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The Holy Guide-Book and the Sword of the Lord: How Melville Used the Bible in Redburn and White-Jacket

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THE HOLY GUIDE-BOOK AND THE SWORD OF THE LORD: HOW MELVILLE USED THE BIBLE IN *REDBURN* AND *WHITE-JACKET*

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In his first three books Herman Melville had assumed a variety of attitudes toward the Bible: he had embraced it, scowled at it, queried it, mimicked it, and cribbed from it—as he would continue doing throughout his long career as a novelist and poet. For Melville scripture remained a currency no less subject to the vagaries of individual perception than the Ecuadorian doubloon nailed to the *Pequod*'s mainmast—and no less valuable as a Rorschach, as I hope to illustrate in this study of character-related biblical allusion in his fourth and fifth books, *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*. A pair of counterpoised sentiments should serve as an introductory example.
Redburn looks:

> Ah! what are our creeds, and how do we hope to be saved? Tell me, oh Bible, that story of Lazarus again, that I may find comfort in my heart for the poor and forlorn.[1]

White-Jacket looks:

> Imagine an outcast old sailor seriously cherishing the purely speculative conceit that some bully in epaulets, who orders him to and fro like a slave, is of an organization [i.e., "having no soul to save"] immeasurably inferior to himself; must at last perish with the brutes, while he goes to his immortality in heaven. (p. 219)

Two sailors orient their Gospel sympathies: "Alas!" says Redburn as his assaulted sensibility gets a balm. "Don't be fools!" White-Jacket says: he shunts consolatory piety because it puts a drag on reform. In short, even though the New Testament grounds judgment in both books—Redburn and White-Jacket references their exposés to it—the sailors define quite different limits and directions of responsibility. Redburn's is a passive consciousness;

events pass before him, and he transforms them inward into psychological drama and outward into conscience fodder. The rhetoric generated by the latter process is ultimately informed by Redburn's self-pity, which he projects, incompletely, through Gospel imperatives and onto society's outcasts. He internalizes scripture, identifies its message and his sensibility, diminishing the politics of Jesus to the meager compass of his own impotent sentimentality. White-Jacket's consciousness is by contrast active; he compounds experience into affective rhetoric, translates his observations into biblical metaphor to incite action. *Redburn* is discursive complaint, *White-Jacket* focused polemic. To Redburn the Bible is a "Holy Guide-Book"—a Friendship's Offering; to White-Jacket it is a manifesto—the sword of the Spirit.

This essay widens Nathalia Wright's limited treatment of *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* in *Melville's Use of the Bible* in an investigation of Melville's use of biblical material in sharpening the contrast between two ethical sensibilities, each of which has already received a measure of fruitful critical attention.[2] Certainly no consensus has affirmed sweeping differences between the narrators' minds: we need not summarize again the contention of pioneer Melville scholars that the books are thinly-veiled autobiography and perforce share one informing mind (though that mind evinces maturation), but James E. Miller, Jr., has more recently affirmed that *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* "form a single whole through the unified development of the protagonist and the informing sensibility of the author."[3] Most recent critics, however, have granted these narrators a fair degree of autonomy while articulating divergent views of their relative formal integrity, intellectual limitations, and goodness.

Among these critics fundamentally sympathetic to Redburn, Heinz Kosok details the sailor's moral growth in terms of redirection of his pity from self to society,[4] and James Schroeter argues that *Redburn* is a tale of healing, as the "Son-of-a-Gentleman" is cured of smugness and narrowness to become a "classless voyager."[5] Both critics view the emerging reflective voice of the older Redburn as salubrious guide to an irony-rich condemnation of the youthful sailor's fatuousness, but a number of critics, whose observations appear further justified in this study, voice doubts about the ethical reliability of the maturer voice as well. Edgar A. Dryden says that Redburn "returns home apparently wiser but basically unchanged,"[6] and Warner Berthoff sees "no spiritual transformation" in Redburn.[7] Focusing on an element of passivity and detachment in Redburn, Newton Arvin suggests that he "remains too much the mere victim, embittered but not very resistant,"[8] and Terrence G. Lish notes that he avoids involvement in evil, thereby denying his brotherhood with mankind.[9] Both John Seelye and H. Bruce Franklin focus on the unflattering implications of Redburn's leaving Harry Bolton to fend for himself in America; Seelye concludes that such an act "appears to qualify the apparent improvement in [Redburn's] character" and proves that he is still "a prig at

heart."[10] Finally, in an astute (if somewhat ingenious) analysis of levels of meaning in *Redburn*, Lawrance Thompson holds that even as we share the older Redburn's amusement at his youthful priggishness and shallow religiosity, we in turn must recognize the inadequacy of his supposedly more enlightened piety.[11]

The character of White-Jacket remains somewhat more elusive, for in general he dissolves into the body of his sentiments. Familiar interpretations of *White-Jacket* as depicting the narrator's fall from innocence have often neglected to emphasize the problematic tension between his democratic professions and his elitist gestures.[12] Larry J. Reynolds, in an examination of "antidemocratic emphasis" in the book, asserts that the narrator has "aristocratic pretentions" in that he "accepts and embraces the common sailors as equals, [but] in practice he disdains them and aligns himself with a few select individuals of social and intellectual distinction."[13] Using the methods of reader-response criticism, Wai-chee S. Dimock accounts for this discrepancy with an explanation of Melville's adherence to the convention of the "respectable narrator," who, in order to maintain the respect of the ordinary reader Melville courted with his "job" of a book, had to be removed by class, education, and sensibility from the vices surrounding him.[14] Although Dimock misreads several clumsy and inflated passages as spiteful assaults on readers whose sensibilities Melville was compelled to accommodate, his analysis of Melville's rhetorical skill in manipulating middle-brow sympathy for White-Jacket clarifies the context in which the apprentice writer issues a diatribe against the evils of the man-of-war world—a context of rhetorical "comradeship" between narrator and reader, in which "Melville the reformer is confident and relentless because presumably there exists a bond of shared sentiments and beliefs between him and his readers which gives him the license to speak out."[15] Such a rhetorical strategy, Dimock points out, counteracts, to a certain degree, the political friction necessary to stir the reader out of complacency, for "by localizing the seat of the malaise" in the man-of-war world Melville "enables his readers to condemn the reprehensible without feeling they are a part of it."[16] In an absolute sense I think we must acknowledge the polemical limitations of *White-Jacket*, yet in so doing we must view its narrator, relative to Redburn, as someone whose language strikes nearer the source of change. As Newton Arvin says, "morally speaking . . . *White-Jacket* has a higher *relievo* and a more complex truth than *Redburn*. There is the moral relief of goodness in *Redburn* but it is too largely associated with passiveness. . . . [we] feel the vein of iron in White-Jacket as we never feel it in Redburn."[17] Even if the character of White-Jacket remains disappointingly obscure in the finer points, our access to that character through his polemics reveals salient features of his moral perception.

In *White-Jacket* and *Redburn* Melville tacked away from Mardi, headed on purpose for the "vulgar shoals" where the money lay. The two books he

hammered out in the summer of forty-nine share a relatively comfortable orthodoxy at the level of belief: neither of the narrators seriously questions the veracity of scripture. Redburn thinks wrestling with such matters silly; White-Jacket cannot risk undermining his rhetoric. The relocation of Melville's concern, from metaphysical investigation in *Mardi* to psychological drama and hortatory persuasion in *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* respectively, signals a concession in the philosophical search for truth but not in the exposition of a rather closely defined kind of moral choice. We may balk at the logistics of Melville's didacticism, defend his integrity by labelling the works cynical, but though stylistically flawed and metaphysically narrow, *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* operate to varying degrees on the moral imperatives of the Sermon on the Mount and may therefore be said to share more than a few of Melville's own moral assumptions. If the books cheat, it is because they are reductive. Good and evil are more distinct here than in most of Melville's later work.

So much common ground *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* occupy, and such are the restrictions of Melville's concerns. Although these qualifications diminish the ethical distance separating Wellingborough Redburn and White-Jacket in the larger scheme of Melville's fiction, his method of drawing from scripture to define contrasting modes of perception in the two books remains no less intriguing.

I

In the context of Redburn's orthodoxy the Bible is an unquestioned guide to conduct rather than a mysterious and provocative repository of thought, as it had been for the questers throughout the greater part of *Mardi*. Redburn quickly dismisses his own uncertaintly about the Jonah story (p. 96), and assures the *Highlander's* black cook, Mr. Thompson, who puzzles fitfully over a "mysterious passage in the Book of Chronicles" (the miraculous appearance of Uzziah's leprosy in 2 Chron. 26:19?), that "it was a mystery . . . no one could explain; not even a parson" (p. 82). In fact, Thompson's earnestness and intellectual curiosity tickle a proud young Redburn because these qualities are excesses in the realm of Christian acceptance, excesses, Redburn implies, to which a black man may be prone.

The central biblical theme of *Redburn* is stated explicitly by the older, reflective Redburn, who relates having discovered his Liverpool guide-book to be anachronistic and unreliable and counseling himself: "Every age makes its own guide-books, and the old ones are used for waste paper. But there is one Holy Guide-Book, Wellingborough, that will never lead you astray, if you but follow it aright" (p. 157). And as what did he rise from the stoop where he had thus been meditating? "A sadder and wiser boy." Although in the course of the novel Redburn rejects the pretty moral restrictions of the

Juvenile Total Abstinence Association and the Anti-Smoking Society, his trust in the Bible as a guide to sympathy and moral judgment is unwavering.

Despite drawing Thompson as a comic character, young Redburn seems drolly to approve of the cook's admonishing the steward with scripture:

> And sometimes Mr. Thompson would take down his Bible, and read a chapter for the edification of Lavender, whom he knew to be a sad profligate and gay deceiver ashore; addicted to every youthful indiscretion. He would read over to him the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife [Joseph resisted her sexual advances; Gen. 39]; and hold Joseph up to him as a young man of excellent principles, whom he ought to imitate, and not be guilty of his indescretion any more. (p.83)

When the grown Redburn recalls having witnessed firsthand the profligacy of the sailors in Liverpool, however, he has stronger feelings about the benefits and methods of spiritual ministry. Because sailors are "moved by the plainest of precepts, and demonstrations of the misery of sin," and because they are loath to enter even the floating chapels," only those preachers are effective who speak in the streets and eschew "mere rhetoric" and "tropes":

> the true calling of the reverend clergy is like their divine Master's;—not to bring the righteous, but sinners to repentence [e.g., Matt. 9:13]. Did some of them leave the converted and comfortable congregations, before whom they have ministered year after year; and plunge at once, like St. Paul, into the infected centers and hearts of vice: *then* indeed, would they find a strong enemy to cope with. . . . Better to save one sinner from an obvious vice that is destroying him, than to indoctrinate ten thousand saints. . . . [Just as Catholic shrines remind the traveler of heaven] even so should Protestant pulpits be founded in the the market-places, and at street corners, where the men of God might be heard by all of His children. (p. 176)

Young Redburn's initiation into the vicious world of Liverpool progresses rapidly at this point. The rather facile practical connection drawn by the reflective voice between the dissemination of scripture and the remedy of vice proves inadequate in the familiar episode involving his unsuccessful attempts to obtain aid for a starving woman and her children. This narrative indicts an entire society for its lack of Christian charity, whether the society's nominal excuse is bureaucratic (no policeman claims the beat) or moralistic (she deserves her fate for being unmarried). Because everyone is responsible for her condition—he who deserted her, she for obliging him, the government for failing to provide shelter, the clergy for ruthlessness toward sinners—no one takes responsibility. This situation overloads the "maturer" Redburn's moral curcuits:

> Ah! what are our creeds, and how do we hope to be saved? Tell me, oh Bible, that story of Lazarus again [Luke 16], that I may find comfort in my heart for the poor and forlorn. Surrounded as we are by the wants and woes of our fellow-men, and yet given to follow our own pleasures, regardless of their pains, are we not like people sitting up with a corpse, and making merry in the house of the dead? (p. 184; Luke 15:32)

Despite Redburn's admirable sentiments, he avoids rather than engages the ethical problem at hand; such a response vitiates the preceding narrative, for Redburn, powerless to remedy the situation himself, diffuses the guilt so widely as to cancel the reader's indignation and suggest that the Liverpool beggars, like the Lazarus of Jesus' parable, will wind up in the bosom of Abraham (Luke 16:19-31). In other words, Redburn relocates our sympathy in the course of this episode: because sympathy for the woman finds no clear directive in indignation, he internalizes the episode so that we look instead upon the quality of his sentiment. To gauge the political impact of this brand of piety we need only note Redburn's silence about the fate of Dives.

In similar fashion Redburn's response to the Dock-wall beggars (apparently related with a mixture of child-like simplicity and adult sophistication) takes the form of an all-embracing compassion which as a result of his powerlessness to act on it is expressed in biblical fantasizing:

> As I daily passed through this lane of beggars, who thronged the docks as the Hebrew cripples did the Pool of Bethesda [John 5:1-4], and as I thought of my utter inability in any way to help them, I could not but offer up a prayer, that some angel might descend, and turn the waters of the docks into an elixir, that would heal all their woes, and make them, man and woman, healthy and whole as their ancestors, Adam and Eve, in the garden.
>
> Adam and Eve! If indeed ye are yet alive and in heaven, may it be no part of your immortality to look down upon the world ye have left. For as all these sufferers and cripples are as much your family as young Abel [Gen. 4], so, to you, the sight of the world's woes would be a parental torment indeed. (p. 188)

The explicitly directed political indignation that had fired Melville's attacks on misguided missionaries in *Typee* and *Omoo* and on British imperialism in *Mardi* is entirely absent from this chapter (38). Redburn is of course sympathetic to the beggars, and his depiction of their condition may evoke a "Christian" response, but his treatment of their situation smacks of the exculpatory apologetics of modern reactionary politicians who invoke Jesus' statement, "the poor always ye have with you."

Not suprisingly, an adult Redburn waxes rhapsodical when his pie-in-the-sky piety finds a convenient political out in edenic figurations of America. Sounding the brass and tinkling the cymbal of scripture-charged rhetoric, Redburn celebrates his homeland as a haven for people of all nationalities

and as a future paradise—a conventional prophecy whose optimism Melville had rejected in *Mardi*'s Vivenzan scroll. Concerning the multitude of nationalities in America, Redburn says that

> the European who scoffs at an American, calls his own brother *Raca* [worthless one], and stands in danger of the judgment [Matt. 5:22, marked in Melville's N.T.]. . . . We are not a nation, so much as a world; for unless we may claim all the world for our sire, like Melchisedec [who was "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life," Heb. 7:3], we are without father or mother. . . . On this Western Hemisphere all tribes and people are forming into one federated whole; and there is a future which shall see the estranged children of Adam restored as to the old hearth-stone in Eden.
>
> The other world beyond this, which was longed for by the devout before Columbus' time, was found in the New; and the deep-sea-lead, that first struck these soundings, brought up the soil of Earth's Paradise. Not a Paradise then, or now; but to be made so, at God's good pleasure, and in the fullness and mellowness of time. The seed is sown, and the harvest must come; and our children's children, on the world's jubilee morning, shall all go with their sickles to the reaping [e.g., Matt. 25:24]. Then shall the curse of Babel [Gen. 11:9] be revoked, a new Pentecost come, and the language they shall speak shall be the language of Britain. Frenchmen, and Danes, and Scots; and the dwellers on the shores of the Mediterranean, and in the regions round about; Italians, and Indians, and Moors; there shall appear unto them cloven tongues as of fire [Acts 2:3]. (p. 169)

Here is the political extrapolation of Redburn's escapist piety—a jeremiad excised of obligation. To whatever extent Redburn may extend the boundaries of Christian awareness by vividly depicting the woes of a part of society normally outside the pale of concern, his distractive use of scripture numbs the conscience aroused by the Liverpool scenes: Pity and political resolve are mitotic. Melville's next narrator, White-Jacket, proves that scripture as a propagandistic tool can be employed to fuse the two responses to inhumanity.

II

A more perceptive sailor than Redburn (as a youth or a grown man), White-Jacket well understands the futility of Redburn's brand of consolatory piety, evinced particularly in the Lazarus-rich man meditation; the main-topman explicitly scorns such escapism in the passage opening this essay. Both narrators invoke the teachings of Jesus in their condemnations of inhumanity, but in White-Jacket's hands the New Testament is more than a guide-book to life; it is a revolutionary's manifesto. His systematic denunciations of all the evils of the "man-of-war world"—tyranny, cruelty, even war itself—are predicated on the book whose ideals his culture both espouses and ignores,

and this charge of hypocrisy, by virtue of its grounding in divine authority, serves him as a powerful propagandistic tool.

The biblical theme driving *White-Jacket* is that the man-of-war world operates on a set of principles repugnant to any Christian who sincerely accepts the commands of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Melville respected the Sermon for its gentleness, wisdom, and hard-headedness; he couched praise for Shakespeare with this comparison—"he's full of sermons-on-the-mount, and gentle, aye, almost as Jesus"[18]—and he attacked Emerson's blithe assertion in "Spiritual Laws,"—"The good, compared to the evil which [a man] sees, is as his own good to his own evil"—thus: "But what did Christ see?—he saw what made him weep. . . . To annihilate all this nonsense read the Sermon on the Mount, and consider what it implies."[19] Melville marked large sections of the Sermon in Matthew 5, including the pivotal verses 39 and 44: "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . Love your enemies, bless them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."[20] White-Jacket considers these commands binding:

> He on whom we believe *himself* has enjoined us to turn the left cheek if the right be smitten. Never mind what follows. That passage you can not expunge from the Bible; that passage is as binding upon us as any other; that passage embodies the soul and substance of the Christian faith; without it, Christianity were like any other faith. (p. 320)

The Sermon serves as text for White-Jacket's Bible-thumping polemic leveled at the evils and abuses of power in the man-of-the-war world. At the heart of this jeremiad lies no less a charge than national hypocrisy. He bases his pleas for reform upon America's Christian ideals, and therefore packages a radical message in biblical rhetoric; he channels sentimental appeal into biblical directive.

The ship-as-microcosm convention enables White-Jacket to give the *Neversink* its own deity (Captain Claret) and its own set of divine commandments (the Articles of War); in so doing, he depicts the American war machine's symbolic usurpation of God's prerogatives:

> I stood before by lord and master [John 13:14], Captain Claret, and heard these Articles read as the law and gospel, the infallible, unappealable dispensation and code, whereby I lived, and moved, and had my being [Acts 17:28] on board of the United States ship Neversink. (p. 292; fitly, the latter phrase, applied to Jesus, appears in Paul's sermon on Mars' Hill.)

The misruled microcosm recurs as a motif in White-Jacket's polemic. Here he comments with bitter irony on the Articles of War:

> But it needs not to dilate upon the pure, bubbling milk of human kindness, and Christian charity, and forgiveness of injuries which pervade this charming document, so thoroughly imbued, as a Christian code, with the benignant spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. (p. 293)

And,

> Christianity has taught me that, at the last day, man-of-war's-men will not be judged by the *Articles of War*, nor by the *United States Statutes at Large*, but by immutable laws, ineffably beyond the comprehension of the honorable Board of Commodores and Navy Commissioners. (p. 188)

When White-Jacket is unjustly accused of negligence and faces a flogging, his righteous indignation threatens to overwhelm his Christian resolve as he prepares to break through the law of the microcosm and appeal to a higher authority: "I meant to drag Captain Claret from this earthly tribunal of his to that of Jehovah, and let Him decide between us" (p. 280). (White-Jacket's crisis and his reflections upon the *Neversink*'s misruled microcosm look forward to Vere's defense of military law in *Billy Budd*, an argument whose salt irony lies in the Captain's assurance that Billy will be acquitted at the "Last Assizes.") If the laws governing sailors constitute an illegitimate gospel, the omnipotent administrators of the laws, White-Jacket observes, are exempt from their penalties. He wonders, "is the Captain a creature of like passions with ourselves?" (p. 301), an allusion to St. Paul's protestations to the citizens of Lycaonia that he was not a god, but a man of "like passions with you" (Acts 14:15).

In two more instances, White-Jacket uses biblical phrasing, in ironic contexts, to cast the rules of the man-of-war world in deiform roles. When the *Neversink*, just out of harbor in Rio, takes part in a sailing race, its sailors are ordered to carry shot to the forepart of the ship and hold them, in order to trim the vessel most efficiently. White-Jacket observes that "the comfort and consolation of all make-weights is as dust in the balance in the estimation of the rulers of our man-of-war world" (p. 272), just as, in Isaiah, "the nations *are* . . . counted as the small dust of the balance [by the Spirit of the Lord] (40:15). And he borrows a Pauline phrase, "we suffer with [Christ] that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17), to chastise the gods of the *Neversink* for imperiling the lives of sailors in furling contests: "And thus do *the people* of the gun-deck suffer, that the Commodore on the poop may be glorified" (p. 197). An explicit statement of the confusion of deities occurs in White-Jacket's commentary on Jack Chase's celebrative narrative of the victory of the British fleet at Navarino: "in relating the story of the Battle of Navarino, he plainly showed that he held the God of the blessed Bible to have been the British Commodore. . . . And thus it would seem that war almost makes blasphemers of the best of men" (p. 320).

The broader pacifistic arguments in *White-Jacket* stem from a previously mentioned theme which, as Howard P. Vincent has shown in his study of the literacy sources of the novel, Melville probably encountered in Samuel Leech's *Thirty Years from Home*. In Leech, Vincent says, "Melville also saw his larger theme, the ironic clash of Christian ideals and Christian practices."[21] Melville entitled Chapter 75, which contains Chase's Navarino narrative, "Sink, Burn, and Destroy." This chapter owes much to a passage from Leech: "Such is the war-spirit! SINK, BURN, and DESTROY! how it sounds! Yet such are the instructions given by Christian (?) nations to their agents in time of war. What Christian will not pray for the destruction of such a spirit?"[22] The "war-spirit," according to White-Jacket, is the *sine qua non* of all the particular evils infesting the *Neversink*—tyranny, vice, flogging, and blasphemy: "war is a thing that smites common sense and Christianity in the face; so every thing connected with it is utterly foolish, unchristian, barbarous, brutal, and savoring of the Feejee Islands, cannibalism, saltpetre, and the devil" (p. 315).

A mother lode of irony lies beneath the practice of religion aboard the *Neversink*, whose boatswain's-mates drive sailors to prayers with curses (p. 156). The following passage is reminiscent of Melville's attacks on the missionaries in *Typee* and *Omoo*, and on Bello's imperialistic Christianity in *Mardi*:

> Now, [the] captain of the bow-chaser was an upright old man [cf. Job 1:11], a sincere, humble believer, and he but earned his bread in being captain of that gun; but how, with those hands of his begrimed with powder, could he break that *other* and most peaceful and penitent bread of the Supper? though in that hallowed sacrament, it seemed, he had often partaken ashore. The omission of this rite in a man-of-war—though there is a chaplain to preside over it, and at least a few communicants to partake—must be ascribed to a sense of religious propriety, in the last degree to be commended.
>
> Ah! the best righteousness of our man-of-war world seems but an unrealized ideal, after all; and those maxims which, in the hope of bringing about a Millennium [Rev. 20:1-7], we busily teach to the heathen, we Christians ourselves disregard. In view of the whole present social framework of our world, so ill adapted to the practical adoption of the meekness of Christianity, there seems almost some ground for the thought, that although our blessed Savior was full of the wisdom of heaven, yet his gospel seems lacking in the practical wisdom of earth—in a due appreciation of the necessities of nations at times demanding bloody massacres and wars. (p. 324)

And concerning the bounty paid to clergyman for ships sunk, White-Jacket wonders:

> How can it be expected that the religion of peace should flourish in an oaken castle of war? How can it be expected that the clergymen, whose pulpit is a forty-two-pounder, should convert sinners to a faith that enjoins them to turn the right cheek when the left is smitten? . . . How is it to be expected that a clergyman, thus provided for, should prove efficacious in enlarging upon the criminality of Judas, who, for thirty pieces of silver, betrayed his Master? (p. 157; e.g., Matt. 26:15)

White-Jacket has gained perhaps its widest notoriety as an anti-flogging book. The narrator's vivid depictions of the punishment, drawn partly from Melville's reading in Leech and in *Two Years Before the Mast*, and partly from the 163 floggings he witnessed aboard the *United States* in 1843-44, create a dramatic vortex into which all the more abstract polemical energies of the novel are drawn. As with the other related topics of his diatribe, White-Jacket argues and illustrates from the Bible, citing the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) in his apology for dealing at length with the subject: "I would not be like the man, who, seeing an outcast perishing by the road-side, turned about to his friend, saying, "Let us cross the way; my soul so sickens at this sight, that I can not endure it" (p. 369). Melville copied verse 30, which contains a vivid picture of a flogged man, on the front fly-leaf of his New Testament: "And Jesus answering said, A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jerico [sic], and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead." With hyperbolic analogy White-Jacket evokes the sensation of witnessing a flogging:

> Indeed, to such a [sensitive] man the naval summons to witness punishment carries a thrill, somewhat akin to what one may impute to the quick and the dead, when they shall hear the Last Trump [e.g., 1 Cor. 15:52], that is to bid them all arise in their ranks, and behold the final penalties inflicted upon the sinners of our race. (p. 135)

He argues emotively that if nothing else, flogging is a profanation of a creature made in God's image (Gen. 1:26):

> And with these marks [of the cat-o-nine-tails] on his back, this image of his Creator must rise at the Last Day. . . . Join hands with me, then; and, in the name of that Being in whose image the flogged sailor is made, let us demand of Legislators, by what right they dare profane what God himself accounts sacred. (p. 142)

And he shames the American government for not according its sailor even the rights that St. Paul, as a Roman citizen, had exercised (Acts 22:25):

> Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman? asks the intrepid Apostle, well knowing, as a Roman citizen, that it was not. And now, eighteen hundred years after, is it lawful for you, my countrymen, to scourge a man that is an American? (p. 142)

Yet Captains and Commodores "take Bible oaths to it that [lashing] is indispensable" (p. 147), for the most part because it has been an integral part of the disciplinary system in which they are used to operating. Indeed, Vincent notes that the Navy collected 83 letters from captains as evidence in support of flogging, 80 of which predicted the collapse of the Navy should the practice be abolished.[23] It is this reactionary logic to which White-Jacket responds with an expansive exhortation, very much in the tradition of the American jeremiad, to throw off the sinful burden of the past and move toward a spiritually-informed political millennium:

> The Past is the text-book of tyrants; the Future the Bible of the Free. Those who are solely governed by the past stand like Lot's wife, crystallized in the act of looking backward [to Sodom and Gomorrah, Gen. 19:26], and forever incapable of looking before. . . . Escaped from the house of bondage [Exod. 13:3], Israel of old did not follow after the ways of the Egyptians. To her was given an express dispensation; to her were given new things under the sun [Eccl. 1:9]. And we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. Seventy years ago we escaped from thrall; and, besides our first birth-right [Gen. 25:33]—embracing one continent of earth—God had given to us, for a future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans, that shall yet come and lie down under the shade of our ark, without bloody hands being lifted. God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. . . . Long enough have we been skeptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in *us*, if we would but give utterance to his promptings. And let us always remember that with ourselves, almost for the first time in the history of earth, national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we can not do a good to America but we give alms to the world [Acts 24:17; Paul told Felix, "I came to bring alms to my nation"]. (pp. 150-51)

The climax of White-Jacket's diatribe against the misruled microcosm of the *Neversink,* this exhortation incorporates all the elements of the American jeremiad, whose nineteenth century form has been defined by Sacvan Bercovitch: he notes that writers of the American Renaissance frequently exploited the "combined forces of eschatology and chauvinism" explicit in the rhetoric of the jeremiad in "simultaneously lamenting a declension and celebrating a national dream."[24] We are familiar enough with Melville's skepticism toward the American myth to fix a healthy distance between the sailor-preacher's soaring rhetoric in this passage and his creator's opinion, but we recognize

that Melville could operate the moral scam like nobody's business precisely because he knew the metaphysics of his mark; whether one peddles Samaritan Pain Dissuader or political reform, the pitch—and this is the lesson of *The Confidence-Man*—must catalyze myth into action, it must coincide with the psychological moment when critical analysis kicks out and myth thinking kicks in. In America, eschatological fustian—Bible talk, usually—is crucial to the pitch, and for this reason Bible talk is both indispensible and dangerous. By appropriating biblical phraseology and types the social moralist like White-Jacket may achieve hortatory eloquence and effectiveness, but he does so at the cost of perpetuating an even more insidious brand of American vulnerability. The sincerity of the moralist, the value of his ends, and the extent to which New Testament ethics may indeed be applied to social ills are at this level moot points, because right down to his anticipation of the popularity of *White-Jacket* and *Redburn* Melville counted on the residual sway of the American jeremiad to fix his readers in an occluded, if not immoral, perception. Not ten years later he would resort to a coterie masquerade to show that Americans were ripe for the plucking by a devil who quoted scripture for his own purposes.

In *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* Melville created narrators whose attitudes toward scripture define in large part the qualities and limitations of their sensibilities. Although this method of revealing different modes of perception was not new to Melville's work—Tomoo's parody of Jeremiah in a mock diatribe against the Typees' religious sloth illustrates his fundamental sympathy for their ecclesiastical insouciance, and Taji's rejection of the New Testament paradise of Serenia in *Mardi* dramatizes his intolerance of intellectual quiescence—it served the author, in a stage of his apprenticeship devoted to subtler and more extensive character development, as a kind of litmus test of cultural awareness whereby what a character makes of scripture reveals in a broader way how he applies culturally imbibed ideals and language to experience. In this respect, Melville's subsequent character studies, from Ishmael and Starbuck to the gulls of the Confidence-Man, owe a sizable debt to the two books he wrote for tobacco money.

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NOTES

1 Herman Melville, *Redburn*, ed. Harrison Hayford et al. (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press and The Newberry Library, 1969), p. 184. All parenthetical references to *Redburn* are to this edition, and all parenthetical references to *White-Jacket* are to Herman Melville, *White-Jacket*, ed. Harrison Hayford et al. (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press and The Newberry Library, 1970).

2 *Melville's Use of the Bible* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1949). No extended treatment of scripture as it relates to character development in *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* appears in Wright's study, although she glances briefly at Redburn's view of the New Testament (p.110) and provides an extended stylistic examination of Redburn's "melting pot" speech (pp. 144-45).

3 *A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville* (New York: Noonday Press, 1962), p. 54.

4 "Redburn's Image of Childhood," *ESQ*, 39 (1965), 40.

5 "*Redburn* and the Failure of Mythic Criticism," *AL*, 39 (1967), 290.

6 *Melville's Thematics of Form* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1968; rpt. 1981), p. 66.

7 *The Example of Melville* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962), p. 33.

8 *Herman Melville* (1950; rpt. New York: Viking Press, 1957), p. 119.

9 "Melville's Redburn: A Study in Dualism," *ELN*, 5 (1967), 113-120.

10 H. Bruce Franklin, "Redburn's Wicked End," *NCF*, 20 (1965), 190-94. John Seelye, *Melville: The Ironic Diagram* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), p. 52.

11 *Melville's Quarrel With God* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952), p. 79.

12 E.g., Howard P. Vincent, " 'White-Jacket': An Essay in Interpretation," *NEQ*, 22 (1949), 304-315; and *Reader's Guide to Melville*, pp. 54-74.

13 "Antidemocratic Emphasis in *White-Jacket*," *AL*, 48 (1976), 13-28.

14 "*White-Jacket*: Authors and Audiences," *NCF*, 36 (1981), 296-317.

15 "Authors and Audiences," p. 298.

16 "Authors and Audiences," p. 299.

17 *Herman Melville*, p. 119.

18 Herman Melville, Letter to Evert Duyckinck, 24 February 1849, in Jay Leyda, *The Melville Log* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), I, 288.

19 Herman Melville, Marginalia, in Leyda, II, 648.

20 Bible markings are taken from William Walker Cowen, "Melville's Marginalia," II vols., Diss. Harvard, 1965.

21 Howard P. Vincent, *The Tailoring of Melville's "White-Jacket"* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), p. 163.

22 Samuel Leech, *Thirty Years From Home* (Boston: Charles Tappan, 1843), p. 189, quoted in Vincent, p. 163.

23 Vincent, p. 102.

24 Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 176, 180.