neglect. He presents as well a statement of the historical significance of Newton’s lunar theory and suggests a number of problems which await solution before the true extent of Newton’s achievement can be understood.

In this respect, it is only fair to remark that the essay republished in the volume is of relatively minor importance. The text of the *Principia*, which Professor Cohen has helped to make more fully available, will continue to be the primary datum for the study of Newton’s lunar theory. Perhaps I will not be alone in regretting that Professor Cohen, with his manifest qualifications, chose to restrict his own commentary so sharply and did not further expand his introduction by undertaking to solve a number of the problems that he has pointed out.

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ASTRONOMY AND MELVILLE’S “MARDI”


Herman Melville’s *Mardi*, a “polynesian romance”, is a transitional work between his novels *Typee* and *Omoo*, and his great *Moby Dick*. The arcane, rambling style of *Mardi* prevented any popular success; it is basically a riddle book, set forth to confound Melville’s English critics. If we are to believe Dr Moore, beneath its inconsistencies there is a tight, hidden logic based on a journey through the calendar and through the zodiac. To make sure the British sceptics would be embarrassed in case one of them discovered this key to the riddle, Melville has incorporated a metaphorical structure in which the fall of the hero, Taji, parallels the fate of John Couch Adams (and the logician Babbanja represents Leverrier whose name translates as “truth”). The journey begins near Christmas Islands on 24 December 1845, and astronomical clues correlated with the popular *American almanac* carry the plot on past its resolution on 24 September 1846, the date when Neptune was discovered.

Moore’s thesis is clearly stated, but its defence is rendered comparatively obscure by the tangled web of fragmentary astrological and card-playing metaphors. A proper evaluation would require careful study of the 500-plus-page *Mardi* as well as this guide. It is interesting to note, however, that Dr Moore considers it an “error” when the *Almanac* states that the Sun enters Capricorn at the winter solstice, although it is actually still in the constellation of Sagittarius. (Her distinction between signs and constellations is confusing at best.) Elsewhere she writes, “From this description of the past-midnight sky, we are given to understand that the third-quarter moon has just set below the horizon”.

Altogether a fascinating, provocative book in a particularly attractive physical format.

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