

Book Review

Melville & Turner; Spheres of Love and Fright.
by Robert K. Wallace
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IN *MELVILLE & TURNER*, Professor Robert K. Wallace traces the process and course of change in Herman Melville's aesthetics, with an emphasis on his structures and styles, through 1851, the publication date of *Moby-Dick*. J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) was forty-four years older than Herman Melville (1819-1891). His influence on Melville's painterly style lasted for thirty years of Melville's creative life. For Wallace, each successive Melville novel occupies a developmental niche characterized by an increasing degree of creative "indistinctness" in manner, culminating in the dense aesthetic, style, and meaning of *Moby-Dick*. Indeed, Wallace's study of both Turner's and Melville's mostly conscious cultivation of the indistinct style is key to Wallace's interdisciplinarity. As J.D. Hooker commented in an 1848 letter, concerning Turner's late *Whalers (boiling Blubber) entangled in Flaw Ice, endeavoring to extricate themselves* (Royal Academy 1846), Turner "displays the rare knowledge of arranging the most difficult combinations that nature produces" (Wallace, p. 403). Hooker, the great botanist who accompanied Ross's voyage to the Antarctic waters depicted in Turner's oils, saw Turner as an intellectual visitor to the interdisciplinary grounds where, in Wallace's words, "literature, art, and science intersect" (p. 404).

Not secondarily, Wallace's book explicates these intersections in ways that define interdisciplinarity. In ways far more complete and complex than in his earlier books,¹ Wallace's *Melville & Turner* is more successfully interdisciplinary because here he has negotiated the troublesome distinction between aesthetic influence and aesthetic similarity. Although I am persuaded that Turner did influence Melville, the validity of Wallace's study far transcends the question of influence. It does so because indistinctness is the defining "principle of coherence" (Wallace, pp. 422-23) for "disparate" and seemingly "unemployable" material in Turner's and Melville's artistry. However convincing Wallace's argument is that Turner did in fact influence "Melville's literary art," Wallace is correct, in my estimation, in valuing and in using the comparison "whether the one had influenced the other or not" (p. 7).

Title, Theme, and Sections of *Melville & Turner*

Wallace derived the subtitle of his book from Ishmael's comment, in the chapter "The Whiteness of the Whale": "Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright" (*Moby-Dick*, p. 195. In Wallace, p. 5).² This sentence may be read as the rubric to the complexly woven analogies Wallace forms between the white sub-stratum of Turner's style and canvas and the whiteness of Melville's white whale. From this fundamental equation, Wallace extrapolates comparisons between Turner's and Melville's increasingly open symbols, their quizzical moral themes, and their artistry of the indefinite. More specifically, Wallace's subtitle signals a key theme and method in the painter

and the writer, both of whom in Wallace's estimation counterpoise "material or imaginative calm," the "visible spheres of love," with a succeeding "material or imaginative storm," the "invisible spheres of fright" (Wallace, p. 388).

Wallace announces his major theme in the first sentence: "Melville made Turner his own in the process of writing *Moby-Dick*. He did so because Turner's powerful aesthetic of the indistinct allowed Ishmael to articulate Melville's precise sense of the meaning of the whale" (1). In his chapter eight, Wallace provides an instance of this aesthetic at work. He cites Ishmael's celebration of "such a process by specifying in 'The [whale's spewing] Fountain' that only through 'all the thick mists of the dim doubts' can 'divine intuitions' either 'irradiate' his [Ishmael's] mind or 'enkindle my fog.'" Here, as in the "consciously Turner-esque 'Spouter-Inn,'" Turner's indistinct aesthetic has become Melville's "operative method for telling the truth" (Wallace, p. 381). Wallace's purpose here is not merely to show Turner's influence on Melville, but rather to illuminate each artist more completely by tracing their common sources of power, which derive from an aesthetic of the indistinct. Indeed, Wallace's study transcends actual influence because, by placing Melville and Turner within a specific Romantic context, with their idiomatic and individualized emphases on the sublime, Wallace creates his opportunity to uncover many dimly or formerly unnoticed structural sequences and details in the oeuvres of the painter and the novelist. Moreover, by emphasizing the painterly qualities of Melville and the narrative qualities of Turner,³ Wallace expands our sense of the vision in each, or as he says: "My intention is...to render our own perception of each one sharper and more distinct by comparing them" (Wallace, p. 8).

What William Hazlitt (1778-1830) called, in Turner, "pictures of nothing and very like"⁴ is, for the more admiring (and Wallace would hold, more correct) eye of John Ruskin (1819-1900), pictures glorying in an "untraceable, unconnected, yet perpetual form," like nature itself (Wallace, p. 36). John Ruskin was Turner's greatest critic and remained, for much of Turner's years, his presiding genius. But later, such Turner-esque indistinctness as resulted in "Europa and the Bull" (c. 1840-50) reached limits which made Ruskin think Turner had lost either his sharp vision or his mind. Wallace would not, I think, agree. A large measure of Ruskin's earlier admiration for Turner is characterized by Ruskin's analysis of *Snow Storm — Steam Boat* (R.A. 1842), whose engraving (made by R. Brandard in 1859) Wallace noticed in the Melville Room of the Berkshire Athenaeum as part of Melville's extensive collection of Turner engravings.⁵ Wallace extrapolates his term "A Powerful Aesthetic of the Indistinct" from Ruskin's study of *Snow Storm — Steam Boat* as characterized by the lack of "distinction ... between air and sea" (Wallace, p. 64).⁶ Wallace's thesis is that Turner supplied Melville with a powerful aesthetic of the indistinct. However, in the course of his study, Wallace also postulates the influence of other key artists or critics—Charles Eastlake and William Hazlitt chief among these—on Melville's style.

The book's structure is appropriate for Wallace's encyclopedic approach. *Melville and Turner* is divided into four Parts: Part One: Turner Before Melville; Part Two: Melville Before *Moby-Dick* (1845-1849); Part Three: Composing *The Whale* (1850-1851); and Part Four: *Moby-Dick* and Turner's Vision. Four short, prefatory summaries precede each Part and serve three functions: (1) they introduce the thought and organization of the forthcoming Part, (2) they adjust for the reader the basic foci of Wallace's thesis, and (3) they form very compact summary interchapters. Wallace takes the occasion of these transitions to dramatize his research, and Turner's and Melville's imaginative strides, as a novelist might. These sections are immaculately clear.

- **Part One — Turner Before Melville, 1775-1845:** Traces Turner's "imaginative growth" up the exhibition of his whaling oils and the emergence of his "true indistinctness."

- **Part Two — Melville Before Moby-Dick, 1845-1849:** Generates a taxonomy of the forms of analogical thinking Wallace uses in the book; trains reader to read literature and to see painting and to feel nature as Wallace (on behalf of Turner and Melville) does; studies earlier Melville, especially *Typee* (1846), *Mardi* (1849), and *White Jacket* (1850).
- **Part Three — Composing the Whale, 1850-1851:** Studies the influence of Turner on the composition of *Moby-Dick*.
- **Part Four — Moby-Dick and Turner's Vision:** A “free comparison” of *Moby-Dick* and Turner's later seascape paintings, establishing further their “common aesthetic” and moral vision.

These four Parts are divided into ten sub-units. Each sub-unit holds a generous number of titled sub-sub-sections. Indeed Wallace's structure may be seen to represent an appropriate mirror of Melville's convoluted and brilliant one-hundred and thirty-five chapter structure in *Moby-Dick* (not to mention three unnumbered chapters).

As is the case with *Moby-Dick*, it is difficult at times to keep one's focus on Melville and Turner. In this way too, Wallace's stylistic manner captures the intricate flavor one derives from a close reading of *Moby-Dick*. Likewise, Ishmael's appraisal of his own writing captures, by extension, certain qualities of Melville. In an attempt to connect Turner's “indistinct but expansive” style with the structure of *Moby-Dick*, Wallace weaves a complex interconnection between the Spouter-Inn painting (ch. 3) and specific features of the cetology chapter (ch. 32). Wallace first quotes Ishmael's final thoughts about lack of finality in his own study of cetology, wherein (Ishmael leaves his

cetological System standing thus unfinished, even as the great Cathedral of Cologne was left, with the crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower. For small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever completing anything. This whole book is but a draught — nay, but the draught of a draught.
{*Moby-Dick*, p. 145. In Wallace, p. 356}

In Melville's artistry, and in Wallace's analysis, cetology is a literary method and an emblem for a reading style, Wallace notes that this “explicit” comparison between cathedral and a particular cetological system becomes Melville's instrument for

a number of implicit comparisons reaching back to chapter 3 [“Spouter-Inn”]. One is between the cetologist who would “classify the constituents of a chaos” and the painter who would “delineate chaos bewitched.” Another is between “the very vestibule” of “this science of Cetology” and the “wide, low, straggling entry” of “that gable-ended Spouter-Inn.” Ishmael's encounter with the “uncertain, unsettled condition” of a science in which “it still [at that time] remains a moot point whether a whale be a fish” recalls his encounter with a painting in whose “nameless yeast” a “portentous, black mass of something” bears a “faint resemblance to a gigantic fish” ... “in fact [to] the great Leviathan himself.” ... In chapter 3, Ishmael offers only “a final theory of my own” about the painting; in chapter 32 he will “promise nothing complete” in his system of classification, “because any human thing supposed to be complete, must for that very reason infallibly be faulty” (*Moby-Dick*, pp. 12-13,

136-37). Incompleteness for Ishmael, like indistinctness for Turner, is at once his fault and his forte."

(Wallace, p. 357)

Wallace's general approach to reading *Moby-Dick* follows the contours of Melville's covert theory of the unfinished masterpiece. Both views, perhaps, harken back to the Romantic genre of "the fragment," thus tying together the daring of the human attempt to complete one's life trajectory, a hearkening back to the overlapping traditions of Christian and classical pride and fall based on overreaching. Be that as it may, Wallace's art of criticism, like Melville's creative art, is as suggestive as it is a specific interpretation.

One's ability to follow Wallace's highly detailed examinations of the micro-structure of *Moby-Dick*, and other Melville novels, is aided by his use of repeat phrases from Melville, Hazlitt, and Ruskin especially, pregnant phrases from which Wallace derives theory. Like Melville, and like Turner, Wallace shows an "absorptive and transmutative" use of his sources, not unlike what he himself points out as Ishmael's ability to reject simplistic and formulaic interpretations in order "to assimilate the 'nameless yeast' of a painter who could truly delineate a 'chaos bewitched'" (p. 367). Thus, near the end of his book, Wallace draws an analogy between Melville's use, in his later chapters, of vortical images which, while as "resistant to literal interpretation as the Spouter-Inn painting," are nonetheless (or therefore) "evocative of psychic motion" (p. 570). Turner's *Deluge* oils (R.A. 1843), as well as *Undine giving the Ring to Massaniello* (R.A. 1846) and *Angel Standing in the Sun* (R.A. 1846) are, for Wallace, elaborate exfoliations of psychic conditions that run parallel to how a "painterly-minded mind" might paint with text. The vortex becomes, for Melville as for Turner, a "structuring principle, for both inner and outer reality. ... It allowed each to create 'pictures of nothing' that invite each of us to open our own psychic spheres of love and fright to those liquid, solar, and mammalian spheres that continue to expand and contract before our very eyes" (p. 573). Wallace has faced the criticism of Melville as a writer who would "allow his mind to run riot amid remote analogies where the chain of association is invisible to mortal minds" (p. 584).⁷ For such a reader as Wallace, "remote analogies" are discovered by the reader *as the direct result of* Melville's adaptation of Turner's painterly method as his own in (especially) *Moby-Dick*. In a seamless comparison study of Turner with Melville, Wallace joins Melville the scholar, "swimming through libraries," with Melville the artist, for whom enigma and suggestion through analogy became primary methodology.

Scholarship and Imaginative Reading

At the beginning of Part Three, Wallace distinguishes critical "fast-fish" from critical "loose-fish," a distinction echoing Ishmael's in chapter 89 of *Moby-Dick* (Wallace, p. 309, *Moby-Dick*, p. 396). A fast-fish possesses "some visible token of its possessor," a loose-fish not so. Wallace appropriates the terms to distinguish demonstrable influences on Melville's thinking or writings, many discovered by Wallace's exhaustive scholarship, from imaginative and revealing studies of analogical similarities between *Moby-Dick* and literary or visual productions by others. Part Three, "Composing *The-Whale*, 1850-1851," studies the influences of many essayists on the composition of that most encyclopedic of American novels. These influences include William Hazlitt (esp. *Sketches of the Principal Picture Galleries in England* (1824)), Charles Eastlake (esp. *Contributions to the Literature of the Fine Arts*, 1848), John Ruskin (esp. *Modern Painters* vol. I, and then vol. II. Repr. In America in 1847-1848), and many others.

It is hard to deny that Turner exerted direct influence on Melville, who was one of those epical writers who would incorporate enormous amounts of information into his writing, whatever he

knew and loved, and he certainly loved Turner and the art of painting. Aside from those watercolors or paintings which Melville might have seen, he owned Turner engravings in several forms.⁸ Wallace has catalogued the collection of engravings after Turner which Melville owned. These engravings, most of which are now held in the Melville Room of the Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, include several Turner works that figure prominently in Wallace's book, among these several in Turner's late style, including engravings after *Peace — Burial at Sea* (R.A. 1842), *Rain, Steam, and Speed* (R.A. 1844), and *Hurrah! for the Whaler Erebus!* (R.A. 1846). In addition to this collection, Melville owned or had access to editions of Byron, Scott, Marryatt, to other writers, to books that were laced with engravings after Turner, and to Ruskin.⁹ Moreover, in *Melville and Turner*, Wallace provides indisputably correct instances of direct verbal and conceptual influences of Turner as mediated through Ruskin, Hazlitt, and anonymous English and American reviews of Turner's work. But more important is one's assessment whether, as I judge to be the case, Wallace transforms these instances of possible, probable, or indisputable influences into resources for imaginative and sympathetic criticism of Melville, and of Turner.

Despite Wallace's cunning and highly successful scholarly detective work, what to me is fascinating about Wallace's book is that most of its critical analyses of meaning and form in Melville and in Turner exist in a grey area between the loose fish of firm scholarship and the fast fish of imaginative speculations into the relationship between form and meaning in art and nature. In an era dominated by the practice and the influence of deconstruction and related forms of post-modern analysis, Wallace, presumably no deconstructionist himself, has in his exhaustive manner given permission for a healthy latitude of interpretation that, to the extent of my reading, has existed far more frequently in Turner studies than in Melville studies. However, Wallace's analytic fabric turns so frequently on a principle of analogy that it seems fair, in this review, to isolate and assess analogy and its limits in interdisciplinary analysis. Such is specially the case for interart analysis where, as an alternative, one could assess the Spouter-Inn whale painting as a traditional ekphrastic representation of art within literature, as with the shield of Achilles in *The Iliad* or that of Aeneas in *The Aeneid*.

Wallace's willingness to base his analysis of *Moby-Dick* on "like conditions in Turner and Ruskin without necessarily embodying a direct influence" (p. 390) is for me well exemplified in Part 3, chapter 8, entitled "Taking Books (and Pictures) Off the Brain." There, Wallace analyzes Melville's blends of cetological description and aesthetic and thematic observations with an acumen that suggests how frequently analogy suggests direct influence. Ishmael's term "indecipherable," applied by him to the marks on the Sperm Whale (*Moby-Dick*, p. 306. In Wallace, p. 393), reminds Wallace of Eastlake's "living surface underneath" an etching, or of Ruskin's "hieroglyphics" with meaning. Considering chapter 70, called "The Sphinx," Wallace speculates that Ishmael's frequent painterly presentations and references, including his description of the decapitated whale head hanging from the Pequod, a "black and hooded head ... [in a] desert ... of an intense copper calm" (*Moby-Dick*, p. 311. In Wallace, p. 393), suggests the very images and colors in two of Turner's whaling oils, one being the *Hurrah for the Whaler Erebus, a Fish!* (R.A. 1846: see my Figure 1).¹⁰

FIGURE I. Detail of J.M.W. Turner, *Hurrah for the Whaler Erebus!* Turner Collection, Tate Gallery, London. (Detail from the painting is shown at the top of page 135 of the article).

Wallace correctly notices the similarity of Ishmael's imagery with Turner's "retinal" and "moral and imaginative coloring" (p. 394) in *Hurrah for the Whaler Erebus*. But the test of analogical analysis must be in its manifold suggestiveness, as Wallace proceeds to suggest, concerning Ahab's comments about the whale's head. With Wallace's mind an inch behind his,

Ahab inquires of the head, “tell us the secret thing that is in thee.” Ahab then proceeds to refer to “linked analogies” by power of which “not the smallest atom stirs or lives in matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind” (*Moby-Dick*, pp. 311-12). Reading Ahab’s words as literary theory, Wallace holds that it is fruitful (1) to read Melville’s prose with the enriching influence of Eastlake’s and Ruskin’s analysis of hieroglyphics that connect art with mind, (2) to understand Melville’s painterly descriptions in their similarities with like scenes and very precise mental and moral details in specific Turner paintings, and ultimately (3) to understand in Melville and Turner the inextricable relationship between artistic vision and moral perception fueled by a common approach (albeit veiled in different art forms) to nature and to ultimate and apocalyptic matters.

One of Wallace’s most telling analogies between Turner and Melville occurs in his Part 3, where he provides a fascinating analysis of Melville’s generation of a theory of whiteness (see *Moby-Dick*, ch. 42, Ishmael’s “white lead chapter about whiteness”). Within Wallace’s study this theory “serves as a white ground for the entire novel” (p. 400), an analogy to that most obvious contemporary artist of the white ground, Turner. Wallace quotes from the final paragraph of Melville’s chapter 42: “Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way?” Ruskin judges that Turner’s coloristic effects strike the reader more forcefully because often, and in a manner analogous to Melville’s literary artistry, these effects are grounded in white paint or opaque undercoatings, prismatic effects flaming outward with a translucent quality (technically called luminescence) emanating from the white ground. This interplay of white and color highlights the moral themes embedded in Turner’s paintings. Likewise, Wallace shows that Melville “paints” moral qualities onto his omnipresent white ground because of the existence of that white ground. Wallace quotes several of Ishmael’s many considerations and tropes for whiteness, but the following of Ishmael’s queries strikes me as particularly pertinent to Wallace’s comparison of Melville with Turner as painter:

Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows — a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink?

(*Moby-Dick*, p. 195. In Wallace, p. 399)

After establishing a ground of whiteness, Ishmael’s sentence continues by making a connection between color, whiteness, and moral themes in literature and art:

... when we proceed further, and consider that the mystical cosmetic which produces every one of her hues, the great principle of light, forever remains white or colorless in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank range — pondering all this, the palsied universe lies before us a leper.

(*Moby-Dick*, p. 195)

The analogical method of reading Melville in an appropriate interart fashion appears at this point not merely helpful, but instrumentally necessary in order to extract precise connections between imagery and moral themes, and especially to understand those moral themes which

border on that difficult secrecy which lies at the heart of the whiteness of Melville's whale. Because analogy is a key procedure for interdisciplinarians, a theoretical statement (mostly in its defense) might, at this juncture, be helpful.

1. As a critical method, analogical analysis is helpful because it yields results not gained by other methods. Most likely its "lit crit" basis lies in *Zeitgeist* theory as practiced by such former literary critics as William Hazlitt and, more recently, E.M.W. Tillyard, among many others. In any event, such a pursuit of analogical structures and meanings implies the existence of commonly shared perceptions as well as shared artistic execution. Put in a more paradoxical way, the critic has offered us the illusion of specific similarities between two creators so as to proliferate our readings as "readers." Inspired by Wallace's work, a series of our interpretations follows. These attach to our challenged imagination as well as to word, line, color and technique in text or on canvas. On the other hand, a simple way out would be to say that certain artists of a time period seem more likely than others to influence one another.
2. Analogical analysis affords an X-ray glimpse of artistic structures at deep levels. This practice is appealing to those who, delighting in the phrasal difficulties offered by such large scale literary works as *Moby-Dick* or *Paradise Lost*, or in the perceptual problemata in making sense of Turner's color and structural schemes, feel compelled to reach through the one artist to arrive at the depth of the other, and vice versa. Inherent to such critical interpretation is the supposition of some common structural methods for each artist, or the assumption of analogical building blocks shared by otherwise distinct art forms. But *Zeitgeist* is key because an underlying assumption, in the absence of direct influence, is that distinct art forms *in an identifiable artistic era* also share vision, or moral meaning. Seen in this way, artistic form shapes the reader's experience of the values embedded in the literary or artistic opus.
3. On the other hand, in the absence of such direct influence and such direct evidence of analogical forms — direct influence is the case with Benjamin Britten's chamber opera, *The Turn of the Screw*, based on Henry James's novella — one might question any casual acceptance of analogy, however revealing, as a complex instance of oversimplification. However, Wallace's "loose-fish/fast-fish" distinction serves the purpose of establishing his use of analogy as a thought experiment rather than as "the truth" or "the facts." Reading and looking are experimental acts leading in many directions.

Wallace's book reminds us to look for the limitations as well as to expect the benefits of analogical reasoning as an instrument for interart analysis.

Wallace's mind, "swimming freely beyond the boundaries of the libraries and museums" (Wallace, p. 477), creates, from his blend of scholarship and free imagination, excursions into the psychic biography of Melville and of Turner. It is not merely in Part Four, "*Moby-Dick* and Turner's Vision," that Wallace exercises his distinguished and pleasantly unique ability, based on complex interart analysis, to analyze literature. Toward the conclusion of Part Three, he supplies an excellent instance of the way in which Melville structures aesthetic perception so that it embodies moral perception, the former leading to the latter as a result of the felt aesthetic experience. The manner by which Melville achieves this effect parallels Turner's like achievement. To illustrate, Wallace compares Melville's "lee-shore" chapter (ch. 23) with several of Turner's lee-shore paintings (a favorite theme in Turner), among these *Waves Breaking on a Lee Shore* (c. 1835. See my Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. J.M.W. Turner. *Waves Breaking on a Lee Shore*, oil on canvas, c. 1835. 23 1/2 x

37 1/2 in. Turner Collection, Tate Gallery, London. (Shown on page 138 of article.)

Wallace argues (1) that the enigmatic character of Bulkington, who appears twice in *Moby-Dick*, in chapter 3 (“Spouter-Inn”) and chapter 23 (“Lee-Shore”), is “the whaler’s equivalent of J.M.W. Turner” himself, and that chapter 23 provides a particularly “Turneresque passage” (454-55):

Let me only say that it fared with him as with the storm-tossed ship,
that miserably drives along the leeward land. The port would fain
give succor; the port is pitiful; in the port is safety, comfort,
hearthstone, supper, warm blankets, friends, all that’s kind to our
mortalities. But in that gale, the port, the land, is that ship’s direst
jeopardy; she must fly all hospitality; one touch of land, though it
but graze the keel, would make her shudder through and through.
With all her might she crowds all sail off shore; in doing so, fights
’gainst the very winds that fain would blow her homeward; seeks all
the lashed sea’s landlessness again; for refuge’s sake forlornly
rushing into peril; her only friend her bitterest foe!

(*Moby-Dick* p. 106. In Wallace, p. 455)

Turner, who created a good number of renowned lee-shore masterpieces, used these portraits of nature’s gorgeous, and sometimes vortically expressed, destructive power as emblematic of the Romantic sublime conjunction of beauty and terror. In the passage just above, there exists more than Melville’s appropriation of the structure of Bulkington’s (Turner’s) lee-shore scene in that (as Wallace notes) there are verbal echoes and sequences of psychic drama in the word progressions and in the setting up of dichotomies within the passage. After reading Wallace’s section, I noted the following: *port-safety/gale-jeopardy*; *touch-graze-shudder*; and *friend/foe*. In addition to this description of a Turneresque lee-shore experience, Wallace quotes a further illustration from chapter 23: “But as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God — so, better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee shore, even if that were safety” (*Moby-Dick*, p. 107. In Wallace, p. 457).

Wallace’s supple comparison of these passages with Turner images moves from his initial reference, which is to Turner’s *Wreckers — Coast of Northumberland, with a Steam-Boat Assisting a Ship off Shore* (R.A. 1834), to Turner’s *Waves Breaking on a Lee-Shore*, which appears as my Figure 2. Responding to that later passage in Melville’s chapter 23, Wallace writes,

The pure spirit of the lee shore that is verbalized in this sentence is nowhere more visible in paint than in Turner’s *Waves Breaking on a Lee Shore*. Here the “howling infinite” of the sea and sky embodies the “highest truth”; these blended elements are juxtaposed against the “inglorious” shore without any human meditation. The only human presence in this work is the spirit of “landlessness alone” that Turner is celebrating, (p. 457)

A potential quarrel with Wallace’s attribution, to Melville’s passages, of a “likely” allusion to Turner’s lee-shore paintings is, to my mind, counterbalanced by the sheer weight of Wallace’s cumulative biographical evidence and argumentation throughout his book. Moreover, Wallace’s Bulkington analysis demonstrates the thickening of apprehension one may derive from

understanding Melville or Turner *in terms of* the other. The angle of Wallace's analysis places Melville's prose in a visible perspective and Turner's images in a narrative perspective. By working with the acknowledged qualities of either artist, Wallace is able to deepen our understanding of and our sensitivity to their respective achievements: how for each artist technique and moral perspective correspond.

In addition, Wallace's interdisciplinary approach has helped to counter the Bulkington problem, as advanced by some Melville critics: namely that Bulkington is an unnecessary nuisance readers face in reading *Moby-Dick*. Wallace's approach illustrates interdisciplinary ways Bulkington must be seen as one essential instrument by which Melville consolidates his presentation of the sublime experience in his novel. Making dozens of interconnections within the text of *Moby-Dick*, Wallace expends pages 453-69 on the Bulkington connection with Turner. In its integration of scholarship with critical flights, I find that sub-section is among his cleverest. Wallace underscores plausible Melville allusions to Turner's life and works, even to the point of establishing similarities — hence the probability of further allusions — between Melville's images of the Spouter-Inn and images, deriving from correspondence, of Turner's private gallery in Queen Anne's Street, London. In this sub-section, Wallace interconnects many key themes of his analysis: the "white painting," the "nameless yeast," the "howling infinite," the annihilation theme of "ocean perishing" (Wallace, p. 467), all as grounded in a blazing white unity: the white whale, the white Turner undercoat on the canvas, from which his lightnings blaze forth. What Wallace calls Melville's "imaginative access to Turner," despite Melville's lack of explicit reference to Turner within *Moby-Dick*, has been explored as exhaustively as this most exhausting of American novelists might himself have enjoyed, and as far as present "hard" evidence permits.

Conclusion

It often has been noted that period studies, perhaps at their best, assume the style of the period and people studied. I judge this a generally mixed blessing, and, if so, Robert Wallace's book is, like Melville and Turner in their now recognized greatest moments, involuted and dense, intractable and filled with fugitive concepts. And yet, in my estimation, I do not see how *Melville & Turner* could have been written with greater lucidness. It might have been shorter, though with intellectual loss; likewise, so could *Moby-Dick*. Prolixity can be of benefit to the sympathetic mind, and to those wanting to drink more deeply, Wallace's book will be a tasty and deep cup of tea. And yet, some readers may feel as Peter Gay, in his intellectual biography of Freud, remarked of another reader of Freud, "His Freud is not my Freud." By performing Melville's and Turner's arts in an act of critical re-creation, Wallace has allowed close entrance to his way of seeing their minds. For those who have had the patience to read *Moby-Dick* well — which as Ben Jonson wrote means "to understand" — Melville and Turner will be worth the time to savor and to digest. It is a finely ground lens by which to view two great artists and central concepts of Romantic style and meaning.

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Notes

1. Prof. Wallace, who teaches at Northern Kentucky University, wrote his dissertation under Jacques Barzun at Columbia University. The work was published as *A Century of Music-Making: The Lives*

- of *Josef and Rosina Lhevinne* (1976). There followed *Jane Austen and Mozart: Classical Equilibrium in Fiction and Music* (1983) and *Emily Brontë and Beethoven: Romantic Equilibrium in Fiction and Music* (1986). The latter two books, accomplished and very detailed studies in the musical and literary imagination, and in their integration, offer unique approaches to reading the musical implications within literary structure. Both are published by Univ. of Georgia Press.
2. For his citations of Melville's novels, Wallace used *The Writings of Herman Melville*, 15 vols. Ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern UP and the Newberry Library, 1967-. *Moby-Dick*; or *The Whale* is volume 6.
 3. Kathleen Nicholson, in a recent study of Turner's mythological and heroic paintings, has established the extent of narrative richness in Turner's work. See Nicholson's *Turner's Classical Landscapes: Myth and Meaning*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990.
 4. Cited by Wallace, p. 36. Hazlitt published the famous comment in his *Table Talk*, in 1817. Publ. in *Works*, vol. 4, p. 76. Ed. P.P. Howe. 21 vols. London: J.M. Dent, 1930-34.
 5. See Robert K. Wallace. "Melville's Prims and Engravings at the Berkshire Athenaeum." *Essays in Arts and Sciences* 15 (June 1986):59-90. The list of these works appears as the Appendix to *Melville and Turner*.
 6. Ruskin's phrases are from *Modern Painters* I, two volume edition. New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1847-48, vol. 1, pp. 374-75. Published in England in 1843-46, reprinted in America in 1847-48.
 7. Wallace excerpts quotations from a review of Melville's *Pierre*. The review appeared in the August 21, 1852, issue of the *Literary World*.
 8. Melville might have seen *Staffa, Fingal's Cave* (1832), the first of the Turner oils to reach America. It was in James Lennox's private gallery in New York City after 1845. Melville purchased James Macpherson's narrative, *Fingal*, in 1848. For a discussion of this and of Staffa's formal similarities to certain passages in *Mardi* (publ, 1849), see Wallace, pp. 120ff. While in England in 1849, Melville must have seen the lost Turner painting, *Seapiece, with Fishing Boats off a Wooden Pier, a Gale coming on* (then owned by Samuel Rogers, but lost since 1856), the watercolor, *Stonehenge* (1829), and, very likely according to Wallace, a few others. In addition, he certainly looked through Rogers' excellent collection of Turner engravings (See Wallace, pp. 284-304).
 9. Especially during his final composition and editing of *Mardi* (publ. 1849) in 1848, Melville had easy access to Turner as mediated by John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, as well as to some Eastlake and Hazlitt, various volumes of which he withdrew from libraries in Boston and New York, or in the library of Evert Duyckinck.
 10. This and my figure 2 are reproduced from the original photographs supplied to Wallace by the Tate Gallery. I owe both the Gallery, specifically Chris Webster, and Prof. Wallace my thanks. Not incidental is the fact that, as noted above, Melville owned an engraving after this painting. The engraving was made in 1859. However, Wallace bases his analysis on the 1842 painting. My Figure 1 appears as Wallace's figure 100, p. 324; my Figure 2 appears as Wallace's figure 2, p. 7.