

The Pacific in the Eastern/Western Hemisphere: Latitude and Longitude in Melville's Nautical Discourse¹

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Eastbound Flight to the West Coast

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for inviting me to the colloquium, “The Transpacific Imagination,” sponsored by the Institute of East Asian Studies.² I am glad to come back to San Francisco, my favorite town.

First, let me tell you how I traveled to UC Berkeley from Tokyo. I took off NRT at 00:05 am on November 4 and arrived in SFO at 16:15 pm on November 3. That is, I travelled into the previous day, because a traveler crossing the International Date Line eastbound subtracts one day.

To me, living in Tokyo, San Francisco lies to the east beyond the huge ocean called the Pacific. However, you, Americans call this place a town on the West Coast. I am interested in these different signifiers—“east” and “west”—we use depending on where we are. Let me tell you an opposite case. You call Japan the “Far East.” However, in a world map with the Pacific at the center and Japanese islands on the left side and American continents on the right, Japan certainly lies to the west to America. East and West, the signifiers to designate horizontal direction, thus turn out to be interchangeable depending on the position on the earth, which is a huge 360-degree globe.

1. *Pequod's Voyage to the Pacific*

Yunte Huang reports in *Transpacific Imaginations* that his colleagues thought Melville's *Moby-Dick* was set in the Atlantic, not in the Pacific. “But isn't *Moby-Dick* set in the Atlantic?” is a question that often pops up during his explanation of the term, “transpacific imagination.” According to Huang, this ignorance of the geographical setting for the American classic is “a symptom of something larger than personal gaps of knowledge” (1), which was a result of decades of canonical symbolist readings. People “see the book as merely an

allegory and shun the geopolitics lying at the heart of Melville's concern" (1). I would like to discuss the Pacific in *Moby-Dick* as one of the most inspiring topics to explore in the context of 21st-century globalization.

The oceanic setting of Melville's major works seems to cover almost an equivalent percentage of the nautical environment, which covers over 70 percent of the earth's surface. Among Melville's narratives of ocean travels, Ishmael's voyage is remarkable for the route that he describes as "a devious zig-zag world circle" (chapter 44 1006).³ At the beginning of Chapter 2, Ishmael says that it is the Pacific that he is bound for when he begins his journey with his old carpet-bag. Ahab's destination is also the Pacific, amid which he expects to encounter Moby Dick and take his revenge.

Here, I would like to ask you one question: When the *Pequod* leaves Nantucket, in which direction does the Pacific lie—the east or west? In Chapter 2, Ishmael leaving Manhattan, says, "I started for Cape Horn and the Pacific" (801). The course Ishmael originally imagines is to go down to the south end of the American continent and into the Pacific. The Pacific lays **westward** to Ishmael.

The *Pequod*, however, does not take the westbound route but takes a route across and down the Atlantic to Good Hope, into the Indian Ocean, through the Sunda Strait and into the Pacific to the Japanese whaling grounds. To access the Pacific, the *Pequod* takes an **eastbound** voyage.

Ahab has good reason for taking this irregular course. In chapter 44, "The Chart," we see Ahab in his cabin studying the lines and shadings on "a large wrinkled roll of yellowish sea charts" (1003) to locate the time and place in which sperm whales had been captured or seen.

For with the charts of *all four oceans* before him, Ahab was threading a maze of currents and eddies, with a view to the more certain accomplishment of *that monomaniac thought of his soul*. (chapter 44 1003; italics Shimokobe)

Ahab, who has cruised "all four oceans"—the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, and

Arctic oceans—now ponders over his charts to accomplish “that monomaniac thought of his soul.” His primary motive for this voyage is to chase a specific whale and take revenge upon him. He knows that Moby Dick has been encountered in the Pacific during a particular time and place, the so-called “Season-on-the Line” (chapter 44 1005). “The Line” means the equator, and a “Season” runs from approximately December to June.⁴

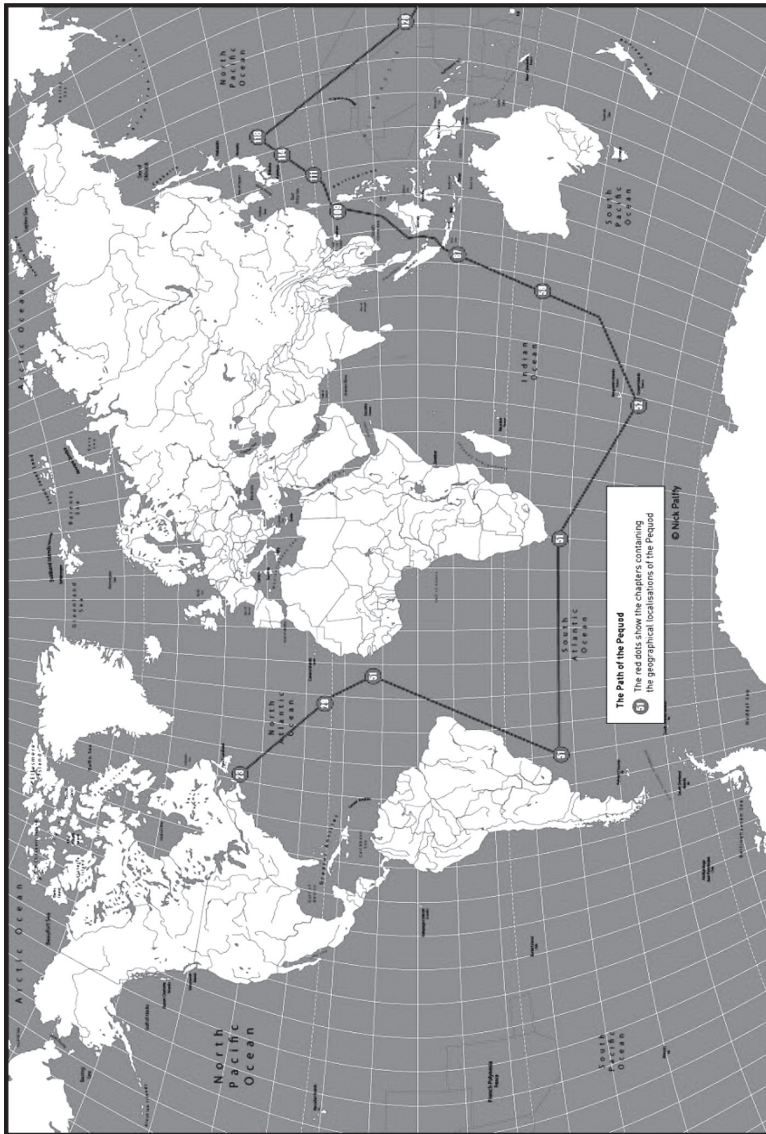
When Ahab sails from Nantucket on Christmas day, it is at the very beginning of the optimal time for whaling in the mid-Pacific region. If Ahab takes a **westbound** voyage, he has to “make the great passage southwards, double Cape Horn, and then running down sixty degrees of latitude arrive in the equatorial Pacific” (chapter 44 1006). Apparently, Ahab will be late to arrive in time for the “Season-on-the Line.” Therefore, to maximize the probability of encountering the white whale, Ahab decides to sail the *Pequod east*, instead of waiting for the next season. Ahab takes his chances of encountering Moby Dick in its **eastbound** wake, hoping to arrive at the equator in December of the following year where Moby Dick is sure to be waiting.

2. Chartless Ocean and Latitude

There is a notable entry in *The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville (1819-1891)*, which suggests an early plan of career building for Herman Melville in 1838:

November 12: Herman begins a course in surveying and engineering at the Lansingburgh Academy, at \$5.25 a term. (*Melville Log* vol. I 81)

When nineteen-year-old Herman Melville was enrolled in a surveying course, his objective was not to become a writer but to get a position to work for the construction of the Panama Canal. On April 3 of the following year, his uncle, Peter Gansevoort, introduced Herman to one of the five Canal Commissioners, William C. Bouck, and wrote a recommendation for his nephew dated April 4.⁵ Melville studied how to measure a piece of land, and he went to the sea as an



The Path of the Pequod

ordinary seaman on the St. Lawrence to Liverpool in 1839. Instead of measuring and recording a piece of land, Melville went into the vast ocean to gauge the globe.

While surveying the land is an act of making a map of an area on the land, making a chart of the ocean is not an easy task. On the vast surface of the water, we have almost no means of locating ourselves on a global scale. We are cruising on the ocean without a chart. Hester Blum points out the chartless situation of the mariners who float on the ocean as follows:

...the sea is a medium inherently resistant to inscription and other forms of fixity or possession. ... In its vastness and motility the ocean opens up to possibility on a *planetary scale*, and yet also presents the risks of *chartlessness or dispersion*. (Blum 23; italics Shimokobe)

For the ship cruising on the fluid surface of the sea, to fix one's location is the major task of the leader. Ahab, the captain of *Pequod*, performs his routine of measuring and calculating the course of the boat. In Chapter 44, Ahab sits at his cabin's desk with large yellowish sea charts before him. With a pencil in his hand, he is seemingly working to chart the *Pequod's* course. However, it turns out that he is studying the chart "to arrive at reasonable surmises, almost approaching to certainties, concerning the timeliest day to be upon this or that ground in search of *his prey*" (chapter 44 1004; italics Shimokobe). Ahab is trying to determine his position in relation to Moby Dick by tracing lines and courses upon the chart.

This chapter titled "The Chart" informs us of not only the plausibility of Melville's narrative but of the practicability of Ahab's performance. Samuel Otter says as follows:

Part of the purpose of the chapter, and part of the reason Melville signals its importance, is that he intends to demonstrate the *plausibility* of his narrative. He strives to convince readers that the search for one whale in the world's oceans is grounded *in actual data and practice*. Ahab uses

stage craft and rhetoric to sway the crew, but this performance is followed by solitary calculation, also necessary to achieve his ends. (Otter 73; italics Shimokobe)

By using scientific technology that allows us to access actual data and practical techniques, Ahab predicts, calculates, and surmises where and when he will encounter his prey, *Moby Dick*.

Among Ahab's various performances on *Pequod*, the most conspicuous and important is the observation of the sun for determining latitude. On many occasions, we witness Ahab "mutely reckoning *the latitude* on the smooth, medallion-shaped tablet, reserved for that daily purpose on the upper part of his ivory leg" (chapter 34 950; italics Shimokobe). Ahab's solitary calculation is devoted solely to the vertical orientation of the *Pequod* or its distance from Moby Dick.

In the whole text of *Moby-Dick*, we find the word 'latitude' 13 times and 'latitudes' 15 times. Most of the 'latitudes' signify a region or an area such as "hot latitudes" (chapter 26 914) or "more sufferable latitudes" (chapter 41 990). Geographical information on the orientation of neither the *Pequod* nor Moby Dick is given to us by the word 'latitudes.'

Meanwhile, the term 'latitude' indicates the real position on the vast ocean surface. Though Melville provides the reader with no real degrees or minutes of latitude, Ahab, who always observes the sun with a quadrant, must obtain the latitude as numerical data. At the final stage of his chase, Ahab, now in the Japanese sea, "seated in the bows of his high-hoisted boat, was about taking his wonted daily observation of the sun to determine his latitude" (chapter 118 1326). Ahab decides to never fail to catch "the precise instant when the sun should gain its precise meridian" (1326).

To Ahab, latitudinal information obtained by gauging position by the height of the sun is necessary not only to get his position on the sea but also to locate the whale and exact his monomaniacal revenge. To determine a latitude at sea was a realistic task for most captains of the 19th century.

3. Longitude for Nineteenth-Century Mariners

After a long voyage, the *Pequod* comes to the “tragic spot” where Ahab’s position converges with that of his foe:

And now that at the proper time and place, after so long and wide a preliminary cruise, Ahab, —all other whaling waters swept—seemed to have chased his foe into an ocean-fold, to slay him the more securely there; now, that he found himself hard *by the very latitude and longitude* where his tormenting wound had been inflicted. (chapter 130 1365; italics Shimokobe)

Ahab, as a captain, situates himself “at the proper time and place” to chase his prey into a specific area on the ocean (“an ocean-fold”) surrounded by an imaginary fence called “latitude and longitude.” It is at *this very latitude and longitude* where Ahab locates Moby Dick upon the grid lines of the global surface.

Longitude is another technical term for describing geographical information. We usually use this word by combining it with latitude as if ‘latitude and longitude’ were their own expressions. However, these two terms have totally different peculiarities and histories. Latitude lines surround the globe parallel to each other from the Equator to the poles, and the circles of latitude become smaller the farther they are from the equator and the closer they are to the poles. Meanwhile, the longitude is a geographic line that fixes the east-west position of a point on the globe. Longitudes loop from one pole to the other and are expressed in angular measurements, or “degrees.” Dave Sobel says the difference between latitude and longitude is as follows:

The zero-degree parallel of latitude is fixed *by the laws of nature*, while the zero-degree meridian of longitude *shifts like the sands of time*. This difference makes finding latitude *child’s play*, and turns the determination of longitude, especially at sea, into *an adult dilemma*—one that stumped the wisest minds of the world for the better part of human history. (4; italics

Shimokobe)

The most important difference between latitude and longitude beyond the difference in line direction is that there were no practical means of determining longitude at sea for a long time in nautical history. Sobel, in her bestselling book, *Longitude* (1995), describes the long human struggle to solve the problem as follows:

The measurement of longitude meridians, in comparison (to that of latitude), is tempered by time. To learn one's longitude at sea, one needs to know what time it is aboard ship and also the time at the home port or another place of known longitude – at the very same moment. The two clock times enable the navigator to convert the hour difference into a geographical separation. (4-5)

It is the impossibility to know the hour in two different places at once that prevented the mariners of the 19th century from finding a practical method of determining longitude.⁶

The quest for the practical means of measuring longitude persisted for four centuries in Europe. In 1714, the British Parliament passed the “Longitude Act,” which offered monetary rewards to anyone who found a practical and useful means of determining a ship's longitude. It was English clockmaker John Harrison who invented a special clock “that would carry the true time from the home port, like an eternal flame, to any remote corner of the world” (Sobel 8). In 1773, the Board of Longitude established by the British government officially acknowledged John Harrison for his marine chronometer.

Though the clock invented by John Harrison was known to the people in general, to the mariners, who required practical means of acquiring the precise date of longitude, the chronometers were hardly feasible because of their high cost for a long time. How about the cruise of the *Pequod*? Is the method and knowledge of calculating longitude available to Captain Ahab, who is so proud of his competence in measuring latitude?

In *Moby-Dick*, we find 6 singular 'longitude's and 4 plural 'longitudes.' It is notable that all 10 words are used in conjunction with 'latitude' or 'latitudes' as a set. In such phrases as "in however apart latitudes and longitudes" or "such and such a latitude or longitude," the term 'longitude(s)' gives no practical geographical information for locating Ahab or Moby Dick.

As for this signifying impotence of the word 'longitude,' Melville has good reason for taking into account the time of his writing. His clumsy and unrealistic use of 'longitude' stems from the historical fact that a practical means of determining longitude was not available at the time of the *Pequod's* voyage. Even to Melville, who knew that the globe was covered by the grid lines of 'latitude and longitude,' longitude remained imaginary because of the lack of a practical method of measurement.

In *Moby-Dick*, geographical information of the sea is mainly given by vertical navigation (north-south movement) gauged by latitude, while very little is provided by longitude, which traces horizontal navigation (east-west movement). Does this mean that we can ignore longitudinal point of view in this 1851 text? Does east-west movement at sea mean nothing in 19th-century American culture, science, and politics?

4. Vertical Division of the Globe

Longitude is a geographic coordinate that gives us the means to situate us in terms of the east-west position of a point on the Earth's surface. As I said at the beginning of this paper, whether one positions oneself in the east or the west is a problematic issue depending on our own place on the globe. Here, I would like to point out that the vertical division of the globe into an eastern half and a western half was a fundamental obsession of 19th-century America.

On December 2, 1823, President James Monroe read the seventh annual State of the Union Address to Congress. The document is couched in political language and came to be seen as a major foreign policy in the United States' long history of American diplomacy. The full text is 6,357 words long, but only two passages (three paragraphs) have been repeatedly quoted as the Monroe Doctrine.

The first is the fourth sentence in the seventh paragraph:

The occasion has been judged proper for asserting, as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth *not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.* (7-4; italics Shimokobe)

Monroe declares that European countries no longer colonize continents across the Atlantic. His rhetoric brings out the opposition between two worlds—old and new—which are divided by the ocean between them.

The second passage consists of two paragraphs in which Monroe declares the Western Hemisphere's immunity from the Eastern Hemisphere's political intervention:

We owe it, therefore, to candor and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers to declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to *any portion of this hemisphere* as dangerous to our peace and safety. (49-6; italics Shimokobe)

Monroe divides the globe into two—this hemisphere and that hemisphere. In his speech, he uses the expression 'this hemisphere' twice to denote the Western Hemisphere as his and his brethren's half of the globe. Monroe's rhetoric is based on two premises: first, the world can and should be divided vertically into two parts, and second, the American continents are situated in the Western Hemisphere.

Grechen Murphy says, "Monroe Doctrine offers a narrative with which to make sense of the place of the United States in the world" (ix). In the 19th century, several decades after gaining its independence, Monroe's rhetoric positioned America against the European continent as the west. To the newly born republic, the Atlantic was a space across which it confronted its mother

country as the other.

When east-west localization is performed in an Atlantic-centered worldview, where is the Pacific? In the east or the west? Today the International Date Line (180 degree east or west) divides the Pacific into the Eastern Hemisphere and Western Hemisphere. The Pacific can be both the east and west of America.

The prime meridian has been arbitrarily set throughout its history. Just as there is no natural starting position for longitude, mapmakers moved the prime meridian (the zero-degree of longitude) to various cities and places, such as the Azores, Rome, Jerusalem, Pisa, Paris, and Philadelphia, before it settled down in London. In 1884, the International Meridian Conference adopted the Greenwich Meridian as the universal Prime Meridian. When Monroe called the American continents ‘the Western Hemisphere,’ he had no basis for situating America in the western half of the globe other than the fact that it lay just west of the European continent.

The placement of the prime meridian was not only politically motivated but also resulted from a psychological momentum that induced people to situate themselves on either the western or eastern hemisphere of the globe. In the mid-19th century, did Melville localize the Pacific eastward or westward? Neither or both is my answer. Melville has his own perspective on the global orientation of America, one not based on an Atlantic-centered hemispheric worldview. In chapter 111, Melville introduces the Pacific, calling it “my dear Pacific,” and proposes a Pacific-centered rhetoric as follows:

It (the Pacific) rolls the midmost waters of the world, the Indian ocean and Atlantic *being but its arms*. ... Thus this mysterious, divine Pacific zones the world’s whole bulk about; makes all coasts one bay to it; seems the tide-beating heart of earth. (chapter 111 1308; italics Shimokobe)

To Ahab (and Melville), who arrives at the Pacific after a long cruise, that huge ocean is at the center of the world with the Indian ocean at the left arm and the Atlantic at the right arm. All coasts of the globe gather to this huge “bay” called the Pacific and become “the tide-beating heart of earth.”

In nineteenth-century America, people's perspective of the globe was Atlantic centered, wherein America lay on the Western Hemisphere against Europe on the other side of the Atlantic. Melville's Pacific-centered orientation of America is the complete opposite of that of his contemporaries.

Conclusion: The Pacific on the Globe

From Nantucket around the Cape of Good Hope to the Pacific, the *Pequod* makes non-stop voyage through four major oceans: the Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, Eastern seas, and the Pacific Ocean. Among the various routes available, Melville had the *Pequod* cruise irregularly eastward to the Pacific into the Japanese ground where Ahab is sure he will encounter his foe. Did Melville have any spatial outline of Ahab's voyage?

Herbert G. Eldridge, in his paper "Careful Disorder," says that "the most obvious potential units would be the successive oceans through which the *Pequod* was to pass" (146). He specifies four chapters out of the whole 132 in *Moby Dick* that provide us with the local information based on the ocean to chart the ship's course: Chapter 51 ("The Spirit Spout"), in which the *Pequod* moves from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean; Chapter 87 ("The Grand Armada"), in which the *Pequod* moves from the Indian Ocean into the Java and China seas; Chapter 111 ("The Pacific"), in which the *Pequod* moves into the Pacific, "the midmost waters of the world"; and Chapter 130 ("The Hat"), in which Ahab arrives at the central Pacific whaling grounds.

Ahab's long chase through the major oceans and seas progresses step by step through each of the four chapters. Melville seems to "dramatize the situation in the context of the locale" (149). However, that is not all that locale information brings to the story. Eldridge proposes another aspect of the effect the local progress has on the story as follows:

... they (the four chapters which provide the information necessary for charting the ship's course) not only give geographical details related to the ship's itinerary and progress but use specific maritime settings for

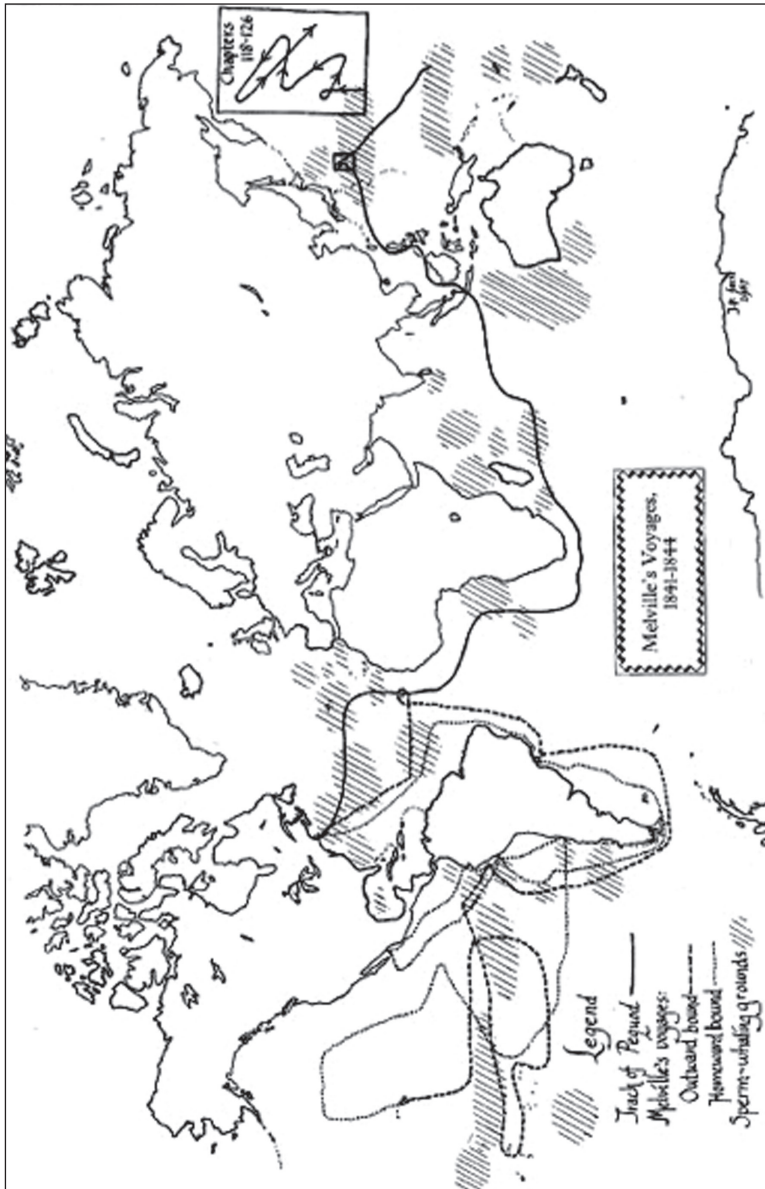
reaffirmation of Ahab's "fixed and fearless, forward dedication" to the quest, which is the primary unifying force in the novel. (147; italics Shimokobe)

The ship's location coincides with the emotion of its captain. This is the hidden plot of the story of the long voyage of the *Pequod*. In chapter 51, Eldridge reads "the figurative parallel between the ship's undeviating course amidst the cape storms and Ahab's monomania amidst the torment of his emotions" (Eldridge 148). In chapter 87, the situation of the *Pequod* (which moves from the Indian Ocean into the Java and China seas) "is made explicitly suggestive of Ahab's state of mind" (148).

At the final stage of the chase, Ahab enters the central Pacific whaling ground, where his fate to encounter his foe will be accomplished. Ahab "seemed to have chased his foe into an ocean-fold, to slay him the more securely there" (Chapter 130 437). By "his foe" Melville means a huge animal that is slayed (killed) by harpooners of the *Pequod* as prey. Ahab's monomaniac quest for the whale is derived from his desire to acquire the object he chases. In the midst of the Pacific, Ahab tries to accomplish his strange business of acquiring his prey. The Pacific in *Moby-Dick* could thus be analogous to the expansionism of 19th-century America, which was active in monopolizing the land and sea on a global scale.

In the chart below, we see the opposite directions of two voyages: *Pequod's* voyage is eastbound, while Melville's is westbound. More interesting is that the two sea charts of Melville's and Ahab's voyages are the Atlantic-centered global maps in which the Pacific is divided into two blanks on both sides. This obscurity of the Pacific was the global perspective of 19th-century America.

Melville is a writer whose nautical discourse of *Moby-Dick* prefigured the 360-degree perspective of globalization, in which east and west are deconstructed arbitrarily. Huang says, "Melville's book traces an imaginary line of the flight from homogeneous visions" (Huang 1). By deconstructing the opposition to the east-west rhetoric of his contemporary Americans, the Pacific in *Moby-Dick* lies at the center of the global environment.



Melville's Voyages, 1841-1844

¹ This paper is a revised, enlarged, and combined version of two papers: a paper given at the colloquium, “The Transpacific Imagination” held on November 4, 2015, at UC Berkeley and a paper read at 10th International Conference held on 26 June, 2015, at Keio University.

² “The Transpacific Imagination” was held on November 4, 2015, 4–6 pm, at Stephens Hall, Townsend Center, Geballe Room, University of California, Berkeley. This panel was sponsored by Center for Japanese Studies, Department of English, and Department of Comparative Literature of UC Berkeley moderated by Miryam Sas, Professor, UC Berkeley. Speakers were Takayuki TATSUMI, Keio University, Joseph LAVERY, UC Berkeley and Michiko SHIMOKOBE, Seikei University.

³ The numbers of chapters and pages are in parenthesis after the quotation.

⁴ “For there and then, for several consecutive years, Moby Dick had been periodically descried, lingering in those waters for awhile, as the sun, in its annual round, loiters for a predicted interval in any one sigh of the Zodiac.” (chapter 44 1005)

⁵ The *inclosed* Certificate of Mr. Maltbee the Principal of on Academy, in which Mr. Melville has endeavored to prepare himself for the business of surveying and engineering...*shew* the proficiency he has made in those studies. (*Melville Log* vol. I 82)

⁶ “On the deck of a rolling ship, such clocks (pendulum clocks) would slow down, or speed up, or stop running altogether. Normal changes in temperature, ... a rise or fall in barometric pressure, or the subtle variations in the Earth’s gravity from one latitude to another, could also cause a clock to gain or lose time.” (Sobel 6)

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