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Freaky Asian Junks: Herman Melville and Antebellum Exhibition Culture

*Shogo Tanokuchi**

Introduction

In Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), when Ishmael has his first encounter with the whaling vessel *Pequod*, his curious gaze settles on the antiqueness and the strangeness of the ship while he notes foreign ships of "square-toed luggers[,] mountainous Japanese junks [, and] butter-box galliots" (*MD*: 69).[1] In this list, the junk is "a sailing vessel of a kind used in East and South-East Asia."[2] The Asian sailing vessel appears again in chapter 50, "Ahab's Boat and Crew—Fedallah," in which Ishmael first sees Ahab's harpooner and his Asian crew. Although he is astonished at "the subordinate phantoms," his sense of "wonder" soon fades because people on the whaling vessel often see such "queer castaway creatures" who seem to have drifted from "blown-off Japanese junks" (*MD*: 191). Immediately afterward, Ishmael reveals his prejudice toward the Asian world, where they still have "the ghostly aboriginalness of earth's primal generations" and have "indulged in mundane amours" (*MD*: 191).[3] In *Moby-Dick*, Japanese junks are used to show racial diversity on the whaling vessel as well as Ishmael's racial fear of Asia.

The transnational turn in American literary studies has drawn more attention to the Pacific Ocean.[4] In the current trend, the Pacific in Melville's

*Assistant Professor, Waseda University

writings has been interpreted as a subversive space where US imperialism, driven by commercial desire, is destabilized.[5] In this article, I examine the Asia-Pacific region in Melville's writings from a politicocultural perspective. More specifically, I scrutinize the interconnection between US imperialism and antebellum exhibition culture, arguing that the act of enjoying racial others as curiosities served to form and destabilize US imperial subjectivity.

Edward Said defined imperialism as a narrative of "sustained possession" based on the relentless imagination of the empire to conquer "far-flung and sometimes unknown spaces" and to own "eccentric or unacceptable human beings."[6] Building on this definition, scholars have examined "the imperialist gaze" of the white protagonists in Melville's South Pacific narratives, discussing how the act of seeing helps them visualize and then possess the racial others through their romanticized imaginations.[7] According to Homi K. Bhabha, however, such colonialist imagination always contains an "*ambivalence*" (italics in original).[8] Through "the production of knowledges," the colonizer tries to create "a space for a 'subject' peoples," in which the colonized are stigmatized as "a population of degenerate types" to justify their control.[9] Yet, while seemingly regarding the colonizer as superior and the colonized as inferior, the stereotyping of racial others ironically reveals that these images are just "an 'impossible' object."[10] In other words, the act of seeing the racial others (de)stabilizes white subjectivity and its superiority.

Nineteenth-century America saw the rise of a type of exhibition culture from Peale's American Museum to the Smithsonian. The exhibition of artifacts and material objects in the museum embodied the Anglo-American belief that "superior cultures produced superior things."[11] My focus is on Barnumian freak shows of this era, which naturalized the hierarchical relationship between the white spectator and the nonwhite curiosities. During the period of the openings of China and Japan, the curious white gaze worked to label these countries as populated with uncivilized freaks. Written during the golden age of freak shows, Melville's works demonstrate that the whites' curiosity forms the colonial dichotomy between the United States and the Asia-Pacific region. By investigating, through the historical context of his lesser-known short pieces "On the Chinese Junk" (1847) and "The Piazza" (1856), I argue that Melville's complex figurations of Asian junks reflects the ambivalence of US imperialism. While reproducing the racial stereotypes of Asians that enforced white superiority, Melville's freaky Asian junks also erase the reductive dichotomy between the imperial

spectator (the US) and the odd curiosities (China and Japan).

I. Barnum and Melville: The Art of Exhibition

In 1841, P. T. Barnum bought Scudder's American Museum on the corner of Broadway and Ann Street in downtown New York and began his career as a showman. The central attractions of Barnum's American Museum were freak shows, in which people with physical and behavioral anomalies were exhibited for amusement and profit. The museum's list covered many different exotic curiosities "from wild men of Borneo to fat ladies, living skeletons, Fiji princes, albinos, Siamese twins, tattooed Circassians, armless and legless wonders, Chinese giants, cannibals, midget triplets, hermaphrodites, spotted boys, and much more."[12] Barnum instantly achieved astonishing success through his curiosities, including Joice Heth, the Feejee Mermaid, and General Tom Thumb, to become the pivotal figure of American exhibition culture.[13]

The uniqueness of Barnum's exhibition was in manipulating information to rouse people's curiosity so they would actually visit his museum. For instance, in a letter to Moses Kimball he conveyed his idea to advertise the Feejee mermaid, offering opposite perspectives about the authenticity of his exhibition. Whereas the owner said the mermaid "has been taken alive [in] the Feejee Islands," "scientific persons" insisted that it was "an *artificial* product" and "its natural existence claimed to be an utter impossibility" (italics in original).[14] Barnum did not clarify what was fact or fiction; rather, he left that decision up to the audience: "At all events whether this production is the work of *nature and art* it is decidedly the most stupendous curiosity ever submitted to the public for inspection. If it is artificial the senses [of] sight and touch are ineffectual—if it is natural then all concur in declaring it *the greatest Curiosity in the World*" (italics in original).[15] As Neil Harris analyzes, "The operational aesthetic" worked at Barnum's exhibition as he "narrowed the task of judgment . . . to a simple evaluation" of "real or false, genuine or contrived."[16] The showman attained commercial success by turning the decision of whether or not his curiosities were authentic into a participative game.

Tracing the history of exhibiting human curiosities, Rosemary Garland Thompson inspects the social role of "freak discourse."[17] In previous times, people thought that extraordinal bodies bore "evidence of God's design, divine wrath, or nature's abundance."[18] As time went by, the development of medical science came to label bodily anomalies as

"atypical" and brought them into freak shows.[19] Yet, excluding people with bodily abnormalities from the standardized society, the freak discourse reveals society's "anxieties, questions, and needs."[20] The freak body, being exhibited for "someone else's purposes," becomes a "politicized" object on which the viewer reflects "national values, identity, and direction."[21] In Anglo-American society, Barnum's freak shows drew considerable attention by deliberately packaging racial ideals: African Americans were displayed as "missing links" and played aboriginal roles; Native Americans performed wild rituals that identified their primitiveness; and Asians adopted a sedate demeanor.[22] As Linda Frost suggests, the Barnumian freak show "naturalized a sense of the slave-as-spectacle as well as the 'rightness' or naturalness of the white gaze."[23] In such shows, white spectators enjoyed racial others as exotic freaks in order to confirm their own superiority.

Barnumian freaks, however, also undermined the stable relationship between the viewer and the viewed. The first edition of Barnum's autobiography introduces an interesting episode. In 1835, "an ex-member of Congress" and his family went to the Joice Heth Exhibition at Boston's Concert Hall.[24] The congressman's old mother, listening to the explanation by Barnum's assistant, Levi Lyman, scrutinized the supposed ancient nurse of George Washington. She expressed astonishment at what Lyman said: that Heth was an automaton, and her heart beats with the same principle as "a pendulum to a clock."[25] The former congressman felt "evident embarrassment" when he saw his old mother totally deceived in front of the audience.[26] In that moment, a "half-suppressed giggle ran through the room and the gentleman and his family soon withdrew."[27] For James W. Cook, this episode narrates the "artful repositioning" of the audience "from the role of observers to observed."[28]

The subversiveness of the Barnumian freak show suggests the possibility of corroding the racial hierarchy as well as the viewer-viewed relationship. Indeed, Barnum later recollected his experience of losing his white identity in his own show. In 1836, he presented his first travelling company in Camden, South Carolina. A performer, who planned to give a blackface performance, suddenly left him, and none of his company "was competent to fill [his] place."[29] Thus, Barnum painted his own face black and sang the advertised songs such as "Zip Coon." His performance was highly applauded. Yet, one white man mistook him for an actual black person and pointed a gun at him, crying, "You black scoundrel! How dare you use such language to a white man."[30] According to Eric Fretz, Barnum's experience was due to the nature of the minstrel show that "confuse[s] the empirical

boundaries between black and white."[31] As this episode indicates, while having naturalized the dichotomy between the white as observer and the nonwhite as observed, the Barnumian freak show undermined such a racial hierarchy.

Writing in the golden age of freak shows, Melville makes allusions to Barnum in works from *Typee* (1846) to *The Confidence-Man* (1857).[32] His essays that were submitted to *Yankee Doodle*, which was known as the American *Punch*, noticeably involved the Barnumian art of exhibition. One impressive example is the "Authentic Anecdote of 'Old Zack,'" published from July 24 to September 11, 1847. This comic essay satirizes US jingoism during the Mexican War (1846–48) by making fun of Gen. Zachary Taylor. During one episode, Barnum tries to obtain profit by hiring the hero of the Battle of Buena Vista as a curiosity in his museum. The showman's "impertinent letter" arranged a plan to exhibit General Taylor as one of his curiosities along with "the venerable nurse of our beloved Washington [Joice Heth] and the illustrious General Tom Thumb" (*WHM* 9: 225).[33] Barnum impudently urges Old Zack, "Think General, of yourself reclining on the poop of the Chinese Junk, receiving the visits of your friends" (*WHM* 9: 225). If he "adopt[s] this course," Barnum foresees, Taylor will attain more popularity and "must be elected President" (*WHM* 9: 225).

The Barnumian freak show in Melville's text inverts the racial hierarchy by displaying a white person as a living exhibit, a position originally assigned to a nonwhite individual. Barnum says at the end of his letter that Taylor's black servant, Sambo, has given permission to make his master an exhibit: "I [Barnum] have already sounded Sambo and he appears to have no objection" (*WHM* 9: 225). Sambo serves to realize Barnum's plan by selling "various articles of dress and furniture belonging to General Taylor" (*WHM* 9: 224). While the black servant acknowledges and authorizes Barnum's plan, the white general almost becomes an exhibited object. Influenced by the Barnumian freak show, Melville's aesthetics of exhibition indicates an ironical subversion of the racial hierarchy between the white and the nonwhite: the white individual is required to abandon his prestigious position as the observer and become the exhibited curiosity.

II. The Chinese Junk at an Exhibition

A 160-foot Chinese vessel, the *Keying*, sailed into New York Harbor on July 9, 1847 (Fig. 1). This three-masted junk ship sailed from China

around the Cape of Good Hope to the United States and England from 1846 to 1848 to celebrate the conclusion of the Treaty of Nanking that opened up China to Western colonialism. Under the command of British captain Charles Kellett, the crew of the *Keying* consisted of about twenty Europeans and forty Chinese, one of whom was a mandarin named Hesing. The *Keying* served as a floating museum, as Kellett intended to exhibit it at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. The junk was loaded with a wide range of Chinese curiosities: clothing, household furniture, weapons, maritime artifacts, temple accoutrements and statuettes, a part of Canton's city walls, a whole tray of opium pipes, and the Chinese crew themselves. The arrival of the *Keying* aroused transatlantic enthusiasms. In London, the ship became a star attraction, visited not only by Queen Victoria and the royal family but also by the famous novelist Charles Dickens. Likewise, New Yorkers flocked to the harbor to see what the *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer* welcomed as "one of the most remarkable curiosities ever witnessed in the United States."[34] During the junk's four-month stay in New York, four thousand people visited it each day, and its earnings amounted to one thousand dollars a day.[35]

In the great response to the Chinese junk, John Rogers Haddad sees "the Barnumization of China."[36] Suspended in an "unreliable hybrid of fact and fiction," the visitors to the *Keying* enjoyed the junk "for its amusement value and scrutinized it to determine whether it truly was what it purported

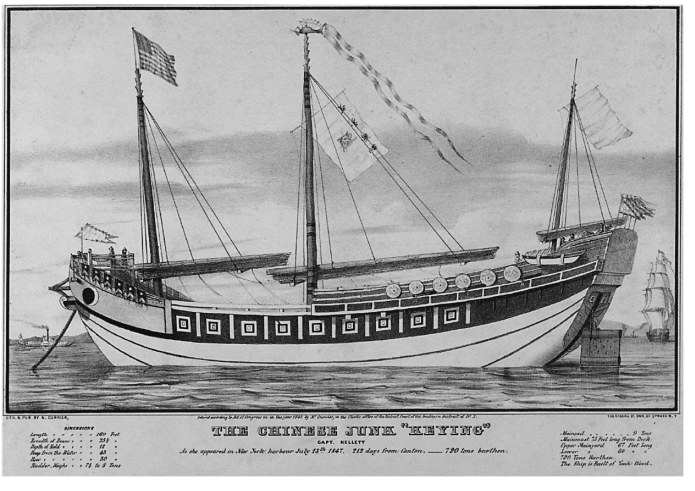

Fig. 1. A lithograph of the *Keying* by Nathaniel Currier in 1847. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

to be."[37] This response could have originated in the fundamental change in China's image after the First Opium War (1840–42). China had been adored as a wonderful country advanced in culture and filled with abundant oriental luxuries. Yet, the war revealed its weakness to the world, turning "the object of admiration" into "the object of a laugh or the subject of a pun."[38] Newspapers and magazines produced several stereotypes that made fun of China and its people: Chinese males as "effeminate fops"; the Chinese as people who enjoyed bizarre food, such as rats, dogs, and cats; the Chinese as heathens who "worshipped strange deities"; and Chinese as opium addicts.[39] China's defeat in the Opium War impaired its authority and stigmatized it as a country of strange, uncivilized, and grotesque freaks.

Exhibitions manifested the radical change in China's image. In 1834, Afong Moy, a Chinese woman with bound feet, was brought to New York City by Nathaniel and Frederick Carne and exhibited in a parlor-like hall as "the Chinese Lady." Moy was seen as a being secluded from society and not someone to be exposed to the public gaze. The audience could have associated her bound feet with China as a closed nation into which foreigners' curious gazes could not penetrate.[40] By contrast, the open structure of the Chinese junk represented China's openness after the First Opium War. Whereas the visitors could not approach the Chinese Lady, they could invade the territory of the Chinese junk and freely view its interior. Owned and commanded by a British captain, the Chinese junk impressed on the observers that China had finally opened up and become a possession of Western nations.[41]

The curious gaze on Asian curiosities validated the white society. For instance, Dickens's report on the Chinese junk, issued at the time of the Great Exhibition, stressed that England had achieved rapid progress with ingenious inventions such as the spinning machine and the locomotive. On the contrary, Chinese inventions, represented by the Chinese junk, he said, "have made no advance and been of no earthly use for thousands of years."[42] Dickens's comparison between "the greatness of the English results" and "the extraordinary littleness of the Chinese" embodies the imperialist discourse that emphasized the progressiveness of his country and the backwardness of China.[43] Yet, "[m]easuring oneself against the exoticized and the alien," John Kuo Wai Tchen points out, was a "means toward stabilizing, destabilizing, a sense of belonging and normalcy."[44] The whites' gaze on the Asian others not only confirmed the virtue of their own society but also revealed that such a proclamation can be made only by stigmatizing Asians and their society as vicious and inferior.

Echoing the great fanfare for the *Keying*, Melville's comic essay "On the Chinese Junk" was serialized in *Yankee Doodle* from July 17 to September 11, 1847. This essay shows the way the white gaze turned the Asian junk and its crew into Barnumian freaks, suspended between authenticity and duplicity. In fact, the narrator, Yankee Doodle, vouching for the genuineness of the junk inextricably raised suspicion. Yankee Doodle gets a letter from the Chinese emperor that asserts the *Keying* "is a genuine junk" and the crew are true Chinese: "[A]ll the pig-tails are all that they look to be" (*WHM* 9: 437). Yet, the letter's authenticity is impaired by Yankee Doodle's narration: its sender is the "Emperor of the Celestials," who is the "brother to the Constellation of the Great Bear" and has "the little star in his tail" (*WHM* 9: 437). One audience member from "the State of Connecticut" doubtfully observes the Chinese junk and its crew and asks the mandarin "Ke-sing" whether he is a real "Chanyman" (*WHM* 9: 433, 434).

Melville's essays, composed of humorous cartoons and passages as reports, reproduce the racial prejudices against the Chinese. In reports 7 and 12, Yankee Doodle satirizes the Chinese crew's bizarre taste for rats and dogs as well as their heathenism (*WHM* 9: 437, 441). More impressive, he adds a caricature of the pigtail (Fig. 2). By suggesting that the Asian crew ascend and descend boats with their pigtails, the cartoon impressed on the readers that Asians were weird aliens. Furthermore, as seen in Dickens's essay, Yankee Doodle's comparison of the Chinese junk with the American clipper the *Sea Witch* underlines the backwardness of Chinese civilization and the superiority of American civilization. Although appreciating the *Keying*'s "grace and beauty in [her] naval architecture," the narrator affirms that "in a question of speed, it may not be presumptuous to claim a superiority for our own," which takes only "81 days" to sail from China (*WHM* 9: 435).

Racial bias hides the true picture of the Asian other. Report 10, entitled "The Opium War Revived," describes the Chinese crew's strike against the captain for higher wages (*WHM* 9: 440). Yankee Doodle attributes the cause to the crew having "been indulging in rather strong opium that morning" and satirically narrates that "these foreign gentlemen" could not "come to tea in the evening" because they had been carried to "the Tombs," that is, the New York City jail (*WHM* 9: 440).[45] This episode was based on a disturbance that had actually occurred. As the *New York Herald* reported on August 31, 1847, when Captain Kellett went on board "to pay the crew their monthly wages," they were "under the effects of opium" and "turned their combined force against the captain."[46] Yet, as later revealed

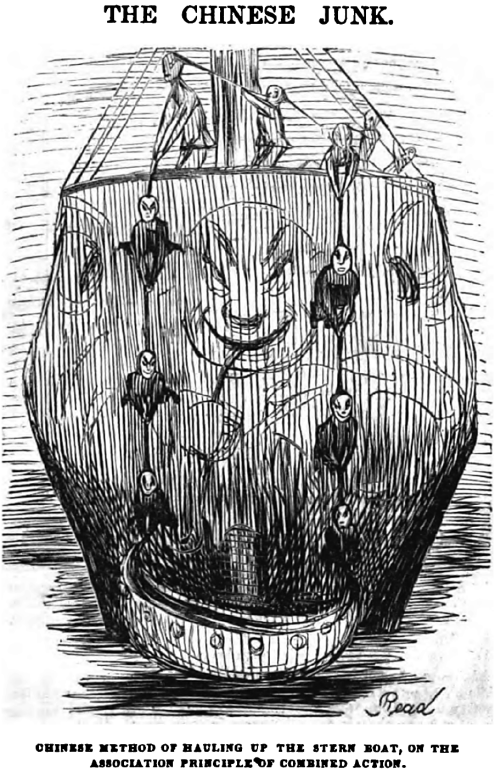

Fig. 2. "Chinese Method of Hauling up the Stern Boat." *Yankee Doodle*, July 31, 1847, 164.

in court, the riot had resulted from the white captain's brutal mistreatment and nonfulfillment of their contract.[47] Along with the newspaper article, Melville's narrator seems to stand on the side of the white authority and order, defining the riot as antisocial behavior and the captain as a victim of barbarity.

Melville's essay, however, undermines such a racial dichotomy with what Leslie Fiedler calls the affective power of "the true Freak."[48] When seeing "the true Freak," audiences recognize that "he is one of us, the human child of human parents," not just "fabulous monsters."[49] Struck by "both supernatural terror and human sympathy," audiences realize that "the distinction between audience and exhibit, we and them, normal and Freak is . . . an illusion."[50] In his first interview with Ke-sing, Melville's narrator asks about his life in New York. The Chinese mandarin, yearning for his lush, green country, says "so muchee peoples—plenty Flun-kees

come to junk" and "me no like all these many Flun-kees" (*WHM* 9: 433). This "Flun-kee" seems to be a pseudo-Chinese word for "flunky," a person who "behaves obsequiously to persons above him in rank or position."[51] Here, Yankee Doodle experiences sincere empathy for the "[p]oor home-sick stranger," crying, "It is no wonder he don't like 'Flun-kees!' YAN-KEE DOODLE himself don't like Flun-kees" (*WHM* 9: 434).

Yankee Doodle's sympathy for the Chinese mandarin originates in his disgust with his New York brethren. When visiting the Chinese junk with "his curious friends," he sees "the near approach of something Celestial" (*WHM* 9: 432). Playing with the word "Celestial," an old name for the Chinese empire, the narrator weaves a satire of his own society in which people, as "mortal sinners," "take so much pains to keep away from things heavenly" (*WHM* 9: 432). Yankee Doodle turns a cynical look not only on his countrymen but also his countrywomen. Superficially taking pity on the "the weary, toil-worn, home-sick stranger[s]," these women are driven by snobbish curiosity and thrust their heads and hands into the Chinese crew's closets. In addition, Yankee Doodle's critical gaze pierces into Western countries' imperial expansion in the Asia-Pacific region. Report 2 blames England for its hypocrisy of advocating for the cause of Christianity while exerting military control over China; report 6 warns about France's trade in the Society Islands, in which the Indigenous people's lives and cultures have been destroyed (*WHM* 9: 431, 436).[52] In this sense, Melville's narrator's sympathetic feeling for the Chinese mandarin is intimately connected to his antipathy toward his own brethren and society.

Sensational reports about the Chinese junk were found not only in Melville's essay. After the strike against Captain Kellett, twenty-six Chinese left the *Keying* and went back home on the *Candace* on October 4, 1847. An article in *Dwight's American Magazine* described their departure in an emotional tone: "[T]he swarthy figures of these bare-headed Mongolians" stood in line on the rail and waved their hands, and they were "in tears at parting with their kind friends."[53] This was "answered by the ladies waving their handkerchiefs, and the response of the gentlemen."[54] When they stopped, the Chinese crew "struck up their farewell song," and "their harsh, cracked voices" continued until they were "so far separated that the sound died on the air."[55]

Yet, I wish to pay more attention to the fact that the meeting with the Chinese mandarin encouraged Melville's narrator to transcend racial boundaries. Indeed, Yankee Doodle's outburst, cited above, shows that he makes ungrammatical expressions and renames himself using the pseudo-

Chinese word, "YAN-KEE." The interracial friendship between Yankee Doodle and Ke-sing is most touchingly illustrated in the cartoon of report 13 (Fig. 3). There are three figures: Ke-sing, Yankee Doodle, and one of Yankee Doodle's "curious" friends who holds a copy of *Yankee Doodle*. A tree, like a wall or a border, separates Yankee Doodle and Ke-sing from the curious magazine reader. On the right side of the tree, Yankee Doodle and Ke-sing are united in a farewell embrace. On the left side, the friend observes their emotional parting. The cartoon demonstrates the result of Yankee Doodle's empathy: going beyond the wall/border that separates the observer from the observed, Yankee Doodle has abandoned his own observer position and ironically become part of an exhibition, at which his "curious" reader-friend stares.

Melville's text, however, puts a rupture between the cartoon and the text to avoid such an ironical subversion. Whereas the cartoon portrays the emotional farewell, the following text, entitled "Will You Go, or Won't You?," describes the narrator's rejection of the Asian other. Two weeks after their "formal farewell," Yankee Doodle knows that the Chinese junk "still sticks close to Castle Garden" and "has not yet even reached the offing" (*WHM* 9: 442). He gets mad and says, "YANKEE DOODLE won't stand this kind of nonsense much longer," threatening the "slow-coach

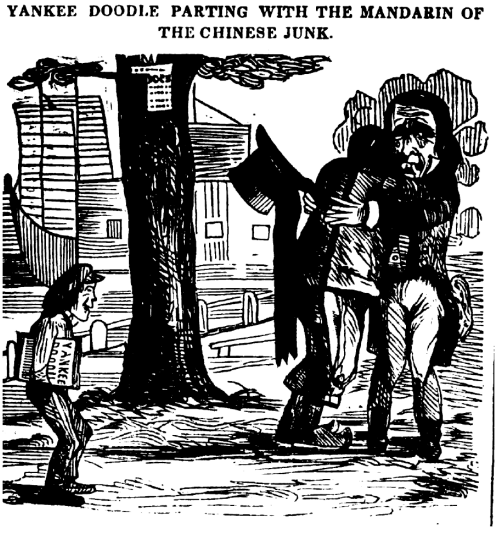

Fig. 3. "Yankee Doodle Parting with the Mandarin of the Chinese Junk." *Yankee Doodle*, September 18, 1847, 240.

Junkers [the Chinese crew]" that he will take "the most extreme measures" (*WHM* 9: 442). If they won't leave, as Yankee Doodle incorporates his antipathy into his humor, they will be forced to "cut off [their] pig-tails, and put [them] all on a full allowance of weak tea," which is "pretty sure to be the death of [them]" (*WHM* 9: 442). The change of Yankee Doodle's appellation is of significance. Writing his name in capital letters as "YANKEE DOODLE," not "YAN-KEE," demonstrates that he chooses to stay in his own society and adhere to his white identity. In resonance with the racial discourse of the time, Melville's "On the Chinese Junk" examines how white curiosity turns China and its people into exotic freaks. At the end, the narrator rejects abandoning his position as an observer. Yet, Melville's comic essay, taking up the Barnumian art of freak shows, discloses the vulnerability of the naturalized border between the white spectator and the oriental curiosities.

III. "The Piazza" on the Pacific Ocean

On March 31, 1854, Japan's feudal government signed the Treaty of Kanagawa with the United States under pressure from Commodore Matthew C. Perry. In command of four "black ships," Perry came to Uraga and delivered President Millard Fillmore's letter that demanded Japan's opening. The treaty marked the end of Japan's closed-door policy with the opening of its doors to the US and other Western countries. Perry's expedition had two aims: to acquire naval bases and coal stations and to establish a commercial route between California and China. It was necessary for American whalers to have access to Japan as a transit port for supplying food, water, and coal, and as a shelter where survivors from sunken whaling ships could be protected "till [the US] can send vessels and bring them away."[56]

The foreign affairs concerning Perry's expedition were related to the domestic US situation. Since the California Goldrush had begun in 1848, the US turned its expansionist gaze toward the Asia-Pacific region as a new frontier.[57] As Fillmore wrote, "Our great State of California produces about sixty millions of dollars in gold every year," while "Japan is also a rich and fertile country, and produces many very valuable articles."[58] Although the Edo shogunate had already imposed strict export restrictions on precious materials, Fillmore was "desirous" to establish a commercial connection with Japan.[59] The president's emphasis on trade was made to avoid the domestic problem of slavery. His administration passed the Compromise of 1850, which, declaring California a free state, enacted the

notorious Fugitive Slave Law. They became worried about how to deal with the problem of slavery if they moved into the Asia Pacific region. To avoid this sensitive issue, Fillmore delineated the aim of Perry's expedition as not being to colonize Japan but to open trade with it. Indeed, he stated, "The Constitution and laws of the United States forbid all interference with the religious or political concerns of other nations"; thus, he ordered Perry "to abstain from every act which could possibly disturb the tranquility" of Japan.[60]

US newspapers and magazines circulated various views of Japan to argue the need for Perry's expedition. On the one hand, they portrayed Japan as a savage country by reporting the cases of the *Lagoda* and *Lawrence*, in which American sailors were severely mistreated, resulting in the deaths of some of them.[61] An article in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* asserted that Perry's expedition should be undertaken to ask Japan for "better treatment of shipwrecked Americans, who have been heretofore barbarously treated by Japanese."[62] On the other hand, Japan was not completely regarded as savage and barbarous. In fact, another report cited Edo foreign diplomatic adviser William Adams's remark that the people in Japan were "governed in great civility" and that "many Jesuits and Franciscan friars" were in Japan, who "[had] converted many to be Christians."[63] Despite its having a cruel closed-door policy, Japan was seen as a half-civilized racial other that someday would come to be an ally of the US.

The structures of Japanese junks symbolize such ambivalent ideas. As Ikuno Saiki points out, they were used as "a symbol of the rigid diplomatic policy of Japan" to criticize the nation's strict closure.[64] On seeing Japanese junks at Matsumae, Perry offered an anthropological observation: the inconvenience of their "frail and open" stern represented "the suspicious policy" of the Japanese government, which "[forbade] any of its vessels to visit foreign countries."[65] The same idea is also found in an eleven-page essay, "Japan," published in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*. The author considered that the awkward structure of Japanese junks reflected the government's policy that "prevent[ed] . . . the possibility of long voyages."[66] This essay dug into the history of Japan's closed-door policy. While criticizing its barbarous attitude toward the shipwrecked sailors, it envisioned a curious future. Claiming geological and climatic "likeness between the Japanese and British Empires," the author imagined that "the sanctifying processes of pure Christianity" would make Japan the second home of America:

> From England the heaven-born pilgrims crossed the Atlantic to the fourth quarter of the globe, and found in this, our land, a home. And now, unwearied, she is travelling after the pioneers of civilization, and voyaging in the wake of ships; sanctifying commercial intercourse and claiming commerce as her partner. She has taken refuge under the flag of these United States to pass over the Pacific to the East again, persevering in her circuit round the world, until she shall reach her birth-place in Asia.[67]

The author figuratively confirmed in Perry's expedition the sacred history of the westward progress of American pilgrims, who had departed from the Old World and would be arriving on the coast of Japan. Japan was imagined as the "birth-place," or "home," of Americans rather than as a mere unexplored land filled with uncivilized savages. In this domestic rhetoric, we can see what Gretchen Murphy examines as a hemispheric ideology. Based on the Monroe Doctrine that divided the globe into Western and Eastern Hemispheres, America's expansion into the Asia-Pacific region was explained as a national errand to promote democratic Christianity and advanced technology through commercial trade. The US rhetoric of the Western Hemisphere as its home promoted nationalism and imperialism at the same time. While blaming the Old World for aristocratic imperialism, the US considered its expansion in the Asia-Pacific region a sacred mission to "tam[e] monsters with trade," not to "destroy" them.[68]

Melville's story "The Piazza" draws the curious white gaze on Japanese junks in a more complicated manner. This was the title work of his collection of short stories, *The Piazza Tales* (1856). The narrator recollects his scary experience occurring "not long after 1848" (*WHM* 9: 3). He buys an old farmhouse in the countryside of Massachusetts and builds a piazza (or porch) to enjoy the beautiful scenery. One day, on the mountain opposite from his house, he finds a spot shining in the daylight. He leaves his home, since he firmly believes what he sees is a "fairy-land" and wants to meet "the queen of fairies" (*WHM* 9: 6). After a long journey, he finally meets an isolated woman, Marianna, who lives in a shabby house. Shocked by the true figure of the fairy queen, he returns home and swears not to leave his piazza again. On first reading, this work can be examined as a domestic fiction not as a sea story, such as *Typee* or *Moby-Dick*. Yet, its details demonstrate that Melville's domestic fiction deliberately reflected the US expansionist desire toward the Asia-Pacific region.[69]

For instance, the narrator of this story is an ex-sailor, whose "light hat,

of yellow sinnet, [and] white duck trowsers" are "relics of [his] tropic sea-going" (*WHM* 9: 8). His curious gaze turns his destination into the islands of the Pacific Ocean: Marianna's bemossed house reminds him of the "copperless hulls of Japanese junks," and she is compared to a "Tahiti girl" (*WHM* 9: 8). These depictions cannot help but suggest the imperialist relationship between the conqueror and the conquered: "[Marianna] shyly started, like some Tahiti girl, secreted for a sacrifice, first catching sight, through palms, of Captain Cook" (*WHM* 9: 8–9). Here, it is important to note that Melville's adaptation of Spenser's *Fairy Queen* echoes the discourse of Manifest Destiny. The narrator literarily departs "westward" from his home (*WHM* 9: 6), and his unyielding travel to see the fairy queen is implicitly driven by the thirst for gold. When first discovering Marianna's house, over which a rainbow arches, the protagonist remembers the saying "If one can but get to the rainbow's end, his fortune is made in a bag of gold" (*WHM* 9: 5). That this story is set around 1848, when the California Goldrush began, suggests that the narrator's travel to Marianna's home traces the history of US expansion into the Asia-Pacific region.

The figurations of a threshold in *Moby-Dick* and "The Piazza" demonstrate that these works discuss the opening of Japan. *Moby-Dick* predicts the end of Japan's closed-door policy with the articulation of a threshold: "If that double-bolted land, Japan, is ever to become hospitable, it is the whale-ship alone to whom the credit will be due; for already she is on the threshold" (*MD*: 99). The American whaler in *Moby-Dick*, written before the opening of Japan, still rests on the threshold to Japan and cannot yet enter into its interior.[70] On the contrary, in "The Piazza," written after Japan's opening, the threshold to Marianna's house is exposed, and its door is opened to the ex-sailor narrator: "Pausing at the threshold, or rather where threshold once had been, I saw, through the open door-way, a lonely girl, sewing at a lonely window" (*WHM* 9: 8). Just as the curious white visitors leered at the interior of the Chinese junk in New York, the narrator's eye penetrates into Marianna's house, which is compared to "Japanese junks." The queerly opened house without a threshold lets his vision infinitely extend into the scenery: "No fence was seen, no inclosure. Near by—ferns, ferns, ferns; further—woods, woods, woods; beyond—mountains, mountains, mountains; then—sky, sky, sky" (*WHM* 9: 8). His expanding view seems to see/possess everything.

Melville's text obstructs such an imperial vision, however, by revealing the reality of what the narrator longs for. At the end, he knows that his destination is less a fairyland of the fairy queen than a haunted domain

of a ghostly woman: Marianna's house is located in a "[f]orbidding and forbidden" place, where even animals fear to tread (*WHM* 9: 7). Her house is "rotting" because of the strong sunshine, and flies gather as they do on dead bodies (*WHM* 9: 10). Marianna's only relative, her brother, is completely "fagged out" after working and sleeps on the bed or "the grave" (*WHM* 9: 9). And she herself is a "pale-cheeked" inhuman character who sits and sews alone all day long and "know[s] nothing, hear[s] nothing" (*WHM* 9: 8, 11). The Gothicization of Marianna and her house indicates that the narrator's dream of seeing the queen of fairyland will never be realized. In this way, "The Piazza" can be read as a fable of the American empire that suggests that US expansion into the Asia-Pacific region, motivated by a desire for gold, will be in vain and produce nothing.

What needs to be stressed here, however, is that Marianna is not merely the ultimate other of the Asia-Pacific region, who completely rejects US imperial advances. Knowing that Marianna suffers from chronic insomnia, the narrator recommends a treatment he has learned by hearsay: "I have heard that, for this wakeful weariness, to say one's prayers, and then lay one's head upon a fresh hop pillow—" (*WHM* 9: 12). Marianna interrupts him, showing "a small garden patch" near her house where she grows two "nipped and puny" hopvines. She explains that she has already tried both "prayer and pillow" but to no effect (*WHM* 9: 12). Although she lives in an extremely isolated place, Marianna seems to have some connections to the outside world. This discordant openness of her life may echo the contemporary view of Japan, which, having basically rejected any exchange with foreign countries, had come to partially accept Western religion and technology through trade.

Gothicized Marianna uncannily represents the narrator's desire. Analyzing the male characters' "fear of faces" in Melville's writings, Elizabeth Renker points out that the pale-faced females uncover these men's desires as they become captivated by their own hunger.[71] In her lonely life, "pale-cheeked" Marianna finds solace in seeing a beautiful spot lit by the setting sun, which is the narrator's house, and she earnestly wants to visit it: "Oh, if I could but once get to yonder house, and but look upon whoever the happy being is that lives there" (*WHM* 9: 12). At that moment, as he turns his gaze to Marianna/her house, the narrator realizes that she is also staring at him/his home. By repeating the narrator's wish and deed, Marianna demonstrates that the reductive dichotomy between spectator (the narrator) and spectacle (Marianna) is just an illusion.

As in "On the Chinese Junk," Melville's narrator tries to keep his

prestigious observer position. After going back home, he swears to "stick to the piazza" and never to leave there (*WHM* 9: 12). In order to forget Marianna, he keeps a physical and psychological distance from her:

> [The piazza] is my box-royal; and this amphitheatre, my theatre of San Carlo. Yes, the scenery is magical—the illusion so complete. And Madam Meadow Lark, my prima donna, plays her grand engagement here; and, drinking in her sunrise note, which, Memnon-like, seems struck from the golden window, how far from me the [Marianna's] weary face behind it. (*WHM* 9: 12)

The theatrical depiction of the piazza as his "box-royal" and the view from it as an "amphitheater" impresses on his readers the considerable distance between the narrator's home and Marianna's. Just as Yankee Doodle decides to stay in his own society by rejecting the interracial friendship with Ke-sing, the narrator here tries to stay in his home and continue to enjoy the beautiful scenery.

However, the narrator's curiosity disturbs the realization of his wish. He is haunted by Marianna's pale face after getting connected with her by visiting her strangely opened house: "[E]very night, when the curtain falls, truth comes in with darkness. No light shows from the mountain. To and fro I walk the piazza deck, haunted by Marianna's face, and many as real a story" (*WHM* 9: 12). Knowing that he has become the target of her curious gaze, he cannot forget Marianna's face. While seeking to purge himself of Marianna and her story, he cannot get rid of his obsessive imagination that Marianna's ghostly face always sees him. In the figurative amphitheater, the narrator finally finds out that he himself ironically has become a curiosity exhibited to Marianna's curious gaze, which vainly mirrors his own desire.

Conclusion

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Asia-Pacific region served as "a coherent space of the American fantasy and design" onto which the US projected its commercial and imperial desire.[72] When the US advanced into the new frontier of the Asia-Pacific region, the domestic culture of exhibition helped to reorganize it as lands with monstrous freaks. On the one hand, Melville's writings on Chinese and Japanese junks seem to have reproduced the contemporary racial discourse that confirmed the imperialist relationship between the colonizer (the United States) and the colonized

(China and Japan). On the other hand, his texts displace such a reductive dichotomy through the ambivalence of stereotyping the racial others as curious freaks. With their own curiosity, Melville's white characters are ironically required to abandon their hierarchical position as observers. Realizing that their romantic wishes come to nothing, they become exhibited curiosities themselves. In this sense, Melville portrays the Asia-Pacific region as a critical space of "the American fantasy and design" that wants to see and possess the oriental others living in far-flung and unknown Asia as freaky curiosities.

NOTES

[1] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale* (hereafter abbreviated as *MD*), ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford, 2nd ed. (NY: Norton, 2002).

[2] *OED Online*, s.v. "Junk, n.3," https://www-oed-com.ez.wul.waseda.ac.jp/view/Entry/102091?rskey=4wB6hw&result=3#eid.

[3] In Ishmael's prejudice, Elizabeth Schultz sees his "derogatory and demonic racist representation of Asians." Schultz, "'The Subordinated Phantoms': Melville's Conflicted Response to Asia in *Moby-Dick*," in "*Whole Oceans Away*"*: Melville and the Pacific*, ed. Jill Barnum, Wyn Kelley, and Christopher Sten (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2007), Adobe Digital Editions, 188.

[4] See, e.g., Rob Wilson, *Reimagining the American Pacific: From South Pacific to Bamboo Ridge and Beyond* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Takayuki Tatsumi, "Literary History on the Road: Transatlantic Crossings and Transpacific Crossovers," *PMLA* 119, no. 1 (2004): 92–102; Yunte Huang, *Transpacific Imaginations: History, Literature, Counterpoetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); and Paul Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[5] For Rob Wilson, the tragic end of *Moby-Dick*, in which Ahab and the *Pequod* are defeated by the white whale and drowned near Japan, warns against US commercial imperialism (*Reimagining the American Pacific*, 81–85). Yunte Huang examines the characters of *Moby-Dick* as "collectors who hover in the abyss of conflicting economic interests," considering that these collectors deny the capitalist logic of trade on the Pacific Ocean (*Transpacific Imaginations*, 7).

[6] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 64.

[7] Warren Rosenberg, "Poem as Palm: Polynesia and Melville's Turn to Poetry," in Barnum, "*Whole Oceans Away,*" 218.

[8] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 95.

[9] Ibid., 100, 101.

[10] Ibid., 116.

[11] John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776–1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 116. Also see Gary Kulik, "Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present," in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 3–37. Analyzing the early displays of the Smithsonian Museum, where historical exhibits were arranged from the primitive and exotic (non-Western) to the civilized (Western), Kulik argues that "the museum had become a temple to secular progress, an affirmation of the happy confluence of

moral and material wellbeing" ("Designing the Past," 9).

[12] Rosemarie Garland Thompson, "From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (NY: New York University Press, 1996), 5.

[13] For Barnum's success, see Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973); Robert Cottrell, *Icons of American Popular Culture: From P. T. Barnum to Jennifer Lopez* (London: Routledge, 2009), 11–22.

[14] P. T. Barnum to Moses Kimball, September 4, 1843, Disability History Museum, https://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/lib/detail.html?id=1636.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Harris, *Humbug*, 78.

[17] Thompson, "From Wonder to Error," 2.

[18] Ibid., 1.

[19] Ibid., 2.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Eric Fretz, "P. T. Barnum's Theatrical Selfhood and the Nineteenth-Century Culture of Exhibition," in Thompson, *Freakery*, 101–2.

[23] Linda Frost, *Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in US Popular Culture, 1850–1877* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 59. For more on exhibiting racial others in Barnum's museum, see James W. Cook, "Of Men, Missing Links, and Nondescripts: The Strange Career of P. T. Barnum's 'What Is It?' Exhibition," in Thompson, *Freakery*, 111–54; Benjamin Reiss, "P. T. Barnum, Joice Heth, and Antebellum Spectacles of Race," *American Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1999): 78–107; Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, 117–23.

[24] P. T. Barnum, *The Life of P. T. Barnum; Written by Himself* (NY: Redfield, 1855), 157, https://archive.org/details/lifeofptbarnum00barnuoft/page/n5/mode/2up.

[25] Ibid., 159.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 9.

[29] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs; or, Forty Years' Recollections* (Buffalo, NY: Warren, Johnson, and Company, 1872), 90, https://archive.org/details/strugglestriumph00barnrich/mode/2up.

[30] Ibid., 90.

[31] Fretz, "P. T. Barnum's Theatrical Selfhood," 104.

[32] John Evelev, adapting Harris's notion of the "operational aesthetic," examines in *Typee* the Barnumian "balancing act between authenticity and duplicity." Evelev, *Tolerable Entertainment: Herman Melville and Professionalism in Antebellum New York* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 31–32. Richard Chase considers that "literaryscientific extravaganza[s]" in *Moby-Dick* have affinities to Barnum's showmanship. Chase, *Herman Melville: A Critical Study* (NY: Macmillan Company, 1949), 75–82. In *The Confidence-Man* appear the Barnumian freaks such as the Siamese twins (chap. 22) as well as the Barnum-like character, Calvin Edson (chap. 16, 23). Reading *The Confidence-Man*, Neil Harris suggests that both Barnum and Melville form the idea of humbug as a social healer who relieves people's tension from "the money-getting and competition of American life" (*Humbug*, 217).

[33] Herman Melville, *The Writings of Herman Melville* (hereafter abbreviated as *WHM*), ed. Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall, and G. Thomas Tanselle, 15 vols. (Evanston, IL:

Northwestern University Press, 1987).

[34] Quoted by Arthur Bonner in *Alas! What Brought Thee Hither?: The Chinese in New York, 1800–1950* (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), 2.

[35] For the *Keying*'s voyage and acceptance, see Stephen Davies, *East Sails West: The Voyage of the Keying, 1846–1855* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014), Adobe Digital Editions; Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, 63–71.

[36] John Rogers Haddad, *The Romance of China: Excursions to China in US Culture, 1776–1876* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2008), chap. 5, www.gutenberg-e.org/haj01/. Barnum himself was said to have made a copy of the *Keying* and exhibited it along with the Chinese crew. See Haddad, chap. 5; Davies, *East Sails West*, 124.

[37] Haddad, *Romance of China*, chap. 5.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid. The visitors could also see the embodiment of Chinese patriarchy in Moy's "monstrous small" feet (Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, 104).

[41] Haddad, *Romance of China*, chap. 5. Stephen Davies analyzes the strange usage of Chinese-like flags in "the established Western manner," considering that the *Keying* "represented a form of Western triumphalism" (*East Sails West*, 37).

[42] Charles Dickens, "The Great Exhibition and the Little One," *Household Words* 8 (1851), 281–89, https://books.google.co.jp/books?id=nYhPAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=ja#v=onepage&q=junk&f=false.

[43] Ibid., 284. For more about Dickens's view on the Chinese junk, see Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 111–25. According to Chang, Dickens's apparently patriotic view stems from his authorial anxiety that he cannot properly understand and narrate the Asian junk.

[44] Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, 20.

[45] "The Tombs" is a symbolic place in Melville's writings where the protagonists of *Pierre* (1852) and "Bartleby" (1853) come to their tragic deaths.

[46] "Row on Board the Chinese Junk," *New York Herald*, August 31, 1847, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1847-08-31/ed-1/seq-2/.

[47] For more on the riot on the *Keying*, see Davies, *East Sails West*, 125–35; and Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, 68–69.

[48] Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 24.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 36.

[51] *OED Online*, s.v. "Flunky, n.," https://www-oed-com.ez.wul.waseda.ac.jp/view/Entry/72129?redirectedFrom=Flunky#eid. In his famous essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses" (1850), Melville expresses his growing frustration with the US literary market of the time, which indulged in "literary flunkeyism towards England" (*WHM* 9: 248).

[52] The negative influence of European civilization is a dominant theme in Melville's *Typee*. Throughout that novel, Melville demonstrates how Western missionaries, merchants, and colonists have had a terrible influence on the natives of the South Pacific islands.

[53] *Dwight's American Magazine*, November 13, 1847, 727, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044092634054&view=1up&seq=5.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Millard Fillmore, "Millard Fillmore, President of the United States of America, to His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of Japan," in *Narrative of the Expedition of an American*

Squadron to the China Seas and Japan, ed. Francis L. Hawks (Washington, DC: Beverley Tucker, 1856), 257, https://archive.org/details/narrativeofexped0156perr/mode/2up. See Tetsuo Kawasumi, *Kurofune ibun* [Curious stories of the black ships] (Tokyo: Yurindo, 2004) on Japan's opening and the American whaling industry.

[57] John Eperjesi, *The Imperialist Imaginary: Visions of Asia and the Pacific in American Culture* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2004), 25–57.

[58] Fillmore, "Millard Fillmore," in Hawks, *Narrative*, 256.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid. For the relationship between Perry's expedition and the Compromise of 1850, see Paul Finkelman, *Millard Fillmore* (NY: Henry Holt, 2011), 92; and Gretchen Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of US Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 67–83.

[61] For more on cases such as the *Lagoda* and *Lawrence*, see Peter Booth Wiley, *Yankees in the Land of the Gods: Commodore Perry and the Opening of Japan* (NY: Viking, 1990); and William McOmie, *The Opening of Japan, 1853–55: A Comparative Study of the American, British, Dutch and Russian Naval Expeditions to Compel the Tokugawa Shogunate to Conclude Treaties and Open Ports to Their Ships* (Kent, UK: Global Oriental, 2006).

[62] *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (May 1852), 835.

[63] Adams quoted in "Dutch and English Intercourse with Japan," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (January 1854), 198.

[64] Ikuno Saiki, "'Strike through the Unreasoning Masks': *Moby-Dick* and Japan," in Barnum, "*Whole Oceans Away,*" 178.

[65] Hawks, *Narrative*, 449.

[66] "Japan," in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* (March 1853), 247. Melville published his short stories both in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* and *Putnam's Monthly Magazine.*

[67] Ibid., 243, 251.

[68] Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings*, 70.

[69] For domestic fiction as a literary instrument embodying the national and imperial ideology, see Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature* 70, no. 3 (1998): 581–606. On reading works by antebellum female writers, Kaplan insists that the domestic novel, although set in "the private sphere of female interiority," reenacts "the narratives of nation and empire" (601).

[70] Several scholars have read *Moby-Dick* in the context of Japan's opening. See Arimichi Makino, "Nihonjin Ishumeru" [A Japanese Ishmael], *Eureka* (April 2002): 126–35; Saiki, "Unreasoning Masks," 175–81; Christopher Benfey, *The Great Wave: Gilded Age Misfits, Japanese Eccentrics, and the Opening of Old Japan* (NY: Random House, 2003), 3–43.

[71] Elizabeth Renker, *Strike through the Mask* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 41.

[72] Wilson, *Reimagining the American Pacific*, 83.