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Moby-Dick and Compassion

ABSTRACT

Because the notions of "anthropomorphism" and "sentimentality" often are used pejoratively to dismiss research in human-animal studies, there is much to be gained from ongoing and detailed analysis of the changing "structures of feeling" that shape representations and treatments of nonhuman animals. Literary criticism contributes to this project when it pays due attention to differences in historical and cultural contexts. As an example of this approach, a reading of the humanization of cetaceans in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*—and more broadly in nineteenth-century whaling discourse—demonstrates how radically human feelings for nonhuman species are affected by shifting material and ideological conditions.

It is only recently that literary critics have begun to explore historically the changing representations of the human-nonhuman animal relationship in romanticism or early modernity (Bate, 2000; Fudge, 2000; Boehrer, 2002).[2] This seems surprising, especially because the dedication of literary texts to documentation of the subjective minutiae of everyday life would seem to offer a mechanism finely calibrated for recording how humans have been disposed to animals in particular times and places. As a demonstration of this, my argument will focus on Melville's

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Moby-Dick, as a case history of the ways in which interactions between literature and other cultural practices both produce and reflect historically-specific attitudes, especially feelings of compassion, toward nonhuman animals.

The lack of culturally and politically-engaged readings of human-animal relationships in literature (prior to the last few years) may reflect the prejudice—as common within literary studies as it is elsewhere—that research into the meaning and function of the animal in the human world involves a kind of self-indulgent taste for the trivial. Baker (2001) describes how, according to this hegemonic dismissal, "*nothing is actually hidden*: it's just that the culture typically deflects our attention from these things, and makes them seem unworthy of analysis" (p. 8). The dismissal of human-animal studies relies on two strategies, often in combination. The first is the allegation of sentimentality, which presumes that researchers of such topics are distracted from the real commerce of human life, presumably by an immature emotional investment in nonhuman animals (Baker, pp. 214-15). The second, perceived as both a cause and an effect of the first, is the allegation of anthropomorphism, which assumes—more often than it demonstrates—that any study not conducted according to rigid scientific principles inevitably misunderstands nonhumans by projecting onto them human characteristics (Philo & Wilbert, 2000).

These dismissals betray assumptions inherited from European eighteenth-century humanism, the ensuing history of epistemological specialization, and the concomitant insistence upon an absolute demarcation between humans and other living beings (Thomas, 1984; Latour, 1993). Insofar as their authority rests upon a claim to objectivity and neutrality—to immunity from ideological influence and transcendence of historical construction—the continued critique of these intellectual traditions remains imperative. It follows that the pejorative concepts of sentimentality and anthropomorphism—invoked with a devotion that itself might seem sentimental—also require further analysis and historicization.

Because literature has always sought to engage the emotions and because certain kinds of anthropomorphism such as metaphorical personification are fundamental to its figurative repertoire, these issues have a particular force in the field of literary criticism. In recent years, as literary scholars have begun

to confront the challenges posed by—and to—human-animal studies, the problematic relation between critical interpretation and emotional affect inevitably has been foregrounded.

Hence, Malamud (2003) argues that in poetry, "The empathizing imagination can be enlisted to enhance the awareness of sentient, cognitive, ethical, and emotional *affinities between people and animals* . . ." (p. 9). Simons (2002) advocates renewed attentiveness to "emotional response" in reading literary texts (pp. 70-2), precisely in order to move beyond the tendency (which he finds characteristic of both traditional "close reading" and recent post-structuralist paradigms) to reduce animals to anthropomorphic mirrors, or screens, for symbolic human meanings. However, the plausibility of these approaches (like any other) requires an articulated consciousness of the parameters within which they work. Malamud makes clear that he chooses poems that "interrogate our received ideas with respect to animals" (p. 44). Because of a shared location in history, his critical method fits with the poetic it explores: Both are legatees of various twentieth-century challenges to Enlightenment humanism—modernism, postmodernism, environmentalism, animal advocacy.

Where literary scholarship attempts detailed study of texts from outside its own historical context, however, a concomitant historicization of the methodological approach surely is imperative.[3] Without self-reflexivity, historical differences between the world of the text and that of the critic will be liable to elision or distortion. In the case of advocacy or ecocritical perspectives, this involves examining how the "emotional response" of humans to nonhumans has been mediated and constructed by historical context. Anthropologists and sociologists have argued that emotions, sensations, perceptions, and tastes cannot be considered beyond the reach of social and cultural determinants and influences (Sahlins, 1976; Bourdieu, 1986). This does not, of course, render them any less genuine or valid than if they were, so to speak, parthenogenetic; but it does imply an obligation to understand the historical or contextual factors intrinsic to even the most apparently intimate and spontaneous of feelings.

I would argue that literary studies, because of their particular engagement with emotional response, have the potential to contribute importantly to historical analysis of the shifting feelings that pervade human-nonhuman relations (Turner, 1980; Thomas, 1984; Ritvo, 1987, 1997). To do so, however,

requires a theoretical method competent to understand the operation and representation of such ephemeral dispositions.

One possible framework is offered by the influential Marxian theorist Williams (1977), who describes literature as a "social formation of a specific kind" that provides "often the only fully available articulation . . . of structures of feeling which as living processes are much more widely experienced" (p. 133). Literary texts, then, document the shared emotions, moods, and thoughts of people in specific historical moments and places, as they are influenced by—and as they influence—the surrounding socio-cultural forces and systems.

More important for Williams, the phrase, "structure of feeling," denotes the "lived" or "practical consciousness" of meanings and values prior to their explicit articulation, definition, classification, or rationalization in fixed or official ideologies: "It is a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange" (pp. 130, 131).

Moby-Dick's Compassion in Historical Context

Given the exceptionally radical reversals that have characterized the Western relation to cetacean species over the last two centuries, I think *Moby-Dick*—especially considering its central place in American culture—provides an exemplary opportunity to test this approach, to see how literary-historical critique can elucidate the genealogy of that nineteenth-century "structure of feeling" and that has bequeathed to our contemporary world the ideology and the disposition of compassion for animals.

> About the "whaling voyage"—I am half way in the work. . . . It will be a strange sort of book, tho', I fear; blubber is blubber you know; tho' you may get oil out of it, the poetry runs as hard as sap from a frozen maple tree;—& to cook the thing up, one must needs throw in a little fancy, which from the nature of the thing, must be ungainly as the gambols of the whales themselves. Yet I mean to give the truth of the thing, spite of this. (Melville in Davis & Gilman, 1960, p. 108)

This first reference to *Moby-Dick*, in a letter written by its author in May 1850, explicitly parallels his determination to impose meaning on whales with the industrial techniques used to process them into a consumable product. Melville,

cited in Davis & Gilman (1960) favored this comparison, later describing the book in its final drafts as being "in his flurry"—the whaleman's term for the death-throes of the animal after harpooning—and adding, "I'm going to take him by his jaw, however, before long, and finish him up in some fashion or other" (p. 129).

In figuratively associating his artistic rendering of the animal with the whale's industrial rendering for oil, Melville, cited in Davis & Gilman (1960) displays an attitude very different from current popular sentiment in Western societies, which regards any cetacean as a peculiarly "charismatic" animal. Today, whale species are protected because of their rarity, which vividly embodies the fragility of ecological biodiversity. Meanwhile, the salvation of individual cetaceans (as in the case of Keiko, the "star" of *Free Willy*) is celebrated because their mammalian characteristics, along with their purported intelligence and benignity, invite in humans a sense of kinship—all the more distinctive because it co-exists with other features suggesting radical otherness: colossal proportions; morphological similarity to an utterly different order of creatures; and occupation of the "alien world" of the oceans (Bryld & Lykke, 2000). For these reasons, compassion for whales has now spread well beyond the once-radical subcultures of environmentalism and animal rights (Einarsson, 1993); an incipient structure of feeling has become an articulate and potent ideology.

Moby-Dick was written at a time when such attitudes were not utterly absent but were barely conceived and certainly not authoritative.[4] In the mid-nineteenth century, two traditions, one longstanding and one more recent, offered competing views of the whale. The first was the Judeo-Christian allegorical tradition that saw "leviathan" as a symbol of either God's power (as in the biblical parable of Jonah) or of Satan's (a comparison famously used by Milton in *Paradise Lost*).[5] A second way of processing cetaceans emerged with the whaling industry which, like its present-day descendent, treated the whale as a "marine resource," a kind of ocean-going cash cow whose harvest was complicated only by the animal's inconvenient size, occasional aggression, and increasing inaccessibility. *Moby-Dick* represents a struggle between these two sensibilities, which—in their vigorous juxtaposition—give rise to new (albeit embyronic) modes of understanding the human-cetacean relationship (Armstrong, 2004a).

Melville critics most often have read *Moby-Dick* allegorically, seeing the whale as an embodiment of human society and relationships—economic, political, psychological, or philosophical (Heimert, 1963; Rogin, 1985; Casarino, 2002). Even Simons (2002), although he criticizes the reduction of animals to screens for human projections, does precisely this when dealing with Melville's novel (pp. 113-115). Yet, the very few critics who do take seriously the animality of Melville's whales still succumb to another kind of temptation: They read into this nineteenth-century work a late-twentieth-century disposition. In particular, they discover in *Moby-Dick* the same compassionate awe that attends contemporary environmentalist attitudes toward cetaceans.

I take Zoellner (1973) and Schultz (2000) to represent the currently influential school of ecocriticism in its origin (which coincides with the emergence of late-twentieth-century environmentalism) and its more recent incarnation, respectively.[6] Both critics discover in the novel plentiful evidence of both anthropomorphism and compassionate fellow feeling for the whale, which they interpret as evidence for Melville's intended attack on the reduction of nature to a passive and exploitable resource by industrial capitalism. Thus, for Zoellner, the perception by Ishmael (Melville's narrator) that ". . . Leviathan is, like man, a placental mammal" leads to a "growing feeling of *fraternal congenerity* regarding the whale. . . ." (p. 185). Similarly, Schultz argues:

> Humanized, with shared emotions and behavior, whales are made to appeal to [Melville's] nineteenth- (and I may add, twentieth-) century reader's feelings, and consequently that reader is forced to consider human beings as agents for the whales' suffering and destruction. Dissolving any absolute dichotomy between humans and whales, Melville cannot represent their suffering and destruction with equanimity. By bringing his reader to identify with whales through this perspective, he indicates an intrinsic and irresistible interdependency among diverse species of life. (p. 100)

In my view, however, neither critic attends adequately to Ishmael's investment in the industrial processing of the animal. It is this commercial affiliation that leads him explicitly to deny a fundamental element in the whale's supposed kinship with humans, namely the whale's mammalian status, and to adopt, instead, the contemporary whaleman's view, "the good old-fashioned ground that the whale is fish" (Melville, 1851/2002, p. 117; Browne, 1846/1968, Ritvo, 1997, p. 49).

It is equally clear that both Zoellner (1973) and Schultz (2000) are influenced by the present-day environmental valorization of complex ecological interdependency, popularly designated by the term "biodiversity." Zoellner refers to "a sense of brotherhood with things" (p. 265), while Schultz asserts (in the passage above) that Melville "implies an interrelationship among diverse species."

The ethical valorization of biodiversity, however, is a recent phenomenon. Among the writers concerned with whaling prior to 1850, only one concluded that fears about the decline of whale populations were well-founded (Cheever, 1850/1991, pp. 108, 155). Reporting on the United States Exploring Expedition, which he commanded during the 1830s and 1840s, Wilkes (1845, vol. 5, p. 493) authoritatively voiced the consensus among the rest:

> An opinion has, indeed, gained ground within a few years, that the whales are diminishing in numbers; but this surmise, as far as I have learned from the numerous inquiries, does not appear to be well founded. (cited in Browne (1846/1968, p. 557); Beale, 1839, pp. 76, 78; Bennett, 1840, p. 178; Olmsted, 1841/1969, p. 157)

It was only decades after Melville wrote his novel that this view was comprehensively debunked, following the collapse of the sperm-whale fishery (Macy, 1880/1972, p. 217; Starbuck, 1882/1989, pp. 96, 113). Hence, Ishmael confidently voices the dominant opinion of his time when, in a chapter that clearly draws upon Wilkes (1845), he asserts,

> . . . we account the whale immortal in his species, however perishable in his individuality. He swam the seas before the continents broke water; . . . In Noah's flood he despised Noah's Ark; and if ever the world is to be again flooded, . . . then the eternal whale will still survive, and, rearing upon the top-most crest of the equatorial flood, spout his frothed defiance to the skies. (Melville, 1851/2002, p. 354)

The novel thus mythologizes the whale in order to deny the possibility of its extinction, in a manner diametrically opposed to the aims of late-twentieth-century environmentalism, which mythologized the whale to make it the symbol of vulnerable biodiversity.

In order to avoid anachronistically misunderstanding the novel's "humanized" whales, therefore, its frequent anthropomorphic and compassionate

evocations need to be contextualized historically. Without doubt, Melville (1851/2002) graphically portrays the first killing of a whale by the *Pequod* crew:

> And now abating in his flurry, the whale once more rolled out into view; surging from side to side, spasmodically dilating and contracting his spout-hole, with sharp, cracking, agonized respirations. At last, gush after gush of clotted red gore, as if it had been the purple lees of red wine, shot into the frighted air, and falling back again, ran dripping down his motionless flanks into the sea. His heart had burst! (p. 233)

Zoellner (1973) argues that here ". . . Ishmael feels *with* the whale rather than *against* the whale", a compassionate impulse that inaugurates "the redemptive process he must undergo" to learn a better understanding of nature (pp. 169, 170). Schultz (2000) echoes this view: "In dying, this whale is not merely a statistic or a resource; Melville transforms it, especially through his touching concluding sentence, into a suffering, feeling being" (p. 105).

Like so much of the novel, however, this moment draws directly upon previous non-fictional accounts of whaling. One of the most likely sources is Beale (1839), who describes a whale as "mad with the agony" of repeated lancing, adding that "his pain appears more than he can bear."

> The fatal lance is at length given,—the blood gushes from the nostril of the unfortunate animal in a thick black stream, which stains the clear blue water of the ocean to a considerable distance around the scene of the affray. In its struggles the blood from the nostril is frequently thrown upon the men in the boats, who glory in its show!. . . . And the mighty recontre is finished by the gigantic animal rolling over on his side, and floating an inanimate mass on the surface of the crystal deep,—a victim to the tyranny and selfishness, as well as a wonderful proof of the great power of the *mind* of man. (pp. 83, 84).

Because his entire volume constitutes a vigorous *apologia* for the industry, it hardly can be claimed that Beale's evocation of this animal's suffering—no less emphatic than Melville's—aims to critique whaling. Rather, Beale (1839) affects a kind of sublime pathos—seeing the animal as, "a victim to the tyranny and selfishness . . . of man"—in order to augment the epic connotations of whaling, which is, therefore, elevated beyond its vulgar status as mere com-

merce to encode the supremacy of the human over the natural world: "wonderful proof of the great power of the *mind* of man."

This encapsulates an emergent structure of feeling, associated with the global spread of industrial capitalism that pervades Melville's sources (Reynolds, 1839/2002, p. 558; 1841/1969, pp. 156, 157; Browne, 1846/1968, p. 297). Similarly, in the above extract from *Moby-Dick*, descriptive emphasis on the anguish and carnage of the whale's death serves, primarily, not to promote concern for animal suffering but to celebrate romantically the laboring whaleman as the hero of American commerce. A parallel can be seen in the deployment of the same apparently incongruous combination—an intense, anthropomorphic identification with the animal and an equal and opposite valorization of the killer—in the discourse of nineteenth-century big game hunting, where it similarly provided an exorbitant celebration of imperial power (Ritvo, 1987, pp. 266, 278).[7]

This is not to say that *Moby-Dick* is reducible to a piece of industrial propaganda. The novel evokes and undercuts the romance of the whale fishery with equal determination. It repeatedly and explicitly invokes "pity" in describing the laborious and ineffectual attempts at escape by an aged and crippled sperm whale from the *Pequod*'s crew:

> It was a terrific, most pitiable and maddening sight. The whale was now going head out, and sending his spout before him in a continual tormented jet; while his one poor fin beat his side in an agony of fright . . . he had no voice, save that choking respiration through his spiracle, and his made the sight of him unspeakably pitiable; while still, in his amazing bulk, portcullis jaw, and omnipotent tail, there was enough to appal the stoutest man who so pitied . . . from the points which the whale's eyes had once occupied, now protruded blind bulbs, horribly pitiable to see. But pity there was none. For all his old age, and his one arm, and his blind eyes, he must die the death and be murdered, in order to light the gay bridals and other merry-makings of men, and also to illuminate the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness to all. Still rolling in his blood, at last he partially disclosed a strangely discoloured bunch or protuberance, the size of a bushel, low down on the flank.
>
> "A nice spot", cried Flask; "just let me prick him there once".
> "Avast!" cried Starbuck, "there's no need of that!"

> But humane Starbuck was too late. At the instant of the dart an ulcerous jet shot from this cruel wound, and goaded by it into more than sufferable anguish, the whale now spouting thick blood, with swift fury blindly darted at the craft, bespattering them and their glorying crews all over with showers of gore, capsizing Flask's boat and marring the bows. It was his death stroke (Melville, 1851/2002, pp. 279-282).

As Vincent points out, this incident again draws on Beale and Browne (1949, pp. 268-277). As Zoellner (1973, p. 174) and Schultz (2000, p. 105) suggest, however, Melville deliberately concentrates elements from different sources to highlight the vulnerability of this particular whale: age and infirmity; missing fin; evident terror; and, particularly, the blindness and the painful ulcer on the side. Moreover, the image of the crew's, "glorying" in the gore of their prey, taken directly from Beale's romanticization of the hunt (as cited earlier), suffers from an unflattering association with the ignoble pleasure Flask takes in delivering an especially cruel blow to an aged, crippled, blind, and dying animal. As Schultz argues, this unedifying brutality undercuts the chapter immediately following, entitled "The Honor and Glory of Whaling" (Melville 1851/2002, pp. 284-286; Schultz, 2000, p. 106).

At the same time, other elements in the passage complicate whatever "pity" might have been inspired in Melville's mid-nineteenth-century reader. In conformity with his usual discursive technique, Melville vividly juxtaposes a number of competing attitudes. Anti-cruelty doctrines—beginning to be advanced in the name of religion at the time (Turner, 1980, p. 45)—are thoroughly satirized, shown to be oblivious to their own participation in an industrial economy that depends upon the slaughter of whales: The spermaceti and oil that motivate the death of this animal will "illuminate the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness to all."

This simultaneous deployment of contradictory sensibilities typifies Melville's *oeuvre*. In this case, he lines up two of his favorite targets, romantic idealism and religious hypocrisy: the former for its rhapsodic vision of an activity driven by motives that are nothing other than economic; and the latter, for condemning the brutality of working men while blithely consuming the products of their labor. Hollow sentimentalism and anthropomorphism thereby are shown at work, both in the opposition to whaling and in its glorification.

However, the incipient structure of feeling satirized here—advocacy of compassion for whales—is not absent entirely from Melville's sources. In Browne (1846/1968), one of the author's shipmates recounts a vivid dream in which he became a whale and endured the process of slaughtering, dissection, and trying-out:

> I've come to the conclusion it's a solemn warnin' against the catchin' of whales. *Whales has feelin's as well as any body. They don't like to be stuck in the gizzards, and hauled alongside, and cut in, and tried out in them 'ere boilers no more than I do;* and if I live to get away from this bloody old blubber hunter, you won't see me in no such un-Christian business while my name's Barzy McF. . . . (p. 201)

The likely attitude of contemporary readers to this sentiment is suggested by the way in which, throughout Browne's (1846/1968), narrative, Barzy features as a figure of affectionate humor. This dream typifies his naïveté and implies the hyperbolic imaginative faculty conventionally attributed to whalemen, evidenced elsewhere in the same volume by a character's (John Tabor) extended fantasy—resulting from fever and inebriation—involving a whaleback ride around the globe (pp. 170-182).

Cheever (1850/1991), who alone among Melville's sources condemns whaling outright, repeats Barzy's words verbatim, devoid of their de-authorizing context, ascribing them only to "an old whaleman" (pp. 125-127). Cheever does feel it necessary, though, to admit that such sentiments "may seem foolish" and to demonstrate that his primary concern is a human one: namely, the "immorality" of whalemen and, in particular, their failure to keep the Sabbath.

Hence, considering that nineteenth-century movements for protection of animals from cruelty most often were accompanied by an agenda to control human elements disruptive of social order (Turner, 1980, pp. 39-59; Thomas, 1984, pp. 181-183, 295; Ritvo, 1987, pp. 125-166), the compassionate element in both Cheever (1850/1991) and Browne (1846/1968) should be understood as subservient to their primary demand for the regulation and "improvement" of whalemen, who commonly were perceived as renegades, brutalized by their trade, and divorced for long periods from the supposedly civilizing influence of home (Marr, 2001). Melville's skepticism about the discourse

against cruelty to animals therefore fits his distaste for missionary evangelism and his sympathy for social outsiders.

Nevertheless, Cheever (1850/1991) citing Cowper, goes further than Melville's other sources in producing an assessment—although a heavily qualified one—of the propriety of animal exploitation. He recommends the principle expressed by Cowper:

> If man's convenience, health,
> Or safety interfere, his rights and claims
> Are paramount, and must extinguish theirs. (p. 115)[8]

This rational approach, typical of Enlightenment humanism, undertakes to measure compassion for animals against the interests of humans. Of course, all others who wrote about the industry, if they did not exclude such considerations altogether, would add "profit" and "commerce" to Cowper's (1784) enumeration of human investments that outweigh the "rights and claims" of animals.

How precisely do these contrasting demands—that of commerce, and that of compassion for nonhuman animals—shape Melville's "humanization" of the whale in *Moby-Dick*? The character of Starbuck best represents the parameters of the mid-nineteenth-century attitude to animal suffering. The aversion to cruelty displayed by "humane Starbuck" in his attempt to stop Flask's tormenting of the infirm whale during the incident cited above is both practically and economically rational. Flask's sadism endangers the crew as it counterproductively agitates the tormented animal and mirrors his distaste for unprofitable heroism:

> [I]n him courage was not a sentiment; but a thing simply useful to him. . . . For, thought Starbuck, I am here in this critical ocean to kill whales for my living, and not to be killed by them for theirs (Melville, 1851/2002, pp. 102, 103). In the same way, he objects to Ahab's passionate pursuit of the white whale because it distracts from the voyage's commercial objective: "How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee if thou gettest it, Captain Ahab?" (p. 139).

Starbuck's calculating materialism features significantly at the most intense moment of identification between human and whale that the novel provides.

During the pursuit of a vast school, a boat is caught in the middle of the circling whales, surrounded by fearless cetacean young:

> [T]hese smaller whales—now and then visiting our becalmed boat from the margin of the lake—evinced a wondrous fearlessness and confidence. . . . Like household dogs they came snuffling round us, right up to our gunwales, and touching them; till it almost seemed that some spell had suddenly domesticated them. Queequeg patted their foreheads; Starbuck scratched their backs with his lance; but fearful of the consequences, for the time refrained from darting it. (Melville, 1851/2002, p. 302)

For ecocritics, this is a consciousness-altering moment of inter-species communion: "[O]nce you have so touched Leviathan, you can never again return to the excoriated sterilities of the Ahabian world-view" (Zoellner, 1973, p. 181). Schultz (2000) agrees, arguing that Melville here, "confirms the cetacean-human kinship and his commitment to persuade his readers of humanity's implications in cetacean suffering and destruction" (p. 102). However, considering the mid-nineteenth-century utilitarian view of compassion for nonhumans, as embodied by Starbuck and Cheever (1850/1991), I suggest that the key qualification in Melville's (1851/2002), evocation of this moment is that the lance remains harmless only "for the time" because Starbuck is "fearful of the consequences" of provoking hundreds of nearby protective adult whales. The text leaves no doubt that, given different circumstances, these "household dogs" would immediately transform from pets into resources.

Even the most emotionally charged moments of humanization in the novel do not exclude a taken-for-granted exploitation of the animal. From their becalmed whaleboat, the three whalemen glimpse sperm whale mothers nursing their young, who are compared explicitly with human infants at the breast (Melville, 1851/2002, p. 303). But Melville here adds a footnote:

> When by chance these precious parts in a nursing whale are cut by the hunter's lance, the mother's pouring milk and blood rivallingly discolor the sea for rods. The milk is very sweet and rich; it has been tasted by men; it might do well with strawberries. (p. 303)

For Schultz (2000), these "astonishing imagistic juxtapositions" represent "a confirmation of cetacean and human kinship, sexual and social" (p. 104).[9]

In my view, however, this entire chapter demonstrates the same ironic intensification of the antagonism between two emergent structures of feeling—that of compassion of animals, and that of globalizing industrial capitalism—which characterizes Melville's portrayal of the relation between humans and whales.

In particular, the suggestion that whale-milk "might do well with strawberries" reintroduces to this nursery idyll the implications of industrial use of animals: It implies the association, not infrequent in Melville's sources, between whale hunting and the farming of cattle (Bennett, 1840, pp. 176, 177).[10] In short, the attitude to whales evinced here might be compared best with the conceit, common enough today, that sentimentalizes newborn lambs or calves while accepting with equanimity that both are products or byproducts of the industrial farming of meat and dairy commodities. This parallel is reinforced if we consider that Melville's (1851/2002, p. 558) sources describe the slaughter of whale calves as a standard technique to bring their mothers alongside for the kill.

Humans and Other Animals—Now and Then

I have argued that although mid-nineteenth and late-twentieth century Western cultures certainly shared a tendency to anthropomorphize the whale, they did so in very different ways and to very different ends. Because Melville's (1851/2002) ironic sensibility engages extant dispositions so strenuously, however, it sometimes allows a glimpse of new developments, albeit in embryonic form:

> But Stubb, he eats the whale by its own light, does he? and that is adding insult to injury, is it? Look at your knife-handle, there, my civilized and enlightened gourmand dining off that roast beef, what is that handle made of?—what but the bones of the brother of the very ox you are eating? And what do you pick your teeth with, after devouring that fat goose? With a feather of the same fowl. And with what quill did the Secretary of the Society for the Suppression of Cruelty to Ganders formerly indite his circulars? It is only within the last month or two that that society passed a resolution to patronize nothing but steel pens. (p. 242)

The content of this passage identifies precisely the position of much animal advocacy and ecocritical thought today: recognition that unacceptable contradictions permeate the current "lived relations" between humans and nonhumans (Fudge, 2002, p. 165) or that compassion for other species implies a radical structural revision of the logic and ethics of consumer capitalism, as in the contemporary call for Western citizens to settle for "less than we have become accustomed to having . . . less energy, less land, less extraction, less meat. . . ." (Malamud, 2003, p. 41). However, historical contextualization makes clear that this apparent commonality of content belies a radical difference in historical disposition: Melville's (1851/2002) satire mocks the appeal to compassion by linking it to logical outcomes that the majority of his nineteenth-century readers would find eccentric, absurd, and even improper.

This passage thereby concisely demonstrates two key lessons of literary-historical analysis of the human-animal relation. First, anthropomorphism and compassion do not always go together; each of these notions involves complex, and sometimes contradictory, processes of meaning-making. Second, a proper understanding of the sedimented privileging of certain species (human, cetacean, or any other) within the cultures of globalizing industrial and commodity capitalism requires us to investigate the historical vicissitudes of the various structures of feeling that affect relations between humans and nonhumans.

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Notes

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[2] Of course, using the words "human" and "animal" in contradistinction implies a false opposition, but I agree with Fudge (2002, pp. 159-165) that a generic concept of "the animal" can sometimes be deployed strategically to demonstrate contradictions inherent in "lived relations" between humans and nonhumans.

[3] Indeed, this self-reflexive placement of the critical method (along with the text) in an historical frame characterizes such (currently dominant) literary-critical modes as Cultural Materialism and New Historicism (Veeser, 1989).

[4] It is easy to underestimate how recent the now-widespread compassion for whales actually is: as late as 1964, an historian of the RSPCA wrote that "Fats and cosmetics may come from whales killed by explosive harpoons. . . . Not many of us care about whales; they are majestic and mysterious, but readily overlooked" (Turner, 1964, p. 14).

[5] *Moby-Dick* uses both associations prodigally (Melville (1851/2002), pp. 8-11, pp. 48-54, p. 158, pp. 284-286, p. 372, p. 410).

[6] In the case of *Moby-Dick*, Charles Olson's *Call Me Ishmael* (1947) could be seen as a precursor to ecocritical approaches. Later examples include Ausband (1975) and Wixon (1986).

[7] This celebration of the whaleman is clearly associated with contemporaneous trends in American gender representation, which are crucial to Melville's very masculinist text, as I have discussed at length elsewhere (Armstrong, 2004b). Moreover the links between celebration of hunting and a certain version of masculinity have been thoroughly investigated by feminist critics, for example Kheel (1995).

[8] The lines are from William Cowper, "The Task" (1784), Bk VI, ll. 581-6. Thomas (1984) cites the same passage, as embodying the "one single, coherent and remarkably constant attitude [that] underlay the great bulk of the preaching and pamphleteering against animal cruelty between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries" (p. 153).

[9] Again, Melville's feminization and maternalization of the whales needs to be understood in the context of shifts in mid-nineteenth-century American gender politics (Armstrong 2004b).

[10] Today, proponents of whaling still find the comparison between whales and cattle a useful rhetorical strategy to combat the environmentalist privileging of cetaceans (Scully, 2002, p. 151).

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