

Herman Melville

(1819–1891)

Herman Melville was born in NEW YORK CITY on August 1, 1819, the third of eight children born to ALLAN MELVILL and his wife, MARIA GANSEVOORT MELVILLE. (Maria added a final *e* to the family name after her husband's death, perhaps to distance herself from his financial problems.) Both of Herman's grandfathers had participated in the Revolutionary War; Colonel Peter Gansevoort, who died before Herman was born, won renown for his heroic stand against the British at Fort Stanwix, and Major Thomas Melvill similarly remained recognized with respect by citizens of Boston until his death. At the time of Herman's birth, Allan Melvill was a fairly prosperous importer of luxury items such as silks and colognes, and the Melvills lived well in a series of houses around New York City, each with comfortable furnishings, refined food and drink, and household servants to keep things in order. Such lineage and lifestyle notwithstanding, family letters suggest that Herman was a rather unremarkable child, at least in his father's eyes. In 1826, when Herman was seven years old, Allan wrote of him to his brother-in-law Peter Gansevoort: "He is very backward in speech & somewhat slow in comprehension, but you will find him as far as he understands men & things both solid and profound, & of a docile & amiable disposition." Instead, the family's highest praise often went to Herman's older brother, Gansevoort. In 1830, after years of increasing debts, Allan's business collapsed, and the family moved—or, some might say, fled—to ALBANY, NEW YORK, to seek sanctuary among Maria's relatives. Allan made another attempt at business in Albany—largely on the basis of loans and credit. But, never regaining his previous success, Allan died of pneumonia in 1832, entirely bankrupt and raving deliriously from fever. Herman, whom his parents considered "innocent" and "shy," was 13 years old and would quickly assume the responsibilities of a "man" in the family.

After six years of formal schooling in New York City and Albany, Herman had been withdrawn from Albany Academy the year before; his parents

were uncertain about the wisdom of investing in Herman's education, especially given his less-than-desirable performance in subjects such as penmanship and spelling. With his father's death and the family's debt, Herman's return to school became even less a priority; he was now obliged to seek employment. After working as an errand boy at a local bank, a clerk at his brother Gansevoort's store, and a hand on his uncle's farm, however, he enrolled in the Albany Classical School for a few months in 1835 in order to prepare for a business career. Once there, the young man whom his father had described as inarticulate and "slow" discovered that he had an interest in writing. Herman and his brother Gansevoort were also members of the Albany Young Men's Association for Mutual Improvements and the Philologos Debating Society; Melville's first published writing, in fact, was an 1837 exchange of heated, satirical letters in the local newspaper, the *Albany Microscope*, regarding the leadership and future of the Philologos Society.

Returning to the Albany Academy for six months to acquire the requisite knowledge of Latin, Melville then obtained a teaching position in the Sikes district of PITTSFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS, in the fall of 1837. He found teaching in a country school unappealing at best. His students were, by his own accounts, dull and backward; he wrote to his uncle Peter Gansevoort that "[S]ome of them who have attained the age of eighteen can not do a sum in addition, while other have travelled [sic] through the Arithmetic: but with so great swiftness that they can not recognize objects in the road on a second journey: & are about as ignorant of them as though they had never passed that way before." An early biographer quoted in Jay Leyda's *Melville Logs* also hints at "a rebellion in which some of the bigger boys undertook to 'lick' him." A few months of teaching left Melville with the impression that "when reduced to practise [sic], the high and sanguine hopes excited by [public education's] imposing appearance in *theory*—are a little dashed." Leaving the teaching position after one term, in 1838 he enrolled in the Lansingburgh Academy, located only a few blocks from the Melvilles' new home in LANSINGBURGH, NEW YORK. That November he was certified as a surveyor and



This portrait shows Herman Melville as the successful young author of *Typee* (Library of Congress)

engineer but failed to find the employment he had hoped for as part of the Erie Canal project.

Gansevoort had declared bankruptcy in 1837, which, after the unsatisfying attempt at teaching, probably prompted Melville's first trip to sea. Several of Melville's uncles were sailors, and he had grown up hearing about their exploits. Melville sailed out as a cabin boy on the merchant ship *St. Lawrence* on June 4, 1839. He spent four months aboard, including a visit to Liverpool that would provide inspiration and material for scenes of England's urban poverty in *REDBURN*. None of Melville's letters from this voyage have survived, so many biographers have used the fictionalized voyage in *Redburn* to reconstruct Melville's perceptions of the trip.

Returning to Lansingburgh after this voyage, Melville found his mother and sisters in serious financial trouble. Desperate for extra income, Melville once again took a teaching job, only to lose it a few months later when the Greenbush & Schodack Academy declared bankruptcy. After a stint of sub-

stitute teaching, Melville decided to look elsewhere for work and accompanied his old friend ELI FLY on a trip west, visiting his uncle Thomas Melvill in Galena, Illinois, and hoping to find better job prospects there. Finding none, however, nor any employment upon his return to New York, Melville signed on with the New Bedford whaler *ACUSHNET*, and on January 3, 1841, he shipped for the Pacific.

In the 1840s, whaling provided profitable business for ship captains and owners but a rough life for crewmen. The American fleet dominated the global whaling industry, though aggressive overhunting and shifting market conditions would bring the whaling era to a close some 20 years later. Melville had signed up for the customary four-year tour aboard the whaler. Once in the fleet, Melville quickly grew restless under the conditions imposed by Captain Valentine Pease. Judging by Tommo's condemnation of life aboard the *Dolly* in *TYPEE*, we can speculate that aboard Pease's *Acushnet* rations were scanty, work and discipline were harsh, and, perhaps most unforgivably, time at sea was continually extended in search of greater hauls. Indeed, similar conditions might be found to greater or lesser degrees on most whalers of the time. The *Acushnet* made one of its few stops in the port of Nuku Hiva (or Nukuheva, in its English spelling) in the *MARQUESAS* in June 1842. Over a span of 300 years, Nukuheva had been "claimed" by Spanish, American, and British captains, but at the time of the *Acushnet's* arrival, it was held by the French. Melville, accompanied by his shipmate RICHARD TOBIAS GREENE, jumped ship on July 9. Though their desertion was illegal (since they had signed a contract for four years), it was not unusual; by the time the *Acushnet* completed its voyage, fully half the crew had deserted, and several more had died. Melville and Greene fled into the island's interior, where they were taken in by the Taipi, whom Melville writes about as the *TYPEE*. Known as fierce warriors who were actively hostile to neighboring groups, the Taipi were also reputed to practice cannibalism on their conquered enemies. Scholars debate about Melville's role among the Taipi, whether he was a captive or a guest; with *Typee* as the main source of information about Melville's stay, it seems likely that he was,

in fact, a bit of both. Similarly, whatever might be gathered about his day-to-day existence among the Taipi must be extrapolated from the novel. Greene escaped almost immediately and would later claim that he had paid one of his rescuers to return for Melville, but to no avail. Melville lived among the Taipi for four weeks before finding his way back to Nukuheva, where on August 9 he went aboard an Australian whaler named the *LUCY-ANN*.

Life aboard the *Lucy-Ann* proved to be even harder than it had been on the *Acushnet*. Already short on officers, the captain of the ship, Ventom, had fallen ill; he was taken ashore at Papeete to be treated. While the Australian ship was anchored at Papeete, Tahiti's largest port, the crew revolted. In the captain's absence, several members of the crew refused to accept the command of the mate, arguing that their contract had been officially broken by the change in command. In addition, they claimed before the British consul that they had been mistreated aboard the ship, including receiving insufficient rations and being forced to work despite severe illness. Melville was one of the sailors who protested that he was too ill to work and asked to be treated by the doctor for limb pain (echoing Tommo's recurring leg complaint in *Typee*), but the doctor believed him to be faking the ailment. A total of 14 members of the crew summarily refused to stand watch, tend the lines and sails, or accept any orders whatsoever in Ventom's absence. The next day, most of the men, including Melville, were arrested as mutineers and handed over to the British authorities, who locked them up in a makeshift outdoor jail. Once jailed, the crew refused to return to duty at all, whether Ventom was their captain or not, and the *Lucy-Ann* left port without them. Conditions at the "calabooza," as the jail was called, were far better than they had been aboard ship. Though the inmates did sleep with their feet locked in wooden stocks, they were well fed and were allowed a great deal of leisure and liberty during the day—including being allowed small day-trips across the island. This laxity resulted in the escape of four prisoners (perhaps, if *OMOO* is to be believed, even with the assistance of their jailors); Melville and his friend JOHN TROY were among these escapees. After touring the SOCIETY ISLANDS

briefly, they signed up on yet another whaler, the *CHARLES & HENRY*.

Melville left that ship on May 2, 1843, in Lahaina, on the island of Maui, HAWAII. He traveled to Honolulu, where he went to work at several odd jobs—including as a clerk in a shop and a pinsetter in a bowling alley—and angered the American colonial authorities by publicly supporting a British takeover of the islands. He left Hawaii on August 17 by joining the crew of the USS *UNITED STATES* as an ordinary seaman, retaining the option to quit the navy when the ship returned to port. Aboard the *United States*, Melville observed flogging routinely used as punishment per existing naval codes of discipline, and he also saw several burials at sea. When the *United States* docked in Boston 14 months later, Melville was discharged, full of dark observations of naval life that would later make their way into *WHITE-JACKET*.

In this very brief account of Melville's sojourn in the Pacific, the raw materials of his future literary works are abundantly evident. *Typee*, *Omoo*, *Redburn*, and *White-Jacket* each would draw more or less directly on episodes of his life at sea and ashore. But besides providing content for his future writing, Melville's Pacific travels also shaped the intellectual and philosophical perspectives that would mark his later work. The issues of order, discipline, and mutiny, for example, which frequently play out in his sea tales, have obvious antecedents in his experiences aboard the *Acushnet*, the *Lucy-Ann*, and the *United States*. The hard physical labor and oppressive conditions he experienced made him more acutely attuned to the hardships experienced by the poor, the working classes, and those without power. His close association with people of all races, both aboard the ships on which he served and on land, opened Melville to notions of cultural tolerance and universal humanity. Melville's particular antipathy for the civilized world and its treatment of those it deemed "savages" clearly stems from what he saw in Polynesia. Observing first-hand the machinations of imperialism, Melville was disgusted by the brutality and inhumanity of white Westerners, as well as by the complicity of Christianity in the imperial system; he was equally moved by the kindness of many Polynesian people

6 Critical Companion to Herman Melville

he encountered, by their generosity, and by their lifestyle, which, to him, seemed far more sensible and humane than life among the “civilized.”

Upon his return to Lansingburgh, Melville’s tales of the South Pacific made him a minor celebrity. Friends and family encouraged him to write about his experiences, and he did, transforming his time among the “cannibals” of the Marquesas into *Typee*, published to critical acclaim and financial reward in 1846. The manuscript was initially rejected by Harper & Brothers before being picked up in London by John Murray for his “Colonial and Home Library” series. The subsequent American publishers proceeded cautiously, cutting Melville’s most vigorous attacks on missionaries and imperialists and his provocatively sexual descriptions of Polynesians. Publishers and readers especially voiced concern over the veracity of the events in *Typee*; they wanted a nonfiction travel narrative, not a novel. Toby Greene’s July 1846 affirmation of the truth of *Typee* did help, but an air of suspicion continued to linger over Melville’s writing. And this suspicion was, to some extent, justified: Melville had augmented the content of his own experience with material culled from stories he had heard at sea and read in other narratives of Pacific travel. Though critics would continue to demand documentation to corroborate the truth of the narrative, Melville would continue to be known as “the man who lived among cannibals.” The publication of *Omoo*, a work simultaneously lighter in tone and more openly critical of imperialism in Polynesia, followed a year later, promoted as a sequel to the popular *Typee*. Herman Melville had finally found his calling.

Around this time, Melville began courting Elizabeth Shaw, a family friend who lived in Boston (see ELIZABETH KNAPP SHAW MELVILLE), daughter of the powerful Lemuel Shaw, then chief justice of the Massachusetts supreme court. Herman divided his time between visiting Elizabeth in Boston, his mother in Lansingburgh, and his brothers in New York City. Buoyed by his recent literary success, Herman married “Lizzie” on August 4, 1847. The merging of Melville’s personal life with his novels in the public eye was evident when, a few days later, the *New York Daily Tribune* noted, “Mr. Herman

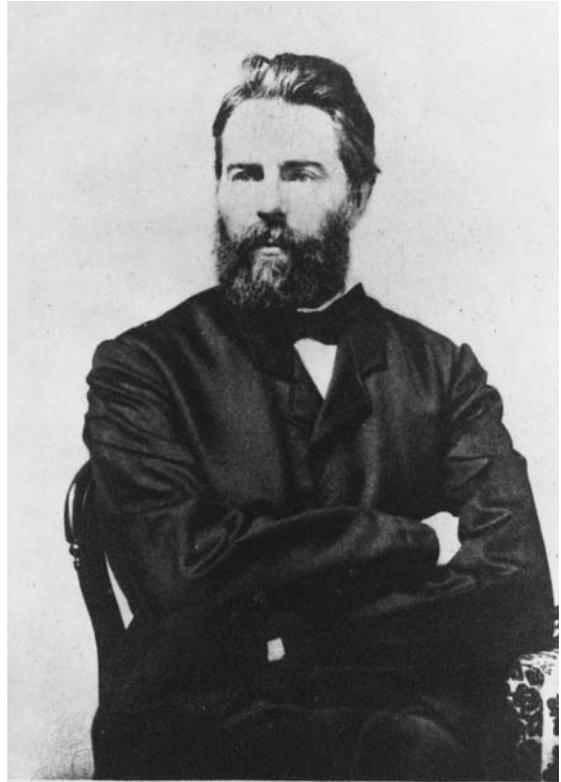
Typee Omoo Melville has recently been united in lawful wedlock to a young lady of Boston. The fair forsaken FAYAWAY will doubtless console herself by suing [sic] him for breach of promise.” The new Mr. and Mrs. Melville set up housekeeping with his family, first in Lansingburgh and then in New York City. Letters suggest a happy, flirtatious union, at least early in the marriage. Herman and Lizzie would eventually have four children together: Malcolm in 1849, Stanwix in 1851, Elizabeth in 1853, and Frances in 1855. Although daughter Elizabeth, called Bessie, suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, both she and Frances would ultimately outlive their parents; her brothers, however, would not. In the beginning of the marriage, Melville wrote a number of reviews and short essays for both Evert Duyckinck’s *Literary World* and Cornelius Mathews’s *Yankee Doodle*, but these clearly did not generate sufficient income for support of a family. He made an unsuccessful attempt to gain a government position in Washington, D.C., but instead relied on the support of his father-in-law to supplement his income. The economic pressures of his new role as husband and provider—as well as the social and ideological pressure of staying in his conservative father-in-law’s good graces—would continue to weigh on Melville for the remainder of his writing career.



Melville and his wife had four children—Stanwix, Frances, Malcolm, and Elizabeth. Only Frances went on to marry and have children. (*Berkshire Athenaeum*)

When the veracity of his first two novels was widely questioned, Melville responded with *MARDI*, a highly ambitious allegorical romance in which he turned his Polynesian observations into material for philosophical speculation. While *Mardi*, which appeared in 1849, proved to be a commercial and critical failure, the more conventional *Redburn*, published the same year, was received more warmly. The popularity of the latter earned Melville an advance on his next book, *WHITE-JACKET*, large enough to permit him to travel to Europe, where he presented his latest novel to his English publishers. In 1850, *White-Jacket* was published. Though these two novels met with commercial success, they did not satisfy Melville's own standards. He would later refer to *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* as "two jobs—which I did for money—being forced to it, as other men are to sawing wood. ... [M]y only desire for their 'success' (as it is called) springs from my pocket, & not from my heart."

While vacationing in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1850, Melville met Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the two struck up an immediate and intense, though short-lived, friendship. Within days of their first meeting, Hawthorne, who had reviewed *Typee* in 1846, obtained and read all of Melville's published works. Melville, meanwhile, composed his essay "HAWTHORNE AND HIS MOSSES," which not only expresses his admiration for Hawthorne but also hints at his enhanced vision of his own work in progress, *MOBY-DICK*. Melville had already promised the completed manuscript to the publishers, but he delayed delivery of the manuscript as his friendship with Hawthorne and his own newly broadened scope of reading both exerted increasingly formative influences. The two writers spent a great deal of time together discussing all manner of intellectual and philosophical matters; perhaps a certain existential kinship allowed these two enigmatic men to understand each other as few others could. Writing of Melville, Hawthorne's wife Sophia remarked that he was "full of gesture & force, & loses himself in his subject ... [until] his animation gives place to a singularly quiet expression out of those eyes. ... It is a strange, lazy glance, but with a power in it quite unique." Even before meeting Hawthorne, Melville had been carefully



Herman Melville sat for this portrait around the time he published *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*. (Library of Congress)

watching for an opportunity to buy a house in the area, drawn there by fond childhood memories. In September 1850, Melville borrowed money from his father-in-law and bought a farm in Pittsfield, a mere six miles from Hawthorne. Melville named his estate Arrowhead. *Moby-Dick*, dedicated to Hawthorne, was published in England in October 1851, with an American edition following a month later. The novel's ambiguity and expansiveness (and, to some sensibilities, its blasphemy) kept it from achieving the high critical—or financial—success for which Melville had hoped.

His next novel, *PIERRE; or, The Ambiguities* (1852), was even less successful. The novel clearly allowed Melville to vent his anger at the publishers and readers who rejected him; some critics also suggest that frustrations with his marriage—or with his own sexuality—might account for some of the

novel's bitterness. Contemporary readers wondered whether Melville had simply gone mad; one reviewer noted that the book "might be supposed to emanate from a lunatic hospital," and the review in the *New York Day Book* even bore the title "HERMAN MELVILLE CRAZY." His family, too, seems to have worried over his mental health under the dual strain of producing his writing and watching it fail. An 1853 fire at the Harper & Brothers Manhattan warehouse, where most existing copies of Melville's books were stored, only added to his distress.

After *Pierre's* failure in the marketplace, Melville tried unsuccessfully to obtain a consular appointment. Over the next few years, Melville became a frequent contributor of short fiction and sketches to *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* and *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, publishing 14 pieces in those two periodicals between 1853 and 1856. Five of these stories, along with the newly written title piece, were later collected in *THE PIAZZA TALES* (1856). He also published *ISRAEL POTTER* in serial form in *Putnam's* before its release as a novel in 1855. Melville's letters suggest that he completed and unsuccessfully attempted to publish two other novels during these years, one called *The Isle of the Cross* and the other a story about tortoise hunting; both manuscripts have been lost. Money problems continued to plague Melville, as he and his connections continually sought some government post throughout these years.

Melville's physical and mental health continued to concern his family. Physically, he suffered severe back problems and recurrent eyestrain; family letters also hint carefully at "ugly attacks" of a more psychological nature. In 1856, his father-in-law financed a seven-month trip (October 1856–May 1857) during which Melville visited Europe and the Holy Land. On the trip out, Melville stopped in Liverpool and spent three days with Hawthorne, who was serving there on a diplomatic appointment. Hawthorne noted in his journal that Melville appeared "much as he used to (a little paler, and perhaps a little sadder)." Overall, his disheartening and enlightening trip through the sites of the ancient world would inspire much of Melville's poetry, especially *CLAREL*, which was not completed

or published until 20 years later. Melville returned home just as *THE CONFIDENCE MAN* was released; in a by-now established pattern, that novel met with critical and popular rejection. It was the last novel Melville published in his lifetime. Melville tried to use his travel experiences as material for earning money on the lecture circuit, speaking on "Statues in Rome," "The South Seas," and "Traveling," but gave up after three frustrating years.

During Melville's lifetime, the eight significant novels he had produced between 1846 and 1857 sold only 35,000 copies altogether and earned him a mere \$10,400. This was hardly enough money to support a family. Melville again sought solace in travel, in 1860 sailing with his brother Thomas to the Pacific but cutting the trip short and returning alone from the port at San Francisco. Once again he tried to obtain a consular appointment, but failed. The 1860s marked perhaps the darkest decade of Melville's life. He continued to meet rejection in his attempts to earn a government position, and his first volume of poetry was rejected for publication in 1860. Melville sold the Arrowhead estate to his brother Allan and bought Allan's house in New York City. During the Civil War, he and brother Allan visited their cousin, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Gansevoort, on the Virginia battlefields in 1864, leading to the poems that would be published as *BATTLE-PIECES AND ASPECTS OF THE WAR* (1866). Melville finally won a position as a customs inspector in New York in 1866—which marked the end of his attempts to sustain a living through writing (see *CUSTOM HOUSE*). He would work there for 19 years. The decade was also marked by the deaths of persons significant to Melville, among them Lemuel Shaw in 1861; George Duyckinck and Sarah Morewood in 1863; Hawthorne in 1864; and Melville's oldest son, Malcolm, who died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in 1867. Malcolm's probable suicide was especially traumatic for Melville because the two had argued the night before. Some debate exists about whether the act was intentional or accidental, though most agree it was suicide. In the months prior to Malcolm's death, Elizabeth had consulted her minister about the possibility of legally separating from Melville, citing his increasing mental instability. The direct reasons for

this remain unknown, but Melville's granddaughter would later report in an interview the family story of Melville's "bursts of nervous anger and attacks of morose conscience"; similarly, a grand-niece told interviewers that the family had been frightened by Melville's outbursts of violence directed at his sons as well as his wife. Melville may have also developed alcohol-related emotional problems over time. Ultimately, however, Elizabeth stayed with Melville until his death.

Throughout his tenure as a customs agent, Melville continued to use his evenings and weekends to write; after his 1889 retirement, he resumed writing as his primary occupation. Much of Melville's late work was poetry. Putnam published the Holy Land epic *Clarel* in 1876; Melville's uncle Peter Gansevoort covered the actual printing costs. Melville had hoped to publish it anonymously, but although he did finally allow his name to be printed



When this portrait of Melville was done in 1868, he had just begun work in the Custom House, where he would spend almost 20 years laboring without a pay raise. (*Berkshire Athenaeum*)

on the title page, he refused to allow references to any of his other works. Melville privately published two other volumes of poetry, *JOHN MARR AND OTHER SAILORS* (1888) and *TIMOLEON* (1891), in small editions of only 25 copies that were circulated among close friends; another volume, *WEEDS AND WILDINGS CHIEFLY*, remained unpublished at his death. Melville died of heart failure at home in his bed on September 28, 1891, having been largely forgotten by the literary world in the 30 years since his last novel was published—the *New York Times* even misspelled his name in its obituary. He is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery, in the Bronx, New York.

Melville left behind another important unpublished work, *BILLY BUDD, SAILOR*, a novella he had been working on since 1888 and had more or less finished sometime in April 1891. Lizzie put the incompletely edited manuscript in a tin breadbox for safekeeping, where it stayed until 1924, when Melville's granddaughters, Eleanor Metcalf and Frances Osborne, saw to its publication. The intellectual and literary climate of the 1920s was right for the appearance of this ambiguous and richly allusive tale of good and evil to help spark a revival of interest in Melville, eventually elevating him to the highest rung of the American literary pantheon.

Melville's biographers have despaired that virtually all of the letters he wrote to those closest to him—to his parents, his wife, his children—were destroyed after his death, as were many of his manuscripts and writing notes. Only one rather unremarkable letter to his wife, for example, has survived. Because of this, many parts of his life remain matters of speculation. Thus, he is a man known best by his books, defined by what they reflect of both his real life and his imagination.

MELVILLE'S WORK AND REPUTATION

Whatever fluctuations in reputation Melville endured during his lifetime, the 20th century saw him firmly ensconced in the American literary canon. Readers and scholars—despite their broad range of particular interpretations—continue to see *Moby-Dick* as a quintessentially and complexly American novel. Indeed, even as the canon is

10 Critical Companion to Herman Melville

actively reassessed, *Moby-Dick* remains a pillar of most American literature curricula at high school, college, and graduate levels. And outside of academia, in the century since his death, Melville's works have been celebrated, parodied, and reincarnated through poetry, fiction, film, theater, music, cartoons, and comic books. Ahab, the white whale, and Bartleby (among his other creations) survive as iconic fixtures not just in popular culture but in everyday discourse. But what allows the work that met such frustrations and failures in Melville's own lifetime to survive, and even thrive, today?

To be fair, 19th-century readers saw those qualities now cataloged as Melville's strengths, though whether those qualities suited their tastes was another matter. The intellectual centers of his best novels from *Typee* to *The Confidence Man* emanate from outside the mainstream. In a way, Melville's experiences in the Pacific seemed to render him unfit for life anywhere else, but neither could he stay in Polynesia, creating a sense of displacement and longing that is perhaps the unifying characteristic of his body of work. In the 19th century readers prized Melville's representations of the exotic, and it is tempting to speculate about how differently his career might have fared had he fed the demand for titillating travel narratives. But from *Typee* onward, Melville's outsider perspectives on his own culture grew more pronounced in his works and less welcome by his readers. Though marketplace tastes certainly influenced his career, he ultimately—as Bartleby might say—preferred not to cater to them.

As a novelist, Melville felt his closest artistic kinship to Nathaniel Hawthorne, who also sought to explore the darker registers of human existence. Yet the sizeable disparity between their degrees of contemporary success (both financial and critical) suggests real differences between the two. Why was Hawthorne favored, while Melville “failed”? After all, it took *Moby-Dick* three years to achieve the sales that *Scarlet Letter* had earned in just 10 days. Melville himself hints at the difference between them in his essay “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” suggesting that perhaps Hawthorne investigated the nature of evil and sin for artistic effect without experiencing them personally and deeply. They

were Hawthorne's matter, Henry James would later agree, but not the man. Melville, by contrast, saw himself as someone who viscerally lived his ambiguities, agonizing over the existential and metaphysical questions that his writings explore. Perhaps, then, there was too much Melville in Melville's novels for his contemporary readers; his searching, his skepticism, and his epiphanies often sting with their immediacy or wallow in their bitterest ironies. Yet there is also a euphoric sense of artistic possibility unbound from convention—a strength in *Moby-Dick*, but a weakness in *Mardi*. In the novels, Melville's moods and feelings explode the neat wraps of their aesthetic packaging, often leaving readers to tidy up after him.

The restlessness that Melville felt (some may say suffered) throughout his life manifested itself in his writings, leaving him homeless even in terms of genre and style across the span of his career. As he shifted from novels to short fiction in the mid-1850s, Melville largely abandoned his Polynesian subjects (though “THE ENCANTADAS” is a notable exception, and asides about the Pacific recur throughout) and focused more thoroughly on the ills of American culture and its European antecedents. The style of the stories remains more conventional, though their complexity and subject matter retain a Melvillean edge. Ranging from direct social protests to extended dirty jokes, the short fiction shows Melville striving more conscientiously to make a living through his writing, but still fighting the expectations placed upon him. The same is true, too, for the poetry that became his focus after his return from the Holy Land. The scope of his poetry seems at once more universal and more intimate than the short fiction, especially in those pieces reserved for private publication. Family letters suggest that Melville saw his further retreat from the novel into poetry as a clear marker of defeat. Yet the best of the poems also show a renewed pleasure in word play and symbolism, as well as a revisitation of those thematic issues that had prevailed in the novels. Scholars have yet to fully explore the links between Melville's poetry and his prose; we may come to see that they are not, finally, so far apart in the spectrum of Melville's work.

And then came *Billy Budd*. One factor in Melville's posthumous esteem lies in our access to works that remained unpublished in his lifetime, and *Billy Budd* ranks foremost among these. Leaner in style and scale than the novels of his earlier years, *Billy Budd* distills a lifetime of philosophical investigation and introspection into one paradigmatic tale; perhaps his experimentation with poetry influenced this process. Compared to *Moby-Dick*, the prose favors precision over expansiveness; compared to *Pierre* or *The Confidence Man*, the ironies are softer, the criticisms keener. But thematically, *Billy Budd* deals just as profoundly with the ambiguities of human nature and human existence. *Billy Budd* suggests the work of a more mature writer—not just one who has polished his craft (although some critics argue that), but one who has endured a longer span of existence and pondered that existence deeply. The Melville who wrote *Billy Budd* had lost two sons and virtually all his extended family; he had seen the Civil War and its aftermath. His celebrity lost, he had removed himself

from public life and worked diligently at a monotonous job for two decades. He had, most biographers suggest, found a companionable gentleness in what had probably been a rocky marriage. Each of these factors probably exerted some influence on the text that became *Billy Budd*. While he still had the same questions, he was able to explore them in a different way at the close of his life than he had nearer its artistic beginning.

Modern readers have found Melville both stylistically and thematically prescient. The emergence of interest in Melville in the 1920s relied largely on the modernist temperament, which appreciated his rejection of universal truths and his fruitless questing after lost ideals and idols. But Melville survived the modernists, as his explorations of identity, sexuality, colonialism, and capitalism remain pertinent to a postmodern reader. Each generation of readers and scholars finds anew in Melville that which makes him suit their era. That, perhaps, is the real key to the enduring interest in his work. We continue to discover him, and to discover ourselves through him.

CHRONOLOGY OF MELVILLE'S LIFE AND TIMES

Events that concern Melville directly appear in boldface.

1774

Thomas Melvill (1751–1832), Melville's paternal grandfather, marries Priscella Scollay (1755–1833), Melville's paternal grandmother.

1776

Thomas Melvill becomes an artillery officer in the U.S. Navy and distinguishes himself fighting at Bunker Hill.

1778

Peter Gansevoort (1749–1812), Melville's maternal grandfather, marries Catherine Van Schaick (1751–1830), Melville's maternal grandmother. He descended from Harmen Harmense Van Gansevoort, a master brewer who emigrated from the Netherlands around 1656 and settled in Fort Orange, later named Albany, New York. Peter takes command of Fort Schuyler (later named Fort Stanwix), at a strategic point overlooking the route from the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys to the Great Lakes. Gansevoort repels the British and their Indian allies, gaining a formidable reputation as a ruthless Indian fighter who burned Indian villages and starved their inhabitants.

1781

Lemuel Shaw, Melville's father-in-law, is born.

1782

Allan Melvill, Melville's father, is born.

1791

Maria Gansevoort, Melville's mother, is born.

1796

George Washington appoints Thomas Melvill naval officer of the Port of Boston.

1809

Washington Irving, under the pseudonym Diedrich Knickerbocker, publishes *A History of New York*.

1814

October 14: Allan Melvill marries Maria Gansevoort.

1815

December 6: Gansevoort Melville, Melville's brother, is born.

1816

Evert Duyckinck is born.

1817

August: Helen Maria Melville Griggs, Melville's sister, is born.

William Cullen Bryant publishes "Thanatopsis."

1818

New York surpasses Boston and Philadelphia in the volume of trade with Europe and the Far East. First steamboat travels on the Great Lakes.

1819

Melville's father, Allan, borrows \$6,500 to start a business selling fancy dry goods.

July: A crowd gathers in the sweltering heat to witness the hanging of Rose Butler, a black woman accused of setting fire to combustibles in a stairwell where she worked.

August 1: Melville is born in New York City. He is the third child (second son) of Allan Melvill (of Scottish descent) and Maria Gansevoort, daughter of General Peter Gansevoort, American Revolutionary War hero, a slave owner, and head of a powerful Albany, New York, family. Melville's mother takes the family to Albany by an upriver steamer, hoping to avoid New York City's yellow fever epidemic.

November: The family returns to New York City. The robust American economy takes a temporary downturn. Walt Whitman is born.

1820

Allan Melvill moves his store to 134 Pearl Street near the family's home in the Battery, but his wife spends more time in Albany, keeping her children away from New York City's unsanitary streets, with pigs and rats rooting in the garbage.

September: Allan finds a new house at 55 Cortlandt Street with more spacious accommodations.

Missouri Compromise: Maine enters Union as a free state, and Missouri as a slave state (in 1821). Washington Colonization Society founds Liberia in Africa for repatriation of slaves and free blacks.

1821

August 24: Augusta, Melville's sister, is born. Santa Fe Trail opens.

1822

As soon as the first yellow fever case of the summer is reported in New York City, Allan Melvill takes his family to Boston for a two-month stay.

1823

April 24: Allan, Melville's brother, is born.

October: The whole family falls ill with winter viruses.

December 2: Monroe Doctrine proclaimed opposing any European power colonizing any independent nation in the Western Hemisphere.

1824

March: Still hoping to find a house away from the damp of downtown New York City, Allan Melvill moves his family to 33 Bleecker Street, between Broadway and the Bowery. They spend the summer in their new home, an improvement over clammy Cortlandt Street.

1825

July: The first American ascends in a hot air balloon. Catherine, Melville's sister, is born.

September: Melville begins four years at New York Male High School.

The Erie Canal opens, establishing a connection between New York City and the West.

1826

Melville and two of his sisters contract scarlet fever. The disease will impair his vision for the rest of his life.

Summer: Herman is sent to Albany, where he learns about the patroons of the Hudson Valley.

July 4: Both Thomas Jefferson and John Adams die, marking the end of the American Revolutionary War generation.

1827

August 26: Frances, Melville's sister, is born. Melville visits his paternal grandparents in Boston.

1828

Herman Melville is named best speaker in the high school's "Introductory" department.

April 28: Allan Melvill moves his family into an elegant house at 675 Broadway, close to the Astors and other prominent members of New York society.

Noah Webster publishes the *American Dictionary of the English Language*. The Working Men's Party is founded in New York. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad becomes the first passenger railroad in the United States.

1829

July: Melville visits his paternal grandparents in Boston.

The new administration of President Andrew Jackson inaugurates the spoils system, handing out jobs to prominent government supporters. Slavery is abolished in Mexico. David Walker's *Appeal*, a widely distributed pamphlet against slavery, appears.

1829–30

Melville attends Columbia Grammar School in New York.

1830

January 24: Thomas, Melville's youngest brother, is born. Herman attends Albany Academy for a year.

September: Allan Melvill's business fails.

October: Family moves to Albany and settles in a house at 338 North Market Street.

Revolution in Paris. Louis Philippe (1773–1850) becomes the French "citizen King." Fur trappers explore the Rocky Mountains. Emily Dickinson is born. Sir Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* is published.

1831

Allan Melvill borrows \$2,000 from Peter Gansevoort to establish a fur and cap store at 364 South Market Street.

December: On a trip to New York City, Allan Melvill fails to find customers for his new business. He arrives home exhausted and ill after exposure to subzero temperatures on the deck of a Hudson River steamer.

Charles Darwin (1809–82) sails as a naturalist on a surveying expedition in HMS *Beagle* to South America, New Zealand, and Australia. William Lloyd Garrison begins publishing the abolitionist periodical the *Liberator* in Boston. The first

horse-drawn buses appear in New York City. Cyrus McCormick invents the reaper.

1832

January 28: Allan Melvill dies in debt.

Summer: A cholera epidemic in Albany spurs Maria Melvill to take her family to Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

New England Anti-Slavery Society founded in Boston. First horse-drawn trolleys appear in New York City.

1832–34

Melville is employed as a clerk at the New York State Bank in Albany. Sometime during this period Melville's mother adds the final *e* to the family's name, hoping to separate the family from her husband's failures.

1833

Melville visits Pittsfield, Massachusetts, briefly.

Shipping magnate Frederic Tudor invents a way to ship ice to the tropical outposts of the British Empire. The *New York Sun*, the first successful penny daily newspaper, is founded. The General Trades Union is founded. Slavery is abolished in the British Empire.

1834–35

Melville works on his uncle Thomas's farm near Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

1835

Melville returns to Albany as a bookkeeper and clerk in his brother's fur business. Enrolls in Albany's Classical School. Joins Albany's Young Man's Association.

Antiabolitionist riots in New York City. Texas declares its right to secede from Mexico. Samuel Colt patents a revolving pistol. Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) is born.

1836

Davy Crockett is killed at the Alamo. Texas wins independence from Mexico. Ralph Waldo Emerson publishes "Nature."

1836–37

September 1–March 1: Melville attends Albany Academy again. Joins Ciceronian Debating Society.

1837

April: Melville's brother Gansevoort's business fails in the Panic of 1837. Banks tighten credit in a depression that lasts five years. Herman obtains a position as a teacher in Sikes District School near Pittsfield for the fall term, then returns to Albany.

June: Melville's uncle Thomas moves to Galena, Illinois, hoping to recoup his fortune as a farmer.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* becomes a best-seller.

1838

March 24: Melville publishes satirical remarks on the area's debating clubs in the *Albany Microscope*.

May: Confronted with mounting debts, Maria Melville moves her family to a less expensive two-family house in Lansingburgh, New York, a small but elegant village 10 miles north of Albany. Herman works briefly on his uncle's farm in the summer and fall.

November: Herman returns to Lansingburgh and studies at the Lansingburgh Academy, receiving a certificate as a surveyor and engineer. Becomes president of Philo Logos debating society. Underground Railroad begins transport of slaves to Canada. The Wilkes expedition sets out to circumnavigate the globe, to explore the South Polar region, and to take soundings and make scientific observations. It is an age of discovery, with much of the world still to be mapped. England has 90 ships of the line, Russia 50, France 49, and America 15.

1839

May: Melville publishes "Fragments from a Writing Desk," signed L.A.V., in the *Democratic Press and Lansingburgh Advertiser*.

May 23: Maria Melville writes to her brother Peter Gansevoort, urging him to help her pay the balance of her rent.

June 5–October 1: Melville serves as a crew member aboard the trading ship *St. Lawrence*, which sails from New York to Liverpool and back. Under the name of "Harry the Reefer," publishes a sketch ("The Death Craft") that prefigures certain aspects of "Benito Cereno." American traveler John Lloyd Stephens (1805–52) discovers and explores the antiquities of the ancient Maya culture in Central America. Two British ships, the *Erebus* and the *Terror*, set off on an expedition to the Antarctic. Shipping magnate Samuel Cunard (1787–1865) establishes the British and North-American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company (later called the Cunard Line). Charles Goodyear (1800–60) invents "vulcanization," which makes the commercial production of rubber feasible. George D. Weed publishes influential antislavery pamphlet "Slavery As It Is."

1839–40

Melville is a schoolteacher in Greenbush, New York, but has to leave when the school's board informs him they cannot pay his salary. Teaches as substitute in Brunswick, New York.

1840

Summer: Melville travels to see his uncle Thomas in Galena, Illinois, taking with him a friend, Eli Fly. On their way east they take a Mississippi River steamer (described in *The Confidence Man*). They visit St. Louis, explore Indian mounds, and then return to New York seeking employment (without success). Herman spends Christmas with his family in Lansingburgh.

Nelson's Column is erected in Trafalgar Square, London, to commemorate his great victory over the French fleet in 1805. The Blue Riband is awarded to the SS *Britannia* for the fastest crossing of the Atlantic. The United States has 2,816 miles of railroad in operation. The bicycle is invented.

1841

January 3: Melville sails from New Bedford, Massachusetts, on the whaling ship *Acushnet*.

March: Stops at Rio de Janeiro. Experiences his first whale hunt off the coast of Brazil.

April: Rounds Cape Horn.

May: Stopping for 10 days at Callao, the *Acushnet* has 200 barrels of oil in its hold.

June: Visits Peru.

August: The *Acushnet* adds another 350 barrels of oil to its hold. Fall and winter are spent cruising the Galápagos Islands.

December: Captain Pease, the *Acushnet's* captain, falls ill and treats his men badly. Melville meets William Henry Chase, son of Owen Chase, author of *Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing Shipwreck of the Whale-Ship Essex* (1821), who loans Melville a copy of the book, which Melville has been eager to read for some time.

USS *Creole* is taken over by slaves on a trip from Virginia to Louisiana. They sail into Nassau and declare themselves free. Overland migration to California begins. Ralph Waldo Emerson publishes *Essays, First Series*. P. T. Barnum opens the "American Museum" in New York City. The *New York Tribune* begins publishing. The first university degrees are granted to American women.

1842

July 9: Melville deserts with Richard Tobias Greene at Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas. Lives for a month in the Typee valley.

August 9: Melville departs on the Australian whaler *Lucy-Ann*. Twelve of the 32-man crew had already deserted on this poorly equipped and badly run ship. Their captain, Ventom, was described as a "petty tyrant" with a "nasty temper." Melville later drew on this appalling episode for *Omoo*. He is shackled and put off the ship in Tahiti as a mutineer. His British jailer allows him freedom during the day if he promises to return at night when authorities come to inspect the jail.

October: Escapes by canoe with John B. Troy and explores Tahiti and Eimeo. Works on a potato farm.

November 7: Sails on Nantucket whaler *Charles & Henry*. A cousin, Guert Gansevoort, puts down a mutiny aboard the U.S. brig *Somers*.

Charles Dickens publishes *American Notes*. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow publishes *Poems of Slavery*. Washington Irving is appointed ambassador to Spain. Boston and Albany are connected by railroad. Anesthesia is first used in surgery.

1843

May 2: Melville is discharged in Lahaina, Hawaii.

July 13: In Honolulu, begins work as a clerk-bookkeeper at an annual salary of \$150 to be paid quarterly. He is also provided with board, lodging, and laundry. He sells supplies and takes inventory.

August 19: Enlists in the U.S. Navy and sails on the frigate *United States*. Meets and befriends John J. Chase. Visits Marquesas, Tahiti, Valparaiso, Callao.

October 6: In Nuku Hiva (the Marquesas) Melville observes the gangs of convicts the French have brought in to construct a fortress and to supply an arsenal. Reads Charles Darwin's *Narrative of the Surveying Voyages of His Majesty's ships Adventure and Beagle*, George's *History of the United States*, and Hough's *Military Law Authorities*. Befriends shipmate Ephraim Curtiss Hine, author of *The Haunted Barque and Other Poems* (1848). Melville would later draw on Hine for his depiction of "Lemsford the Poet" in *White Jacket*.

SS *Great Britain*, the first propeller-driven ship to cross the Atlantic, is launched at Bristol. Congress grants Samuel Morse \$30,000 to build the first telegraph line between Washington and Baltimore.

1844

January: Melville visits Lima.

Spring: Visits Mazatlán.

Summer: Visits Rio de Janeiro.

October 2: Sails around Race Point into Cape Cod Bay. Melville tastes fresh cod for the first time in four years.

October 3: Arrives in Boston. Visits the Bunker Hill Monument, an Egyptian obelisk 221 feet high, situated on a hill overlooking Charlestown. Melville writes a dedication to the monument in *Israel Potter*.

October 14: Discharged from the navy. Melville would later write about the navy as the “asylum for the perverse, the home of the unfortunate.” Returns to his mother’s home in Lansingburgh.

First message by Morse’s telegraph is sent. Emerson’s *Essays, Second Series* is published.

1845

Melville begins work on *Typee*. Takes over his mother’s big attic as his writing den. Peruses Charles S. Stewart’s *A Visit to the South Seas, in the U.S. Ship Vincennes, During the Years 1829 and 1830*, William Ellis’s *Polynesian Researches*, and Captain David Porter’s *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean in the U.S. Frigate Essex*.

July: Gansevoort Melville is appointed secretary to the American legation in London by the new Polk administration. Herman submits manuscript of *Typee* to Harper & Brothers, which rejects it.

November–December: Travels to Boston, either to visit his intended wife’s relatives or to look for a job in the Custom House where his grandfather had worked. Gansevoort, advised by a friend at Harper’s, shows the manuscript of *Typee* to the British publisher John Murray, who accepts the book on December 13. Murray offers the neophyte author a contract for a two-volume edition of 1,000 copies. Melville is to receive an advance of £100 at half profits.

Edgar Allan Poe publishes *The Raven and Other Poems*. U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis is opened.

1846–48

Mexican War.

1846

January: Washington Irving, American minister in Madrid, visits London, and Gansevoort tells him about his brother’s book. Gansevoort reads excerpts to Irving, who admires the author’s “graphic” style and “exquisite” descriptions.

February 27: Murray publishes *Typee* in London.

March 4: Murray confesses to Gansevoort that he suspects *Typee* is more fiction than fact. He proposes tempering the book’s more sensational aspects. Gansevoort falls ill with a severe headache, followed by partial blindness. Several of his teeth are also extracted, but his illness worsens.

March 20: Wiley & Putnam publish *Typee* in New York.

April 3: Gansevoort writes Herman that he fears he is “breaking up.” His request to relinquish his embassy duties is granted.

May 12: Gansevoort, Melville’s brother, dies of tubercular meningitis in London. A memorial service is held in Westminster Abbey, and 12 people, mostly Americans, attend.

May 29: Herman and his family learn of Gansevoort’s death. By steamer Herman takes a 20-hour trip to New York to take charge of his brother’s body. He apparently reacts to the death with restraint, writing to Peter Gansevoort about removing the “remains” to Albany. In Buffalo, Richard Tobias Greene publicly supports Melville’s version of events in *Typee*.

August: A revised edition of the book appears in New York with an addition, “The Story of Toby,” Melville’s response to his friend’s public account and to the charge that the book is really fiction.

November: Travels to New York City and confers with Evert Duyckinck about *Omoo*, asking his advice as a “friend,” not as an editor at Wiley & Putnam. Duyckinck approves of Melville’s work and recommends it to his brother George, remarking “his account of the church building there [in Tahiti] is very much in the spirit of Dickens’s humorous handling of sacred things in Italy.”

December 18: Melville signs a contract with Harper & Brothers to publish *Omoo*.

President Polk declares war on Mexico. Brigham Young leads the Mormons to the Great Salt Lake in Utah. The Smithsonian Institution is founded in Washington, D.C. Famine in Ireland is precipitated by the failure of the potato crop. Elias Howe invents the sewing machine.

1847

January: Evert Duyckinck is named chief editor of a new weekly, the *Literary World*. He asks Melville if he can publish a part of *Omoo*, but Melville prefers to wait for book publication and instead writes a review of J. Ross Browne's *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* and Captain Ringbolt's *Sailor's Life and Sailor's Yarns*. Neither book quite satisfies Melville: The former presents just facts without a compelling style; the latter is pleasant but lacks profundity.

February 1: Ships proof sheets of *Omoo* to his agent, John Brodhead, in London; attends Donizetti opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Palmo's Opera House. Murray offers £150 in promissory notes provided that sales are good.

February 4: Melville travels to Washington, D.C., to see federal officials whom Gansevoort had supported in the 1844 campaign. He hopes to secure a position in the Treasury Department, but given Melville's lack of political experience and his brother's death, nothing is done to find him employment.

March 9: Travels to Boston, evidently to ask Judge Lemuel Shaw for his daughter Elizabeth's hand in marriage. Shaw, chief justice of the Massachusetts supreme court and an old friend of the Melvilles, is concerned about Herman's prospects as a writer, but he is also impressed by the young man's openness and drive.

March 27: John Murray publishes 4,000 copies of *Omoo* in London. The first printing sells out in one week.

May 1: Harper publishes *Omoo* in New York.

May 4: Melville visits New York and sees Thomas Cole's epic painting series *The Course of Empire*. Cole's amalgamation of historical and allegorical motifs will figure in Melville's next book, *Mardi and a Voyage Thither*.

July 30: Dines with Evert Duyckinck, who confides to his diary that Melville, a writer in the vein of Washington Irving, is about to be married and is "cheerful company." The next evening Melville's friends treat him to a bachelor party.

August 4: Marries Elizabeth Shaw in Boston. The couple honeymoon in New Hampshire and

Canada, and then move in with Melville's mother in Lansingburgh.

October: Finding Lansingburgh too confining and wanting access to New York City's literary life, Melville and his brother Allan purchase a brownstone at 103 Fourth Avenue, between 11th and 12th Streets. Their mother and sisters also move in. Melville deepens his friendship with literary figures Evert Duyckinck and Cornelius Matthews and writes for their journals, *Literary World* and *Yankee Doodle*. Evert Duyckinck takes Melville to the opening of the American Art-Union. The novelist sees more of Cole's work as well as that of the painters Edward Hicks and Thomas Sully. At the exhibition, Melville meets the poet William Cullen Bryant and the genre painter William Sydney Mount. Duyckinck observes that Melville seems very happy in his new family arrangement. The novelist devotes himself to a life structured around his new work.

Christmas Eve: Melville and his wife attend the Astor Place Theater. When her brother arrives, they take him to see the view from Trinity Church, and then they go to a performance of Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* and to a party of friends afterward.

1848–49

California gold rush.

1848

February 14: Herman and Elizabeth Melville attend poet Anna Charlotte Lynch's annual Valentine party. There they meet several literary lights: Fitz-Greene Halleck, Nathaniel Parker Willis, Bayard Taylor, Charles Fenno Hoffman, Parke Godwin, Henry T. Tuckerman, Felix Darley, G. P. A. Healy, Seba Smith, Caroline Kirkland, Grace Greenwood, William Cullen Bryant, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, the renowned preacher Dr. Orville Dewey, and the engraver and painter Asher Durand.

May 5: Elizabeth Melville shows the first strains of living with an intense, dedicated author. This usually confident woman seems distracted and

less than articulate in her letters. Her proximity to authorship (she has been copying the final pages of her husband's manuscript) takes its toll. Part of the problem is that Melville's new work, *Mardi*, is taking a new direction, and his publisher, John Murray, is reluctant to publish what he deems a "romance."

June: Melville purchases a translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which helps him to extend the allegorical approach of *Mardi*.

August: Husband and wife travel to Pittsfield for a vacation. They stay at Melvill House, an inn owned by Melville's aunt Mary, the widowed wife of his uncle Thomas. Melville leaves his pregnant wife at her parents' home while he returns to New York to finish his book. He reads William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* during breaks from writing.

The New York State legislature passes the Married Woman's Property Act, under which a married woman could retain her personal property if she could prove charges of abuse by her husband. Without a judgment in her favor, however, a woman could lose everything. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton organize a convention of women in Seneca Falls, New York, announcing a "Declaration of Sentiments" comparing male domination to British repression and women's rights a principle as important as the liberties fought for in the American Revolution. John Jacob Astor, the wealthiest landlord in New York, dies.

Louis Philippe's reign in France ends, and revolutionary fervor sweeps Europe. Austrians demand greater autonomy from their absolutist system of government. The Magyars (Hungarians) agitate for complete independence and the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Editor Horace Greeley dispatches Margaret Fuller to report on the revolution in Rome for the *New York Daily Tribune*. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels publish *The Communist Manifesto*. Serfdom is abolished in Austria. In England, the Chartists demand democratic changes such as a secret ballot and universal male suffrage, but their program is not adopted by Parliament.

In America, the presidential campaign year is marked by debates over the Wilmot Proviso,

which proposes a ban on slavery in the new territories captured from Mexico. In New York, antislavery Democrats hold their own convention opposing the majority position of the party, which tolerates slavery as a means of preserving the Union. The New York News Agency (in 1856 renamed the Associated Press) is established. Lewis Temple, an African-American blacksmith in New Bedford, invents a new harpoon, a vast improvement over the traditional barbed spear. Indians had used stoneheaded spears and arrows to hunt whales. Temple perfected the toggle iron, with blades that expanded on impact, ripping and grasping whale flesh.

1849

January: Melville ships proofs of *Mardi* to John Murray and requests £200. He rejoins his wife in Boston and attends one of Ralph Waldo Emerson's lectures. Expecting to find Emerson "full of transcendentalisms, myths & oracular gibberish," Melville is surprised to find him "quite intelligible." He also attends a reading by the acclaimed British actress Fanny Kemble. Her interpretation of Desdemona is like that of a "boarding school miss," he protests, but she is a "glorious Lady Macbeth." He finds her curiously masculine, and wonders what a private examination of her would reveal. His biographer, Laurie Robertson-Lorant, calls this an "uncharacteristically crude remark." The expectant parents spend two months in Boston. Melville reads Emerson's essays, Seneca's moral philosophy, and essays by Eastlake and Hazlitt on the methods of modern painters and principles of aesthetics. Begins work on *Redburn*.

February 16: Malcolm, a son, is born in Boston.

March 16: Richard Bentley publishes *Mardi* in London.

April 14: Harper publishes *Mardi* in New York.

May 7: At the Astor Place Theater, a mob protests the performance of *Macbeth* by the English actor William Macready. They are incensed that their favorite, the renowned actor Edwin Forrest, also performing *Macbeth*, should have to contend with this for-

eign interloper. Melville joins 47 prominent New Yorkers—among them Washington Irving and Evert Duyckinck—defending Macready's right to appear. In spite of their signed petition, a crowd of Forrest supporters storms the theater three days later, attempting to disrupt Macready's performance. The violence begins with the throwing of bottles and stones. As the mob gathers strength, the militia is mustered. Soldiers fire into the crowd estimated at 25,000, and 22 people are killed, with 36 more wounded. Altogether, the riot injures 100 people, and 86 men are incarcerated.

Summer: Melville works through a steamy summer in New York, finishing *White-Jacket* near the end of September, undaunted by a cholera epidemic. At a New York bookstall, Melville becomes intrigued with a small book of memoirs, *The Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter (A Native of Cranston, Rhode Island), Who was a Soldier in the American Revolution*.

September 29: Richard Bentley publishes *Redburn*, a popular success, in London.

October 11: Melville travels to London to see his publishers, asking for \$500 for *White-Jacket*. Bentley gives Melville £100 owing him for *Redburn* and £200 for the first thousand copies of *White-Jacket*. Worried about piracy, Bentley feels he can offer no more and reminds Melville that the firm did not make a profit on *Mardi*.

November 13: Before dawn a crowd gathers to witness the execution of George and Maria Manning, a married couple. They had conspired to murder a friend and then turned against each other when apprehended. Melville commented on the "brutish crowd" and the unusual spectacle of this couple being "hung side by side—still unreconciled to each other." How so much must have changed, he speculated, from the day they had married. Melville does not know that in the crowd another writer, Charles Dickens, also watches the event, finding the crowd nearly as wicked as the condemned couple.

November 14: Harper's publishes *Redburn* in New York.

November 17: Visits a gallery "full of gems," including Guido Reni's *St. John in the Wilderness*, Nicholas Poussin's *Assumption of the Virgin*, Joshua Reynolds's portraits as well as work by Titian and the Dutch and Flemish masters. The genre paintings in particular are like strolling through "green meadows & woodlands steeped in haze," comments Melville, who feels a "profound calm."

November 24: Enjoying his success in London, Melville puts down in his journal that he had returned to his rooms at midnight with "an indefinite quantity of Champagne [sic] Sherry, Old Port, Hock, Madeira, & Claret in me."

November 27: He embarks to tour the Continent, taking a Channel steamer, the *Emerald*, for Boulogne. By late afternoon his train has arrived in Paris. He finds the city's sites alternately beautiful and bizarre.

Edgar Allan Poe dies.

1850

January 23: Bentley publishes *White-Jacket* in London.

February: Melville returns to New York.

March: Reviews James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Red Rover* in the *Literary World*. Like the work Melville is beginning to contemplate, Cooper's novel centers on a character who embodies the ambiguities of identity.

March 21: Harper's publishes *White-Jacket* in New York.

April 29: Melville renews his membership in the New York Society Library and begins reviewing work he has read on sea voyages. He is attracted to the story of Mocha Dick, a whale, a story the *Knickerbocker* published in 1839.

July: The Melvilles move to Pittsfield for the summer. At the end of the month, Melville returns to New York to escort his mother and sisters to Pittsfield. At the same time, he invites his literary colleagues Evert Duyckinck and Cornelius Matthews to Melville House for a week.

August 5: Meets and befriends Nathaniel Hawthorne.

August 9: Melville begins work on his review of Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse*.

August 10: Duyckinck takes the review "Hawthorne and His Mosses" back to New York for publication in the *Literary World*. It appears in two parts on August 17 and 24.

September 14: With help from his father-in-law, Melville purchases a 160-acre farm near Pittsfield. By early October his family is in residence at what he calls Arrowhead.

The Compromise of 1850 limits the spread of slavery, but Congress also enacts the Fugitive Slave Law, forcing northerners to return slaves escaping from the South. Judge Shaw, who opposes slavery, and who has judged cases on the state level refusing to return slaves, is put in an uncomfortable position. He decides not to resign his judgeship, disappointing some of his fervent abolitionist friends.

October 4: Ex-slave Frederick Douglass speaks at Faneuil Hall in Boston, stimulating the formation of the Boston Vigilance Committee headed by Richard Dana Jr. A total of 80 members vow to aid fugitive slaves. The Astor family collects \$100,000 a year in rents. The narrator of "Bartleby, the Scrivener" accords Astor reverential respect. Nathaniel Hawthorne publishes *The Scarlet Letter*. Emerson publishes "Representative Men." *Harper's Magazine* is founded.

1851

March: Melville learns that his old friend Eli James Murdock Fly is destitute and an invalid. Melville escorts Fly to Springfield, Massachusetts, where he embarks on a train for Brattleboro, Vermont, to try the "water-cure."

April 11: Melville helps deliver a clog and bedstead to Nathaniel Hawthorne.

August 1: Melville pays a surprise call on the Hawthornes. The two writers "talk about time and eternity, things of this world and of the next, and books, and publishers, and all possible and impossible matters, that lasted pretty deep into the night."

October 18: Bentley publishes a handsome three-volume edition of *Moby-Dick* in London.

November 14: Harper's publishes *Moby-Dick* (dedicated to Hawthorne) in New York. The American edition is also sumptuous: 2,915 copies embossed with gilt life preservers. Reviewers complain about the \$1.50 price—very high for the period.

October 22: Stanwix, a second son, is born.

James Fenimore Cooper dies. Hawthorne publishes *The House of the Seven Gables*. The schooner *America* wins the race around the Isle of Wight and brings the America's Cup to the United States. The *New York Times* publishes its first issue.

1852

July: After visiting Melville at Arrowhead, Judge Shaw takes him to New Bedford and Nantucket to meet some of his friends.

August 6: Harper's publishes *Pierre* in New York.

November: Sampson Low publishes *Pierre* in London.

Winter: Works on a novella, "The Isle of the Cross." Along with Washington Irving and William Cullen Bryant, as well as other writers, Melville petitions Congress to institute international publishing agreements to protect the copyrights of authors, but Congress takes no action.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is published and sells a record 300,000 copies in one year. Hiram Powers's sculpture *The Greek Slave* causes a sensation when it is put on display in New York's Crystal Palace.

1853

May 22: Elizabeth, a daughter, is born. Melville's health suffers. Friends and family try (unsuccessfully) to secure a consulship for him. Financial difficulties, strains in the marriage and family life, and sickness mark the Melville household for the next 25 years. At Harper's, a fire destroys many of Melville's unsold books.

June: Melville travels to New York to show his manuscript of "The Isle of the Cross" to Harper's.

1854

Melville promises Harper's the delivery of several manuscripts based on stories he is writing. Plans for several books, however, including "The Isle of the Cross," never fructify.

March: During a period of harsh storms Melville works at the sketches that will form part of *The Piazza Tales*.

May: Thomas Wentworth Higginson and other militant abolitionists storm a Boston jail to free Anthony Burns, a fugitive slave, even as Judge Shaw is hearing arguments in the case. Higginson and his forces fail to obtain Burns's release, and a deputy is killed in the melee. Higginson, along with Theodore Parker and Wendell Phillips, are charged with obstruction of justice. Their case is thrown out of court. Judge Shaw rules that Burns be returned to his owner. William Lloyd Garrison burns copies of the United States Constitution, the Fugitive Slave Law, and Shaw's court decision.

September 24: Melville drives through a snowstorm to visit his cousin Priscilla, a seamstress.

U.S. Senate ratifies Gadsden Purchase for acquisition of parts of southern New Mexico and Arizona. "War for Bleeding Kansas" between pro- and antislavery forces. The Republican Party is formed. SS *Brandon* is launched as the first ship with compound expansion engines. The railroad reaches the Mississippi. Henry David Thoreau publishes *Walden, or Life in the Woods*. *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* is founded.

1854–55

July–March: *Israel Potter* is serialized in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*.

1855

February: Melville suffers acutely from sciatica. Nevertheless, he attends a literary party in honor of the visiting William Makepeace Thackeray.

March: Putnam publishes *Israel Potter* in New York. Frances, a second daughter, is born (March 2). Melville is afflicted with both rheumatism and sciatica and is treated by Oliver Wendell Holmes.

April: The *Albany Evening Journal* and other eastern newspapers are full of accounts of one William Thompson, a man of many aliases and a swindler par excellence. He is referred to as a "confidence-man." He is undoubtedly one of the models for Melville's character by the same name.

May: George Routledge publishes *Israel Potter* in London.

Spring: Melville nears completion of "Benito Cereno."

The first iron Cunard steamer crosses the Atlantic in nine and a half days. Walt Whitman publishes *Leaves of Grass*; he also calls New York the most radical city in America.

Evert Duyckinck publishes the *Cyclopaedia of American Literature*, which includes an entry on Melville.

1856

May: Dix & Edwards publishes *The Piazza Tales* in New York; Sampson Low distributes this edition in London.

October 11: With financial help from his father-in-law, Melville embarks on a journey to the Holy Land, stopping first in Glasgow. He also visits Hawthorne in Liverpool. "Herman Melville came to see me at the Consulate," Hawthorne wrote, "looking much as he used to do (a little paler, and perhaps a little sadder), in a rough outside coat, and with his characteristic gravity and reserve of manner. ... Melville has not been well, of late; he has been affected with neuralgic complaints in his head and limbs, and no doubt has suffered from too constant literary occupations, pursued without much success, latterly; and his writings, for a long while past, have indicated a morbid state of mind." Melville resumes his trip, departing for the Middle East, Greece and Italy.

New Year's Eve: Melville and one of his fellow travelers, Dr. Lockwood, ride donkeys toward the Valley of the Nile.

New York's *Weekly Times* decries the Fillmore administration's support of William Walker, an American soldier of fortune who invades Nicaragua

and declares himself its president. Massacre of Potawatomie Creek, Kansas. Proslavery gang murders antislavery agitators for admission of Kansas as a free state.

1857

New Year's Day: Melville returns to Alexandria to arrange passage to the Holy Land.

January 6: Melville's ship lands at Jaffa, and he proceeds immediately to Jerusalem.

January 18: Leaves Jerusalem with a question: "Is the desolation of the land the result of the fatal embrace of the Deity?"

February 5: Melville journeys through Rhodes "afflicted with the great curse of modern Travel—skepticism."

April 1: Dix & Edwards publish *The Confidence Man* in New York; Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts publish *The Confidence Man* in London. Melville arrives in the city by the end of April. He walks through Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, visits Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum and the Crystal Palace (built for the 1851 Great Exhibition and lavishly praised as a noble structure by others). Melville finds it "a vast toy" and "overdone."

May 4: Returns to Liverpool for voyage to New York. He declares in a poem of this time: "We sham, we shume while faith declines."

May 20: Arrives in New York.

October: Melville begins a three-year effort to make a living as a lecturer, with meager results.

Europe and America experience high inflation. The gold rush has set off frantic speculation in land and railroad stocks; the Crimean War has stimulated overproduction of staples such as grain. There is panic on Wall Street. Businesses go bankrupt. Tensions over slavery worsen with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

William Walker is hailed as a hero after he returns to the United States, having been expelled from Nicaragua.

The *Dred Scott* case is decided by the Supreme Court. The ruling stipulates that slaves cannot bring legal actions. Not only is Scott's case thrown out, but he also is ordered back to his owner in Missouri. (Scott argued that his domi-

cile in a free territory rendered his reenslavement unconstitutional.)

American engineer E. G. Otis installs the first safety elevator in New York. The transatlantic cable between New York and London is laid.

1858

Melville lectures in the South (Tennessee area) and in the Midwest (Ohio area).

Lincoln-Douglas debates take place. New York Symphony Orchestra gives its first concert. SS *Great Eastern*, the largest ship of its time (27,000 tons), is launched. First stagecoach line from Missouri to Pacific Coast is established.

1859

Melville lectures in Baltimore, Wisconsin, New York, and Massachusetts.

The first oil well in the United States is drilled in Titusville, Pennsylvania. The steamroller and the first practical storage battery are invented. Gold is discovered in Colorado and Nevada. Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* is published. Washington Irving dies.

1860

May 28: Melville travels on the clipper ship *Meteor* to San Francisco as a guest of the captain, his brother Thomas.

November 12: Returns to New York via Panama. His brother Allan tells him that his book of poems has not found a publisher.

The New York population numbers 813,699 citizens; 12,000 are free blacks, slavery having been outlawed in 1827. The city relies on the cotton trade, which nets \$200 million a year. Western wheat is another important staple. Some 75 percent of the nation's imports are handled by the city's port. New York bankers dread a war if southern planters, squeezed by Republican antislavery policies, cannot repay bank loans. In the city there is a deep division between abolitionists and a populace now full of immigrants, especially the Irish, who fear the idea of freedom for all blacks, who would then flood the labor market, working for cheap wages. Banker Richard Lathers assembles members of the Demo-

cratic Vigilant Association to extend an appeal to the South, proposing that slaves gradually be emancipated and returned to Africa. He fears, as do other bankers, that England would enter an American civil war on the side of the South because of the importance of cotton to the British economy.

On February 15, Abraham Lincoln arrives in New York to give a speech at Cooper Union. More than 1,500 show up in spite of a snowstorm. He argues eloquently for opposing the spread of slavery and for preserving the Union. Gathering support in New York, he begins to make progress toward the Republican nomination. He is elected president in November. South Carolina secedes from the Union in protest.

The Marble Faun, Hawthorne's last novel, is published. American inventor Christopher L. Sholes invents the first typewriter. The Pony Express runs from Missouri to California.

1861

February 18: Jefferson Davis is inaugurated as president of the Confederacy. President-elect Lincoln travels through New York on the way to Washington amid rumors of a southern plot to stop him from taking office.

March 12: **Melville travels to Washington and attends one of Lincoln's receptions. He reports to his wife: "Ladies in full dress by the hundred. A steady stream of two-&twos wound thro' the apartments shaking hands with 'Old Abe' ... without cessation for an hour & a half. Of course I was one of the shakers. Old Abe is much better looking [than] I expected & younger looking. He shook hands like a good fellow—working hard at it like a man sawing wood at so much per cord. Mrs. Lincoln is rather good looking I thought. The scene was very fine altogether. Superb furniture—flood of light—magnificent flowers—full band of music & c."** Melville is seeking a consular appointment. Judge Shaw dies and has an Easter funeral.

Washington Peace Convention tries to preserve the Union, but the Congress of Montgomery forms the Confederate States of America with South

Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and Louisiana.

April 13: Walt Whitman, walking down Broadway after the opera, hears the news of the Confederate onslaught against Fort Sumter. The next day, Lincoln calls on the state militias, asking for 75,000 men to defend Washington, D.C. West Virginia separates from Virginia and remains loyal to the Union. Telegraph links East and West.

Henry Sanford Gansevoort, Melville's cousin, is in New York's Seventh Regiment.

June: **Melville and Evert Duyckinck visit Guert Gansevoort, now on shore duty at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.**

July 21: Early Confederate victories such as Bull Run convince many New York businessmen that the Union cannot win the war.

August: **Melville travels to Boston, where his wife has been staying, and the family reassembles in Albany. The Melvilles live in New York during the winter but celebrate Christmas and New Year's in Boston. Melville again suffers from rheumatism.**

Elizabeth Cady Stanton lobbies the New York legislature to abolish the "legalized slavery" of women. Specifically, she wants wife-beating made grounds for divorce. The legislature rejects the proposed law, and New York is one of six states that do not allow divorce or separation because of cruelty.

1862

Melville lives briefly in Pittsfield and is badly injured when he is thrown from a wagon.

Union forces capture Fort Henry, Roanoke Island, Fort Donelson, Jacksonville, and New Orleans; they are defeated at the second Battle of Bull Run and Fredericksburg. R. J. Gatling (1818–1903) invents the 10-barrel gun, named after him. Henry David Thoreau dies.

1863

January 1: President Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves in states rebelling against the Union.

February: **Melville is slowly recovering from a bout of rheumatism.**

Summer: The Melvilles are in the Berkshires and celebrate July 4 with fireworks.

July 11: The draft lottery is announced.

July 12: New York City protestors take to the streets to oppose the draft and the despotism of the federal government. On Broadway, whites march with a “No Draft” banner. Irish gangs begin a spree of violence, tearing up railroad tracks, smashing windows with paving stones, and ripping down telegraph wires. The rioters loot an arms factory. The damage spreads from lower to upper Manhattan as lower-class whites and immigrants vent their rage against African Americans and wealthier Americans who can buy their way out of the draft. Draft offices are burned. Even the mayor’s home is attacked, provoking a call for federal troops.

July 14: Federal troops are brought into New York City from the Brooklyn Navy Yard and West Point. Melville writes a poem, “**The House-top: A Night Piece,**” from the perspective of a man watching the riots: “No sleep. The sultriness pervades the air / And binds the brain—a dense oppression, such / As tawny tigers feel in matted shades, / Vexing their blood and making apt for ravage.”

August: Husband and wife leave their children for a vacation / second honeymoon, touring **Bash-Bish Falls, Mount Everett, Copake, Great Barrington, Monterey, and the hill towns of Becket, Savoy, and Cummington.** Elizabeth Melville writes: “We passed through some of the wildest and most enchanting scenery, both mountain and valley and I cannot sufficiently congratulate myself that I have seen it before leaving Berkshire.”

October: Family leaves **Arrowhead in a swap for a New York house (104 East 26th Street) owned by Melville’s brother Allan.**

Fifth Avenue becomes the most fashionable street in the city, supplanting Broadway. Confederate victories at Chancellorsville, Virginia; defeats at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and Vicksburg, Mississippi; surrender at Fort Hudson; further defeat at Chattanooga, Tennessee; victory at Chickamauga, Georgia. Lincoln delivers the Gettysburg Address at the dedication of a military cemetery.

1864

February: Melville pays off his Harper’s debt. **His mother falls ill.**

March: **George Duyckinck dies.**

April: **Visits his cousin, Colonel Henry Gansevoort, in an army camp on the Virginia front.**

May 19: Nathaniel Hawthorne dies. Admiral Farragut sinks the Confederate ironclad *Tennessee*. He is said to exclaim, “Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!” General Philip Sheridan routs Jubal Early’s forces at Cedar Creek. General Ulysses S. Grant succeeds General Halleck as commander in chief of the Union armies. General Sherman marches his army from Chattanooga through Georgia, defeats Confederate army at Atlanta, and occupies Savannah. Confederate agents set Barnum Museum and Astor House on fire as part of plot to burn down New York City.

1865

January 21: Congress passes the Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery.

February 2: John Rock, an African-American attorney and physician, is admitted to practice before the Massachusetts supreme judicial court.

February 6: Robert E. Lee is given supreme command over the weakening Confederate armies. Confederate currency has become worthless. Food is scarce in the South’s devastated areas. People are eating their pets.

March 3: Abraham Lincoln takes the oath of office for his second term, urging his countrymen to “bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battles, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.” Union fleet takes Charleston; Richmond, Virginia, surrenders to Grant; Jefferson Davis appoints Robert E. Lee general in chief of the Confederate army.

April 9: Lee surrenders to Grant at Appomattox.

April 14: Lincoln is assassinated. Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, is captured and imprisoned.

May: *Drum-Taps*, Walt Whitman's sequence of Civil War poems, is published.

May 26: The Civil War ends.

Summer: Intensely involved with writing his Civil War poems, Melville nevertheless takes frequent breaks for exercise and to help family members. He assists his sister Augusta in distributing cakes and other sweets to the Sabbath (Sunday) schools. His health has improved considerably.

The Ku Klux Klan is founded. The first train holdup occurs, at North Bend, Ohio. The Atlantic cable is completed. Joseph Lister initiates anti-septic surgery by using carbolic acid on a compound wound. The first oil pipeline (six miles) is constructed in Pennsylvania. The first railroad sleeping cars are designed by George Pullman. Matthew Arnold publishes *Essays in Criticism*. The *San Francisco Examiner* and *San Francisco Chronicle* are founded.

Maria Mitchell, possibly the model for Urania in Melville's poem "After the Pleasure Party," is the first woman appointed professor of astronomy at Vassar College.

1866

August 17: Harper's publishes Melville's *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* in New York. It is dedicated to "the memory of the three hundred thousand who in the war for the maintenance of the Union fell devotedly under the flag of their fathers." An item in the *New York Herald* includes the comment: "For ten years the public has wondered what has become of Melville."

December 5: Melville is appointed deputy inspector of customs at the port of New York. He takes an oath, swearing that he has "never voluntarily borne arms against the United States." He signs an affidavit affirming that he will "support the Constitution of the United States." He is issued a numbered tin badge to be worn on his lapel and "a set of government locks, a record book or two, forms and stationery." The position requires him to work six days a week. His only time off is for national holidays and a two-week vacation. He is paid \$4 a day or approximately \$1,200 a year, "a

pittance," one of his relatives remarked. It was the same salary Hawthorne received during his employment at the Salem Custom House in 1846. Even on his low salary, Melville was expected to contribute 2 percent of his salary to the Republican State Committee.

The National Labor Union is established. It advocates "equal pay for equal work" and the inclusion of women and African Americans in the labor movement. The Fourteenth Amendment is passed, prohibiting voting discrimination, denying public office to certain Confederates, and repudiating Confederate war debt.

1867

May: A legal separation is discussed after Melville's wife and minister conclude he is mentally unbalanced. Given the laws of the time, Elizabeth Melville would forfeit everything—children, home, and all property—if she should leave her husband. Rumors circulate that Melville sometimes beats his wife.

September 10: Malcolm, the Melvilles' son, stays out until 3:00 A.M. His anxious mother asks him where he has been. He has been out with a friend to parties and a nightclub, he replies. She chides him for coming home so late but kisses him goodnight, and he goes to bed. He has not been drinking, as far as his mother can tell.

September 11: Malcolm does not appear in the morning. He answers his sister's call, but he does not come out of his room. Melville, apparently in a temper, tells the family to leave Malcolm alone: If he is late for work, he will have to pay the consequences. Malcolm remains in his room all day. Melville returns quite late from work, finds his son's door locked, and breaks into the room. Malcolm is curled up on his bed in his nightclothes with a pistol in his right hand. Melville sees the bullet hole in his son's right temple. Melville summons the coroner, who declares the death a suicide. The Melvilles find their son's death mysterious and cannot accept the verdict of suicide. Apparently no one heard the shot, or no one was willing to acknowledge it.

September 14: At Malcolm's funeral, the Melvilles, suffering from shock, do not cry. Herman, so often a stoic, looks "quite composed."

November: Melville's brother Thomas is appointed governor of the Sailor's Snug Harbor, a Staten Island complex including dormitories, a seaman's chapel, a domed Renaissance memorial church and music hall, and other buildings.

Matthew Arnold publishes *Culture and Anarchy*. Mark Twain visits New York City and is appalled to find that 100,000 people have only cellars for homes and that tenements with a capacity to house eight families are crammed with as many as 300 people. Elizabeth Cady Stanton campaigns for the abolition of "all discrimination on account of sex or race."

1868

July 15: Guert Gansevoort dies. George Adler, Melville's old friend, dies.

Christmas: There is a family reunion at Snug Harbor. Melville's mother enjoys seeing her seven children and six of her seven grandchildren. She calls Snug Harbor "a very social place little family whist parties, private Billiard tables, or I should say perhaps Billiard tables in private houses—are very general." Herman and Elizabeth stay the night and return to the city the next day, where they host a party for Elizabeth's nephew Oakes Shaw, who closely resembles Malcolm.

President Andrew Johnson is impeached. U. S. Grant is elected president. Herbert Spencer coins the phrase "the survival of the fittest." Congress approves eight-hour day for federal employees.

Meat-packing factory of P. D. Armour opens in Chicago. Mark Twain visits New York and calls it a "splendid desert." The pace of life in the city was killing: "There is something in this ceaseless buzz, the hurry, and hustle, that keeps a stranger in a state of unwholesome excitement all the time, and makes him restless and weary."

1869

Melville reads Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism* and is struck by Arnold's observation

that the "literary career seems to me unreal, both in its essence and in the rewards which one seeks from it, and there fatally marred by a secret absurdity." Melville comments: "This is the finest verbal statement of a truth which everyone who thinks in these days must have felt."

June: The Melvilles celebrate Elizabeth's 47th birthday at Snug Harbor. Melville's family and friends often gather at this comfortable place.

September: Elizabeth suffers from "neuralgia & weakness." Stanwix leaves home and embarks on desultory travels.

The young French statesman Georges Clemenceau visits the United States and calls Reconstruction "Darwinian." The *Atlantic Monthly* states that it is "tired of the Negro question." Jim Fisk and Jay Gould conspire to control the New York gold market, bribing President Grant's brother-in-law to restrict the Treasury's gold bullion, causing the price of gold to rise. While other investors are ruined, Fisk and Gould make huge profits. In New York, corruption is even worse, for the city is ruled by the regime of Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall, which bilks the city coffers of enormous sums—estimated at between \$50 million and \$200 million. Fisk and Gould escape prosecution, but Tweed is eventually convicted of 204 of the 220 charges against him. The Knights of Labor is established and campaigns for an eight-hour workday. The vacuum cleaner is invented. The transcontinental railroad is completed. Wyoming passes first U.S. woman suffrage law.

1870

The Supreme Court overturns provisions of a civil rights bill, canceling protections for African-American voters. *The Dictionary of American Biography* is issued. Melville is not in it. John D. Rockefeller founds Standard Oil.

1871

The Commune in Paris rules for two months. The Supreme Court overturns another civil rights bill, further destroying the rights of African-American voters. Charles Darwin publishes *The Descent of Man*. Simon Ingersoll invents the

pneumatic rock drill. P. T. Barnum opens his circus, "The Greatest Show on Earth," in Brooklyn. Chicago is devastated by the Great Fire. SS *Oceanic*, the first of the modern luxury liners, is launched.

Christmas: Increasingly reclusive, Melville nonetheless celebrates with his family at Snug Harbor. His mother is in fine form; his wife is depressed about the loss of Malcolm.

1872

So many scandals plague the Grant administration that it is doubted he can be reelected. The economy takes a downturn. Melville fears losing his job, but the crisis ebbs.

February: Allan, Melville's youngest brother, dies of tuberculosis. Allan had often been Herman's companion and adviser. Maria Gansevoort Melville, Melville's mother, dies.

November: Fire destroys Elizabeth Melville's Boston property. The U.S. General Amnesty Act pardons former Confederates. William Thompson, later Lord Kelvin, invents a machine by which ships can take accurate soundings while at sea. American engineer George Westinghouse (1846–1916) perfects the automatic railroad air brake.

1873

February: Stanwix returns from trips through Arkansas and Mississippi to New Orleans and Havana. He had also been in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Herman comes down with a severe illness that lasts almost two months.

May: Melville begins work again as a customs inspector. The home life of the Melvilles seems to have settled down into a comfortable pattern, husband and wife apparently reconciled. Elizabeth writes to a relative: "When Herman is gone all day, or the largest part of it, the house seems utterly desolate—it is quite a new sensation for me to have the days seem so long—We are counting the days for going to Pittsfield and think with longings of the refreshing breezes from hill-tops."

August: A visit to Arrowhead proves to be a tonic. Elizabeth writes about "walking, or driving, or

sitting out doors ... as if we could not get enough of the reviving air, after being nearly suffocated in the heat and smell of New York." There is a stock market panic, and the economy falters. Some 6,000 small businesses go bankrupt. The streets are full of beggars.

1874

March: Stanwix finds a job on a sheep ranch in California at a salary of \$25 a month.

Christmas: Stanwix comes home at his mother's urging. He has little to show for his ranching period and is embarrassed.

The first American zoo is established in Philadelphia. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is founded by E. T. Gerry in New York. A. T. Still (1828–1917) founds osteopathy in Kansas. H. Solomon introduces pressure-cooking methods for canning foods, so that steam under pressure cooks food quickly and preserves it.

1875

Mark Twain publishes *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Helena Blavatsky founds the Theosophical Society in New York.

1875–76

By the end of 1875 Stanwix moves to San Francisco. Melville works intensively on *Clarel*. His wife worries over his health and confides to a relative: "The fact is, that Herman, poor fellow, is in such a frightfully nervous state, & particularly now with such an added strain on his mind, that I am actually *afraid* to have anyone here for fear that he will be upset entirely, & not be able to go on with the printing—He was not willing to have his own sisters here, and I had to write Augusta before she left Albany to that effect—that was the reason she changed her plan, and went to Tom's—If ever this dreadful *incubus* of a book (I call it so because it has undermined all our happiness) gets off Herman's shoulders I do hope he may be in better mental health—but at present I have reasons to feel the gravest concern & anxiety about it—to put it in mild

phrase—please do not speak of it—you know how such things are exaggerated—& I will tell you more when I see you.”

1876

April 4: Augusta, Melville’s sister, dies. In late March, she had suffered an internal hemorrhage. Herman hurried to Snug Harbor and found her at the point of death. She has been a fount of energy, caring for her family, doing good works in her parish, as well as being an ardent novel reader and amanuensis for her brother.

April 7: Herman takes Augusta’s body by boat to Albany to be buried in the family plot. He had done the same for his brother Gansevoort 30 years earlier. By the end of the month, *Clarel* has been set in type, and a relieved Elizabeth writes to a friend: “I shall be thankful when it is all finished and off of his mind and cannot help hoping that his health will improve when he is released from this long continual mental strain.”

May 10: The Centennial Exhibition opens in Philadelphia.

June 3: Putnam publishes *Clarel* in New York and distributes the edition in England; it is paid for by Melville’s uncle, Peter Gansevoort, to whom Melville dedicates the book. It is published in two volumes, described by Laurie Robertson-Lorant as “bound in fine-ribbed cloth embossed with a gilt Jerusalem cross cradled by palm trees and crested with three crowns beneath a star stamped on its cover.”

November: The Centennial Exhibition closes, having attracted 10 million visitors, who are able to view George Washington’s false teeth and the work of Edmonia Lewis, the first African-American sculptor of note. The Plains Indians re-create their sacred dances, and various artifacts on display show the “primitive stage of civilization.” Guards attempt to stop Frederick Douglass from entering the fairgrounds. When they learn of his identity, he is admitted to the exhibition.

The presidential election is undecided. Samuel Tilden (Democrat) has 184 electoral votes, while

Rutherford B. Hayes (Republican) has 165. Tilden wins the popular vote, but 20 electoral votes are in dispute.

A reformatory is established for juvenile offenders in Elmira, New York. Women now constitute 20 percent of America’s workforce. Lieutenant Colonel Custer and 265 men are killed at Little Bighorn, Montana. Alexander Graham Bell patents the telephone.

1877

Melville continues to work at the Custom House surrounded by corruption and incompetence. His salary remains at \$1,200 a year, and he will never receive a raise.

Rutherford B. Hayes takes office in a contested election that he wins by one vote in the House of Representatives. The Republicans agree to restrain Reconstruction in exchange for the presidency. Federal troops are withdrawn from the South. “How about President Hayes?” Melville writes to a cousin. “What’s the use? life is short, and Hayes’ term is four years, each of 365 days.” At the end of the year Melville receives a royalty statement from Harper’s. *Omoo*, *Redburn*, *White-Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick* together account for 192 copies sold, for which the author receives \$64.38. He spends most of his royalties on prints and books. By New Year’s he is suffering from erysipelas, a painful inflammation sometimes called “Saint Anthony’s fire,” since the saint suffered from this form of skin irritation. Melville’s hands are temporarily paralyzed, and his joints ache. It is impossible to write in this condition.

Public phones are introduced in the United States.

1878

Melville’s wife inherits a large amount of money from the estate of her aunt Martha Marett.

July 4: The Melvilles celebrate at Snug Harbor.

August: Evert Duyckinck dies. Melville is the last one to see him alive. Stanwix writes from Sacramento, where he is hospitalized. It is not clear what ails him, but the family is relieved to know where he is, since he has

not been in contact with them for a long time.

Edison patents the phonograph.

1879

A family friend visits Elizabeth and Herman and finds them feeling rather depleted.

Mary Baker Eddy becomes pastor of the Church of Christ, Scientist, Boston.

1880

Frances Melville marries Henry B. Thomas.

Thomas Edison perfects the electric light bulb. First important gold strike in Alaska.

1881

President Garfield is assassinated. New York's population reaches 1,200,000.

1882

February 24: Eleanor Melville Thomas, Melville's first grandchild, is born.

Summer: Elizabeth spends time with family at Overlook Mountain in Woodstock, New York, where Herman joins her for a week. Stanwix writes his mother often but complains of a chronic cough. In fact, he has contracted tuberculosis.

The United States bans Chinese immigration for 10 years. Thomas Edison designs the first hydroelectric plant.

1883

Robert, one of Melville's cousins, dies, and the circle of friends and family around Melville begins to shrink rapidly. Some 45 percent of all industrial workers makes less than \$500 a year, and 12 million families make less than Melville's annual \$1,200 salary.

Melville becomes a member of All Souls' Church. Although his skepticism seems not to have relaxed, his membership may simply reflect his continual search for religious inspiration and his belief in the "intersympathy of creeds."

The Brooklyn Bridge opens. The U.S. Civil Service is reformed. The first skyscraper is constructed

in Chicago. Buffalo Bill (William Cody) organizes his first "Wild West Show."

1884

March: Thomas Melville, Melville's brother, dies of a heart attack.

April: Judge Shaw's son dies, as does Melville's aunt Mary.

Hiram Maxim invents the machine gun. The steam turbine is invented.

1885

May: Melville publishes a poem, "The Admiral of the White," in the *New York Daily Tribune* and the *Boston Herald*.

August: Elizabeth presents Herman with a copy of a book on Balzac. Melville underlines a statement of Balzac's that to have a strong life means to "forget life's misfortunes." Melville travels to Pittsfield, while Elizabeth goes to New Hampshire for relief from her hay fever. An old friend finds Melville content: "He did not evince the slightest aversion to society but appeared to enjoy the hearty welcome which it gave him."

December 31: Resigns position as customs inspector. Frances Priscilla Melville, Melville's sister, dies. Melville receives a royalty check from Harper's for \$223.73 covering the sale of all of his books. Stanwix's tubercular condition worsens, and he moves to southern California to take advantage of the drier climate.

Cornelius Vanderbilt dies with a fortune estimated at \$200 million. In Haymarket Square, Chicago, police gun down laborers demonstrating for decent wages and working conditions.

1886

A Dutch visitor to the city meets Melville and comments that he is "a delightful talker when in the mood," but that he also is a genius who has to be "handled with care."

February 23: Stanwix dies in San Francisco. Melville's reaction is not known.

October: Melville's brother-in-law John Hoadley dies. He had become a good friend of Herman's and shared a love of literature. A poet,

Hoadley was one of Melville's most sympathetic readers.

New York celebrates completion of the Statue of Liberty. Emily Dickinson dies. Henry James publishes *The Bostonians*. Hydroelectric installations are begun at Niagara Falls. The American Federation of Labor is founded.

1887

March 4: Melville receives his final royalty statement from Harper's, for \$50.02. *Typee*, *Mardi*, *Redburn*, *Pierre*, and *Battle-Pieces* remain in stock, but sales are minuscule. *Omoo*, *White-Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick* are out of print.

1888

Melville receives a bequest of \$3,000 from his sister Frances Priscilla. In March, he uses part of the money to visit Bermuda. The rest will be spent on private printings of his poetry. De Vinne Press produces a private printing of 25 copies of *John Marr and Other Sailors*. Melville writes "Billy in the Darbies," the genesis of *Billy Budd*. Helen Maria Melville Griggs, Melville's sister, dies.

May: The *American Magazine* publishes an article attempting to exonerate the officers who condemned the mutineers on the *Somers*. Melville produces a 70-page draft of *Billy Budd*. Not feeling well, he writes: "I, Herman Melville, declare this to be my will. Any property, of whatever kind, I may die possessed of, including money in banks, and my share in the as yet undivided real estate at Gansevoort, I bequeathe to my wife. I do this because I have confidence that through her our children and grand-children will get their proportion of any benefit that may accrue.—I appoint my wife executrix of this will.—In witness, whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 11th day of June 1888."

The first electric trolley line opens.

1889

March: Melville continues working on *Billy Budd*, which he has expanded to 350 pages.

November: Professor Archibald MacMechan of Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia writes to Melville craving more information than the meager amount that is available in Evert Duyckinck's *Cyclopaedia*, which appeared in 1855. Melville replies: "You do not know, perhaps, that I have entered my eighth decade. After twenty years nearly, as an outdoor Custom House officer, I have latterly come into possession of unobstructed leisure, but only just as, in the course of my nature, my vigor sensibly declines. What little of it is left I husband for certain matters as yet incomplete, and which indeed may never be completed."

The new Madison Square Garden, designed by Stanford White, is completed.

1890

December: Melville is afflicted with a respiratory infection, which turns out to be bronchitis.

Iron and steel workers strike in the United States. The first cans of pineapple are produced. The first entirely steel-framed building is erected in Chicago. W. L. Judson invents the clothing zipper. Rubber gloves are used for the first time in surgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. The first automatic telephone switchboard is introduced. Rudolf Diesel patents his first combustion engine.

1891

May: Caxton Press produces a private printing of 25 copies of *Timoleon*.

June 13: Herman presents Elizabeth with a copy of *Timoleon* in which he writes: "To Her—without whose assistance both manual and literary *Timoleon & c* could not have passed through the press—with her name I gratefully and affectionately inscribe this volume."

August: Elizabeth makes a fair copy of *Weeds and Wildings: With a Rose or Two* for the printer. Melville is failing fast but still plays with his grandchildren.

September: Toward the end of the month, Melville declines rapidly.

September 28: Just after midnight, Melville suffers a heart attack and dies, leaving *Billy Budd* and

several poems, including *Weeds and Wildings*, in manuscript. Elizabeth keeps the papers in a tin breadbox. Congress finally passes a law respecting international copyright, nearly 40 years after Melville and other writers agitated for its passage.

1892

Walt Whitman dies.

1906

Catherine Gansevoort Melville Hoadley, Melville's sister, dies. Fanny and Eleanor, Melville's grandchildren, become custodians of his papers.

1924

Billy Budd is published.

MELVILLE AND HAWTHORNE

A number of Melville's letters to his friend Nathaniel Hawthorne have survived. The following three are of particular interest. They were written in 1851, the year *Moby-Dick* was published.

Melville wrote the following to Hawthorne in early June 1851

My Dear Hawthorne,—I should have been rumbling down to you in my pine-board chariot a long time ago, were it not that for some weeks past I have been more busy than you can well imagine,—out of doors,—building and patching and tinkering away in all directions. Besides, I had my crops to get in,—corn and potatoes (I hope to show you some famous ones by and by),—and many other things to attend to, all accumulating upon this one particular season. I work myself; and at night my bodily sensations are akin to those I have so often felt before, when a hired man, doing my day's work from sun to sun. But I mean to continue visiting you until you tell me that my visits are both supererogatory and superfluous. With no son of man do I stand upon any etiquette or ceremony, except the Christian ones of charity and honesty. I am told, my fellow-man, that there is an aristocracy of the brain. Some men have boldly advocated and asserted it. Schiller seems to have done so, though I don't know much about him. At any rate, it is true that there have been those who, while earnest in behalf of political equality, will accept the intellectual estates. And I can well perceive, I think, how a man of superior mind can, by its intense cultivation, bring himself, as it were, into a certain spontaneous aristocracy of feel-

ing,—exceedingly nice and fastidious,—similar to that which, in an English Howard, conveys a torpedo-fish thrill at the slightest contact with a social plebian. So, when you see or hear of my ruthless democracy on all sides, you may possibly feel a touch of a shrink, or something of that sort. It is but nature to be shy of a mortal who boldly declares that a thief in jail is as honorable a personage as Gen. George Washington. This is ludicrous. But Truth is the silliest thing under the sun. Try to get a living by the Truth—and go to the Soup Societies. Heavens! Let any clergyman try to preach the Truth from its very stronghold, the pulpit, and they would ride him out of his church on his own pulpit bannister. It can hardly be doubted that all Reformers are bottomed upon the truth, more or less; and to the world at large are not reformers almost universally laughingstocks? Why so? Truth is ridiculous to men. Thus easily in my room here do I, conceited and garrulous, reverse the test of my Lord Shaftesbury.

It seems an inconsistency to assert unconditional democracy in all things, and yet confess a dislike to all mankind—in the mass. But not so.—But it's an endless sermon,—no more of it. I began by saying that the reason I have not been to Lenox is this,—in the evening I feel completely done up, as the phrase is, and incapable of the long jolting to get to your house and back. In a week or so, I go to New York, to bury myself in a third-story room, and work and slave on my "Whale" while it is driving through the press. *That* is the only way I can finish it now,—I am so pulled hither and thither by circumstances. The calm, the coolness, the

silent grass-growing mood in which a man *ought* always to compose,—that, I fear, can seldom be mine. Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is forever grinning in upon me, holding the door ajar. My dear Sir, a presentiment is on me,—I shall at last be worn out and perish, like an old nutmeg-grater, grated to pieces by the constant attrition of the wood, that is, the nutmeg. What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,—it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches. I'm rather sore, perhaps, in this letter, but see my hand!—four blisters on this palm, made by hoes and hammers within the last few days. It is a rainy morning; so I am indoors, and all work suspended. I feel cheerfully disposed, and therefore I write a little bluely. Would the Gin were here! If ever, my dear Hawthorne, in the eternal times that are to come, you and I shall sit down in Paradise, in some little shady corner by ourselves; and if we shall by any means be able to smuggle a basket of champagne there (I won't believe in a Temperance Heaven), and if we shall then cross our celestial legs in the celestial grass that is forever tropical, and strike our glasses and our heads together, till both musically ring in concert,—then, O my dear fellow-mortal, how shall we pleasantly discourse of all the things manifold which now so distress us,—when all the earth shall be but a reminiscence, yea, its final dissolution an antiquity. Then shall songs be composed as when wars are over; humorous, comic songs,—“Oh, when I lived in that queer little hole called the world,” or, “Oh, when I toiled and sweated below,” or, “Oh, when I knocked and was knocked in the fight”—yes, let us look forward to such things. Let us swear that, though now we sweat, yet it is because of the dry heat which is indispensable to the nourishment of the vine which is to bear the grapes that are to give us the champagne hereafter.

But I was talking about the “Whale.” As the fishermen say, “he's in his flurry” when I left him some three weeks ago. I'm going to take him by his jaw, however, before long, and finish

him up in some fashion or other. What's the use of elaborating what, in its very essence, is so short-lived as a modern book? Though I wrote the Gospels in this century, I should die in the gutter.—I talk all about myself, and this is selfishness and egotism. Granted. But how help it? I am writing to you; I know little about you, but something about myself so I write about myself,—at least, to you. Don't trouble yourself, though, about writing; and don't trouble yourself about visiting; and when you *do* visit, don't trouble yourself about talking. I will do all the writing and visiting and talking myself—By the way, in the last “Dollar Magazine” I read “The Unpardonable Sin.” He was a sad fellow, that Ethan Brand. I have no doubt you are by this time responsible for many a shake and tremor of the tribe of “general readers.” It is a frightful poetical creed that the cultivation of the brain eats out the heart. But it's my *prose* opinion that in most cases, in those men who have fine brains and work them well, the heart extends down to hams. And though you smoke them with the fire of tribulation, yet, like veritable hams, the head only gives the richer and the better flavor. I stand for the heart. To the dogs with the head! I had rather be a fool with a heart, than Jupiter Olympus with his head. The reason the mass of men fear God, and *at bottom dislike* Him, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch. (You perceive I employ a capital initial in the pronoun referring to the Deity; don't you think there is a slight dash of flunkeyism in that usage?) Another thing. I was in New York for four-and-twenty hours the other day, and saw a portrait of N.H. And I have seen and heard many flattering (in a publisher's point of view) allusions to the “Seven Gables.” And I have seen “Tales,” and “A New Volume” announced, by N.H. So upon the whole, I say to myself, this N.H. is in the ascendant. My dear Sir, they begin to patronize. All Fame is patronage. Let me be infamous: there is no patronage in *that*. What “reputation” H.M. has is horrible. Think of it! To go down to posterity is bad enough, any way; but to go down as a

“man who lived among the cannibals”! When I speak of posterity, in reference to myself, I only mean the babies who will probably be born in the moment immediately ensuing upon my giving up the ghost. I shall go down to some of them, in all likelihood. *Typee* will be given to them, perhaps, with their gingerbread. I have come to regard this matter of Fame as the most transparent of all vanities. I read Solomon more and more, and every time see deeper and deeper and unspeakable meanings in him. I did not think of Fame, a year ago, as I do now. My development has been all within a few years past. I am like one of those seeds taken out of the Egyptian Pyramids, which, after being three thousand years a seed and nothing but a seed, being planted in English soil, it developed itself, grew to greenness, and then fell to mould. So I. Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life. Three weeks have scarcely passed, at any time between then and now, that I have not unfolded within myself. But I feel that I am now come to the inmost leaf of the bulb, and that shortly the flower must fall to the mould. It seems to be now that Solomon was the truest man who ever spoke, and yet that he a little *managed* the truth with a view to popular conservatism; or else there have been many corruptions and interpolations of the text.—In reading some of Goethe’s sayings, so worshipped by his votaries, I came across this, “*Live in the all.*” That is to say, your separate identity is but a wretched one,—good; but get out of yourself, spread and expand yourself, and bring to yourself the tinglings of life that are felt in the flowers and the woods, that are felt in the planets Saturn and Venus, and the Fixed Stars. What nonsense! Here is a fellow with a raging toothache. “My dear boy,” Goethe says to him, “you are sorely afflicted with that tooth; but you must *live in the all*, and then you will be happy!” As with all great genius, there is an immense deal of flummery in Goethe, and in proportion to my own contact with him, a monstrous deal of it in me.

H. Melville.

P.S. “Amen!” saith Hawthorne.

N.B. This “all” feeling, though, there is some truth in. You must often have felt it, lying on the grass on a warm summer’s day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels like leaves upon your head. This is the *all* feeling. But what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion.

P.S. You must not fail to admire my discretion in paying the postage on this letter

Melville wrote the following to Hawthorne in late June 1851

My dear Hawthorne—The clear air and open window invite me to write to you. For some time past I have been so busy with a thousand things that I have almost forgotten when I wrote you last, and whether I received an answer. This most persuasive season has now for weeks recalled me from certain crotchety and over doleful chimearas, the like of which men like you and me and some others, forming a chain of God’s posts round the world, must be content to encounter now and then, and fight them the best way we can. But come they will,—for, in the boundless, trackless, but still glorious wild wilderness through which these outposts run, the Indians do sorely abound, as well as the insignificant but still stinging mosquitoes. Since you have been here, I have been building some shanties of houses (connected with the old one) and likewise some shanties of chapters and essays. I have been plowing and sowing and raising and painting and printing and praying,—and now begin to come out upon a less bustling time, and to enjoy the calm prospect of things from a fair piazza at the north of the old farm house here.

Not entirely yet, though, am I without something to be urgent with. The “Whale” is only half through the press; for, wearied with the long delay of the printers, and disgusted with the heat and dust of the babylonish brick-kiln of New York, I came back to the country to feel the grass—and end the book reclining on it, if I may.—I am sure you will pardon this speaking all about myself, for if I say so much on

that head, be sure all the rest of the world are thinking about themselves ten times as much. Let us speak, although we show all our faults and weaknesses,—for it is a sign of strength to be weak, to know it, and out with it,—not in [a] set way and ostentatiously, though, but incidentally and without premeditation.—But I am falling into my old foible—preaching. I am busy, but shall not be very long. Come and spend a day here, if you can and want to; if not, stay in Lenox, and God give you long life. When I am quite free of my present engagements, I am going to treat myself to a ride and a visit to you. Have ready a bottle of brandy, because I always feel like drinking that heroic drink when we talk ontological heroics together. This is rather a crazy letter in some respects, I apprehend. If so, ascribe it to the intoxicating effects of the latter end of June operating upon a very susceptible and peradventure feeble temperament.

Shall I send you a fin of the *Whale* by way of a specimen mouthful? The tail is not yet cooked—though the hell-fire in which the whole book is broiled might not unreasonably have cooked it all ere this. This is the book's motto (the secret one),—Ego non baptiso te in nomine—but make out the rest yourself.

H.M.

Melville wrote the following to Hawthorne in November 1851

My Dear Hawthorne,—People think that if a man has undergone any hardship, he should have a reward; but for my part, if I have done the hardest possible day's work, and then come to sit down in a corner and eat my supper comfortably—why, then I don't think I deserve any reward for my hard day's work—for am I not now at peace? Is not my supper good? My peace and my supper are my reward, my dear Hawthorne. So your joy-giving and exultation-breeding letter is not my reward for my ditcher's work with that book, but is the good goddess's bonus over and above what was stipulated—for for not one man in five cycles, who is wise, will expect appreciative recognition from his fellows, or any one of them. Appreciation! Rec-

ognition! Is love appreciated? Why, ever since Adam, who has got to the meaning of this great allegory—the world? Then we pygmies must be content to have our paper allegories but ill comprehended. I say your appreciation is my glorious gratuity. In my proud, humble way,—a shepherd-king,—I was lord of a little vale in the solitary Crimea; but you have now given me the crown of India. But on trying it on my head, I found it fell down on my ears, notwithstanding their asinine length—for it's only such ears that sustain such crowns.

Your letter was handed me last night on the road going to Mr. Morewood's, and I read it there. Had I been at home, I would have sat down at once and answered it. In me divine magnanimities are spontaneous and instantaneous—catch them while you can. The world goes round, and the other side comes up. So now I can't write what I felt. But I felt pantheistic then—your heart beat in my ribs and mine in yours, and both in God's. A sense of unspeakable security is in me this moment, on account of your having understood the book. I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb. Ineffable socialities are in me. I would sit down and dine with you and all the gods in old Rome's Pantheon. It is a strange feeling—no hopefulness is in it, no despair. Content—that is it; and irresponsibility; but without licentious inclination. I speak now of my profoundest sense of being, not of an incidental feeling.

Whence come you, Hawthorne? By what right do you drink from my flagon of life? And when I put it to my lips—lo, they are yours and not mine. I feel that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the Supper, and that we are the pieces. Hence this infinite fraternity of feeling. Now, sympathizing with the paper, my angel turns over another page. You did not care a penny for the book. But, now and then as you read, you understood the pervading thought that impelled the book—and that you praised. Was it not so? You were archangel enough to despise the imperfect body, and embrace the soul. Once you hugged the ugly Socrates

because you saw the flame in the mouth, and heard the rushing of the demon,—the familiar,—and recognized the sound; for you have heard it in your own solitudes.

My dear Hawthorne, the atmospheric skepticisms steal into me now, and make me doubtful of my sanity in writing you thus. But, believe me, I am not mad, most noble Festus! But truth is ever incoherent, and when the big hearts strike together, the concussion is a little stunning. Farewell. Don't write a word about the book. That would be robbing me of my miserly delight. I am heartily sorry I ever wrote anything about you—it was paltry. Lord, when shall we be done growing? As long as we have anything more to do, we have done nothing. So, now, let us add *Moby Dick* to our blessing, and step from that. Leviathan is not the biggest fish;—I have heard of Krakens.

This is a long letter, but you are not at all bound to answer it. Possibly, if you do answer it, and direct it to Herman Melville, you will mis-send it—for the very fingers that now guide this pen are not precisely the same that just took it up and put it on this paper. Lord, when shall we be done changing? Ah! it's a long stage, and no inn in sight, and night coming, and the body

cold. But with you for a passenger, I am content and can be happy. I shall leave the world, I feel, with more satisfaction for having come to know you. Knowing you persuades me more than the Bible of our immortality.

What a pity, that, for your plain, bluff letter, you should get such gibberish! Mention me to Mrs. Hawthorne and to the children, and so, good-by to you, with my blessing.

Herman.

P.S. I can't stop yet. If the world was entirely made up of Magians, I'll tell you what I should do. I should have a paper-mill established at one end of the house, and so have an endless riband of foolscap rolling in upon my desk; and upon that endless riband I should write a thousand—a million—billion thoughts, all under the form of a letter to you. The divine magnet is on you, and my magnet responds. Which is the biggest? A foolish question—they are *One*.

H.

P.P.S. Don't think that by writing me a letter, you shall always be bored with an immediate reply to it—and so keep both of us delving over a writing-desk eternally. No such thing! I sh'n't always answer your letters, and you may do just as you please.