonds with each are more important and valuable than their being deceived into following Ahab's quest.

5.0 CHAPTER 5

“She was following the path of duty”: Whaling Wives and Their Fantasies of Domestic Bliss

Helen E. Brown, in her sentimental novel, *A Good Catch; or, Mrs. Emerson's Whaling-Cruise* (1884), employs the above phrase in order to explain why her heroine, the wife of a whaling captain, decided to sail around the world with her husband on his whaleship (14). Mrs. Emerson was indeed a fictional character, and Brown's focus is primarily on how her gentle maternal influence inspired a religious conversion in one of the common sailors. However, she was based upon an actual whaling wife, Mary Chipman Lawrence, and Brown's text loosely follow the events Lawrence recorded in her personal journal. Like many other whaling wives, this fictional one traveled with her husband and her small, five-year-old daughter, Minnie, because she felt that it was her “duty” as his wife to stay with him and keep the family together, even though a whaleship was not necessarily considered to be a place that a nineteenth-century woman should frequent. As women who were living in their husbands' workplaces, these wives faced special challenges, for they were passengers, not laborers, and they were the only women aboard these ships. They may have been able to stay with their husbands, but they lost contact with all of the family affiliations they had ashore and were relegated to staying in their cabins, talking only to their husbands and children, because it was thought to be dangerous for them to associate with the uncouth, boorish, and uncivilized common sailors.⁶³ What's more, they were not allowed to perform all their traditional domestic housekeeping duties, for the ships already employed cooks and cabin boys. Many of these wives were left with nothing to do except write in their journals,

⁶³ While this may seem like an irrational class-based resentment of common sailors, in some cases, the dangers women faced in associating with sailors were quite real. In *Rites & Passages*, Margaret Creighton records the experiences of one Captain Jernegan, who found that his first mate had developed a particular obsession with his wife, and this sailor attempted to spy on her in her cabin so that he could witness her undressing (99-100).

read, play with their children, or do needlework. For a nineteenth-century American woman, these were definitely unconventional domestic arrangements, and ones which many women found unsatisfying, as is evidenced by the amount of boredom and frustration they express in their journals.

What is especially important to note is that the opportunity of sailing with their husbands was not presented to whaling wives until later in the nineteenth century and that this choice was only available to captain's wives. These women were upper-middle-class individuals, not members of the working classes. Throughout the nineteenth century, whaling voyages grew longer and longer, and ship owners realized that their captains resented being absent from their wives for three or four year intervals. Moreover, they felt that the sexual and drunken escapades of the common sailors were getting out of control. In order to boost the captains' morale and provide a civilizing influence over the crew, they permitted some captains to bring their wives along with them.⁶⁴ For most other whaling wives, however, the only option was to stay at home while their husbands were gone. The problem for them was that their domestic sphere was also organized in a quite unconventional manner. If those who traveled with their husbands felt frustrated and concerned with their domestic arrangements, these wives who stayed on shore experienced much apprehension about theirs as well. Because whaling required men to be absent for increasingly long periods of time, shoreside whaling families, by necessity, had to adopt different configurations of men's and women's roles than the normative ones enacted in many nineteenth-century households. These wives played the role of both father and mother for their children, managed the economic affairs of the household, and transacted business dealings outside of the home in their husbands' stead. Coping with the loneliness they experienced was quite difficult, and they established extensive networks of family and friends, who all constantly visited and supported each other while their husbands were gone.

The degree of fear and consternation which accompanied these quite novel domestic arrangements has been especially puzzling for scholars such as Lisa Norling and others

⁶⁴ Having their wives aboard did ease the loneliness of many ship captains, but there is little evidence to suggest that their crew members behaved any differently. Both Mary Chipman Lawrence and Eliza William record how their husbands punished many of the common sailors on their ships for insubordination and drunken misadventures ashore. Of one of these shore-leave incidents, Lawrence remarks, "Saw several of our sailors pass, who told me that one of our number had been taken to the fort for drinking and being unruly in the street. It made me feel badly; I had hoped there would be no such doings among our crew. I thought better things of them, but my husband has always told me that sailors would be sailors and that after we had been in port, my eyes would be opened. I am fearful that it is so" (26).

interested in whaling narratives by and about these women. After all, there were a number of representations of nontraditional domesticity circulating throughout nineteenth-century American culture. Fanny Fern's novel *Ruth Hall* describes how one woman, upon the death of her husband, independently managed to support herself and her daughter by establishing her own writing career—without getting remarried. In Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok*, a white woman marries an Indian chief, has a child with him, and then leaves them both for another man. And in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Margaret Fuller argues, against prevailing nineteenth-century cultural beliefs, that men and women were inherently similar, not essentially different. Despite the fact that nineteenth-century writers, especially women writers, were discussing and promoting many different kinds of domestic options for women, whaling wives and those writing about them remained quite critical of the versions of domesticity they were forced to adopt. Norling, in *Captain Ahab Had a Wife*, concludes that representations of these women were drastically impacted by the cult of Victorian domesticity, which she quite persuasively argues became descriptive instead of prescriptive. In other words, at first the cult of domesticity *promoted* certain popular visions of domesticity, but this vision became so powerful that it distorted these women's perceptions and descriptions of reality, and they eventually used these norms to *describe* their unconventional household arrangements.

I would argue, though, that it is important to separate the way men represented these women from the way these women represented themselves, for there are several significant differences. The cult of domesticity and the gender roles it advocated certainly did have an impact on the way in which men represented whaling wives, for masculinity, as defined by this ideology, relied upon the fantasy of masculine American physical labor in which many writers were already enmeshed. Physical laborers were compensated for their subordinate position in the hierarchy by being in charge of their families, while for upper-class men, being in charge at home reinforced the superiority written into their positions at work. Importantly, the domesticity prescribed by the cult of domesticity was class specific, for many working-class families could not depend solely on the income of husbands and fathers, and wives and mothers did have to work outside of the home. Even if working-class families could not afford to have their wives spending all of their time inside the home, these women were subordinates to their husbands and were responsible for performing the vast majority of the domestic tasks. Many working-class families could believe in the ideal as something they hoped to achieve even if they could not live

by it at the present time.⁶⁵ They could hope someday to reach a position of economic stability which would enable them to arrange their households in this way. Both the working-class pride in masculine physical labor and the cult of domesticity's division of labor cast masculinity against femininity, as two essentially different identities, and positioned men as providers, going out into the world and working or laboring—depending on the class of the family—, and ideally coming home to women safely installed in a stable domestic sphere. The non-traditional gender roles assumed by both whaling wives who stayed at home and those who traveled, threatened these configurations of masculinity, which, as I indicated in the Introduction, were quite unstable. Many whalemens worried a great deal about what exactly their wives were doing in their absences, and this was not just a matter of being anxious about how their wives were managing the household income. Rather, it had everything to do with fears of being cuckolded. Some men did trust their wives to be faithful to them. Many women were, but some whalemens, such as Owen Chase, returned home after a three or four year voyage only to discover that they had newborn babies waiting for them.⁶⁶ Wives who traveled with their husbands assumed the role of world traveler, and they moved about in the incredibly masculine world of the ship in ways other nineteenth-century women could not. Critiquing these domestic arrangements—in the case of men writing about stay-at-home whaling wives—or containing women in the hyper-domestic sphere of the cabin—in the case of men writing about traveling whaling wives—were two ways of stabilizing this kind of masculine identity.

For whalemens in particular, defining masculinity was troublesome, not just because their wives were assuming more masculine gender roles, and they had difficulty controlling them, but because men on whaleships formed intense kinds of homosocial bonds with one other and were forced to perform the domestic tasks that were typically assigned to women. While most whaling narratives—other than Melville's—do not focus on homosociality explicitly, fears about it manifest themselves in extensive re-assertions of heterosexuality. Sailors, such as Bill Mann in J. Ross Browne's *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*, and Jack Jarvis in Harry Halyard's *Wharton the Whale-Killer!*, tend to continually over-emphasize their heterosexual conquests and describe how they have girlfriends in every port of call around the world. Modern critics such as Eve

⁶⁵ Also noteworthy is the fact that upper-class families did not necessarily live according to the norms of the Cult of Domesticity either. As Kate Chopin scathingly remarks in *The Awakening*, “the mother-women” are not really “mother-women,” for most of their child rearing duties are performed by maids and servants (10).

⁶⁶ See Nathaniel Philbrick's *In the Heart of the Sea* for more on Owen Chase and his life after the *Essex* disaster.

Kosofsky Sedgwick and Cesare Casarino have found many of Melville's nautical texts, including *Billy Budd*, *White-Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick*, useful for examining the presence of manly homosexual desire, albeit latent and controlled. Despite some subtle differences in their arguments, Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* and Casarino in *Modernity at Sea* both focus on Melville's ships in *White-Jacket*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Billy Budd* as places where new configurations of masculinity are being played out—where homoeroticism is admired, promoted, suppressed, and repressed. While this scholarship does pave the way for an interrogation of alternative definitions of nineteenth-century masculinity, I am more interested in the fact that this homosexual desire is typically controlled, metaphorically “closeted,” to use Sedgwick's terminology. Women and their accompanying gender roles were key to this suppression. Sedgwick maintains in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* that “the emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality...can[not] be understood outside of its relation to women and the gender system as a whole” (2). I would suggest that one way of holding the disruptive potential of homoerotic masculine desires or affiliations in check was to control women, to metaphorically thrust women back into the domestic sphere—a reactionary move made by many of the whaling narratives. In this way, men could reclaim their masculinity and suppress any threats to it posed by the absence of women in their shipboard lives or the fact that women ashore assumed more masculine roles.

When nineteenth-century definitions of domesticity and femininity are analyzed alongside this fantasy of American manly labor, the question becomes: what role did women play in this configuration of physical labor and American-ness? For the most part, women were not included in this fantasy. After all, women did not perform the work of whaling; one of the only recorded instances of a woman working in the whaling industry appears in Nelson Cole Haley's *Whale Hunt: The Narrative of a Voyage by Nelson Cole Haley Harpooner in the Ship Charles W. Morgan 1849-1853*. In this sailor's yarn, a woman, jilted by her whaleman lover, disguises herself as a man and ships on a whaling voyage in a futile attempt to find him. For a time, she proves herself as able-bodied as any man aboard ship, but she is eventually discovered, summarily removed from her duties, and ultimately returned home. Apart from this one exception, so far as I know, women were not performing the work of whaling themselves, but working-class women did perform vast amounts of physical labor, both inside the home and out, and their labor was not appropriated for national purposes in the same way as that of the men.

They had a different relationship to physical labor and national identity. As Michèle Barrett claims in *Women's Oppression Today*, "A sexual division of labour, and accompanying ideologies of the appropriate meaning of labour for men and women, have been embedded in the capitalist division of labour from its beginnings" (98). If ideological fantasies of masculine physical labor gave meaning to the labor performed by men, then there were also ones which went along with the kinds of labor performed by women, and one of these was the ideology of the cult of domesticity, which appropriated the labors of women for national purposes and assigned particular gender roles that possessed particular national significance to both men and women.

In the genre of the American work narrative, there are any number of texts appearing throughout the nineteenth century which address women's work, but they typically describe women's work as a specific kind of domestic work. Many of these work narratives take the form of advice manuals instructing women about the proper ways to keep house, cook, raise children, and be a good wife. As a genre, most American work narratives tend to be segregated by sharp sexual divisions of labor—addressing men's and women's work separately in different contexts and, as Barrett suggests, embedding them in different ideologies. Men had their work in public forums outside of the house, and women had their work in the private domestic sphere. In the normative model, men returned home every night, seeing something of the sphere in which women worked, but women were supposed to be protected from the world of men's work. The whaling narratives present families whose gender roles had been altered. This blurring of traditional gender roles had the potential to challenge one of the most dominant late eighteenth and nineteenth-century narratives of American national identity: the association of particular definitions of marriage and family with American-ness. The reason why these unconventional domestic arrangements were never presented as exceptions or challenges to the cult of domesticity had everything to do with the way men wrote about whaling wives, maintaining, as Joseph C. Hart does in *Miriam Coffin*, that women belonged in the home, not the business arena. Whaling wives, writing about themselves, found other, more subtle ways of generating their own domestic fantasies, which were quite different from those espoused by the men, who tended to follow the ideology of the cult of domesticity.

For men, fantasies of physical labor created dominant narratives of national identity for the imagined community of the nation, defining men as exemplary national citizens according to

their laboring pride, but this was not necessarily the case for women, for the arena of capitalism and the nation were both patriarchal spaces, which tended to exclude women. It is profoundly difficult, if not impossible, to discuss nineteenth-century American women as national citizens, since were denied the privileges and advantages their male counterparts enjoyed. As Geoff Eley points out in his essay, “Culture, Nation, and Gender:”

Across the emergent national contexts of the nineteenth century, this [languages of representation of essential differences between men and women] translated into the exclusion of women from citizenship, most obviously through denial of the franchise, but more elaborately through a complex repertoire of silencings and disabilities, barring them from property, education, profession, and politics, or all the roles that qualified men for the public sphere. (32)

As Eley observes, the laws of the nation-state denied women citizenship in the nations into which they were born by reserving rights of suffrage for men. What lies behind these laws is a set of patriarchally-based cultural attitudes and belief systems, which provided the justification for denying women suffrage, education, and individual property rights, among other things. Even though women were not legally full citizens, they were living in the nation, working in it, and contributing to it, and there were cultural narratives of national identity that were attached to women. Flourishing in late eighteenth and nineteenth-century America, the cult of domesticity, a patriarchal configuration of the family with the man as its leader and the woman as his “helpmate,” generated a particularly popular narrative of American national identity for women, which emphasized the importance of their roles as wives and mothers.

Why was the cult of domesticity so often appropriated for national purposes, though? Ever since the publication of Barbara Welter’s highly influential essay, “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860” in 1966 scholars have generally referred to this set of cultural beliefs as the “Cult of Domesticity,” and many, such as Lisa Norling and Signe O. Wegener, have attempted to locate, define, and interrogate this set of ideas about how nineteenth-century American families should be configured.⁶⁷ However, it is important to remember that the definitions of marriage, family, and women’s roles that entered into the cohesive ideology that

⁶⁷ I have already described Norling’s scholarship in *Captain Ahab Had a Wife*. Wegener’s *James Fenimore Cooper Versus the Cult of Domesticity* argues that some of Cooper’s representations of the family subvert the norms espoused by the Cult of Domesticity.

could be named as the Cult of Domesticity had a long historical genealogy in American thought. The definitions of marriage and family advocated by the Cult of Domesticity were the *culmination* of years of debate and concern about the importance of these institutions to the health of American society rather than utterly new conceptions. Nevertheless, this narrative of gender complementarity is useful for explaining how women were metaphorically positioned within a dominant narrative of American family life. For my definition of the Cult of Domesticity, I am loosely following Lisa Norling's explanation:

We now recognize that domesticity was a particular set of closely related assumptions and ideals about gender, family and home that saturated American culture in every conceivable form and medium from about 1820 to at least the end of the nineteenth century. According to the pervasive norms and values, men were supposed to be producers and providers who went out to work to support their families, which they understood to mean primarily their wives and children. Women's complementary responsibility was to create a home in which husbands were loved, sustained, and renewed, and children loved and nurtured. The home was envisioned as a private and spiritualized haven, isolated from the harsh and stressful worlds of work and partisan politics. As a consequence, the work that women performed within the home in service to their families was reconceptualized as an effortless labor of love rather than any sort of toil worthy of pay. (4)

I have quoted Norling at length here because her main interest is in whaling wives, whose roles were very different from those espoused by the Cult of Domesticity, and she hits upon many of the key definitions of how marriage, family, and gender roles were conceived during the period in which most of the whaling narratives I have been discussing were written. Men were supposed to work outside of the home in the public arena, and women were supposed to take care of the private sphere in which the family lived and flourished. The family was defined primarily as a husband, wife, and their children, not an extended kinship network of grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, and cousins, and the family home was specifically defined as the place to which the immediate family unit retreated from the world. This configuration of the family artificially reduced the number of its members, ignoring or discrediting the fact that many families living under the same roof were actually extended ones. The key institutions around which this Cult of Domesticity was built were marriage and a

particular kind of family, and the definitions of each were closely intertwined and particularly inflexible.

It is important to ask how this Cult of Domesticity was figured as a specifically American institution. While Norling does not make this connection, Signe O. Weaver suggests that this definition of domesticity was “a set of values aimed at shaping private and public life in a rapidly changing nation” (1). For a fledgling nation fearful about its future, and still possessing an intense need to define its project as exceptional, this Cult of Domesticity provided ways of thinking about how the family was supposed to be structured and how the roles of the family members were supposed to be configured. These ideas about the proper functioning of domesticity gave Americans blueprints for how their families should be constructed, which would benefit the health of society, and, in turn, the nation. But this begs the question of why so much *national* significance was attached to the family. After all, a society is not necessarily a nation. As I will discuss, the answer lies in the historical genealogy of these ideas, especially the seventeenth-century legacy that the family metaphorically represented the state—the system of governance by which nations were organized—in microcosm.

As I noted above, arguments about the importance of marriage and the family to the general health of society and the nation have been circulating since the time of the Puritans. As Warren Motley contends in *The American Abraham: James Fenimore and the Frontier Patriarch*, Cooper’s representation of patriarchally arranged families in the frontier settlements stems from the New England Puritans’ belief that “Families not only made up the ‘foundation of all societies’; they continued to shape the present in their role as the ‘Nurseries of all Societies’...The persistent convictions that circumstances within the family projected themselves into society and that the order of society reciprocally imprinted itself on the family underlay the synecdochic usefulness of the frontier settlement” (4). He argues that the Puritans saw the family as metaphorically representative of the state, because they believed that the state should govern its people in the same way that the father governed his family. Furthermore, as Motley observes, by Cooper’s time, it was quite conventional to use images of the family to map arguments about the proper functioning of the state and vice versa. Capitalizing on this common metaphor, then, Cooper uses his frontier families to synecdochically represent the nation as a whole.

One of the reasons why this particular vision of the traditional family has such a long genealogy is because it was derived from Biblical sources, and the Puritans were not the only ones to base their definitions of the family on Biblical traditions. American versions of the argument about the integral nature of the family to the stability of society make use of a familiar though somewhat paradoxical connection between Christian identity and American identity. The Book of Genesis maintains that God created Eve from Adam's rib because "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him," and this passage placed women firmly in the role of subservient "helper" to her husband (2.18). For these authors, Genesis not only defined a woman's proper role regarding her husband, but it also furnished a definition for what a family should be: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (2.24). Here, the family unit is composed of a man and his wife and however many children they might have, not other biological relations. The New Testament's Book of Mark reinforces this definition of family by repeating it almost verbatim, and the New Testament goes on to describe a wife's role in the patriarchal terms that eventually emerged in the Cult of Domesticity. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians states quite clearly and succinctly, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord" (3.18). Made popular by the Puritans in the seventeenth century, Biblical arguments about what a family was supposed to be were quite prolific and enjoyed quite a long life in the imagination of the American public. This Christian-based conception of the family and its association with American national identity is somewhat paradoxical, given that one of the other main tenets of American national identity is religious freedom. However, Protestant's claims to religious freedom, especially those of the Puritans, possessed a mythic quality that was quite exaggerated and partly symbolic. As Sacvan Bercovitch notes in *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, despite protests of men like Roger Williams who argued for complete separation of church and state, the Puritans used religious freedom primarily to justify their separation from England, and, once they arrived in the Americas, they often intertwined church and state because they believed so strongly in their mission, their ascendancy (109).

There were also more practical, utilitarian reasons why the connection between the family and the nation was so compelling. Ida Blom argues in her essay, "Gender and Nation in International Comparison," "Women's maternal capacities created life for the nation, created the new generations...giving birth and raising children were often referred to as 'woman's maternal

duties” (16-17). Nations need new citizens, new people to keep the nation moving forward in time and space, and it was in the family that new national citizens were born, thus perpetuating the nation into the future. Not only were women expected to bear new national citizens, but they were expected to raise them properly to be productive individuals. As Wegner suggests, “Throughout the [nineteenth] century, writers had not only diligently posited the mother as the center of the family, but they had consistently endowed her...with ‘civilizing power’” (54). Women and mothers had an obligation to their nation to make sure that their children were good enough to be entrusted with the future of the nation, and thus they were expected to be the keepers of morality in the domestic sphere.

Whether they were religious or secular, narratives of national identity based on ideas about the family were highly influential, creating some space for women within the imagined community of the nation as metaphorical keepers of the family. The problem for whaling wives in particular was that the roles they played were so different from the norms perpetuated by the Cult of Domesticity. As Eley notes, “Nations have invariably been imagined through the metaphors of family, thereby replicating the patriarchy and hetero-normative axioms of conventional familial forms” (32). Identifying women with the nation metaphorically via their roles as wives and mothers may have given some women, not necessarily whaling wives, some sense of psychological identification as Americans. More often than not, what the Cult of Domesticity represents is women’s ideological conscription for the nation’s purposes. For men writing about whaling wives, harshly criticizing their transgressive domestic arrangements both at home and at sea was a way of preserving the gender roles that both the Cult of Domesticity and ideologies of manly American labor espoused, a way of preserving the health of the family and the health of the nation. While J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur does admire some of the freedoms whaling wives enjoy as a result of their novel domestic arrangements, his *Letters from an American Farmer* plays into particular eighteenth-century ideas about essential differences between the sexes and positions these women firmly in a strictly subordinate role as their husband’s helpers. In this way, Crèvecoeur helps to further develop the ideas that would become the Cult of Domesticity. Joseph C. Hart’s punitive novel, *Miriam Coffin*, harshly critiques unconventional domestic arrangements and warns that giving women too much freedom will result in disaster—specifically, economic hardship and death—for he argues that women truly do belong in the home, not in the business arena. Miriam’s business dealing plunge her family into

poverty, and her daughter's independence coupled with her refusal to obey her parents results in her largely loveless marriage to a non-whaleman.

As I mentioned above, the question Lisa Norling contends with is how to explain the conservative character of women's writing about whaling wives. I would suggest that women's writings, particularly those by and about whaling wives who traveled with their husbands, are not as conservative as they might appear to be. These traveling whaling wives possessed identities as multi-faceted as those of their male counterparts, for they were cosmopolitan, American, upper-middle-class women, but they were living in an intensely male-dominated world—the world of the ship and the world of the ocean. Once there were enough whaling wives sailing around the Pacific or living on islands like Hawaii to form a community, they were just as capable of forming intense bonds with each other as the men were, but they could only do so when their husbands decided to gam with other ships or stop at one of these islands. The writings of these women indicate that they were engaged in the process of generating their own fantasies, new ways of ordering their world, claiming their own identity, and describing the realm of the Pacific in their own terms. The reason why some of these whaling narratives seem so conservative is because these women usually first tried on a more masculine way of seeing the world and their position in it; they attempted to see the ocean and the world of the ship according to male fantasies, but they eventually rejected this view, largely because it did not fit their lives, and created their own.

As Annette Kolodny claims in *The Land Before Her*, pioneer women had a quite different relationship with the landscape in which they found themselves than their male counterparts did, and, in their writings, they too developed their own fantasies. Kolodny argues that male pioneers were typically enmeshed in mythic masculine fantasies about the frontier; these men confronted and subdued a landscape, forests and mountains, typically gendered as feminine. But women's fantasies "focused on the spaces that were truly and unequivocally theirs: the home and the small cultivated gardens of their own making" (6). Kolodny further maintains that for metaphorical purposes, "The prairie...spoke to women's fantasies" (6). Thus, the prairie became the garden, a space over which women already had dominion. Using a similar method of fantasizing the landscape, whaling wives were eventually able to describe the realm of the Pacific, not as a masculine space, but as a gigantic feminine domestic sphere in which individual families moved about on vessels, meeting, socializing, and bonding with each other whenever

they had a chance. The seascape was particularly available for feminine re-appropriation because it was gendered so differently from the interior of the mainland. Ships were undoubtedly gendered as feminine, but the ocean itself was much more flexible in this regard. In the Introduction to *America and the Sea: A Literary History*, Haskell Springer suggests that even though there was a great deal of ambivalence about the gendering of the ocean, men, such as Melville, typically saw the sea as feminine and women, such as Kate Chopin, typically saw the sea as masculine (18-19). However, men did refer to the ocean using the name of the Roman god of the sea, Neptune: hence, the equatorial Neptune rituals which represented rites of passage for green hands. Women could re-claim the seascape as their own precisely because the gendering of the ocean was so ambiguous, and there was something special about the Pacific as opposed to the Atlantic that lent itself quite well to these purposes. Of the two oceans, the Atlantic was typically regarded as being more stormy and more threatening, while the Pacific was thought to be more placid, calm, and idyllic—hence, its name (Springer 2-3). So the Atlantic was the realm of men, the realm of confrontation with the elements, but the Pacific could be configured as the realm of women, a more nurturing domestic-like environment.

As I mentioned, many traveling whaling wives at first attempt to describe their relationship with the ocean in much the same way as the men, but they quickly give this up, and their writing suggests that they develop a new fantasy for themselves—something similar to what Kolodny suggests happens with pioneer women. Mary Chipman Lawrence attempts to describe herself as a sailor, and her first descriptions of the ocean employ the same sort of terminology that men, such as Ishmael, J. Ross Browne, and Washington Irving, use while viewing it from the foretopmast. But Lawrence only does so at the beginning of her personal journal, and she quickly rejects these descriptive techniques, never to return to them. In its later passages, her journal tends to discuss the meetings she has with other captain's wives, the ways in which she creates a social, domestic community for herself. Manifested in the journal is some resentment of the power structure in which she is enmeshed because her husband and the business of whaling completely control her efforts to bond with other whaling wives. And here too is the boredom, frustration, and dissatisfaction with these unconventional domestic arrangements. Lawrence's feelings of discontent were not induced by not measuring up to the domestic standards of the Cult of Domesticity, but by the fact that her husband and the patriarchal world in which she was living prevented her from fully living according to her own

fantasy. Helen E. Brown's novel further develops the fantasy, effacing resentment and describing how women could enjoy the solitary time spent with their husbands and children as well as the social world of the Pacific. In her novel, this domestic configuration perfectly sustains both the men and women living within it because it gives each of them what they need.

If men sailing around the Pacific described themselves as "lone" and "wandr'ing," women described themselves as part and parcel of a group of circulating whaleships—an extended kinship network. In this fantasy, the entire realm of the Pacific became not a forbidding place where men confronted the elements and the largest creatures of nature, but an immense domestic realm in which there was an intense sense of community and in which traveling women formed close bonds with each other, visited with each other as often as they could, and helped to spread Christianity on the Islands of the Pacific. These women might have seemed to be powerless, captives in their husbands' cabins, but they were generating their own domestic fantasies and their own expanded domestic communities, and even though many whaling wives seemed to lament their lack of control over their own lives, this situation does not diminish the significance of their accomplishments or their narratives. In *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins provides a way of understanding the power inherent in this structural subordination when she says, "This fiction [sentimental novels] presents an image of people dominated by external authorities and forced to curb their own desires; but as they learn to transmute rebellious passion into humble conformity to others' wishes, their powerlessness becomes a source of strength. These novels teach the reader how to live without power while waging a protracted struggle in which the strategies of the weak will finally inherit the earth" (165). These whaling wives live within a constraining system—subject to their husbands' governance and the demands of whaling voyages—but despite all this, they provide a new fantasy for women.

5.1 SECTION 1

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* and
Joseph C. Hart's *Miriam Coffin or The Whale-Fisherman, A Tale*

Both J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* and Joseph C. Hart's *Miriam Coffin* are heavily invested in fantasies of manly American labor. However, they also focus quite a bit on whaling wives. In these two narratives, men attempt to explain where and how women might find a place for themselves within the imagined community of the nation. While these texts are natural companions for each other because they make every effort to describe the Nantucket whalers as ideal Americans, the ways in which they figure the presence of women could not be more different. Both authors link women metaphorically to the nation through their roles as wives and mothers, but Crèvecoeur's position on the differences among familial arrangements is somewhat more fluid and adaptable. Crèvecoeur gives these whaling families and the gender roles their members assume some latitude because they are only non-traditional for short times. When Crèvecoeur was writing, a typical whaling voyage only lasted about six months or so; therefore, a whaling wife only had to manage the household for a short time, and upon her husband's return, she handed control back over to him. Hart, on the other hand, creates a series of dynamic and strong female characters, each of whom he subdues in turn for not following traditional roles, which, he argues, are integral to the proper functioning of society as a whole, and, in turn, the nation. The problem that a novel like *Miriam Coffin* encounters, then, in its articulation of the Nantucket whalers as ideal American citizens is that they seem to achieve this status, not because of the women associated with them, but in spite of them, and the family dynamics that in *Letters from an American Farmer* seem functional create chaos and disarray in this novel.

Letters from an American Farmer definitely does not offer as reactionary an account as *Miriam Coffin* and other whaling narratives published later in the nineteenth century. Lisa Norling attributes Crèvecoeur's flexibility to the fact that the particularly rigid definitions of familial and gender roles which became known as the Culture of Domesticity had not become a concrete ideology: "the half-century voyage from Crèvecoeur's praise to Hart's melodramatic criticism marks a sea change in the way in which women's relationship to the whaling industry and community was conceptualized" (119). This insight is valuable because it helps to explain why Crèvecoeur's attitude towards the Nantucket whaling wives is quite different from Hart's, but I think that describing it as unadulterated praise would be a mistake, for, at that the time Crèvecoeur was writing, there were dominant ideas about what a marriage should be and, even

though he appears to commend the non-traditional familial arrangements of the whaling wives, he describes them as subordinates to their husbands.

Crèvecoeur's investment in these more traditional ideas—an eighteenth century ideology of gender roles which positioned women as essentially complementary, but subordinate, to men—is manifested in the opening sections of the text which describe the marriage between the farmer and his wife. At first, Crèvecoeur's description of this marriage appears to make quite a contrast with the marriages of whaling wives, and it seems to pull the text in two different directions, begging the question: If the marriage between the farmer and his wife is the ideal, then how do the whaling wives and their husbands measure up to this ideal? In order to answer this, Crèvecoeur emphasizes the similarities between the two different kinds of marriage, applying the same general criteria for what constitutes a “good” marriage to both types. There are places where Crèvecoeur's description of the whaling wives seems a bit strained, though, as if he is working hard to represent them in such a way that they would be less objectionable to readers who subscribed to more traditional ideas about marriage and family. And so, while Crèvecoeur's high regard for the whaling wives suggests that ideas about familial arrangements were more fluid prior to the nineteenth century, it also demonstrates that there were, already in existence, models of familial organization that were considered to be more ideal than others, models which the whaling marriages challenged.

Crèvecoeur's characterization of marital bliss and marriage's usefulness as an institution is rooted primarily in eighteenth-century, utilitarian philosophical notions about how the differences between the sexes complement each other and how each partner keeps the other motivated to perform his or her duties to his or her utmost potential. In his 1762 novel, *Emile*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues that “...nature means them [women] to think, to will, to love, to cultivate their minds as well as their persons; she puts these weapons in their hands to make up for their lack of strength and to enable them to direct the strength of men” (575). As far as Rousseau was concerned, women did possess certain skills, emotions, and kinds of intelligence, but they should be used expressly to complement those of men. It is noteworthy that women such as Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft, among others, spoke out against these prevailing opinions; however, these ideas represented an immensely popular ideology which had a wide

sphere of influence.⁶⁸ The scope and persuasiveness of this ideology helps to explain why Crèvecoeur's attitude towards marriage is very similar to that of his predecessors. In the Americas, Benjamin Franklin, in 1745, in a piece rather ironically entitled, "Advice to a Friend on Choosing a Mistress" claims:

It [marriage] is the most natural State of Man, and therefore the State in which you are most likely to find solid Happiness...It is the Man and the Woman united that make the compleat human Being. Separate, she wants his Force of Body and Strength of Reason; he, her Softness, Sensibility and acute Discernment. Together they are more likely to succeed in the World. (207)

Here, Franklin, in a manner similar to that of Rousseau, endorses marriage for reasons which lie rooted in the belief that the sexes possess inherently different mental and physical characteristics, and, when united in the bonds of marriage, these qualities work together to the express benefit of both parties. What makes Franklin's utilitarian advocacy of marriage somewhat different from Crèvecoeur's, however, is the absence of romantic attachment and emotion. In *Letters from an American Farmer*, Crèvecoeur tends to emphasize both the emotional and practical aspects of marriage, and as he describes it, the farmer enjoys both a more practical kind of "solid happiness" and a passionate emotional attachment to his wife:

I married, and this perfectly reconciled me to my situation; my wife rendered my house all at once cheerful and pleasing; it no longer appeared gloomy and solitary as before; when I went to work in my fields, I worked with more alacrity and sprightliness; I felt that I did not work for myself alone, and this encouraged me much. My wife would often come with her knitting in her hand and sit under the shady tree, praising the straightness of my furrows and the docility of my horses; this swelled my heart and made everything light and pleasant, and I regretted that I had not married before. (52)

As Crèvecoeur presents it, marriage is a reciprocal working arrangement, even though there is a sexual division of labor, with each partner—in this case, literally side-by-side—performing his or her work with joy. The work is divided practically according to what each partner is capable of doing; working together in harmony, two different individuals come together to form a

⁶⁸ Mary Astell's essay, "Some Reflections on Marriage" (1700) and Mary Wollstonecraft's piece, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) represent two particularly strong protests against prevailing gender stereotypes and the oppression of women.

stronger whole. The happiness that each partner experiences is so intense that the laboriousness of the work is effaced, and each one enjoys working for the express benefit of the other. The farmer further emphasizes the emotional benefits of being married as he goes on to describe this scene of domestic and marital bliss:

When I contemplate my wife, by my fireside, while she either spins, knits, darns, or suckles our child, I cannot describe the various emotions of love, of gratitude, of conscious pride, which thrill in my heart and often overflow in involuntary tears. I feel the necessity, the sweet pleasure, of acting my part, the part of an husband and father, with an attention and propriety which may entitle me to my good fortune. (53)

According to Crèvecoeur, the emotions that having a solid marriage, a devoted wife, and a family engender in a man keep him working in a proper and productive fashion. Here, the farmer maintains that he acts the part of husband and father because of the emotional benefits that he receives as a result of doing this job and doing it well. He wants to be a better person and do better things because of his attachment to his family. This contrasts greatly with the melancholy emotions he experienced before he was married, when he was only working to benefit himself. In this definition of marriage, wives play the roles of both motivators and “civilizers.” They keep men focused on the proper goal: working hard to be the most productive men that they can be, both in a material sense, and a moral sense. Crèvecoeur identifies women with the repressive and constricting features of “civilization.” Apparently, without the proper motivation of having a wife and a family, men are lost; left to their own devices, they fall into fits of melancholy and inappropriate behavior, which is not healthy either for themselves, or the society/the nation in which they live.

Whaling marriages for Crèvecoeur, despite the fact that they were very different from this farmer’s marriage, are described in much the same way. As he sees it, they may be unconventional, but they are akin to marriages ashore in that each partner performs specific functions as they are able, which contribute to the express benefit of all involved. This rationale is an extension of the utilitarian and emotional basis for marriage, as he explains it earlier in the text. What’s more, Crèvecoeur actually maintains that these wives are better companions and helpmates than their peers:

As the sea excursions are often very long, their wives in their absence are necessarily obliged to transact business, to settle accounts, and, in short, to rule and provide for their

families. These circumstances, being often repeated, give women the abilities as well as a taste for that kind of superintendency, to which, by their prudence and good management, they seem to be in general very equal. This employment ripens their judgement and justly entitles them to a rank superior to that of other wives; and this is the principal reason why those of Nantucket as well as those of Montreal are so fond of society, so affable, and so conversant with the affairs of the world. (157)

As he explains it, whaling wives play any number of roles in their families, for they must be businesswomen, mothers, housekeepers, cooks, “rulers” and “providers” as well as caretakers. In Crèvecoeur’s estimation, these women deserve some praise because they are doing what they need to do to keep their families running smoothly, and they keep the entire community thriving financially because of the roles they play as business women. They are an integral part of the material success that the whaling towns on Nantucket enjoy, for without them the community might fall into financial ruin. However, it is not solely for this practical reason that Crèvecoeur praises these women, for he notes that a woman who is more aware of the world around her is a better conversationalist, a better social companion, a better partner, and this only works to increase the joy men can experience in their marriages.

For Crèvecoeur, whaling wives not only satisfy the financial and emotional needs of their husbands quite well, but they also provide a much needed “civilizing” influence over them. While, for the farmer, this was one of the functions his wife served, it was not quite as important in his marriage as it was in the marriages of the Nantucket whalers, because sailors had a reputation for being drunken, rowdy, promiscuous boozers throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Part of what Crèvecoeur admires so much about this maritime community is that even though a seafaring life is rife with moral temptations which sailors are often incapable of resisting, Nantucket Islanders marry at a young age, and it is this which keeps them morally upright:

On the contrary, all was peace here, and a general decency prevailed throughout; the reason, I believe, is that almost everyone here is married, for they get wives very young; and the pleasure of returning to their families absorbs every other desire. (141)

Unmarried sailors might be led astray by the temptations of alcohol and promiscuous women, but Nantucket Islanders, committed to their wives at a young age, keep focused on their goal of providing for their families. This is much like what the farmer says about his wife in that the

emotions that having a wife and child give him keep him filled with joy and pride, and he feels that he must do whatever he can to provide for them as best he can. Marriage inspires the Nantucket Islanders to be the best possible men that they can be and keeps them grounded and working hard to move up the proverbial ladder of success so that they can better provide for their families.

As I mentioned above, Crèvecoeur seems to have been aware that his readers might find the roles played by the Nantucket whaling wives too unconventional to be admired. After all, their marital arrangements tended to flout more traditional ideas about a woman's proper place in the domestic sphere. And so he allays his readers' potential fears that these women might possess too much power and freedom, by maintaining that despite their independence, they do know their place. They might be willing to fulfill their duties to their husbands by venturing out into the business arena when necessary, but once their husbands come home, they cheerfully resume their subordinate roles. Of the Nantucket wives, he says:

But you must not imagine from this account that the Nantucket wives are turbulent, of high temper, and difficult to be ruled; on the contrary, the wives of Sherborn, in so doing, comply only with the prevailing custom of the island; the husbands, equally submissive to the ancient and respectable manners of their country, submit, without ever suspecting that there can be any impropriety. Were they to behave otherwise, they would be afraid of subverting the principles of their society by altering its ancient rules; thus both parties are perfectly satisfied, and all is peace and concord. (159)

In this passage, Crèvecoeur maintains that even though these women have more authority over their husbands, insofar as they make important financial decisions while their husbands are away, they do not let this power corrupt them and turn them into termagants. They know their subordinate place and their duties, and when their husbands return, they act accordingly. Both parties submit to the better judgment of the other in turn, and this kind of marital union works because of the social precedents which have already been established on the island of Nantucket. Giving women more freedom does not shift the balance of power in the marriage; rather, it increases the spirit of cooperation, which, in Crèvecoeur's estimation, can only be more healthy for all involved.

As Crèvecoeur's opinions about whaling wives show, even before the emergence of the Cult of Domesticity it was not unusual to hold men and women as inherently different, but

complementary, and believe that a wife's role was ultimately subordinate to her husband's. Thus, Crèvecoeur plays on the more traditional notion that wives were supposed to fulfill particular duties in a marriage in order to praise what the whaling wives do. By the time that Joseph C. Hart wrote *Miriam Coffin* in 1834, a woman's duty to her husband had become primarily the maintenance of the domestic sphere, and any deviation from this prescribed norm was seen as harmful to the health of the family, the society, and the nation. One particularly useful way of understanding the way in which the institution of marriage was positioned with regard to the nation is provided by Signe O. Wegener, who argues that:

As an answer to outside pressure—the competitive marketplace, industrialization, and religious doubt—marriage had come to be seen as a bulwark against all forces vying to destroy the fledgling nation. Marriage, claimed the proponents of the cult of domesticity, formed a protective circle around the endangered American civilization. Strict measures were needed to protect the ways and values of an older and ostensibly more stable America; hence, domestic writers—whether working in fiction or nonfiction—created a dichotomy still with us today, the separation of the public and private spheres of interest. The two societal spheres formed a symbiotic, indivisible relationship. By the breadwinner's daily return, the business world encroached on the domestic sphere and, more importantly, the business world provided the finances necessary to maintain this domestic *sanctum*. (56)

Wegener's insight that marriage was the institution that was supposed to protect and nurture American culture and society is integral to understanding why Hart's novel is so obsessed with promoting the moral message that women belong in the domestic sphere and demonstrating the dangers of female independence and freedom. If women ventured from the private domestic realm into the business arena, the public arena, they would upset the balance—the symbiotic relationship between the two spheres—that was supposed to be integral to the health of the family. As Miriam does this, she creates chaos and disorder which disrupts the proper functioning of her family and eventually causes its financial ruin. Miriam's daughter Ruth and Ruth's friend, Mary, also suffer quite severe consequences for displaying their independence.

It is possible to read *Miriam Coffin* as a punitive tale, warning women to stay in the home and not venture out into arenas in which they do not belong, and this is certainly a plausible interpretation of the text. However, what cannot be ignored is the irony that the whaling industry

required women to work both in the business world and at home, for if they did not, their families would suffer great financial hardship, since there was no one else at home to take care of these affairs. Furthermore, Hart depicts the Nantucket whalers as ideal Americans, worthy of the patronage of the United States government, but does not extend this idealization to their wives. Hart's historical preface to *Miriam Coffin* is comprised of unadulterated praise for the accomplishments of the Nantucket whalers and the role they play as important national citizens, without ever mentioning their wives. In fact, Hart goes so far as to chastise the United States government for not financially supporting this lucrative and endangered branch of the American economy and the good, honest, brave American men who work in it. The rest of the novel demonstrates how precariously positioned on the brink of disaster the whaling industry is, because by the end of the text, there are very few whalers and whaling vessels left. Of the only three young characters who are whalers, two die, and one leaves the industry for the British Navy. In addition, one of the biggest Nantucket whaling vessels is sunk in the middle of the Pacific Ocean by an accidental collision with a giant sperm whale. No new whaling families are created because the two whalers who die are the preferred suitors of Ruth and Mary, who are forced to marry others in their stead. This is part of their punishment for being so independent and refusing to marry anyone unless he had proved himself to be a successful whaler first. Ironically, then, the future of the whaling industry is left quite bleak at the end of the novel, but it is not because of lack of governmental support; rather, it is the fault of the female characters who must suffer for assuming non-traditional roles.

Even though *Miriam Coffin* does not play a major role in the novel until the second volume, she is the title character, and her fate is integral to Hart's moral message that a woman with too much freedom and power is a dangerous individual. Much like *Lady Macbeth*, *Miriam* usurps her husband's role, and as such she creates chaos and disorder for her husband and her family. The obvious similarities between *Miriam Coffin* and *Lady Macbeth* do not go unnoticed by critics like Nathaniel Philbrick, who, in his 1995 introduction to the novel, says that "Instead of displaying a benign 'sagacity,' *Miriam* proves to be more of a diabolical *Lady Macbeth*, wreaking all sorts of havoc on her fellow islanders by striking up a private trade agreement with the British once the Revolution begins" (viii). Just as *Lady Macbeth* undermines what was thought to be the natural order of gender relations by stating "Come, you Spirits/That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,/and fill me, from crown to the toe, top-full/Of direst cruelty!"

(1.5.39-42), so does Miriam when she claims that “I will assume such a front and presence as may become a woman with a masculine spirit” (173). What the two women create by assuming gender roles which are not naturally their own is utter chaos and their own eventual demise—for Lady Macbeth, death, and for Miriam, financial ruin.

Miriam is perhaps worse than her Shakespearean counterpart, whose subversion of the natural order of things only extends to the influence she exerts over her husband, who is just as complicit in the tragedy which ensues as she is. Lady Macbeth does not take action herself, preferring instead to manipulate her husband’s ambition, urging him to put their murderous plan in motion from behind the scenes, but Miriam’s untrammelled ambition is her own, and she takes her own measures to satisfy it. In Miriam’s eyes, controlling the family’s finances by advising her husband in his business affairs is not enough:

Thus far have I been wary, and have obtained, by every means that assumes to the eyes of men a natural shape, a strong ascendancy over the mind of my husband. My counsel, kindly asked, and disinterestedly given, has thus far helped to swell the fortune of Jethro, until but a few in the colony may compete with him in extent of possessions. But I would be second to none—and it will be a miracle if I am not shortly the first in the colony in power, and in wealth and magnificence. Power is consequent on wealth—then wealth must be sought by every channel, until it flows in constant and unremitting streams into my coffers. Let me but be firmly seated in the saddle, and I will ride such a race as shall make men—ay, the boasting men—stare with unfeigned wonder! (173-74)

It is obvious from Miriam’s soliloquy that she is just as manipulative as Lady Macbeth, and she has been laying the groundwork for her plan to gain ascendancy over her husband’s financial affairs for some time. By pretending that she is not interested in her husband’s business ventures, she has led him to believe that she is satisfied with the status quo, but her real desire for wealth and power is exposed in the latter half of her speech in which she reveals her ambition to be the most profitable and admired businesswoman in all the colonies. The overloaded metaphor of female dominance which concludes the passage further emphasizes Miriam’s unnatural and dangerous investment in reversing typically gender roles and gaining power over men.

Miriam’s opportunity to seize control of her husband’s mercantile house arises when he decides to embark on a long voyage to London, and he leaves the business in her hands. Jethro says, “Thy discreet conduct heretofore is sufficient guaranty for the safe ordering of my affairs;

and I leave them all to thy control. The burthen will prove somewhat weighty; but it is fitting that I confide in thee for thou hast ever proved an able and efficient helpmate, in the honest furtherance of my fortunes” (176). In Jethro’s opinion, thus far she has proved to be a good wife, at least according to the Biblical tradition, for she has been an invaluable helpmate, and this is why he trusts her to manage his business affairs while he is gone. Miriam is not satisfied with just Jethro’s personal endorsement, and her unrestricted ambition drives her to seek power of attorney over her husband’s finances. Although he eventually signs the papers drawn up by Miriam’s attorney, Grimshaw, Jethro is, at first, hesitant to do so: “I would not, upon any account, be the first to break in upon our ancient manner of conducting business, by adopting the technicalities of lawyers. Whenever the hand of a man of the law appears, it throws suspicion upon the minds of plain matter-of-fact people, like our straight-forward, single-minded island race” (177). What is important about this scene is that here Miriam makes a conscious and unnecessary break with tradition. After all, she has already been given control of the family finances, but she wants more; she wants legal recognition of her authority. She wants to be equal to her husband in the eyes of the law, and it is precisely this break with tradition, this flip-flopping of gender roles, that is characterized as unnatural, and therefore, undesirable.

After her husband’s departure, Miriam’s fortunes continue to grow, and the onset of the American Revolution enables her to gain a trade monopoly on the island. Although Miriam’s subversion of gender roles is not specifically cast as a threat to the well-being of the nation in the text, the fact that she sides with the British during the Revolution is very telling. In order to gain this monopoly, Miriam tells the British that she is the only Loyalist on the island, so she should be given exclusive trading rights there, and she fends off her American competition by telling them that the island is full of Loyalists, and trading with them would only help their adversaries. Historically, the citizens of Nantucket did negotiate with both the Americans and the British during the Revolution and the War of 1812, and Miriam’s alliance with the British might be a reflection of that, but I would argue that this novel, written well after both wars, casts her actions as un-American, because Miriam’s legal and illegal—she begins smuggling operations from her country house—business operations threaten the safety and well-being of Island society and by extension the nation.

As Miriam steadily continues to accumulate the wealth and power she desires, she becomes more and more ruthless, until, eventually:

The wealth of the Indies seemed to be at the command of Miriam; and the gorgeousness of her establishment, which she took all opportunities to flaunt in the eyes of the people, showed forth like the stately pile and liveried household of a grandee of an empire, while all around was misery and wretchedness, and betokened poverty and decay...The exorbitant prices demanded and received by Miriam, for all the supplies furnished to the islanders, finally took the semblance of barefaced extortion. (304)

She displays a shrewd business sense and knowledge of the laws of supply and demand, but her shrewdness is characterized as inhumane because she takes advantage of the fact that the Revolution had reduced many of the Islanders to a state of abject poverty. Instead of coming together with her fellow community members to help the Island weather the economic hardships of the war, Miriam exploits their need for goods from the mainland to further her own material gain.

For a time, Miriam is able to continue to build her fortune, but not for long, and she actually forces the community to polarize against her. The Islanders, who also understand the laws of supply and demand, drastically reduce the demand for Miriam's goods by boycotting her mercantile house:

She found, too late, that she had not only overreached herself, but had been overreached; and that in accumulating riches, by unfair and exorbitant means, she had created a host of enemies, who were not as implacable in their prosperity as she had been inexorable in her demands and extortions, while they were needy. (315)

As it is represented in the text, this is her punishment for her too strong ambition, and when her husband returns to find himself a "ruined man," he firmly tells her,

'I do *not* see as thou seest;—thy unchastened ambition, not content with reasonable gains, hath ruined thy husband, stock and flock!—Get thee gone to thy kitchen, where it is fitting thou should'st preside;—Go—go to thy kitchen, woman, and do thou never meddle with men's affairs more!' (317)

Jethro's words perfectly embody the message of the novel and the moral of Miriam's story: a woman belongs in the kitchen, because domestic affairs are the ones over which she should preside, and any disruption of gender roles only results in chaos and ruin. Giving women too much power and the freedom to exercise that power is dangerous to the safety and well-being of not just the family, but the entire community, which suffers as a result of Miriam's actions.

What is perhaps even worse for Miriam is that, although she is punished for her unconventional behavior, she retains her desire and ambition. By placing her back in the kitchen, Jethro forces her to stifle her real emotions and put on a false front to the rest of the world:

But she obeyed; and, in time, put on the show of content, and seemed to the eyes of the world at least, to accommodate herself, without murmuring, to the humble pursuits which suited her decayed fortunes. But that world never knew of the volcanic fires, burning with a smouldering flame in her bosom;—nor of the yearnings for power;—nor the throbbings, struggling to be revenged upon those who had brought her house to its ruin. (318)

Jethro is successful at controlling Miriam's behavior, which is restricted to regulating domestic affairs, but he is not able to chasten her great yearning for power and revenge. She still seems to be dangerous, just as an active volcano might erupt at any time, but she has been properly restrained, and as Hart says, "that world never knew" about the emotions and desires struggling to break free from the constrictions of living a life solely in the private domestic sphere. Hart's last mention of Miriam maintains that "She was a being of fierce mind and great force of intellect; but the softer shades of female character were absent in her composition. She was a woman that one might easily fear, but never thoroughly love nor admire" (335). Unlike Lady Macbeth, who ultimately has a moment of recognition in which she acknowledges what she has done and is psychologically destroyed by it, Miriam never changes despite her reversal of fortune, and even though she assumes the role proper to which her gender entitles her, she is never satisfied with it. Thus, it is not just that she is forced to return to the domestic sphere, for her ultimate punishment is that she is never loved nor admired by anyone, and given that she longs for the admiration of her fellow Islanders, this is the harshest punishment of all.

Miriam is not the only spirited female character in the text, and the marriage plots that whirl around Ruth and Mary also drive the moral message of the novel. It is important to note that the way in which Hart manipulates the marriage plot in *Miriam Coffin* is far different from the methods of many of the other whaling narratives that take up this subject. Texts like Harry Halyard's *Wharton the Whale-killer! or, The Pride of the Pacific. A Tale of the Ocean* (1848) and Roger Starbuck's *The Golden Harpoon* (1865) present a host of male and female characters who are destined to become united in the bonds of matrimony after overcoming the machinations

of overbearing parents, the cruelties of renegade mutineers, and the dangers of life at sea. From the very beginning of *Wharton the Whale-killer!* when Wharton saves the beautiful heiress, Anna Ashford, from drowning, it is obvious that the two are destined for each other. Likewise, Harry Marline, the brave boat steerer in *The Golden Harpoon*, inevitably falls in love with and marries the captain's niece, Alice, after repeatedly saving her from the evil designs of Tom Lark and Driko, the mutineers. The work of whaling takes a back seat to the romance plots of these novels, and the opposition to the love between the heroes and their heroines stems from outside sources, not internal issues of character. Wharton's love for Anna is temporarily thwarted by her greedy father, who intends for her to marry the piratical villain, George Milford, not for love, but for money. In fact, the entire novel centers around the idea that men and women should not be forced to marry for financial reasons, because romantic love, an essential component of the Cult of Domesticity, is what results in a happy marriage. The repeated oscillations in power aboard the *Montpelier* are what prevent and threaten the romance between Alice and Marline. These outside interferences are overcome, and predictably, both of these novels satisfyingly and happily marry the men and women intended for each other at the end.

What makes *Miriam Coffin* so different from these other texts is that it contains characters who appear to be destined for each other, but it refuses the happy ending that the other whaling narratives present. Ruth and Mary, two spirited island girls, each have two rival suitors, one from Nantucket and one from the mainland: Ruth has Thomas, a young future whaleman, and Grimshaw, the buffoonish lawyer, while Mary has Harry, another future whaleman, and Imbert, the rakish doctor. It appears from the very beginning that Ruth and Mary prefer their Nantucket suitors, and that they would make better husbands than Grimshaw and Imbert, the former because he is only interested in Ruth's family fortune, and Imbert because he enjoys seducing and abandoning women. Even though the last ending a reader—nineteenth-century or otherwise—might expect is one in which Ruth marries Grimshaw, and Mary is jilted at the altar by Imbert, this is precisely what occurs. Just as a comparison, Ruth's marriage to Grimshaw is the equivalent of Elizabeth Bennet's marrying Mr. Collins in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. I would argue that the reason why Hart undermines Ruth and Mary's potential happiness by killing their preferred suitors is because both women are too spirited, and while they do not go so far as to completely subvert traditional gender roles like Miriam, they are too independent for their own good. Thus, they, too, must be punished.

Ruth possesses a sharp tongue, and, not unlike Elizabeth Bennet, she is quite willing to display it. When Mary asks her for her assessment of Grimshaw, Ruth declares, “I did call him a Yankee: he comes from Connecticut, depend on’t;—for that’s the only place for slab-sided, long-legged, tin-peddling, leaching *coof* like Grimshaw” (131). Here, Ruth displays her contempt for Grimshaw, and her harsh and cruel names for him speak volumes about her independent and free spirit. What is not clear is whether or not Grimshaw deserves these appellations, and whether or not Ruth is justified in her conclusions about him. After all, Ruth might be excessive in her display of dislike for him, but he is characterized as a cowering buffoon, Miriam’s pawn, and an opportunistic fortune hunter. She is repulsed by his advances and maintains that “..the fellow had the assurance to press my hand, and put his arm around my waist, as we came home! I did not strike him in the face, for presuming upon the civilities we have shown him as a stranger; but I wished for a man’s strength, to lay him prostrate in the sand!” (133). Ruth, like her mother, expresses a wish for a power to which her status as a female does not entitle her, but, unlike her mother, she does not attempt to exercise these powers, and she restrains herself from physically striking Grimshaw.

Ruth might have a sharp tongue and a free spirit, but it is not these characteristics alone which are undesirable in a female and worthy of chastisement, for Mary is punished too, and she does not possess half of Ruth’s wit. As Imbert says of Mary:

“She is just such a confiding, flexible, kindly being as I should desire to cling to me. There could be no danger of rubbers in after life with a woman of her happy temperament; but the devil may take the woman who would refuse to twine her will with mine, and to bend to the wish of her lord and master. I have no notion of allowing a female to imagine herself the oak, around which the man may twine as the ivy; nor would I, for the riches of Croesus, lay siege to a termagant like—” (129)

Even though it is Imbert who speaks these words, and he is not necessarily trustworthy, he makes the contrast between the two women more clear. Mary is apparently more desirable than Ruth, who is the woman Imbert is referring to in the last sentence of the passage, because she is more gentle and “flexible,” and because he thinks that she will be more able to fulfill the traditional duties of a wife. In other words, she will allow her husband to take charge of the family, and not oppose herself to her husband’s wishes as a more independent woman like Ruth might.

However, Imbert underestimates Mary, and the real problem with both women is that both of them do indeed expect men to live up to their expectations and bend to their wills.

Both women are members of a secret society of women that Hart claims arose on Nantucket in opposition to that of the Masons, which did not admit women into their ranks. As Hart explains, according to the beliefs of this society, women have sole control over who they choose for a mate. In this way, this mysterious group of women possess beliefs similar to those espoused by nineteenth-century suffragettes; both wanted a choice, a say in events which impacted their lives, and, not coincidentally, both were reacted to with suspicion and apprehension.⁶⁹ Apparently, the members of this society prefer whalemens as husbands as opposed to outsiders, and they only allow themselves to marry fellow Nantucket Islanders:

The letter and spirit of this charge, were for a long time pertinaciously adhered to by the unmarried members; and some of them were known to carry it so far, as to make it a *sine qua non* in permitting the addresses of their suitors, that they should have struck their whale, at least before the smallest encouragement would be given, or a favouring smile awarded as the earnest of preferment. (58)

What is important to note about Hart's description of this secret society is that the women take total control of deciding who and when they marry. They will only marry whalemens under the condition that they prove themselves to be capable and successful at their work. For all practical intents and purposes, this secret society might seem to be promoting the best interests of its unmarried members and the health of the community. By preferring island men to those from off the island, the society ensures the continued perpetuation of the community on Nantucket. Also, a woman who promises to marry only after her potential husband has proved himself to be a successful whalerman is ensuring the prosperous future of her family, because if she marries an unproven suitor, she does not know how fruitful a provider her husband will be. Despite the practicality of the society's beliefs, Hart casts them as dangerous on the grounds that they give women too much freedom, too much power, and too much independence, and, in so doing, he reinforces the oppressive ideology of the Cult of Domesticity. In fact, Ruth and Mary's membership in this society is what indirectly causes the deaths of their preferred suitors, Harry and Thomas, because if they had not gone whaling, they might have survived.

⁶⁹ Note how even as late as 1964 Walt Disney's movie version of *Mary Poppins* casts the children's mother as inadequate because she is a suffragette, abandoning and neglecting her children in order to gain rights for herself.

Ruth insists that Grimshaw go whaling as well, but this is merely an attempt to free herself from his unwanted and awkward advances, but to her dismay Miriam keeps him on Nantucket as her legal advisor, thwarting her daughter's effort to rid herself of his presence. In his assessment of Mary's character, Imbert has underestimated her strong will, and he, too, is asked to go whaling to prove himself worthy of her hand in marriage.

Mary seizes control of the situation, and instead of accepting Imbert on his terms, she produces this barrier to their affections. Unlike Grimshaw, Imbert departs on a whaling voyage and establish a reputation for himself as a proficient whaler. He even manages to redeem himself for immoral bad behavior regarding his ruination of Manta, a young Indian girl, by capturing Harry's murderer and preventing him from escaping. Upon his return, in a rather curious move, he jilts Mary at the altar on her wedding day, writing her a letter in which he says:

The blame must rest with yourself, and with that unnatural society to which you have given your pledge, and which has forced me, against my will, to assume a character foreign from my nature, and to play the hypocrite in order to win you. I confess that I have also had many misgivings as to the possession of your affection; for the woman who can so far forget herself as to play upon the feelings of her lover, and put him to unnecessary tests, such as I have undergone, for the mere gratification of whim or caprice, must be guilty of duplicity, to say the least of it. (330)

According to Imbert, it is the fault of the secret society and the fact that Mary put her beliefs before her affections that causes him to desert her. The moral message of his letter, as well as Hart's opinions on the matter, are clear in that he characterizes the society as "unnatural" and its belief in the test as "unnecessary." His assessment of Mary's affection for him as "duplicitous" and her nature as "whimsical" contradicts his prior impressions of her and serves to reveal her true character as well as that of all the other members of this female society. The strength of this message that the beliefs of this society are harmful and that the independence of these women is dangerous is compromised by the irony of the fact that Imbert is the one who articulates it. The way in which he is characterized in the rest of the novel suggests that he needs no motivation to "play the hypocrite," and all of his indignation about the fact that he was asked to fulfill Mary's wishes seems like an excuse to leave her. In fact, he is the one guilty of duplicity, by consorting with the Indian maiden to satisfy his more carnal desires while simultaneously courting Mary, because her family is quite wealthy. Because of Imbert's character, his moral message, which, I

think, given the rest of the novel, is supposed to be taken quite seriously, is hard to take at face value, especially since Mary's beliefs saved her from an imprudent match with Imbert.

In the end, Ruth, Mary, and Miriam are all returned to their homes, where the author contends they belong, and any attempt at independence on their parts is thwarted. Grimshaw does marry Ruth, despite her reduction in fortune, but, as Hart explains: "In the course of their wedded life, if there were no very strong symptoms of love, neither were there any remarkable outbreakings of angry and quarrelsome tempers. It was, in this respect, rather a happy union than otherwise; for their lives flowed on with an even tenor" (337-36). Both parties are required to compromise their desires in that Grimshaw learns that money should not be the sole reason for getting married, and Ruth learns to hold her tongue and moderate her temper. This statement begs the question of what a marriage is supposed to be, however, for this one is based on mediocrity, not love or financial gain. Despite Hart's claim that it was "rather a happy union," it is difficult to see how rewarding this relationship is for either party. As for Mary:

She gave her hand in marriage to a man of exalted worth, who loved her for her virtues and amiable qualities. Her gentleness and personal beauty—her goodness of heart and purity of mind, were jewels in the crown of a fond and excellent husband. Of their passage over the down-hill of life we have no authentic information; but no woman ever deserved to be happier in her earthly lot than the gentle Mary Folger. (337-38)

These words suggest that the proverbial "happy ending" can be represented at all, for Mary's husband is never named, and even though she appears to be somewhat better off than Ruth, she fades gently into the background of the story. According to Hart's definition of the kind of temperament a woman should possess, Mary is better than Ruth, and this is perhaps why she is given a happier situation at the end of the novel. Mary's sole flaw is her membership in the secret society of women, not her sharp tongue and her wit, and, even though she is punished, she is not punished as severely as Ruth.

From the concluding paragraph of the novel, it is clear that its moral message has everything to do with placing women in a specific domestic sphere and showing them that the way to happiness lies in submission, not in exercising their independence. Hart says:

If we have succeeded in conveying a useful moral, and in showing the young and inexperienced female where the true sphere of her duties lies;—if we have enabled her properly to appreciate the butterfly acquirements of flippant dealers in mere compliments

and insincere protestations, which proceed from the tongue outwards, and have no origin in the heart;—if we have, in any way, contributed to give to the world a just representation of the character and hazardous pursuits of the daring Whale-Fishermen, who form a race of mariners of whom we are proud;—in short, if we have afforded the reader but a moiety of the pleasure in perusing some of the simple annals of Nantucket that *we* have experienced in tracing them,—we shall be satisfied that our time has been spent to some good purpose:—for we have been both instructed and amused, while collecting and putting together the various parts of this tale. (344)

The first part of the paragraph addresses the instructional goals of the text regarding women, namely showing them that they belong in the domestic sphere, not in the business world and that they should beware of men like Imbert, who seek only to flatter and seduce them. What is interesting is that the secret society Mary and Ruth belong to is condemned by Hart, but it does play a role in filtering out the Imberts of the world as potential spouses. In the latter portions of the paragraph, Hart praises the whalers, but the novel's resolution ironically serves to subvert his admiration of them. As the plot concludes, there is no future for the whalers, heretofore described as some of the best Americans existing in the nation. Thomas and Harry, and perhaps even Imbert if he had continued to pursue whaling, represent the future of the industry. Thomas and Harry's deaths and Isaac and Imbert's desertion metaphorically represent the death of the industry in that they will not perpetuate it into the future. The problem Hart faces is that the whaling industry by necessity required women to be more independent, and by relegating them solely to the domestic sphere, he takes away an important and integral component of the system that keeps the industry functioning. By attempting to align the whaling wives with dominant narratives of national identity which linked women metaphorically the nation by placing them in the role of moral caretakers and keepers of the home, Hart ironically undermines the ideological viability of the industry he so much admires.

5.2 SECTION 2

Mary Chipman Lawrence's Personal Journal and
Helen E. Brown's *A Good Catch; or, Mrs. Emerson's Whaling Cruise*

As I mentioned above, by the mid-nineteenth century, whaling voyages grew longer, and women had another option besides staying at home while their husbands were absent; captains' wives could sail with their husbands aboard the whaleships. Lisa Norling's study of the journals of whaling wives who traveled with their husbands points out, and rightly so I think, the anxiety that these women felt about the fact that they were not adequately fulfilling the roles for women prescribed by the Cult of Domesticity. What is most important about these narratives, though, is the fact that these women were also engaged in the process of imagining their own domestic fantasies. Because dominant narratives of national identity connected American women to the nation via their role as wives and mothers in the Cult of Domesticity, whaling wives, whose roles were necessarily different from the roles of other American women, were forced to come to terms with those differences. But the fact that so many women did decide to marry whalers and did assume non-traditional roles is a testament to the idea that, despite however much anxiety attended their decisions, the Cult of Domesticity did not completely dominate their vision of what a family should be like. Being whaling wives gave them more fluid ways to construct their sense of themselves and their world than dominant narratives of national identity and the Cult of Domesticity did, and, even if they worried about it, being whaling wives gave them opportunities that other women did not have. These women could claim their own identities as traveling whaling wives, forming important bonds with each other, seeing the world, and helping to spread Christianity across the islands of the Pacific.

Two of the most interesting whaling narratives which address the presence of women aboard ship are the personal journal of Mary Chipman Lawrence (1856-1860), and a fictional rendition of Lawrence's journal, *A Good Catch; or, Mrs. Emerson's Whaling-Cruise* (1884), written by Helen E. Brown and published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication in Philadelphia. These two whaling narratives make a nice contrast with each other because they are based on the exact same events—Brown even quotes Lawrence's journal in places in the novel. The plot of Helen E. Brown's *A Good Catch* revolves around the role Mrs. Emerson plays in the religious awakening of a runaway sailor named Aleck Fielding. Through her gentle influence, he comes to recognize the importance of religion in his life, correct his wayward behavior, and return to his own family. Supposedly one of the sailors on Mary Chipman Lawrence's voyage underwent a similar conversion; however, the role she played in his life went

unbeknownst to her until the sailor, Edward Leighton, contacted her later in life. He simply credited the presence of the mother and child aboard ship with giving him thoughts of his own family, and thus inspired, he returned home. Since she did not know what kind of effect she had on Leighton, his presence and religious conversion is noticeably absent from her journal, which is also markedly less sentimental than Brown's novel. Lawrence's journal focuses more on the practical aspects of the voyage, the hardships and internal struggles she encountered as well as the excitement she felt about being able to witness her husband running the ship, seeing the open ocean in all its beauty, and visiting places she never thought she would be able to go to. Lawrence, after first attempting to adopt the way the male sailors see the world of the Pacific, rejects that view, and, albeit somewhat hesitatingly, creates her own. Brown completes the process of imagining a new kind of domestic fantasy by effacing all of Lawrence's anxiety and frustration about her living situation and casting Mrs. Emerson as the perfect traveling whaling wife who enjoys both the social world of the Pacific and fulfills her duty to her husband by keeping the family together, always being cheerful, supportive, loving, and submissive, finding ways to make herself useful to the other sailors by exposing them to the light of religion, and never complaining or questioning her husband's judgment.

What Lawrence's journal represents is an attempt to manage different facets of feminine identity, some of which tended to oscillate in importance, depending on the situation in which she found herself. Aboard ship, she was a wife and mother, but she performed few of the duties wives and mothers performed ashore; she was also a passenger who traveled the world, but she was an adjunct to the business at hand and a captive in her cabin; she was a lone woman aboard a ship filled with men, but she was also a part of a large community of women, an extended network of closely affiliated friends. All of these facets of her identity manifest themselves in her journal, but the terms that tend to emerge fairly resiliently are the ones having to do with her position in the extended community of women and her role as wife and mother and traveling passenger. What makes analyzing the dominant identity which emerges from her writing—and her attitude towards it—so difficult that the other facets of her identity were always in play, and they are always mediated, especially at the beginning of the voyage, by the facets of masculine identity, which she tries to employ as a mean of describing herself. Only once Lawrence frees herself from the influence of facets of masculine identity—the masculine fantasy of physical labor—is she able to create her own fantasy of feminine identity.

In a proud moment three months into the journal, Lawrence claims, “I flatter myself that I have become quite a sailor” (16). Here, Lawrence describes herself, not as a woman aboard a whaleship, but as a man, a sailor, a laborer. The fact that she begins the sentence by saying, “I flatter myself,” suggests that she hesitates a bit to use this terminology to articulate her sense of herself. She seems to realize that she is not really a sailor in that she is not performing any labor at all, and in fact, she really isn’t sailing anything. Rather, she is sailing on something over which she has no control. Interestingly enough, this is the only time Lawrence refers to herself in this way, and she ultimately rejects it because as she says while watching the cutting in of a whale: “We [Lawrence and Minnie] are supernumeraries; nothing for us to do but look on, and we avail ourselves of that privilege. I want to see everything that is going on. I may never have another opportunity” (19). She and her daughter are definitely not laborers, and they take no part in the process of hunting whales and trying out the oil. They are simply witness, adjuncts to the voyage. Lawrence has nothing to do, for there is no place for women to labor on the ship, to make themselves busy because their sole duty is to provide their husbands with companionship. What’s more, she is completely subject to her husband’s wishes, the needs of the ship, and the business venture of which she is both a part and not a part. Lawrence’s dissatisfaction with her lack of control appears quite consistently throughout her journal, the only place where she felt that she could object to the patriarchal and hierarchical system of capitalism in which she was enmeshed. When the ship stops briefly in Hawaii, Lawrence comments that “I could content myself very well to pass a few weeks here, but that is not what we came for, and my husband is in haste to be about his business” (27). In Hawaii, she was able to leave the ship, go to church, and socialize with the missionaries’ wives, all activities which she enjoyed immensely, but she realizes that since she is a passenger, she does not have any say in where the ship goes or what her husband does. Her relationship to the capitalism of the whaling industry is such that she is, in a manner of speaking, held prisoner by the business but is not allowed to work in it.

In the opening sections of the journal, Lawrence complements herself by calling herself a sailor, trying on a more masculine identity, which she does eventually reject, and she also employs a masculine style to talk about the ocean. As I mentioned above, Lawrence is, at first, fascinated with the many moods of the sea, and she describes the beauty of the ocean with the eye of newcomer and a *male* poet:

Went on deck immediately after breakfast to view old Ocean in another aspect. Everything is smiling and serene; one would never suspect the treachery that lurks in his bosom. Everything seems changed. This is one of the most delightful moments of my life. I do not wonder that so many choose a sailor's life. It is a life of hardship, but it is a life full of romance and interest. (5)

Although lacking in some of their detail, her personification of the ocean is similar to that of J. Ross Browne, Ishmael, and Washington Irving, and she displays an awareness of the sublime qualities of the sea. She knows that beneath the calm that she perceives at this moment, there lies great danger, but still she is excited about the prospects of the voyage, and her description of a sailor's life displays a hint of jealousy that these men get a chance see all sorts of interesting and exciting things throughout their travels, things she finally has a chance to see as well. Her romantic description of the ocean is often repeated in the first sections of the journal, especially in this entry in which she explains what it is like to sail through a storm:

I never weary of watching old Ocean in his many varying aspects. At one time, it is as still and placid as a lake; scarcely a ripple disturbs the surface of its water. We would never dream of the treachery that lurks in his bosom. Again, the waves rise mountain-high and dash against our noble ship with redoubled fury. Yet still we pursue our way. The mandate has gone forth: "So far shalt thou go and no farther. Here shall thy proud waves be stayed." It is this that I enjoy most to witness; it is sublime beyond conception. (15)

These early entries emphasize the novelty of the new scenes that she witnesses as she comes to terms with her new surroundings. For her, sailing the open ocean is both a wonderful experience and a terrifying one, and, at least at this point in the journey, she does not experience the boredom and loneliness that she will later on. As she says, "I never weary" of seeing all of the new and exciting elements of traveling on a whaleship. One of the noteworthy aspects of this entry is the sense of fear and trust in God that it displays, which is a bit different from masculine representations of the sea. As a woman aboard ship, she can do nothing herself—her sense of helplessness is emphasized by her personification of the sea as masculine—and she constantly worries about the safety of her husband as he goes whaling and manages the ship through terrifying storms. Being abandoned with her small child is one of her greatest fears, and she

attempts to alleviate this sense of helplessness by turning to religion as a means of helping her survive the voyage.

After these early sections of the journal, Lawrence tends not to describe herself or the ocean in these more masculine ways, and what is made manifest is her frustration at her subordination to her husband and the industry itself. As a wife, part of her identity as a woman, Lawrence feels that her utmost duty to her husband is to obey him, a duty at which she frankly displays some frustration when he makes decisions with which she disagrees:

Samuel talks very strong this morning of proceeding immediately to the Okhotsk Sea instead of sperm whaling a year as he intended. If he does, it will be a great disappointment to me, but of course I have nothing to say about it. But our letters that were to be sent to Paita will remain there, I suppose, and much good will they do us. I want oil as much as any of them, but it is hard telling just what to do. (8-9)

Altering their course would prohibit their receiving letters from home, a great disappointment to Lawrence, and would prevent her from socializing with her friends, but as Samuel's wife, she knows that it is not her position to protest or question his judgment. Of course, this might have something to do with the fact that she was a bystander in the business ventures of the ship. This was not a pleasure cruise, and as such, their course should not be altered for something that would simply provide them with entertainment and recreation. She knows that their primary business is to capture whales, but the desire to receive news from those living at home is so great that it engenders mixed feelings on Lawrence's part about her submissive role. Instead of openly opposing her husband, Lawrence again quietly protests in her journal entry, which is marked by a tone of sarcasm about the letters being sent to Paita and lying there unread.

But the very role of her husband with which she was irritated—his status as commander of the ship—cause her to see him in a new light as the voyage progresses. Being able to witness her husband at work gives her a sense of pride that she is his wife:

We are as it were, shut out from our friends in a little kingdom of our own of which Samuel is the prime ruler. I never should have known what a great man he was if I had not accompanied him. I might never have found it out at home. I think if they do their duty on shipboard, they will have no reason to complain of him. He is the same affectionate husband to me that he has always been. Hope I may continue worthy of his love. (15)

Being at home did not give her the opportunity to see him in his element, and it is his power with which she is impressed. She expresses a great deal of pride here at being married to a man who commands such respect from everyone, and she expresses the hope that all of the other sailors will see him as she does. What is also worthy of note in this passage is an attempt to re-define home in terms of the whaleship. Throughout Lawrence's journal there is some confusion about where home exactly is, and these alternating definitions of home suggest that her understanding of her identity is in a state of flux. She repeatedly stresses that home is aboard the whaleship, but it is in this passage that she makes an active attempt to call the ship their "little kingdom" of which her husband is the "prime ruler." In other words, home is with her husband, but she constantly yearns to return "home" to their families and friends ashore. She claims elsewhere that she has made the ship seem quite like home, because home is where her husband is, but she constantly uses the same word to simultaneously describe the place where her extended family lives. These two different concepts of home tear back and forth at Lawrence throughout the course of her voyage, because she wants to be both with her husband and in the world she left behind ashore. As Lawrence finally says in an attempt to resolve this conundrum, "...but I accompanied Samuel that my little family might be an unbroken one, and nothing but sickness will cause me to change my views" (96). Stubbornly, Lawrence insists that home is with her husband, because what is ultimately the most important is keeping her immediate family together. And when they pass a passenger ship at sea, she says, "...although I imagine that I was looked upon by them as an object of pity, but I do not believe that I would exchange situations with any of them" (156). Others may not understand her situation or why she would choose the hardships of such a voyage, but she continues to assert that she made the right decision.

Ultimately, the positive and negative aspects of being a woman on a whaling voyage are expressed in one particular passage where Lawrence says:

When I was a schoolgirl studying geography, how strange it would have seemed had anyone told me that I should view these places with my own eyes. We have very pleasant weather now, and I enjoy sitting on the house very much, watching the ships and whales. I am perfectly contented, and so is Minnie. Occasionally a tear dims our eyes when we think of home and friends, but we know they are in the hands of an all-wise Father, and to his care we commit them. (39)

Here is the alternating definition of home, as Lawrence refers to their ship as “the house,” but in the same breath talks of thoughts of home in the United States. She emphasizes her identity as a traveler, by expressing excitement about the freedom and independence which she has achieved as a whaling wife, but she also articulates how she passes the time, watching the men and waiting for them, and how much she misses her social circles of family and friends at home. This alternation between excitement and anxiety is what is perhaps the most important aspect of her journal, in that Lawrence is never quite able to resolve these opposing feelings and is forced to continuously mediate between them throughout the course of her entire four-year voyage.

What does emerge from Lawrence’s journal is a sense of the social community of women of which she was apart, something which gives her great joy and happiness. The latter portions of the journal tend to focus much more on the time that she spends socializing with other captains’ wives and their children than the early sections, and it is evident from her writings that these events are what is most valuable about her experiences aboard a whaleship. Towards the end of her fourth cruise, Lawrence finds herself in the Bering Sea, anchored in a bay off the coast of Siberia, and she finds herself in the company of several other whaleships: “About noon the *Omega* and three black clippers, the *Eliza F. Mason*, the *Gay Head*, and the *Speedwell*, came in and anchored for water, so that there were four ladies in the bay” (110). This may have caused her husband some consternation because more ships meant more competition for already scarce whales, but Lawrence does not emphasize this, focusing instead on the presence of other women with whom she could visit, talk, and socialize. The rest of the entries for this period discuss just that: her daughter’s birthday celebration and how the captains and their wives paid visits to each other. This vision of the social world of the Pacific is indeed quite different from male representations in that it stresses the presence of women, and the bay seems almost akin to a small neighborhood, consisting of various ships instead of houses, which all contain separate families.

Lawrence’s visions of domestic bliss—her re-configuration of the social world of the Pacific—manifests itself in her representations of the social events which occur when these ships meet. In her entry for January 21, 1859, Lawrence describes how she and her husband joined with two other captains and their families to have a picnic off the coast of Mexico:

Today we went onshore and had a picnic: Captain Weeks, his wife, and two children; Samuel, Minnie, and myself; and Captain May and son. Started about nine o’clock in the

morning. We took our steward with us, and Captain Weeks took his cook. Carried bread, crackers, cake, cookies, and pies with us. After we arrived there, kindled a fire and made a quahog chowder and stewed some birds for dinner. We had plenty of coffee and beer also. The captains went a little farther up the lagoon seining for fish. Their seine was too short so that most of the fish escaped. We had an abundance of oysters all around us growing on the trees, and the empty shells on all sides of us would show that we did them ample justice. We would have a tree cut down and thrown across the fire until the oysters were sufficiently roasted, then take the tree off and commence operations, each child having a separate fire and roasting her own oysters. It was a pleasant day of their lives and one long to be remembered. (143)

I have quoted this passage at length because it presents this social event in idyllic terms. In this fantasy of domestic bliss, the men and women gather together to share good food and each other's company—other than the novelty of the food and their surroundings, they might as well be at home in New England. In this passage, there is a definite delineation of classes: these upper-class captains and their wives bring their cooks and stewards with them, so that they do not have to do so much of the cooking themselves. They leave the world of whaling behind for the other men to perform in order to enjoy themselves for the day. Once they get back to the ship, they discover that their boats have taken a whale, but this is of little consequence, for it is the social event itself which is important to Lawrence, and as she says, "We all decided that after having such a pleasant time that we must try it again before we leave the bay" (144). What this passage represents then is a new vision of the world of the Pacific, one that represents a woman's fantasy. In it, Lawrence stresses just what she finds valuable about traveling the world on a whaleship, the socializing in the community of whaling wives and their families, and in this way, she transforms the world of the "lone, wand'ring whaling-men" into her own extended domestic community.

As I observed, Helen E. Brown's novel, *A Good Catch*, is based largely on Lawrence's journal; however, the former is much more sentimental, for although Lawrence could be sentimental in places, her journal displays a more practical tone and realistic attitude toward the trials and tribulations as well as the benefits of sailing with her husband. The novel places much more emphasis on the importance of keeping the immediate family together and the wife's marital duties toward her husband in her marriage. If Lawrence's fantasy describes the social

world of the Pacific as a community of women, Brown's novel strives to complete the fantasy by describing the ship, itself, as a satisfying domestic community. While Lawrence says very little about the process of making her decision to go with her husband, *A Good Catch* elaborates upon this to emphasize that a wife's primary duty is to her husband and that it is of the utmost importance to keep that portion of the family unit intact. Mrs. Emerson's extended family members attempt to dissuade her from accompanying her husband asking, "Have you decided to bury yourself alive in the Caledonia—to take three or four of the best years right out of your life?" (11) and commenting that "It is too bad for a young creature like you to shut yourself up in that greasy old ark of a whale-ship and deprive us all of your pleasant society for so long a time. And to take Minnie along, too! She'll mope herself to death on shipboard" (11-12). The coffin metaphor used to describe the ship is quite striking as is the argument that she will not be usefully using her life—she will simply be wasting it away in the ship. However, Mrs. Emerson comments that:

...my home is henceforth to be with my husband. Samuel is all the world to me, and why should we live with half the globe between us? We have been married ten years, and for two-thirds of that time oceans and continents have separated us, and we have both decided that it shall be so no longer. From this time, where he goes I shall go; and my happiness will be in making him a home wherever business calls him. (12)

Her statement stresses that her place, and her home, is with her husband. A marriage with so much separation is plainly a painful one, or perhaps not even a marriage at all, and it "shall be so no longer." Her duty is to be by her husband's side, for that is what will make her happy, and what she is supposed to do as a wife. Later on, she maintains "And in her heart the good wife thanked God that she had come with her husband, even if it did seem to the home friends that she was burying herself alive (244-45). Unlike Lawrence, who is quite unsatisfied with the domestic community aboard ship and gives up on being a good influence over the crew members because she recognizes that there is little she can do to curb their rowdy behavior, Mrs. Emerson manages to find a usefulness for herself, and she takes great pleasure in keeping her family together and providing a moral compass for the ship.

Mrs. Emerson stresses that "home" for her is clearly defined as the restricted space she occupies on the whaleship. And so, while Lawrence articulates some confusion about where home actually is:

...she [Mrs. Emerson] was satisfied that she was following the path of duty, and “there’s nothing like a clear conscience to sustain a body,” she said to herself as she wiped her eyes and turned from the deck of the vessel to the little cabin and state-room which Will had called her “tomb,” and which was to constitute her home-making and housekeeping arena for she knew not how long. (14)

The novel maintains that she still has her arena, and she does not display the frustration the other women do with her limited abilities to take care of her husband and the crew. Unlike Lawrence, Mrs. Emerson feels that she is still in full possession of her domestic space, even if it only consists of the small cabin in which she, her husband, and their young daughter live. As she says to her daughter, “We will make the ship look just as much like home as we possibly can Minnie...and then we’ll live every day just as we would at home” (19). While other women found that life aboard ship was quite unlike life at home, Mrs. Emerson maintains that it really is, and what they will do is to maintain as much of an atmosphere of normality as possible, in which their roles as a wife and mother and daughter, well-defined according to the Culture of Domesticity, will be kept according to tradition.

In the novel, Mrs. Emerson’s duties are configured as twofold. She is supposed to be both a good wife and mother to her husband and her daughter, but she is also supposed to fill that role for the sailors aboard ship. She feels that it is her presence that “will have a good effect on the men. It will make them more orderly and quiet, and put them on their best behavior” (27). She is not allowed direct contact with the men as the narrator comments, “Though practically somewhat restricted, as her prudent husband allowed very little communication with the men, yet she realized that she could shed around the ship a wholesome and invigorating moral influence, and this she determined with divine help to do (111). She was not allowed to fraternize with her men, but her husband agrees with her in that her influence will do the sailors a great deal of good—even if she cannot speak to them, herself—and keep them more docile and hard-working. The novel maintains this optimistic outlook, and true to form explains that:

It was such thoughtfulness on the part of a good woman, and the home-like influences that were diffused through their life on the ocean-wave, that served to hold these men in quiet obedience during along and perilous voyage. Thirty-five men on a ship’s deck, each full of human passions and prejudices, are not easily kept in subjection. Never by brute command, as some captains say: “Treat your men like animals; it’s the only way to

hold them.” Captain Emerson, supported by his good wife, said, “We will treat our crew like men; so we shall be able to make something of them.” (48-49)

The repetition of the phrase “good woman” or “good wife” is very telling in articulating what Mrs. Emerson’s role is supposed to be aboard ship. She is supposed to be this for all the men aboard, and according to the novel, she does this so well that she is able to convince Aleck Fielding that stereotypical sailor behavior is wrong, just as it was wrong for him to desert his family and go whaling against his father’s wishes. This is a tale of a prodigal son, who returns home, and all the credit goes to Mrs. Emerson for inspiring him to love his family more than his life at sea. The moral thrust of the novel rests on describing the ship as satisfying domestic community, despite the fact that in reality captain’s families who lived at sea were quite unsatisfied with it. Mrs. Emerson creates a traditional family for her husband and child, providing an example of what an ideal family is supposed to be. Aleck Fielding is sinful, not so much because he gets drunk or fraternizes with questionable women, but because he disobeys his father, leaves his family, and loses the importance of religion in his life. Once he sees what a family is supposed to be, he is able to recognize what he has done wrong, and he repents of his behavior and returns home.

The novel does not just focus on Mrs. Emerson’s role as a behind-the-scenes influence on the sailors; however, it works quite hard to show how important marriage is, and what the secret to maintaining a good marriage is. The novel fictionalizes the entry in Lawrence’s journal in which she marks her tenth wedding anniversary to remark further on what the components of a good marriage are. Lawrence only says,

JULY 13. The tenth anniversary of our marriage. Ten years today we were united until death do us part:

Yes, ten most blessed years have passed
Since Heaven pronounced me thine,
Each still more happy than the last
Since first I knew thee mine.

Yes, mine! My precious husband, thou
More than when first thy bride,
Full well I know thou lov’st me now;

My warmth thou wilt not chide.

Stoics have smiled and poets talked
Of love's first fitful boons;
But we in heightening bliss have walked
'Neath scores of "honey moons."

May the day that shall separate us be far distant. (42)

This is a simple, uneventful marking in which Lawrence focuses on the development of love over time via her use of poetry. She relates how the mutual love and affection she shares with her husband has deepened over the years because they have come to know each other more fully. Death is always in the back of Lawrence's mind, due to the dangers of a whaling voyage, but she focuses on her hopes for the future and continued happiness. Her husband and what his thoughts are about their anniversary are not represented in this passage, and it does not seem as though they celebrated the moment together; rather, she takes the time to quietly observe the occasion herself.

In the novel, this anniversary is the cause for a meditation on marriage in a conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Emerson. They decide to celebrate together, and her husband gives her some simple presents: a string of kelp, the proceeds of a mother whale and calf, and a gam with the ship, *Ditmarsh*, which brings news from home. Their ensuing conversation presents a quite specific definition of what a good marriage is supposed to be. Mrs. Emerson reflects on her marriage and anniversary thusly:

"Just like our life—quiet happiness. I've been thinking back to-day," said the wife with a loving smile. "We have had ten years of quiet happiness; not a cloud has shadowed our sky."

"That's a fact, wife; we've never quarreled. But I guess it's no credit to me; I'm as quick as a flash. But they say it takes two to make a quarrel, and I guess it's because you've been so good natured that we haven't."

"I think I've had the very kindest and best of husbands, Samuel. I feel very thankful to-night that my lines have fallen in such pleasant places..." (157)

Both insist on the goodness of the other one in terms of providing them both with an pleasant marriage. Quarreling means discord and disagreement, and as such has no place in a loving marriage. These two partners consistently maintain that it is due to the other's good nature that such quarrels have not occurred. They go on to add:

“...I don't see why life can't be all one honeymoon.”

“With God's blessing.”

“Yes, and a real good-natured wife that's always willing to give up her own will to make her husband happy. When the wind's fair, wife, it's smooth sailing.”

“My good husband only tells half the story,” was the rejoinder; and she was undoubtedly right. Forbearance, consideration and tender love are requisite on both sides to make a marriage-union happy. With these and God's blessing, the light of heaven shines into and irradiates the home. And it is no matter where the home is—in city or country, in palace or cottage, on the land or on the sea; dwelling in God, we dwell in love and are truly happy. (158)

Captain Emerson stresses how important it is for a wife to willingly submit to her husband's judgment; however, Mrs. Emerson adds that this is not the only thing that makes for a happy, good marriage. Love on both sides is important, but so is the role of religion in the life of the family. Marriage, here, comes from God, and those who “dwell in God,” will have happy marriages and families. Home is where the husband is, where the family makes it, and no matter how unconventional Mr. and Mrs. Emerson's marriage is, it is these former characteristics which make it a good one. Both partners must possess mutual love and affection for one another, but each one must also know their place and their role in the marriage, and be satisfied with it. For Mrs. Emerson, this means submitting to her husband and not arguing with him, but it also means keeping the family moral by promoting religious values, which help keep the family running smoothly.

The novel focuses not so much on the interactions between whaling wives as it does on this shipboard domestic community and the relationships in it, and Brown uses the times where Mrs. Emerson does visit other whaling wives to suggest that if these other wives are unhappy, it is because they do not see how satisfying it can be. In these instances, Brown effaces the resentment Lawrence displays, by describing Mrs. Emerson's complete and total happiness and critiquing the views of these other women. During a conversation with a fellow captain's wife,

Mrs. Skinner, the latter complains that “‘The days seem very long to me sometimes,’ said Mrs. Skinner. ‘I get so tired and homesick! If I had a little companion, as you have, it would be different’” (230). These comments are quite similar to those which Lawrence makes in her journal, but Mrs. Emerson responds by saying, “‘The days are not long to me,’ replied Mrs. Emerson—‘unless,’ laughing, ‘when it is sunlight for sixteen or twenty hours. I have a variety of occupations. My housework—which includes washing and ironing, sewing and reading, schoolkeeping and play—furnishes all I need. I never have to complain of *ennui* or seek diversion to pass away the time’” (230). Thus, Mrs. Emerson asserts that for her, the world of the ship is not a boring, unsatisfying place, as it was for many other women, including Lawrence, and she goes on to chastise Mrs. Skinner for not bringing her children with her. It is noteworthy that she focuses on domestic chores as a means of passing her time—domestic chores that most traveling whaling wives did not perform. Mrs. Skinner is left to conclude forlornly that “‘I can see how different your life is from mine. I confess mine is rather an idle, aimless one’” (231). In this instance, then, it is Mrs. Skinner’s fault if her life is idle and aimless, because she does not understand the potential that life aboard a whaleship has for women. She cannot see the fact that a whaleship can be a domestic community in which women can thrive.

If men writing about whaling wives were enmeshed in particular ideological configurations of gender roles, such as fantasies of masculine American labor and the Cult of Domesticity, what the narratives of the traveling whaling wives all engage in is a reworking of domesticity, and various facets of their own identities. They all seek to re-define as domestic the communities in which the whaling families were living, and while *A Good Catch* attempts to show that this is possible to achieve on the ships themselves, the journal of Mary Chipman Lawrence, upon which *A Good Catch* was based, shows how the realm of the Pacific was, from her perspective, a large community of women. Both of these texts, albeit in different ways, attempt to capitalize on elements of the identity of whaling wives which shifted in importance over time. Lawrence finds that describing herself using the terminology men used does not work, and she turns to finding ways to depict herself, her role aboard ship and among the community of whaling wives, according to a different fantasy. Brown works much more with the ship itself as a domestic space, and she appropriates it from the men, showing how a woman—even if she is the only woman aboard ship—can establish her own domestic realm in this male-dominated arena. Both women insist on locating domestic dimensions to their

shipboard lives. However, in Lawrence's hands, her identity as a traveler, as a part of a community of traveling women, is ultimately more important than her identity as a subordinate wife and captive woman. For Brown, her heroine's domestic role is foremost, but she re-configures it to transform Mrs. Emerson from a captive or anomaly to an important figure in the shipboard community.

6.0 CHAPTER 6

“When I have fears that I may cease to be”: Manly American Whalemens and the Limits of Nationalism

The above epigraph and the sonnet from which it is drawn more directly express John Keats’s intensely personal apprehensions about his own mortality, but its tone, mood, and themes capture the emotional currents of many of the Nantucket whaling narratives which address the fears of a people whose livelihoods were threatened by devastating wars, fluctuations in the fickle market for whale oil, and what they perceived to be a failure of government patronage. Keats’s fear stems from the fact that he is worried that he will die “before my pen has glean’d my teeming brain,” before he is able to bring his poetic productions to fruition, expressing everything he has wanted to express. While Keats addresses his artistic endeavors, not physical labor, this sonnet captures the tonality of fears whalemens expressed about the potential “death” of the whaling industry that was their way of life as well as their livelihood. The fear expressed in these whaling narratives further demonstrates the immense investment these laborers had in their working identity. Writers such as Cooper and Crèvecoeur, who were engaged in the process of nation-building, took advantage of the strength of certain ideological fantasies of masculine labor to describe these whalemens as model Americans. But these particular whaling narratives provide further evidence for Eric Hobsbawm’s claim in *Nations and Nationalism* that national identification is not always the most comprehensive and stable one, and they show that a whaleman’s passionate investment in his work could be independent of his national identification or even at odds with it

Owen Chase’s personal narrative of the famous *Essex* disaster (1821), Joseph C. Hart’s *Miriam Coffin* (1834), and Obed Macy’s *History of Nantucket* (1835) all express the immediate

fears of a people whose livelihoods were threatened by forces they could not control.⁷⁰ It is not all that surprising that authors forecasting the imminent collapse of the New England whale fishery would use the same kind of language as Keats, who was more consumed with fears about his own personal mortality. For a laborer to lose his job is to suffer metaphorical death in that he is no longer a laborer; he has joined the ranks of the un-employed, the shiftless and idle. He has completely lost his identity as a manly laborer, and the only way to recover it is to labor again. Furthermore, each kind of physical labor has its own unique set of skills, associations, and meanings that involve its practitioners in a special fellowship, generating a powerful sense of belonging and identification. Sailing around the world for years at a time, harpooning and killing whales, and rendering the oil from the carcass was vastly different from sailing quickly from port to port in the merchant marine, shuttling various goods from place to place on water, or cruising with the United States Navy, protecting the American coastline and engaging in conflicts with other nations. Some of the same skills may have been used by all of these sailors, but possessing the knowledge required to hunt whales and render the oil was special to whalers. Thus, whaling's entire range of meanings and associations—including the identities it made possible for whalers—would die with the death of the industry.

What's more, the island of Nantucket drew its local identity almost entirely from the whaling industry because Nantucket was one of the only whaling ports in the United States and virtually everyone on the island was involved in the industry in some way.⁷¹ The vast majority of the citizens of Nantucket sailed on the vessels themselves, or they lived on the island and provided supplies and support for the men at sea. The fact that the business was so dangerous coupled with the fact that, against all odds, it was so lucrative generated a great deal of laboring pride in the fishery and by extension the island itself. The death of the whaling industry, then, would result not just in the death of the whalers' identity as manly laborers, but in the death of an entire community's identity. These factors alone might seem like reasons enough to

⁷⁰ I am using the second edition of Macy's *The History of Nantucket*, which was originally published in 1835, and reissued in 1880 by William C. Macy with an extra introduction and a historical addendum that includes the events occurring over the course of the years 1835-1880. Obed Macy's original text is left largely undisturbed in the second edition. The only corrections William C. Macy made involved matters of spelling and punctuation.

⁷¹ During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, whalerships departed almost exclusively from Nantucket. Some whaling vessels did depart from a few ports on the New England mainland, but for the most part whaling was centralized on Nantucket. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, the center of the whaling industry shifted from Nantucket to New Bedford because it was easier to ship whale oil to market from the mainland than it was from the island of Nantucket. For more information on the transition see Edouard Stackpole's *The Sea-Hunters*.

explain why Nantucket Islanders were so loyal to their industry and why their identification with their work could function independently of their identification with their nation, but it is also imperative to observe that the whaling industry was born well before the birth of the United States as a nation. While the American Revolution may have more materially helped men and women working in other sectors of the American economy by alleviating their tax burden to the English crown, it actually hurt rather than helped the whaling industry because it effectively closed overseas markets for whale oil, subjected whale ships at sea and the island itself to attacks from British cruisers, and reduced many living on the island to a state of abject poverty. For Nantucket Islanders, the American Revolution was not necessarily a momentous event that freed them from the rule of a dictatorial, monarchical power, but a war which disastrously disrupted the way in which they had been making a living undisturbed for many, many years. As such, Nantucket Islanders sometimes found it difficult to be loyal to the newly-formed United States, especially when they noticed that whaling was not a primary concern of the new national government.

And so, like Keats, Nantucketers were immensely concerned that their work would be curtailed by forces that they could not control, and their writings take on this same tone of fear, anxiety, and depression. Fears expressed in whaling narratives of the mid- and late nineteenth century were catalyzed not only by the growing scarcity of whales but by the whaling industry's crippling experiences during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. Obed Macy records in *The History of Nantucket* that the industry's proceeds from the year 1770 were upwards of 100,000 pounds, while, during the years 1783-84, the whaling fishery earned an average profit of 15,000 pounds per year. And just as the Islanders predicted, this noticeable drop in returns occurred again during the War of 1812: Nantucket's whaleships brought home a grand total of 28,477 barrels of oil in 1811, as opposed to 3,700 barrels of oil in 1813. Along with attacks from British cruisers, American whalers were also concerned with the fluctuations in the market for whale oil which the wartime atmosphere created. State governments on both sides of the conflict issued trade embargoes on goods imported and exported by their enemies, and the result was that the price of whale oil dropped by half in just one year—from 40 pounds per ton to 23 pounds per ton from 1783 to 1784.

Tables of statistical profits and losses were not the only way in which Nantucket Islanders described their wartime sufferings, however. In the preface to his *Narrative of the*

Most Extraordinary and Distressing Shipwreck of the Whale-Ship Essex, Owen Chase maintains that “the English have a few [whaling] ships there [in the Pacific Ocean]; and the advantages which they possess over ours, it may be *feared* will materially affect our success” and that he hopes that “our present decided supremacy will not be lost for the want of a deserved government patronage” (15; emphasis mine). In *The History of Nantucket*, Obed Macy observes with a tone of utter pathos that during the Revolutionary War, “The inhabitants were now driven from their wonted line of business [whaling] into a state of inactivity, in which many of the laboring poor could not long subsist without a change” (89). He adds that “The ways were numerous, and the places various, in which the people of Nantucket lost their lives during the war; their sufferings were long felt, deeply deplored, and they will never be forgotten” (94). Macy’s simple, yet hyperbolic language—“long felt,” “deeply deplored,” “never be forgotten”—underscores the toll that the war took on the unprotected inhabitants of Nantucket, who were forced to abandon the only business in which they could make a living because their whaleships were consistently attacked and raided by British cruisers. The crucial difference between these narratives and Keats’s sonnet is that even though they may have been periodically filled with the same sense of despair that Keats expresses when he says, “...then on the shore/Of the wide world I stand alone, and think/Till love and fame to nothingness do sink,” the writers of these whaling narratives could and did take proactive strategies to preserve the prosperity of their industry at any and all costs, even if it led them to negotiate treaties of neutrality with the British.

Whaling narratives that worry about the death of the industry engage one of the antinomies I described in the Introduction, the one having to do with whalemens as both citizens of the world and as ideal Americans. As these whaling narratives demonstrate, these two roles—which only in certain versions come into conflict—could coexist, sometimes contentiously, sometimes peacefully, in many of the whaling narratives. Alternating periods of crisis and prosperity for the whaling industry were a direct result of the international wars in which the United States was enmeshed—the American Revolution and the War of 1812. The wartime atmospheres stimulated national allegiance, demanded that all Americans unite against a common enemy, but, at the same time, these wars made whaling voyages impossible to undertake. Given that, as world travelers, the whalemens felt themselves to be a part of world-wide community of sailors, their national affiliation was perhaps not as strong as that of many Americans who spent their entire lives living ashore. What’s more, since whaling was the only

means the Nantucket Islanders had of making a living, the threats these wars posed generated a great deal of anti-American sentiment. Indeed, Nantucket Islanders independently negotiated treaties of neutrality with the British during both wars and refused to pay taxes to the state of Massachusetts. These actions did not mark a clear or complete break with the United States, politically or psychologically: there are signs that Nantucketers were ambivalent about committing what amounted to treason. Furthermore, during times of peace, the Nantucketers openly expressed their allegiance to the United States, having no enduring loyalty to the British crown. The whaling narratives trace the contours of a flexible and somewhat opportunistic political and economic relationship to the United States, in spite of the highly nationalist attempts of some whalers and industry outsiders to appropriate the pride that whalers' labors generated.

Whaling narratives like those of Owen Chase, Joseph C. Hart, and Obed Macy, which express fears over the untimely demise of an immensely profitable industry positioned precipitously on the brink of disaster, pose a certain set of questions about the role of the state in the lives of its citizens and vice versa. Chase's narrative asks: what is the responsibility of the federal government to the economic welfare of its citizens? Hart's novel asks: how can the exceptional American project be fulfilled unless the United States becomes powerful in world affairs? While Macy's narrative asks: how did many of the Nantucket Islanders understand themselves to be full-fledged American citizens, belonging to the imagined community of the nation, when they committed what amounted to treason?

These narratives say something, not just about the shifting resilience of the component terms of the form of manly American laboring identity I have been tracing, but about contemporary American political struggles. At the time that many of these texts were written, Americans were still in the process of defining what exactly the American project was and instituting a federal government that supported it. The question facing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Americans was whether to focus on internal or external concerns—domestic policy or foreign policy. Some felt that being an insular nation, avoiding international wars, and solely addressing insular concerns, such as settling the West and developing the United States' agricultural economy, would be best. Others felt that the United States needed a stronger presence in world affairs and that the way to achieve that was to develop a powerful navy, launch world-wide oceanic exploring expeditions, and invest in the mercantile and whaling industries.

As Jefferson's advocacy for a small navy in *Notes on the State of Virginia* suggests, this issue concerned Americans even prior to the existence of the federal government. However, in the Federalist debates, questions about the United States' position in the world became a subject of even greater concern. Proponents of developing the United States' military might, such as Alexander Hamilton, argued that building a navy which was capable of competing with those of France and England required the support of a strong federal government. Anti-Federalists, such as Patrick Henry, felt that having a weaker federal government would give more power to individual states to develop their economies according to what was the most profitable for them.⁷²

The Nantucket whalers were caught squarely in the middle of these arguments about what role the federal government should have, and even after the Federalist debates were over and the Constitution had been ratified, they were still asking important questions about what the responsibility of the federal government was to its people and vice versa. The American Revolution and the War of 1812—and many of the trade embargoes and tax laws accompanying these conflicts—hurt the whaling industry, and Nantucket Islanders wished for the freedom to prosecute their business independently of these wars. However, whaleships at sea had no means of defending themselves from hostile warships or pirates, so the Nantucket Islanders also wanted the U.S. to develop a navy which was capable of defending them. There was strong support among Nantucketers for a federalist project that would develop a navy and ensure it supported whaling, but if no such support was forthcoming, there was hope of not only loosening the bonds of federalism but operating outside them.

As I have shown, images of the Nantucket whalers were often appropriated for nationalist purposes, but what is most important about many of the whaling narratives from the early to mid nineteenth century is that this industry was available to be appropriated for *different kinds* of national projects. Writers such as Cooper and Crèvecoeur may have been interested in claiming the whalers themselves as exemplars of the American spirit—the character of these Americans could be used to metaphorically represent that of all Americans, whether they lived ashore or at sea. However, writers such as Owen Chase, Joseph C. Hart, and Obed Macy were

⁷² Hamilton's strongest argument for a powerful navy is contained in *The Federalist Papers*, "Number XI: The Utility of the Union in Respect to Commerce and a Navy." Henry's most compelling claims appear in his speeches of July 5th and 7th, 1788.

interested in using the Nantucket whaling industry to show how the United States was already in the process of developing a strong international presence in the world, one that needed to be developed further. They claimed that the American project was not just to build an exceptional insular nation, but to build an exceptional nation which played a powerful role in world affairs and could earn the respect of its European counterparts. However, Owen Chase's, Obed Macy's, and Joseph C. Hart's narratives each employ different strategies for describing the role of the whaling industry in narratives of American national identity.

Because of the empirical needs of the whaling industry, Owen Chase and the Nantucket Islanders in Obed Macy's *History of Nantucket* called for federal *laissez-faire* economic trading policies which would lift trade embargoes and lower taxes on American and global markets for whale oil and ensure whalers the right to be protected by the United States Navy as they traveled around the world. This argument, in spite of drawing on anti-federalist and federalist positions at once, represented one possible solution to the kind of controversy I have described. The fact that there were many different versions of federalism circulating throughout nineteenth-century American culture is substantiated by Anne Norton's scholarship in *Alternative Americas*. She claims that during the antebellum years, the North and the South envisioned their roles in the national community quite differently. The South's blameworthy association with slavery should not obscure the fact that it offered a vision of the United States as a looser confederation of states than the North did, Norton argues. Of the antebellum years, Norton says:

North and South came to represent contending conceptions of America and hence alternative notions of standards of legitimacy which the regime was required to satisfy, of the historical origins of the nation, and its eschatological significance and constraints upon its future course. This adherence to alternative Americas was manifested in regional identities which presented, in disparate constellations of traits, attributes, and associations, radically different conceptions of American individual rights and collective authority. (8)

These different conceptions of regional identities constituted an important distinction between the North and the South in the early nineteenth century, one that has been obscured retrospectively by historians' focus on slavery. However, as the whaling narratives demonstrate, these same divides were present in the North itself.

Obed Macy's *History of Nantucket* shows that the Islanders were willing to do whatever they thought necessary in order to protect their industry, even if it meant explicitly violating the Constitutional mandates against individual states negotiating independently with hostile foreign powers. Despite the fact that the Constitution maintains that "no State shall...enter into any Agreement or Compact with another State, or with a foreign Power, or engage in War, unless actually invaded, or in such imminent Danger as will not admit of delay," the citizens of Nantucket openly negotiated with the British government during the War of 1812 for special treatment, because they wanted to remain neutral during this period of hostilities (Art. I, Sec. 10). They also refused to pay wartime taxes to the United States government or the state of Massachusetts because they did not think that they should be required to support a government which could not, in their view, adequately protect them during times of war. Moreover, the narratives justify any and all requests or actions by the Nantucket Islanders, whether they were against the wishes of the federal government or not, by invoking ideological fantasies of masculine American labor. Chase's, Hart's, and Macy's narratives reclaim the figure of the whalers as American heroes in order to further a range of political agendas, not all of which were strictly compatible with American law. Even though the nationalist component of the fantasy might be expected to drop out of the combinatory identity when the Nantucket Islanders felt the whaling industry to be threatened, it was actually reinforced by these authors, who claimed that the independence of the Nantucket Islanders was somehow quintessentially American.

6.1 SECTION 1

"This species of commerce will bid fair to become the most profitable and extensive that our country possesses": Owen Chase's
*Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing
Shipwreck of the Whale-Ship Essex*

Owen Chase's narrative of the shocking and sensational *Essex* disaster first appeared in 1821, a year after he survived his voyage as first mate aboard the ship which was famously sunk by a large sperm whale in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, leaving the crew to fend for themselves in

tiny open boats with little to no food and water. More than just an exciting tale of adventure—which it is—, Chase’s narrative is also intensely political in that it attempts to imagine a particular kind of role for the federal government. The government should be both “energetic” enough—to borrow a phrase from the Federalists—to develop a navy capable of protecting America’s maritime economic interests and hands-off enough to allow Americans to pursue whatever way of making a living they so choose. In order to advocate for this position, Chase aligns whaling with core American values and represents whalers as ideal Americans.⁷³ His proclamation that the whaling industry has the potential to become “the most profitable and extensive” one in the United States capitalizes on the love that Americans have for their country and its economic interests; however, by going so far as to predict the industry’s demise if it does not receive some kind of governmental support, he infuses his narrative with a sense of fear (Chase 19). By making it hard not to love these wonderfully American men and the services they perform for their country, Chase makes it difficult for fellow Americans to object to providing them with a government which will give them the support that they need in order to avoid the collapse of the industry in which they work. Chase employs these tactics in order to argue that providing military support for the whaleships at sea will aid the United States’ standing in the global marketplace and increase its power in the global arena. He argues that as a more powerful nation, the United States could better defend the safety and security of its citizens, and he assumes that Americans who love their country would want to promote American supremacy in the world, especially when it would not only benefit them financially, but protect them from the depredations of other more powerful nations. This approach tends to be hyperbolic, exaggerating the industry’s positive aspects and downplaying its negative aspects.

Because of the range of different perspectives adopted by the Federalist and Anti-Federalists alike, the eventual ratification of the Constitution did not necessarily put an end to the controversy over U.S. foreign policy, and it was still raging by the time Chase published his

⁷³ Chase’s *Narrative* was actually written by an unidentified ghostwriter upon Chase’s return to Nantucket; thus, it is difficult to attribute the perspective on whaling which this narrative presents solely to him, especially in the opening sections that do not deal with the specific events of the voyage. Scholars have speculated widely about who wrote the narrative for Chase—some have suggested that the same man who ghostwrote Obed Macy’s *History of Nantucket*, William Coffin Jr., was also responsible for the *Essex* narrative, but this has not been proven. Even though it is impossible to determine who wrote the text, Chase endorsed this version of the events of his voyage, and I think it is clear from the text that whoever wrote it was familiar with and sympathetic to the whaling industry. Thus, for the purposes of clarity, I have chosen to ascribe the words and perspectives of the narrative to Chase, himself, even though the words are not necessarily his.

narrative in 1821. Moreover, Nathaniel Philbrick's book, *Sea of Glory*, describes a debate lasting more than twenty years about whether or not the U.S. Exploring Expedition of 1838-1842 should be launched. Despite the fact that some Americans felt that the United States should send out its navy on this voyage of discovery and exploration as an investment in American foreign policy, other Americans felt that the money that this expedition would cost would be better spent on domestic concerns. The U.S. Exploring Expedition of 1838-1842 eventually set out on its voyage, but in light of this long struggle, Chase could not count on Americans to be interested in increasing the United States' supremacy abroad.

Upon its publication, Chase's narrative proved to be immensely popular and was avidly read throughout the United States during the early nineteenth century. His story must have connected with the reading public, thereby circulating his political message. Philbrick's *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* claims that nineteenth-century Americans were as fascinated by the *Essex* disaster as twentieth-century Americans were by the sinking of the *Titanic* (218). It is impossible to know what Chase's American readers actually thought of his political goals, but the narrative was later re-printed, re-written, and re-circulated in a wide variety of different educational texts aimed directly at children. William H. McGuffey's *The Eclectic Fourth Reader* (1843) contained a version of Chase's narrative, as did *The Child's Book About Whales* (1843), *The Natural History of the Whale* (1844), and *Stories About the Whale* (1850). Certainly, the sensational nature of the destruction of the *Essex* made these narratives popular, and its survivors' experiences would have made interesting reading for nineteenth-century American children. In *Beneath the American Renaissance*, David Reynolds vividly describes nineteenth-century America's thirst for thrilling, sensational tales of adventure, but this was not the only aspect of the *Essex* disaster that contributed to its popularity. It also contained descriptions of a prominent American business and explained its basic characteristics and operations.

Many of these re-written versions of the *Essex* story transform Chase's narrative into a cautionary tale. The children's books in particular, despite quoting Chase's narrative in places, completely drop his social and political message in favor of a quite different one: "If boys know when they are well off, they will seek some other occupation besides that of whaling, when they come to be young men" (*Stories About the Whale* 24). Thus, Chase's original narrative, which attempts to help the foundering whaling industry, actually works in this version to the detriment

of the whaling industry, by cautiously advising young men to stay away from whaleships because of the dangers they might encounter. In the case of this children's book and others, Chase's narrative was appropriated for ideologues who needed to find apolitical, didactic applications for any text directed at children. In the case of Hart's novel, *Miriam Coffin*, it was appropriated to further the cause of the proposed U.S. Exploring Expedition of 1838-1842.

Part of the narrative's appeal lies in Chase's rhetorical strategy of representing the whalers as, on the one hand, unique individuals and, on the other, as typical, working Americans, who deserve to be admired for their bravery and morality. The early sections of the narrative, where the most explicitly political discussions occur, are designed to acquaint readers with the whaling industry. The Preface and initial chapters endow the whalers' work with national significance. Chase begins, "The increasing attention which is bestowed upon the whale fishery in the United States, has lately caused a very considerable commercial excitement; and no doubt it will become, if it be not at present, as important and general a branch of commerce as any belonging to our country" (15). Like his predecessor, Crèvecoeur, Chase describes the way in which the whaling industry, already an important source of income to the United States, is more successful than that of other nations. Chase, then, goes on to describe how the Nantucket Islanders are famous for their "primitive simplicity, integrity, and hospitality" and how they remain uncorrupted by the remarkable material gains that have come flowing into their community (15). Nantucketers are simple, humble rustics—much like Jefferson's farmers—as well as ingenious, progressive capitalists, and their fellow Americans should love them because of their moral character and because of their monetary contributions to their country.

Alongside these remarks about Nantucketers ashore, Chase also comments on the character of the whalers themselves. Implicitly disavowing the unsavory reputation that sailors had in the early nineteenth century, he claims that "unlike the majority of the class or profession to which they belong, they labour not only for their temporary subsistence, but they have ambition and pride among them which seeks after distinguishment and promotion" (16). Therefore, Nantucket whalers are not like other sailors because of their "pride" and "ambition" which drive them to work hard and make their way up the industry's hierarchy. He also adds that "If the post of danger be the post of honour; and if merit emanates from exemplary character, uncommon intelligence, and professional gallantry, then is it due to a great majority of the shipmasters of Nantucket, that they should be held above the operations of an invidious and

unjust distinction” (17). The argument that Chase makes here is difficult to disagree with, especially since the rest of the narrative demonstrates that whalers possess all of these qualities. However, Chase neglects to mention, as Thomas Nickerson, the cabin boy aboard the *Essex*, does in *Desultory Sketches* (circa 1876), that the sailors on the *Essex* embarked from the ship in the Azores, visited dance halls, drank excessively, and cavorted with women of questionable moral character.⁷⁴ These missing details could be a result of the fact that Chase and Nickerson might be adopting different conceptions of morality—the former claiming that sailors could be brave and rambunctious at the same time; the latter claiming that moral character was closely associated with sexual restraint and temperance. But the fact that Chase goes to such great lengths to differentiate whalemens from other nineteenth-century sailors would suggest that he ignores the events Nickerson describes in order to further his own claim.

According to Nickerson, the common sailors aboard the *Essex* were not the only ones whose behavior was suspect. Their captain, George Pollard Jr., did not always demonstrate the “exemplary character” and “uncommon intelligence” that Chase claims all Nantucket whalemens possess. Nickerson claims that as a first-time captain, Pollard was not always confident in his leadership abilities, and his treatment of his crew was not at all consistent. Sometimes, he was harsh, cruel, and dictatorial and made the men work without adequate food and rest, but he also displayed more democratic tendencies. Nickerson seems hesitant to completely condemn the behavior of his captain: “I would not impress upon the mind of the reader that Pollard was a hard master. He was generally very kind where he could be so...” (108). Trying to manage his work force with some combination of directive firmness and compassionate deference to their desires proved to be quite difficult for Pollard, and his inexperience had disastrous consequences when the *Essex* finally foundered in the middle of the Pacific. Originally, Pollard had wanted to sail along with the prevailing winds and ocean currents in the direction of the relatively close islands of the South Pacific, but against his better judgment, he chose to follow the opinion of first mate, Owen Chase, who, because he was afraid the men would encounter cannibals on the Pacific islands, wanted to head towards the coast of South America. This decision ultimately cost most of the crew their lives. Whatever the truth about the character of the men aboard the

⁷⁴ Although Nickerson forwarded *Desultory Sketches* to professional writer, Leon Lewis, in 1876, it is not clear whether or not he wrote it then or much earlier. Despite the popularity of the *Essex* disaster, Lewis never responded to Nickerson’s desire to tell his version of events, and *Desultory Sketches* remained in obscurity until it was discovered in the attic of a house in Hamden, Connecticut and was first published in 1984.

Essex actually was, Chase's political advocacy gave him a motive to emphasize the whalemens' more positive qualities. After all, who would want to build a stronger federal government which would provide economic subsidies and military support to men of questionable character? Of course, Nickerson, as a common sailor, might have seen more of the disreputable behavior of his fellow crewmembers than Chase would have as a first mate, and it should be noted that Nickerson, too, spun his narrative to his own advantage. Preferring not to admit to cannibalism himself, Nickerson maintains that the men in his tiny open boat were saved before they had to resort to partaking in this practice. Instead, he points the finger at the men in Chase's boat, describing how they were so desperate and starving that they drew straws and shot the loser for food.

Once Chase describes the whalemens as manly American laborers, he turns to a discussion of the United States government's lack of support for the industry. He notes that the War of 1812 caused great difficulty for the whalemens, but he asserts that they have managed to resourcefully continue their pursuits anyway. With some consternation, Chase observes that the English whaling industry is growing and may eventually surpass the success of the Americans. To avoid this threat, he says, "It is to be hoped that the wisdom of Congress will be extended to this subject; and that our present decided supremacy will not be lost for the want of a deserved government patronage" (15). Rhetorically, Chase appeals to Congress's desire to support a strong American industry as well as its rivalry with England, the nation with which the United States had been at war twice in the space of less than fifty years. He goes on to add that "Recent events have shown that we require a competent naval force in the Pacific, for the protection of this important and lucrative branch of commerce; for the want of which, many serious injuries and insults have been lately received, which have a tendency to retard its flourishing progress, and which have proved of serious consequence to the parties concerned" (15-16). Wrapping himself in the flag, Chase warns that this lucrative American industry's progress will be seriously "retarded" if something is not done. His statement aligns his position with Alexander Hamilton's.

The first chapter of Chase's narrative repeats much of what he says in the Preface, namely that the Nantucketers are "a very industrious and enterprising people," that "the profession is one of great ambition and merit, and full of honourable excitement," and that "this species of commerce will bid fair to become the most profitable and extensive that our country

possesses” (18-19). His repetition of the same adjectival descriptors in order to characterize the Nantucket whalers as model Americans further drives home his point. Chase does not mention much of the first part of the voyage before the *Essex* was sunk by the enraged whale. Instead of describing the places where the ship stopped for food and recreation, as Nickerson does, Chase briefly mentions the amount of whale oil they managed to procure and a few incidents in which the smaller whaleboats were wrecked by whales but no crew members were injured. In his account, everything seems to function as it should, smoothly, with the crew working together to capture the whales, and there does not appear to be any unhappiness or challenge to authority on the part of the crew. According to Chase, they are all eagerly involved in their joint venture pursuing whales. After the *Essex* sinks, Chase takes control of one of the three whaleboats, and the rest of the narrative establishes him as an intrepid, brave leader, a perfect example of what he previously described a Nantucket whaler to be: a self-reliant, courageous, rugged individual. Chase does admit that his poor decision-making, in terms of sailing for the coast of South America not the Pacific Islands, contributed to the hardships that befell the men in his whaleboat, but he counts on the fact that many nineteenth-century Americans would understand his fear of the cannibalistic “savages” living on these islands. This somewhat irrational but quite visceral fear is the same as that which Queequeg confronts in *Moby-Dick*.

The preface and introductory paragraphs are meant to garner support for Chase’s position that Americans should be more interested in world affairs and therefore in competition with other countries. Therefore, the opening portions of Chase’s narrative portray whalers as hard-working “industrious” people who should be rewarded for their bravery, piety, and the material contributions they make to the United States economy. It is no accident that what follows the initial chapters stylistically resembles many early American Indian Captivity Narratives in that disastrous events befall the men, but they are rescued primarily by God’s grace.⁷⁵ Just as Cotton Mather and others used captivity narratives to show that the Puritans were a chosen people whose “errand into the wilderness” was blessed by God, Chase’s tale of moral redemption shows that Americans working in the whaling industry are equally blessed. To a limited degree, the

⁷⁵ For more information on early American Captivity Narratives, especially the ones from the Puritan era which develop the theme of suffering and redemption, see Richard VanDerBeet’s study, *The Indian Captivity Narrative an American Genre*.

deliverance of the *Essex* men is attributed to their resourcefulness and bravery; however, by and large, faith and piety guarantee their survival. Upon his return to Nantucket, Chase says, “My unexpected appearance was welcomed with the most grateful obligations and acknowledgements to a beneficent Creator, who had guided me through darkness, trouble, and death, once more to the bosom of my country and friends” (72). These words, which conclude the narrative, clearly display the religious tenor of these portions of the narrative, but they also serve to connect national sentiment, not Puritan beliefs, to moral redemption. Chase’s narrative does not quote the Bible directly, a strategy employed by Mary Rowlandson in her captivity narrative (circa 1682), but it does emphasize the importance of faith, piety, and morality in the lives of these men, even if they were sailors and temporarily became cannibals. Chase’s brand of watered-down Christianity—it is not clear what kind of Christians these men are, only that they believe that their faith in God saved them—does not emphasize any one sect of Christianity; rather, it simply harnesses the nation’s dominant religion to reinforce the idea that these men are good, moral, hard-working American citizens.

6.2 SECTION 2

“A hive of industrious bees, for a miniature representation of the vast whole”:
Joseph C. Hart’s *Miriam Coffin or the Whale Fisherman, A Tale*

Like Owen Chase’s narrative of the *Essex* disaster, Joseph C. Hart’s novel, *Miriam Coffin, or The Whale-Fisherman*, also lobbies the U. S. government to provide financial and military support for the Nantucket whaling industry. However, Hart engages much more in the debate over the United States’ position in the world, adapting the language of Manifest Destiny to apply to the United States’ expansion not only in North America but across the oceans of the world as well. Hart’s introduction to *Miriam Coffin* takes a position similar to that of Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, but Hart tries to instill readers with a sense of shame for any government that would not support the brave whalers he depicts.

In a complex series of metaphors, Hart links the destiny of the Nantucket Islanders to that of all other American citizens, which, in turn, he compares to the personified character of the

Mississippi River. As the title of this section shows, Hart uses the same synecdoche as Crèvecoeur, linking the Nantucketers to Americans at large by comparing them to swarms of worker bees and maintaining that their industrious character is representative of Americans everywhere. Then, he brings into play the language of Manifest Destiny. The Mississippi River, like the United States, has risen from modest beginnings, Hart observes, and just as the Mississippi necessarily grows larger and stronger as it courses southwards to the ocean, the United States, over time, will steadily increase its territory and military and economic might. Just as surely as the Mississippi fulfills its manifest destiny of reaching the Gulf of Mexico:

It is even thus with the American nation. The remote and interminable wilds of the earth witnessed its birth, amidst forests boasting the growth of centuries, where, giant-like and unconquerable, —combining in its own elements and wisely directing its own energies, —it moves on surely and steadily to the accomplishment of a glorious and unequalled destiny. (2)

In this extended organic metaphor, both the Mississippi River and the United States possess immense power and move toward monumental destinies.

The language of Manifest Destiny, in a variety of different forms, swarms throughout nineteenth-century American writing about the settlement of the Western territories. To varying degrees, almost all writing about the Westward expansion of the United States employs religious imagery, natural imagery, or some combination of the two in order to make the “glorious” destiny of the nation seem inevitable. In the 1839 Preface to *The Pathfinder*, James Fenimore Cooper observes that:

A passing glimpse, even though it be in a work of fiction, of what that vast region [New York state] so lately was, may help to make up the sum of knowledge by which alone, a just appreciation can be formed of the wonderful means by which Providence is clearing the way for the advancement of civilization across the whole American continent. (2)

Cooper makes the expansion of the United States seem absolutely inevitable because New York State has already been transformed from wilderness into civilization, and the “wonderful” hand of Providence will continue this process all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Nothing is more inevitable than God’s will, which mere men can do nothing to stop, even if they want to.

Benson J. Lossing’s brief biography of Daniel Boone, published in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in October of 1859, relies less on the role of Providence and more on natural

imagery to make the Manifest Destiny of the United States seem inevitable, arguing that the Native Americans in Kentucky were “resolved to crush this bud of civilization before it should become unfolded in strength” (586). Characterizing civilization as a bud about to bloom capitalizes on the natural processes that generate and complete the cycle of life, but these figurative descriptions of civilization also lend a positive, innocent, beautiful, and Edenic tone to the forms of conquest and appropriation required by Manifest Destiny. Lossing’s language is no less grandiose than Cooper’s: “Daniel Boone has ever been regarded more as a great hunter, than as a bold and enlightened pioneer in the grand Westward march of civilization in America” (577). Both men emphasize “civilization” as the driving force behind Manifest Destiny, and by placing a heavy importance on property and the acquisition of territory on the North American continent, both Cooper and Lossing respectively stress that it is the “the advancement of civilization” and the “grand Westward march of civilization” that fulfills the monumental destiny of the United States and increases its strength and power. They make the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny seem like a natural process by which Americans move unchallenged into lands awaiting them.

Hart extends the language of Manifest Destiny to the international arena, using his promotion of the Nantucket whaling industry to push and even shame the United States’ government into taking a stronger and more forceful position in world affairs. He also changes the focus to human agency, arguing that the United States’ prospective superiority in the international area is the inevitable and natural result of the Nantucket Islander’s dedication to their labors, not the hand of Providence. Hart warns that if the United States fails to promote its international interests, it will fall behind the other nations of the world in the arenas of commerce and industry, exploration and knowledge, and scientific advancement and discovery. At this point, Hart’s political goal becomes clearer: he is arguing for support for the U.S. Exploring Expedition which was eventually sent out in 1838, four years after this novel was written. Citing a statement made by the director of the Department of the Navy to the House of Representatives, Hart poses the question:

Is it honourable for the United States to use, for ever, the knowledge furnished us by others, to teach us how to shun a rock, escape a shoal, or find a harbour; and add nothing to the great mass of information, that previous ages and other nations have brought to our hands? (xxxii).

In other words, good, patriotic Americans who love their country should not let it languish as a weak or lazy nation, dependent on all the others for its financial stability, development of technology, and acquisition of knowledge. He invokes a sense of shame about the prospect of the United States relying on the knowledge of others without contributing something back to that stock of knowledge. Hart's argument may have helped to stimulate action on the part of the United States government since not long after it financed the expedition. What is important for my purpose, though, is how he transfers the language of Manifest Destiny to the cause of supporting American oceanic industry, largely removing Providence from the equation and dropping the untranslatable emphasis on turning wild lands into civilized property.

Hart also strikes the note of shame in claiming that the United States' "honour" is at stake if the government does not start becoming more active in world affairs:

It seems well understood, at this time, that it is for our interest and for our *honour*, to be well acquainted with the *capacities* of the globe; to see what resources can be drawn from that great *common* of nations—the *ocean*. (xxix-xxx)

It is not just honor but also personal gain—"interest"—that makes this exploring expedition such a wise investment. Interest looms larger as his account continues:

No one who has reflected on the vast resources of the earth, 'which is our inheritance,' can doubt that such a large portion of it contains many things which may be turned to good account, by the enterprise and good management of our people—and these are the true profits of commerce. The great mass of the intelligence of the country is for it, and is calling on the National Legislature for aid in the undertaking. (xxx)

Here, labor is discussed in Biblical terms, and Hart converts the idea that "the meek shall inherit the earth" into the idea that the industrious "shall inherit the earth," industrious Americans such as the Nantucket whalers. Meekness would not really serve his project of increasing the supremacy of the United States abroad. In one fell swoop, Hart both invokes the Biblical language of destiny and removes the hand of Providence from the equation. The destiny of Americans seems to derive from their own will to exploit their inheritance to their own advantage. This inheritance includes the as yet unexplored oceans of the world, "that great common of nations," and all Americans have an obligation to make the most of this inheritance and turn it "to good account" through their industry.

The Exploring Expedition of 1838-1842 might seem as though it would benefit only a very narrow segment of the American population—only those involved in the whaling industry or the merchant marine. Hart is careful to stress its wider benefits:

Our commercial and national importance cannot be supported without a navy, or our navy without commerce, and a nursery for our seamen. The citizens of Maine, of New-York, of Georgia, of Ohio, and of the great valley of the Mississippi, are deeply interested in the existence of our gallant navy, and in the extension of our commerce, as they are interested in the perpetuity of our institutions, and the liberty of our country. Indeed, liberty and commerce have been *twin sisters*, in all past ages and countries and times; they have stood side by side, moved hand in hand. Wherever the soil has been congenial to the one, there has flourished the other also; in a word, they have lived, they have flourished, or they have died together. (xxxii-xxxiii)

This passage moves steadily from the specific to the general, showing that Americans from all regions of the country see the benefits of such an exploring expedition. Like Hamilton, Hart strongly supports a navy. Moreover, the “nursery for our seaman” to which he is referring seems in context to be the whaling industry, which needs sustained governmental support in order to continue making these contributions to their nation. Hart links the naval power to international trade, international trade to national commerce, and flourishing commerce to freedom, culminating in a familiar American formula. Other work narratives, such as J. Ross Browne’s, argue that unadulterated capitalism tends to benefit a few individuals and limit the freedoms of the vast majority of its workers by condemning them to lives of perpetual poverty and struggle. However, Hart yokes capitalism to liberty by using an agricultural metaphor about their common “soil.”

An interesting semantic overlap between Hart’s narrative and *Moby-Dick* serves to highlight Hart’s political agenda. Hart and Melville’s Ishmael both compare whalers to insects. Bearing in mind Hart’s bees, consider Ishmael’s ants:

And thus have these naked Nantucketers, these sea hermits, issuing from their ant-hill in the sea, overrun and conquered the watery world like so many Alexanders; parcelling out among them the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans, as the three pirate powers did Poland. Let America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let the English overswarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun; two thirds of this

terraqueous globe are the Nantucketer's. For the sea is his; he owns it, as Emperors own empires; other seamen having but a right of way through it. (64)

The hyperbolic and rather negative language of the quote suggests that underneath Ishmael's superficial admiration lies an implicit critique of the conquering Nantucketers. Conquering and colonizing an element of nature, rather than property, is an impressive feat, but Ishmael's ant metaphor is rather less complimentary than Hart's analogy to bees, in that pesky ants are far less valued and admired than industrious, honey-producing bees. And his metaphorical comparisons to "pirate powers" and dictatorial emperors such as Alexander further suggest that his tone is more critical than Hart's. Ishmael's passage is shot through with the language of domination—"overrun," "conquered," "pile," "overswarm," "owns,"—but unlike Hart, who sees this power as leading the United States to its glorious destiny, Ishmael presents this domination as frightening and dreadful. Ishmael's Nantucketers are not coated with the promotion of Manifest Destiny. Instead, they join the ranks of men and nations who are so much obsessed with conquest they try to stake claims to oceans as well as lands. In contrast, in Hart's hands, the language of domination for the sake of domination turns into an inevitable supremacy destined from the very beginning of the creation of the nation, not because of the beneficent hand of Providence, but because of the efforts of manly American physical laborers, such as the American whalemens.

6.3 SECTION 3

"If we could justify any war, it would be that of the Revolution":
Obed Macy's *History of Nantucket*

In their descriptions of Nantucket whalemens as manly *American* laborers, both Owen Chase and Joseph C. Hart ignore the fact that the allegiance that these men felt to their nation was highly variable. Obed Macy's *The History of Nantucket* focuses on this oscillating loyalty in an honest attempt to understand the behaviors of the Nantucket Islanders during times of war when their business was threatened by the turmoil around them.⁷⁶ Somewhat paradoxically, Macy both

⁷⁶ Macy's *History of Nantucket* was also ghostwritten—see the note pertaining to Chase's narrative—, but for reasons I have already articulated above, I have chosen to treat this work in the same manner as Chase's.

depicts Nantucket as a community of Americans and as an isolated island community, a self-enclosed unit, functioning as its own independent body, almost completely regardless of state and national ties. As my section title shows, Macy struggles mightily to argue that Nantucket Islanders supported the American Revolution—even though few of them fought in the war, many of them did not pay their wartime taxes, and their representatives negotiated treaties of neutrality with Great Britain. In effect, Macy presents the Nantucket Islanders as having been consistently loyal to what America means or ought to mean but not always to the current American government.

Narratives of national identity depend upon imagining a seamless national community. One way of promoting this unity was to emphasize, as Crèvecoeur does, that despite the fact that individual Americans might possess different religious beliefs, emigrate from various nations around the world, and live in widespread parts of the country, their national government gives them all the same opportunity to earn material success by working hard. Benedict Anderson claims that there are certain rituals in which all national citizens take part, such as reading the newspaper: “It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion” (35). Another ritual might be the process of getting up and going to work every day. Knowing that many Americans get up, go to work, and try hard to succeed, Americans can imagine a nation unified by its daily endeavors. But what happens to that unity when American workers are denied the opportunity of going to work?

Macy’s *History of Nantucket* registers both Nantucketers’ rather elastic sense of national belonging and Macy’s own eagerness to insist on Nantucket’s fundamentally American character. In fact, throughout the course of the entire text, the Nantucket Islanders’ allegiance to their nation appears to be the least of their concerns—at least until Macy, himself, interprets their actions. The Nantucket Islanders seem to care mainly about the whaling industry, and they are constantly prepared to protect it—even if it means committing treason, as they did during the War of 1812. Well before the Civil War, when Southerners justified their secession as a patriotic defense of their way of working and making a living, Macy makes use of a similar rhetoric. For Macy, though, the key to transforming the Nantucket Islanders from traitors into ideal Americans is to make use of their Quaker heritage.

The history of Quakers in North America has been volatile. At times, Quakers were oppressed and suffered a great deal of persecution, but at others they were quite well-respected and highly regarded by their fellow colonists or Americans. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, various aspects of the Quaker belief system were amenable to dominant narratives of American national identity including ones that were cohering before the Revolution. The Quakers' stance on equality and against hierarchy—women were considered to be equal to men, and their churches had no ministers, pastors, or officials—appealed to a people struggling to overthrow the monarchical power of Great Britain. Their abolitionist position on slavery was quite well respected in the Northern states, and they were famous for their role in helping runaway slaves reach freedom via the underground railroad. The fact that they were famous for their strong work ethic, good business sense, and their honest piety only increased their standing in American society. For example, Marmaduke Temple, in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823), a wealthy Quaker and shrewd businessman, is one of the pillars of the community in the new settlement on the shores of Lake Otsego, New York. After the American Revolution, Quakers suffered less intolerance, but Americans continued to be baffled by a people who adhered to such a strict code of non-violence. Robert Montgomery Bird's novel *Nick of the Woods* (1827) is just one of the many literary treatments of Quakers in the nineteenth century, and it shows how men on the frontier strongly disapproved of the behavior of pacifist Quakers, who preferred to negotiate with Native Americans as opposed to fighting them. In Bird's view, Quaker pacifism is emasculating and generates psychological instability because these men suppress their aggressive and natural urges to engage in physical violence when provoked. After witnessing the violent deaths of his family members at the hands of marauding Native Americans, the title character's personality splits in two. Nick, the simple Quaker pacifist by day, turns into the Jibbenainosay, the relentless and almost super-human, Indian-killer at night. Other Americans quite simply did not understand men who would not fight even if they were provoked. Quaker whalemens were not as vulnerable to these superficial charges of emasculation as other Quaker men since they were bravely hunting down the largest animals in the world. As might be suspected, though, there was a great deal of opposition regarding the Quakers' conscientious objection during times of war. Suspicion against the Quakers ranged from charges of cowardice to charges of opportunism: they lived in the United States, took advantage of all the freedoms their nation had to offer, but refused to fight for it.

Macy tackles suspicions against Quaker pacifism head-on, attempting to turn refusing to fight for one's country into the ultimate act of patriotism. In the Preface, he maintains, "There is one trait in their character, however, to which they may claim undisputed right; it is a settled, strong, and almost universal opinion, that wars are wrong" (iv). He goes on to say that "Situated, in a time of war, beyond the protecting arm of government, they have been exempted from taking an active part in our national contests; surrounded often by the enemy, and always utterly defenceless, they enjoyed a greater immunity from plunder and devastation than fortified seaports or even many inland towns" (iv). While Macy claims "they have been exempted" from fighting in American wars such as the Revolution and the War of 1812, the Constitutional debates occurring between these wars registered considerable uncertainty and dissensus on this issue. The Anti-Federalists argued that the Constitution be amended to contain a Bill of Rights, which among other things, proposed "that any person religiously scrupulous of bearing arms ought to be exempted, upon payment equivalent to employ another to bear arms in his stead" (*Additions Proposed by the Virginia Convention* 221). In a similar vein, the writers of "The Address and Reasons of Dissent of the Minority of the Convention of Pennsylvania to their Constituents" objected that under the present Constitution "the rights of conscience may be violated, as there is no exemption of those persons who are conscientiously scrupulous of bearing arms" (255). However, these arguments did not prevail. By the time Macy was writing, the only portion of the Constitution which protected the Quakers' right to conscientious objection was the rather vague first amendment, which guaranteed them freedom of religion. In this light, one can only read Macy's preface as offering a vision of a fiercely independent people who refuse to do things which they consider immoral, whether or not their government agrees.

The rest of Macy's history further elaborates the complexity of justifying Quakers' pacifism to a national readership. As I have described, just before the American Revolution brought whaling ventures to a halt, the whaling industry on Nantucket reached never-before-imagined heights of prosperity. Partly because of this wealth, the whalemens strongly opposed the war. Macy's account emphasizes at once Nantucketers' sympathies with the North American colonists and their principled opposition to war: "If we could justify any war, it would be that of the Revolution...Respecting as we do, and that most sincerely, the rights of man, we have little sympathy with those who supinely submit to unprovoked injuries...and we believe that there are ample means for this purpose [settling disputes], without resort to blood, and that wars and

fightings are the causes, rather than the remedies of oppression” (84-85). Thus, the Nantucketers agreed with the feelings of those leading the Revolution, but not the way in which they were expressing their resentment towards Great Britain. Sacvan Bercovitch has asserted, in reference to the American women’s suffrage movement, that there is nothing more American than social protest if the protestor can link his or her goals to core American values (159). Macy offers such a link, maintaining that the Islanders are strong believers in “the rights of man”: the goals of the Revolution, freedom and independence, are in fact their own, but they have a different way of achieving those goals.

The subsequent actions of the Islanders, however, do not seem to fit Macy’s account of their motives. During the American Revolution, the citizens of Nantucket, like those in almost every other colony, were divided between those loyal to the British crown and those sympathetic to the American cause. Unlike other populations, however, Nantucketers made countless attempts to petition the British government regarding their “neutral” stance on the war, and their petitions specifically asked for military protection so that they could continue their whaling voyages, which had come to a halt. Macy mentions these petitions, which other sources confirm. Naturally, since they did not know or even expect that the Americans would win the war, they hedged their bets and chose to appeal to the country they saw as their most advantageous ally, Great Britain. They received replies from the British government granting them the protection they desired, and it was promised that the towns and wharves of Nantucket would not be looted and burned by the British cruisers. Writing in retrospect, according to his understanding of these events, Macy suggests that these actions were the direct result of the fact that Quaker whalers needed to earn a living and were merely acting out of self-preservation, rather than that they were disloyal to the American cause.

After the war was over, the American government and the state of Massachusetts wanted to collect back taxes from the citizens of Nantucket, who objected because they claimed that they should not have to pay taxes to a country that could not protect them during wartime.⁷⁷ The irony—not emphasized by Macy—is that the Nantucket Islanders felt that the federal government had an obligation to defend them, but, even if they were asked to do so, they would not serve their own government in the same capacity. Instead of focusing on these issues, Macy

⁷⁷ Henry David Thoreau’s essay, “Civil Disobedience,” recounts Thoreau’s use of the same form of social protest to register his disagreement with the Mexican War.

tries to sever Nantucket from its ties to both Massachusetts and the United States by explaining that:

The wide ocean is the source of their livelihood, and they breast its waves and grapple with its monsters in every latitude between the polar ices. The sun never sets on their industry; they labor and worship under the whole dome of the firmament. The objects of their affections are abroad on the deep, or buried for ever beneath its billows; their prayers are wafted on every wind, their tears are mingled with every surge. (110)

In this rhetorical construction, Macy links the activities of the Islanders to the pioneering spirit of other Americans. These men are brave explorers who travel the expanse of the entire globe to “grapple with its monsters.” He is also sure to link those living ashore with the men abroad; whaling is not an individual activity, but a communal one. The above passage details not only the dangers of life on a whaleship, but also the very real and devastating consequences of losing a loved one at sea. Thus, Macy switches his focus in order to represent Nantucket as an independent body, whose domain is the entire world.

Macy recounts that during the War of 1812, the relationship between Nantucket and the federal government became even more contentious. Because they were so concerned about another impending war, the citizens drew up a protest which was forwarded to Congress. They outlined how severely the whaling industry was affected by the American Revolution as an example of how they would fare should the United States declare war on Great Britain again. But all of their efforts were to no avail; the growth of the whaling industry, which had increased after the Revolution, again came to a halt with the onset of the new war with England. The citizens of Nantucket explored a wide variety of options for preserving the whaling industry and even contemplated appealing to the British minister for help. At first, they decided against that option, not because they felt more loyal to the United States, but because they feared failure (Macy 165). Instead, they wrote a letter to James Madison, then President of the United States, in which they stated:

We are aware that the constitution of the United States expressly provides, that no preference shall be given to one state over the others; at the same time we are fully sensible, that, when a resort to arms is considered unavoidable, our government will afford that consistent relief to such parts of the community as are deprived of the means of subsistence by a continuation of the war. Such appears to be the situation we are

approaching, as most of the trading capital of the island is now in the Southern Ocean, some of which will not be on its return within one year from the present date; and if the war continues, we fully believe the greater part, if not the whole, will fall an easy prey to the enemy.

As we are thus situated, and deprived by nature from obtaining a subsistence on the island, it seems we have no choice, but that of respectfully soliciting your attention and that of our government, to our alarming condition; requesting also liberty to ask, if in your wisdom any means can be devised to save our fleet of whale ships now in the Southern Ocean, and if any method can be adopted, where by we may prosecute the cod and whale fisheries without the risk of capture by the enemy. (170-71)

What I find particularly interesting about this request is that the citizens of Nantucket went directly to the President of the United States, not bothering to appeal to the state of Massachusetts or Congress first. They begin by mentioning one of the possible objections to their request themselves, the fact that the Constitution prohibits granting the special permission they request, and they rely on their pitiable economic state to garner sympathy for themselves. They build their importance in the eyes of the President by representing themselves as their own “state,” and they strongly emphasize the disastrous economic implications of the impending war. Nowhere do they articulate any opposition to the war itself or the motives of the United States in it. Nowhere do they enumerate their beliefs that as Quakers, they regard all wars as wrong and refuse to fight in one. Instead they echo Chase’s logic: if the United States government thinks the whaling industry is an important economic resource, the government will attempt to save it. This request did little to help the cause of the Islanders, and they were again forced to petition Congress in 1813. Frustrated by the unresponsive United States government, the following year the people of Nantucket sent an emissary to the British naval commander-in-chief to independently negotiate a treaty of neutrality with that country. This time, they received a positive response, and they proceeded to further negotiate the terms of that neutrality so that they could attempt to revive their foundering whaling industry from utter ruin. Of course, this was an express violation of the United States’ Constitution, which stipulates that no individual state—never mind an incredibly small part of a state—has the power to negotiate such treaties. Because their commitment to their work was so strong, the Nantucket whalers were convinced that they

had to do whatever they could to save their industry, even if it meant completely abandoning their allegiance to their nation.

As Macy's history and the above documents quoted therein show, the Nantucket whaling community was committed to preserving its livelihood and religious freedom no matter what the political circumstances in America and other European nations. In their attempts to remain neutral during both the American Revolution and the War of 1812, the citizens of Nantucket acted as though they had no allegiance to any nation but rather considered themselves a separate entity whose domain covered not only their tiny island but the entire globe. They imagined themselves and their community as a distinct body, capable of independent self-government; however, they recognized that their size and their refusal to engage in warfare made them vulnerable to the actions of more powerful political bodies. At times, they appealed to Great Britain, at times the Massachusetts legislature, and at times directly to Congress and the President of the United States. Macy insisted that the actions of the Quaker community of Nantucket did not necessarily have to be seen as treasonous, though. Rather, the Nantucketers were preserving their religious freedom. Their protests against the federal government, in the form of delinquent taxes, were one way in which they were trying to correct the problems with America—to envision a different America, which did not participate in wars. They insisted that however honorable the goals of the American Revolution and the War of 1812, there were other means by which to achieve the same ends.

Taken together, these narratives by Chase, Hart, and Macy home in on a little-recognized zone of contention over the competing claims of federalism and state or local self-determination. If as Crèvecoeur pointed out, America gave men the opportunity to achieve material success, did the federal government have an obligation to protect the interests of various industries? And what role would the military have in protecting and extending American commercial interests? Because American whalers were recurrently positioned as American heroes, they had unusual opportunities for enlisting nationalist sentiments—including the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny—on behalf of their industry's interests. These narratives, especially Macy's defensive reconstruction of Nantucketers' patriotism, register the pressure of nationalizing narratives of whaling even in the most unlikely corners of history.

7.0 EPILOGUE

“At the end of every hard-earned day, people find some reason to believe”:
The Image of the Manly Physical Laborer in the Twenty-First Century

The whaling industry may have fallen into dire straits by the end of the nineteenth-century and completely collapsed by the early twentieth, but ideological fantasies of masculine American labor did not. By way of concluding, I want to gesture toward the way in which these fantasies resonate in the present day, particularly in the realm of popular music. In this forum, these fantasies are still quite alive and well and continue to circulate. I have drawn the epigraph to the Epilogue from the last song on Bruce Springsteen’s album *Nebraska*, “Reason to Believe,” because these words demonstrate that working-class American men are still a viable source of artistic inspiration even though they might be living in a post-industrial society. The epigraph asks, How do these laborers find some reason to believe? And what do they believe? These the rest of the songs on the album explore these questions, imagining a wide variety of American laborers—alternating between admirable working-class men, such as one of the brothers from “Highway Patrolman,” and those who adopt a life of crime out of frustration with their dire circumstances, such as the other brother from “Highway Patrolman.” While the album explores the questions raised above, Springsteen resists coming to any concrete conclusions about what these admirable and not-so-admirable men believe or how they manage to continue to believe. The positioning of “Reason to Believe,” the song which poses the questions, as the last song on *Nebraska* suggests that what is more important is that they *do* find a reason to believe in something, for this belief enables them to continue living, to continue struggling. Perhaps this belief is in laboring pride; perhaps it is in something else, something bigger. Overall the entire album unflinchingly represents these manly American laborers and creates an artistic aesthetic out of the lives of these working-class men, an aesthetic based on the beauty, grace, and dignity of their human spirit.

Before moving on to discuss the various other representations of manly American laborers in contemporary American popular music, I want to mention a few important aspects of the representations of the whaling industry which appear well after its collapse. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the New England whaling industry was in a state of decline, and the last whaleship left New Bedford in the early twentieth-century. Whales had become so scarce that ships had to travel into the dangerous waters of the Arctic seas to hunt them, and many vessels were destroyed in the shifting ice floes—one particular disaster sunk twenty-two ships at one time. Even before the very end, the Civil War played a role in bringing whaling to a halt, for Confederate battle ships attacked and sunk many vulnerable whaleships. Resting idle and useless in New Bedford's harbors, many whaling vessels were taken South and sunk at the mouth of Southern harbors in attempts by the North to blockade them.⁷⁸ After the war, though, whaling declined because substitutes were found for whale oil. Petroleum deposits were discovered in several U.S. locations, including Western Pennsylvania, and this kind of oil was far easier to extract and refine than whale oil.

Warmly nationalist idealizations of whalers never really disappeared, however. As James M. Lindgren explains in his essay, "Let Us Idealize Old Types of Manhood': The New Bedford Whaling Museum, 1903-1941," the founders of this museum proclaimed that these sailors needed to be memorialized because "time and circumstance have swept away one of the great types of our American manhood, along with [a] handicraft in which courage, resourcefulness, agility, clear eye, and steady nerve, were the very common-places of the calling" (qtd. in Lindgren 165). These museum officials chose to depict the American whalers in the same way as Crèvecoeur, Cooper, and Owen Chase, playing on their "manly" qualities, their courage and practical intelligences. And they cast whaling as a "craft," with a certain amount of nostalgia for a non-existent "Golden Age" in which men learned these crafts and skillfully practiced them, not worked in industrial mills and factories. It wasn't just the museum's founders who continued to figure whalers as exemplars of the American spirit, though. Edouard Stackpole's history of the whaling industry, *The Sea-Hunters*, written in 1953, concludes with this statement:

⁷⁸ Frank McKibben's articles, "The Stone Fleet of 1861" and "The Whaling Disaster of 1871," both appearing in the *New England Magazine* in 1898, respectively describe the effects that the loss of all of these whaleships in the Civil War—particularly in the blockades—and the Arctic ice had on the New Bedford whaling industry.

Today, in a world which has become so closely knit in an air age, the limitations of geographical position are not so apparent as they were even a quarter-century ago. But the whaleman of the early nineteenth century gave a concept of internationalism which was far ahead of his time. As a mariner he was a citizen of a watery world; as a man of industry he was a worker who added greatly to the material wealth of his country; as an oceanographer he was a seaman who contributed much to the world's knowledge; as a whaler he was a sea-hunter whose exploits make such a bright page in American history.
(473)

I have quoted Stackpole at length, because embedded in this passage are traces of the antinomies I described in the Introduction and expanded upon in subsequent chapters. Here is the whaleman as world traveler and American. Here is the physical laborer, not the disgruntled employee. The fact that Stackpole ignores the disgruntled employee suggests that he too is enmeshed in the same fantasy as many of the other authors of the whaling narratives. Here, above all, is the ideological fantasy of manly American labor, still clinging to whaling up through the twentieth century. Furthermore, as I suggested in the first paragraph, it is still circulating today, especially in the realm of popular music.

While the world of contemporary popular music might not seem to have anything in common with late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American whaling narratives, I would argue that in this forum the ideology of manly American labor still circulates, resonating for many Americans. The chorus of Lynyrd Skynyrd's popular patriotic anthem, "Red, White, and Blue," spells out the early twenty-first-century ingredients/markers of the manly American laborer perhaps more neatly and succinctly than any other song:

My hair's turning white
My neck's always been red
My collar's still blue
We've always been here
Just trying to sing the truth to you.
Yes, you could say
We've always been
Red, white, and blue

In this configuration, the colors of the flag stand for particular aspects of the speaker's identity. The redneck reference in the second line of the chorus marks a particularly white identity, and the blue-collar reference in the third line of the chorus marks a specifically working-class identity. Redneck is a particular kind of white, class-based identity, for a white man's neck wouldn't turn red under the sun unless he was laboring outdoors. This identity is further reinforced by the blue-collar reference and is clearly invested with laboring pride. Importantly, this white, working-class laboring pride is figured as particularly American—these laborers are the ones who represent what America stands for.

Skynyrd's song is not the only one enmeshed in this ideology, for the country band Alabama's song "Forty Hour Week (For a Livin')" does as well. This piece lists a wide variety of working-class jobs, mostly male-identified jobs, in order to praise the kinds of people who perform this kind of labor:

You can see them every morning,
In the factories and the fields,
In the city streets and quiet country towns,
Workin' together, like spokes inside a wheel,
They keep this country turnin' around.

This song conflates the categories of urban, industrial labor with rural, agricultural labor in order to unite them in one working-class fantasy. The singer claims in the opening lines that these laborers are not often recognized or acknowledged as being the backbone of America, but they truly are, and their efforts, their labors, keep this country running smoothly, "like spokes inside a wheel." This image offers a pleasing aesthetic of the machine—spokes in a wheel going somewhere rather than cogs in a machine endlessly turning in place—in order to observe that these laborers provide the foundation for the American economy and for American life. Despite some investment in the aesthetic of the machine, which is similar to what appears in *Moby-Dick* in those scenes where the whalemens work together in perfect synchronicity, "Forty Hour Week" ultimately downplays the value of machines, for it asserts that this song is "For everyone who works behind the scenes,/With a spirit you can't replace with no machine." This is another version of the story of John Henry. In the 1980's, an era when manpower and manly American labor was threatened by increasing mechanization on the assembly lines in America's factories,

this song rather ironically employs a mechanistic image of people beautifully working together, only to suggest that machines can never replace the spirit of these laboring bodies.

In spite of their differences, these two songs represent one way of poetically and musically figuring the role of manly labor in America. While they demonstrate that the ideological fantasy is alive and well and has persisted up through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, they do not tell the whole story. Many, many other genres of American popular music and artists are heavily invested in versions of this fantasy. Various songs in the genres of punk, country, rap, rock, and blues riff on masculine physical labor, and many of these different songs and genres embody versions of the antinomies which I have used to analyze representations of the whalemens. Some argue the notion that the manly laborer is emblematically American, as Cooper did; some use that popular representation of the manly laborer to lobby for treating workers better, as J. Ross Browne did; some claim that America denies many of its citizens the means to become a manly laborer, as Frederick Douglass did; and some explore gritty or high-flown philosophies grounded in the experience of manly labor, as Melville did.

These musical genres are usually studied independently, but there is scholarship about punk, country, rock, blues, and hip hop that discusses the relationship each of these genres have to issues of labor and class. Roger Sabin's Introduction to *Punk Rock: So What?* observes that "Philosophically, it [punk] had no 'set agenda' like the hippie movement that preceded it, but nevertheless stood for identifiable attitudes, among them: an emphasis on negationism (rather than nihilism); a consciousness of class-based politics (with a stress on 'working-class' credibility); and a belief in spontaneity and 'doing it yourself'" (2-3). Aaron A. Fox's Preface to *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture* claims that "country music is an authentic working-class art of enormous value to its blue-collar constituency" (ix). Within studies of traditions of African American blues and hip hop music, labor is mentioned less frequently, but some writers suggest that this music is informed by the fact that many African American men have been unfairly blocked from working. In "Coolidge's Blues: African American Blues Songs on Prohibition, Migration, Unemployment, and Jim Crow," Guido Van Rijn discusses a few of the blues songs appearing throughout Coolidge's presidency that bemoaned unemployment. Lead Belly's blues songs "Pick a Bale of Cotton" and "Cotton Fields" both talk about laboring in the Southern cotton fields, and his "Take This Hammer" is an old African-American work song, which railroad men sung while hammering spikes into ties.

Tupac's hip hop song "Words of Wisdom" contains the lyrics, "This is for the masses the lower classes/The ones you left out, jobs were givin,' better livin'/But we were kept out," and his song, "Panther Power," concludes by saying, "So now I'm sitting here mad cause I'm unemployed/But the government's glad cause they enjoyed/When my people are down so they can screw us around/Time to change the government now panther power." Both of these lyrics angrily observe that America denies access to jobs, gainful employment, to an entire segment of its population. Taken together, Lead Belly's songs and Tupac's suggest that labor—or the frustration of being prevented from laboring—is indeed an important concern in both of these genres of music.

All of these genres of music are usually studied separately for they possess different aesthetics and different racialized perspectives. It is important to note these differences, especially since punk has European origins, and blues and hip hop evolved out of some of the particularly oppressive aspects of the African American experience. Even given these differences, the figure of the manly American laborer circulates through all these genres. Singers of these songs all speak from different positions and see different possibilities in being both a proud laborer and a disgruntled employee. These possibilities reflect and inflect the specific aesthetics of each genre of music. Punk embodies anger about the subordination of the worker in the system. Punk's high volume and violent, crashing rhythms—represent the anarchic feelings of the disgruntled employee who wants to overthrow the institutions which trap him in a life of near-slavery and drudgery. As I have already observed, country music and some kinds of country-inflected rock music (Southern classic rock) tend to valorize laboring pride—although Bruce Springsteen and Steve Earle both tip this pride into protest in some songs. Lead Belly's blues voice discontent but also gesture toward the hope of overcoming the "blues" that are inherent in subordination. Some rap music, particularly that of Tupac, has an angry aesthetic as well, but it is not so much based on being a disgruntled employee, but on being a disgruntled non-employee. The potential emasculation experienced in not being able to support a family is partially compensated for in strains of blues and hip hop which emphasize the sexual prowess of black men and subordinate women as sexual objects. The emergence of this stereotype about black male heterosexuality in contemporary hip hop is an attempt to appropriate, control, and promote the stereotype, but it is also an important way to reclaim masculinity from insubordination, particularly in the identity of the masculine laborer, or unemployed laborer.

Much of popular music, with the exception of country songs, does attempt to put this ideology of manly American labor to insubordinate uses—to use it, as J. Ross Browne did, to serve the interests of working class men and women, or men and women who are denied access to work. The fact that the ideology continues to perpetuate itself, despite the fact that the cultural and historical conditions of capitalism have changed, is, indeed, a testimony to what Fredric Jameson suggests about the powerful emotions attached to it, its Utopian components. What's more, the fact that this manly American laboring identity can be appropriated for nationalism helps to explain why labor movements never really spread beyond the national level, the problem with which, as Gopal Balakrishnan observes, much of Marxist scholarship has struggled. In other words, the protest some of these songs put forth has not really inspired people to think differently about the capitalist organization of labor, proving that it is difficult to ignite these isolated protests into a powerful trans-national labor movement. I want to emphasize, though, that the emotive aspects of this ideology do more than just make working-class men and women—as well as many other Americans—feel better about the important roles American laborers play as the backbones of their country. The feelings which this ideology generates—pride, anger, frustration, exuberance, etc.—help to shape the different aesthetics in the popular forms of music I have described above.

I want to conclude with Bruce Springsteen's song, "Badlands," from the album *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, because this one song offers several different and complex examples of the aesthetic accompanying this ideology. In order to understand the utopian aspects of this ideology, one must understand the range of emotions it evokes, and this one song spans that range. In the retrospective liner notes to his *Greatest Hits* album, Springsteen had this to say about both *Darkness on the Edge of Town* and "Badlands": "This was the record...where I figured out what I wanted to write about, the people that mattered to me, and who I wanted to be. I saw friends and family struggling to lead decent, productive lives and I felt an everyday kind of heroism in this. I still do." Springsteen is understating what the album does and what its aesthetic is, for the way he casts the project of the album makes it seem rather simple. The album is actually a quite complex exploration of manly American laboring identity. "Badlands" is the most intriguing song on this album, for in it are all the emotions inherent in manly laboring identity: anger, despair, defiance, exuberance, and hopefulness.

The song begins with anger, although there are hints of hopelessness and defiance as well:

Got a head-on collision
Smashin' in my guts man
I'm caught in a cross-fire
That I don't understand
I don't give a damn.

In these lines, there is an internal struggle, a violent and visceral one, represented by the forces colliding in “my guts.” The violent images continue with the “cross-fire,” which threatens to destroy the speaker, who is confused by the different forces that control his laboring life. And this passage ends with either carelessness or defiance, depending on how one interprets the statement, “I don't give a damn.”

As the song progresses, the emotions change and shift over to fear. At this point, the speaker sings about his dreams for his life and his apprehensions that they might not come to fruition:

Talk about a dream
Try to make it real
You wake up in the night
With a fear so real.

It is the fear that is immediate, the sense that this dream may never happen. Perhaps the same sense of fear that the Nantucket whalers felt when their means of making a living was threatened by forces beyond their control. As the song progresses, the tone shifts to one of hopelessness, which is closely associated with this fear:

Poor man want to be rich
Rich man want to be king
And a king ain't satisfied
Till he rules everything.

Here, the speaker comes to an important realization about how the world of American capitalism works. “Poor men want to be rich,” want to achieve material success, but the rich want still more, they want to “rule everything.” In American capitalism, there is never enough money to be had, and rich keep striving to be richer and more powerful no matter how much they have

already earned. For the laboring man caught in this system there is little to do, but struggle, both with life and with the sense of hopelessness that accompanies it.

Further on in the song, the speaker embraces a sense of hopefulness, which somewhat compensates for the hopelessness he experiences above. Here is his “reason to believe”:

I believe in the love that you gave me
I believe in the hope that can save me
I believe in the faith
And I pray that some day it may raise me
Above these badlands.

In earlier lines the speaker addressed a woman, whom he calls “honey” and “baby.” Since he is speaking to a woman, the love that he is discussing in these lines could be the love that these two individuals share with one another. In other words, everything else in life might be a struggle, but the love of a woman is some compensation. There is an added dimension to this sustaining love, though—it is a woman’s love, but it is also God’s love, the grace which God guarantees to everyone, no matter who they are or what they have done. Soon after this moment in which the speaker experiences more positive emotions, the song concludes with defiance, anger, and frustration: “I want to spit in the face of these badlands.” In this line the speaker expresses his desire to act out, “to spit” on the “badlands” to denounce them and overcome them. All of the emotions which this song contains cannot be extricated from one another, for they are all part and parcel of being at once a proud laborer and a disgruntled employee. They are all bound together in the identity of manly American laborer. This range of emotion—the despair, anger, hopefulness, frustration—constitutes an important feature of the aesthetic project of Springsteen’s music. All of this emotion funnels into an evocation of simple heroism, a dignity of the human spirit, an ongoing search for grace and personal fulfillment against all odds.

As I mentioned above, Springsteen’s songs about manly laboring American men appear in a post-industrial age, a time when the forces of capitalism have shifted and its structures have changed. Like the whaling narratives, much of his music evokes a kind of nostalgia for a “Golden Age” of the working man, a time when he could make a living via his labor; however, this time no longer exists. In fact, it might never really have existed. What makes the whaling narratives such a noteworthy example of this kind of nostalgia is that the whaling industry was threatened by the scarcity of whales right from the start. Even as whalers began prosecuting

the business in the seventeenth century, they found themselves traveling further and further afield in search of increasingly scarce whales. Thus, most whaling narratives, no matter when they were written, look back fondly to a distant “Golden Age” when whales were plentiful and forward to a fast-approaching time when whaling will no longer be economically viable. This powerful nostalgia, coupled with the emotions it generates, helps to further explain how the Utopian components of this ideological fantasy of manly American labor keep nationalist visions of American whalemens, farmers, and factory workers living on in the imaginations of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Americans.

APPENDIX A

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WHALING NARRATIVES

Whaling narratives are widely available in a number of different archives and libraries; however, there is no one complete repository of texts. Brown University's John Hay Library contains the Morse Collection of whaling narratives, and other collections include the ones at the Providence Public Library in Providence, Rhode Island, the Nantucket Historical Society, the New Bedford Whaling Museum, and the Kendall Whaling Museum in Sharon, Massachusetts. Many whaling narratives were reprinted and republished in the twentieth-century, and although many of them are again out of print, they are available at used bookstores and a wide variety of public and university libraries across the United States. For example, the novels of Harry Halyard can be found on microfilm at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and, although this library does not have a special whaling collection, it also has a number of other whaling texts. Cornell University's online archive of nineteenth-century periodicals—part of their ongoing Making of America project—is very useful for locating whaling narratives that appeared in the magazines of this period. The following bibliography of whaling narratives is not an exhaustive compendium of all of the whaling narratives; rather, it represents a sampling of the kinds of archival materials available, grouped according to genre. Other useful bibliographies of whaling narratives include the ones in Lisa Norling's *Captain Ahab had a Wife* and Nathaniel Philbrick's *In the Heart of the Sea*. Norling's is quite helpful in locating whaling narratives by and about whaling wives, while Philbrick's is good for finding out more information about whaling narratives in general.

A.1 NOVELS

The category of novels includes nineteenth-century American novels which focus almost entirely on the whaling industry as well as some which make references to the whaling industry. For example Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and Melville's *Typee* begin as whaling narratives, but do not necessarily concern themselves with the particulars of whaling as Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Hart's *Miriam Coffin* do.

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Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. Ed. Richard Kopley. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1999.

Starbuck, Roger. *The Golden Harpoon, or Lost Among the Floes: A Story of the Whaling Grounds*. New York: Beadle and Company, 1865.

A.2 NON-FICTION

Included in the non-fiction category are late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts by industry outsiders such as Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* as well as more autobiographical accounts of the whaling industry by insiders such as J. Ross Brown. These texts take the form of memoirs, essays, and narratives of particular voyages.

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Comstock, George. "Narrative of the Mutiny capture and transactions on board of the Ship Globe of Nantucket after Sailing from Edgartown." *Mutiny of the Globe: The Fatal Voyage of Samuel Comstock*. Ed. Thomas Farel Heffernan. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002. 219-236.

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Islands. New York: Bell Publishing Company, 1969.

Scoresby, William. *Journal of a Voyage to the Northern Whale-Fishery; Including Researches and Discoveries on the Eastern Coast of West Greenland, Made in the Summer of 1822, in the Ship Baffin of Liverpool*. Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co., 1823.

A.3 PERIODICAL ARTICLES

The category of nineteenth-century periodical articles includes a sampling—by no means exhaustive—of texts about whales and whaling appearing in these popular magazines. They are all available on Cornell University’s Making of America website.

“Aboard a Sperm Whaler.” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*. 8(1854): 670-74.

Aldrich, Herbert L. “New Bedford.” *The New England Magazine and Bay State Monthly*. 4(1886): 423-45.

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Browne, J. Ross. “Whale-Fisheries.” *The United States Democratic Review*. 19(1846): 453-65.

“A Chapter on Whaling.” *New England Magazine*. 8(1835): 445-49.

Dall, William H. “How Long a Whale May Carry a Harpoon.” *National Geographic*. 10(1899): 136-37.

“Extract from the ‘Journal of a Whale Cruiser.’” *The American Whig Review*. 2(1845): 230-35.

“A Homeric Fight at Sea.” *Scientific American*. 75(1896): 27.

“How We Went Whaling.” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*. 1(1850): 844-46.

“Huntsmen of the Sea.” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*. 49(1874): 650-62.

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A.4 JOURNALS

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A.5 MISCELLANEOUS TEXTS WITH WHALING REFERENCES

The miscellaneous category includes both brief whaling narratives—in the case of the children’s books about whales and whaling—and other nineteenth-century texts which refer to whaling—in the case of Frederick Douglass’ speech or Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast*.

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