



# Melville Society EXTRACTS

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sixpence for the unrivalled view from his forehead."

All this has remarkable, if fanciful, correspondences with Barnum's display of the Greenland or Black whale skeleton in his museum in November 1849. With his usual skill in promoting his marvels, Barnum spread a large portrait of a whale across the front of the museum and advertised it throughout November, 1849 in the *New York Daily Tribune*. Melville was in England during that month where he could, in fact, have seen news of the exhibit of the "vast frame of the Greenland whale." But he could not have missed the event on his return to New York. His friends George and Evert Duyckinck might have brought it to his attention. George had written a letter announcing Melville's new book, *Redburn*, and Barnum's whale to his friend Joann Miller on November 14, 1849 (Log 332), soon after Barnum had begun advertising.

The correspondences which link Tranquo's Sperm Whale skeleton to Barnum's Greenland whale, begin with Melville's displacement of King Tranquo's skeleton to "Pupella glen, where a temple of lordly palms now sheltered it." This could be Barnum's exotic "retired ... villa," Iranistan, an imitation of the Prince

of Wales's exotic oriental "palace" in Brighton, England (see A. H. Saxon, *P.T. Barnum's, The Legend and the Man* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1989], 156-59). Iranistan, in Fairfield just across the city line from Bridgeport, CT, Barnum's home town, was surrounded by exotic and rare trees and shrubs, flowers and green lawns, and overlooked an inlet on Long Island Sound. Tranquo's "retired palm villa at Pupella" was on a "sea-side glen not very far distant from what our sailors called Bamboo-Town, his capital," equivalent to nearby New York City, Barnum's "capital."

Barnum was, like King Tranquo, a collector of "matters of barbaric virtù," as was Oh-Oh of *Mardi*, an antiquarian collector of "objects of Mardian virtù," for Iranistan was full of "articles of virtù," or "trinkets." Tranquo of Tranque was a collector of "trinkum-trankums," or trinkets. Melville's mention of museums in Chapter 102 is pertinent, and Sir Clifford Constable's scheme, like Barnum's, to milk every penny possible out of each exhibit is significant in Melville's third "blow-ups" of P.T. Barnum and his American Museum.

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## TOUCHSTONE AND THE VIRTUE OF IF

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Shakespeare's influence on Melville is a fact so well-known that it may be taken for granted. In his letters, the author insisted upon the overwhelming experience, an epiphany really, that was his immersion in the plays. And as shown by Michael Zimmerman's exhaustive Columbia University thesis on the subject (1963), Melville's books from *Typee* to *Billy Budd* in varying degree reflect that fact, though Shakespeare's influence is most profound in *Moby Dick*.

And yet for all the notice that has been taken of Shakespeare's influence, one direct example has been somehow overlooked. Zimmerman and others have pointed to the correspondence between Ahab's great monologue that climaxes Chapter 114, "The Gilder"

and Jaques's "All the world's a stage" speech in *As You Like It*. It begins with "Oh, grassy glades!, oh, ever vernal endless landscapes in the soul" and continues with Ahab later spinning the following conceit:

There is no steady unretracing progress in this life. . . through infancy's unconscious spell, boyhood's thoughtless faith, adolescence' doubt (the common doom), then scepticism, then disbelief, resting at last in manhood's pondering repose of If. But once gone through, we trace the round again; and are infants, boys, and men, and Ifs eternally. . .

The Shakespeare analogue begins:

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players . . .  
At first the infant,