

“MY BEARD IS MY OWN”: HERMAN MELVILLE’S BEARD POETICS IN HIS NARRATIVES OF MARITIME MASCULINITY

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ABSTRACT

This article celebrates the vital role of the beard in Herman Melville’s narratives of maritime masculinity. While the limited commentary on the beard has thus far focused on the hair on Melville’s face, this article shifts the focus to the beard on the page of Melville’s early texts to explicate the nuances in Melville’s developing beard poetics. These appear first in *Typee* (1846), *Omoo* (1847), and *Mardi* (1849), three texts which begin with the traditional idea of the beard as a symbol of native Otherness before introducing the symbolic power of the braided beard and setting out the importance of the beard in male homosocial relations. This final strand is key in Melville’s most sociologically charged writings, no more so than in *White-Jacket* (1850). From the communal cultivation of the beards on board the *Neversink*, to the tragic events of “The Great Massacre of the Beards,” *White-Jacket* displays an acute awareness of the discourses of hegemony, hierarchy, power, and authority that underscores the power of the beard in the performativity of masculinity of Melville’s characters on the sea.

RESUMEN

Este artículo celebra el papel vital de la barba en las narrativas de masculinidad marítima de Herman Melville. Mientras que los escasos comentarios sobre la barba se han centrado hasta ahora en el vello facial de Melville, este artículo desplaza el foco de atención a la barba en la página de los primeros textos de Melville para explicar los matices de la poética de dicha barba (“*beard poetics*”) en su desarrollo. Estos matices aparecen primero en *Typee* (1846), *Omoo* (1847) y *Mardi* (1849), tres textos que comienzan con la idea tradicional de la barba

como símbolo de la alteridad nativa (“*native otherness*”) antes de introducir el poder simbólico de la barba trenzada y exponer la importancia de la barba en las relaciones homosociales masculinas. Esta última vertiente es clave en los escritos de mayor carga sociológica de Melville, como en *White-Jacket* (1850). Desde el cultivo comunal de las barbas a bordo del *Neversink* hasta los trágicos sucesos de “*The Great Massacre of the Beards*,” *White-Jacket* muestra una aguda conciencia de los discursos de hegemonía jerarquía, poder y autoridad que subraya el poder de la barba en la performatividad de los personajes de Melville en el mar.

INTRODUCTION

As David Leverenz argues in the opening pages of *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (1989), “Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, and Whitman find their most original voices in responding to the pressures and conflicts of American manhood” (3). This group were not simply literary heavyweights but they were also hirsute heavyweights—from Emerson’s sideburns to Hawthorne’s whiskers to the beard of Thoreau and, of course, the flowing locks of Walt Whitman. Indeed, Walt Whitman might well be considered as the writer most in tune with the performative nature of the beard. With his bearded stubble on the frontispiece of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Whitman set out to use his facial hair to project an image as the bearded everyman during a time that saw notable changes in everyday hirsuteness. Indeed, shaving was considered a particularly peculiar activity as the beard on both sides of the Atlantic was seen as natural, divine, and layered with certain health benefits. “Pro-beard manifestos” calling for the importance of each individual proudly wearing their own particular stylisation of facial hair emerged in the 1850s and continued onwards throughout the nineteenth century.¹ As the United States started to shift from an agrarian nation to a global power traversing sprawling commercial markets, facial hair became a visual marker for American men attempting to navigate the throes of masculinity.

Herman Melville, who would later himself come to be fully bearded, seems to have been particularly invested in the everyday

¹ See Joan Nunn *Fashion in Costume, 1200-2000* (2000), 143; Allan Peterkin’s *One Thousand Beards: A Cultural History of Facial Hair* (2001), 34-36; and Christopher Oldstone-Moore’s *Of Beards and Men* (2015), 186.

realities for American men during this turbulent time.² Indeed we might say Melville engaged with the discourses surrounding the growing and wearing of facial hair *before* Whitman! For Melville in particular, beards play a central role in his narratives of maritime masculinity; so much so that we might argue that Melville developed his own particular "beard poetics" during a period in which facial hair started to become entwined with masculine identity. The choice of the term "beard poetics" in the title and throughout this article is very much deliberate for three key reasons: first, I would argue that Melville goes beyond simple representation of beards to engage in a more complex and nuanced mimetics, with the beard presented as a site upon which the various discourses surrounding masculinity in the middle decades of nineteenth century America are played out; second, Melville's beard poetics point to the textuality of these beards; in other words, a key element of Melville's engagement with these beards, in *White-Jacket* in particular, is the language used to describe all the various stylisations of facial hair; and third, and perhaps most importantly, it points to the idea of the richness of art and literature to offer something beyond history, in other words, the ability of Melville's texts to highlight truths about men, masculinity, and beards that go beyond mere historical fact. These elements of Melville's beard poetics are anchored in the particulars of a Melville text: the casts of all male-characters, the exploration of the relations between these characters, and the staging of such relations upon the high seas.³ Staging is the key word here as approaching such texts through the lens of the Critical Study of Men and Masculinities underlines how Melville's narratives might be perceived as being primarily concerned

² See Ellen Weinauer's essay "Melville and Masculinity" for a brief summary of the theme of masculinity in Melville's writing. Established studies on masculinity in Melville's writing remain Robert K. Martin's *Hero, Captain, Stranger* (1986), Person's "Melville's Cassock" (1994) and "Gender and Sexuality" (2006), Wiegman's "Melville's Geography of Gender" (1989), and Penry's "Sentimental and Romantic Masculinities in *Moby Dick* and *Pierre*" (1999). For broader overviews of masculinity during the middle decades of the nineteenth century in addition to Leverenz's *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (1989), see also Rotundo's *American Manhood* (1993), and Kimmel's *Manhood in America* (2006).

³ Studies of Melville and the sea that have been a particular influence in the writing of this article include Charles R. Anderson's *Melville on the South Seas* (1939), Robert K. Martin's *Hero, Captain, Stranger* (1986), Jill Barnum, Wyn Kelley, and Christopher Sten's "Whole Oceans Away": *Melville and the Pacific* (2007) and Hester Blum's "Melville and the Novel of the Sea" (2011) and "Melville and Oceanic Studies" (2013).

with the performance of masculinity; and, indeed, we might say that the trope at the front and centre of such performances is the beard.

Despite the importance of the beard in Melville's texts, there has been sparse scholarship on the beard and facial hair in the field of Melville Studies. Thus far, such scholarship has focused exclusively on Melville's face. Two observations in particular appear to underline an irritation towards Melville's hirsuteness. The first bearded barb comes from Charles R. Anderson's comments in the introduction to his seminal *Melville in the South Seas* (1939). Anderson argues that the beard Melville sported later in his writing life was grown to be a key part of the self-fabricated image of Melville as philosopher, and, as such, "it has become customary to dramatize him [Melville] as a bearded and 'mystic' Triton" (3). Anderson prefers to see Melville as "the literary discoverer of the South Seas" (5) as there is "no trace of the beard which later muffled the lamentations of America's mid Victorian Jeremiah" (7).⁴ More recently, Brian Yothers, in *Melville's Mirrors* (2011), sees Melville's beard as a marker of Melville's "elusiveness" and "the elusive quality of his work" (3). Pointing to the prominent positioning of the beard in Melville's hirsute portraits in 1861, 1870, and 1885, Yothers argues that in such poses the beard is a mask for Melville to hide behind. In Yothers' view, "Melville's beard can stand as a potent symbol for his capacity to evade, tantalize, and frustrate his readers, increasing rather than diminishing uncertainty" (3). Such issues concerning the beard can be resolved by moving our focus from the beard on Melville's face to the beard on Melville's page. Here the engagements with the beard in *Typee* (1846), *Omoo* (1847), and *Mardi* (1849) point to the beginnings of the insightful readings of hegemony, hierarchy, authority and power in the performance of masculinity, all of which reach a climax in *White-Jacket* (1850).

TYPEE, OMOO, AND MARDI: MELVILLE'S BEARDED BEGINNINGS

The first sprouts of Melville's engagement with the beard begin in *Typee* (1846). While at this stage the beard appears to be employed as a typical marker of Otherness, there are also the first seeds of an

⁴ As Brian Yothers writes, "Curiously, Anderson seems to have had a quarrel with Melville's beard—which he saw as standing in for a wider misapprehension of Melville as an author who was important because he was tortured and profound, rather than, as Anderson argued, because he was a "joyous" narrator of the experience of travel who rather liked being a popular author at first, and knew that he was good at it" (15).

awareness of the symbolic power of the beard in the context of the beard wearer and the beard watcher. The first beard appears on the face of the islander who works on Tom's swollen leg. While his "head was bald as the polished surface of a cocoa-nut shell," itself particularly charged language, our narrator Tom notes the "long silvery beard" which "swept almost to his girdle of bark" (79). While the weaponization of the language used here clearly points to the colonial perspective of the narrator, the details of the beard are telling: we might expect the islander to have some sort of growth due to his perceived savage nature, but the focus on the length and colour, in this case its sweeping nature and its graybeard appearance, points not only to its Othering power but also the intention of using the beard to present the islander's wisdom, knowledge, and experience. The second appearance of Tom's "faithful valet" Kory-Kory continues the idea of the beard as a marker of Otherness. Tom is not reticent in how he views Kory-Kory, as to him this man was "alas! a hideous object to look upon" (83), and this apparent ghastliness is mirrored in the note of the oddness of his beard wearing: "His beard, plucked out by the root from every other part of his face, was suffered to droop in hairy pendants, two of which garnished his upper lip, and an equal number hung from the extremity of his chin" (83). The more nuanced language surrounding the beard here shouldn't be overlooked. Kory Kory's facial hair, in the eyes of the narrator, is "suffered to droop," itself perhaps a pointer towards the view of native masculinity. But this really raises the question about how we should read the word "suffered" here. Who or what is experiencing this suffering? Is it Kory-Kory who wears the beard? Is it the observer who must look at this beard? Or is it the beard itself?

The final appearance of the beard in *Typee* offers the first indication of a focus on the performativity of beards and facial hair. In this instance, Tom observes old Marheyo "standing up to the waist in water, engaged in plucking out the stray hairs of his beard, using a piece of muscle-shell for tweezers" (164). A key feature of Melville's beard poetics is the beard wearer's act of caring for the beard, particularly that of old Ushant in *White-Jacket* after he is flogged and put in chains for resisting the call to shave. Furthermore, this scene subverts the idea of savage natives by pointing to old Marheyo's awareness of the symbolic power of the beard. In plucking out stray hairs, Old Marheyo demonstrates a degree of self-awareness in how the beard wearer may be viewed by others.

Melville's second published work *Omoo* (1847) offers the first hints of Melville's texts moving towards exploring the power of growing and wearing the beard as part of the dynamics of the homosocial group. When our narrator Tomoo arrives onto the whale ship, he does so with his hair and "beard uncut" (18), a pointer towards his assimilation into the social group on the island. Upon meeting the captain —"quite a young man, pale and slender, more like a sickly counting-house clerk than a bluff sea-captain" (19)— the narrator must follow the directives set out by the hierarchy of the ship and be shorn. The captain calls for a mate who the narrator tells us is "charged to make a 'well man' of me" (20), which he does with "a great pair of sheep-shears, to the imminent jeopardy of both ears, and the certain destruction of hair and beard" (20). There are various things to point to here in this scene of barbaric barbery: first, there is the implicit suggestion that beard wearing is something savage to be associated only with the natives; second, the satirical rhetoric with regards to the shaving should also not be overlooked - the idea of the "sheep-shears" suggests the abundance of the narrator's beard as perceived by those on board and, indeed, the idea of its imminent "destruction" points to the violent nature of such shaving and the sadness felt by the narrator for the freedom of his life lived on the island; and third, the performative nature of the sporting and shaving of such flocculence is evident in the fact that the narrator is taken onto the deck for this examination and eventual shearing. Ultimately, this is the first indication of the importance of beards and shaving in the dramatization of the conflicts that shape the hierarchy of masculinities on a ship, a central narrative that reaches its climax in *White-Jacket*.

The final early work which features strands of Melville's beards poetics is *Mardi* (1849), in particular on the face of the character Mohi. Mohi is also known as Braid-Beard, "so called from the manner in which he wore that appendage, exceedingly long and gray" (485). The braided beard is loaded with the ability to communicate, to impart wisdom, and of course to tell stories. But the braided beard also points to how Mohi is feeling at various points in the text: in one instance, Mohi is seen "twitching his beard" (530) when offended by Yoomy who challenges Mohi and his storytelling; or Mohi's beard becomes "horizontal" (532) when he himself challenges Yoomy's inability to tell a good story and tell the truth. We can see a further sophistication in Melville's beard poetics here. The introduction of the trope of the braided beard foregrounds the sociological and symbolic power of the

beard that is further elaborated by Melville in *White-Jacket* as an object of protest and an object of resistance to the discourses of power and authority, as well as the individual acts of self-care and self-realisation.

HIRSUTE HEGEMONY AND HIERARCHY IN *WHITE-JACKET*

Melville's beard poetics reaches its high point in *White-Jacket*. *White-Jacket* does this in three ways: the centrality of the beard in the image and identity of the protagonist Jack Chase; the importance of the act of "cultivating beards"; and the subsequent ramifications of "The Great Massacre of the Beards" (334) that leads to the bearded resistance of old Ushant.

If the hierarchy of maritime masculinities onboard the *Neversink* is the central organising framework of *White-Jacket*, then Jack Chase's emergence as the hegemonic male is very much encapsulated in Chase's "abounding nut-brown beard" (20).⁵ It is worth looking closely at the language surrounding Jack Chase's beard for two reasons: first, the "nut-brown" colour of the beard is a recurring hue in Melville's hirsute writings, first employed in *Redburn* (1849) to describe the beard of a sociable old skipper that Jack meets on a salt-drogher. Second, the fact that his beard is "abounding" not only suggests the thickness and fullness of the beard but it also suggests a sense of agency or movement or even community in terms of growing and wearing the beard. Abounding also points to how the shipmates view Chase, as not only is his beard abounding but "there was such an abounding air of good sense and good feeling about the man" (21). Jack Chase's abounding nut-brown beard, therefore, is an outward visual marker of Chase's intrinsic virtues.

The idea of the beard as the main identifier of Jack Chase is taken further in another key scene that establishes his hegemonic hirsuteness. In Chapter 5, Chase —"a stickler for the Rights of Man, and the liberties of the world" (25), suddenly leaves his ship for Peru for "the cause of the Right" (25). Months later, the narrator and the crewmates spot "a tall, striking figure of a long-bearded officer" (26) upon a Peruvian ship and recognise him to be Jack immediately. "By

⁵ For discussions of hegemony and hierarchies within the Critical Study of Men and Masculinities, Raewyn Connell's *Masculinities* (1995) remains the seminal text in the field. Subsequent re-engagements and reformulations include Demetriou 2001, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, and Messerschmidt 2018a and 2018b.

heaven... it is he—he can't disguise his walk—that's his beard" (26). Jack's return to the ship to face Captain Claret and the accusations of desertion emerge as a scene that sets out clearly Jack's status on the *USS United States*—and the importance of the beard in how he is regarded by all onboard. Once Captain Claret reinstates Jack, the reaction of the "crowds of admiring tars" is telling as they "[swear] by his nut-brown beard, which had amazingly lengthened and spread during his absence" (27). The question in this instance is why the beard has "amazingly" grown in this way? It can't simply be the fact that it has grown, rather we might argue that what is particularly amazing about the length and girth of the beard is how striking it is for the other shipmates as a marker of Jack Chase's hegemonic masculinity which they confirm by figuratively and literally holding him above themselves to welcome him aboard the ship.

While the beard is first employed in *White-Jacket* to point to the hegemonic status of Jack Chase, the role of beard extends later in the novel to explore the dynamics of the homosocial group upon the *Neversink*.⁶ Charles R. Anderson calls the drama surrounding the growing and the shaving of the beards in this section of the novel as nothing more than a "comic interlude" (405) which "was invented [...] for comic relief and for the sake of sheer merriment" (408). While we can certainly appreciate the humour and satire of bearded life, by looking closely at the text through a hirsute lens it is also possible to acknowledge the awareness of the impact of beard wearing and beard shaving on the performance of masculinities in the group. Within groups of men, beards are a key tool of communication: beards can signal maturity and wisdom, status, aggressiveness, and dominance.⁷ It is clear that facial hair influences how men are seen by others; and, indeed, facial hair is used by men to influence how they want to be seen. Research shows that men grow beards in order to augment their

⁶ As Mary K. Bercaw Edwards states in her chapter "Typee and Omoo" in *A New Companion to Herman Melville* (2022), Melville drew on *The Penny Cyclopædia of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* (1833–1843) for the descriptions of beards. in chapters 84 and 85 of *White-Jacket*, namely the "Man-of-War Barbers" and "The Great Massacre of the Beards" chapters.

⁷ See Dixson & Vasey 2012; Geniole & McCormick 2015; Saxton et al. 2016; Nelson et al. 2019; Gray et al 2020; Caton et al 2022a, 2022b; Dixson et al 2022.

status in groups and social situations.⁸ Put simply, men grow beards for other men.⁹

This importance of beard wearing begins in the "Man-of-War Barbers" chapter. We are told that "among the numerous artists and professors of polite trades in the Navy, none are held in higher estimation or drive a more profitable business than these barbers" (407). There is a certain ironic and mocking tone here as White-Jacket—a narrator who on various occasions points to his fondness for his own nut-brown beard—is quick to criticise the jaggedness of their razors, the length of the queues, and quite comically (or not?) the life-threatening turns in the barber's chair on the most tempestuous days at sea (408-409).¹⁰ Melville's treatise on the barber within the microcosm of the ship reflects the developing views of the barber in American society during this period. While American writings set in the barbershop began far back as the eighteenth century in early American periodicals and magazines, the middle decades of the nineteenth century saw a rise in the interest in the barbershop and the barber himself. Certainly the barbershop was viewed as a place of safety and sanctuary for the average American male, but it was also an arena within which complex issues such as race, violence, and masculinity were played out.¹¹ Melville's satire here at the end of the 1840s and into the 1850s is very much in line with the changing attitudes toward the barber. We might question here who is holding the barbers in such elevated terms - the captain, the crew, or perhaps the barbers themselves?

The barber plays a key role in the heightening of the bearded drama with the chapter "The Great Massacre of the Beards." The telling of this "calamitous event" (413) opens with the narrator's

⁸ Grueter et al. 2015; Dixson et al 2016.

⁹ In research put forward by two beard researchers, Barnaby J. Dixson and Paul L. Vasey in a field shaping article in 2012, it was found that "men [...] judged neutral faces with beards as having higher social status and being older than clean-shaven faces" (486). One interesting finding is that men who find themselves in subordinate positions place greater importance on beards and what they are perceived to represent. This importance is very much in contrast with those in more dominant positions who place less significance on the potential symbolic currency of the beard.

¹⁰ The narrator makes reference to his own beard while he writes: "With intuitive sympathy I feel of my own brown beard while I write, and thank my kind stars that each precious hair is forever beyond the reach of the ruthless barbers of a man-of-war" (413).

¹¹ See the chapter "The Barbershop in American Literature" from Peter Ferry's *Beards and Masculinity in American Literature* (2020) for further discussion on the engagement with the figure of the barber and the setting of the barbershop.

lament of “such a heartless massacre of hair!” by the “ruthless barbers” who leave the men on the ship with “assassinated beards” (413). The first issue is the communal cultivation of such beards, and how this is viewed by each ranking of men on the man-of-war. At this point of the text, there is the sense of the democratising power of the beard. Not only is there a prevalence of “large whiskers” (410) on the ship, but by the end of the trip “very many of the seamen had redoubled their assiduity in cultivating their beards, preparatory for their return to America” (410). Notably, the text here does not say that the men were “growing” or “letting their beards go”; rather, Melville has them “cultivating” their beards, consciously engaged in the act of tending to their pogonotrophy which might be seen as their attempts to demonstrate their own individual and collective growth.¹² Certainly, the crew expects their beards to have an impact as “they anticipated creating no small impression by their immense and magnificent *homeward-bounders*—so they called the long fly-brushes at their chins” (410). As Oldstone-Moore writes in *Of Beards and Men* (2015), the beard was still held with a certain degree of suspicion during this period. The beard was considered a symbol of resistance, reform, and at times, revolution, with even social reformers somewhat suspicious towards wilful beard wearing.¹³ The communal act of cultivating the beard here, then, is a marker of challenging the hierarchy and projecting their agency on the ship.

Those with an issue with the communal cultivation of the beards on board are the officers—those who see themselves in positions of certain rank but find themselves without power.¹⁴ The narrator notes that “the officers [...] had no authority to preach a crusade against whiskerandoes” (413), and their irritation with the

¹² “Pogonotrophy,” the act of displaying the beard, and “pogonomania,” the obsession with beards, both come from the Greek “pogon,” referring to beards or something resembling a beard.

¹³ As Oldstone-Moore writes about the beard during this period of American individualism, “Facial hair was especially offensive to New Englanders because it suggested a wilful independence that ran counter to the communal ethic of the Puritan tradition. Even social reformers were likely to react negatively to such idiosyncratic displays” (161).

¹⁴ As we are told in an earlier section of the text, the dinner table is the place where the true rank and authority plays out: “The Commodore dines alone, because he is the only man of his rank in the ship. So too with the Captain; and the Ward-room officers, warrant officers, midshipmen, the master-at-arms’ mess, and the common seamen;—all of them, respectively, dine together, because they are, respectively, on a footing of equality (37).

cultivation of the beards "under their very noses" notwithstanding how "they frowned upon every beard with even greater dislike." Their reasoning is clear: "They said it was unseamanlike; not ship-shape; in short, it was disgraceful to the Navy" (413). And yet, while Captain Claret initially displays no issue with the beard growing (as he "himself wore a small speck of a beard upon his own imperial cheek; which, if rumor said true, was to hide something" (414)), he does finally make the call for the crew to be "shaven and shorn" (414) as the ship edges towards shore. A wonderfully eloquent passage from the bearded narrator voices the reaction of the crew who react to the "barbarity" of such a request as "the unkindest cut of all!" (415). Their beards have now become part of their attempts to endure the final days and weeks on the high seas and as they sit "tenderly stroking the fine tassels on our chins" (415), the beard part of their exercises of self-reflection.

The passion felt towards the communal act of beard growing and the democratising power of the beard is cemented in the next paragraph with the narrator White-Jacket suddenly exclaiming:

Where are you, sheet-anchor-men! Captains of the tops! gunner's mates! mariners, all! Muster round the capstan your venerable beards, and while you braid them together in token of brotherhood, cross hands and swear that we will enact over again the mutiny of the Nore, and sooner perish than yield up a hair! (416)

The key features of Melville's beard poetics come together here. The first is the importance of the communal act of beard growing as a democratising act which brings together all the groups of men regardless of rank or role on the ship. The beard is the great unifier, with such "venerable beards" to be recognised and respected by all. Second, the narrator focuses on one of the central elements of Melville's beard poetics, namely the act of braiding the beard. In *Mardi*, it was Mohi, one of the native Others, who was engaged in braiding his beard; here, in *White-Jacket*, the act of braiding brings the men together in a bearded brotherhood against the discourses of power that wish to see them shorn of their identities. And third, we learn that for a time the men stand up for the rights of the beard and the rights to wear a beard as "one and all, they resolved not to succumb, and every man swore to stand by his beard and his neighbour" (416).

“MY BEARD IS MY OWN” – OLD USHANT’S FINAL ACT OF PASSIVE RESISTANCE

The climactic moment of the bearded narrative of *White-Jacket* occurs after Captain Claret’s call for the rebels on board to shave. After the threat of flogging, the crew all cede their cultivated beards. Everyone, that is, except old Ushant. As much as Jack Chase should be celebrated as the outwardly hegemonic (bearded) figure in Melville’s maritime tales, the flocculent figure of old Ushant should equally be lauded for harnessing the power of his hirsuteness. In the eyes of the other sailors, Ushant is “a fine specimen of a sea sexagenarian” who “wore a wide, spreading beard, grizzled and gray, that flowed over his breast, and often became tangled and knotted with tar” (410). This carefully sculpted introduction, echoing Melville’s early beard poetics from the tales mentioned above, suggests Old Ushant’s qualities both in and of his beard. The suggestion that he sports a “wide” and “spreading” beard echoes Jack Chase; however, the fact that his beard is also “grizzled and gray” adds something extra to his status as the bearded sage. In contrast to the “sorry exhibitions” of the “redundant mops” of some of the crew onboard, Old Ushant’s beard, rather, symbolises his “strong natural sense” (411) and the ability of him (and his beard!) to bring together and communicate with those “of civilised and savage, of Gentile and Jew, of Christian and Moslem” (411). As we are told, Ushant is simply “the bearded master” (411).

The true power of Old Ushant’s beard in *White-Jacket* emerges in his “passive resistance” to the demands of Captain Claret. It is not overstating the point to say that Ushant’s statement “My beard is my own, sir!” (425) emerges here as a forebearer to Bartleby’s “I would prefer not to” (25) in “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (1853). Ushant says this statement “lowly” (425) the first time he refuses to remove his beard and, after, receiving his twelve lashes and being asked once more again by the Captain to remove it, Ushant repeats his resistance and is literally and figuratively enchained for his beard wearing. Once Ushant is punished, he begins braiding his beard, “[...] interweaving with it strips of red bunting, as if he desired to dress out and adorn the thing which had triumphed over all opposition” (426). Added to the act of braiding as a form of meditation, the weaving of red bunting into the beard can be read a form of defiant pogonotrophy as Old Ushant makes the effort to enhance its visual power. Ultimately, Ushant succeeds and keeps his beard and, upon reaching shore is reported to exclaim “At home, with my beard” (427). Once the man-of-war is

docked at the harbour, old Ushant is rowed ashore in a boat to the cheers of admiration from all of those who knew and respected him on board. This celebratory moment is the climax of the dramatization of the discourses shaping the performance of such hirsuteness. Despite the failure of the whole group to maintain their rebel beards, Ushant's solo act of passive resistance demonstrates the possibilities for men to challenge established hierarchies and demonstrate a sense of agency and identity through their pogomania. Old Ushant succeeds both with his beard but also because of his beard as his flocculence encapsulates the main strands of Melville's beard poetics which should be celebrated as a key element of Melville's narratives of maritime masculinity.

CONCLUSION: FURTHER TRIMMINGS

This article illustrates that the beard is a central feature of Melville's narratives of maritime masculinity and that his beard poetics develop steadily until their culmination in *White-Jacket*. Melville's engagement with the beard was so attuned that referring to this engagement as Melville's beard poetics seems apt—Melville's texts present the beard as the site upon which the various discourses surrounding masculinity are played out, be it cultivating the beard, braiding the beard, or performing the beard in the face of those who question the wearer's status or identity. Melville also clearly takes great joy in the rich language used to describe stylisations of the facial hair, most notably in *White-Jacket*. Put simply, Melville's beard poetics are a key part of the power of his texts to highlight truths about men and masculinity.

While the focus of this piece has been on the emergence of Melville's beard poetics in his narratives of maritime masculinity, there is clearly still more to be written on Melville's engagement with facial hair. A return to the barbershop is surely a worthwhile endeavour. While the intimate interactions in the barber's chair between Don Benito Cereno and Babo in "Benito Cereno" (1855) have been touched on briefly in beard scholarship, there is still more to be written on it and other barbershop scenes, no less the interaction between William Cream, "the honest barber" (314) and Frank Goodman in *The Confidence Man* (1857).¹⁵ Moreover, where does facial hair fit into

¹⁵ See again the chapter "The Barbershop in American Literature" of Peter Ferry's *Beards and Masculinity in American Literature* (2020) for a close reading of the intimate shaving

Ahab's self-examination in *Moby-Dick*? Why is it noted that "the vast and venerable head" of the decapitated whale is "ungarnished with a beard" (346)? And what should we take from Gregory Peck's Lincoln beard in the 1956 movie adaptation? Also, we might turn to *Pierre* (1852) to forward on from Yothers' reading of the role of the beard in Melville's projections of his own authorial persona with Pierre's own longing for a beard.¹⁶ Ultimately, I hope this article has shown how critically informed readings of beards in Melville's texts add to our appreciation of the sociological power of Melville's narratives of masculinity. As Jack Chase reminds us while sitting in the barber's chair on the *Neversink*: "Beards are sacred things [...] Have you no feelings for beards, my friend? Think of it" (420).

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scene between Don Benito Cereno and the barber Babo in the makeshift barbershop on the *Bachelor's Delight*.

¹⁶ See Brian Yothers' discussion of Melville's beard in the introduction to his *Melville's Mirrors* (2011).

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