

## Herman Melville's "Pequot Trilogy": The Pequot War in *Moby-Dick*, *Israel Potter*, and *Clarel*

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### INTRODUCTION

Herman Melville (1819–91) makes recurring use of a Connecticut Valley Native American tribe, the Pequot, who were declared extinct after the Puritan-Pequot War of 1636–37. (The official declaration of the war was in 1637. The appellation of the tribe used in the nineteenth century was the Pequod, but it is now the Pequot.) In the following essay, I discuss what I term Melville's "Pequot trilogy"—consisting of two novels, *Moby-Dick* and *Israel Potter*, and a lengthy poem, *Clarel*—in which, I argue, the history of the Pequot is embedded.

In part 1, I begin by discussing how the Pequot War virtually set the course of later events between whites and Native Americans. In part 2, I show how some aspects of the retributive violence that marks this history of encounter between the two races are transposed in *Moby-Dick* and *Clarel*, and I show how *Israel Potter* affords not only collateral evidence

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of Melville's knowledge about the Pequot but also his unconventional sympathy toward them. In part 3, I compare Melville's view of the Pequot with that of a few of his contemporaries. In part 4, I argue that Melville analogizes the Pequot with the Typee, another indigenous people discursively demonized by whites due to their hostility toward whites, and propose that Melville's outlook might be a reason for his mistrust of official narratives. On the basis of the above discussion on the theme of being "possessed" by the Pequot in *Moby-Dick* and *Clarel*, in the last section of part 5, I review how the "ghost" of the Pequot seems to find fit agents in characters such as Captain Ahab in *Moby-Dick* and Nathan in *Clarel* and hijacks the main plots of those narratives to fulfill the tribe's desire for vengeance. In these two works, what at first seems like personal enterprises on the parts of Ahab and Nathan might actually have a larger, national aspect on another level, thereby indicating these works' relationship with American Gothic literature.

## I. THE PEQUOT WAR

Though a small war in terms of scale—and bearing in mind that Native American tribes were anything but monolithic—the symbolic import of the Pequot War is in fact immense. The tribe was massacred at the earliest stage of its contact with whites. It was not just the first such massacre but one that marked the beginning of the United States' later westward expansion through the initial genocidal intentions of the English colonists,<sup>1</sup> and it "may have been the first example of total warfare in New England."<sup>2</sup> Contemporary Native American author/critic Gerald Vizenor likens the attack on Mystic Fort during the Pequot War to other notorious instances of genocide against Native Americans: "Killing Indians was once sanctioned by the military of this nation. Who can forget the slaughter of tribal people at Mystic River and Sand Creek and Wounded Knee in South Dakota?"<sup>3</sup>

The preemptive strike on the Pequots' major fort/settlement, Mystic Fort on the banks of the Mystic River in southern Connecticut, opened the Pequot War. The English colonists set the fort afire in a predawn surprise attack, an unprecedented incident for Native Americans: "The fort was an effective shield in the limited scope of New England aboriginal warfare, where such a weapon as fire was considered too horrible and deadly to use."<sup>4</sup> So, although the Pequots have no written history, the fire attack must have been regarded as unfair. The attack has been typically described as follows:

[The sleeping Pequots] had no chance once the fort/settlement was set fire and the shooting started. In the early hours of May 26, 1637, Captain John Mason had quietly deployed his troops. He positioned some ninety Englishmen from Connecticut and Massachusetts, and several hundred Narragansett and Mohegans—around a Pequot settlement on the banks of the Mystic River.<sup>5</sup>

Acknowledging that there has historically been controversy surrounding the attack, for the purposes of this essay, I regard it as a massacre: two English soldiers out of eighty lost their lives whereas around four hundred to eight hundred of the Pequots died within an hour. Losing their tribal base in this way, the Pequot were defeated in skirmishes in the marshes, and the survivors were hunted down and sold as slaves, mainly to the West Indies, though some became slaves of the rival tribes allied with the English colonists.

The Pequot War had a complex set of causes. Politically, the Pequot were regarded as dangerous, because, having rare foresight into whites' drive for expansion, they tried to make alliances with other tribes to keep the English colonists in check. Economically, not until the settlers' demands for agricultural land became keener and the importance of trade disappeared as the beaver population neared extermination, did an all-out war initiated by the whites break out as the Pequot War.<sup>6</sup> Rhetorically, the Puritans' deftness has importance. The contemporary spiritual crisis caused by the Antinomian controversy, which was about individual faith versus socially established morality, partly triggered the war to "redefine and adjust New England's proclaimed mission",<sup>7</sup> or, put another way, "the events of 1637 established the legitimacy of genocidal war against nonwhite peoples."<sup>8</sup> The following passage, written by the above-mentioned Maj. John Mason who attacked the fort, exemplifies how the Christian God's power was deployed to justify the massacre: "And indeed such a dreadful Terror did the ALMIGHTY let fall upon their Spirit, that they would fly from us and run into the very Flames, where many of them perished. . . . But God was above them, who laughed his Enemies and the Enemies of his People to Scorn, making them as a fiery Oven."<sup>9</sup>

## II. MELVILLE'S PEQUOT TRILOGY

### A. *Moby-Dick*: Namesake of the *Pequod*<sup>10</sup>

Melville names the whaler *Pequod* in his novel on whaling, *Moby-Dick: or, The Whale* (1851). The novel's first person narrator, Ishmael, introduces the whaling ship to the reader in the following manner: “*Pequod*, you will no doubt remember, was the name of a celebrated tribe of Massachusetts Indians, now extinct as the ancient Medes.”<sup>11</sup>

In a famous quarterdeck speech, Captain Ahab of the *Pequod* reveals to his crew that the true purpose of their circumnavigatory whaling voyage is to pursue and kill a white sperm whale, Moby Dick, which bit off his leg in the previous voyage. Ahab mesmerizes the crew by describing how he feels imprisoned by a metaphorical “white wall” shoved near to him and how he is being driven toward a deadly struggle with the giant whale by saying, “If a man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me” (164). Ahab also demands fair play, saying, “I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein” (164), or, later, stoically prohibiting the use of lightning rods in the middle of a typhoon off the coast of Japan, “let's have fair-play here, though we be the weaker side . . . out on privileges!” (505).

There seems to be some rapport between Ahab and his nonwhite harpooners, particularly between Ahab and the Native American harpooner Tashtego. The other harpooners, Queequeg from Polynesia and Daggoo from Africa, are former princes who came to the United States of their own free will and thus can relish their pride. For them, the legendary white whale vaguely embodies the white man's power. For Tashtego, on the other hand, the same “white wall” analogy would appear to symbolize the land confiscation and genocide that characterize the Native American experience, in which the white wall overlaps with the line of the frontier that is ever pressing in on them. The Native Americans had been pushed into territories west of the Mississippi by the Indian Removal Act, which was advocated by President Andrew Jackson and passed by Congress in 1830, and the removal of the Native Americans was virtually completed by 1850. Tashtego—from “the last remnant of a village of red men” (120) in the westerly point of Martha's Vineyard Island—is a fit representative of his “vanishing race.”<sup>12</sup> Tashtego has generally been considered a minor character, but it is notable that it is he who sights the voyage's first whale, and then Moby Dick (though a split second later than Ahab).

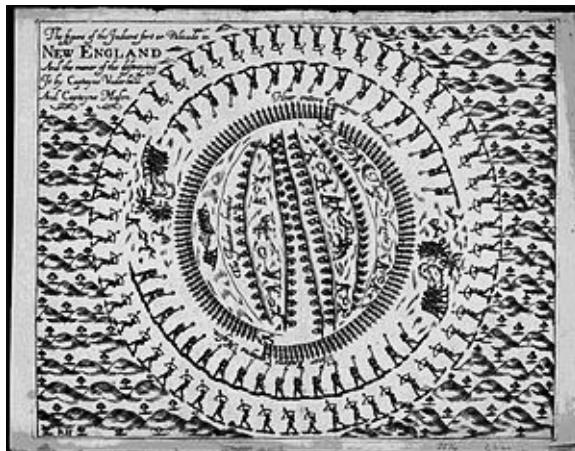
Tashtego is the first person to respond to Ahab's speech, and then is followed by the other two harpooners. Ahab, reversing the power hierarchy

of the ship, makes the reluctant white mates serve the harpooners as "cup-bearers to my three pagan kinsmen there—yon three most honorable gentlemen and noblemen, my valiant harpooners" (166). This is a point attested to, much later, when the other crew members come to fear Ahab's growing monomania, "a certain magnetism shot into their [i.e., the harpooners'] congenial hearts from inflexible Ahab's" (518), and again, when the frenzied hunt for Moby Dick embarks on its final stage, Ahab "seemed distrustful of his crew's fidelity; at least, of nearly all except the pagan harpooners" (538).

Metaphors abound in the sinking of the *Pequod*, as the Native American presence claims visibility in conjunction with the name of the ship, the plaid cloth, red flag, and "red arm" of the red man. Ahab's heart is embodied in the captain's flag: unlike a company flag chosen by the ship's owners, this one is his own choice. This flag wraps around Tashtego like a patterned plaid blanket, which was often worn by Native Americans to display their tribal identity in the nineteenth century, and it "streamed itself straight out" (570) from him. In addition, Tashtego's "forward-flowing heart" (570) is set against the passive renunciation of the white mates. Hearing Ahab's final words to a human being, Tashtego, at the mainmast of the sinking *Pequod*, nails the captain's flag to the main-mast while the enraged Moby Dick charges the ship. Only the uppermost mainmast is out of the water, and Tashtego's red arm hovers backwardly uplifted in the air, in the act of nailing the captain's red flag faster and yet faster to the subsiding spar:

A sky-hawk that tauntingly had followed the main-truck downwards from its *natural home among the stars*, pecking at the flag, and incommoding Tashtego there; this bird now chanced to intercept its broad fluttering wing between the hammer and the wood [i.e., the mainmast] and simultaneously feeling that *ethereal* thrill, the submerged savage beneath, in his death-grasp, kept his hammer frozen there; and so the *bird of heaven*, with *archangelic* shrieks, and his *imperial* beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship, which, like Satan, would not sink to hell till she [i.e., the *Pequod*] had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and *helmeted* herself with it. (572, emphasis mine)

This sky-hawk can be interpreted as a variant symbol of America's



Engraving depicting the attack on the Pequot fort, published in Capt. John Underhill's *News from America* in 1638 (courtesy of Massachusetts Historical Society)

imperialistic ambitions, for “*the bird of heaven*” can be seen as the American national bird.<sup>13</sup> As described above, Tashtego’s blow captures the bird and takes it to the bottom of the ocean. It is also the same kind of hostile bird that had previously taken Ahab’s hat, which he had been wearing daily, as well as his flag on the same day. We can interpret that, in the passage quoted above, Melville ceremonially “helmeted” the *Pequod*/Pequot with a feathered war bonnet of the Native Americans.

When Moby Dick staves in the ship and the *Pequod* sinks in a huge whirlpool of the whale’s making, it seems that on a certain level the history of the destruction of the Pequot people is being reenacted. As Ishmael spins around, being pulled toward the bottom of the ocean while witnessing Tashtego’s last act, he compares the whirlpool to the wheel of fire that Ixion was fastened to in Greek mythology—“at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve” (573). Melville analogizes Ixion’s wheel of fire with the burning, circular Mystic Fort.<sup>14</sup> And Ishmael alone survives out of some thirty crew members—much as a handful of the Pequot survived.

#### B. Israel Potter: Sympathy toward the Pequot<sup>15</sup>

In *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile* (1855), which Melville published four years after *Moby-Dick*, the eponymous white protagonist’s

exile in London is compared to the experience of a postwar Pequot slave who was made to a slave by his rivals, the Narragansett, who were allied with the English colonists in the Pequot War. The novel is based on an actual Revolutionary War veteran who experienced adventures as an intrepid soldier and a spy and who was sometimes made use of by famous historical figures such as Benjamin Franklin, John Paul Jones, and Ethan Allen. For these services, however, far from receiving any financial reward or commemoration, Israel has to lose himself in the crowd for the sake of sheer survival in London until his dream of a homecoming materializes fifty years later.

There are a few moments in which this novel deviates from recounting a mere adventure story and achieves a different tone. For instance, in a famous scene, the *Man-in-the-Moon* sneers down on the battle between the *Serapis* and the *Bonhomme Richard*. Here, however, I would like to focus on a scene near the ending of the novel that has escaped the attention of critics. It comes when Israel works for one day at St. James's Park in London. His isolation in an oasis-like space triggers a suppressed memory of his beloved New England; expressions such as "fenced in with iron pailings between whose bars" or the word "cage" underscore his bondage-like exile. Then the novel abruptly compares the "imprisoned" Israel to a fictitious "trespassing Pequod" on the former tribal homeland that is now occupied by the Narragansett:

It was a little oval, fenced in with iron pailings, between whose bars the imprisoned verdure peered forth, as some wild captive creature of the woods from its cage. And alien Israel there—at times staring dreamily about him—seemed like some amazed runaway steer, or trespassing Pequod Indian, *impounded on the shores of Narraganset Bay*, long ago.<sup>16</sup> (emphasis mine)

Here, more explicitly than in *Moby-Dick*, the Pequot seem to have figured prominently in the author's mind as the epitome of people unfairly subjugated. In addition, Melville's placing of the "Pequot" Israel at St. James's Park can be seen as being relevant to the Mystic Fort massacre because St. James is related to the burning of heathens. The New Testament says that St. James "suggested fire from heaven to consume" the pagans and Samaritans (Mark 10:38–40).

The preeminent animal imagery of a fox as representative of Israel seems to further connect Israel to the Pequot. Unlike in the primary source

for this novel, fox imagery is repeatedly used by Melville to describe the protagonist; for instance, Israel was “hunted from food and sleep, driven from hole to hole like a fox in the wood.” Also, we read of “the hunted fox [i.e., Israel] still to elude apprehension” or, later, “the same instinct which impels the hunted fox to the wilderness” (29, 32, 153). We should note that the Pequot were called the “fox people.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, judging from the use of the Pequot in *Israel Potter*, Melville not only knows much about their tribal history but also sympathizes with them. The novel’s preface professes that the author has refrained from offering “artistic recompense of poetical justice” to Israel “though sorely tempted” (viii) to do so.

Melville might have confirmed his views on the Pequot had he read William Apess (1798–1839), who was of Pequot and African ancestry, and who identified himself with the officially extinct Pequot. Apess had the honor to give an encomium on King Philip, war leader of the Wampanoag, at Boston’s oldest theater in 1836. However, after a short period of preaching as a Methodist minister and activist, Apess disappeared into obscurity. Similarly, Melville’s Israel Potter goes into exile in London: “What befell Israel during his forty years’ wanderings in the figurative London deserts, surpassed the forty years in the natural wilderness of the outcast Hebrews under Moses” (161). For Melville, Israel’s exile might have recalled Apess’s essay, “The Indians: The Ten Lost Tribes,” in which Apess laments that the Pequots’ “history has been blotted out from among the nations of the earth.”<sup>18</sup> Another link between Apess and Israel Potter is that, like some of the tribes who fought on the American side in the Revolutionary War, the Mashpee with whom Apess lived for some years were put into bondage by Massachusetts law from the time of the American Revolution until 1834. It appears as if Melville intended to show that roughly half of the Pequots and twenty-five out of twenty-six Mashpees died in the war, and that, like Israel Potter, despite their contribution to the war their claims were denied by the United States government.<sup>19</sup> Had Melville known about Apess’s messages, he might well have reconfirmed the nullified Pequot’s desire to protest.

#### C. *Clarel*: Reenactment of the Hostility toward the Pequot<sup>20</sup>

The Pequot theme reappears yet again twenty years later in *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876). The major body of the poem *Clarel* concerns a young American named Clarel who listens

attentively to his fellow pilgrims' discussions with an open mind. It is hard to summarize this poem, which is the longest in American literature; however, *Clarel's* outline is as follows: the titular protagonist, Clarel, tormented by religious doubts, has arrived in Jerusalem. Falling in love with a Jewish girl, Ruth, Clarel soon becomes engaged to her. However, her father, Nathan, a farmer-immigrant from America, is killed by Arab raiders, whom the poem's narrator compares with the Pequot. Clarel, forbidden by Jewish custom from seeing his fiancée, Ruth, during her mourning period, joins a pilgrim group and visits biblical sites. On his return ten days later, he finds that Ruth and her mother have died of a fever that was caused by grief. The long poem soon closes, leaving the dejected Clarel alone again. By examining the poem's framework, as outlined above, we may see that Nathan is a pivotal character, and that the main plot is put in motion by the "Pequod," because the hostile Arabs who murder Nathan are compared with the tribe. Thus, although the poem is set in Palestine, it also reflects the Pequot theme in a significant way. The background of the poem reveals a cyclical revenge pattern between white American settlers and Native Americans.

Criticism on the Native American theme in *Clarel* has been centered on the figure of Ungar, another pilgrim, who is an ex-officer of the Confederacy and who lives in self-imposed exile in foreign countries. Ungar indicts American "democracy" and materialism from the vantage point of his Native American heritage. Acknowledging the importance of Ungar, I propose that the Pequots' curse seems to be embedded in Nathan's paternal lineage. Nathan is given the longest canto in *Clarel*, and his background, which reaches back three generations, is presented in seemingly excessive detail. Another white American character, Nehemiah from Narragansett, becomes the first spiritual guide for the newly arrived Clarel. As Nehemiah explains to Clarel, Nathan regards the Arabs as being like the Pequot and this causes Arab hostility. This leads to his cruel murder by Arabs. Nathan's sensibility of hating the Pequot-like racial Other has its roots in New England, going back a few generations when the farmer-uncle of Nathan's father died in a massive landslide in the White Mountains. Nathan's father interpreted this incident not as a mere natural disaster but as a "havoc from the heaven,"<sup>21</sup> which occurred because his people had dispossessed the region's Native Americans. This peculiar interpretation of Nathan's father seems to expose a fear of white settlers concerning the unfairly dispossessed indigenous people. After the death of his uncle, Nathan's father, who spoke in "blunt straightforward

Saxon tone” (58) befitting his Puritan lineage, moved to Illinois. In Illinois, because of this view about sin, Nathan’s father was haunted by the Native Americans who were buried in the landscape until his mind became “unhinged” (57). Such an obsession, tinged with a sense of ancestral sin, seems to be passed down to his son Nathan. Thus, the hidden motive for Nathan’s immigration to Palestine seems to be to escape from the American landscape that drove his father insane.

Nathan’s overzealousness is his “tragic flaw,”<sup>22</sup> but it is also comical. Before his marriage, Nathan had a period of inner turmoil during which he was “a spiritual window-shopper” who tried various faiths.<sup>23</sup> He marries a Jew and becomes an extreme Zionist. In spite of such a drastic change, his internal restlessness is only intensified until Nathan finally settles on Sharon plain. At the same time, however, he comes to appear “as little more than a cartoon figure of Zionist monomania”;<sup>24</sup> his “zeal to be a better Jew than the Jews, is as close to humor as *Clarel* gets.”<sup>25</sup>

The consequences of his ancestral racism have not yet run their course. In Palestine, Nathan maintains that he has a natural right to convert the marauding Arabs into Christians who follow an agricultural livelihood. The Arabs do not obey. Nehemiah compares the way in which the interracial relationship worsens to the Puritan-Pequot hostility: “Himself and honest servants three / Armed husbandmen became, as erst / *His sires in Pequod wilds immersed. / Hittites—foes pestilent to God / His fathers old those Indians deemed:* / Nathan the Arabs here esteemed / The same—slaves meriting the rod; / And out he spake it; which bred hate / The more imperiling his state” (63, emphasis mine). On the basis of this crucial passage, Laurie Robertson-Lorant, though only sporadically, relates this Nathan-Arab hostility to the Pequot-Puritan hostility: “Nathan, whose ‘sires in Pequod’s wilds’ regarded the Indians as ‘foes pestilent to God,’ treats the Arab tribesmen as ‘slaves meriting the rod,’ and shortly after Clarel and Ruth become engaged, Arab raiders ambush Nathan and kill him.”<sup>26</sup> Nathan thus reacts as his Puritan ancestors had done—regarding the Other as the Judeo-Christian God’s enemy. Extending Robertson-Lorant’s line of thought that connects Nathan’s fall to his ancestors’ view of and deeds against the Pequot, and given my above interpretation of *Moby-Dick* and *Israel Potter*, I see much significance in Nathan’s lineage and propose that the Pequot in fact activate *Clarel’s* main plot. Otherwise, why did Melville take such pains by writing the poem’s longest canto—book 1, canto 17, “Nathan”—to delineate Nathan’s lineage in such a seemingly digressive manner, while offering so little background information on the

vast majority of other characters? In addition, the Arab raiders' burning of Nathan's corpse and the shreds of Nathan and his servants can be analogized to the Pequots' Mystic Fort settlement being set afire.

Furthermore, in view of the American situation during the years when Melville was writing *Clarel*, the poem's Arab raiders on horseback are also analogous to Plains Indians. As Hilton Obenzinger points out, quoting from *Clarel*, "the band of Arab robber-sharks, 'Swart, sinuous men on silvery steeds,' reappears; like the Plains Indians, and revels in their horsemanship."<sup>27</sup> (The theme of Jewish cowboys versus Arab raiders is still valid today, in which Native Americans and Palestinians are presented as if they are interchangeable.<sup>28</sup>) Thus, Nathan's murder can be said to overlap with the contemporary situation involving the Sioux (Lakota) in the 1870s. The US government policy by the mid-1860s was to confine Native Americans to reservations, allegedly to force them to abandon their nomadic lifestyle and "civilize" them. Those Sioux living off the reservation in the unceded territory complained when the federal government permitted the Northern Pacific Railroad survey crews onto their land in violation of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. Starting in 1853 many battles took place such as Red Cloud's War (1866–67) until they culminated in the Battle of Little Bighorn (1876). Also, the Sioux were an important tribe for Melville, not just because of their prominent role in history but as seen in his views expressed his critical book review of Francis Parkman's nonfiction work, *The California and Oregon Trail* (1849), appeared in the magazine *Literary World* in May 1849.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, what is at issue here is settler culture. A dichotomy presented in the foreground of *Clarel* is the conflict between the immigrant Nathan versus the native Arabs in nineteenth-century Palestine, whereas embedded in the background are the Puritan settlers versus the Pequot in seventeenth-century America and the frontier settlers versus the Plains Native Americans in the nineteenth century. Subtle writer that Melville was, this roundabout way of portraying cyclical revenge in *Clarel* will remind the attentive reader of Melville's indirect way of recounting the famous phrase "The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating" in his earlier work, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (1857). The Nathan story in *Clarel* and "The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating" in *The Confidence-Man* present the way in which the encounter between the two races, which started in hostility in a far corner of the "civilized" world, nonetheless set the course for the future. In *The Confidence-Man*, Indian-haters, who are usually those whose beloved have been killed by Native Americans in the

antebellum period, devote themselves to killing as many Native Americans as possible, while the frontiersmen of the Great Plains imbue their children with racial hatred.

Taking the theme of a passion for revenge into consideration, I propose that Nathan in *Clarel* might have been named after another Indian-hater, the protagonist Nathan Slaughter (nicknamed Nick) in Dr. Robert Montgomery Bird's novel *Nick of the Woods: Wild Man of the Forest* (1837). Though it depicts a racial conflict that occurs at a Kentucky frontier settlement in the 1780s, the popularity of *Nick of the Woods* at the time of its publication was mainly because it was published only several years after the Black Hawk War (1832) that took place on the Iowa frontier. After his wife is massacred and his own scalp is taken by Native Americans, the title character Nathan of *Nick of the Woods* turns into an Indian killer. He makes it a rule to mark a cross on each slaughtered enemy's bosom with his knife, as if to self-represent the Christian world. As Richard Slotkin points out, "Nathan Slaughter had been a fanatical Quaker, who sought license for his hyperintense religiosity in the isolation of the forest."<sup>30</sup> Not unlike the case of Nathan in *Clarel*, religiosity causes the protagonist to be an excessive character, one who is harsh toward the racial Other. And not unlike the case of another Indian-hater, Col. John Moredock in "The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating" in *The Confidence-Man*, Nick of *Nick of the Woods* is a gentleman when he is in a town, whereas his fanaticism is intensified in a wild and isolated environment. Again, not unlike the dubious "authentic" historian Judge James Hall in "The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating" in *The Confidence-Man*, the author of *Nick of the Woods*, as a physician, conveys authenticity in his voice as he presents to the reader what Native Americans are like.

### III. MELVILLE'S MISTRUST OF OFFICIAL NARRATIVES

If my above supposition is correct, the next question would be why a white writer like Melville, whose ancestors on both sides of his family fought in the Revolutionary War, came to see the other side of the national imagination. I would propose that Melville might have analogized the Pequot with another tribe that remained hostile to the encroachments of whites, the Typee. From 1842 to 1844, during his early twenties, after deserting his whale ship with his friend, Melville ended up living for four weeks with the allegedly cannibal tribe, the Typee, on the island of Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas. There, in the Taipi Valley, he was treated with

hospitality, though he could not get rid of the fear of being tattooed (that is, "going native") or of being eaten by members of this tribe. Drawing on this experience, Melville later wrote his first novel, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846).

Frequently recurring expressions found among the various writings on the Typee and the Pequot are so similar that it is as if they are interchangeable. First, in Timothy Dwight's epic poem "Greenfield Hill" (1794) it is observed that "long held the Pequods an extensive sway; / Bold, savage, fierce, of arms the glorious pride, / And bidding all the circling realm obey."<sup>31</sup> Second, Captain David Porter's journal on the attack of the Typee villages (1815) includes the following: "Unhappy and heroic people! The victims of your own courage and mistaken pride."<sup>32</sup> Third, in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's novel *Hope Leslie* (1827), it is stated that "the Pequod race, a name at which, but a few years before, all within the bounds of the New England colonies, English and Indians, 'grew pale.'"<sup>33</sup> Fourth, in Melville's three works, similar expressions appear: In *Typee* it is remarked that the Typee are "reputed the most ferocious in the South Seas" (170).<sup>34</sup> In *Moby-Dick* are found the words, "Pequod, you will no doubt remember, was the name of a celebrated tribe" (69), and in *Clarel* appear the words, "His sires in Pequod wilds immersed. / Hittites—foes pestilent to God" (63). The Typee and Pequot are similar in their domination of neighboring tribes, alleged bellicosity, and, as a result of this, the white writers' attribution to their tribes of violence and arrogance. The two tribes might be connected, as well, in terms of cannibalism. Though the Pequot were not cannibals in the literal sense, they were represented in this way by whites. In introducing the whaler, Ishmael describes the *Pequod*'s decoration of whale bones as "a cannibal of a craft, tricking herself forth in the chased bones of her enemies" (70).

Writings on Polynesia had been popular in Europe and America; however, the authors who wrote on this subject were usually famous voyagers or military officers who observed the indigenous people from a superior position, whereas the young Melville in the Pacific was a common sailor/deserter who saw the world from the lowliest perspective. As T. Walter Herbert, Jr. notes, "His beachcomber perspective permitted Melville to notice aspects of Marquesan life that had been invisible to Western observers who enjoyed official backing, and to identify the source of certain false impressions they had broadcast."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, worse still, as a guest/captive Melville could have been eaten by the Typee, or, he could likewise have been killed by whites because, while he was there, French

men-of-war were about to take possession of Nuku Hiva. Even after he fled from the Typee, as a deserter who escaped from two whalers, Melville was afraid of being arrested in Hawaii until he found his way back home in a man-of-war. The perspective from the other side of the “civilized world,” fostered for three years, must have been one reason why Melville came to doubt the savage/civilized binary that had been maintained by the majority of whites to justify their violence. Besides this lowly perspective, because the young Melville had experienced the hospitality of the Typee, it is only natural that he came to doubt the validity of the historical discourse that had demonized indigenous tribes, whether the Typee or the Pequot. Melville famously writes in *Typee*, “These things are seldom proclaimed at home [i.e., the United States]; they happen at the very ends of the earth; they are done in a corner, and there are none to reveal them” (26–27). Because of this sort of outlook, Melville would not draw a hasty inference that any tribal hostility was an automatic verification of Native American devilishness. On the other hand, far from boasting of an authoritarian stance, as the subtitle of *Typee, A Peep at Polynesian Life* proclaims, Melville admits that his observation was just a peep and that he understood only a little about the Typee—only a little, yet a tremendous amount for a nineteenth-century American.

#### IV. THE AMERICAN GOTHIC: STORIES OF POSSESSION

Susan Sheckel in *The Insistence of the Indian* maintains that a Native American “ghost” haunts America and its narratives.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Renée L. Bergland writes in *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* that Native Americans can possess white Americans’ imagination: “Although Native Americans can be said to have taken possession of the American imagination, this means that they have vanished into the minds of those who have dispossessed them.”<sup>37</sup>

The Pequot “ghosts” are not safely dead for whites. In *Clarel* we see the persistence of the white man’s sense of guilt in the national imagination and how the unfairly subjugated Native Americans enact a type of wish-fulfilling counterattack against Nathan through the Arab raiders.

In *Moby-Dick* Melville creates a framework that makes it appear that Captain Ahab, despite his strong ego as a self-made man, is manipulated by someone above him because of his doubly anti-Christian signifiers, *Ahab* of the *Pequod*. First, his crazed mother names him Ahab after an accursed Old Testament king who provoked God more than any king

before him (1 King 16:33). Second, Captain Ahab is also enticed by the "ghost" of the Pequot people through the name of his ship.

We shall now reexamine Ahab's quarterdeck speech scene that grabs the crew's hearts. Right before Ahab ceremonially makes everyone drink and swear "Death to Moby Dick!," hints are abruptly and obliquely given that the novel's main plot of the chase are under control by "the Indian" and that no one notices this. Ishmael narrates, "But those wild eyes met his [i.e., Ahab's], as the bloodshot eyes of the prairie wolves meet the eye of their leader, ere he rushes on at their heads in the trail of the bison; but, alas! Only to fall into the hidden snare of the Indian" (165). An easily detectable analogy here is that Ahab, the leader of the wild crew, is the leader of a pack of wolves who are to chase Moby Dick, a "bison," for the ocean is often compared to the prairie by Melville. Yet when it comes to the signification of "the hidden snare of the Indian," in which "the Indian" instead of "the wolves" eventually get the reward, the snare analogy would break down unless we accept that the novel's whole main plot, seemingly controlled by Ahab, is in fact hijacked by "the Indian." At least that is the understanding of Ishmael at the point of his narrating *Moby-Dick*, presumably years after his experience on the *Pequod*.

Because of the namesake of the *Pequod*, and because of Ahab's eloquent demand for fair play, the "ghosts" of the Pequot choose Ahab as a target of their possession to make him lead the crew into again fighting an impossible fight against whiteness par excellence, the giant white whale. Ahab indeed seems to be a fit agent for the Pequot. He suffers visitations of whiteness in an unbroken succession. Some years earlier, he was hit by white lightning and was branded with a livid lash-like scar, presumably from head to toe, as Ahab bellows to the corporal fire "in the sacramental act so burned by thee" (507). Then, in the previous voyage, he was deprived of his leg (and, most likely, his sexual potency) by Moby Dick. In chapter 119, "The Candles," opposing the corporal flames, whose whiteness is redundantly stated, Ahab bellows, "The white flame but lights the way to the White Whale!" (507). Even though the attempt to kill Moby Dick fails, as it inevitably does, Melville at least offers a symbol of Manifest Destiny, that is, "the bird of heaven" (572), to the sinking *Pequod*. As the voyage nears its end, Ahab has to repeat that he is made to do what he would not do. For instance, Ahab asks Starbuck, "Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?" (545), disclosing an uncanny hunch that he has been manipulated by someone outside himself. Though it seems as if Ahab is merely complying with the false prophet Fedallah, a representation of the

Orient, the fact that it has been prophesized that Fedallah himself will die before Ahab betrays that someone else presides over Fedallah as well. And in the context of my argument, that someone else can be speculated to be “the Indian” in general and the Pequot in particular.

I have shown this to be the case in *Clarel*, in which the agents are Arab raiders who mirror the Pequot and the Sioux and who kill Nathan. Again, on the surface, Nathan seems to have chosen his course through his adamant will; however, the poem’s narrative voice emphasizes that Nathan is only led by fate to his early death: “And Fate, which from her ambush springs / And drags the loiterer soon or late / Unto a sequel unforeseen; / These doomed him and cut short his date” (64). Thus, judging from the way in which Native Americans are deployed in *Moby-Dick* and *Clarel*, it seems that the main plots are constructed by the Pequot “ghost” to take revenge against whiteness through the appropriate agents, thereby showing that these works can be read as phantasmagoric examples of the American Gothic, which is deeply seated in white Americans’ sense of guilt.

## CONCLUSION

Though rendered in an oblique manner and within an especially large framework, which can hinder the reader from seeing an overall pattern in *Moby-Dick* and *Clarel*, it is worth examining the Pequot theme to explore how what at first may seem to be a sporadic pattern comes to resonate as we reconfirm Melville’s sympathy toward the tribe in *Israel Potter*. I have examined how tropes related to the Pequot take possession of Melville’s authorial imagination. Even after the actual disappearance of the tribes from their ancestral lands, dispossessed Native Americans haunted the American imagination, from such far-flung places as off the coast of Japan in *Moby-Dick*, London in *Israel Potter*, and Palestine in *Clarel*. Chronologically rearranged in relation to the Pequot War, *Clarel* makes use of the cause of the war, *Moby-Dick*, the massacre at Mystic Fort, and *Israel Potter*, the postwar bondage.

As a coda, we can ascertain Melville’s concern about an America that is caught in a cycle of interracial violence, this time through art that portrays the frontier. One of the two works of American art that survive in the collections that Melville is known to have owned is an engraving by W. G. Jackman of an oil painting entitled *The Death Struggle* (1845) by Charles Deas.<sup>38</sup> In *The Death Struggle*, a mountain man on a horse is locked in combat with a Native American just as both are about to fall off a precipice

and into an abyss. The two races are intertwined in a death struggle whose import would have been familiar to Melville.

## NOTES

An earlier version of this article was read at the International Melville Conference held at the University of Rome in July 2011 and at the symposium at the general meeting of the American Literature Society of Japan held at Nagoya University in October 2012.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (1980; repr., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 43–44.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick M. Malone, *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics among the New England Indians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 102.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald Vizenor, *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 39.

<sup>4</sup> Malone, *Skulking Way of War*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> H. Gregory Nobles, *American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Laurence M. Hauptman, "The Pequot War and Its Legacies," in *The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation*, ed. Laurence M. Hauptman and James D. Wherry (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 69; Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), 89–94.

<sup>7</sup> Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500–1643* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 220.

<sup>8</sup> Ann Kibbey, *The Interpretation of Material Shapes in Puritanism: A Study of Rhetoric, Prejudice, and Violence* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 120.

<sup>9</sup> John Mason, *A Brief History of the Pequot War* (New York: Readex Microprint, 1966), 809. For Melville's view on the Pequot War, see Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1979), 122–24. Rogin places the Pequot War in the framework of America's expansion: "The Puritans justified the Pequot War as the elimination of those idolatrous tribes who occupied the Promised Land before God's chosen came from Egypt. The line from the Pequods through Fort Stanwix [at which Melville's ancestor was honored] pointed forward—by way of Andrew Jackson, New Orleans, and Indian removal—to the war against Mexico" (123).

<sup>10</sup> A version of this section appears in Yukiko Oshima, "The Red Flag of the Pequod/Pequot: Native American Presence in *Moby-Dick*," in *Melville "Among the Nations": Proceedings of an International Conference, Volos, Greece, July 2–6, 1997*, ed. Sanford E. Marovitz and A. C. Christodoulou (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001), 254–66.

<sup>11</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick: or, The Whale* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1988), 69. Here, purposely or not, Melville mistakes the Pequot as a Massachusetts tribe, rather than a Connecticut one. Further citations of this work are given in the text.

<sup>12</sup> A full-blooded Tashtego was a rare case, because Native American mating with African slaves and English colonists had been common. Melville's description of Tashtego's Gay Head tribe is historically correct. See William S. Simmons, *Spirit of the*

*New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1986), 24–28.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Heimert, “*Moby-Dick* and American Political Symbolism,” *American Quarterly* 15 (Winter 1963): 504, 507–8; Carolyn L. Karcher, *Shadow over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville’s America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 89.

<sup>14</sup> For the circularity of the Mystic Fort, see David R. Wagner and Jack Dempsey, *Mystic Fiasco: How the Indians Won the Pequot War* (Stoneham, MA: Digital Scanning, 2004), 2, 90–91.

<sup>15</sup> A version of this section appears in Yukiko Oshima, “Reading Israel Potter as National Amnesia: What to the ‘Impounded Pequot’ Slave is the Fourth of July?,” *Sky-Hawk* (Japan Melville Study Center) 22 (2006): 5–14.

<sup>16</sup> Herman Melville, *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1982), 164. Further citations of this work are given in the text.

<sup>17</sup> The name of the present-day Foxwoods Resort Casino run by Pequot survivors can be seen as the Pequot having fulfilled their revenge to a certain extent. See Kim Isaac Eisler, *Revenge of the Pequots: How a Small Native American Tribe Created the World’s Most Profitable Casino* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> William Apess, “The Indians: The Ten Lost Tribes,” in *On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, a Pequot*, ed. Barry O’Connell (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 113.

<sup>19</sup> William Apess, “Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts Relative to the Mashpee Tribe; or, The Pretended Riot Explained,” in *On Our Own Ground*, 239–40; Melville, *Israel Potter*, 166.

<sup>20</sup> A version of this section appears in Yukiko Oshima, “Kurarero no Nyu Palestina to Hokubei Senjumin” (“New Palestine and Native Americans in *Clarel*”), ed. Katsunori Takeuchi and Tsutomu Takehashi. *Kan-Taiseiyo no Souzouryoku: Ekkyou Suru Amerikan Runessansu Bungaku (Transatlantic Imagination: Reconceptualizing the American Renaissance as Literary Border Crossing)*. Tokyo: Sairyu-Sha, 2013, 283–300.

<sup>21</sup> Herman Melville, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1991), 57. Further citations of this work are given in the text. Similarly, Andrew Delbanco links Nathan’s obsession with Native American mounds in the Midwestern landscape to his abandonment of Christianity: “[Nathan] was haunted by the sight of Indian mounds that ‘Dim showed across the prairie green / Like dwarfed and blunted mimic shapes / Of Pyramids at distance seen,’ and began to drift away from the cold ancestral creed that had never satisfied his need for a vital faith.” Andrew Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 283.

<sup>22</sup> Stan Goldman, *Melville’s Protest Theism: The Hidden and Silent God in “Clarel”* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 82.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence Buell, “Ecoglobalist Affects: The Emergence of US Environmental Imagination on a Planetary Scale,” in *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*, ed. Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 227–48, quote at 244.

<sup>25</sup> Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal*, 284.

<sup>26</sup> Laurie Robertson-Lorant, *Melville: A Biography* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1996), 546.

<sup>27</sup> Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 109.

<sup>28</sup> Steven Salaita, *The Holy Land in Transit: Colonialism and the Quest for Canaan* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 13–81, esp. 57–61.

<sup>29</sup> For his criticism of Parkman's racism, Melville wrote a letter of apology to the editor, Evert A. Duyckink. Herman Melville, *Correspondence*, ed. Lynn Horth (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1993), 149.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (1985; rpt., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 129.

<sup>31</sup> Timothy Dwight, "Greenfield Hill," in *Early American Poetry: Selection from Bradstreet, Taylor, Dwight, Freneau, and Bryant*, ed. Jane Donahue Eberwein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 181. It was natural for the nationalist Dwight, who was a Congregationalist minister and later a president of Yale University, to praise the development of white settlements in the area taken from the Pequot in part 4 of "Greenfield Hill," entitled "The Destruction of the Pequods," though Dwight explains that the "jealous" colonists coveted the Pequot's fertile land and started an invasive war.

<sup>32</sup> David Porter, *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean* (Philadelphia, 1815), quoted in T. Walter Herbert, Jr., *Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 110.

<sup>33</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie: or Early Times in the Massachusetts* (1827; rpt., New York: Penguin, 1998), 359. Further citations of this work are given in the text. Though the preface praises the Pequots' pride and patriotism, the novel as a whole values white "civilization." The Pequot survivors, like heroine Magawisca's sachem father, who are hostile to whites, have to leave for the unknown West. Since she refuses to convert to Christianity, even Magawisca, who fosters a sense of sisterhood with the titular white heroine and even sacrifices herself to protect a white boy, Everell, is no exception. We can confirm the Pequots' desires not just from Magawisca's vengeful sachem father but Magawisca as well, as she tells, "[W]hen the vengeance comes, if it should come, remember it was provoked [by the English colonists]" (48). Magawisca is revealed as yet another noble vanishing Indian, when she blesses the union of Everell and Hope Leslie and disappears forever from their sight." (Susan Castillo, *American Literature in Context to 1865* [New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011], 109.) There is a similarity between Dwight's depiction of the tribe and Sedgewick's: in spite of their relative sympathy toward the tribe, in their celebration of the progress of Christian civilization, there is no room for the Native Americans, especially such a prideful tribe as the Pequot.

<sup>34</sup> Herman Melville, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1968), 170. Further citations of this work are given in the text.

<sup>35</sup> Herbert, Jr., *Marquesan Encounters*, 152.

<sup>36</sup> Susan Scheckel, *The Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, 2000), 3.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Wallace, "William Reese Donation," *Extracts* (February 2005): 14–15, n. 128.