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[Previous](#)

[Index](#)

[Next](#)

P.T. BARNUM IN *MOBY-DICK*

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That Herman Melville was familiar with Phineas T. Barnum and his American Museum in New York City we know from allusions in Melville's works. In a series of humorous sketches on General Zachary Taylor in the *Punch*-like magazine *Yankee Doodle* in 1847, Melville parodied Barnum's method of collecting for his museum (NN *Piazza Tales* 212-234). In a February 1849 letter to his brother Allan announcing the birth of his son Malcolm, Melville compared the baby to some of Barnum's exotic exhibits (NN *Correspondence* 115, 116; see also Hennig Cohen and Donald Yannella's 1992 *Herman Melville's Malcom Letter*). Merrell R. Davis detected caricatures of Barnum in the antiquarian Oh-Oh of Chs. 122, 123 in *Mardi* (Melville's *Mardi* 154). In *The Confidence-Man* (1857), Melville alludes in Ch. 44 to Barnum's Drummond light, which Barnum had mounted atop his museum at the corner of Broadway and Ann Street in Manhattan (Phineas T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs* [New York: Penguin Books, 1981], 112). In his late poem, "The New Ancient of Days," which mocks the fad for speculating on the age of man as evidenced in fossil remains, Melville compares gigantic specimens like the Megalosaurus and Iguanodon to a "Barnum-show raree" (*Collected Poems*, ed. Howard Vincent [New York: Hendricks House, 1949], 375).

The detailed knowledge of Barnum's celebrated museum suggests that Melville was alluding to Barnum, "The Prince of Humbugs," in his fanciful dissertation on the skeleton of a whale in Chapters 102 and 103 in *Moby-Dick*. He places the skeleton in "A Bower of the Arsacides," the realm of his friend "Tranquo, king of Tranque, one of the Arsacides." According to the *Complete Pronouncing Gazetteer or Geographical Dictionary of the World* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1888), Tranque is an obscure island off the east coast of the island of Chiloe on the coast of Chile (2226), and the Arsacides are a group of islands south of the Solomon Islands (Hendricks House *MD* 808), first named Terres des Arsacides by

the explorer Surville (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th ed., Vol. 22, p. 253) and now appear on modern maps as Cape Arsacides on the island of Malaita (*Pacific Ocean, Atlas Plate 61*, National Geographic Society, 1962). Thus, having obscured the real islands in his fanciful world where some places, such as Queequeg's Kokovoko, "far away to the West and South," like the Arsacides, don't appear on maps (NN *MD* 55), Melville places the "lord of Tranque, at his retired palm villa at Pupella; a sea-side glen not very far distant from what our sailors call Bamboo-Town, his capital." Lord Tranque is "gifted with a devout love for all matters of barbaric virtù ... rare things the more ingenious of his people could invent," like "carved woods of wonderful devices, chiselled shells, inlaid spears, costly paddles, aromatic canoes." "Chief" among these objects was the skeleton of "a great Sperm Whale," which Melville goes on to describe in Chapter 102, then measure in Chapter 103, and then use as a basis for philosophizing upon "The Fossil Whale" in Chapter 104.

King Tranquo's whale, which has been found stranded on the beach, was stripped and the skeleton was transported "up the Pupella glen, where a grand temple of lordly palms now sheltered it." "Royal Tranquo" had converted the skeleton into a chapel, a sort of "object of virtù" among "trees [that] stood high and haughty" entwined in "ground-vine tendrils" with "living flowers" overshadowed by "the trees, with all their laden branches; all the shrubs and ferns, and grasses" (*MD* Ch. 102). In this chapter also, Melville mentions museums, one in Hull, England, and another in Manchester, NH, with whale exhibits. He also describes a skeleton in the possession of Sir Clifford Constable of Burton Constable in southeastern Yorkshire, England, "lord of the seignories of those parts." Sir Clifford exhibited his specimen and, like Barnum, sought to profit as much as possible by piecemeal charges: "twopence for a peep at the whispering gallery in the spinal column; threepence to hear the echo in the hollow of his cerebellum; and