PREFACE

THE BIOGRAPHER of Herman Melville finds no large collection of source material ready to his hand. In fact, no other major American author has left such scanty literary remains. The manuscripts of none of his principal works have been discovered; less than a year of his life is recorded in diaries, and all but three months of that lie outside the period of his authorship; fewer than one hundred and fifty letters have come to light so far, and not more than half of these are of real significance. These meager records, most of which have been published, are chiefly contained in three repositories: the Eleanor Melville Metcalf Collection in the Widener Library at Harvard, and the Duyckinck and Gansevoort-Lansing Collections in the New York Public Library.

The present study is partially drawn from these three known collections and from a fourth one in the Naval Records and Library at Washington, D. C. The bulk of it, however, is drawn from newly discovered manuscripts and documents, widely scattered from Paris to Sydney, Australia, and from the vast unexplored literature of travel (see "The Romance of Scholarship," Colophon, Spring, 1938).

Several mechanical matters call for a word of explanation. For the sake of uniformity, I have followed the French spelling of Polynesian words (the Century Dictionary and Atlas for proper names), with two exceptions: I have retained Melville’s form “Typee” instead of “Taipi” and the more popular “Papeete” instead of “Papéiti.” To avoid confusion, I have used quotation marks for fictitious ships (“Pequod”) to differentiate them from actual ships (Acushnet). The list of works on pages 497–505 is merely a key to the abbreviations used in the notes, and is not intended in any sense as a bibliography. Finally, the maps that serve as end-papers will furnish a chart for Melville’s South Sea wanderings: the route outward bound has been established by conjecture from half-a-dozen
documented points on his itinerary; the route homeward bound is taken from the Log Book of the frigate *United States*.


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CHARLES ROBERTS ANDERSON

Duke University
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