

Chapter 6

Global Commons as Resource and as Icon: Imagining Oceans and Whales

We were the generation that searched Mars for the most tenuous evidence of life but couldn't rouse enough moral outrage to stop the destruction of the grandest manifestations of life here on earth. We will be like the Romans whose works of art, architecture, and engineering we find awesome but whose gladiators and traffic in slaves are mystifying and loathsome to us.

—Roger Payne, *Among Whales*

Prohibition is easy to legislate (though not necessarily to enforce); but how do we legislate temperance?

—Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons"

One knows that nationalism and nation-states are facing a crisis of legitimacy when the most influential theorist of the subject defines nations as collective fictions, and when this feat of interpretative delinquency is itself almost at once criticized for rigidity, for insufficient sensitivity to the history of migration, diaspora, and the interplay of contesting population groups.¹ Although the challenges of transnational dialogue and threats to civil order are bound, notwithstanding, to keep nation-states in business for a long time to come if not forever, it is no less self-evidently crucial in today's world to envisage cultural dynamics operating across transnational expanses: for example, in terms of historic macrocivilizational blocks² or in terms of a Eurocentric, capitalist, and in the late twentieth century U.S.-dominated global order whose origins lie in the early colonial era and whose present influence is without precedent in world history. Predictably, we find sharp disagreements as to whether, for example, the promise of this order (stabilization, rule of law, propagation of democratic values) outweighs its threats (neocolonialism, cultural standardization, unprecedented

power for transnational corporations) and as to how much of a monolith it really is.³

Environmental concerns have rightly figured in these discussions, again in conflicting ways. There are at least six (semi-interlinked) models—or families of models—of what the defining emphases of global environmental culture are or should be: the risk society paradigm (which puts the globe under the sign of toxic endangerment); the environmental justice paradigm (which affirms ubiquitous grassroots resistance of environmentally oppressed peoples); the Gaia paradigm (which begins from envisionment of the biosphere as a single homeostasis); the ecotheology paradigm (which images the material world as a spiritually unified holism); the ecofeminist antidominationist ethics-of-care paradigm (which begins from the long conjuncture between patriarchal ideology and the subjugation of a female-imagined earth); and the sustainability paradigm or "ecological modernization" paradigm as some skeptics call it (which offers the prospect of a reformed global environmental order wherein economic development would be so regulated as not further to deplete earth's resources or further degrade environmental quality).⁴

None of these models is monolithic. For example, one could debate at length the question of whether Gaia is more than a metaphor for an assemblage of interactive biochemical processes, or which groups properly count as victims of environmental injustice. Likewise, the models are perennially subject to change and erosion. Take sustainability. Up to a point, its history is a striking success story. Within the last quarter of the twentieth century, it has become the environmentalist paradigm of preference, achieving a canonical standing in international policymaking circles, especially since the 1987 United Nations report *Our Common Future* promoted "sustainable development" as the optimal planetary goal. The appeal is understandable: Who can be *against* a path where "sustainability" is maintained without "development" being sacrificed? But with the ethical-political advantages of an environmental lingua franca has come a high-stakes dispute over connotations. "Ecological modernization," geographer David Harvey warns, "provides a discursive basis for a contested rapprochement between [reformist environmentalism] and dominant forms of political economic power. But on the other [hand], it presumes a certain kind of rationality that lessens

the force of more purely moral arguments [Harvey cites Love Canal activist Lois Gibbs here] and exposes much of the environmental movement to the dangers of political cooptation."⁵ Energy economist Herman Daly recalls a case in point: the World Bank's refusal to accept his group's minority recommendation to define "sustainable development" as "development without growth beyond environmental carrying capacity," though the Bank was on record as endorsing the underlying concept and has proven itself more responsive to environmental concerns than most member states.⁶ Even a vague stipulation of a "limit" or "carrying capacity" felt too threatening to the Bank's commitment to support economic growth. A more Machiavellian discursive manipulation, one all newspaper readers and television watchers encounter daily, is greenwash: advertisement campaigns by oil, chemical, and other multinational corporations to persuade the public that their technological miracles will not disrupt the environment.⁷

The mass circulation of images of clean, shining storage tanks set amidst rolling pastures or amber waves of grain makes one fear that global environmental culture, if there really is such a thing, may be grounded in nothing better than a shallow cosmopolitanism and an evisceration of cultural particularity. The recalcitrance, horse trading, niggling, and obfuscation surrounding accords having to do with atmosphere, oceans, and water rights further demonstrate how tenuous transnational environmental discourse is. Yet the vitiation by interest-group politicking of projects like the post-Rio "Earth Charter" for United Nations general assembly ratification hardly invalidates the unprecedentedness and the worth, in principle, of attempts to establish green principles and treaties on a global scale.⁸ Modest as its results so far have been, the growth of the felt need for a planetary environmental policy that does not conceive earth's resources to be "created for man's exclusive benefit" amounts, as a leading historian of international environmental regulation puts it, almost to "a second Copernican revolution."⁹ Despite porousness, vacillation, and backsliding, the ozone accords of the 1980s and 1990s were of milestone significance as an indication of willingness to consider compromise of economic self-interest in order "to anticipate and manage a world problem before it becomes an irreversible crisis."¹⁰ The awareness of air pollution's power to affect

places far remote has reinforced the intuitive sense of atmospheric health as a transborder concern as well as the attempts of particular actors to evade responsibility. But by far the more anciently recognized global commons is the sea, which covers nearly three-quarters of the earth's surface.

No aspect of recent environmental thought more strikingly illustrates the significance and the difficulty of the "second Copernican revolution" than late twentieth-century concern about degradation of the world's oceans. For one thing, oceans are the closest thing on earth to a landscape of global scope. They are also incomparably the largest commons; if there is to be a "tragedy of the commons,"¹¹ this will be the biggest; and the possibility that such a thing might happen has captured international attention more suddenly and dramatically than has the degradation of land or air, which has been worried about for the better part of two centuries. By the same token, and more to the point of our present study, few developments in the history of environmentalism better exemplify at once the cultural power of environmental imagination, the cultural limits that also inevitably constrain it, and (oppositely) its capacity—sometimes—to speak with striking pertinence across borders of culture and time.

Resymbolizing Ocean

Modern science tells us that ocean is literally where we came from. Millennia before that, however, it was a common symbol for primordial reality, as in "the waters" of the Genesis creation narratives, or a symbol for what lies beyond the known world. In the mythical epitome of the ancient world fashioned by the god Hephaistos on the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*, "the Ocean River" formed the perimeter of "the uttermost rim."¹² Later, water in general and ocean in particular came to symbolize unbounded inner space. Freud referred to the "sensation of 'eternity'" as the "oceanic" feeling. "Meditation and water are wedded for ever," affirms Herman Melville's narrator Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* (1851).¹³ "And of all the elements," adds Joseph Conrad, "this is the one to which men have always been prone to trust themselves, as if its immensity held a reward as vast as itself." Mindful though Conrad was of the greed

and rapacity of maritime enterprise at its worst, he lets his imagination be suffused momentarily by wonder at ocean's lure.¹⁴ So too with the most significant book of the sea in the nature writing tradition, Rachel Carson's *The Sea Around Us* (1950).

Carson is today much better known for *Silent Spring's* indictment of the toxic effects of DDT and other chemical pesticides. But throughout her life she was far more interested in the sea. Her college and graduate concentration was marine biology, and her main subjects during her formative years as a writer were estuaries, seacoasts, and oceans. *The Sea Around Us* was the book that won her fame as a scientifically serious nature writer, such that she was assured of a wide hearing for *Silent Spring*.

Carson's fascination with the sea, both as writer and as person, was quickened by the traditional symbolic sense of it as a mysterious realm apart, resistant to human meddling. In *The Sea Around Us*, the one chapter on islands, which focuses on anthropogenic degradation of island biogeography, has a satiric bite the rest do not, as they ruminate in a generally soothing lyrical way about both biology and commerce, treating the sea as an inexhaustible intellectual, spiritual, and economic resource without registering awareness of the possible conflict between these uses. The book tranquilly begins and ends with images of eternal return: it begins by evoking "that great mother of life, the sea," and ends by affirming that "all at last return to the sea—to Oceanus, the ocean river, like the ever-flowing stream of time, the beginning and the end." As Carson later mused, "It was pleasant to believe . . . that most of Nature was forever beyond the tampering reach of man," "to suppose that the stream of life would flow on through time in whatever course that God had appointed it." By the time she died a dozen years later, however, she had begun to reverse herself, begun especially to worry about promiscuous use of oceans as hazardous waste dumps.¹⁵

Silent Spring was the project that changed Carson's mind, and it is notable that one of that book's most powerful dimensions is its water pollution theme: "it is not possible to add pesticides to water anywhere without threatening the purity of water everywhere."¹⁶ Reviewers were struck by Carson's insistence on massive carnage of marine life from pesticide "invasion of streams, ponds, rivers, and bays" and by her re-

port of the tiny amounts that could be lethal: one-half part per billion in the case of shrimp killed by endrin.¹⁷

Carson's horror at insidious water-borne toxification may have been intensified by her attachment to the traditional romantic image of ocean as ultimate sanctuary. In any case, thanks in part to her most famous book, indignation and betrayal are now the controlling motifs in contemporary works of ocean-focused nature writing (often likened to the Carson of *Silent Spring*): for example, Anne W. Simon's *Neptune's Revenge* (1984), Sylvia Earle's *Sea Change* (1995), and Carl Safina's *Song for the Blue Ocean* (1998), which foreground issues like dumping, coral reef degradation, depleted stocks, and ecological fallout from the Gulf War. All testify to how swiftly the dominant image of the sea shifted in nature writing during the late twentieth century from inexhaustibility to fragility.¹⁸ Few episodes in the history of modern environmentalist consciousness have been more dramatic than this late twentieth-century awakening to the awareness that three-quarters of the globe, hitherto thought virtually immune from human tampering, might be gravely endangered.

This attitudinal shift can be thought of as a great demythologization: as a lesson taught by the hard evidence of dwindling and contaminated supplies of certain seafoods worldwide, evidence made more authoritative by increasingly precise methods of tracking species populations, based in turn on increasingly sophisticated mathematical modeling and data gathering methods. But just as plausibly the shift is a great re-mythologization, marked by the creation of icons of endangerment. A prime example is the revaluation of whales. "Beyond the image of the planet Earth itself," Lynton Caldwell declares, "the most poignant symbol of the world environment movement has been the whale." He may be right. Certainly he is right that in many regions today "the economic returns from whale watching are now substantially greater than the profits once gained by whaling."¹⁹

All large creatures have the potential to become environmental icons: pandas, elephants, lions, tigers, white rhinos, bald eagles, deer, whooping cranes, and, of course, bears like Theodore Roosevelt's grizzly cub (the original Teddy bear) and Faulkner's Old Ben. This may reflect an endemic bias of human perception. In the United States there is

a correlation between size of creature and federal expenditure for protection, and a further correlation according to whether the creature is considered “a higher form of life.”²⁰ That environmentalists realize and are quick to avail themselves of the public sentiment implied by these correlations is evident from their reliance on domestic metaphors²¹ and appealing photographs of cute, sensitive-looking animal faces in green magazines.²² Sociologist Alison Anderson found that face-on photographs of North Sea common seals helped rouse public indignation against a 1988 virus epidemic allegedly pollution-caused, even though the scientific evidence was inconclusive.²³ This is arresting fortuitous corroboration of the power of the central metaphor in Emmanuel Levinas’s ethical philosophy for one’s responsibility for another.

A face, as Levinas writes in characteristically rhapsodic prose,

presses the neighbor up against me. Immediacy is the collapse of the representation into a face, into a “concrete abstraction” torn up from the world, from horizons and conditions, incrusting in the signification without a context of the-one-for-the-other, coming from the emptiness of space . . . Such an order throws a “seed of folly” into the universality of the ego. It is given to me who answer before the one for whom I am responsible.²⁴

Levinas himself had no interest in extending his idea of ethical obligation to human-nonhuman relations. His interest was exclusively in the face as the trace of the human and as activator of one’s responsibility for another. But much of what he suggests here applies also to the activation of the human sense of accountability for (certain) animals, including the passage’s implication that the appeal of the face is all the more compelling for being abrupt and unexpected, pressing itself on the experiencer seemingly out of nowhere.

By the criteria of size and “higher” life form, if not of face, whales have especially great charismatic potential. Langdon Winner’s antithesis of “the whale and the reactor” as a late twentieth-century update of Henry Adams’s antithesis between the virgin and the dynamo makes perfect intuitive sense.²⁵ As the largest of mammals, size alone makes whales easy to envision as planetary microcosms:

The whales turn and glisten, plunge
and sound and rise again,
Hanging over subtly darkening deeps
Flowing like breathing planets
in the sparkling whorls of
living light—²⁶

It is not bulk alone that whales have going for them as icon candidates, but the combination of their size, their intelligence (which more easily makes them seem our “kindred”), their fascinating alterity (as creatures of a radically different scale inhabiting a radically different medium: the “subtly darkening deeps”), their increasing scarcity, and (to most, although not all, of earth’s inhabitants today) their “nonessential” use-value: although one can make a profit from harvesting them, they are apparently not indispensable to the manufacture of any known product essential to human welfare. Cetaceans, whales and dolphins both, are also sociable, even sportive; and they have individuality as well as intelligence, including powers of adaptation, mimicry of human sounds, and even the capacity to transmit “‘collective wisdom’ from one generation to the next.”²⁷ Cetaceans have remarkably sophisticated and acute vocal and auditory capacities that allow some species to communicate acoustically thousands of miles away²⁸ by a process still not fully understood. One evolutionary ecologist has even suggested that “dolphin language may in some ways be similar to written Chinese characters, in which analog pictures are given digital functions.”²⁹ Perhaps most intriguingly of all from an anthropocentric standpoint, cetaceans seem to enjoy socializing with humans under certain conditions: to play, to race and follow boats, to listen and respond to flute music, and so on. Such interspecies behavior has been reported at least as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, not counting such ancient legends as Arion and the dolphin.³⁰

Whales anciently seemed to partake of ocean’s mysterious, radical, ambiguous otherness: to symbolize divine power, whether benign or threatening. Today whales still seem uncannily other, but with the uncanniness increasingly seen to reside in the “fact” that despite dramatic differences in scale and anatomy and habitat they are so much like us.³¹

Like modern primatology, cetacean studies are one of those areas where assumptions of species distinctiveness, and particularly the superiority of human mental powers to those of nonhuman species, are being most vigorously challenged. If western culture's representative ancient whale figuration was the unnamed sea creature in the Book of Jonah, the representative contemporary image is something like Shamu, Sea World's captive killer whale, or the winsome "Little Calf" (a baby sperm whale) whose early life and adventures Victor B. Scheffer narrates in *The Year of the Whale*, which won the annual John Burroughs Medal for the best book of natural history writing in 1969. "Remote indeed they are," Scheffer writes of the yearling calf and his mother, "but not lonely, for never are they out of range of the submarine voices of their own kind."³² As this typical blend of exoticism and intimacy shows, domesticity has been even more important than physiognomy in modern literary efforts to give whales and other nonhuman creatures "a face."

In the century-old animal story tradition, of which Felix Salten's *Bambi* and Rachel Carson's first book *Under the Sea Wind* are more distinguished examples, *The Year of the Whale* inverts standard assumptions about the relation between hunter and hunted in the interest of dramatizing the claims of animal rights and animal suffering on human attention. This revisionary ethical thrust of the reimagination of cetaceans has itself been strongly pressed by whale conservationists. As animal rights advocate Peter Singer put it in a statement that influenced the Australian government's decision to discontinue whaling and adopt protectionist measures, whaling is morally objectionable for its acts of violence against "member[s] of an intelligent, social species, where the emotional links between different members of the group, and the capacity to enjoy life, are only too evident."³³ Singer's premise that "higher-order" creatures have higher moral claims on humans than "lower-order" creatures has been challenged,³⁴ but there is no question about the readiness of whale protectionists to reinforce their claims by promoting the sentiment of closeness between humans and whales.

Important as imaging has been for advocates of whale conservation and of ocean conservation more generally, and prolific as recent artistic imaging of whales has been (in film, painting, and music as well as literature), no modern work of maritime animal imagination, notwithstand-

ing the award of Burroughs Medals and the like, seems likely to achieve the standing Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* has long enjoyed. At first thought, the situation seems ironic. For *Moby-Dick* rose to the status of literary classic less because of than despite its prolix and obsessive preoccupation with cetology, and even today Melvillians chronically fail to take this aspect of the book seriously, except when preparing documentary apparatus; and from a present-day protectionist standpoint the novel is in some ways, to say the least, quite politically incorrect. At first sight, *Moby-Dick* seems considerably closer to the Book of Jonah than to *The Year of the Whale*. Yet if one turns back to Melville with contemporary concerns about the oceanic commons and the fate of cetaceans in mind, the complications of these issues and those of *Moby-Dick* itself become mutually illuminated in unexpected ways. Certainly no more modern feat of "whale versus reactor" imagination comes close to matching this astonishingly prescient work of the early industrial era.

Moby-Dick and the Hierarchies of Nation, Culture, and Species

Moby Dick was written in and about the moment when the world was coming under the regime of global capitalism. It is the first canonical work of Anglophone literature to anatomize an extractive industry of global scope—an industry, furthermore, where American entrepreneurs had become the leading edge. "By 1850 the supremacy of American whaling had been established beyond question," as the classic American industry history states.³⁵ Melville makes much of this boast. The seas through which the *Pequod* sails are dominated by Yankee and particularly by Nantucket whalers. The French and the Dutch whalers are pathetic; the British house of Enderby, which pioneered the Pacific sperm whale fishery, is represented by jovial triflers; and the crews of the New England vessels reflect this dominance. The *Pequod*—much like other New England whaling ships of the time—is a global village of ethnicities in which "the native American liberally provides the brains [i.e., the officers], the rest of the world . . . the muscles" (p. 108). This was one arena, then, where American imperial reach more than matched the British. As Ishmael puts it with characteristic panache, "let the English overswarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner

from the sun; two thirds of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketer's" (pp. 62–63).

The multitythmic collage with which Melville overlays Captain Ahab's fantastic quest, on the decoding of which Melvillians have expended far more intellectual energy than they have on its cetology, is an abstract counterpart of the global reach and multiethnic composition of the whaling industry itself. No wonder it takes on a life of its own, and not just for biographical reasons but for broader cultural reasons as well: this was also the moment of the birth of comparative anthropology and religion in the West. In suggesting a link, Melville anticipated what today's global culture theory has formulated more analytically: that the cultural and political-economic dimensions of globalism were interconnected. Exploration made possible by technological advantage led both to trade in which superior technology produced western (and, in this case, Yankee) dominance and to cultural exchange in which western cultural condescension normally prevailed, although not always. The same American subculture that opened up trade with the Far East in the eighteenth century and forced entry into Japan in the mid-nineteenth produced the first American converts to Buddhism a half-century later. On the one hand, the expansionist impulse epitomized by Ahab's imperial will is partially echoed by Ishmael's more innocent-seeming desire to fathom unknown lands, customs, ideas.³⁶ On the other hand, contact with unfamiliar geographies and cultures produced disorientation and sometimes also reorientation of values in anyone with a grain of receptivity.³⁷ In *Moby-Dick*, it is historically apt both that the upcountry greenhorn Ishmael's first contact with the whaling industry should induce culture shock (his initial encounter with Queequeg), followed by deparochialization; and also that the novel should not know quite what to do with their relationship in the long run. The state of the Yankee culture within as well as against which Melville wrote was such as to make it hard even for an independent thinker to imagine such companionship except as a brief glimpse of an alternative world. Yet the novelty and audacity of that glimpse should not be underestimated. The same holds for the novel's ecological vision.

Both latter-day chroniclers of whaling and whale conservationists have laid claim to *Moby-Dick* as authority and/or as witness.³⁸ On the face of it, the first claim seems more plausible, since this is a book more

concerned with whale-chasing and whale chasers than with whale-watching, let alone whale-saving. Professional Melvillians are taught to suppose that to the extent this highly ornate, stylized, self-consciously metaliterary book has historical-material reference it must be to the management-labor dynamics of emerging industrial capitalism or to contemporary debates over slavery and expansionism; and that as for the whale-watching dimension of *Moby-Dick*, its engagement is with whales as symbols rather than with whaleness as such.³⁹

Notwithstanding the weight of such opinion, Roger Payne rightly holds *Moby-Dick* to be a book calculated to unsettle one's assumptions about the borderlines between the human and the nonhuman, so as to ensure "that whales would reconstitute themselves . . . at the point of origin of all the meridians of the imagination, its very pole, and there tie themselves forever into human consciousness by a kind of zenith knot."⁴⁰ In effect Payne asserts that, yes, Melvillian whales *are* signifiers, but of the intertwinement of humans with whaleness and by implication with all other nonhuman creatures as well. There is much to support this view.

First, of course, is the fact that the human characters in the book are fixated on whales, particularly the White Whale, to the point that they anxiously subject it/them to a multitude of interpretative constructions, all of which prove insufficient or downright wrong. It is not the captain alone who is umbilically tied to the monster that snatches him off at the end. Ishmael, for all his playfulness, is no less tied, and so too is Ahab's first mate and rival Starbuck, who is far too commonsensical to attach special significance to Moby Dick as against other whales, but no less bound to his own task-oriented mentality that whales equal barrels of oil equal profit. The plot is contrived so that cetacean materiality triumphs over all attempts to construe or contain it.

Second, and more important, the species boundary is perpetually being blurred, and the reader pulled back and forth across it. Through dozens of playful personifications, whales are given brows, bonnets, "chaste looking" mouths, infant flukes like palms of hands. And negatively: whales are without voice, face, sense of smell, without a "proper nose" (p. 291). Right whales are stoic, sperm whales platonian. Right whales graze through brit like "morning mowers" (p. 234). Young bull sperm whales carry on "like a mob of young collegians" (p. 330). The

“desecrat[ion]” of a whale’s corpse after the kill is the parody of a proper funeral (p. 262). Whales have families, and females care for their young and for each other. We are asked to imagine how nonbinocular vision might feel, to imagine the felt texture of the whale’s isinglass skin, to appreciate that tiny earholes do not necessarily mean poor hearing.

Whaling narratives of Melville’s day stressed the daring, risks, dangers, and excitement of whaling far more than the suffering of the whales when driven, maimed, and killed, but they were also capable of transient empathy for “the royal game of the seas.” A graphic passage in J. Ross Browne’s *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*, one of Melville’s sources, dwells on the “intensity of agony” of the whale toward the end of a chase. Another source, Francis Olmsted’s *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage*, pauses affectingly to behold another whale in extremis, “exhausted with pain and the loss of blood.” Still another, Henry Cheever, confessed that “I am not one that can coolly observe the last agony of so mighty an organized creature as the whale.” Eliza Williams, who loyally accompanied her shipmaster-husband on several voyages and carefully noted their successes and failures, “could not bear the sight” of whales “tumbling and rolling about in the water, dying” that she had just seen “playing about, so happy in their native element, all unconscious, it seemed, of danger.”⁴¹ In *Moby-Dick* as well, most of the sympathy is reserved for sailors working under hazardous conditions, and humanitarian side-glances at their quarries are sparing, but they are also more pronounced. The account of the *Pequod*’s first kill is traumatic, not triumphal. Ishmael beholds the whale “spasmodically dilating and contracting his spout-hole, with sharp, cracking, agonized respirations,” emitting the next instant “gush after gush of clotted red gore” (p. 245). Starbuck chides Flask for wanting to puncture a sick whale’s ulcerated sore, and when Flask does anyhow, Ishmael calls it a “cruel wound” and proceeds to describe in detail the creature’s “most piteous” death throes (p. 301).

The “Grand Armada” chapter, however, is the most poignant example of this fellow-creaturely identification. Ishmael’s boat is becalmed in the center of a vast school where the newborn calves are crowded. Whether from “a wondrous fearlessness and confidence, or else a still, becharmed panic,” the whales seem suddenly tame, letting themselves be stroked and scratched (p. 325). (Modern whale biologists are less

likely to be surprised by this sociability.) This idyllic moment is then broken up by a whale one of the other boats has maimed, slashing about himself “in the extraordinary agony of the wound” and wounding others in the process (p. 326). The nominal lesson Ishmael obtusely draws after escaping from the melee is “the more whales the less fish. Of all the drugged whales only one was captured” (p. 328). He seems to have forgotten completely his becharmed delight, now that he has refocused on the chase that was the crew’s practical objective. After all, the interlude was happenstance. But it also sets up the next chapter, on cetacean domesticity, in a more comic-pastoral vein (“Schools and Schoolmasters”), which avoids the poignancy yet continues the theme of whales as fellow creatures.

At moments like these, the book prepares one to think that it is not fancifulness but good sense to look upon whales generally and *Moby Dick* particularly as more than a “dumb brute” acting from “blindest instinct,” as Starbuck holds him to be (p. 144). Although we need not take the ascription of intentionality at face value when the narrator tells us that “retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect” (p. 468) as *Moby Dick* swam toward the *Pequod*, it is by no means out of keeping with the intelligence with which Melville (and modern zoology) has shown whales can behave to suppose that he might have targeted the ship as “the source of all his persecutions” (p. 466). That this language formulates his supposed reaction as the duplicate of Ahab’s revengeful fixation comports with the quasi-equivalences between human and animal that the book has been suggesting all along.

Melville’s whale ethnography also casts a new light on the sense of taboo with which “the fiery hunt” (p. 170) is invested. It is not merely a question of whether the whale should or should not be read as a providential (or Satanic) agent, or whether Ahab is or is not a providential (or Satanic) avenger. The taboo is created more fundamentally by imparting the sense that a limit has been transgressed when one revengefully picks a fight with a nonhuman creature who is thought to be an intelligent agent (or principal) in its own right: so “organized” a creature as the sperm whale. In *Moby-Dick* the taboo is of course mainly associated with the title figure, who is distinguished from other sperm whales. But the distinction is less sharp than it seems. First, *Moby Dick* is placed within a cohort of “famous whales” to which whalers have given

proper names (p. 177); second, Ishmael provides testimony from whaling history to corroborate most of Moby Dick's later exceptional acts, including the sinking of the ship; third, the whole series of whales with which the *Pequod* has significant previous encounters are also, as we have seen, to some extent "humanized." So the difference between Moby Dick and other cetaceans is more of degree than of kind, and appearances to the contrary can largely be written off as figments of overheated Ahabian and Ishmaelian imagination.

All this is not to say that some concealed save-the-whales message can be surgically extracted from *Moby-Dick*. Such was hardly to be expected given the conditions of whaling before harpoon guns and large high-speed vessels. Melville was acutely aware that under the paleotechnic constraints of 1840s whaling, whales posed a greater threat to their human pursuers than their pursuers did to them. He might have thought differently had he seriously believed that sperm whales were an endangered species—a point of dispute in his day, as he well knew. Certainly Ishmael longs to believe "the whale immortal in his species, however perishable in his individuality" (p. 384). But the book raises the endangerment question only to dismiss it.⁴²

By the same token, the novel's predominant vision of the vast, unpredictable oceanic expanse as "a heartless immensity" (p. 347) is much more like Tennyson's proto-Darwinian "nature red in tooth and claw" than like Wordsworth or Thoreau, despite interludes of "The Grand Armada" sort. Indeed, one motive for the humanizing lyricalness and drollery with which Ishmael by turns invests whales seems to be to cope with "a horror" by being "social with it," as he freakishly remarks in the first chapter, "since it is but well to be on friendly terms with all the inmates of the place one lodges in" (p. 16). Melville's ocean is an arena of sudden violence daunting even to old salts. Within this context, however, the book distinguishes pretty consistently between different kinds of totemic creatures. Melville's sharks embody the sea's violent, predatory, "cannibalistic" aspect; whales, even though we are told what they eat and we sometimes see them do it, are not cast as sinister predators. On the contrary, more often they are typed as prey to the whalers, who themselves get slyly caricatured as the sharkish, cannibalistic ones.

Even at first sight, there is something atavistic about the *Pequod*, just as there is something archaic about Ishmael's wish to embark from the declining port of Nantucket rather than from thriving New Bedford, as the fountainhead of the industry. ("Where else but from Nantucket did those aboriginal whalers, the Red-Men, first sally out to give chase to the Leviathan?" [p. 17].) Fittingly, the ship is named for a tribe Ishmael (wrongly) insists is extinct. "A cannibal of a craft," he calls it, intending the term in the most literal sense: tricked out "in the chased bones of her enemies," with whale teeth for fastening pins, the tiller carved from a jawbone (p. 67).

The book seems to be playing a dubious and equivocal game here with the notion of cannibalistic barbarity. After all, hasn't it just been at pains to discredit civilizationism by honoring Queequeg's moral superiority and idealizing Ishmael's unlikely friendship with him? To a modern reader the mood swings between dismantling savagery and reinstating it in blatantly stereotypical ways can be disconcerting. Later, matters get worse, as in "The Try-Works," when Ishmael describes "the Tartarean shapes of the pagan harpooners" stoking the furnace, regaling each other at break-time with "their unholy adventures, their tales of terror told in words of mirth; as their uncivilized laughter forked upwards out of them, like the flames from the furnace" (p. 353). But I take it that the main point of having shown Queequeg and the others in more companionable ways beforehand is to demonstrate that they aren't "naturally" by disposition "cannibals" at all but at worst green-horns in the ways of western culture, as Ishmael is in the ways of whaling. It is the exigency of the whaling industry that (re)produces them as savages. As the passage concludes: "the rushing *Pequod*, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul" (p. 354). It is not the "pagans" but the captain who gives the order to pierce "the heathen flesh" in order to baptize his harpoon in their blood (p. 404).⁴³

Ahab's inverted sacramentalism, here and elsewhere, gives this voyage an infernal titanicism quite unlike standard whaling narrative. Yet Melville was by no means the only writer of his time to imagine whaling as a devilish existence that bestialized the worker. "Before I had half

finished my share of the labor," writes Browne of the cutting-in and trying-out process, "I heartily wished myself in the meanest dog-kennel ashore"; and as for off-hours, "if ever there was a miniature representation of the Black Hole of Calcutta, it was the fore-castle of the Styx."⁴⁴ Here too one hears the self-indulgent exaggeration of the respectably bred young man abruptly thrust down into the proletariat without the vaguest notion of what would face him. But there is also plenty of bona fide vernacular testimony from the nineteenth century as to the stresses and privations of multiyear whaling voyages under tyrannical captains.⁴⁵

On the one hand, then, *Moby-Dick* suggests that whaling forces many of those involved in it into more bestial lives than they would lead shoreside (whether they hail from Nantucket like Ahab or from Kokovoko like Queequeg). On the other hand, whales emerge as less bestial than one might expect. This is not, of course, the professional seaman's typical view, which if only as a survival tactic must not stray too far from Starbuck's utilitarianism. It takes a thinking person like Ishmael who is also an outsider to fashion a mental space in which these matters can be held up for contemplation: how whaling reduces people, how whale-beholding sometimes ennoble whales and impels one to imagine people and whales as semi-interchangeable.

Ishmael, then, is both a lens through which humans and sea creatures become coordinated into an informal comparative ethnology and a link between the amateur cetology in which premodern whaling narratives regularly indulge at least in passing, and late twentieth-century popular books about whales in which biology and/or environmental ethics get commingled with personal narrative, as in Payne's *Among Whales* or Scheffer's *Year of the Whale*.

Melville's ethnological cross-referencing between persons and beasts provides a zestful-skeptical running commentary on the age's passion for comparative anatomy and the more theoretical pseudosciences built upon it, like phrenology and craniology. Samuel Otter, who has delved furthest into this aspect of *Moby-Dick*, demonstrates how the novel disrupts racist pseudoscience by such devices as the deliberately overdone classificationism of the "Cetology" chapter and comical hyperfocus on cranial and skeletal measurement, on Moby Dick's chromatics, and so on.⁴⁶ The satirical treatment of classification, and the zest with which human and nonhuman get commingled, also express a more sweeping

unsettlement of Enlightenment rationalism by way of a deliciously irreverent relish for the pedantic minutiae and incongruities of the pre-Darwinian scene of clashing taxonomic systems, which belabored the question of whether cetaceans were fish or mammals long after it had been "resolved" and set off fierce disputes over the classifications of "monsters," both human and nonhuman, including category-defying new species from Europe's colonies.⁴⁷

Even more central to *Moby-Dick* than the unsettling of theories about racial intelligence and potential, however, is its interest in animal intelligence, specifically of course cetacean. This issue gets introduced by way of the mystique with which whales are invested, both by tradition (especially the biblical-exegetical association of Leviathan, popularly thought to be incarnated in the form of a whale, as divine instrument and/or adversary) and by Ishmael's compulsive foreshadowings. At this level whales, especially sperm whales and most especially Moby Dick, are mysticized as the quintessence of "the full awfulness of the sea which aboriginally belongs to it" (p. 235). But the book is also concerned to make this "awfulness" plausible, so as to refute in advance those who—as Ishmael puts it in a famous but imperfectly understood assertion—might "scout at Moby Dick as a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory" (p. 177). Here Melville protests too much, as he later granted in an equally famous remark to Sophia Hawthorne that her response to the novel made him realize its "part-&-parcel allegoricalness" as never before.⁴⁸ But the context of the original passage is no less important: a chapter purporting to argue for "the reasonableness of the whole story of the White Whale, more especially the catastrophe" (p. 177). "Reasonableness" also protests too much, and knowingly so: Ishmael is perfectly aware of intermixing documentary with tall tale-telling, as in the pretended vehemence of his jesuitical argument that the sixth-century "sea-monster" of the Propontis "must in all probability have been a sperm whale" (p. 182). Yet amidst the rhetorical hijinks are more measured observations: that "it is very often observed that, if the sperm whale, once struck, is allowed time to rally, he then acts, not so often with blind rage, as with wilful, deliberate designs of destruction to his pursuers" (p. 181); that "the Sperm Whale is in some cases sufficiently powerful, knowing, and judiciously malicious, as with direct af-

terthought to stave in, utterly destroy, and sink a large ship; and what is more, the Sperm Whale *has* done it" (p. 178). The best contemporary accounts of whaling bore out these claims: that sperm whales were "ordinarily of a peaceful and sluggish disposition," but when roused they could act like uncannily intelligent adversaries.⁴⁹

It is important to stress Melville's differential handling of the whale's alleged malice versus its intelligence while not, in the process, overstating the distinction. The novel hints that imputing malice may be as superstitious as traditional demonizing of sea monsters as Leviathan,⁵⁰ that such "malice" as whales display is reactive and not initiatory. At the denouement, the White Whale's first reaction to the *Pequod* is to swim away, not to attack—as Starbuck is quick to point out to Ahab. This is in keeping with the reputation of his historical prototype Mocha Dick, for whom "it was not customary . . . while unmolested, to betray a malicious disposition."⁵¹ Indeed, the novel at times goes much farther than this by imputing sinisterness to the whalers instead: not only depicting Ahab as mad but whaling generally as "a butchering sort of business" (p. 98), and the *Pequod's* routine kills as being like the "burglaries" of the Crusaders on their way to their holy assaults on Jerusalem (p. 184). At the same time, *Moby-Dick* by no means negates the impression of whales as Leviathanic adversaries, much as one might wish the novel to have done if approaching it from a presentist save-the-whales perspective. On the contrary, the plot, like conventional whaling narratives of the day, builds toward a climax in which resourceful hunters confront resourceful monster. The mirror opposition of whalers (especially Ahab) bestialized by the hunt versus whale (especially Moby Dick) maddened by being hunted is culturally avant-garde insofar as it implies a comparative pathology of early capitalist enterprise and of intelligent mammals under pressure of systematic harassment. But the novel remains traditional insofar as it reproduces the familiar narrative and cosmic melodrama of the traditional symbolic hunt.

Imagining Interspeciesism: The Lure of the Megafauna

In short, *Moby-Dick* is still at some remove from Aldo Leopold's prescription of nature study as a more enlightened substitute for literal hunting. Indeed, from Leopold's "Conservation Esthetic" and the other three extended thinkpiece chapters that conclude *A Sand County Al-*

manac one might almost think Leopold believed that promiscuous sport hunting had become a greater social problem than promiscuous harvesting for gain. Of course, Leopold knew full well the enormous problem commercial exploitation of nature continued to pose—meaning for him most especially the shortsighted farming practices that had deforested, monocropped, and desertified the midcontinent and still remained orthodox despite the horrendous example of the Dust Bowl years just passed.⁵² But the era of worst land abuse—somewhat evasively from one standpoint but prudently from another—Leopold prefers to diagnose as a Paleolithic stage of existence that most of his readers will be inclined to bracket off as a cultural memory of bygone times rather than as a description of the way they live now.

As we saw in Chapter 5, recreational hunting was for Leopold a trace of that pioneer stage that he hoped to refashion into a bridge toward a more advanced state of ecological enlightenment such as Faulkner's Ike McCaslin also grasps for. *Moby-Dick* stands closer to the frontier mentality, aware of the fragility of humankind before the power of first nature and empathetic albeit not uncritical of the emotional need and the romantic excitement of the adversarial struggle against brute force that this produces. Though Leopold had no more desire to place a ban on hunting than Faulkner did, the thrust of *Sand County Almanac* is to try to cajole the reader much more firmly than Melville does into laying down his gun for the sake of the nobler path of nature study.

Elsewhere in Melville's day we find the prehistory of this. Emerson had challenged his reader to "name all the birds without a gun"—a swipe at the then-standard ornithological practice of killing birds in order to study them.⁵³ Even Audubon, who did so promiscuously, confessed to twinges of guilt. Indeed, by the mid-1800s, animal watching in the United States was already a more common activity for the book-reading segment of the U.S. public than was animal hunting, whether for sport or subsistence: hence in part the brisk literary trade in books of maritime narrative, which afforded another kind of vicariousity. It was no coincidence that the turn of that century marked the start of live exotic animal exhibits on a large scale in Europe and the United States. These were initially hawked by local entrepreneurs as curios, like "the REAL WHALE!" beached at Salem and briefly exhibited at Boston before it began to stink.⁵⁴ Soon afterward aristocratic collections of exotic beasts, zoological gardens, and menagerie entrepreneurship became common,

the taste for them whetted not only by an interest in living wonders that monster folklore suggests is more or less perennially appealing to the human mind, but more immediately by the quickened pace of western penetration of the rest of the world.

Human and animal wonders were coexhibited and even commingled, most notoriously in the form of "missing links" or fake Barnumesque collages of mermaids and the like.⁵⁵ But if the purpose of such exhibits was to titillate Caucasians with the thought that dark-skinned people were little different from primates, the late twentieth-century trend has been more to emphasize the humanity of the beast. In no case has the turnaround been more striking than in the case of how we think about whales. "Since the mid-1970s, whales and dolphins have been caught up in a tide of popular spiritualism and cross-species identification," Susan G. Davis observes in her ethnography of San Diego's Sea World experience.⁵⁶ This especially holds for killer whales, which have been semidomesticated in Sea World's theme parks. Only a half-century ago, Robinson Jeffers could unselfconsciously count on the reflex association of "orca" with "killer" as the basis for an "inhumanist" meditation on the terrible beauty of two predatory orcas snuffing out a panicky sea lion:

Here was death, and with terror, yet it
looked clean and bright, it was beautiful.
Why? Because there was nothing human involved, suffering nor
causing; no lies, no smirk and no malice;
All strict and decent; the will of man had nothing to do
here. The earth is a star, its human element
Is what darkens it.⁵⁷

Within less than a quarter of a century, however, "the captive-orca era," as one enthusiast exclaims, had produced "almost overnight [a] change in public opinion. People today no longer fear and hate the species; they have fallen in love with them."⁵⁸

Davis unfolds in fascinating detail the manipulations that have helped produce this result: the extreme care to which impresarios and trainers go to perfect "the old circus trick of humanizing the animal," how this is scripted in the show by such ground rules as "the whale must never be

an object of ridicule" and "it is positively important that humans be the butts of jokes"⁵⁹—jokes that involve such "human"-like behavior on the whale's part as splashing, head-bobbing, spitting, belching, and so on. This leads her to a jaundiced appraisal of a gullible public hoodwinked by an ersatz experience of "authentic" nature perpetrated by corporatism masquerading as patron of biological research and educational outreach. The trained orcas begin to look like a slightly more exotic version of Anheuser-Busch's other animal logo, Clydesdale horses, and Sea World a high-tech version of Barnum's American Museum.

Presumably a version of this argument about theme parks could be made about commercially organized whale-watching. Whale biologist Roger Payne, however, tenders an opposite verdict about whale-watching, a version of which he might well apply to theme parks also. Payne argues that it is important for large numbers of tourists "to become awestruck by whales" because "in the long run it is they who will determine the fate of whales more than many of the scientists who get to spend their lives with them." Such being the case, a carefully scripted live encounter is better than none at all.⁶⁰ But perhaps these claims are complementary, not irreconcilable. It may be true, as Davis claims, that commercial enterprises like Sea World offer a packaged version of nature in the interest of enhancing the corporate image, and yet it may also be true that such packaged experiences of contact with "nature" can reinforce or activate environmentalist commitment. Otherwise, one might add, why should environmentalists bother to write for publication, which demands another type of corporate packaging unless you run your own press on your own funds.

Contemporary regulation of the whaling industry presents a similarly mixed picture. Payne comes down on both sides of the fence in his remarks about the International Whaling Commission (IWC), an assemblage of representatives from member states charged to implement the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling ratified after World War II by the major whaling nations. His annual trips "to the IWC constitute the most dispiriting, irritating, and outrageously frustrating activity of my life," rigged as the proceedings seem to him in favor of industry and porous as the IWC's oversight has been. Yet he believes that the IWC, meaning especially the minority of vigilant articulate conservationists who serve together with industry advocates and

meretricious politicians, has saved a number of species from utter extinction, and that international organizations like it “constitute the only way forward.”⁶¹

It is this mixed picture that leads Lynton Caldwell to conclude that the key to generating an effective system of protection for the transnational marine commons is neither scientific nor institutional but cultural: commitment to a better environmental philosophy. “Unless related to a holistic concept of humans-in-biosphere along with a realistic assessment of a sustainable future for mankind, facts alleged to be scientific may as easily be used to support exploitative policies as to protect the integrity of the earth.”⁶² Caldwell commensensically argues that institutions of mediation must supply the *structure* of any workable solution, but that public environmental values will determine whether they work well or poorly. From this standpoint, empathy for nonhumans as fellow creatures, however sentimental and subject to image manipulation, would seem a better augury than otherwise, especially when the creatures have the charisma to represent an entire ecological domain: indeed, to embody, like the great whales, the ocean or the planet within themselves.

Though this microcosmic way of thinking may seem fanciful, there is even, at least sometimes, a scientific as well as aesthetic eco-logic to it. Florida conservation biologists, for example, have looked to the vicissitudes of the endangered Cape Sable seaside sparrow as a “barometer” of the ecosystemic health of the Everglades.⁶³ The Endangered Species Act has been a powerful instrument for protecting ecosystems, not only individual creatures. This is not to say that ordinary citizens, creative writers, or advocacy journalists think “krill” or “squid” when they think “whale.” Very likely, lay judgments as to why species extinction is wrong are driven by a more simplistic combination of large critter bias, higher-form-of-life bias, and uneasiness about seeing nature thrown “out of balance.” Yet there is also a rough-and-ready wisdom to the fear that the disappearance of creatures at the top of the food chain will be harmful to “the environment,” even if it is misguided to think that directing protectionist efforts toward them alone will ensure environmental health, ensure even their own survival.

Indeed, the latter-day shift in sentiment toward whales and whaling has been so pronounced—notwithstanding pockets of resistance in Japan, Iceland, Norway, and other scattered peoples—as to threaten to

make old-time whaling imagination seem as retrograde as minstrel-show renditions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* Topsy or the late-imperial child’s classic *Little Black Sambo*. Jeffers’s poem about murderous orcas now looks even more atavistic than it meant to be. Disney’s decision, entirely logical for 1940, to make the people-swallowing shark of Carlo Collodi’s children’s classic *Pinocchio* into “Monstro the Whale” would be a less automatic choice today.⁶⁴ Likewise, narratives of contemporary whaling adventure and derring-do have virtually dried up;⁶⁵ nature writing about whales has taken on a more explicitly protectionist cast; and *The Year of the Whale* has led to other whale-protagonist narratives. Robert Siegel’s popular novel in the first person about the life and adventures of Hralekana-kolua—an improbably altruistic, sensitive young cetacean’s attempts to rescue fellow whales from human predators though it may cost him his own life—comes close to turning *Moby-Dick* on its head.⁶⁶

In contemporary nature writing the shift in imagination of the non-human is nowhere better seen than in the work of Barry Lopez, one of the leading figures most committed to reexamining human-animal relations. One of Lopez’s signature achievements has been his sympathetic, scientifically informed meditations on selected large mammals with concurrent emphasis on the images, myths, and fantasies humans have constructed about them. A dual commitment to make literary representation more scientifically informed and at the same time to recover and advocate what he takes to be a lost understanding between humans and nonhumans is central to his work. In his essay “Renegotiating the Contracts,” Lopez argues that western culture has been diminished by speciesism, by decline in contact with and sense of wonder about animals, by failure to appreciate that animals have cultures of their own that might in some respects even provide role models for ours. Lopez’s claim that traditionally “among hunting peoples in general in the northern hemisphere, these agreements derived from a sense of mutual obligation and courtesy” may be a somewhat wishful romanticization.⁶⁷ But that does not affect the core of what he has to say about how species boundaries need to be renegotiated in order to strengthen human animal intercommunity.

This essay was written in the aftermath of Lopez’s first major book, *Of Wolves and Men* (1978), which went several steps beyond Aldo Leopold’s “Thinking like a Mountain” in combatting the settler culture

"varmint" stereotype that had driven wolves to the brink of extinction. Lopez seconds Leopold's ecological argument (a wolf population keeps mountain forests from being defoliated by those "good" critters, the deer) with a rich account of wolf behavior set within an even richer tapestry of narrative and reflection about wolves as objects of human imagination. The book seeks thereby to demonstrate the antiquity of human fascination with wolves, to renew that interest, and to rechannel it so as to strengthen cross-species awareness.

Much the same is true of the three large mammal chapters that form the first main section of Lopez's *Arctic Dreams* (1985): on the musk ox, the polar bear, and the narwhal. None of these creatures are burdened with the negative stereotypes attached to wolves, but all have been thoughtlessly hunted, exploited, or taken for granted in ways that these chapters seek to supplant by education and reenchantment. In each case the Arctic ecosystem, which the initial chapter has sketched and which later chapters are to deepen, is made to revolve around the concentrated portraits of the individual creatures; and each portrait is transfused with a sense of past and present transactions between creatures and humans, with continual emphasis on the wonder and mysteriousness of encountering them, both experientially and contemplatively.

Interspecies communication, or rather the lack of it, is more centrally the subject of Lopez's essay "A Presentation of Whales," about the 1979 stranding of forty-one sperm whales on the Oregon coast.⁶⁸ Lopez stresses the well-meaning but ignorant and hence unintentionally cruel efforts to help the whales survive or die more quickly, and the ineffectiveness of these efforts given how little is known about the phenomenon of whale-stranding and even about sperm whale biology. The focus shifts back and forth from the suffering, death, and cleanup of the whales to the ethics and behavior of various people charged with crisis management: scientists, park officials, the press, and so on. In these ways "A Presentation of Whales" instantiates the diagnosis in "Renegotiating the Contracts" that western culture suffers from a pathetically meager ability to think across species lines. To Lopez, the loss on both sides, particularly for nonhumans, is sad indeed.

Lopez moves with greater sophistication along the path that Sea World and Disney protocols follow formulistically: interspecies understanding is important, animals shall no longer be treated as victims or

scapegoats. Unlike popular culture's orchestrations of animal-human encounters, however, Lopez studiously refrains from familiarizing them. On the contrary, for Lopez the mysteries of animal behavior ("We know more about the rings of Saturn than we know about the narwhal") and the intricate perplexities of human wonderment in response ("My eye was drawn to them before my conscious mind, let alone my voice, could catch up") express an earnest, baffled thinking person's respect.⁶⁹ This attentive respectfulness differs sharply from the just-like-me illusion propagated by popular cetacean productions like the three *Free Willy* films, boy-critter melodramas about an initially hostile but actually tender, smart, and sensitive orca that evil mercenary Sea World-type entrepreneurs capture (in a boat ironically named the *Pequod*) and almost destroy, until Willy's new friend Jesse frees him with the combined aid of Jesse's wise Native American mentor, a disaffected trainer, and Jesse's foster parents. Willy and Jesse are playmates and soulmates. *Free Willy II* and *III* show the adolescent Jesse returning to shore to resume contact and, of course, to get embroiled in dangers from which orca and boy at different times save each other. What is finally most interesting about Willy is that he is Jesse's friend, an amazingly responsive wild pet.⁷⁰

I do not mean to deny standing to the *Free Willy* films on this account as environmentalist interventions, despite their banal plotting and undistinguished cinematography. They remain preservationist, animal-rights-friendly texts even though Willy is not "freed" either literally (because a domesticated—or mechanical!—orca is needed for the role)⁷¹ nor thematically (because Willy is made to matter chiefly in terms of Jesse's feelings toward him). As such, the films reaffirm—if reaffirmation be needed given the long history of the plot device—that dramatized rapport between individual human and individual nonhuman can be a powerful resource for imagining environmental concern. But how, if at all, can this be done at minimum sacrifice to ecological literacy and without reducing the new ethical paradigm of species relativism to nothing more than a friendly amendment to the old Adamic myth that the primary end of the animal creation is to serve human needs?

Lopez's recourse, as we have seen, is an intertwined lyric meditation and narrative descriptivism that amounts to a kind of supersensitive whale watcher's aesthetic of distance: a means of expressing intellectual

interest and emotional empathy while keeping his hands off, the observer's ego conscientiously peripheral to his account of the creature.

Moby-Dick, on the other hand, insofar as it begins to deal with the issue of interspeciesism, generally follows a *via negativa* of dramatizing the pathogenic side of human preoccupation with it. The Nantucketers' thirst for dominance threatens to turn them into global predators. The root of Ahab's madness is that he is utterly sure that a MESSAGE has been delivered him from the cosmos through the medium of the White Whale (be it "agent" or "principal" [p. 144]). Ishmael too, although he would prefer to keep his distance, is almost as obsessive in his own quest for understanding: a quest also left hanging in an intellectual sense. *Moby-Dick* thereby reproaches in advance the sentimental side of animal rapport aesthetics, saying, in effect, "Don't assume it is in the interest of animals that we should act out our emotions toward them," and "It's understandable that you should care about the cosmos, but don't expect the cosmos to care about you." When your boat goes down, "the great shroud of the sea [will roll] on as it rolled five thousand years ago" (p. 469).

Melville might have rethought his ending, and other aspects of his book as well, had he foreseen that modern whalers would obtain the wherewithal to exterminate the globe's entire population of big cetaceans. As it was, he had no way to predict even the near-term collapse of American whaling less than a decade later as the result of the fuel oil revolution and the U.S. Civil War, let alone the twentieth-century revival of the industry with the aid of high-tech weaponry, factory ships, whale-disorienting sonar, and the like. But he would likely have stood by his narrative of obsession with "the whale" defeated by its own obsessiveness, and he would probably have taken *both* the excesses of modern whaling *and* the excesses of modern cetaceophilia as supporting testimony.

Moby-Dick's imagination of excess and Lopez's modeling of restraint (especially in *Arctic Dreams*) share at least two major ethical-aesthetic commitments. First, an agnostic fascination with human desire to find in animals configurations of behavior that seem symbolically significant (for those especially interested in cosmological reading of nature's book) or behaviorally meaningful from the standpoint of evidencing animal cognition. Second, a commitment to beholding the individual crea-

ture not merely as *sui generis* or *qua species* but in the context of a global vision of some sort, the chief ingredients of which for Melville are imperial enterprise and comparative mythology, and for Lopez polar ecology and comparative ethnography. These commitments produce a cosmopolitan vision that helps keep the novel from succumbing to trivialization of animal-human rapport such that the iconic beast loses its standing as an ecosystemic, ecocultural synecdoche, dwindling into an isolated case, and the experience of rapport into little more than an exotic episode of private life. That the latter seems more often the case in popular turn-of-the-twenty-first-century imaging of cetaceans suggests that the globalization of environmental imagination of the oceanic still has a long way to go before it can match its high-water marks with any frequency. Indeed, *Moby-Dick*, "A Presentation of Whales," *Free Willy*, and the Sea World experience all in their discrepant ways testify that when the mentality that produces grosser forms of abuse of commons is suspended or repressed—the conception of whales as commodities that are fair game for all entrepreneurs, for example—what may take its place is often little better than sublimated proprietarianism: this is *my* trophy, *my* playmate, *my* unique and unprecedented experience. It then becomes the challenge of literature, and the discourses of cultural expression more generally, to make that insight common property in ways that resist the seductions of appropriation. This is the challenge a writer like Lopez has assumed, and it will surely remain a challenge for environmental writers throughout the new century.