



Redburn

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Characters Discussed

Wellingborough Redburn, a young American who leaves his widowed mother and his brothers at home on the Hudson River in New York to go to sea. He learns, during a voyage from New York to Liverpool and return, that a sailor's life is a good but rugged one, that each generation makes its own world, and that true joy and sorrow are components of the human condition.

Harry Bolton, a young English prodigal son of good family who becomes Redburn's friend during the voyage from Liverpool to New York. Bolton is a misfit aboard ship, thus belying the stories he tells of his voyages as a crew member on other vessels. His pride is so injured when the captain pays him a dollar and a half as wages at the voyage's end that he throws the money back on the captain's desk.

Captain Riga, the tough, shrewd master of the *Highlander*, Redburn's first ship. He pays Redburn three dollars a month for his work on the voyage, but when the ship returns to New York, he dismisses Redburn without a penny because he says Redburn had left the ship for a day at Liverpool and, furthermore, had lost tools overboard.

Bibliography:

- Branch, Watson G., ed. *Melville: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974. Contemporary reviews of *Redburn* in British and American periodicals. Interesting for comparison with later Melville scholarship. The novel was widely praised at its publication, but praised for its qualities as an adventure story rather than as serious fiction.
- Bredahl, Carl A., Jr. *Melville's Angles of Vision*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972. Emphasizes Melville's concern with characters in their environment. Discusses Redburn as first-person narrator adjusting to the psychological implications of life at sea.
- Hillway, Tyrus. *Herman Melville*. Boston: Twayne, 1963. Excellent analysis of Melville's characterization, particularly in the degree to which it improved since the publication of his earlier novels. Particular attention given in this regard to the tragic contradictions in the character of Harry Bolton.
- Kirby, David. *Herman Melville*. New York: Continuum, 1993. Treats the relationship between Melville's creative imagination and his life. Offers an engaging contrast between the fanciful *Mardi* and *Redburn*, which reveals Melville's personal experience.
- Rosenberry, Edward H. *Melville*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979. Places particular emphasis on *Redburn* as an initiation novel in which personal experience is paramount in the development of the character of the mature adult. Rosenberry makes an interesting distinction between lust for life and a talent for living in *Redburn*.

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