In her article “Melville's Literary Cartographies of the South Seas,” Juniper Ellis plunges into the heart of a debate regarding Melville's place in American studies and cultural studies: is he a progressive multiculturalist before his time or a white imperialist who seeks to “acquire” the Pacific? Ellis points out that this question is not to be answered in dichotomous terms: “Melville's literary cartographies present criticism of ‘Western’ civilization in a way that projects an account of Pacific Islands people while maintaining his own culture’s frame of reference and denying the existence of other systems of perception and evaluation” (13). Critics such as Ellis, Geoffrey Sanborn, and Rob Wilson have raised these concerns about Melville's cultural attitudes as the increased globalization of literary studies has followed trends of globalizing economies, industries, and media. At the same time, the extent of Melville's cross-cultural awareness has been championed by Donald Pease in his account of Moby-Dick's role in developing C. L. R. James's vision of what Pease terms “transnational American studies” (135). As a way into these debates, I offer a history of Pacific cartography that, though impressionistic, highlights crucial issues in understanding Melville's relationship to Ishmael's “sea of [his] adoption” (Moby-Dick 482), particularly the epistemological opportunities and challenges that the Pacific posed to those seeking to chart it.

John Leighly notes that in the history of European oceanic cartography, two main traditions governed the drafting of charts and maps from the Renaissance through the seventeenth century: one tradition, favored by sailors for its empirical accuracy, showed newly discovered landmasses only to the extent to which
those lands had been sighted, even to the extent of leaving islands half-drawn, as if the yet-to-be-seen half were still beneath the ocean's surface. Much better documented was the second tradition, that of professional cartographers, whose desire for coherence, completeness, and balance in their maps led them to draw from exaggerated accounts of obscure lands or even to invent their own theories and coordinates to produce maps more acceptable either to themselves or to their patrons (Leighly 16).

English cartography before 1700 had largely followed this second tradition through the examples of Spanish, German, and Dutch mapping. However, with the founding of the Royal Society in 1660 and the ascendancy of the British navy in the Atlantic and Indian oceans in the last decades of the seventeenth century, an increase in the number of exploratory expeditions and the collection of astronomical data combined a heightened interest in cartography and navigation with a new ideal of scientific rigor in measurement. This new approach to mapping, what I call cartographic empiricism, dominated British voyage accounts and maps throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The terms of cartographic empiricism were simple: through the use of scientific instruments and mathematics, explorers were to take as careful observations as possible and record only what those observations showed. The work of Edmond Halley, most famous today for the discovery of the comet that bears his name, introduced a high level of precision to world mapping following his painstaking voyage in the Atlantic in 1697–1698. In 1702, Halley published his first map of the world, which included isogonic lines delineating the variations of the compass from true north, based on his own observations in the Atlantic and on studying the logs of others' voyages in the Indian Ocean. Following the lead of the earlier mariner tradition of cartography, Halley's map shows Australia as only half-drawn, as it would remain on English charts until Cook circumnavigated the continent in 1770. Likewise, the Pacific is a vast blank on the left side of the map. Halley covers his naked Pacific with cartouches containing Latin and English text. He justifies the incompleteness of his map in the cartouche in the ocean's center: "I durst not presume to describe the like Curves of the South Sea wanting accounts thereof." Here Halley points to the vital link between experience and the map within cartographic empiricism: the written discursive explanation of observations justifies the map, just as the map circularly asserts the veracity of the text by showing what the account tells. Yet even Halley's maps slipped into a more romantic mode; his 1702 world map, for all its empirical rigor, shows California as an island and goddesses adorning the North American hinterland. The revised map that Halley published in the Royal Society's 1705 Miscellanea Curiosa is still more imaginative (figure 11). Here, Halley still refuses to give the magnetic variations of the Pacific, but he is willing to provide the paths of the trade winds around the globe, notwithstanding his complaints in one of the
attached essays about the lack of exploratory voyages in that ocean and Spanish sailors' unwillingness to share their own data ("An Historical Account" 71–72). He justifies his decision by the analogy he sees between the world's oceans and the "lack of variation" in accounts of the trade winds (74)—accounts he earlier claimed not to have, or at least to have had in insufficient numbers.

By the 1830s, cartographic empiricism had made the publishing of governmentsanctioned accounts common procedure for expeditionary leaders. Cook's and Vancouver's journals became classics in their own right but did not appear in print until after being reviewed and endorsed by royal commissions—and neither did the maps described by those accounts. Essential to establishing national sovereignty is the concept of territory, the land over which sovereignty can be exercised legitimately; thus the maps that Cook, Vancouver, and Turnbull brought back from their voyages not only claimed to show the world "as it is," but also what could be owned and controlled by the British Empire. These maps held such epistemological and scientific value for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century audiences partly because the political and economic stakes were so high. Nor were the stakes merely about monetary gain; the drive to institute European, and especially British, cultural and racial norms in the Pacific was led by missionary societies as well as government agencies that wished to transform what Halley's map showed to be a tabula rasa into outlets of British civilization. To this end, maps began to record not only geographical but also anthropological data. In John Snow's 1840 map of Polynesia, the work of Cook and his successors has filled out the South Pacific into a fairly recognizable array of islands, albeit with many of those islands still bearing names such as "New Ireland," "New Britain," and "Nantucket Island." In fact, the physical geography of the map pales in interest next to the cultural geography recorded in a table at the lower right corner. In the table, Snow records the names of major archipelagoes where missionary societies are at work, along with information such as the archipelagoes' "State," meaning that they are "Christian," "mostly Christian," "partly Christian," or "Heathen." At the bottom of the table, Snow includes the statement "All beyond in Heathen Darkness." That maps are records of experience seems to have been taken for granted by 1840; in fact, they could now record not only the state of the land as the cartographer saw it, but the state of thousands of souls as the cartographer understood them.

Melville's attitude toward South Seas missionaries has been widely noted and discussed, but in the publication of Typee and Omoo he evinced a shared interest with them: the power of the map. Once established, missionaries often surpassed military and scientific explorers in improving the accuracy of maps throughout the Pacific, as in the case of the printing press established at the Lahainaluna Seminary on the west coast of Maui. Lorrin Andrews, the head of the school, taught himself copper engraving and passed on his knowledge to his Hawaiian students, who produced maps of the Hawaiian Islands that contained numerous key corrections
Fig. 11. Halley's 1705 Map of the World, from *Miscellanea Curiosa*. Courtesy of Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.
to Cook's records and often included detailed prospect views of Lāhaina, which in
the 1830s and 1840s was the capital of American whaling in the Pacific (Fitzpatrick
108–15). In their day, these maps were the most accurate available of Hawai‘i and
the surrounding area.

At the same time, Melville identified with a cartography that, while adopting
the rhetoric of empiricism, retained and even inserted elements of imagination
into the map. Daniel Defoe used maps and specific geographic information to
keep his *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* rhetorically balanced between fact and
fiction. As the frontispiece for the second volume of *Crusoe*, Defoe used a world
map depicting the line that Crusoe's journeys were to have followed (figure 12).
The map reflects the cartographic conventions of 1722 Britain, both empiricist and
imaginary: Australia is half-drawn, California is an island, and northwestern North
America is a large blank space. Defoe's adoption of contemporary conventions
was to make his map, and thus his text, believable. Writing in a world in which
scientific accounts and mathematically precise maps verified each other, Defoe's
map rhetorically "proved" that Crusoe was an actual person who lived and moved
in the actual world.

In "reporting" his own adventures in the South Seas, Melville also included
a map of the Marquesas for the frontispiece of *Typee* (figure 12). Melville in fact
owned a copy of the map that was used as the source for that in *Typee*, and as San­
ford Marovitz suggests in his discussion of the source, Melville may have drawn
a copy himself for the publisher. The Northwestern-Newberry edition of *Typee*
includes the map in the appendix, with a comment on the map's inaccuracy (362).
The statement is true, but accuracy was not crucial for Melville in deciding to in­
clude his map. The manuscript of his first novel had been rejected by the Harper
brothers on the grounds that "it was impossible that it could be true and there­
fore was without real value" (278). The doubts of *Typee's* veracity were, however,
mixed with recognition of the book's similarity to *Robinson Crusoe*, a similarity
that was one of Wiley and Putnam's main reasons for subsequently accepting the
manuscript. Many critics agreed upon *Typee*’s publication that Melville was writ­
ing in the tradition of *Crusoe*, and Melville's decision to include the map follows
that tradition as well. Defoe's mix of exotic romance and detailed, realistic descrip­
tion captured the imagination of generations of writers, including not only Mel­
ville but figures such as Richard Henry Dana Jr., who sought to capture the spirit
of *Crusoe's* romance through careful description of his experiences in *Two Years
before the Mast*. For both Defoe and Melville, maps served as powerful rhetori­
cal devices with which to at least partially circumvent the need for suspension of
disbelief in their audiences; because the maps were there, the narratives could by
implication be trusted as true.

While seldom referred to in reviews, the map in *Typee* spoke to the author's
and publisher's claims for the book's veracity, a concern voiced by the Harpers and
scrutinized by the critics. Facing an audience conditioned by the precise realism of Dana’s *Two Years*, Melville could expect little patience for extravagant invention. In the preface to *Typee*, he writes: “There are some things related in the narrative which will be sure to appear strange, or perhaps entirely incomprehensible, to the reader; but they cannot appear more so to him than they did to the author at the time. He has stated such matters just as they occurred . . . trusting that his anxious desire to speak the unvarnished truth will gain for him the confidence of his readers” (xiv). Thus, Melville claims not only the book’s basis in his own experience but his intention to faithfully, even artlessly, represent that experience. His British publisher, John Murray, went even a step further, dropping *Typee* from the title and releasing the book in London as *Narrative of a Four Months’ Residence among the Natives of a Valley of the Marquesas Island; or, A Peep at Polynesian Life*. If Melville was to be a “modern Crusoe,” as Evert Duykinck called him in his review of *Typee* (qtd. in Higgins and Parker 20), he needed to temper his romantic inventions with the rhetoric of factual realism.

“What will our juvenile readers say to a real Robinson Crusoe, with a real man Friday?” asked an early London reviewer of *Typee* (qtd. in Higgins and Parker 30). While not all critics were convinced—some even questioned whether Melville’s name was a nom de plume (Higgins and Parker 21)—many praised his verisimilitude; the Cincinnati *Morning Herald* reviewer averred: “This is a veritable picture of life among the cannibals, from actual observation. The narrative is worthy of the author of *Robinson Crusoe* in style and in interest, with the additional advantage of being a simple record of facts” (qtd. in Higgins and Parker 38). To the critics,
Melville was not the uncompromising realist that Dana was, but an author with what Hawthorne termed "a freedom of view" (qtd. in Higgins and Parker 22) who also happened to be telling the truth.

When preparing the manuscript for Omoo, the sequel to Typee, Melville also commissioned a sequel map, focusing on the Society Islands but including the Marquesas in the far corner, shaded as though fading into the past (figure 13). The map's foreshadowing of Omoo's link to Typee is not accidental; according to a letter to John Murray in January 1847, the strange title was intended to create a romantic effect that the map would both preserve and offset, continuing the Crusoe mode from his first novel: "I desire the title (as it now appears) to remain untouched—its oddity, or uniqueness, if you please conveys some insight into the nature of the book. It gives a sort of Polynesian expression to its 'figurehead.'" Melville added: "With the proof sheets, I send a map, a draught of the one which will appear with the book here. I have had it drawn expressly for the work.—I think it essential" (Omoo 331). Like its predecessor, the Omoo map was inaccurate, but its rhetorical claim to representation of actual lands tied to an actual history stood nonetheless. Melville's reputation as "the man who lived among the cannibals" increased, and critics looked forward to more of the same from the young novelist.

As Melville's confidence in himself as a writer grew, he nursed an ambition to write a weighty allegorical romance that would establish his reputation not just as a Pacific adventurer but as an intellectual figure within the American literary world. The result of this ambition was Mardi, Melville's second-longest novel, and
the first to appear without a map—for Mardi is a fictional archipelago, and rather than give his readers orientation within his imaginary world, the author purposely leaves his voyage without a map. The chartlessness of Mardi infuriated both critics and general readers, and the book was a complete failure. In the eyes of Melville's readers, he had violated the social contract that Typee and Omoo had established: the audience would believe and enjoy the story as long as the author aimed for verisimilitude in geography and plot, thus winning "the confidence of his readers." Melville's attitude toward his readers had certainly changed in the preface to Mardi: "Not long ago, having published two narratives of voyages in the Pacific, which, in many quarters, were received with incredulity, the thought occurred to me, of indeed writing a romance of Polynesian adventure, and publishing it as such; to see whether, the fiction might not, possibly, be received for a verity: in some degree the reverse of my previous experience" (xvii). The placating narrator of Typee has evolved into a defiant, sarcastic, headstrong author who openly admits his intent to manipulate his audience, to lie like truth.

Critics have tended to see Mardi as a departure from Melville's earlier novels since the book's first appearance. However, Ellis offers both ideological and narrative evidence for a continuation from Typee to Mardi. She notes that in all three novels, Melville uses Pacific Islander characters as "models of alterity or difference that allow both his critique and his replication of white civilizations, enacting a partial white-out of prior, indigenous figurations of Pacific Islands cultures" ("Melville's Literary Cartographies" 10-11). Ellis finds that Melville's treatment of Pacific cultures reinforces colonial categories through his very attacks on imperialist practices in the Pacific. His literary encounters in the South Seas, Ellis argues, are "with ostensibly pure and primitive cultures" (10), and his critiques of missionaries and military conquerors maintain Western points of reference even while condemning the results of those points of reference (13). In short, Melville's use of the Pacific is strikingly similar to that of the imperialist whites he criticizes: he renders the cultural geography of the area as a tabula rasa that literally gives him a blank space in which to exercise his imagination. Ellis refers to the beginnings of each of the three novels to highlight a narrative device that creates this tabula rasa, the "description of a 'blank' Pacific ocean that awaits mapping" (15), as if the Pacific had no meaning without Melville's creative talent to bring it forth. As she gives textual evidence of this, Ellis also cites the ends of Omoo and Mardi, which similarly portray a blank ocean. She claims that "the cartographic void or the 'chartless seas' that Melville refers to here and in Moby-Dick evince the empty field that he constructs to inscribe authorial, cultural, and national identity. . . . Melville presents his narrative as filling in the textual field" (15). However, Ellis glosses over the endings of all three books, which offer interpretations that complicate reading Melville as a successfully imperialist writer.
Let us first examine the “chartless seas” from the three books’ openings:

Six months at sea... the sky above, the sea around, and nothing else! (Typee 3)

The vessel we sought lay... about a league from the land, and was the only object that broke the broad expanse of the ocean. (Omoo 5)

At length, dead before the equatorial breeze, we threaded our way straight along the very line itself. Westward sailing; peering right, and peering left, but seeing naught. (Mardi 4)

Each of these passages describes not only an idea but a feeling of chartlessness. Lacking the cognitive maps that Polynesian navigators had developed for Pacific sailing (Finney 443–44), Western sailors often documented the psychological trauma of spending days, weeks, and months sailing without any landmarks. For Melville's narrators, life in the Pacific is life “off the map.” Even with the development of precision chronometers and other navigation equipment, the distance between mathematical knowledge of a ship’s position on the globe and the experience of “peering right, and peering left, but seeing naught,” was at times insurmountable for sailors. In Moby-Dick, Pip’s abandonment at sea in “The Castaway” results in the terrible psychological effect of visual solitude on the ocean: “To swim in the open ocean... the awful lonesomeness is intolerable. The intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity, my God! who can tell it?... Pip’s ringed horizon began to expand around him miserably.... The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul.... He saw God’s foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad” (413–14). No matter how well charted the Pacific might be, the individual sailor’s experience of an inconceivably massive body of water cannot be explained, sublimated, or described by cartography. The openings of each of Melville’s early novels activate a specific kind of imperialism: that of the common Western sailor, whose own place in the hierarchy of a ship colonizes him and in turn places him in a position to colonize the cultures that he encounters—but on the level of buying trinkets (Moby-Dick 18) and carousing with native women (Typee 14–15), rather than that of “consummating” treaties “artfully drawn” with island governments and the “piratical seizure” of territory, as politically and economically powerful institutions do (254).

The individual and institutional forms of colonization dovetail in Melville’s writing as the private and public versions of the same tropes: ravishing, buying, selling, and thieving. And yet the ultimate doom of both kinds of imperialism is figured in the common sailor’s “chartless” experience. Ellis is right to point out the political implications of Melville’s “chartless seas” trope; however, she does not explain why, after the narrative is supposed to have constituted a Western inscription of
meaning onto this chartless space, the ocean again appears at the end of the last two books as an overwhelming chaos.

By noon, the island had gone down in the horizon; and all before us was the wide Pacific. (Omoo 316)

Churned in foam, that outer ocean lashed the clouds; and straight in my white wake, headlong dashed a shallop, three fixed specters leaning o'er its prow: three arrows poising. And thus, pursuers and pursued flew on, over an endless sea. (Mardi 654)

In an act of cartographic empiricism, the establishment of the narrative as an authoritative description of the tabula rasa would render the space charted, inscribed, and defined by Western categories. The exact opposite happens in the above passages from Omoo and Mardi. The narrative circles back on itself, as if it had never happened. This is not to say that the impact of Atlantic culture on the South Seas has been neutralized, but it is certainly the case that the thoroughly Atlantic mind of Melville has been tattooed by the Pacific. One of the necessary elements of the cartographic empirical narrative was a safe return home to a “white Atlantic” culture that could make logical sense of the Pacific experience. The problem that Melville encountered, both in his own life and in his writings, was that experience in the Pacific would never allow him fully to go home to his Atlantic heritage. His ambivalent attitude toward the Typees, alternately admiring them as noble savages and fearing them as physically powerful, morally inscrutable forces, drives Tommo into a cultural and moral space in which he separates from his own prior identity.

In one of the most disturbing scenes in all of Melville’s writing, Tommo ensures his escape by striking the Typee chief Mow-Mow with a boat hook: “Even at the moment I felt horror at the act I was about to commit; but it was not time for pity or compunction, and with a true aim, and exerting all my strength, I dashed the boat-hook at him. It struck him just below the throat, and forced him downwards. I had no time to repeat my blow, but I saw him rise to the surface in the wake of the boat, and never shall I forget the ferocious expression of his countenance” (Typee 252). Tommo abandons his Western virtues to protect his own identity as a white man. There is no clear indication what Mow-Mow’s intent was in swimming out to the boat, but like Amasa Delano in Benito Cereno, Tommo at the end interprets his pursuer as hostile; only after the stab with the boat hook does Tommo see a “ferocious expression.” The image of Mow-Mow’s face in the boat’s wake haunts the close of the novel, and by the time of Mardi’s composition, the Pacific has become for Melville the allegorical space in which Western civilization perceives, and often misperceives, itself. The inability to read the Pacific does not stop its political acquisition by the West, but it unsettles Western assumptions about the
stability of epistemology and interpretation. The map on the frontispiece promises a safe return home, as with Crusoe. But in the end, Tommo is still in the Pacific commenting on the political scene in Tahiti, rather than finding the comforts of home in America; he “escapes” Typee only to achieve landlessness.

The ending of Omoo reveals even more anxiety about the ability of maps to anchor the individual in epistemological certainty. Faced with “the wide Pacific,” Melville finds no connection to the “essential” map on the frontispiece. The map has served as a way into the narrative, but the narrative rejects from its outset the map’s method of sense making, finding only a ship to break the horizon; at the end, the map has failed to provide a way back, leaving the characters as chartless and landless as they were before. This abandonment of the sailor-abandoning map continues into Mardi, in which the drawn map is replaced by Melville’s most extensive table of contents, listing over two hundred chapters in what amounts to a chart of Mardi’s spatial layout and Mardi’s temporal progression, without providing a coherent visualization of the cartographic information (such as distance, coastlines, and currents) that would make the voyage empirically successful. While Taji’s story appears primarily in the first person, his own personal experience fractures into a third-person narrator and a cinematically viewed character, described in mid-chase with the islanders whose father he killed, as they race into oblivion. The chase moves into a level of abstraction beyond the time and space of the map in Mardi’s closing words: “Pursuers and pursued flew on, over an endless sea.” The “white wake” metonymizes Taji’s impact on Mardi—a wake, not a map, or indeed anything that could be brought with him back to his Atlantic world. As Mow-Mow’s and Toby’s fates are left unclear at the end of Typee, so too the narrator Taji’s fate is left unclear at the end of his own narrative, as he watches himself in a scene of almost certain doom, yet from a (problematic) first-person perspective that, like Ishmael’s in Moby-Dick, suggests the necessity of his escape. The chartlessness of Mardi is the logical extreme of the distrust Melville expresses toward maps in his first two books.

The trajectory of chartlessness continues in Moby-Dick, initially through his character Bulkington. The “landlessness” that Melville describes in Bulkington denies the groundedness of the empirical cartographic tradition (Moby-Dick 106), just as Bulkington’s disappearance denies the narrative balance of the book, and throughout Moby-Dick Melville questions the underpinnings of the map’s imperial empiricism. In “The Funeral,” Ishmael muses on a bleached whale carcass as it floats away from the Pequod. He hypothesizes other ships sighting the carcass, or rather mis-sighting it: “Espied by some timid man-of-war or blundering discovery-vessel from afar, when the distance obscuring the swarming fowls, nevertheless still shows the white mass floating in the sun, and the white spray heaving high against it; straightway the whale’s unharming corpse, with trembling fingers is set down in the log—shoals, rocks and breakers hereabout: beware! And for years afterwards,
perhaps, ships shun the place; leaping over it as silly sheep leap over a vacuum, because their leader originally leaped there when a stick was held” (309). The observer’s authority is fractured; the popular image of the intrepid sailor facing the unknown gives way to “timid” and “blundering” observers who identify objects based on their presuppositions—especially their fears—without coming close enough for a more thorough identification. The carcass is named, recorded, and charted as a sandbar or reef, destined to appear on maps for years, although it will be gone in a matter of hours. Two logical assumptions of empiricist mapping, that what is seen is permanent and that it is correctly identified, suddenly become shoddy tenets under Ishmael’s critique. The sailor scoffs at the power given to maps that rivals that of church and state: “There’s your law of precedents; there’s your utility of traditions; there’s the story of your obstinate survival of old beliefs never bottomed on the earth, and now not even hovering in the air! There’s orthodoxy!” (309). Read in the light of *Moby-Dick*, maps such as those of Halley and Snow are charts based on hearsay, articles of faith drawn up in the name of finding familiar patterns that make sense of an overwhelming ocean.

Melville presents a more sustained critique of cartographic empiricism through Ahab in “The Chart.” In the wake of the captain’s announcement of his planned revenge on Moby Dick in “The Quarter-Deck,” Ahab enters his cabin, takes out a roll of old sea charts, and pores over them for hours. He reads as an empiricist, “stud[y]ing] the various lines and shadings which there met his eye” (198). Yet he is not satisfied by the experience of reading and studying the maps; he traces “with slow but steady pencil . . . additional courses over spaces that before were blank” (198). He refers to old logbooks, following Halley and Snow in adopting hearsay as truth. Ahab is creating an exhaustive map of a moving object, as Melville’s footnote on Matthew Fontaine Maury suggests was actually being attempted (199). Maury, a U.S. Navy officer and the preeminent oceanographer of his day, produced his *Whale Chart* in 1851 at the same time that Melville was penning *Moby-Dick*. Maury’s chart was the extreme culmination of cartographic empiricism. It distilled information from hundreds of American ships’ logs, and Maury claimed that it would show the impossible: the fixed locations of moving animals. The chart depicted where, and in what concentration, right and sperm whales would be at any given time of the year. Ahab’s narrator explains the principles by which a skilled cartographer can track, within a certain range of probability, where a whale might be at any given time. However, as in Maury’s work, only probability can be shown, yet the rhetoric of the map claims verified knowledge, as Ahab insists while he yearns for a time when “all possibilities would become probabilities, and, as Ahab fondly thought, every probability the next thing to a certainty” (*Moby-Dick* 200).

Melville asserts that the great unrealized danger in forcing maps to say what they cannot reveal—that only halves of islands exist, that whales *will* appear at such a place in such a season—is the self-reflexive violence done by projecting
the self into the world. As Ahab alters his chart, he alters himself: "The heavy pewter lamp suspended in chains over his head, continually rocked with the motion of the ship, and for ever threw shifting gleams and shadows of lines upon his wrinkled brow, till it almost seemed that while he himself was marking out lines and courses on the wrinkled charts, some invisible pencil was also tracing lines and courses upon the deeply marked chart of his forehead" (198). Here Melville gives empirical mapping a Kantian twist. If the cartographer only maps what he sees, then his map might not represent the world as it is but only demonstrate how his own consciousness understands his environment. The map is an individual's representation of reality, subject to misreadings, prejudices, faulty sources, and limited understanding of context. For Melville, the map is a representation of the psyche just as much as it is of physical geography—and this projection into reality ruptures the line between appearance and reality, bringing the peril of misnavigation and thus of destruction.

Yet Ahab is not the only member of the Pequod's crew susceptible to the dangers of empirical mapping. Earlier in this essay, I used Pip's madness as an example of the psychological rift between the map and experience. At the end of Ishmael's description of Pip's fall into the ocean, and subsequently into insanity, the narrator offers this frightening disclaimer: "[Abandonment on the ocean] is common in that fishery; and in the sequel of the narrative, it will then be seen what like abandonment befell myself" (414). The disturbing suggestion here is that Ishmael can be compared to Pip not only in his isolation but also in the psychological breakdown that results from it—that the narrator who navigates us through Moby-Dick is in fact mad himself. Indeed, Ishmael returns not to the safe havens of New York or New Bedford, but to the "devious-cruising Rachel" (573), a ship searching for the unfixed point of a lost son. The narrative device that Ellis noted in Melville's first three novels returns at the close of Moby-Dick. Ishmael's ocean is not boundless, but it is cyclically portentous: he floats on a "soft and dirge-like main" (573), recalling the funerals that morbidly drew his attention in New York. He is delivered, but from what and to what is unclear. If Ahab is destroyed by his Kantian projection onto his world, Ishmael paralyzes himself by projecting his New York consciousness onto the very ocean that threatens to consume him—his body goes halfway around the world, but his mind seems to go nowhere, except possibly into the "wondrous depths" of Pip's madness. Ahab's map leads Ishmael into the circularity of the exile's journey.

Now to return to the question of whether Melville works more as a predecessor of multiculturalism—or perhaps transnationalism—or as a white imperialist. It seems clear from analyzing Melville's engagement with Western maps that, as Ellis argues, indigenous forms of Pacific mapping seldom enter his thoughts. Ishmael's insistence that Queequeg's island of Kokovoko is "not down in any map" because "true places never are" (55) romanticizes the islander's origins rather than
reframing them into more authentically Polynesian terms. Similarly, Taji's claim that the map of Mardi is the map of the world to the islands' inhabitants (Mardi 176) provides symbolic reflexivity in Melville's treatment of the West at the expense of granting the sophistication of Polynesian mapping practices. Yet Melville resists Western maps, and indeed their failure in guiding his characters to the safe haven of American civilization suggests that, for all his imperialist tendencies, Melville does not believe in the ultimate epistemological or even anthropological success of the imperialist project of mapping the Pacific.

Let us return for a moment to the theme of the common sailor's experience. The difference between institutional mapping of territories and individual encounters with the Pacific's vast chartlessness is more than the difference between official and personal accounts, or between collective and individual narratives; it articulates a class divide projected onto a literally global scale. While Melville's most extensive treatments of class tend to appear in his Atlantic works, such as Redburn, "Bartleby," Israel Potter, and "The Tartarus of Maids," his Pacific novels famously involve tyrannical captains whose wills are either to be defied through mutiny, rejected through desertion, or submitted to through obedience. Class struggle defines at least as many on-ship situations in Melville's novels as does racial conflict or oppression—and at times the two become conflated, as in the case of Pip's infantilization both as a black sailor and as a cabin boy. In his Pacific world, where only the captain holds the charts, Melville seldom engages race without first wrestling with matters of class.

Such a line of progression is an inversion of the tendencies of multicultural criticism and what John Carlos Rowe calls the "new American studies." While studies ranging from Carolyn L. Karcher's Shadow over the Promised Land to Timothy B. Powell's Ruthless Democracy and Sanborn's Sign of the Cannibal provide remarkable insight into the implications of race, imperialism, and minority oppression for Melville's writings, few if any analyses have attempted integration of Melville's class concerns with his ideas about race and empire. However, this tendency in Melville criticism is merely a symptom of a larger trend in multicultural criticism in general. According to Larry J. Griffin and Maria Tempenis, although class plays a less explicit role in American Quarterly articles than do race, ethnicity, and gender, or even religion, there is little agreement among practitioners of multicultural criticism as to whether class has been inappropriately excluded. Paul Lauter has admitted in an assessment of the state of American studies that Americanists have been "considerably less successful in focusing on 'class' in the context of the United States" than in using concepts such as race, gender, and sexuality ("Reconfiguring Academic Disciplines" 28). Reading Melville's engagement with cartography suggests not so much a model for multiculturalism as a challenge to current multicultural scholarship, an insistent presence of class conflict that drives
Tommo to escape into visions of noble savages, that sends Taji from a realistic Pacific to a fantastic archipelago, and that oppresses the white mates on the *Pequod* more tangibly than it does the multiracial trio of harpooners. As Donald Pease has argued, C. L. R. James may in fact be a seminal figure in suggesting the place of Melville criticism in the age of transnational American studies, but Pease fails to acknowledge in his essay that James was not only a Trinidadian but a Marxist as well, and that James holds up the crew as the true heroes against not only Ahab but Ishmael.

To discount objections raised by Ellis, Sanborn, and other critics to Melville’s attitudes toward colonized peoples would be to reject a vital element of current criticism, but if Melville appears to us as less than a perfect cultural relativist, his convictions concerning the struggles of the oppressed and the intellectual humility of the honest skeptic dovetail in instructive ways for critics and cultural theorists. Rob Wilson, in his study of cultural perceptions of the Pacific, presents a sharp critique of *Moby-Dick*’s cultural work in American society: “As canonical spectacle of destructive powers enacted in the Pacific, *Moby-Dick* conducted global politics, opening, traversing, and interlocking disparate regions and fresh markets into a coherent space of American fantasy and design, even as it linked with minor languages and other symbolic systems through Pacific islanders and Singapore laborers” *(Reimagining the American Pacific 82–83)*. Wilson’s argument concerning Melville’s role in the Americanization of the Pacific is well taken, but by ignoring Ishmael’s vision of Americans “federated along one keel” with workers of the world’s nations, Wilson downplays the socioeconomic interdependence of the Pacific Rim that Melville’s treatments of class highlight. If “global politics” and “fresh markets” are avenues of American imperialism, Melville’s many portrayals of unmapped, unconvincing sailors suggest that the machinery of imperialism involves a group of subjects who bring race and class together: they can be categorized simultaneously as oppressors and as oppressed. The Pacific cartography that Melville offers us is one of not seeing, of not finding, of realizing the ideological and epistemological constraints—not least of all racism and class oppression—that prevent the Western viewer from taking in the Pacific on its own terms. Rather than eliding the struggle to represent the Pacific, Melville foregrounds the difficulties that the Euro-American Atlantic world creates in mediating authentic encounters with the other. At the same time, Melville’s price for this insight is his inability to return fully to his previous life in the United States. The impossibly vast Pacific has left its indelible, unreadable, unownable tattoo on his Atlantic mind.