



Journal of the Short Story in English

Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

52 | Spring 2009
General issue

'The Half Shall Remain Untold': Hunilla of Melville's *Encantadas*

K. M. Wheeler



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/949>
ISSN: 1969-6108

Publisher

Presses universitaires de Rennes

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 June 2009
ISSN: 0294-04442

Electronic reference

K. M. Wheeler, « 'The Half Shall Remain Untold': Hunilla of Melville's *Encantadas* », *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], 52 | Spring 2009, Online since 01 December 2010, connection on 03 December 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/949>

This text was automatically generated on 3 December 2020.

© All rights reserved

'The Half Shall Remain Untold': Hunilla of Melville's *Encantadas*

K. M. Wheeler

Introduction

- ¹ Melville's *Encantadas*, or *Enchanted Isles* is a group of ten 'sketches' about the Galapagos Islands. Melville visited the islands in the early 1840s, possibly several times,¹ not long after Charles Darwin's momentous encounter. Darwin had been mystified and entranced by the 'creative force' which such blackened, ruined landscape could still convey to the onlooker, and Melville's sketches suggest that this paradox provided a stimulus for his own imagination. Of greatly-varying lengths and themes, the first few pieces describe the bizarre and other-worldly landscape and fauna of the volcanic, lava-encrusted rocks. Beaches are strewn with decayed bits of sugar cane, bamboo, and coconuts, all 'relics of distant beauty' washed up onto this 'other and darker world' from the palm isles of the South Pacific. The wondrous Galapagos tortoises are enchanted, huge, antediluvian creatures, their shells engraved with 'hieroglyphic ciphers' representing indecipherable histories. Later sketches regale the reader with outlandish encounters: a magical ship *Flyaway* bewitches the famous American frigate of 1812, the *Essex*. Or buccaneers turn out to be poet/ philosophers who 'pirate' from others. A mock historical sketch based on an infamous governor of an isle in the 1830s meditates on the possibility of reliable facts and impartial history. Rumours and tales about a hermit, Patrick Watkins, are Melville's starting point for an elaborate exploration of character inconsistency, mirroring the inconsistency of the text. In sketch eight, the experiences of Hunilla – a young woman abandoned upon an isle – struggle for expression, so that processes of perception, of articulating experiences, and of storytelling become central themes. Melville drew upon his experiences of the Galapagos Islands but – like his predecessors on the Galapagos – he borrowed from the literature: "[he] took whatever lay close at hand... covered it with flesh... and gave it life."²

- 2 The extensive use of travel and other sources— like the use of autobiographical experiences — along with the resulting ‘paratexts’, applies of course to all his writings.³
- 3 “Sketch Eighth Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow”, on the other hand, is the only *Encantadas* sketch which does not draw extensively upon travel sources. It may have originated in the so-called ‘Agatha letters’ to Hawthorne, or been suggested by newspaper accounts in September–November, 1853, about an Indian woman who spent eighteen years on a desert island off the coast of California before being rescued.⁴ But Melville elaborated these suggestions beyond anything found in his sources, and even seems to have found the sentimental aspects of the reports objectionable.⁵
- 4 *The Encantadas* was first published in *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine* (New York) in March, April, and May, 1854, under the remarkable pseudonym, Salvator R. Tarnmoor.⁶ Melville seems to have admired the paintings of the 17th Century Italian painter, Salvator Rosa, who portrayed the kinds of desolate scenery confronting him in the Galapagos.⁷ This transparent pseudonym in *Putnam’s* confirms Melville’s interest in authorship, originality, authenticity, and ‘the literary’ itself, developed from early novels and the essay, “Hawthorne and His Mosses” (1850)⁸ to *The Confidence-Man* (1857). The pseudonym is a Poe-like ironic gesture⁹, perhaps indicating, first, that the sketches are unusually, self-consciously allusive, indeed even predatory upon several other writings (Cowley, Porter, Colnett, Coulter), with Melville himself the buccaneer/ poet of sketch six who ‘pirated’ from others. The pseudonym also suggests he was ‘quoting’ from Rosa’s paintings.¹⁰
- 5 The ten sketches, enchanting their 1854 readers, were republished in 1856 by Dix & Edwards (New York) in the equally-acclaimed *Piazza Tales*.¹¹ The sketch form of *The Encantadas* would not have surprised Melville’s readers; *Moby-Dick* is a novel made up of a mass of 138-odd sketches, *The Confidence-Man* forty-five. For Harold Beaver, Melville’s “whole aesthetic remained one of the sketch, the tentative essay or ‘draft’, however huge and swollen.”¹² Moreover, ‘true’ erections
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. Oh, Time,
Strength, Cash, and Patience! (*Moby-Dick*, chapter 32, final paragraph)
- 6 “Sketch Eighth Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow” differs from the other nine ‘sketches’ in Melville’s *Encantadas*, or *Enchanted Isles*, and raises literary issues unique to *Eight*. It is the longest sketch, the only one about a woman, and the only one not having origins in tales about the Galapagos. It may well constitute something more of a genuine ‘short story’ than the others (though some readers may feel this about sketches seven and nine). Its structure involves, first, a short, enigmatic, and constantly interrupted tale told by Hunilla.¹³ Her account forms a most elusive ‘core’ for the second structural element, the narrator’s own highly-embellished *amplificatio* of her tragedy. The first, embedded tale is complicated by significant gaps which constantly disrupt Hunilla’s telling at crucial moments. The ‘framing’ tale of the narrator overtly draws attention to gaps in Hunilla’s centrepiece version – and creates new breaches of its own – through careful deployment of the rhetorical devices of *aposiopeses*, *anacoluthies*, *apophases*, and *paraleipses*¹⁴— all contribute to a dawning sense that the tale is not only unspeakable. It begins to recede into the distance as the narrator’s embellishments come between us and any authentic ‘original.’¹⁵ The plot of the sketch *cum* short story is also complicated by the narrator’s extreme disruption of suspense by means of *prolepsis*: he frequently anticipates later events. And our inventive narrator’s gestures to convey ‘lived

experience' are depicted as a virtual impossibility, in a death scene which Hunilla tragically observes and experiences as a 'dumb show.' Lived experience is represented as an already-constructed artifice – albeit full of gaps and ruptures – of as much interpretive difficulty as any text or painting. Moreover, Hunilla's roles as elliptic narrator of her own tragedy and 'unwilling heroine' of the narrator's tale present contradictions and paradoxes: she is indeed the paradigm of an enigma.

- 7 Also of literary interest is the narrator's obsessive invocation of his authority for the outer tale by gestures which undermine the authority he seeks to establish. In this sketch, the narrator matter-of-factly assigns the events about Hunilla to his "first visit to the *Encantadas*," a typical fictional deception to establish an authenticity or closer relation to 'life' for his narrative. The gesture masks the story's art behind a disguise of historical event and eye-witness reportage. Fact and fiction are inextricably intertwined in this complex 'yarn.'¹⁶

'For Never Was a Story of More Woe'¹⁷

- 8 The gist of the tale can be gleaned from early paragraphs:

A Chola, or half-breed Indian woman of Payta in Peru... with her young new-wedded husband Felipe, of pure Castilian blood, and her one only Indian brother, Truxill, Hunilla had taken passage... in a French whaler...[which would drop them off in the islands on its way to cruising grounds somewhat beyond them]. The object of the little party was to procure tortoise oil... With a chest of clothes, tools... and other things, Hunilla and her companions were safely landed at their chosen place; the Frenchman... engaged to take them off upon returning from a four months' cruise... [But] the blithe stranger never was seen again.

Felipe and Truxill... elated by their good success [with tortoise oil], and to reward themselves for such hard work, they, too hastily, made a catamaran, or Indian raft... and merrily started on a fishing trip...about half a mile from [the shore]. By some bad tide or hap... forced in deep water against that iron bar, the ill-made catamaran was upset, and came all to pieces; when, dashed by broad-chested swells between their broken logs and the sharp teeth of the reef, both adventurers perished before Hunilla's eyes.

Before Hunilla's eyes they sank...Felipe's body was washed ashore, but Truxill's never came... this heavy-hearted one performed the final offices for Felipe.... Day after day, week after week, she trod the cindery beach... With equal longing she now looked for the living and the dead; the brother and the captain; alike vanished, never to return. [Later the narrator's ship rescues her, taking her back to Payta.] (11-20)

- 9 The central paradox of "Sketch Eighth" involves the narrator's repeated insistence on how little Hunilla told of her experiences, which he, by some magic of insight, was able to expand. No sooner has Hunilla been rescued by the crew than we are reassured, "Her story was soon told, and though given in her own strange language was as quickly understood, for our captain from long trading on the Chilean coast was well versed in the Spanish" (paragraph 11).¹⁸ All has had to be translated by a Captain whose rough Spanish serves him well in the 'market-place' perhaps. But this – "her own strange language" – adds another remove to Hunilla's story – embedded as it is in the narrator's embellishments, creating uncertainty about basic facts of Hunilla's account: elaborations of the narrator's insatiable imagination put Hunilla's words at a distance.

- 10 Shortly after, the narrator reassures us again that “it needs not be said what nameless misery now wrapped the lonely widow. In telling her own story, she *passed this almost entirely over*, simply recounting the event” (17). He further noted that “from her *mere words* little would you have weened that Hunilla was herself the heroine of her tale” (17); “she but showed us her soul’s lid, and the strange ciphers thereon engraved; all within, with pride’s timidity, *was withheld*” with “one exception” (18). Later when the Captain asks specific questions, the narrator reports her failure to answer them: “Braced against her woe, Hunilla would not, *durst not trust the weakness of her tongue*” (40). Much later the narrator calls her “our silent passenger” (67, all emphases added). The paradox intensifies when one scrutinises the speech of Hunilla. Her quoted speech – with only the exception of 18 – is either blatant invention by the narrator (21, 27) or, more interestingly, registers a narrative collapse (see below 41) which opens up gaping holes in both hers and the narrator’s versions. Take the following conversation:

“...why did you not go on and notch [the rest of the days] too, Hunilla?”

“Senor, ask me not.”

“And meantime, did no other vessel pass the isle?”

“Nay, Senor; – but – ”

“You do not speak; but *what*, Hunilla?”

“Ask me not, Senor.”

“You saw ships pass, far away; you waved to them; they passed on; – was that it, Hunilla?”

“Senor, be it as you say.”

...Then when our Captain asked whether any whale-boats had — —

But no, I will not file this thing... (32-41, emphases added)

- 11 Hunilla’s story is portrayed as brief and with disturbing lacunae (insinuating dire attacks upon her by visiting whalers); ‘explanations’ involve pure superstition and enchantment. Yet our narrator also collapses at crucial moments:

And now follows -----

Against my own purposes a pause descends upon me here. One knows not whether nature doth not impose some secrecy upon *him who has been privy to certain things*.

At least, it is to be doubted whether it be good to blazon such. (23, 24, emphases added)

- 12 What might have followed, what might have been told us is, theatrically, excluded. The gaps continue with more insinuating dashes: “When Hunilla -----” (25). In Hunilla’s case, it remains ambiguous how much she tells the Captain, in Spanish, of “two unnamed events,” or what he conveyed in English to the sailors. Whatever this was, the narrator holds back from telling us, but ensures that we know he held back:

But no, I will not file this thing *complete* for scoffing souls to quote, and call it firm proof upon their side. *The half shall here remain untold*. Those two *unnamed* events which befell Hunilla on this isle, let them abide between her and her God. In nature, as in law, it may be libellous to speak some truths. (41, emphases added)

- 13 If the events are unspeakable and, hence, illegible for the reader, then what a reader can ever know or surmise becomes another signal issue in this ‘framed’ story.¹⁹
- 14 We can understand theatrical gestures by the narrator as literary method: not as mere gaps, but gaps with aesthetic function. They draw attention to the communicative act, the telling of the tale, and to the existence of two distinct, quite different tales, the narrator’s and Hunilla’s.²⁰ Hunilla is unwilling to say much; the narrator is loquacious at most times but theatrically unable or unwilling on a few special occasions. Hunilla is unable, for example, to tell the Captain how long she was abandoned:

But this proved impossible. What present day or month it was she could not say.
Time was her labyrinth, in which Hunilla was entirely lost.
And now follows ----- (22, 23).

- 15 But here the text of the narrator breaks off, too, in those above dashes. "She could not say" this and much else; he *will* not. Like her, the reader could be said to be lost in the midst of two versions and several crucial gaps. Indeed, reading analogies abound in the text. The most parodic occurs after the narrator admitted his first collapse (24), and referred to books *versus* events. He tries but fails to describe the intimated, bizarre event:

When Hunilla -----

Dire sight it is to see some silken beast long dally with a golden lizard ere she devour. More terrible, to see how feline Fate will sometimes dally with a human soul, and by a nameless magic make it repulse a sane despair with a hope which is but mad. Unwittingly I imp this cat-like thing, sporting with the heart of him who reads; for if he feel not, he reads in vain. (25, 26)

- 16 Hardly unwittingly we suspect! We then read, "Truly Hunilla leaned upon a reed, a real one; no metaphor; a real Eastern reed...rubbed smoothly even as by sand-paper..." (29). No metaphor indeed! For readers too must lean, but upon a 'read,' a real one smoothed and polished by our narrator's skill, the time staked out by markings, as Hunilla did on her notched reed – her time-keeper for six months.

- 17 Before our eyes the narrator has emphasised gaps he will not or cannot fill, or he emphasised the brevity of Hunilla's tale, her refusal to be a heroine in it and his ability to overcome these obstacles. He blithely remarked when he lacked words of hers:

It needs not to be said what *nameless* misery now wrapped the lonely widow. In telling her own story she *passed this almost entirely over*, simply recounting the event. Construe the comment of her features, as you might; from her mere words little would you have weened that Hunilla was herself the heroine of her tale. But not thus did she defraud us of our tears. All hearts bled that grief could be so brave. (17, emphases added)

- 18 Whatever she passes over our narrator will rush in and make her a heroine, name the nameless miseries, and create the elaborate supplements that will allow all to experience with and weep for Hunilla. The narrator thereby draws attention not only to the creation of a story, but also to the hearing and reading of it (paragraph 29 above). Reading analogies pervade the text as we 'watch' the sailors listening to her tale:

During the telling of her story the mariners formed a voiceless circle round Hunilla and the Captain...Nor did ever any wife of the most famous admiral in her husband's barge receive more silent reverence of respect, than poor Hunilla from this boat's crew. (51)

- 19 The narrator also calls attention to his narration and the sailors' listening, when he constructs his version openly, deliberately dramatising his 'adumbrations,' a not inapt word since he conceals and overshadows her tale at least as much as he brings it to light. He not infrequently refers to "this little story" (3, 42). He remarks to his readers, "be it here narrated how it came to pass" (3), "for the truth must out" (3). "Her story was soon told" he says and he insists on her "telling her own story"(17), thereby theatricalising his own telling, *his* act of narration, *his* prefigurings and shadowings forth – distracting us from Hunilla's tale or its (so meagre) content. He twice speaks mysteriously of a "sequel of this little story" (3, 42); the second time he insists that

"this needs explaining ere the sequel come," but the 'explanation' is an account of the purest superstition (44-8).

I can mar a curious tale in telling,
And deliver a plain message bluntly'²¹

- 20 Subtle analogies abound in the text as the narrator refers to the difficulties both of reading the faces of people and of establishing in language what happened:

It is not artistic heartlessness, but I wish I could but draw in crayons; for this woman was a most touching sight; and crayons, tracing softly melancholy lines, would best depict the mournful image of the dark-damasked Chola widow. (10)

- 21 Here the narrator only enacts the difficulty of *verbal* representation and interpretation. Later he acknowledges the difficulty of reading faces in a way that suggests *imagery* to be no more effective than words: "Construe the comment of her features, as you might..." (17). Other examples of the difficulty of reading and interpretation occur at critical moments when the narrator is struggling to give an account of Hunilla's behaviour: she returns from visiting her husband's grave for the last time:

A few moments ere all was ready for our going, she reappeared among us. I looked into her eyes, but saw no tear. There was something which seemed strangely haughty in her air, and yet it was the air of woe. A Spanish and an Indian grief, which would not visibly lament. Pride's height in vain abased to proneness on the rack; nature's pride subduing nature's torture. (61)

- 22 He needs to be reassured that though tearless she still feels deeply, much as he insists the reader must feel: "for if he feel not, he reads in vain" (26). Hunilla strains the narrator's power to rationalise, but he manages on most occasions to find an 'explanation' for her tearless reserve: it is Spanish or Indian; it would not visibly lament, though the semantics of the final sentence of paragraph 61 (quoted above) are noticeably strained.²²

- 23 Equally a riddle for him is her deportment when the first mate forbids but two of the dogs on board and, upon departure these her only companions of desolate months cry out "a clamorous agony of alarm. They did not howl, or whine; they all but spoke" (65). "But her face was set in a stern dusky calm. She never looked behind her" (66).

- 24 Contrastingly, at the outset of the 'little story' the narrator describes a rather more successful (and crucial) act of interpretation or 'reading' when he gives a long, elaborate account of how an inebriated seaman "paused suddenly, and directed my attention to something moving on the land, not along the beach, but somewhat back, fluttering from a height" (2). He explains that because of intoxication his 'unwontedly exhilarated' companion had leapt upon the windlass and, "being high lifted above all others was the reason he perceived the object, otherwise unperceivable; and this elevation of his eye was owing to the elevation of his spirits; and this again – for truth must out – to a dram of Peruvian pisco" (3). Gaze on high meets gaze on high:

Glancing across the water in the direction pointed out, I saw some white thing hanging from an inland rock, perhaps half a mile from the sea. "It is a bird; a white-winged bird; perhaps a – no; it is – it is a handkerchief!" "Aye, a handkerchief!" echoed my comrade, and with a louder shout apprised the captain.

Quickly now – like the running out and training of a great gun – the long cabin spy-glass was thrust through the mizzen rigging from the high platform of the poop; whereupon a human figure was plainly seen upon the inland rock, eagerly waving towards us what seemed to be the handkerchief. (4-7)

- 25 This passage gives the reader a theatricalised, gradually transformative interpretation of “an object which partly from its being so small was quite lost to every other man on board,” then “the object, otherwise unperceivable” (3), into “some white thing hanging from an inland rock” (4), into a bird, a handkerchief, and finally “a human figure... eagerly waving...what seemed to be the handkerchief”. We are shown how perception works: it is essentially interpretation, and interpretation relies upon some kind of language to bring perception to a conscious level, to a state of structured, formulated experience. Basic perception is revealed to be already an interpretive act. Whether we see Hunilla wildly waving her kerchief as a gentle parody of the author trying to attract the reader’s attention to his ironies, parodies, and bluffs is a matter for each reader’s sensibilities. Or we may reverse the analogy: Hunilla, like the reader, is lost in the labyrinth of the text, wildly waving to be rescued from an illegible tale.
- 26 The spy-glass of imaginative reading is also needed by readers to “make out” the figure of Hunilla in her full import as that enchanting figure of all figures, a figure of metaphor itself, full of ambiguities and enigmas which make her emblematically enchanting.
- 27 Viewings and gazings form a central focus of the Chola Widow story from start to finish. Further examples, in addition to the seaman sighting Hunilla’s white kerchief, include the extraordinary depiction of Hunilla’s viewing of the death of brother and husband, her endlessly ‘spellbound eye’ searching for her brother’s never-to-be-found body, then her gazing out to sea in search of a ship, her eventual sighting of the rescue ship, and the seamen’s viewing of her solitary dwelling ‘half-screened from view’ (53). Viewings foreground the act of perception, to demonstrate it as always mediated, complex, and structured.²³ These sightings show reading to require a heightened perception, while perception is a kind of reading, never simple, unmediated, or ‘natural,’ but always, already, conventional. The most notable occasion of the constructedness of perception is the extraordinary passage recounting the death of Hunilla’s companions:
- Before Hunilla’s eyes they sank. The real woe of this event passed before her sight as some sham tragedy on the stage. She was seated on a rude bower among the withered thickets, crowning a lofty cliff, a little back from the beach. The thickets were so disposed, that in looking upon the sea at large she peered out from among the branches as from the lattice of a high balcony. But upon the day we speak of here, the better to watch the adventure of those two hearts she loved, Hunilla had withdrawn the branches to one side, and held them so. They formed an oval frame, through which the bluey boundless sea rolled like a painted one. And there, the invisible painter painted to her view the wave-tossed and disjointed raft, its once level logs slantingly upheaved, as raking masts, and the four struggling arms undistinguishable among them; and then all subsided into smooth-flowing creamy waters, slowly drifting the splintered wreck; while first and last, no sound of any sort was heard. Death in a silent picture; a dream of the eye; such vanishing shapes as the mirage shows. (15)
- 28 Perceptual and ‘lived experience’ are a painting; ‘the *real* woe’ is represented as a sham tragedy on the stage.²⁴ Natural is already art and artificial; the drowning men are painted figures on a painted ocean, framed by no less than the natural branches and leaves of nature’s tree. Not even death, much less one’s responses to death, can be said to be spontaneous, natural, or free from conventions.²⁵ Melville boldly drew death itself as a picture, a ‘sham’ tragedy, a dream, to demonstrate that its deepest meaning is experienced indirectly, mediated and derived from conventions of figurative

representation from culture, not nature. Frame *and* content are equally conventional constructions, while Hunilla's experience and perception are represented as meaningful to her auditors and to herself through verbal or imagistic constructs, not 'natural' unmediated feelings.²⁶ There is no direct, original relationship with the natural world or with the self's experiences, it seems, but only one mediated by linguistic or imagistic but essentially artistic structures. The myth of an independent reality prevents us from seeing types of language (verbal, painterly, musical, scientific, and mathematical) as the means by which we consciously grasp anything. Nature herself Melville painted as a literary myth, gaining meaning and reality through figurative language or other re-presentative aesthetic acts of a structuring, transforming perception. There is only transformation; formation is already transformation building on prior acts of metaphoric elements.

- 29 The narrator adds another dimension to this portrayal; he not only paints the death of the men as a picture. He includes the observer in *his* verbal painting and includes her emphatically, both in the above paragraph and, for emphasis, in the next one:

So instant was the scene, so trance-like its mild pictorial effect, so distant from her blasted bower and her common sense of things, that Hunilla gazed and gazed, nor raised a finger or a wail. But as good to sit thus dumb, in stupor staring on that dumb show, for all that otherwise might be done. With half a mile of sea between, how could her two enchanted arms aid those four fated ones. The distance long, the time one sand. After the lightning is beheld, what fool shall stay the thunderbolt?
(16)

- 30 The complexity of this 'portrait of a gaze' is labyrinthine; it expresses Melville's preoccupation with the problem of the relationship of things or events to representation, whether verbal, pictorial, or other. He created a complex metaphor for reading and writing by not only framing death (the ultimate 'lived experience') through imagery, but also by including Hunilla in another verbal frame: she is painted into the painting. The observer is included in the work of art and the reader reads/ watches the verbal portrayal not merely of a happening, but of the reading or observing of it. Hunilla gazed and gazed in dumb stupor staring on a dumb show. Hunilla, through her enigmatic reserve, withholds 'all' within (18). This does not "defraud us of our tears" however, thanks to the narrator's wonderful powers of invention: his ability to establish the authority of illusion, the authenticity of his account, and to transform lived experience into a language free from disfigurement or error.²⁷

The old Salt who salts his tale, Or black veils and feathered tops

- 31 Or so he pretends. Or pretends to pretend. Melville, in his representation and creation of the figure Hunilla, enacts the convention in fiction of overt creation of characterisation.²⁸ In sketch eight Hunilla is painted in front of our eyes by the narrator's fantastic elaborations and interpretations of the so-called bare facts. He embellishes her character with his own peculiar, subjective responses and wondrously embroiders her experiences (and her narration of them) with objectionable, super-added description which cannot have been conveyed by Hunilla. Our narrator's artistry portrays before the readers' gaze the painting both of Hunilla and of characterisation itself, and the constructedness, the non-naturalness, of people and selves.²⁹ And it 'tells

the story' of the creation by a story-teller of one of Melville's most elusive stories. Melville wove in an embedded story for Hunilla to tell the sailors, in order to display the inner workings of story-telling. He sought to demonstrate the mesmerising effects on an audience, in Hunilla's case her rescuing sailors, the captain, and our mischievous narrator. Yet he alone, like Ishmael, constructed a version of Hunilla's story. By telling his elaborately-embroidered tale of her brief tale, he achieves (the illusion of) artistic authenticity.

- 32 Frequent prolepsis pre-empts suspense. Anticipating the ending, the narrator relieves us of ignorance as to the outcome of the rescue, increasing the focus on modes of telling. The title already reveals the Chola woman to be a widow, while "rescuing a human being from the most dreadful fate" occurs as early as paragraph three. By paragraph nine (out of sixty-eight) readers are told again of the successful rescue: "in half an hour's time the swift boat returned. It went with six and came with seven; and the seventh was a woman" (9). In paragraph thirteen we are apprised of the failure of the promised original ship's return, but a more devastating prolepsis is found in fourteen:

Yet however a dire calamity was here in store, misgivings of it ere due time never disturbed the Cholos' busy mind, now all intent upon the toilsome matter which had brought them hither. Nay, by swift doom coming like the thief at night, ere seven weeks went by, two of the little party were removed from all anxieties of land or sea. (14)

- 33 Narrative revelations anticipating events continue throughout, denuding the tale of suspense; nor can we find a typical plot, only interwoven digression after digression.
- 34 The narrator's recounting of a slow, long-delayed return to Payta, vexed by baffling winds and currents into a 'long passage' (64), toys with reading metaphors. The journey back from the *Encantadas* to Peru incorporates one of the Romantic Ironist's favourite ploys, the punning on long (verbal) passages, with travel a metaphor of reading voyages. Hunilla's desperate need for rescue by the sailors smacks of intimations of lost or abandoned readers stranded or mired in tales whose meanings are elusive, whose plots dissolve into insignificance, whose characters evade clarity, and whose narrators intrude distractingly. At the end, our narrator/sailor has to rescue readers from the tale he wove himself, not through clarification, but by abandoning us to a parody of an ending. Hunilla rides off into the sunset on her cross-bearing donkey but to what, no one knows, and we are left with the enigmatic or parodic symbol of the armorial cross.
- 35 Narrative displays of concealed happenings and untold experiences expose the gaping fragmentariness of Hunilla's tale, but more still the narrator's patched-together speculations, fabrications, and embellishments. Many are presented as Hunilla's version. These splits and tears disfigure the narrative and foreground the hidden theme of the sketch as an exploration of the complex interpenetration of experience and articulation. They characterize the nature of language and experience as full of holes, cut with 'ragged edges.' Imperfections, disfigurements, cracks, and crevices – these express our experience of truth: ever incomplete, flawed, ambiguous and subject to profound revision in the light of further experience. Hunilla's and the narrator's stories contain other interesting but less obvious 'missing links.' Another lacuna involving both the narrator's and Hunilla's tales evades being filled with any certain meaning: the effects on Hunilla's character and her religious faith of the trials undergone are hinted at but never expressed.³⁰ One resorts, as Hawthorne said, to the

witchery of language, to the sorcery of art, to the enchantment of words – not to dispel the ambiguity and raggedness of experience but to establish the illusion, created at times by the power of imagination alone, that things are less uncertain than they seemed.

- 36 Everywhere the flotsam or jetsam of the story strews the white-beach/ page of our reading with interruptions and disruptions; endless literary bits, historical relics, and biblical allusions float in a sea of the narrative. Fragments, shards, scraps and orts – of rumours and tales and quotations from other seamen, relics of memories, optical illusions, piecemeal superstitions and broken spells, ruins of all kinds, shells and reeds – are thrown up on the shore from islands hundreds of miles away; all this 'rubbish' contaminates the beach of the island and the page of the story. It threatens to drown any unambiguous perception, either of the work and the people described, or the narrative itself, whether Hunilla's version or the narrator's. As with her drowned husband Felipe and brother Truxill, the 'body' of the story is a dead one, a missing one, or an insolubly elusive Hunilla-like enigma.³¹

NOTES

1. See Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, vol. 1, 1996 and vol. 2, 2002), I, 183 *passim*, and see C.R. Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1939).
2. V.W. von Hagen, ed. "Introduction" and "Epilogue" to *The Encantadas Or, Enchanted Isles by Herman Melville* (illustrated edition, Burlingame, Calif.: William P. Wreden and San Francisco: Grabhorn Press, 1940), v-xxiii and 101-19, page 101.
3. Regarding *The Encantadas*, the travel sources include Darwin, Robert Fitz Roy (the captain of the *Beagle*), William Dampier, William Cowley, Benjamin Morrell, Amasa Delano (source for *Benito Cereno* primarily), and James Burney. Of especial interest are David Porter's (1815) *Journal of a Cruise*, James Colnett's (1798) *Voyage to the South Atlantic*, and John Coulter's (1845) *Adventures in the Pacific*.
4. The most complete report was the *Springfield Republican*, November 22, 1853. See Robert Sattelmeyer and James Barbour, "The Sources and Genesis of Melville's 'Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow,'" *American Literature* 50 (1978), 398-417. For the Agatha-letters source, see C. N. Watson, Jr., "Melville's Agatha and Hunilla: A Literary Reincarnation," *English Language Notes* 6 (1968), 114-18, and compare Basem L. Ra'ad, "'The Encantadas' and 'The Isle of the Cross': Melvillean Dubieties," *American Literature* 63:2 (1991), 316-23, who discussed the 'Agatha Letters' as a source.
5. Sattelmeyer and Barbour, 417; note: "It is a deceptively sentimental sketch... [using] its sentimentality in very unconventional ways... it exhibits its author's most characteristic 'layering' method of composition – the touchstone of which was almost always some particularly compelling 'story of reality.'"
6. Many critics have discussed the pseudonym, but see especially Margaret Yarina, "The Dualistic Vision of Herman Melville's *The Encantadas*," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 3 (1973), 141-8; Marvin Fisher, *Going Under: Melville's Short Fiction and the American 1850's* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State

University Press, 1997), and M.-M. G. Riddle, *Herman Melville's "Piazza Tales: " A Prophetic Vision* (Goeteborg, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1985).

7. Melville, in *Redburn*, had already referred to Rosa's painting in describing his character Jackson, chapters 12 and 55. And see Sharon Furrow, "The Terrible Made Visible: Melville, Salvator Rosa, and Piranesi," *Emerson Society Quarterly* 19 (1973), 238, on Rosa's influence and his paintings in Melville's house.

8. This essay had the only other pseudonym Melville used: "By a Virginian Spending July in Vermont," perhaps a gesture toward Edgar Allen Poe's short stories and *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838). Poe had recently died in 1850.

9. See further Jill R. Gidmark, "Deception and Contradiction in *The Encantadas*: Salvator R. Tarnmoor on 'Not Firme Land,'" *North Dakota Quarterly* 56 (1988), 83-90.

10. Since advance notice of the sketches was given in the *New York Evening Post* of February 14 under Herman Melville's name, few readers fell for the outlandish 'Salvator R. Tarnmoor' ascription. Praise in the *Berkshire County Eagle* of March 10 for Melville as the author would have further enlightened them.

11. The collection includes some of Melville's most famous short fictions: "The Piazza", "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno." This time, the pseudonym was left out, whether by accident or deliberately is not known.

12. *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, ed. with an introduction and commentary by Harold Beaver (Harmondsworth and New York, 1972, 1977), 26.

13. The name may well be a play on 'Una' of *The Faerie Queene*; most of the sketches have extracts from Spenser's work as epigraphs of greatly varying lengths, which create an extraordinary atmosphere from the outset. Sketch eight has, unusually, three short epigraphs, the one from *The Faerie Queene* only five lines long; the other two are from Chatterton's *Aella* and Collins' "A Song from Shakespear's *Cymbeline*" (the latter only in the 1856 edition). On the three epigraphs as concerned with the pity and grief resulting from deception, see Marvin Fisher, "The Encantadas," in *Herman Melville: Critical Assessments*, ed. A Robert Lee, 4 vols. (Robertsbridge, East Sussex: Helm Information Services, 2001), 284-301 (originally published in 1974). And see R.C. Albrecht, "The Thematic Unity of Melville's 'The Encantadas,'" in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 14 (1972), 463-77, especially 474.

14. *Aposiopesis*: a sudden breaking off as if from unwillingness to continue (Gk., lit. to be silent); *anacoluthon*: a break of grammatical sequence (Gk., lit. to cut short, to disappoint); *apophasis*: a denial of intentions to speak of things strongly hinted at or insinuated (Gk., lit. a denial); and *paraleipsis* (or -lipsis): a pretended ignoring, for rhetorical effect, of something actually spoken of, as in "not to mention other faults" (Gk., lit. a passing over, a leaving untold).

15. A favourite topic of Melville's; see *The Confidence-Man*, for example.

16. See Sattelmeyer and Barbour, 400 ff, and Basem L. Ra'ad, 316-23.

17. *Romeo and Juliet* V, iii, 309.

18. All quotations are from *Herman Melville: Billy Budd, Sailor and Selected Tales*, ed. Robert Milder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), and all numbers refer to paragraphs, not to pages.

19. Bruce L. Grenberg, in *Some Other World to Find: Quest and Negation in the Works of Herman Melville*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 209-10, discussed similar gaps, lacunae, and hidden (but hinted at) elements in *Billy Budd, Sailor*, 208.

20. A. Robert Lee, in "Moby-Dick: The Tale and the Telling," *New Perspectives on Melville*, ed. Faith Pullin (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 1978), 86-127, said Melville's writing calls attention to processes of telling and making fiction, in Melville's "wonderfully canny piece[s] of self-knowing negation," 91.

21. *Lear* I, iv, 32-3, variation.

22. E.A. Dryden, in "The Minister's Black Veil," *New Essays on Hawthorne: Hawthorne's Major Tales*, ed. Millicent Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 133-52: Melville's texts

demonstrate that the human countenance cannot be taken at 'face' value; the narrator or author of a tale is also veiled by the text. An inherent tension between the hidden and the revealed means that some meanings always remain 'in reserve,' 145.

23. Peter Bellis, in *No Mysteries out of Ourselves: Identity and Textual Form in the Novels of Herman Melville* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 188, insisted that for Melville, pure and unmediated representation is not possible; Melville always tested the limits of representation, 12. And see Nancy Fredricks, *Melville's Art of Democracy* (Athens, Ga. and London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), for a sustained discussion of Melville's notions of the limits of our powers of representation.

24. Dryden argued that central parts of the sketch "put into question the very distinction between perception and representation, between events and their verbal or painterly images," 65. He insisted that Melville makes "the real appear as figure, perception as a form of representation. The present... is already represented," 66. He goes on to talk of unnaturalness of death; earlier he discussed, 64, the rubbish that intervenes between us and reality and precludes any original relationship to it.

25. Leroy Day, in *Narrative Transgression and the Foregrounding of Language in Selected Prose Works of Poe, Valery, and Hofmannsthal* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1988), also argued that for Melville, our world is not natural but constructed; phenomena seemingly natural are conventions, 2-4.

26. Or as Leon Chai explained in *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 420, 422, "without the embodiment of consciousness in a representation, the self possesses no means of knowing itself;" representation is consciousness itself.

27. Davis, L.J., in *Factual Fictions. The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), analysed how fictions can either seek to hide and deny their fictionality in order to assert their powers of *mimesis* of reality, or seek to build into the text a subversive gesture exposing the illusion of reality and exposing the reality fiction 'reports' as the one it is in the process of creating.

28. For example, in "Feathertop" (1852), as well as in "The Minister's Black Veil" (1836), Hawthorne had provided his readers with two very different displays of literary characterisation in fiction. Melville's Hunilla sketch compares more obviously with the Minister story than with Feathertop because of the tone of serious Romantic Irony pervading it, along with its freedom from the overtly comic, indeed hilarious parody in "Feathertop" of the author/witch creating a 'straw-man,' mistaken by 'readers' as a 'real' person. (And note the "Postscript" to *The Marble Faun* and the example of 'Donatello' for further occasions of Hawthorne's similar hoodwinking of his readers.)

29. And, according to Bellis, Melville's fictions usually end up showing that a self cannot be given adequate textual or visual forms of representation, 84.

30. See Marvin Fisher, "The Encantadas," in *Herman Melville: Critical Assessments*, ed. A. Robert Lee, 4 vols. (Robertsbridge, East Sussex: Helm Information Services, 2001), 284-301, who discussed the impossibility of interpreting Hunilla's responses; he proposed Christian reaffirmation, stoicism, and disenchantment as undecidable possibilities, 295.

31. In Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), interpretation and reading are portrayed as the digging up of a recently buried corpse; the body of the story is imaged as a surprisingly empty coffin, then later a coffin with, shockingly, the 'wrong' body. Finally, the 'clue' to identification of the killer lies solely in the type of 'hole' made in the 'right' body by a bullet, only one of several crucial gaps. Faulkner once remarked that of all books he knew, he would like to have written *Moby-Dick*.

ABSTRACTS

Des dix esquisses qui composent *Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles* (1854) de Herman Melville, nous proposons d'aborder la huitième, intitulée « Sketch Eighth Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow », qui contient un récit bref énigmatique et constamment interrompu que fait Hunilla, la veuve du titre. Ce récit est enchâssé dans un autre récit, celui du narrateur qui élabore sa tragédie. Cette étude analysera plus particulièrement deux caractéristiques spécifiques de cette esquisse. Premièrement, les fréquentes interruptions du récit aux moments décisifs : le récit du narrateur attire l'attention du lecteur pour les lacunes du récit qu'il enchâsse tout en créant des brèches supplémentaires par d'habiles recours aux procédés rhétoriques. Deuxièmement, ces procédés qui permettent au lecteur de se rendre compte progressivement que les deux histoires sont en fait inénarrables, aucun texte original n'étant possible. La tentative de communiquer la vérité intrinsèque de l'expérience se révèle impossible parce que l'expérience pure est déjà une construction.

AUTHORS

K. M. WHEELER

K. M. Wheeler is Reader in English Literature at Cambridge University, England. Author of a study of Coleridge's prose as well as an analysis of several major poems, she has also written *Romanticism, Pragmatism, and Deconstruction* and *Explaining Deconstruction*. Other works include *Modernist Women Writers and Narrative Art* and *A Critical Guide to 20th Century Women Novelists*. She is presently completing a book on Herman Melville.