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## PHILOSOPHY FACULTY PUBLICATIONS

### Beasts, Sovereigns, Pirates: Melville's "Enchanted Isles" Beyond the Picturesque

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#### Abstract

Herman Melville's "The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles," included in his signature set of shorter narratives *The Piazza Tales*, remains relatively unvisited by readers and critics. So too was the archipelago generally known as the Galapagos, before becoming a chic destination for natural history excursions and eco-tourism. These ten "sketches" relate a narrator's experiences on the Pacific islands, adding a number of travelers' stories, some extrapolated (more or less accurately) from known records, some creatively transformed. One informative, comprehensive handbook suggests that Melville's description of this volcanic archipelago as Encantadas or "enchanted" in the sense of bewitched-uncanny, weird, their very positions and relations apparently forming a zone of indeterminacy-can serve as a metaphor for the critical writing attempting to chart them. That guide asks whether critics have been successful in their efforts to find something more than geographical unity here. Are these sketches just travel narratives connected merely by their subject's equatorial position six hundred miles west of Peru? Naturally, some are struck by the fact that the most celebrated visit to the islands was Darwin's, recorded in the *Voyage of the Beagle*, which Melville may have read shipboard (apparently ships' libraries were rich enough to justify Ishmael's description of his whaling life as his Yale and Harvard). There is a striking contrast between "The Encantadas" impressions of utter inhumanity and desolation and Darwin's fascination with the rich variety of birds, reptiles, and amphibians that stimulated his eventual formulation of the grand theory of evolution. Melville too is interested in the beasts-both native and imported-not so much as a naturalist but in terms of how they shock humans, provide food, become part of, or present analogies to our social and political structures, and whose exploitation enables a global economy.

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"Enchanted Isles" Beyond the Picturesque Gary Shapiro. 83. On Religion and the Strangeness of Speech: Typee as a "Peep" Tracy B. Strong. 37 Faulkner's never-silent silence that tremendous duration which consecrates the universe and exists beyond the evanescent clutter of human change—is in its own way an answer to Melville's 1851 question to Hawthorne. The world, of which we are a small part, is never done changing. But the terror of vanishing traceless into unmarked solitude, into silence, is also the transformative motivation of art and philosophy.