Freely Given to the Waves

A Collection of Essays on Herman Melville’s Moby Dick

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Publisher’s Note

The following essays in this volume have been reviewed by some members of both the LATCH Collection Series reading panel and/or the editorial panel. The focus of our review has primarily been on the level of factual content and argument development. In order to accommodate the various methods of citation, documentation, mechanics and formatting the individual authors may be comfortable with, we have not insisted that a uniform style of these matters be maintained throughout the volume. Our guiding principles in these latter matters is that (1) authors be consistent throughout their own work in the styles of surface-level elements they choose to employ and that (2) all stylistic choices concerning citation and documentation be such that information sufficient to exactly identify sources is present.
Preface

This volume testifies to the hard work (close to physical struggle), as well as to the thrill and pleasure of intensive reading. Melville’s text is an inexhaustible challenge and, in the course of interpretation, the 21st century reader might meet seemingly impenetrable walls and suddenly opening doors, ajar for communication and personal involvement.

A course, setting out with the aim of a good encounter with *Moby Dick* is as unpredictable as the weather when a whaler sails out of Nantucket. The title of our book, *Freely Given to the Waves*, reflects both the freedom and the danger of such an enterprise. Yet I feel that both in Santa Cruz, California, and in Budapest, Hungary, my groups of students met the challenge with expertise and soon formed skillful and cooperative “crews”, ready for a “fiery hunt”.

If “hunting” can be accepted as a workable metaphor for reading, our aim during the courses was definitely not to “hunt down” this “whale of a book”, since its bulkiness, depth and diversity rejects any attempt at taking “full” possession of it, or taking it under control. Our task was rather to “hunt up” various possible connections. Instead of killing the text with harpoons of theories, we hope to have succeeded in giving it a new life through the sudden surprises of bonds – chords and strings, ropes and lines – that weave Melville’s words into our lives. When such a “line” is discovered, one might feel tempted to sing out: “There she blows!”

In Chapter 53 of the novel, Ishmael defines the concept of a “Gam” in the following way: “A social meeting of two (or more) Whale-ships, generally on a cruising ground; when, after exchanging hails, they exchange visits by boats’ crews …” I strongly hope that the two groups, like the crews of two whaleships meet in a true and fruitful “gam” on the following pages.

Katalin G. Kállay
Student Editors' Preface

Dear Reader,

We are happy to present a fresh volume of student essays, this one dealing with Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, and being the seventh among the volumes compiled by Károli students. However, *Freely Given To the Waves* is unique in the sense that it also contains papers written by American students who attended Dr. Katalin Kállay’s course held on *Moby Dick* at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

It is indeed an excellent opportunity to compare interpretations from two rather different parts of the world, at the same time, it also proves how significant and universal Melville’s novel is. We hope therefore that you will enjoy continuing the spiritual journey offered by *Moby Dick* by reading these essays, and discovering aspects perhaps hidden so far. Hopefully, this volume can also serve as an appetizer for those not yet acquainted with this masterpiece of American literature. It will be easy for everyone to find some especially interesting topics in *Freely Given To the Waves*, as the papers are written on various thought-provoking subjects, mirroring the complexity of *Moby Dick*.

In the first part of the volume you can find the creative products of the authors—poems and prose works inspired by, but only loosely connected to the novel. This is followed by the longer, more sophisticated essays shedding light on numerous aspects of *Moby Dick*. Some identical titles in this part are due to the fact that these were given by Dr. Kállay for seminar papers. It is our hope therefore that this volume will inspire new respect for and new perspectives upon Melville’s major literary text.

Finally, we would like to thank Dr. Kállay for her encouragement and support in creating yet another volume, and for being just as enthusiastic as the students whose works are published here.

Nóra D. Nagy, Eszter Guti, Zsófia Szabó, Kinga Turányi
Budapest, June 2009
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I

POETRY & PROSE
“As Queequeg and I are now fairly embarked in this business of whaling; and as this business of whaling has somehow come to be regarded among landsmen as a rather unpoetical and disreputable pursuit; therefore, I am all anxiety to convince ye, ye landsmen, of the injustice hereby done to us hunters of whales.”
(Moby Dick, Chapter 24)
Whale Haikus

Veronika Boross

All the world is a whale
And the continents are marks
Paddling in the space

Whale ship approaches
Meadows of Brit celebrate
Slaughter of slaughterers

Plastic whale sinks
Child roars with laughter
Waves in the bath-tub
Blue humpback’s singing
Cruel darting of a harpoon
Silence blends with blue

Slap of a whale’s tail
Flap of a butterfly’s wings
Both will cause earthquakes

Supper by candle-light
Once was the life of a whale
Burning away slowly

Bubbles at the surface
A cow’s blood colours the depth
First swim of a calf
Angelless
In Response to “Art” by Herman Melville

Nóra D. Nagy

Torn on the production line
Of dull waves—each a wreck of fate—
We stand dreamless, hands tied
Fastened to a decayed piece of Jacob’s sight
The unlike to meet and mate
Are caught in the breathless vortices:

Melting winds and freezing flames.
With hips wrenched we lie
At the bottomless oceans of space;
Though echoes remain, the spirits depart
And we are left to wrestle alone—
Angelless, with—Art.
ART

In placid hours well-pleased we dream
Of many a brave unbodied scheme.
But form to lend, pulsed life create,
What unlike things must meet and mate:
A flame to melt—a wind to freeze;
Sad patience—joyous energies;
Humility—yet pride and scorn;
Instinct and study; love and hate;
Audacity—reverence. These must mate,
And fuse with Jacob’s mystic heart
To wrestle with the angel—Art.

Herman Melville, 1891
I’m a Mast-head Stander of the Sea

Olívia Barta

Call me Ishmael; I am standing a hundred feet high
Striding along the deep sea, lost in the infinite
Between my legs, which the stilts are
There swims the hugest monster of all time
Like Admiral Nelson upon the column in Trafalgar Square
I’ll be standing for two hours in the mast-head, I’m aware
The sum of these various hours spent up here
By the end of the journey, will amount to entire months, I fear
Until I am relieved, resting in the top to have a chat
With any whalermen, whom I find off-duty near at
I prefer if it’s my bosom friend Queequeg, who will “kill-e”
But if none then I indulge myself in sweet reverie
This is the Pequod, bound round the world, up helm!
The crew has taken oath for the big whale to overwhelm
Our Captain is Ahab, who is madness maddened
He lost his leg, now wants to dismember his dismemberer
How could I keep not but a sorry guard?
Throwing my lazy leg over the top sail yard
With the problems of the universe revolving in my mind
I cannot keep my weather eye open, and sing out every time
What a Sperm Whale looks like, only a few know
But the great live Squid’s his only food for sure
The other feeds on vast meadows of brit
That must belong to the other kind of it
Who hasn’t spotted one for real, only in pictures he saw
Tell him to cry upon a floating amputated sow
Or that the eye of the whale is a huge bow-window
In which Jonah will signal him and it’s five feet long
Starbuck, the chief mate, is game for any whale
That would fetch him much in the Nantucket sale
Doesn’t like the idea of taking vengeance on a dumb brute
It sounds blasphemous, that might be true
Tash, Daggoo and Queequeg heard of the whale they have all
That fan-tails a little curious like a split jib in a squall
And his spout is a big one like a whole shock of wheat
Death to the white whale, Moby Dick! God help us to defeat!
There Is No Place like Home

Míra Hervay

The air was warm, finally the Pequod reached the southern oceans. The evenings became more and more pleasant. I lay on the wooden floor of the deck, the wood was lukewarm, it exhaled the sun lights that it had drank during the day. I stared at the stars. The sky covered me as an enormous tent. It was quiet, only the Pequod let us hear her fight with the waves, the wood creaked, and the ropes squeaked. But we all got used to these noises and the nights were quiet compared to the daytime which was full of excitement and with the noise of the arduous job when a whale is cut in, coiled and scarfed by the mates. I enjoyed the calmness of the night when I could sink into my thoughts or rather give myself to the night. I just gazed into the air, felt the warmth of the floor. Now, two weeks after we left Nantucket, the crew calmed down. There was still a sparkle in their eyes when they searched the horizon of the sea but the initial great expectations disappeared. We started getting used to the routine. As I lay on the deck my eyes went up to the mast. To the mast-head that captured Ishmael. I remembered his eyes when he came down from the guard. It was full of revelation, his face became smooth, and the signs on his forehead engraved by the unanswered questions became lighter. I remembered when I first saw his face, on the day when he proposed himself as a candidate for the voyage. I knew that he had run away in quest of answers for his questions. His dreamy eyes and high forehead revealed his constant search. Many times on the board of the Pequod
I could catch him staring at the sea, his hands were working but his eyes revealed that he was marvelling at something. He was travelling in his subterranean depths. His look was not the look of a young lover, it was more of an explorer. Whenever I looked into his dark blue eyes it drew me in a deepness that I long tried to avoid. And now I was on the deck again just sinking into the moment. I became one with the breeze that ran through the vast ocean. I melted into the lightness of the stars. I accepted everything, nothing could have surprised me. I gave myself to the powers. Under the Milky Way I was exposed lying on an altar accepting any decision. If something had happened, I would have bluntly faced it, without surprise, only with submission. And this is what Ishmael and his constant search for significance made me realise. He lived with us but he lived in a mental atmosphere. We were all on a pilgrimage, closed together on a vessel open to the power of the boundless ocean. While he struggled to hear the echo of his thoughts, I let myself become detached. I accepted my powerlessness or I rather gave up the fight. I just lay there and understood that I miss the fight and need a purpose, but for one more moment I let myself sink in the calmness of being without thoughts. I took a rest in the middle of the battle. But sharp knocks cut into my ears, rough quiver run through my spine. The brutal, selfish steps of Captain Ahab’s ivory leg reached me. From the first moment he raised an unpleasant feeling in me that could not be calmed down. He walked with sparkling eyes, but these eyes were not an explorer’s but a conqueror’s eye. The Captain restlessly walked up and down on the deck. Each time when he turned to the moon I could see the lines of determination carved into his face. He stared at the ocean but his face did not reflect Ishmael’s search, it rather uncovered a constant fight. His mouth was a hunter’s, and as a hunter he wanted to rule nature and all the
creatures in it. He wanted to gain control over uncertainty. While he was standing unaware of my searching look he raised his fist and threatened his invisible enemy. Then he went back to his cabin. However, he did not sleep that night. Through his cabin window I could see his shadow walking all night. My thought turned to Moby Dick, the white whale. All the sailors waited for him, all the watchers at the top of the mast looked for him. When two people started to speak they always ended up telling stories of this ferocious creature. As they were talking they gave voice to their fear, they told the retold stories that they had heard once in the parlour of an inn. And while they prepared themselves for the unknown their fear could gain a form in Moby Dick. And what did I do? I just waited, I was ready to face anything. I knew I won’t be surprised, I will only look and accept what might come. I learnt to endure the uncertainty. Uncertainty became my medium. Therefore, I lost the ability to marvel at the secrets of life. Most importantly I saved myself by not searching for the meaning of life.

I was getting tired. I lifted my head to see the switch and for a moment I stared into the light above my head. I quickly closed my eyes but I could see only whiteness in the dark. I was blinded by a 60W bulb.
I

“But it was ruthless indeed to set sail right on Christmas Day” - Mrs Starbuck thought. “This is something I will never understand, nor get used to.” However, there were plenty of other things she had already got used to, and never ever questioned their points. She could have known when she married Starbuck that she would be as lonely as if she had remained an old maid, but she had not thought of that. People in love, especially if young, rarely think of sad things. They were both very young when they got married, and actually they still counted as young, though Mrs Starbuck felt very old. Being the wife of a whaleman makes one mature quickly. At first it was really hard, almost maddening, being alone for years, with the ever-present worm of anxiety in her heart, knowing almost nothing of the man she loved the most in this world beyond one or two short-cut letters a year. Sometimes she sank into bitterness, sometimes she was even angry with him: how could he choose such a profession? how can he go away still, leaving her alone? why did such a man have to get married? or why doesn’t he marry those damned whales? Yes, in those times Mrs Starbuck could even swear, strictly to herself of course. Not as if there had been anyone around her to speak to.
But it was so long ago she could hardly remember her former self. In these days Mrs Starbuck was like a mirror to her husband. Nothing could stir her calmness or her moral steadiness. She lived quietly, finding entertainment in small everyday household things, and waiting for those few happy weeks or months even when Starbuck was at home and she felt life again, running-dancing in her veins. On the other hand, she had quite used to missing her husband, so it was not such an extraordinary, painful feeling as earlier, she slowly learned to accept her fate in this earthly life. If she had thought about it, she would not have liked her being so resigned, but, first of all, she did not like to think about herself fearing it would be too despairing. Secondly, she knew her husband was very grateful to her for not making his hard life even more difficult with unnecessary and vain complaints, but supporting him by offering a quietly joyful little nest where they could enjoy being together in their thoughtful, wordless way.

Now there was another thing she had to learn to miss, for Mrs Starbuck had no doubt that Nantucket cannot provide the same sermons as New Bedford. Going to Father Mapple’s church had always been a balm to her troubled soul, it was her chief consolation, to be honest. But Mrs Starbuck accepted Mr Starbuck’s decision about moving to Nantucket without hesitation or disagreement. It was after all no wonder that her husband, being a born Nantucketer, longed for his hometown. Though both towns were centres of shipping and whaling, Nantucket was in a sense another world, yet Mrs Starbuck was sure she would soon get used to it, given that she had no other choice. Still, it was quite unpleasant that Starbuck left on the Pequod not long after they had settled in their new home, and the strange feeling
that came over Mrs Starbuck in that afternoon almost reminded her of her younger days.

At that moment a short but dynamic knocking was heard on the door. Mrs Starbuck was not a bit startled, since although it was the middle of January, she did not make a lot of acquaintances yet. This winter was especially cruel and she stayed at home most of the time. When she opened the door she found a pretty young woman with a cheerful smile on the doorstep. Her face was red from the cold wind, and she was literally trembling, but her whole being showed that she will not get intimidated by the extremely bad weather, if she set her mind upon something.

“My name is Mrs Stubb, and my husband is second mate on the Pequod. We know you had not long ago moved here, and we thought we should visit you, and make friends, if our husbands are bound to the same ship, and thus we are, too.”- said the unexpected visitor with one breath, and before Mrs Starbuck could wonder who the ‘we’ might be, she stepped aside, and another young woman came into sight behind Mrs Stubb, rather insignificant looking, though obviously not believing herself insignificant.

“Mrs Flask” – announced she, no less majestically than announcing Queen Victoria herself.

Mrs Starbuck was, as she discovered, very pleasantly surprised, and in this rare feeling she even forgot to worry about not having proper tea-cakes at home. This latter incident, however, did not avoid Mrs Flask’s attention, and it made her happy: here was another proof that she was better than others, since she always kept at least two different kinds of cakes at home, just in case.
After all, noone must think that she is not worthy of her perfect whaleman husband, as a perfect housewife.

The three women spent a remarkably nice afternoon together, their continuous chatting and laughter seemed to conquer the gloomy clouds even outside of the room, let alone in their bored souls. The good atmosphere was largely due to Mrs Stubb, who was no doubt determined to keep up her spirit no matter how much she missed her husband. It was definitely an easier task for her than for the other two. Above all, she had an easy-going nature, not meaning irresponsibility, but meaning that she seldom wasted her time for deep thoughts, and it certainly helped her preserve her cheerfulness. On close observation she did not look as young as at first sight, but her carefree attitude to life ensured that she will not grow old even when the number of her years suggested so. Perhaps the only problem in her life was that she missed her beloved husband, but being brought up in a family and in a town where men were always out at sea on different whaling voyages it was something she considered one of the basic things in life. Mrs Stubb was the youngest of Captain Bildad’s numerous brothers and sisters, and thus held a strong position in the pious Quaker society of Nantucket. Although her passionate behaviour was secretly condemned by several elderly matrons, the respect honouring her family prevented them from uttering their dislike, and otherwise Mrs Stubb was generally popular with people. In spite of this, Mrs Stubb was still very enthusiastic to make two more friends, and Mrs Starbuck, in her calm way, also was eager to strengthen the relationship. She did not like Mrs Flask as much as Mrs Stubb, but her kind nature was open to her as well.
Mrs Flask was very short -suited to her husband-, a fragile woman, at least as far as her complexion was concerned. She was not ill-tempered, but had her own human flaws, which were in her case vanity and pride. She could be charmingly nice as long as noone doubted that her husband was the most perfect creature in the world, with herself following in the second place. She was similar to Mrs Starbuck in the sense that she also hardly remembered the time when she was young, but the reason for this was not that she could not, but that she did not want to remember. She had been an unimportant, unpretty figure, with poor background, no definite goal, and especially, no real chance in life. Then the magical prince came, and since then Mrs Flask felt that she was somebody, and devoted her life to her glamorous hero rather out of thankfulness than out of love. However, if observing her shining eyes when speaking about her husband, one could also come to the conclusion that love has innumerable forms, one being not superior to any other. Mr and Mrs Stubb for instance, had a real romantic love story, though lacking such deep emotions that were as natural to the Starbucks as breathing.

Stubb, then a middle-aged Cape Cod-man came to Nantucket for adventures in the form of a dangerous whaling voyage, but walking in the street, he met his destiny in the form of the very young, very beautiful and very vivid Miss Bildad. Though it was love at first sight on both sides, the girl’s sober family refused to share their blindness caused by love. The unknown stranger was sent to whaling under the inspecting eyes of Captain Bildad himself, and having passed the exam, he and his affectionate girl tied the knot on the very day the ship returned to Nantucket. Despite the age difference and the
fact that they hardly knew each other it soon became obvious that this match was made in heaven.

“A match made in Heaven”- repeated Mrs Stubb once more delightedly, after telling their story to her new friends. With such themes the afternoon went by, the wives wandering from one topic to another like bees flying from one colourful flower to the other. Mrs Flask told Mrs Starbuck that she too was once a newcomer in Nantucket, and she could never get accustomed to it after the much neater Martha’s Vineyard. Mrs Stubb was a bit hurt, being a proud Nantucketer, but swiftly changed the subject and asked Mrs Starbuck whether Mr Starbuck liked whale-steak. Whithout really listening to the answer, she told every single detail of her preparing the above-mentioned dish, and the various praises she earned from her satisfied husband. Seeing Mrs Stubb’s face overjoyed with innocent triumph, Mrs Flask could not resist the temptation to ruin it, and noted that the negro cook of the ship might as well make the same whale-steak for Mr Stubb, since it was said that these non-white people were very skilful and indispensable in whaling. Mrs Starbuck could not stand the affected Mrs Flask’s malice, and said that these qualities were only true for the harpooneers. From this the talk turned to the tattooed monsters that walk around Nantucket’s streets all the time, and circulated in a similar way further and further. At that time there were no psychologists yet to explain them the blessed effects of relaxed friendly talk on women, but even without any science, the three wives certainly felt their mind and soul to become lighter and maybe happier.

Considering this it came as quite natural that towards the end of the visit Mrs Stubb suggested a regular meeting between the three of them, being sure that they
were already great friends. The other two agreed with her completely and after mutual promises and best wishes the two visitors departed, leaving a smiling Mrs Starbuck behind the closing door.

II

That next meeting never happened after all. The three mate-wives met sometimes in the street, in the shops, or in the church, and always found time for a bit of a chat, but somehow the appointment was forgotten. However, none of them felt lonely or tired any more. Interestingly, it was a time for all of them when their life turned in a happier direction. In August Mrs Stubb gave birth to her third child. Their friendship with Mrs Starbuck continued, and the latter suddenly realised that she was having quite a good time in Nantucket. The whole experience was much better than she expected, she found a community, and even new friends like the kind-hearted Aunt Charity. Although she still missed her Starbuck, since there was none who could equal him, sometimes she was even heard laughing, a thing she had forgot years ago. Mrs Flask left Nantucket for a while: she was invited by her sister to Martha’s Vineyard, and later to Pennsylvania to some other relatives, and she was more than happy to leave the freezy, smelly Nantucket. Of course by the time the Pequod was expected to return, she was also back in town, and walked towards the port every day just to meet Mrs Stubb, Mrs Starbuck and others and wait impatiently for the ship or at least for news. First they did not worry, delay was a common, if annoying, thing in this business. But months, even years passed, and no Pequod was welcomed in Nantucket, and there were no letters, no news delivered by other ships either. Yet Hope is
the stubbornest creature in the world, and after a while she was the only one who kept the waiting Mrs-s alive.

III

It is ruthless, but Hope had to die one day, too. Still, interestingly, however much they felt their hearts breaking, however much they wished for death, the women stayed alive, even after the appearance of that Ishmael. First they hated him, refused to believe him, then approached him, wanted to know how their beloved died, then also wanted to know every little incident that happened on the ship during these years, every single detail about the life of their husbands, sons, fathers, brothers. That Ishmael promised to tell the story.
The story I will share with you this time took place in 1857, on a frosty, foggy December day. I, Ishmael, was on a hunting journey for a year to the day on the ship named Peqoud; and since this was the very first whale-hunting expedition in my life - moreover, it was astonishingly cold when we set off - no surprise that I was extremely excited about it. Leastwise, in the beginning.

I am sure I will never forget that Christmas Eve. Although being excited in the beginning, after a year I started to feel the opposite: not enthusiasm but insensivity. And on that very day I felt so lonely, so heavy-hearted, I felt that I could not bear any more the painful absence of my missing family. However, it was Christmas, a holiday that is supposed to be spent in family circle, a pleasure which, unfortunately, was not given to me this year. So, with all these displeasing feelings in my heart I decided not to celebrate loudly with the others but to roll away from them to my little cozy cabin - the only friendly place for me on this ship -, meditate and write in my diary in complete solitude. Yes, writing; it was the only act for me during my gloomy days and hours that could give me some hope and relief.

I sat on my bed, turned on the petroleum lamp and started a letter to my faraway family. But to tell you the truth, I could not really concentrate. Not only my distracted soul caused this feeling. It was rather a rhythmical, repetitive clattering, too artificial and harsh enough to get used to it. It came
from upstairs, from the deck. A sound, though a long time ago already familiar to me as I have heard it from time to time, this evening, when I really longed for complete silence it did annoy me, very much.

First, I did not know what I should do. I hoped that the maker of the noise - who else could it be than Captain Ahab - will soon go to his cabin, leaving the ship in tranquility. I just waited and waited, I do not remember how long, but the sound did not want to cease. After a while, it started to drive me crazy. It was similar to the feeling when a person is tortured by letting water drops fall on the head to one certain point for long minutes or hours. Queequeg told me a story about this method a few months ago. Waterdrops were used in some societies to torment their culprits. A thing that seems to be harmless, but drives you crazy after a while. So did I feel in connection with the never-ending hammering. Finally I decided to get out of my cabin, go upstairs and have an inconvenient but hopefully effective conversation with Mr.Ahab.

So I did. As I was walking upstairs, full of anger and planning all the things I would say to the Captain, suddenly I heard an inhuman, dreadful shout I had never ever heard before in my life. No doubt, it came from the deck, it could not come from anywhere else. The loud roar became even louder as I was walking up on the ladder and finally turned to rampage as I stepped on the flooring of the deck. This was the point when I wished I had never moved out of my cabin, but it was already too late. An unbelievable, unforgettable spectacle appeared in front of my eyes.

Captain Ahab was standing at the mass-head, all over around him blood and pieces of body parts: here a head,
there an arm...(if you do not mind, I would not continue.) Ahab was screaming and blasting. I was shocked, seeing all these bloody bodyparts around him and realizing that these were the mates - Starbuck, Stubb and Flask - but the moment when I almost got a heart-attack was when I glanced at Ahab and realized that he is becoming a lunatic monster, a Leviathan, himself! His face turned white, extremely white, then a snow-white hump grew out of his back. Only his ivory bone-leg remained, the whole human body had turned into the body of Moby! And Moby started to speak in a human voice, and what is more, in Ahab’s voice!

He said: 'This is my revenge, my bloody revenge on the whole humankind! I am Captain Ahab, yes, a human; but I am also Moby Dick, the Whale, the Monster; all this in one pent-up body, half-human, half-animal! So far I had the body of a human and the soul of a whale, my life was all about whale-hunting and taking revenge on the White Whale. But now things have changed, my body turned into Moby’s, and my soul from now on is human. An animalistic soul can live in a human body, but a human soul cannot bear to be enlocked into a body of an animal! No better revenge than this!’ - he laughed aloud, then looked at me and continued:

'I do not want to hurt you. You have a family and never wanted to hunt or kill me. Not like these, here.' - he pointed with his ivory-leg at the dead bodies, lacerated body-parts. 'But I have a task for you before I leave this ship. I want you to write my story. Write down everything you saw and share it with everyone you can. People must get to know that revenge, which rules a man’s life, will lead here. The more you chase the subject of your revenge to avenge it, the
more similar you get to it and finally the much-hated person’s or animal’s soul moves into you and that will be very hellish, really hellish!’- he rattled, then stood on the fringe of the ship, where finally his ivory-leg became a tale.

‘Do not forget what I told you! If you do, I will come back for you, just as I did come for Captain Ahab!’- he hissed looking at me, then murmured a ’Merry Christmas!’ (how ironical a Whale), jumped into the ocean and dissappeared, hopefully forever. As soon as he disappeared out of sight, I immediately went to my cabin.

It took me a few hours to calm down a little. Then, I could have fallen asleep because I woke up in my bed, with my head lying on the diary. I rubbed my eyes and it took me a few minutes to remember what had happened the previous day (or was it even days before?!). It seemed to be so untrue, so impossible, so unbelievable that I began to believe that it was only a nightmare. But then, suddenly I saw something that set all my doubts at rest. I saw blood, on the floor. Bloody footprints. I decided to follow the footprints; they led up to the deck. As I climbed up the ladder and stepped on the floor, I was prepared for the bloody view I saw previously, - yesterday, or who knows when the scathing encounter could have been,- and thought that there can be no more surprise for me. I was wrong. There WAS a surprise.

There was NO blood. NO bodyparts. NOTHING. No signs that anything horrifying had happened here last night.

I was all alone on a crazy, spooky ship. On a ship that was without a captain, without any mates. And that WAS horrifying. I was the only living person here. I did not know
what to do. I mean, I actually knew. I had to write, right at
the moment. I had an inner urge to write down this
impossible, but true situation. I did not want Moby to come
back to me, no, I really did not. So I took my diary and
started a letter, a new one, THIS one. And I have been
writing it since THAT day. Meanwhile I became sick, very-
very sick, I almost died and thus was not able to write for a
while, which was approximately 6 months ago.

If you, dear friend of mine, are lucky enough, YOU will
receive this letter. I do not know what will happen to me or
what will happen to THIS letter, the only thing I know is
that I had to write it. If YOU happen to be the lucky
receiver, please show it to everbody you can, and spread the
message of the Whale: 'Do not take revenge on anybody
because if you do, Revenge will avenge you.'

If you do not wish to accomplish the spread of this message,
God have mercy on all on this planet.

P.S. The letter above was found by me, Captain Sparrow on
the Pequod in 1897, about 40 years after it was written. On
the boat there were neither human creatures nor traces of
human presence. The only sign that testifies the fact that
there must have been humans on the ship sometime was an
ivory-leg. Everything else is a mystery.

I wanted to go back to pull the ship out to the land. But by
the time I arrived there, the Pequod had dissappeared. No
human eyes saw it again.

I decided to publish the letter in *American Gazette*, to make
it possible for all the people on the New Continent to get the
Whale’s message.
II

ESSAYS
The original matter touching the Sperm Whale to be found in their volumes is necessarily small; but so far as it goes, it is of excellent quality, though mostly confined to scientific description. As yet, however, the Sperm Whale, scientific or poetic, lives not complete in any literature. Far above all other hunted whales, his is an unwritten life.

(Moby Dick, Chapter 32)
Intimacy with Ishmael: Narrative, Subversion in *Moby-Dick*

Dylan Travis

Melville's *Moby-Dick* maintains its titanic place in the American cultural consciousness. Whaling, while thoroughly un-romanticized by domestic and international conservation movements, remains an exciting, mysterious curiosity. The iconic Captain Ahab (along with his gruff cries of "the White Whale!") is often represented unwittingly as the archetypal whaling-captain: obsessive, violent, biblical. Regardless, mention the title to just about any American reader, and the first association with the book is its memorable first line. "Call me Ishmael," our introduction to Melville's meditative alter-ego, is burned into the memories of all who figuratively set sail with him, navigating the turbulent waters of his epic, tragic narrative. "Call me Ishmael" is simple and catchy, to be sure, but this is not why the imperative is so entrenched in the discourse surrounding the novel.

Ishmael's character is fascinating from the first, moral yet subversive, at turns taking the central role in the novel, narrating stories within it, and disappearing from the narrative completely. He is a whaler with a conscience, but not necessarily a Christian or even Western derived one. Like the White Whale that the Pequod pursues, Ishmael is forever on the move, his narrative style and structure changing tack with the principal movements of the plot, or the particular taboo he wishes to explode. Through his stylistic, dictional, and referential choices, Ishmael ultimately proves a truly subversive narrator, engaging the reader and challenging nineteenth-century (and in some cases contemporary) social norms.
The question, then, is one of Ishmael's methods. Why would a conservative nineteenth-century Melville reader bother to finish the book, when his narrator is challenging his worldview at every turn? It seems that many did not (see "Reviews of Moby Dick" in the Norton Critical Edition of the text). Perhaps it is the benefit of over one hundred fifty years of thought since the publication of the text that allows us to regard Ishmael in a sympathetic light, which puts Melville far ahead of his time indeed. However, his techniques are products of their time, and should be examined.

Our introduction to the novel is not, in fact, an introduction to Ishmael. The reader is first greeted with a somewhat faulty, less-than-inclusive Etymology section. Ishmael is ruled out by the text, which explains that the section has been "Supplied by a Late Consumptive Usher to a Grammar School", a stark contrast to the swarthy, sea-faring Ishmael. This section, as well as the "Extracts" section which immediately follows it, is an example of what I shall be calling our narrator's "encyclopedic approach". Since these sections are not immediately attributable to Ishmael, they will be avoided in this study, but they exemplify the style: a non-fictional, studious, inter-textual approach to knowledge of all things about whaling. Of interest is Ishmael's use of the narrative role to subvert and redefine science, while still providing the reader with an "objective" overview of whaling.

With "Call me Ishmael", the reader is plunged into the most common form of narration in *Moby-Dick*, the first person. Ishmael, a ruminative and complex character, utilizes this form for most of the book, relying on an understood "language of witnessing," that is, the reader must take it for granted that Ishmael the character witnesses these events himself and relays them to us. However, there
is a tension between what is actually relayed and what Ishmael could actually have witnessed, imbuing him with a somewhat more omniscient role. Ishmael utilizes first person narration (often in tandem with the second-person direct address) for a myriad of subversive ends. Chief among these is the relationship with and humanization of Queequeg, which includes an element of religious subversion as well.

Direct address, while usually used alongside the first-person, plays a very different role in Ishmael's narrative idiom. Often the tones are imploring, questioning, or moralizing; the reader is asked to agree, or understand. Often these moments are found at the end of chapters, inviting the reader to think twice about themes presented. Ishmael often uses the archaic "ye" form to imply intimacy with the reader, and also to lend gravity to concepts important to him.

The discussion of the "ye" form brings up another important aspect of Ishmael's narrative voice. Linguistic choices are important in the text, as often the language of whaling is one of slang and unfamiliar jargon. Often Ishmael will shift between formal, biblical language, the salty dialect of the whaling boat, and scholarly, almost theoretical prose in the same chapter.

The final issue to be addressed is the absence of narration, that is, when is Ishmael with us, and when is he not? What is the significance of his appearances or disappearances? Why do stage directions appear with such frequency? The sense of drama in Moby-Dick is of the utmost importance to the tone of the novel, and should be looked at carefully.
Queequeg and Ishmael

A pure love, untainted by social, racial, and gender biases, may never be achieved, which is why Ishmael's portrayal of his is so shocking to modern readers. Of course, it may also be shocking because his "lover" is Queequeg, the novel's Pacific Islander "noble savage" character. The scene of their budding friendship/love is perhaps the most intimate in the novel, and certainly one of the only moments of interpersonal confidence. What is of interest is how Ishmael draws the reader in, wraps him in his/her confiding, intimate imagery, and ultimately subverts and challenges his/her notions of race, homosocial/sexual relationships, and religion, in one neatly wrapped episode.

Chief among Ishmael's techniques in Chapter 10 is his very intimate use of the first-person narrative. At times in *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael's first person can be somewhat detached from his senses, that is, a headier, metaphysical reading experience. Here, the intimate personal interaction seems to awaken a deep sensuality in our narrator, usually buried in the narrative or reserved for descriptions of the whale's grandeur. The style is less like a treatise on whaling, and more like Ishmael's personal diary. There is little or, no address of the reader in this section (beginning on page 56, part of the chapter entitled "A Bosom Friend"), but a more personal recollection. Even his rhetorical questions, usually posed to the reader, seem positioned inward. Ishmael wonders, "What is worship?" perhaps his first questioning of faith in the novel (57). First person pronouns are the rule in this section, with Ishmael's intimate "ye" never appearing in regards to the reader. Of course, most important to the creation of intimacy are Ishmael's sensuous descriptions, which pervade the section. The passage begins with a beautiful, romantic description of the setting:
As I sat there in that now lonely room; the fire
burning low, in that mild stage when, after its first
intensity has warmed the air, it then only glows to be
looked at; the evening shades and phantoms
gathering round the casements, and peering in upon
us silent, solitary twain; the storm booming without
in solemn swells; I began to be sensible of strange
feelings. I felt a melting in me. (56)

One of Melville's signature long, languorous sentences,
this softly lit room is loaded with significance. Ishmael and
Queequeg are sitting in bed together, and yet the room is
"now lonely", a tying of the two souls together, a spiritual
bond or union created by a feeling of separation from the
world. This reading is bolstered by the paradoxical
description of Queequeg and Ishmael as "silent, solitary
twain". The description of the fire is evocative, "glowing"
with sexual power; we can safely assume that its "first
intensity" is the direct antecedent of the "melting" which
occurs so provocatively in the next sentence.

The "mild," "warmed" atmosphere of Ishmael's love-
est is contrasted by way of semicolon with the "shades and
phantoms gathering round the casements", representing the
outside world, the other, forces of repression and
oppression. Phantoms are a continuous trope in the novel,
avways representative of the unknown, the blank, the other;
for example, the Whale, or Fedallah's crew in later chapters.
Fedallah and Queequeg are opposite images of savagery in
the novel. Queequeg represents a known, conquered
species, the noble savage, loyal and loving. Fedallah is
darker, the unknown, blank. A phantom. It is significant that
these phantoms are simply "peering in," they (and the
roaring storm, presaging the powerful, destructive ocean
conditions) have no bearing on the pure love of Queequeg
and Ishmael. Of course, the narrative sets their love aside as
soon as the Pequod sets sail, but here it is still simple and straightforward.

The last two phrases in this passage are brief and powerful. The "strange feelings" Ishmael becomes aware of are romantic stirrings, perhaps unusual for a grizzled seadog like him. The "melting" is a preface to the references to sperm present in future chapters, especially during Chapter 94, "A Squeeze of the Hand", a fairly blatant homosexual image. The tender language here is subversive even in its existence. Does our stereotype of the rough and tumble whaleboat sailor include these quiet, affectionate moments? Surely in the 19th Century, whalemen and savages were not generally thought capable of this sort of high romantic imagery and sentiment. It is a very enlightened, literary sort of language employed here. Ishmael continues his soliloquy:

No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it. There he sat, his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits. Wild he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those very things that would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets that thus drew me. I'll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy. (56)

A clearly subversive passage, one of the many which would contribute to Herman Melville's public castigation in regards to religion in the press of his day. Ishmael poses his relationship with Queequeg as a pacifier, a positive, peaceful alternative to the hazily defined "wolfish world" which he is ostensibly a participator in. The word "savage" poses a problem to modern sensibilities, as the "noble
savage" stereotype is seen as offensive, and has been thoroughly debunked. However, for Melville's time, a noble savage stereotype poses far less of a problem than a "bloodthirsty savage" stereotype, which was probably far more prevalent, therefore making this passage at the very least progressive, if not politically correct in our time.

Nevertheless, Melville (Ishmael) decides to accentuate Queequeg's purity, his savageness. Ishmael's intimate diction ("soothing", "splintered heart", "the very magnets that thus drew me") allows the reader a certain identification with Queequeg. These sort of terms are in strong opposition to descriptors of Western society: "civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits" characterize Ishmael's idea of the Western world, the very foundation of Christianity, "Christian kindness" is nothing but a "hollow courtesy".

Following an invitation to be "bedfellows" once again, Queequeg and Ishmael engage in the reading of a book, usually an activity reserved for the solitary. The moment, despite reading like a commercial for a library, is an important one in their relationship. That Ishmael and Queequeg first bond over an unidentified text has no little significance. What could they be reading? A book on whaling? A dictionary? Certainly not a bible. After their literary bonding session, Queequeg and Ishmael share a "social smoke", and Queequeg declares that they are "married; meaning, in his country's phrase, that we were bosom friends; he would gladly die for me, if need should be". The implications of two men being married, even figuratively, are obvious. Melville has no qualms about upturning antiquated social norms in his novel, even if they still haven't been upturned in American society.

The chapter closes with Ishmael's first idol worship, perhaps the ultimate piece of blasphemy in the novel. Melville places Ishmael in the "infallible Presbyterian
Church" (57), a move that a footnote in the *Norton Critical Edition* credits with stirring up the "wrath of Presbyterians and other evangelistic Protestants. But the tone of Ishmael's justification for blasphemy is never mocking; in fact, it is well reasoned and poignant. Ishmael switches to a less intimate form of address in this passage, a sort of self-questioning and reflection that allows the reader a look into his process of reasoning, a gaze that would be quite important for a skeptical reader who is ideologically entrenched in, say, the Presbyterian Church. And who but the most vitriolic, offended Presbyterian could resist the sweetly romantic final line? "Thus, then, in our hearts' honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg — a cosy, loving pair" (57).

### A Whaleboat's Education

*Moby-Dick* often reads as a defense of Ishmael's progressive views against critical skepticism, but this does not just extend to the religious sphere. Each taboo or misconception is handled differently. Depictions that could be considered blasphemous, for example, might be couched in romantic, interpersonal asides. For example, Queequeg and Ishmael's love overcomes petty religious differences. This sort of sentiment is absent when Ishmael tackles other topics, such as the legitimization of the whale-fishery. Ishmael's concern with the topic, while tongue-in-cheek at times, is prevalent throughout the novel, and deserves a look, especially since the rhetorical and scholastic devices he employs in its service are often quite unique.

Chapter 24, entitled "*The Advocate*", assumes the form of a legal argument, perhaps a closing statement in a grand trial against the whaling business. Ishmael admits that whaling is "not accounted on a level with what are called
the liberal professions", an attitude that he is "all anxiety" to correct (97). The chapter continues by expounding upon the importance of whaling in all spheres of human business, touching on whales in war, economics, and politics. However, rhetorically, Ishmael's most interesting moment comes while discussing the aesthetic value of whales. His argument nearing completion, Ishmael challenges the reader:

But, if in the face of all of this, you still declare that whaling has no aesthetically noble associations connected with it, then am I ready to shiver fifty lances with you there, and unhorse you with a split helmet every time. (100)

A direct call to battle with the reader is rare in literature, but the subject is a high priority with Ishmael. "Shiver", in its archaic form, means to break or splinter, quite a violent image for a literary disagreement. The "fifty lances" are perhaps representative of the knowledge Ishmael is prepared to duel with, and he doesn't disappoint. The next section is an enumeration of Ishmael's well-researched whaling references, recalling the "Extracts" section that prefaces the novel. Each defense is preceded by a fallacious rhetorical question, and then incredulous repetition from Ishmael himself, italicized for emphasis. The style is legal and encyclopedic, full of references to existing texts and histories.

Ishmael's first reference seeks to prove that whales are of great literary significance. Figures of biblical (Job), historical (Alfred the Great), and political (Edmund Burke) significance are invoked. Ishmael's defenses come in the form of passionate, staccato sentences, as if the truth of the matter is glaringly obvious. "Who but mighty Job!" References to royalty are employed at Ishmael's convenience in this passage. Ishmael will invoke Benjamin
Franklin (and his connections to the whaling business) as someone possessing "something better than royal blood", but we also hear that "Whaling is imperial!" and that it is "declared a 'royal fish'".

The tension present between royalty, American identity, and the whale-fishery finally resolves itself near the end of the passage: "No more! Drive down your hat in presence of the Czar, and take it off to Queequeg! No more! I know a man that, in his lifetime, has taken three hundred and fifty whales. I account that man more honorable than that great captain of antiquity who boasted of taking as many walled towns" (100). The statement is direct, exclamatory, and probably quite upsetting to 19th Century sensibilities. Ishmael's juxtaposition of the Czar, at this time the very picture of a powerful monarch, with the savage Queequeg is hard proof of Ishmael's desire to subvert, and to elevate whaling to a respectable position in literature.

The final paragraph of the passage is worth taking a look at, if only as a glimpse into the inner workings of Ishmael's character. He speaks here of a "high hushed world which I might not be unreasonably ambitious of", perhaps a reference to the upper echelons of respected literati, or of academia itself. The way he references it is rather hushed itself, in a humble sort of way. However, it is one of the few glimpses of literary confidence we get from Ishmael. He mentions gloomily that perhaps his "creditors" will find some "precious MSS". (manuscripts) in his desk, but to give all the credit to whaling, for "a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard." A more poignant cry to be taken seriously does not exist in the novel.
Faith, Like a Jackal

A reader cannot be blamed for moments of frustration with Ishmael. While not a traditional unreliable narrator, it is easy to label Ishmael as deeply ambivalent, a soul ever searching, lacking in conviction, or, as he puts it himself, a "wretched infidel". Imagine Ishmael confronted with such doubters. Would he not ask, in his favored biblical tongue, "Who among ye has not questioned their faith?" Though Ishmael's shocking breach of faith (the episode with Queequeg and Yojo) comes near the beginning of the book, it is in a chapter on the metaphysical qualities of "The Fountain" that we finally receive an explanation what one might perceive as a continual religious ambivalence:

And so, through all the thick mists of the dim doubts in my mind, divine intuitions now and then shoot, enkindling my fog with a heavenly ray. And for this I thank God; for all have doubts; many deny; but doubts or denials, few along with them, have intuitions. Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye. (293)

Ishmael's "heavenly ray", his "divine intuition", is evidence of a deep spirituality. This is compared, earlier in the chapter, to the rainbow that appears in the vapors spouted from the whale, to Ishmael a divine apparition. This beautiful metaphor comes at the end of the chapter, one that mixes Ishmael's encyclopedic and metaphysical styles interchangeably. Ishmael decides to "thank God", an act that occurs rather infrequently, but one that symbolizes a belief in a higher power, even if it isn't a Christian one. Ishmael's claims to Presbyterianism, as we have already seen, are often suspect. The last sentence of this passage can be seen
as an explanation of Ishmael's philosophy, and by extension, Melville's. An aesthetic of spiritual skepticism, as opposed to flat-out blasphemy or a watery ambivalence, is what is encoded here.

An early example of this spiritual skepticism (as well as another example of direct address) can be found during Ishmael's first encounter with death, in "The Chapel". Before delivering the punch line on "Faith", Ishmael remarks on the sight of several placards for sailors lost at sea:

Oh! Ye whose dead lie buried beneath the green grass; who standing among flowers can say—here, here lies my beloved; ye know not the desolation that broods in bosoms like these. What bitter blanks in those black-bordered marbles which cover no ashes! What despair in those immovable inscriptions! What deadly voids and unbidden infidelities in the lines that seem to gnaw upon all Faith, and refuse resurrections to the beings who have placelessly perished without a grave. As well might those tablets stand in the cave of Elephanta as here. (45)

The beginning of the passage is typical of Ishmael—exclamatory statements such as "Oh!" or "Ah!" often serve as attention-grabbing introductions to paragraphs such as these. The intimate "ye" is immediately employed, further drawing the reader in (it is absent in the chapter up to this point). The style of the writing is dramatic, in the style of a monologue. Melville's writing style seems to be influenced by Shakespeare a great deal, and it is apparent with such ornate phrases as "who standing among flowers can say—here, here lies my beloved". The prose is rhythmic, poetic. The repetition of "B" words, like "broods in bosoms", gives
an alliterative, smooth flow to what could easily be a
-dramatic monologue.

After addressing the reader in this first line, Ishmael
delivers his complex, fascinating message. The fear of
"blankness" or "blackness" is wrapped up with religious
metaphors in the remainder of the passage, "voids"
juxtaposing with "Faith", the "grave" with "resurrection". For Ishmael, the blankness here is the absence of the sailors' ashes, a lack of closure, emptiness that symbolizes an eternal uncertainty. It is no mistake that the language of resurrection is bound up with this uncertainty, the gnawing "upon all Faith." Things seem bleak for our narrator's conception of Christianity—the very text of the marble plaques turn into the teeth that gnash upon Faith. For Ishmael, the uncertain graves of seafarers are chilling proof of his own mortality, and the essential paradox of Faith itself.

After a brief, soul-searching rumination on the significance of the tomb, Ishmael finally decides: “But Faith, like a jackal, feeds among the tombs, and even from these dead doubts she gathers her most vital hope” (45).

Which opens up a whole host of new questions: What doubts does Ishmael refer to? Are these the doubts of Ishmael, or is he referring to the blankness left by a sailor's grave? Referring to Faith as a "jackal" is loaded as well, investing the concept with a fully negative connotation before reversing it at the end of the sentence with the phrase "vital hope." This statement can be read as a harsh, subversive critique of the concept of "Faith", exactly the sort of thing Ishmael might take aim at. However, in light of the way Ishmael portrays his divine intuitions in later chapters, it can be seen as a more hopeful reading of human behavior. Faith may be blind, and it may scavenge for its
sustenance in unwholesome places, but it still propagates the "vital hope" of humanity.

**Omniscient, Exhaustive: Melville's Realism**

While much of the novel is spent trying to legitimize whaling, or subvert commonly held beliefs on faith and Christianity, there are sections in which Ishmael becomes aware of the text itself, that is, the work becomes self-reflexive and self-contemplative. Ishmael, in the process of presenting such a trove of information to the reader, becomes quite aware of both the strictures placed upon him, and the vastness of the task before him. This becomes especially apparent when Ishmael takes on a subject with the encyclopedia as his tool. With a subject as mighty as the whale, how could one not include all there is to offer? Ishmael expounds on this very problem in "The Fossil Whale":

> Since I have undertaken to manhandle this Leviathan, it behoves me to approve myself omnisciently exhaustive in the enterprise; not overlooking the minutest seminal germs of his blood, and spinning him out to the uttermost coil of his bowels. Having already described him in most of his present habitatory and anatomical peculiarities, it now remains to magnify him in an archaeological, fossiliferous, and antediluvian point of view. Applied to any other creature than the Leviathan—to an ant or a flea—such portly terms might justly be deemed unwarrantably grandiloquent. But when Leviathan is the text, the case is altered. (349)

Referring to the Leviathan as a "text" is not unheard of in *Moby-Dick*. For example, in the "Cetology" chapter, Ishmael decides that categorization of whales will function
in a "folio" system, comparing them to different sizes of books. However, the unfolding of this passage is unique in its construction. Ishmael's diction grows increasingly "grandiloquent", as he reflects on the magnitude of the creatures being discussed. The section begins with a reflection on the handling ("manhandling") of the Leviathan as a text itself—Ishmael resolves to be "omnisciently exhaustive" in his treatment of the animal. It is, in a word, a resolution to define the animal closely within the strictures of a certain 19th Century literary aesthetic, a realism based on the encyclopedic style. At the same time, Melville's joke is on Ishmael. As a first-person narrator, how can Ishmael ever be omniscient in any way? It is an interesting moment of self-reflexivity in the novel.

The words suddenly proliferate and enlarge in the second sentence. Nonsense terms like "habitatory" and "fossiliferous" start appearing, alongside such biblical mouthfuls as "antediluvian" and scientific terms such as "anatomical peculiarities". Ishmael has a sense of humor about it all, referring (with a typical sailor's pun) to them as "portly terms", but their existence is indisputable.

The next passage is a true classic:

One often hears of writers that rise and swell with their subject, though it may seem but an ordinary one. How, then, with me, writing of this Leviathan? Unconsciously my chirography expands into placard capitals. Give me a condor's quill! Give me Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand! Friends, hold my arms! For in the mere act of penning my thoughts of this Leviathan, they weary me, and make me faint with their outreaching comprehensiveness of sweep, as if to include the whole circle of the sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and mastodons, past, present, and to come, with all the
revolving panoramas of empire on earth, and throughout the whole universe, not excluding its suburbs. Such, and so magnifying, is the virtue of a large and liberal theme! We expand to its bulk. To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme. No great and enduring volume can be written on the flea, though many there be who have tried it. (349)

A wonderful example of 19th century realist aesthetic shining through, and perhaps meant as an explanatory note as to why *Moby-Dick* is so long and difficult. Ishmael still regales the reader here with his adopted grandiloquence, his prose as verbose and flowery as it ever gets. Note that like the swelling of the author and his subject, the very text itself is expanding: Melville's "chirography" (handwriting) expands into "placard capitals". In a melodramatic gesture, Ishmael calls out to the reader, first for a pen, second for a volcanic inkwell, and third for a bracing arm. This sort of direct address, while forging a somewhat contrived bond with the reader, heightens the drama, inflates the importance of the passage. Not only his grand language, but his sweeping, melodramatic actions are meant to parallel the size of the mighty whale being riffed upon at length. A reference is made earlier on the page to the size of dictionary Ishmael is forced to consult in order to express himself properly ("a huge quarto edition of Johnson"). Here, however, Ishmael is referring to his own text, his own whaling encyclopedia, and the amount of knowledge being thrown together, an amount, which makes him "faint" with its magnitude. At the end of the passage, he invites the reader (or the royal "we") to "expand to its bulk".
A Dramatic Aside

There are dozens of ways to interrogate the narration of *Moby-Dick*, but one of the most interesting aspects of the novel is the drive towards a classical dramatic aesthetic, and the way Ishmael accomplishes it through his *absence*. As we have seen, one of Melville's intentions with the novel was the legitimization of the whale-fishery. It follows, therefore, that a novel full of lewd, unsavory depictions of whalem en would not do. Neither would one containing unelevated language be appropriate—language entirely in sailor's vernacular, or even one entirely depicted in the first person. This is why, at times, Ishmael disappears from the narrative, making room for Melville's idea of elevated discourse, that is, drama.

Stage directions, monologue, and even a full-blown script make appearances early in the novel. However, for purposes of contrast, an episode in the chapter entitled "The Candles" is of interest. The chapter begins typically enough, with an introduction from who we assume must be Ishmael. But suddenly, Stubb gives a bit of a speech, and then he "—(sings)" (380). It is a stage direction, a break in the narrative, a tear in the fibers of the increasingly frail text. However, it is small enough to go unnoticed, the narrative continues, and the reader suspects nothing. After all, there have been previous chapters, which read like scripts, though they were self-contained!

The story progresses, the climax approaches as Ahab and crew encounter a holy trinity of fire ("three tapering white flames, each of the three tall masts was silently burning in that sulphurous air, like three gigantic wax tapers before an altar" [381]). Ahab proclaims, "[I]ook up at it; mark it well; the white flame but lights the way to the White Whale!" And with that, he delivers a paragraph-long monologue, a
sermon of sorts. It is *here* that Ishmael drops out—at the unholy climax of the novel, the peak of Ahab's devilish powers—and stage directions take over, throwing down lightning from outside the narration, outside the text, outside the petty world of Ishmael and Ahab; like blank bolts of warning from an incensed God: "Sudden, repeated flashes of lightning,' the nine flames leap lengthwise to thrice their previous height; Ahab, with the rest, closes his eyes, his right hand pressed hard upon them" (383).
The directions place the reader directly in the action, the bolts fly down upon our heads, not just Ahab and Ishmael's. We understand the religious significance through the power of immediacy: this is not a witnessed act, a tall tale relegated to us through a fallible, earthly medium (Ishmael). This is the arm of the author, the authorial role flexing its muscles; this is Melville's conception of God.

**A Final Address**

No tome exists that can possibly hold all interpretations of Ishmael's role in the novel, Ishmael's relationship with Melville (an *incredibly* important aspect which I unfortunately must gloss over), or even every aspect of Ishmael's personal character. We receive very few indicators of Ishmael's background (such as the scene with his abusive stepmother), but this could also be interrogated. However, like a holy book, Melville has constructed the text around the ability to open to any chapter and be drawn in, and Ishmael functions perfectly in this role. Melville's subversive ends are accomplished often, as we have seen, but it is not Ishmael's primary role. Like any great author, Melville has given us a device, a tool to interpret his book, a theory with which to decode his voluminous text. We are given Ishmael.
Works Cited

At the very core of human experience lies an element so fundamental to existence that without it, we would perhaps cease to exist; or, at best, would cease to exist as we do now. The nature of a human's relationships can be said to compose the very foundation upon which his existence is predicated. How one relates to his fellow humans, himself, and his environment are the essential elements of what we know to be existence. The task of trying to imagine an existence without these relationships is merely an exercise in futility, for such a condition would reduce the human experience to nothing. Without relating or responding (which can be thought of as relating in itself) to oneself, to one's fellow humans, or to one's environment, what are we then but rocks waiting to be slowly decomposed by nature? By adopting this approach towards relationships, then, I encourage you to consider an interpretation and evaluation of Herman Melville's epic *Moby-Dick* through a close reading of the nature and development of the aforementioned relationships. By examining the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, which will be extended to include those relationships between characters and the whale and between the narrator and audience, it is my hope to expose the abundance of meaning and interpretations that lie within the dynamics and complexities of such relationships. By limiting our approach to *Moby-Dick* to stay within the confines of the variety of the present relationships, we will not only be able to have a firm handle to grip - an ever
important tool to possess when dealing with such an evasive whale of a novel - but will be able to encounter the didacticism of Melville through the most fundamental circumstance of the human condition.

During the first few chapters of his novel, Melville creates Ishmael's presence- his style of narrating, which includes first, second, and third person, as well as his attitude towards the universe and towards himself. However, what is most interesting to note here is how Melville is able to establish the viewpoints and perspectives that Ishmael carries with him from a time that predates our current point of action. Interestingly enough, Ishmael possesses a variety of prejudices that dictate his reactions and responses, which are ultimately his ways of relating to other people. Our first glimpse into the nature of Ishmael's interpersonal relationships occurs at The Spouter-Inn, where our narrator encounters the vernacular-speaking landlord. While this relationship only proceeds to be fairly undeveloped, it does provide a point of foundation from which our discussion of interpersonal relationships should proceed, for it provides us with the starting point from which Ishmael's attitude and approach towards other people develops. Upon his request for a room at the Inn, the landlord asks Ishmael, "... you haint no objections to sharing a harpooner's blanket, have ye? I s'pose you are goin' a whalin', so you'd better get use to that sort of thing." Upon hearing this, we are immediately struck by Ishmael's ambivalence towards the landlord's proposition: "I told him that I never like to sleep two in a bed; that if I should ever do so, it would depend upon who the harpooner might be.” While he appears to agree to the offer, he is clearly reluctant. Immediately, the cause of Ishmael's apprehension becomes clear, which is much more interesting than the apprehension itself. Contemplating his situation with a vivid
and wild imagination, Ishmael admits, "I could not help it, but I began to feel suspicious of this "dark complexioned" harpooner. At any rate, I made up my mind that if it so turned out that we should sleep together, he must undress and get into bed before I did." Alas, the mere thought of sharing a bed with another man does not nearly cause the same level of uneasiness as does the thought of sharing a bed with a "dark complexioned harpooner," which sheds considerable light on the prejudices that Ishmael carries with him into this tale. Writing in 1851, which preceded the Emancipation Proclamation by 11 years and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment by 14, Melville was indeed entirely attuned to the mentality and discourse of colonialism and slavery. While it is not my aim here to determine whether or not Melville himself possessed these prejudices, it is my objective to promote the idea that Ishmael does posses prejudices- at least, in the early stages of the novel. However, these prejudices do serve a function. Not only does Ishmael become immediately unnerved by the mention of a "dark complexioned" bedmate, he becomes "suspicious." His response to the landlord's mention of the complexion of the harpooner indicates two conditions of Ishmael's prejudicial mentality. First, the fact that the mention of his dark complexion rendered Ishmael suspicious parallels the attitude of colonialists and slave owners alike towards their subjects and slaves. Suspicion and unnerving being two chief characteristics of the Western subject in response to his Eastern, or 'other', subject, Melville presents us with the possibility that *Moby-Dick* is a novel that engages in colonial discourse. However, through the development of Ishmael and this "dark complexioned harpooner," who is, of course, Queequeg, we discover these initial prejudices to serve as a foundation from which Ishmael is able to learn and grow - suggesting
the didacticism of Melville and perhaps his discontent with such a discourse that was so common in his time. The second characteristic of Ishmael’s prejudice is indicated by his strongly stated assertion that" ... [the dark complexioned harpooner] must undress and get into bed before I did," which suggests Ishmael's self-proclaimed superiority to the harpooner of whom his only knowledge is the tone of his skin. Just imagine the scene that this passage describes: Ishmael standing over his dark complexioned subject, commanding that he undresses before him and get into bed. Not only is this a ridiculous image, akin to a slave owner addressing his slaves or a parent directing a child, it suggests that he feels superior to another person strictly based upon the color of their skin, since he knows nothing else of the harpooner aside from his complexion. Furthermore, even when Ishmael does come to know more about Queequeg, he regards him with discourse that echoes the principles and elements of primitivism and Dryden's *noble savage*. Ishmael, speaking to himself and his audience, declares " ... the truth is, these savages have an innate sense of delicacy, say what you will; it is marvelous how essentially polite they are." What is even more indicating of his position is his self-reflective statement regarding his voyeurism, which was caused by his "... curiosity getting the better of [his] breeding." Juxtaposing "savage" with Ishmael's "breeding," we discover a sense of moral superiority. ‘However, as the novel progresses, we find a convergence of the native and the civilized *man* into one being: human.

By establishing Ishmael's prejudices, Melville sets up the audience to be further touched or affected by the flourishing of the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg (the dark complexioned harpooner) that ensues. Not only is there going to be a cultural barrier to break
through for both men, as we will soon see, but there is also
a barrier which Ishmael must break through and eventually
shatter within himself, which will be discussed in greater
detail later. Upon our first encounter between Ishmael and
Queequeg, the characteristics of colonial discourse further
arise. Describing his entrance into the room, Ishmael notes:
"Holding a light in one hand, and that identical New
Zealand head in the other, the stranger entered the room … I
was all eagerness to see his face, .." Watching every
movement of his bedfellow, Ishmael assumes the role of a
voyeur in such a way that he separates himself from his
'subject,' studying his every gesture with a scientific but
biased eye. Even at the point when we think that Ishmael
has overcome his prejudices when he states "... a man can
be honest in any sort of skin," we soon discover that he only
finds this to be a valid statement if "any sort of skin" means
white, as indicated by the statement which immediately
follows: "But then, what to make of his unearthly
complexion", it might be nothing but a good coat of tropical
tanning; but I never heard of a hot sun's tanning a white
man into a purplish yellow one." As he continues to watch
Queequeg and his "queer proceedings," Ishmael's state of
"uncomfortableness" becomes "increased," and we are
somewhat led to believe that he will never overcome his
apprehension, However, upon "waking the next morning
about daylight, [Ishmael] found Queequeg's arm thrown
over [him] in the most loving and affectionate manner." A
sharp turn from the adjectives Ishmael previously used to
describe Queequeg, which include but are not limited to
'savage,' 'heathen,' and 'wild,' the use of the terms 'loving'
and 'affectionate' indicate and foreshadow the change of
heart on Ishmael's behalf, as well as the intimacy of the
interpersonal relationship that ensues, By the next night the
two men share a bed together, they become, as Ishmael
announces, "bosom buddies." Far from the suspicions and apprehensions Ishmael harbored towards Queequeg initially, he now views him with such affection that one cannot help but feel a sense of homoeroticism developing between the two (although I do concede that this never comes to fruition). Describing their interactions with such statements as "we had lain thus in bed, chatting, and napping at short intervals, and Queequeg was now and then affectionately throwing his brown tattooed legs over mine" Ishmael indicates how intimate their relationship has already become - and how even more intimate it will soon be. Perhaps because a homoerotic relationship never develops between the two, Melville uses their physical closeness in this scene to symbolize the platonic intimacy that is and will continue to develop between these two men, as well as between the crew of the *Pequod*. What is further interesting to analyze is the effect that Queequeg initially has on Ishmael. As he was at first intimidated, suspicious of, and ambivalent towards Queequeg, it is very surprising to find that “… no more [Ishmael's] splintered heart and maddening hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it. There [Queequeg] sat, his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits." (Not only has Ishmael overcome his initial prejudice towards "dark complexioned" men, he has actually come to learn from one and has adjusted his attitude and mentality towards the world in which he lives. Through the development of their interpersonal relationship, as well as through the initiative of Ishmael to change his own perspective, Melville suggests to his audience not only the limitations of a closed mind, but the advantages of an open one. With a predominantly American audience with very American prejudices, it is not a stretch to suggest that
Melville is speaking didactically in these passages with a clear intention of disrupting the social norms of the time and inserting his own critique of modern civilization in the Western world.

While the intimacy of the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg is recorded in the most depth and breadth in the beginning of the novel, and is not developed too much further throughout the remainder, the ending scene described in the Epilogue is worth considering for the multitude of symbolism and meaning that it suggests to the reader. As we just noted, Ishmael acknowledges, in Chapter 10 that the lessons of decency, humanity, and kindness he learned from Queequeg helped to redeem his "splintered heart." What is perhaps most interesting about this is the function of foreshadowing that it assumes (albeit it remains unknown until completion of the work).

Here, Ishmael has essentially had the essence of life returned to him by Queequeg; for with a splintered heart, one views life through the most dreary and depressing lens imaginable, Symbolically, Queequeg has saved Ishmael's life. By the conclusion of the work, we discover that Queequeg will again save Ishmael's life, although this time it is both literal and symbolic. When the Pequod goes down, our narrator is saved when he is "buoyed up by that coffin" that coffin which, built at the behest of Queequeg, is the last unconscious gesture made by that noble harpooner to bring Ishmael to salvation. Suggestive of a plethora of meanings, this final scene invites the reader to make a number of considerations. This reader views the final scene as something much larger than the intricacies of friendship, which, as previously stated, serve as a conduit through which Melville's didacticisms can flow.

With Ishmael established as a white man with the "breeding" of a civilized Westerner, Queequeg becomes
juxtaposed as a representative of the dark complexioned "other" who lacks the breeding of the Western man. However, as Queequeg time and again saves Ishmael, is it not unreasonable to suggest that the entire sequence is an allegory for the need of the Western, civilized world to be saved by the primitive and uncivilized non-Western world? Ishmael, who is at best a rudiment of a whale man when compared to Queequeg, can be thus said to stand for the "enlightened" civilized man who in reality knows nothing of the natural world he lives in, while Queequeg assumes the role of the "primitive" and "natural" man who, while lacking in the modern conventions of civilization, is more equipped to deal with the world as it is. In this sense, Melville disrupts the Western discourse of colonialism and superiority by placing the tenets of the Western mentality of domination into a setting and circumstance in which they fall apart: the vast sea, one of the last truly unaltered landscapes of the natural world. Perhaps what Melville is suggesting is that the modern, civilized man has become so detached from the natural world, indeed alienated from that world, that he has been rendered unequipped to deal with a magnanimous force of nature like the sea. Perhaps Ishmael can be read as a civilized man attempting to return to the natural world from which he originated, only to be rejected when he is found to be unable to manage himself in such a setting. However one chooses to interpret this situation, all of which are appropriate (which will be further expanded upon when we discuss the readers' involvement in the novel), the obvious allegories and binary oppositions of civilized/uncivilized, modern/traditional, and light/dark cannot be ignored nor easily dismissed.

Equal in its primacy to interpersonal relationships are the various intrapersonal relationships Melville develops throughout *Moby-Dick*, which allow Melville to explore
how we relate to ourselves and the consequences that may arise when these relationships become strained. While he develops some type of intrapersonal relationship for nearly every character that is present in this work, only the most flourished and explicated will be made topics of discussion here. I am speaking, of course, of the intrapersonal relationships that develop within Ishmael, Queequeg, and Ahab. For the latter, discussion will be reserved for later, when I examine the fatalist captain's interpersonal relationship with the whale (which, as we will see, may in fact be nothing more than an intrapersonal relationship with himself) and how this impacts the dynamics of his intrapersonal relationship. However, we may begin with Queequeg, who has by far the least chronicled intrapersonal relationship of the aforementioned three; however, I contend that this is a consequence of the degree to which his self-consciousness is present. When compared with Ishmael, who is seemingly self-conscious throughout the entirety of the work, Queequeg seems to operate directly in relation to the events and occurrences that proceed around him. This is not to liken Queequeg to a more animalistic state, but rather, as something to be viewed positively when juxtaposed with Ishmael, who embodies the ever self-conscious civilized man of the Western world.

For instance, let us examine briefly a scene that has previously been explicated in a different respect, that being Chapter 10 which Melville appropriately entitled "A Bosom Friend." Speaking of Queequeg, Ishmael states: "He seemed to take me quite as naturally and unbiddenly as I to him; and when our smoke was over, he pressed his forehead against mine, clasped me round the waist, and said that henceforth we were ... bosom friends ... he would gladly die for me." What is interesting to notice here is Queequeg's complete lack of regard for himself, who he is willing to sacrifice for
the good of our narrator Ishmael. As Ishmael himself notes, "... in this simple savage those old rules [of a countryman] would not apply." Queequeg is not hung up on self-conscious matters like propriety, for he is a man of instinct and reaction, rather than calculation and contemplation, His affinity towards Ishmael is present within him as a feeling, to which he responds rather than considers. Instead of allowing their relationship to develop further before making what would commonly be considered a bold statement, Queequeg announces his commitment to self-sacrifice for his new friend of less than 36 hours. Also interesting and indeed important to note here is Ishmael's lack of reciprocity to Queequeg’s assertion. Ishmael fails to tell Queequeg that he is willing to do the same for his savage companion. There are two distinct differences that arise from a close examination of this scene. First, let us remember that Ishmael is narrating this entire experience- a circumstance that in itself indicates his proportionally greater level of self-consciousness. He describes his feelings and reactions, offers his opinions and emotions. He is a completely self-conscious narrator, as will be further fleshed out by continued analysis of his intrapersonal relationship. Queequeg, on the other hand, is completely delivered to us by Ishmael, so we are automatically restricted in our ability to determine his self-consciousness and the nature of his intrapersonal relationship. However, it is the second difference that arises from this scene which should be given primacy, a difference, we will see, upon which their other relationships are contingent. That difference, of course, is Queequeg's selflessness compared with Ishmael's, which is not so much selfishness as lack of selflessness.

Queequeg's selflessness is further supported by the events that unfold in Chapter 13, when a young country
"bumpkin" loses his balance and falls into the sea. While Ishmael regards the situation with a helpless attitude, exclaiming, "... nothing seemed capable of being done," Queequeg takes action by diving in after his lost comrade. For Queequeg, however, this was not a noble action, nor was it an action he felt the need to be commended for. Such motivations would undoubtedly be the product of a self-conscious mind. Queequeg, on the other hand, operates solely from the instinctual, unconscious mind, as noted by Ishmael when he comments on Queequeg, asking himself "... was there ever such unconsciousness?" What is perhaps the most compelling facet of this situation to consider are the consequences of civilization, rationalism, and the enlightenment on man. Ishmael, a man who prides himself on his 'breeding,' which carries with it the weight of rationalism and enlightenment, is rendered unable to make a decision in the face of a life-or-death situation; rather, his decision is to remain indecisive, or better put, non-responsive: This lack of response can be said to be a product of rational thought, which, for our purposes, can be juxtaposed with instinct. Thus, Ishmael, with his rational thought process, views the boy fall in the water, does not see him emerge, and 'logically' comes to the conclusion that there is nothing to be done. Queequeg, rather, operates solely off of his instincts, which tell him that when a man goes overboard, you go after him. Ignoring the freezing cold water and the 'rationality' which only serves to convince Ishmael that nothing could be done, Queequeg dives right in. Here, perhaps Melville is engaging himself and the reader in a consideration of the limitations of modern rational thought, for a circumstance like the one being discussed here, rationality fails to live up to instinct—a very bold proposition on Melville's part, for the entire foundation of the Western domination rests upon the postulation that
rational (civilized) thought is to be favored over instinctual (primitive) thought, which in this structure is rendered irrational. However, Melville creates a scenario where this entire presupposition fails, which causes the entire foundation upon which Western dominance and superiority rest to be disrupted and ultimately dismissed.

Melville's ability to contain so much symbolism and critique of modernity into such a seemingly simple construction is incredibly noteworthy. Ultimately, he is able to use a characters' intrapersonal relationship to draw out criticism of the society from which that relationship is cast. As we can be thought of as simply constructs of the society into which we are born and raised, our ideas, opinions, and actions can be said to be direct products of that society which limits and constricts our possibilities of existence. This approach to social construction is especially useful in a work like *Moby-Dick*, where characters (especially the main characters) are especially subject to being rendered allegories or symbols of something much larger than a single individual. We have already noted how these become fleshed out by Ishmael and Queequeg's relationships with one another and with themselves. Now, let us shift our discussion towards the relationship between Captain Ahab and his ever-elusive White Whale, which can quite possibly be considered the most symbolic and interpretable relationship of all.

From the early stages of Melville's work, we discover the surface layers of the complexities and dynamics of their relationship. Ahab, who seeks nothing less than total annihilation of Moby Dick, is defined by his vengeance, obsession, and fixation. Rare is the opportunity to encounter Ahab without some discussion of his task or his state of mind (which is completely controlled by his task). Early in his discussion of Captain Ahab, Ishmael offers this passage,
which is an excellent indicator of Captain Ahab's interpersonal relationship with the whale and its effect upon his intrapersonal relationship with himself:
"... seems it not but a mad idea, this; that in the broad boundless ocean, one solitary whale, even if encountered, should be thought capable of individual recognition from his hunter. .. Ahab would mutter to himself, as after poring over his charts till long after midnight he would throw himself back in reveries ... Ah God! What trances of torments does that man endure who is consumed with one unachieved revengeful desire. He sleeps with clenched hands; and wakes with his own bloody nails in his palms."
Here, we first encounter the true extent of Ahab's insanity and irrationality caused by his obsession with Moby Dick. Speaking to himself, tormenting himself night in and night out with thoughts of the Whale and of revenge, Ahab has alienated himself not only from his crew, but also from himself. Of the Whale, we have a very limited amount of knowledge. Ishmael discusses its whiteness, its sheer size, and the events that previously unfolded between it and Ahab. This limitation of knowledge is, perhaps, indicative of the nature of the Whale and the symbolism of which it takes on. Without going into ‘too detailed’ of a discussion of the various symbols and interpretations the Whale assumes, it will be important here to establish a few of the possibilities in order to appropriately discuss the relationship between Moby Dick and Ahab. The Whale, in all its size and whiteness, evades universalisms. Unable to be caught, and only harming him who tries, the Whale assumes something of a Godlike status. Perhaps the whiteness and the size are indications of the magnitude of knowledge contained within the great leviathan - so great that it will never be obtained or grasped by a mere human. Perhaps it is the meaning of life, a question whose answer
has plagued mankind from the beginning. For some, like Starbuck, it is assumed from the earliest that being able to reach so profound a level of understanding and knowledge is merely an exercise in futility, and ultimately a dangerous and fatal task. For Ahab, however, it seems to be impossible to give up the mission. Perhaps because Moby Dick took from Ahab his leg, or perhaps because Ahab was unable to capture the Whale when he had the opportunity, Ahab has become consumed to the pinnacle of obsession with capturing the Whale. I cannot help but wonder whether or not Melville projected his own task of writing *Moby-Dick* onto our fateful Captain Ahab. The parallels are clear. Such a work like the one in question is not simply the product of an interesting idea, nor is it just a regular story. It is a work that is seemingly an attempt by Melville to fit everything he knew about the world—his ideas, perspectives, considerations, and questions- into one work. Such a task, daunting for any individual, must have been especially consuming for Melville, who, at the youthful age of 32, was not exactly one who would be considered aged and experienced enough to succeed at such a task. While this is a claim that cannot be verified or validated, it is not unreasonable to consider Melville's position as somewhat disadvantageous for the purpose of his task. It also is not to say that Melville was indeed too young to write such a work, for *Moby-Dick* has a solidified and venerated position in the American literary canon. However, for our discussion, it becomes especially relevant to consider Melville's projection of his own frustrations and considerations upon *Moby-Dick*, for as it will be argued, he invites the reader to do the same through his employment of second-person narration.

It is somewhat unfortunate for the purposes of this paper that the reader is never given much of a glimpse into
the person Ahab was before his encounter with Moby Dick. However, it can probably be safe to say that before becoming obsessed by Moby Dick, his temperament was not nearly to the extreme degree of madness that it is throughout the entirety of the novel. With this considered, then, let us examine the effect that Ahab's obsession has on his relationship with his crew. Ishmael phrases this relationship succinctly when he states: "To accomplish his object Ahab must use tools; and of all tools used in the shadow of the moon, men are most apt to get out of order." To Ahab, his crew was nothing more than objects he could employ for this task or that purpose - they became less than human. His obsession with his task rendered him dehumanized, unable to recognize the fatal danger in which he placed his crew. Or perhaps he could recognize it, and he just didn't care. Ignorance or apathy, Ahab's obsession with obtaining his object had successfully alienated him from human empathy, a condition which would serve to exacerbate his relationship with his crew. A condition which, furthermore, ought to be abhorred by humans, and certainly by the author of this novel. By examining the effect of his obsession on the interpersonal relationships Ahab develops with his crew, we can again discover the didacticisms of Melville, which again, are subject to a great amount of interpretations. Let us consider for a moment the time in which Melville lived and wrote. Riding the great vessel that was the Industrial Revolution, Melville lived in a time of rapid advancement in the technology of communications and transportation, as well as science becoming the beacon of knowledge. The time was also defined by great division within the United States, with *Moby-Dick* being written merely 10 years before the onset of the Civil War. With the civilized West consumed by the conquest of men and knowledge, it is not unreasonable to
consider Melville's rendering of Ahab as dehumanized a parallel to the condition of men in the society in which he lived. For Ahab, men had become tools, in order for the great captain to pursue his task of domination. While this is both symbolic and literal in our novel, it was completely literal in the United States. Men had become, literally, tools, with their 'masters' rendered dehumanized: a condition that was chronicled in detail in such work like Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, where he considers the effect that slavery has on both the slave and the master. The attempt to conquer men and knowledge was ultimately an impossible and unfulfilling task, as was Ahab's purpose of obtaining the White Whale. While this interpretation is quite specific, and perhaps not necessarily the intention of Melville, it is nonetheless interesting to consider the historical circumstances under which the author lived.

Perhaps an approach to the relationship between the fatal Captain and his Whale, and the consequences such relationship has upon the intrapersonal and numerous interpersonal relationships Ahab has with his crew, would be better structured within a more universal and spiritual discussion. For, as the Whale evades capture, it is equally reasonable to say that it evades one strict symbolical representation. Let us then place no definite meaning of the Whale, and instead consider it in the most generic of terms as strictly an object of man's desire. Whether that object be something so base as a material item, or so grandiose as the existence of God, perhaps Melville is making a comment on *any* object that consumes a man's faculties until he is no longer himself. As Ahab gets closer and closer to the object of his desire, he becomes increasingly sane. In response to Pip's incessant following, Ahab erratically screams, "Weep so, and I will murder thee! have a care, for Ahab too is
mad." Not only does he acknowledge his own madness, Ahab also speaks in the third person- a condition that can more or less be considered typical to those lacking in their full mental capacity. He wishes to be alone, literally alienating himself from Pip, whom he has grown more fond of than any other crew on board the *Pequod*. Soon, we arrive at Chapter 133 for the first day of the chase of Moby Dick, and at this point, the great captain’s obsession pulls closer and closer to its peak, which is especially poignant at the end of the second day of the chase. With his possessed captain Starbuck pleads: "... never, never wilt thou capture him, old man- In Jesus' name no more of this, that's worse than devil's madness ... Shall we be dragged by him to the bottom of the sea? Shall we be tow'n by him to the infernal world?" Starbuck, who has recognized Ahab's obsession with the Whale as a danger to the entire crew, is perhaps best described as the part of Melville's voice that carries a direct and explicit message to the reader: *don't let your objects of your desire consume your existence, for the consequences are grave.* To this, however, Ahab can only respond as a person consumed by his madness: "Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. This whole act's immutably decreed ... Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders." It is especially interesting to consider the way in which Ahab displaces responsibility for his actions from himself to the Fates. This is the ultimate signal that he has become disconnected from himself, and as a consequence, from the world and those around him. His relationship with himself has now become a complete lie, as he no longer recognizes his free will as the agent that drives his decision-making capabilities. Giving up any consideration for his self, how then can one expect him to have any consideration for his surrounding crew? What is most compelling here is not the fact that Ahab dies- in fact, one almost *expects* Ahab to die.
in the end. It is the final development of Ahab's intrapersonal relationship with himself that truly carries Melville's didacticism, for the captain is truly dead before he is pulled down to the bottom of the deep blue sea. What one should note is how the object of Ahab's pursuit ultimately came to pursue *him*, as he concedes when he states: "Aye, he's chasing *me* now; not I, *him*—that's bad." With his obsession now obsessing over him, Ahab has truly lost his control and orientation of sanity. What is most telling here, however, is although he recognizes the deadly condition of his pursuit of knowledge and conquest he cannot stop himself from continuing to pursue his objective; ultimately, he commits suicide, because he knowingly chases his own death.

For the remainder of our discussion, let us shift our focus now to the extent to which Ishmael's second person narration has an effect on the reader's involvement, and ultimately their experience, with the novel, since this is perhaps the single most important aspect of Melville's work. While there is nothing unordinary about the use of first and third person narration—indeed, these are almost mandatory for a narrative—the use of second person narration explicitly engages the reader in the novel. We are addressed as not only spectators, but participants as well—which has the ultimate effect of deconstructing the barrier that separates the reader from the story. To do this successfully, Melville addresses the reader in a variety of ways. From treating the reader as somewhat of a student, introducing to us the intricacies and complexities of whaling, to speaking to us as if we were actually in the boat with the crew, our being directly addressed has a large impact on the way we choose to interact with and interpret the novel. Although the role Ishmael assumes as a teacher when he speaks during the very informational passages can be somewhat alienating,
further analysis of these encyclopedic passages can reveal meaning that goes much deeper than the surface. Furthermore, it engages the reader with the discourse of whaling, allowing us a further and deeper level of involvement. The direct involvement of the reader allows us to project our own meaning upon the work, and the relationship begins from the very onset of the novel when Ishmael tells us: "Call me Ishmael." This often quoted line is so important to this work because it immediately establishes the informality of the relationship between Ishmael and the reader. Speaking informally by requesting that we call him by his first name (or at least what we can assume to be his first name), Ishmael creates a direct line of communication with us in order to bring the reader further into the text, until we are equally as involved in the story as Captain Ahab himself. With this first line, the distance and the barriers that typically separate the reader from the text itself are eliminated, in part because Ishmael speaks directly to us as if we were new pals, sitting next to the narrator rather than in front of or below him. He places us in a position where we can feel relaxed and at home with the text. Rather than telling you a story, Ishmael invites you to come inside *Moby-Dick*, where all of your thoughts, input, and interpretations are welcome and valid; in other words, Ishmael invites *us* to communicate back with him. Using his opportunity to speak directly to the reader, Melville communicates many of his didacticisms explicitly. For example, when Ishmael is describing the images of the whale that are available to him, only to find that they all fail in one way or another to capture the overall essence of the whale, he tells us that "... any way you may look at it, you must needs conclude that the great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last ... wherefore, it seems to me you had best not be to
fastidious in your curiosity touching this Leviathan." What is interesting to note here is the way that communication is established between Ishmael and us; and although we are not able to respond per se to exactly what Ishmael is saying, we are given the opportunity to really consider what he is saying. Whereas if Ishmael had just spoken this line in a passive voice and not directly at the reader, it would appear as yet another of Ishmael's philosophies; instead, he looks the reader directly in the eye and captivates our attention with the repeated use of you and your. Now it is us who must choose to respond to this comment, which will be different for every reader. For some, it will of course just be another passage to read through without making a personal connection with the text. However, for others it is an opportunity to engage directly with the text; it challenges us to consider what Ishmael is saying, because he is saying to us rather than just for us. It is not that just anybody has this curiosity to which Ishmael refers, but we who have this curiosity (as indicated by the use of your). To an extent, then, we begin to consider whether or not we may have a Leviathan of our own in life with which we may be too fastidious with our curiosity. The use of second-person narration is not only a device used by Melville to convey his didacticisms, but also to place the reader within the text rather than outside, perhaps as a measure to ensure that we are just as involved and engaged in the story as any character.

There are occasions throughout Moby-Dick where the manner in which Ishmael speaks to the reader is so direct and assuming that it actually serves to place us on the inside of the text as a participant, rather than a mere spectator. When speaking of Pip, Ishmael assures us that we "... have heard of him before; ye must remember his tambourine on that dramatic midnight, so gloomy-jolly." Here, it is not 'I
have told you of this before,' but rather, "ye must remember him." Ishmael indicates here that he considers us to be with him aboard the Pequod, forming our own memories of the experience. It is not that Ishmael tells us about Pip's tambourine; it is us who must remember it, which would indicate that we had heard it at some point during our time aboard the Pequod. Establishing our presence aboard the ship, Ishmael then allows us to witness everything for ourselves, and thus formulate our own meanings and interpretations. We are not only hearing about the voyage, we are in the boats every time they are lowered. We see and hear and think for ourselves. Whereas with strictly explanatory tone and language an author may separate himself from the reader, the reader feeling like he is just merely witnessing some unfolding of events, the use of second-person narration engages with us directly so that we must communicate our ideas and perspectives back onto the text. Just as perhaps Melville projected some of himself upon the fatal Captain Ahab, so are we given the opportunity to project our own meaning upon the text. Again referring back to the quote regarding the Leviathan and our fastidious curiosity, we can see how this invites us to create a personal meaning rather than one that will be the same for every reader. What will our Leviathan be? For Ahab, it is of course the Whale. For Ishmael, it is unclear—but perhaps it is the pursuit of universal knowledge, as indicated by his failed attempts to describe the whale. For us, it may take on any number of meanings, all of which are equally validated because our involvement in the story makes it our story rather than Ishmael’s. This condition is paralleled by Melville in Chapter 99 of the novel, which chronicles the infinite possibilities of meaning generated by the doubloon. Every member of the ship brings his own life experience with his interpretation, which has the effect of
creating a different meaning from the same image for every member of the crew. Melville offers this, I believe, to encourage the reader to make his or her own meaning from the magnanimous *Moby-Dick*. He may direct our attention this way or that, but we are always given the opportunity to choose a meaning that is most valuable to us. Rather than confining his story, telling us that it is *this* and only *this*, Melville leaves it open to each and every individual reader; a circumstance which may be considered a reason behind the seeming timelessness of the work. By remaining elastic and compromising, then, *Moby-Dick* adjusts itself to the questions and curiosities of the current reader and the time in which s/he lives. Furthermore, this what we may call universalistic quality of *Moby-Dick* prevents readers from feeling alienated by a text which would normally feel so foreign due to the nature of its content. However, because Ishmael (Melville) uses a balanced mix of didactic/philosophical second person narration in conjunction with strictly informational passages that describe such features of the whaling enterprise as the procedures for extracting spermaceti oil and the cetology of the Sperm Whale, we become so completely engaged in the tale as a student and participant- which ultimately places us on the same level as our narrator himself, for he too is a novice assuming the role of student and participant. Melville is able to communicate so effectively with the reader ultimately because of his success in establishing concrete, complex relationships in *Moby-Dick*. From the highly developed and intricate interpersonal relationships, such as between Ishmael and Queequeg, we are offered mind-expanding and alternative mentalities to our conceptions of the possibilities of friendship and learning. The benefits of such a healthy relationship are offered, and then we are given the opportunity to witness the
consequences of an unhealthy interpersonal relationship, such as,’ that between Ahab and his Whale (object of obsession). Going beyond simple description of action, Melville engages our attention to witness the effect one's intrapersonal relationship with oneself has on their behavior and life perspective. To do so effectively, he captures our attention by intertwining first, second, and third person narration in order to provide a complete and thorough line of communication with the reader, which allows us to effectively and completely interact with the didacticisms and philosophies offered by the great American author. Remaining continually connected and engaged with the text, Melville offers us the opportunity to live and learn from Moby-Dick by allowing us to become a part of the novel, so that for everyone of us, a unique and individual experience is created. Melville offers us more than a story; he creates memories.

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"D'ye see him?"
On The Nature of Revenge in
Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*

Rebeka Sára Szigethy, Ádám Bogár

My own ‘Call me Ishmael’

The main motive lying at the basis of Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, one of the most important reasons of the putting together of an approximately 600-page-book, is the depiction of the psychology of revenge. The will to fulfill his retaliation on the White Whale, the will to strike back for its taking his leg and his wholeness is the impulsive force that drives Captain Ahab after Moby Dick. In this short study I attempt to explain the background of Captain Ahab’s monomaniacal desire to kill the White Whale and also try to give a short insight into the nature of Ahab’s own revenge and into that of revenge considered generally.

Revenge

Revenge can be more or less defined as an act of retaliation against somebody for a perceived offence or wrongdoing (Wikipedia). Scientific studies claim, that the act of revenge stimulates various receptors in the human brain, which results in a positive feeling (LHP.hu). Contemporary philosopher Martha Craven Nussbaum, considering the psychological and moral allusions and basis of revenge, wrote that "the primitive sense of the just...starts from the notion that a human life...is a vulnerable thing, a thing that can be invaded, wounded, violated by another's act in many ways. For this
penetration, the only remedy that seems appropriate is a counter invasion, equally deliberate, equally grave.” (Nussbaum 157) In *Moby Dick*, this sense of just becomes in a way even more primitive, since the target of Captain Ahab’s rage and vengeance is a „dumb brute” (Melville 161), Moby Dick, the White Whale.

The background

The novel *Moby Dick* is the story of the travels and finally the destruction and sinking of a Nantucket-based whalership, the Pequod and its crew. The ship, under the tyrannical rule of Captain Ahab, leaves port on Christmas Day to hunt whales. In the beginning of the trip it becomes quite clear that the captain’s main goal through this voyage is not primarily the financial success of a good hunt and therefore the well-being of himself or the members of his crew, but the aim is to fulfill his vengeance on one certain creature, a white sperm whale, commonly referred to as Moby Dick. Many years before the time when the plot is taking place, Ahab and his former crew was trying to kill Moby Dick. The whale broke their boats and killed many of Ahab’s fellow whale-hunters; and when the floating Ahab swam to the white whale with the line-knife in his hand and with grief and rage in his mind and tried to kill the whale with that single 6-inch-long knife, Moby Dick suddenly swam beneath him and bit his leg off. Ahab was rescued by the remaining crew members, but, in spite of more or less recovering from his agonizing wound after a few months, he will never be the same person as he was before his encounter with Moby Dick. Following his recuperation, his only desire was to get even with the White Whale for taking his leg and everything he did or said was to serve this infirm complex.
Pathologically speaking…

The above mentioned ‘infirm complex’ can be examined from the viewpoint of pathological psychology. In the momenta of Ahab’s behavior and in his deeds and words, in his thoughts and his ideas about the universe as such, many features of various pathological personality disorders can be pointed out. I consulted László Döme’s book about personality disorders to see if any of the most commonly described pathological ailments’ syndromes matches the acts and thoughts of Captain Ahab. Based on this book, I managed to separate a few diagnostical criteria of different disorders that may best suit the captain’s personality. These criteria are the following:

a) he defends himself from his deeply rooted vulnerability with a mask of self-righteousness, his self-content and self-confidence results in separation and megalomania to a certain extent (Döme 195);

b) he supposes hidden malice or threat in innocent remarks and events (Döme 195);

c) he is resentful or he is in some other way unable to forgive offences committed against him (Döme 195);

d) easy to hurt and instantly reacts or counters outrageously (Döme 195);

e) power, strength is of high importance for him, he is mistrustful and offensive, he has inexorable desire to defeat others, to conduct ruthless vengeance because they feel that others deserve so (Döme 201);

f) he is unaware of his own and others’ physical safety (Döme 275);

g) acts without responsibility (Döme 275);

h) he is extremely hostile and ruthless, his vindictiveness is characterized by incredible hatred and destructive
rejection of conventions, he fears of becoming weak and manipulable if he does not show off his ruthlessness, strength and venture (Döme 281).

The above mentioned symptoms refer to various ailments. According to Döme, the existence of the identical symptoms does not necessarily mean the consequent evolution of any personality disorder; to apply the label ‘pathological’ to the aberration, in most cases at least four of the symptoms have to be present. The enlisted symptoms are those of different disorders and in the captain’s case neither of the ailments can represent itself with more than three symptoms in Ahab’s personality. Therefore, none of the disorders that are to be mentioned can thoroughly characterize the captain.

The actual lack of the possibility to classify Captain Ahab into any pathological category can have various reasons. Firstly, although the captain’s behavior has a destructive effect both on himself and on his environment, he cannot be squarely considered demented. Secondly, Melville’s aim was not to relate to the captain’s personality in a pathological way, but to depict the psychology of vengeance with the literary tools of soul imagery and realistic detail.

A revengeful soul

Although from the symptoms mentioned in the previous chapter it was not possible to construct a coherent clinical picture, still we might try to capture the symptoms in the captain’s thoughts and deeds.

He defends himself from his deeply rooted vulnerability with a mask of self-righteousness, his self-content and self-confidence results in separation and megalomania to a certain extent: Captain Ahab is unable to
overcome the sense of loss felt due to his being wounded by Moby Dick. He was confronted with his extreme vulnerability to a force much larger than him, and this resulted in a deep shock. He cannot expel the memory of the trauma from himself, therefore instead of expelling it, he covers it and himself, too, with a hard shell built up of self-content, self-confidence, sense of separation and self-righteousness. The question is, can this vulnerability be pointed out in any parts of the novel other than the main motive mentioned above? Beyond his encounter with the White Whale, which exposed his physical vulnerability, there are instances where Ahab’s mental vulnerability strikes upon the surface. In chapter CXXXII, Captain Ahab says the following to Starbuck: „But do I look very old, so very, very old, Starbuck? I feel deadly faint, bowed, and humped, as though I were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise. God! God! God! - crack my heart! - stave my brain! - mockery! mockery! bitter, biting mockery of grey hairs, have I lived enough joy to wear ye; and seem and feel thus intolerably old?” (Melville 535) As the journey is approaching its end and the White Whale is in immediate vicinity, it seems difficult for Ahab to keep this ‘shell’ intact, his surpressed inner self comes to the foreground more and more often. Throughout the novel there are dialogues and inner monologues from which it is evident that within Ahab the desire for love goes toe-to-toe with the obsession deriving from hatred. He is not only obsessed with the pursuit of the whale but he chases himself towards his fate as well.

He supposes hidden malice or threat in innocent remarks and events: „But once, the mood was on him too deep for common regardings; and as with heavy, lumber-like pace he was measuring the ship from taffrail to mainmast, Stubb, the odd second mate, came up from
below, and with a certain unassured, deprecating humorousness, hinted that if Captain Ahab was pleased to walk the planks, then, no one could say nay; but there might be some way of muffling the noise; hinting something indistinctly and hesitatingly about a globe of tow, and the insertion into it, of the ivory heel. Ah! Stubb, thou did'st not know Ahab then.

"Am I a cannon-ball, Stubb," said Ahab, "that thou wouldst wad me that fashion? But go thy ways; I had forgot. Below to thy nightly grave; where such as ye sleep between shrouds, to use ye to the filling one at last. - Down, dog, and kennel!" ” (Melville 124) Stubb’s innocent remark, targeting the crew’s basic right of a good night’s sleep, raises unintelligible rage in Captain Ahab. He takes it as a personal offence against his wound, therefore against himself, instead of simply taking the needs of the sailors into consideration. This episode can also exemplify that he acts without responsibility and he is easy to hurt and instantly reacts or counters outrageously.

He fears of becoming weak and manipulable if he does not show off his ruthlessness, strength and venture: „"Starbuck!"/ "Sir?"/ "For the third time my soul's ship starts upon this voyage, Starbuck."/ "Aye, Sir, thou wilt have it so."/ "Some ships sail from their ports, and ever afterwards are missing, Starbuck!"/ "Truth, Sir: saddest truth."/ "Some men die at ebb tide; some at low water; some at the full of the flood; - and I feel now like a billow that's all one crested comb, Starbuck. I am old; - shake hands with me, man." Their hands met; their eyes fastened; Starbuck's tears the glue. "Oh, my captain, my captain! - noble heart - go not - go not! - see, it's a brave man that weeps; how great the agony of the persuasion then!"/ "Lower away!" - cried Ahab, tossing the mate's arm from him. "Stand by the crew!"” ” (Melville 558). As Ahab feels
the nearness of death, the sensitive part of his self is about to break through his ’shell’. The caring love of Starbuck, which Ahab has not felt before, almost awakes the human being in this „more a demon than a man” (Melville 534). Before the moment of lowering, he is seemingly moved by Starbuck’s confession, but in an instant he realized that he simply cannot deny his mission to which he dedicated his whole life; he could not afford having his ’shell’ broken before setting off to his final battle.

Certainly the above mentioned parts of the novel referring to various pathological symptoms are examples only for a small fraction of the syndrome. For the sake of briefness I left out the symptoms whose existence is absolutely self-evident, since basically all parts of the novel in which Captain Ahab is mentioned, can provide examples for the presence of those symptoms.

The morality of vengeance

While reading the novel, the question might rise in the reader, to what extent is Captain Ahab’s journey a tragedy of destiny. It can be obviously seen that his attributes determine him to avenge insults committed against him by any means. His moral grandeur consists of not-giving-up and purposefulness, his desperateness and toughness seem to raise him above his mates, although it is undecidable, whether his qualities are entirely positive, since they derive from a vulgar human emotion, namely the thirst for revenge. Similarly to these crucial qualities, Ahab wears a stigma that disfigures him, still distinguishes him from the masses at the same time, strengthening the feeling of predestination and tragedy of fate in the reader. In chapter XXVIII, a scar–like birthmark is mentioned: „Threading its way out from among his grey hairs, and
continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish. It resembled that perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight, lofty trunk of a great tree, when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it, and without wrenching a single twig, peels and grooves out the bark from top to bottom, ere running off into the soil, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded.” (Melville 120-121). The scar-likeness of the mark may refer to Ahab’s fate: his suffering and pain hardened him, and this hardness made him remarkable, the same way as the members of the crew become remarkable for their respect, or maybe love, with which they follow their captain to the utmost. The tragedy rests partly in the fact that Captain Ahab’s foe is much greater and more forceful than he is, and partly in his monomaniacal sticking to vengeance. It is impossible to imagine any ending other than Captain Ahab falling in honesty, during a battle with Moby Dick. If he won, what would be left for him afterwards? The desire for revenge fills his whole life. It instinctively pursues him after the White Whale, though throughout the novel he confronts the longing for seeing again his home, wife and child, left long ago. Still, the thirst for avenge stays triumphant. He becomes a prisoner of his obsession and maybe by this time the freedom of the whale enrages him. Since Moby Dick does not look for him. Moby Dick is free. Ahab is the one, who cannot do what his human feelings would prescribe for him, because the instinct of vengeance surmounts and holds him tight: „What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural loavings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready
to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare?”” (Melville 536).

Concludingly, Captain Ahab himself – maybe half-unconsciously – chooses revenge as the goal of his life, managing to find the meaning in the sufferings that it goes hand-in-hand with: „For, thought Ahab, while even the highest earthly felicities ever have a certain unsignifying pettiness lurking in them, but, at bottom, all heart-woes, a mystic significance, and, in some men, an archangelic grandeur…” (Melville 460). Although along with his tragedy of destiny, Captain Ahab is a romantically static hero, his personality and the duality of his external judgement is realistic. He is respectful and raises high above other people with his oddity and firmness, but at the same time these very attributes, blended with revenge, toss him to his own hell. Captain Ahab is the Quaker, who, instead of the Christian forgiveness, still lived and fought according to the Old Testamental ’eye for an eye’-law.

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In the course of analyzing the concepts of mission, monomania and revenge, we can see that these expressions represent three categories or states of the mind and human soul. Mission is usually connected with a deed of high resolve, something holy, something that is precious, holds value and is generally appreciated by everyone. On the contrary, monomania is a type of paranoia, based on extreme fear of an animate or inanimate being, a human, an animal, an object or anything else. In case of monomania the sufferer is captivated by one annoying, mad idea or feeling and cannot release himself from it: he is not able to get himself out from this kind of maniacal situation. As a result, soon he is regarded to be very odd, or even mentally ill by the people of his environment, and they might also be afraid of him as well. Actually, the monomaniac does become mentally aberrant. Finally, revenge can be closely linked to the phenomenon of monomania. The person who suffers of this type of mania often has only one aim in his life: to take revenge on the subject of his paranoia. But can he take revenge, or the subject of revenge will instead avenge its persecutor?

In *Moby Dick*, the person who obviously has all the symptoms of monomania—infatuation, distracted mind, strange customs and incalculable, reserved or aggressive behaviour—is the dark protagonist, the Captain of the Pequod, Mr. Ahab. He is the dominant and monomaniac character of the novel and source of main action. To be able to understand the background and origin of Ahab’s
monomania, and thus the essence of the story, the novel introduces us the whole sad unlucky event that had happened with Ahab when he met Moby Dick, the Whale. The result of this 'encounter' was the loss of his leg which had serious aftermaths on the Captain and caused the forming of his later appearing monomaniac nature. This monomaniac, lunatic behaviour resulted in the isolation and alienation from the rest of society and implied Ahab’s solitariness. In the case of Captain Ahab we find that the concepts of monomania, mission and revenge strictly join together and they trend to one single being on the Earth, or to say it better, in the sea, Moby Dick, who embodies all the cruelty. Monomania is the state in which the Captain is, and revenge is the single mission of the monomaniac Captain. Wreaking his vengeance upon the Leviathan is his only reason to live. He is ‘intent on an audacious, immitigable, and supernatural revenge.’

First of all, I would like to put an emphasis on those chapters where the monomania of the main character is described and where we can be the witnesses of his maniacal, insane mind. It is important to see the point when this monomaniac nature was based, the process, in which it took shape and became a mission, and the climax where it culminated, when revenge became the overall goal of the protagonist. Captain Ahab first appears—though yet not personally, only indirectly, by mentioning him—in Chapter 16, where it turns out that he is the captain of the Pequod, and that he has only one leg and the other one is complemented by an ivory-leg, which fact gives him a peculiarity. Reading forth the chapter, we get to know even more about him and get insight into his strange, dual nature. On the one hand he acts like if he was sick but on the other hand he does not look so, he is a queer but also a good man, who does not speak much but when does, grabs
everybody’s attention with his interesting stories. He has been in colleges as well as among cannibals, so he is both a pundit and a cannibal himself. In one sentence: Ahab is a ’grand, ungodly, god-like man’ whose nature is very subtle and not easy to understand. The complexity of his character is well demonstrated by words that describe him as both a human and an inhuman being, an unpredictable phenomenon, a fool and a king, a hero and an evil: all this in one person. In the following chapters (in chapters 19, 20, 22, and 27) until the point when Ahab actually appears personally (in chapter 28) by the previous information we get about him, we are already full of tension and wait for the roll-up of this mysterious character. It is interesting to see that before Ahab in person would appear, Ishmael’s personal equation to him is rather positive: he is shocked by his story, thus feels sympathy and sorrow for his misfortune, and also feels curiosity and a certain type of strange awe of him possibly because of the mystery that clusters around him -partly due to his ivory-leg, partly owing his incalculable dualness of his nature. Ahab is yet handled here as the victim of the vicious monster. Shortly afterwards, Captain Ahab shows himself and all the mysteries around him turn to become true in reality, too. There is something dignified and divine in the monomaniac Captain’s appearance and behaviour when he first turns up: he stands erect, with no fear but power and fortitude in his eyes. When he takes solitary walks at mindnight on the deck (chapter 29) he seems to be the thoughtful and sublime king of the ship, the sea and the whales. However, he is a moody character with ’tormented spirit’ and easily goes blind with rage. His monomania at this point is already obvious, and soon his mission starts to shape and rises to view as well. This mission is not the traditionally meant ’holy’ mission at all, the aim of which is to serve others’ happiness or gratify
others’ needs: no, this mission is only one-sided, egocentric, it has no sacred goals at all. The exclusive aim of this mission is to chase the Great Enemy, the Whale, and once found, hunt him down, take revenge and compensation on him. There can it be that soon only one person’s, Ahab’s volition—and sovereignty—will govern the ship and prevail over her inhabitants, to fulfill the Captain’s mission and take revenge over Moby Dick. On this whale-hunting voyage Ahab’s only and all-engrossing object of hunting is Moby; he is not interested at all in other whales. At this point we can experience a dramatic development in Ahab’s character, he becomes more and more reckless and ruthless. The ship soon becomes the stage of emotions, passions, agreement and disagreement, approval and rebellion: some of the attendants are able, while others cannot accept this type of crazy and rabid revenge without any reservation.

The first chapter in which we can clearly find that Captain Ahab is obsessed with destroying Moby Dick and that he has a strong wish for taking revenge on him is in chapter 36. But here his desire to get the Whale first appears in front of us to be only a foolish idea, a strange mania and the whole mission yet seems to be rather a good game in which the participants even win an award (gold) in the end, if they do well. But when the ’participants’ realize that the Captain’s ’game’ is not a game at all but a serious and bloody chase and hunt of one single whale, Moby Dick, and they get more and more frightened by Ahab’s madness and paranoia, they do not really wish to support his ordinance. This is the point from which Ahab is not regarded any more as the poor, injured victim of Moby, he is no more considered to be the sufferer of a bloody attack. Instead, roles change: he himself becomes the merciless attacker, the villain with all the characteristics of a monster and the Whale becomes the defenseless victim. As well as the ship,
soon the sea becomes the scene of a battlefield, the voyage the stage of terror, and Ahab, the impious captain, who is spiritually outside of christendom and depicted as a dark, satanic figure begins to chase the white, ’holy’ creature of the sea. This is the beginning of the battle between good and bad, holy and unholy, sinful and pure, dark and white- not only in the physical but instead in the spiritual sense.

Mission and revenge for Captain Ahab means one and the same: killing the Whale. He must be conscious of the fact that he is mad, as it is implied by the narrator in chapter 41: ‘All my means are sane, my motive and my object mad.’ Apparently, he has a great talent to dissemble his madness and use his lacking leg to create empathy in others and thus get them to do all that he wants in order to achieve his goals. In some degree Ahab is not a fool at all: he realizes that he could be charged any time with usurpation and that would end the obedience of the crew and make an end to his command. To avoid this, he creates a simulacrum towards the others as if they were having a natural, normal hunting-journey, but actually, all his purpose obviously is still the hunt of Moby Dick.

In reality, Moby Dick could not be that vicious, bloody monster at all as Ahab saw and described him. Naturally, a whale is fearful, huge and powerful but it does not aim to kill human creatures at all. I think that the fact that Ahab lost his leg has nothing to do with the cruelty of Moby. He is only an animal, who, when being chased and hurt and wanted to be killed, obeying his instincts tries to protect himself and fights for his life. As follows, the concept of such a barbarous, bloody and immortal, supernatural beast is only Ahab’s created concept, it lives only in his mind and has not much to do with reality. My firm belief is that Captain Ahab projected all evils on this single creature: Moby Dick. He personified him, endowed
him with human features, and after the unlucky incident with the Whale when he lost his leg, this personification became even stronger and his feelings more aggressive. Moby Dick, by consuming a physical part of the captain also took away a part of his spiritual being, his mind. Ahab lost his identity and in order to get it back and find his peace he had to conquer the whale. His mission was extended to the search of ‘all the subtle demonisms of life and thought’, for ‘all evil’ and his own lost identity. Moby became a beast first in Ahab’s mind, then this imagined and created beast characteristic of Moby started to reflect on Ahab and soon he himself became a monster, too. I wonder if Ahab’s anger and hate did originally want to level at Moby, or before the often mentioned attack his vengeful nature was already present and tortured other people. Maybe, he could have a common hate towards humankind, the world, and that was the reason he went to sea? And after being disillusioned by the creatures of the sea as well, needed a victim that could be blamed for everything, that could be avenged for all the bad and sad events that happened to him on the land and in the sea? We do not know, there are no evidences in the novel to prove or confirm these thoughts and suppositions; though these are all exciting ideas and possibilities, they will stay unanswered.

In Melville’s novel monomania, mission and revenge are all similar concepts that strictly relate to each other and can be the best seen in Ahab’s attitude towards Moby Dick. Besides other important topics, vital moral, religious, social and philosphical questions, the novel concentrates on the nature of the human mind and behaviour, studies the human character and destiny. Last but not least, it takes us not only on a voyage on the Pequod but on an imaginative journey into the human characters’ minds as well.
Mission and Monomania: The Nature of Revenge

Míra Hervay

Typically for the American renaissance Herman Melville placed the ‘self’ into the centre of his novel *Moby Dick*. Melville focuses on the restless mind of his characters. Still the driving force in his two characters, Ahab and Ishmael, is fundamentally different. The reason of this difference stems from Melville’s segmented world view; he did not see the world as a unified whole anymore. This world view also foreshadows the modern world view that formed the literature of the twentieth century. Not only does he show resemblance to twentieth century literature concerning his world view but he also places uncertainty into the centre. The apparent sense of horror in the novel derives from the unknowable. Ishmael, the main narrator and hero of the book, by constant contemplation tries to understand the world and find answers to his questions while Ahab tries to reinforce his place in the universe by power (Kazin14). This difference will lead Ahab into a destructive quest against Moby Dick.

On the one hand, Ahab can be seen as a modern hero going against the vacant forces driving human beings. Rising against the forces that - as Ahab says it to Starbuck in chapter 132 - turns them “round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and the Fate is the handspike” (508). He leads a mission to prove that human beings have free will. As Newton Arvin emphasises it, Ahab is the epitome of modern Western man who is self assured and never afraid to go against any power that could force his own will down. Ahab himself shouts out his uncurbed “self-assertive Ego” (Arvin 176) into the storm in chapter 119 titled *The*
Candles: "I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here.” (476). According to Lewis Mumford Ahab stands up to the everydayness, against the life that is driven only by money (129). It is perfectly symbolised by whale industry that was one of the most lucrative jobs in the nineteenth century. Based on Lewis Mumford’s view Ahab leads a “humanly satisfactory” (129) mission which can be seen as a possible break out from the dullness of life.

In Ahab’s view Moby Dick incarnates all the malevolent forces that might influence people beyond their will. “But in each event - in the living act, the undoubted deed - there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask.”(161). Ahab’s hunt after Moby Dick becomes the means by which he can prove himself that he is not a passive, powerless object of these powers.

If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. (161)

In other words, Ahab goes into fight against the “inscrutable”, invisible and unknowable. As Alfred Kazin highlights, Ahab wants to prove that he can control his life
and that human beings can reassert their place into the universe. But Ahab wanted to achieve this by force therefore during his mission he loses all his humanity and beyond that, his mission brings death on his crew (Kazin 14).

As Newton Arvin emphasises the proof that Ahab only projects his hate and distorted ideas on Moby Dick that the whale causes destruction only when attacked, he “never should have sought these encounters” (Arvin 187). The malice contributed to the white whale might derive from the mystic, unknowable nature of Moby Dick—“the invisible spheres were formed in fright” (193)—and it is further reinforced by his unusual appearance. Melville also mentions that because of the highly dangerous nature of the whaling job, each time when they attack or process a whale they risk their life. Therefore peoples’ imaginations are more likely to create demonic creatures. Also whales represent the limitation of human knowledge as these sea mammals are the only creatures able to descend in a depth that can not be penetrated by anyone else. But for Ahab “all that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick.”(181) Ahab’s hate partially fortifies how a possibly noble mission changes into a monomaniac revenge.

Ahab’s desire to prove that he has a free will and that he can control nature is doomed because he does not realise that the only possible way to achieve his aim is to “become more human” (Mumford 126). In his monomania he becomes more and more alienated from the crew of the Pequod. This is what differentiates him from Ishmael, who - contrary to the image of the modern independent man
represented by Ahab - realises what interdependent human beings are like (Arvin 178). In the mat- making scene Ishmael contemplates free will and how destiny is influenced by others (Arvin 182). This connection between human beings is perfectly exemplified by the monkey rope scene when Ishmael is tied to Queequeg and he has to accept that if his savage friend makes a mistake and stumbles, he has to follow Queequeg into the depth. Another mayor difference in Ahab’s and Ishmael’s way of thinking is the acceptance of the unknown. Right in the first chapter Ishmael says: „And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all.” (3). It reflects Ishmael’s point of view that even though the cosmos and the existence of human beings are inexplicable by going to sea and spending time with constant contemplation - as Alfred Kazin points out (11) – man can prove his integrity and place in the universe. On the contrary, Ahab can not live in uncertainty, his inner urge wants to prove that definite answers exist and that human beings can influence their own destiny. His tragedy lies in his mistake that he chooses fight not contemplation as Ishmael. His self-assurance and self belief causes total destruction. His ravaging obsession with the white whale creates a vulture inside him that starts to consume all his ability to love.

This consuming monomania through which Ahab gradually looses all his humanity is shown in the scenes when the Pequod meets with other ships. Ahab’s intentional alienation from other human beings is reflected in these encounters. Instead of taking part in the gam, the traditional greeting of ships, Ahab always asks about Moby Dick first.
Goney is the first ship that meets with the Pequod but they can not talk with each other because of the strong wind. Goney appears as the symbol of the forthcoming tragedy. Similarly all the ships they meet on their journey foreshadow the tragedy that will happen and each encounter reveals that nothing can divert Ahab from his aim. Ahab’s obsession first becomes clearly prominent when he meets with Samuel Enderby. The captain of the ship lost his arm in a battle with Moby Dick and learning from the accident when he sees the white whale for the second time he does not want to attack it. At the seventh encounter the Pequod is contrasted with the Bachelor that is on its way home. The atmosphere on the two ships is sharply contrasted: “and as the two ships crossed each other’s wakes - one all jubilations for things passed, the other all forebodings as to things to come - their two captains in themselves impersonated the whole striking contrast of the scene” (489). While passing the Bachelor, which is heading home, Ahab looks at a bottle full of sand from Nantucket. It can be viewed as if Ahab had bid farewell to the life and memories Nantucket represented for him. The last two encounters show Ahab’s raving mania for the white whale. He refuses to help the captain of the Rachel, who is looking for his son disappeared in a fight with Moby Dick, showing that Ahab lost his ability for compassion. His last encounter with a ship, ironically called Delight, foreshadows the final disaster. The Delight lost five members of her crew and they see the coffin on the side of the Pequod as the emblem of the forecoming death.

There are many instances of Ahab loosing his mind and gradually letting his evil monomania drive the events. One of such hints is when the Pequod appears as the blazing inferno and it is compared to Ahab’s soul in the Try-work scene:
the ship groaned and dived, and yet steadfastly shot her red hell further and further into the blackness of the sea and the night, and scornfully champed the white bone in her mouth, and viciously spat round her on all sides; then the rushing Pequod, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul. (421)

When the Pequod reaches the Pacific Ocean Ahab’s total control over the ship becomes more apparent. His self-assurance and desire to rule over nature comes to light when he rejects to use the quadrant and to put on the lightning rods. He even combats with the higher powers in the storm proving himself that he is equal to these forces. His behaviour reflects his belief that man can influence his destiny and he is not passively open to events. Ahab’s monomania irretrievably takes over the control on the Pequod when he creates his own compass, and he breaks the log and the line showing that he is indifferent to the crew’s safety. Ahab halts only when he feels Pip’s love and the same feeling is evoked in Ahab. But he sends Pip into his cabin in order to make sure that his love for Pip will not distort him from his aim. Another instance of tender feelings being evoked in Ahab can be seen in the chapter titled Symphony when the beauty of nature touches his soul and Ahab becomes a human being, a man of feeling, for the last time, although earlier he saw only brutal malice in nature: “not the smallest atom stirs or lives on matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind” (310). The symbolic wedding of ocean and air eases his pain and nature embraces Ahab as a mother her prodigal son. But he does
not let himself get saved by the beauty of nature nor by the memory of his young wife and child, neither by the love felt toward his comrade, Starbuck (Mumford 126). Beside Ahab turning into a human, the chapter *Symphony* is significant because Ahab here becomes aware of his madness and gives voice to his doubt concerning the rightness of his quest. Seemingly he is the closest to the acceptance of the limitation of human knowledge when he gazes into the depth of the ocean but he can not accept his impotence to control his own destiny. He bursts out in frustrated range:

> What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovinings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? (536)

When he turns back to the sea to gaze into the blue depth, he sees only Fedallah, the emblem of his madness. From now on nothing can stop him.

The Pequod’s journey started on a cold Christmas Day and turned into a disastrous monomania of Ahab. His madness caused the death of many innocent men, but Ishmael survived it. He stayed alive to tell the story and to allow readers to contemplate over the story of Ahab and the white whale together with Ishmael. In this sense *Moby Dick* became the orphan of Herman Melville that he had to let on its own way and let the readers interpret his novel in as many ways as the doubloon was interpreted by the crew. Melville also gave an opportunity to the readers to glance into the impenetrable depth of the sea. It is no wonder that
Melville’s *Moby Dick* received the well deserved recognition only at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the world did not form a whole any more. Another reason for the popularity of the novel is that however threatening it might be to face the unfathomable universe, meditation allowed Melville and still allows readers to become a Catskill eagle, which “even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar” (423).

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Shakespearean Visitations in *Moby Dick*

Eszter Guti

There is a saying in Ambrose Bierce’s *The Devil’s Dictionary* which is definitely true for *Moby Dick*: “The covers of this book are too far apart.” Its size should not be intimidating, though, since *Moby Dick* is a real treasure island. One thing that makes it truly enjoyable to read is intertextuality. While there are many little surprises, reminders of other later works of art, which Melville obviously could not be aware of\(^1\), a major part of this intertextuality is undoubtedly conscious. Melville worked with many different sources to create his own great vision. The novel is interwoven with allusions; the reader can find even some recurring images like the prairie or the colt\(^2\). However, even more significant is the presence of the Shakespearean spirit throughout the novel.

“I fancy that this moment Shakespeare in heaven ranks with Gabriel, Raphael and Michael.” The sentence is from a letter written by Melville in February 1849 (qtd. in Olson 265). Such a statement leaves no trace of doubt about Shakespeare’s longlasting effect upon Melville. The “divine William’s” great impact can be discovered in numerous ways in *Moby Dick* (ibid. 266). Images and parallels inspired by Shakespeare’s evergreen thoughts or drama itself as a genre are to be detected from the very beginning of the masterpiece.

\(^1\) Think of Faulkner, Hemingway, Emily Dickinson, Twain, Conrad, Blake or Coleridge  
\(^2\) pp 22, 195, 222, 224, 325, 456, 519
First of all, right in the first chapter, Ishmael-Melville speaks about “those stage managers, the Fates” (25), which resembles the world-famous exclamation of Jaques from As You Like It: “All the world’s a stage...” (2.7.141). In Shakespeare, not only Jaques uses this metaphor, he actually answers the Duke Senior who referred to “this wide and universal theatre” (2.7.138). Also, in Moby Dick the idea returns with the experienced Old Manx sailor paraphrasing the world as a ball, alluding to some similar expression which is common knowledge among learned men: “the whole world’s a ball, as you scholars have it” (176). As for the world metaphor, Melville has every right to borrow it, since Moby Dick seems to be a large-scale tableau not only of whaling but also of the staff of whaling, the Pequod having various nationalities and temperaments on board. In the same chapter from which the Old Manx sailor was quoted (Ch. 40) one can see all these different kinds of people together and cannot help feeling that the whole world is somehow represented by the ship. At the same time, emphasising the roles of Tashtego and Daggoo, a native American and an African-American, the novel is very specifically American as well, and very unique, too, concerning its contemporaries’ attitudes towards non-whites.

This fortieth chapter is one of the novel’s dramatic features. Besides several dramatized chapters Melville applied other devices reminiscent of the genre, and though Moby Dick is referred to as a novel, and it is one, the boundaries are not at all clear-cut, which again indicates the innovative and unique nature of the book. There are chapters where the narrative is introduced or interrupted by ‘stage instructions’, such as “By the mainmast; Starbuck leaning against it” (171) or “Ahab moving to go on deck; Pip catches him by the hand to follow” (498). Chapter 108,
containing the carpenter’s work on Ahab’s new leg and their conversation, is totally intervowen with such instructions, like a real drama in prose. On the other hand, there is example for a minimalized drama-presence, too, like only the title of a chapter: ‘Enter Ahab; to Him, Stubb’. *Moby Dick* closes with an epilogue, which in itself is a dramatic device, in addition, it begins with the sentence “The drama’s done” (536). It raises the question what the author means by drama. The Pequod’s fate? Or the whole book, not just its story? Melville intends to keep his readers in confusion till the very end, and even afterwards. Yet this confusion is not necessarily a problem and it does not even have to be a confusion. Instead of strict narrow-minded categorisation we get an alluring literary work calling us to discover its world by ourselves, liberated from any prescribed expectations.

According to Rudyard Kipling, “Words are the most powerful drugs used by mankind”. It is clear that Melville was well aware of this truth already years before the British author was born. He discovered the power of words and consciously played with language in order to achieve the desired effect on the readers. He showed the archaic speech of the Quakers, the dialects of the Afro-American Fleece and the foreigner Queequeg well before the emergence of the so-called local colour writers, with Mark Twain as their founding father. What is more, language is in the centre in the case of one of the main heroes, Stubb, whose style is a continuous source of humour in the book as well as a very good characterising feature. Language is even put under analysis by the characters themselves. When it is found out that probably Ahab’s line had killed the Parsee, the captain exclaims: “My line! my line? ... What means that little word?” (524).
Moreover, language goes deep beyond the surface of formal examples, and has a decisive role in creating the characters’ fates in both Melville and his idol, Shakespeare. Richard III is perhaps the most famous villain manipulating his surroundings with his crooked mind and smooth-talking behaviour. The same manipulation is to be observed in Ahab, the purest example of it being perhaps his ‘coming out’ in chapter 36. Here he turns his men into a “frantic crew” taking the blasphemous and tragically true oath “God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death!” simply by a passionate, moving speech (170). Paradoxically, Ahab himself feels himself manipulated, he is a prisoner of his own maniac mind, as he admits to Starbuck at the very end of their doomed journey: “Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. ...I am the Fates’s lieutenant; I act under orders” (524). The ability to manipulate is not the only feature Ahab inherited from the ill-willed king. The ultimate cause of their souls becoming infected with hate and all its ruining companions is their deformed body. Richard III is angry with nature itself and wants to take revenge on the whole world, while Ahab has a more concrete goal, taking revenge on one single whale, yet he pulls his whole crew with him into death. Richard even appears explicitly once in *Moby Dick*, indicating the sign-painters’ false pictures of whales: “They are generally Richard III whales, with dromedary humps, and very savage...” (261).

Othello and King Lear are a fine pair in a sense that their destiny lies in relying on language uncritically. More accurately, Othello’s noble nature and Lear’s pride keep them from reading between the lines and this failure eventually culminates in personal tragedies. Othello’s trust in Iago and his extreme gullibility makes him his own greatest enemy, just like Ahab’s measureless obsession is
the most dangerous for him, as Starbuck points out “...let Ahab beware of Ahab...”(450). In vain do Desdemona and Starbuck try to convince them, both heroes are already too absorbed in their own dark world, and no sober speech can help them in finding the way out.

Chapter 31, which tells us Stubb’s “queer dream” (135), is not accidentally entitled ‘Queen Mab’. Both Stubb’s dream and Mercutio’s spontaneous monologue about Queen Mab seem to be insignificant, senseless episodes, a confusing game with words, however, an uncertain bad feeling covers them both that does not let the dreams being swept aside. For even Mercutio admits that dreams in a chaotic but sure way have something to do with reality (“...dreams ... are the children of an idle brain” [1.4.97-98]), and also Stubb takes his one seriously. Moreover, both scenes bear an uncanny predictive value, felt and even articulated by the heroes: “...my mind misgives/ Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,/ Shall bitterly begin his fearful date/ With this night’s revels...” (Romeo and Juliet 1.4.107-110) and “Look ye - there’s something special in the wind” (Stubb 137). It can be also observed that the imaginative, sensitive characters caught by the dreams are coupled with a down-to-earth companion, Benvolio and Flask, who, as a sharp contrast, look at the same things completely soberly: “Supper is done, and we shall come too late” (1.4.106); “ I don’t know, it seems a sort of foolish to me, tho”” (136). In the case of Moby Dick, it is important that this chapter is the first time when the white whale is mentioned by Ahab, and Stubb, though not knowing the captain’s intention yet, assumes that things are not quite all right: “Ain’t there a small drop of something queer about that, eh? A white whale—...” (137).
Perhaps the most challenging task for language is to express faithfully the incomprehensible complexity of life, where nothing is purely black or white, therefore more sensitive devices are needed than mere adjectives. Charles Olson in his essay on Shakespearean influence on Melville examines some paradoxes from *King Lear* as well as from *Moby Dick*, pointing out that Melville’s main preoccupation was the “twisting ambiguity in the nature of man” (Olson 269). Gloucester’s and Edmund’s words, “I stumbled when I saw” (4.1.18) and “...some good I mean to do/Despite mine own nature” (5.3.252-253), short but eloquent, prove Shakespeare a master of the language. Melville follows in his footsteps with such characterisations as “So man’s insanity is heaven’s sense” (397) and “No, no, my lad; stricken, blasted, if he be, Ahab has his humanities!” (93). Ambiguities are drawn attention to in every aspect of the novel. Although Melville’s admiration for the sea is evident, he calls it “the image of the ungraspable phantom of life” (23), and often contrasts it with land images, the latter symbolising safety but dullness, water offering uncontrolled freedom, he does not pretend that this freedom is one-sidedly positive. The reader is astonished by wonderful phrases describing the ugly, bloody, treacherous personality of the ever-changing ocean. Melville speaks about “the universal cannibalism of the sea”, its “devilish brilliance and beauty” and how the “most dreaded creatures glide under water, ... hidden beneath the loveliest tints of azure” (270). The same idea is formulated by reminding everyone of “the tiger heart” panting beneath “the tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the ocean’s skin” (463). A most beautiful expression of the subtleness of life appears in the chapter ‘The Funeral’. “Beneath the unclouded and mild azure sky, upon the fair face of the pleasant sea, wafted by the joyous breezes, the great mass of death floats on and on,
till lost in infinite perspectives” (300). It is marvellous how a basically disgusting image can be become almost poetic through a perfectly created atmosphere. At the same time, maybe only after a second reading of the sentence, one is touched by its sadness and implied irony. A sharp contrast is needed for realizing the actual characteristic of the scene, its cruelty, its indifferent resignation to the ruthless rules of life and death. Fleece’s preaching to the sharks also shakes the reader, since suddenly, in the middle of a humorous scene, one is faced with some much deeper meaning conveying an uncomfortable truth. “You is sharks, sartin; but if you gobern de shark in you, why den you be angel; for all angel is not’ing more dan de shark well goberned” (288). Are angels actually well-bred sharks? The traditional view rooted in the Christian faith teaches us that disobedient angels were banished from Heaven. In other words, the starting point is something positive, while Melville here suggests us that darkness is the principal element of the world and becoming virtuous requires as huge efforts as a shark needs to give up cannibalism, and consequently, is as impossible.

Madness is undoubtedly a central theme in *Moby Dick*. But, as “madness is undefinable”, it turns up in several forms in the novel and has many forerunners among Shakespeare’s tragic heroes. Othello and Macbeth are the same way blinded by their obsession as Ahab, still it is an important difference that hunting down the white whale is Ahab’s only purpose from the very beginning, while both the Shakespearean figures, essentially outstanding, exemplary men, sink slowly and gradually into the depth of madness.

One of the most famous madmen of Shakespeare is King Lear, and his fate is reflected in many details in *Moby Dick*. His tragedy is rooted in his inability to face plain
truth, namely that his daughters have to love him just “according to” their “bond; nor more nor less” (1.1.91). Ahab, though he is aware of his madness, triumphantly claiming that he is demoniac (171), also refuses to accept the simple truth of Starbuck’s words: “Vengeance on a dumb brute! ... To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous” (167). Starbuck is a crucial figure next to Ahab, opposing still supporting him, similarly to Kent’s relationship to Lear. Though Olson compares Starbuck to Albany, on the basis of their “weak goodness” and being “guarded against life by the protective tissue of accepted morality” (270), the mate’s role is also very much like Kent’s in the drama. Starbuck is the only one who dares to criticise and tries to persuade his captain even in the very last moments, yet (or that is why?) he is the one Ahab “felt strangely moved to” (524) and shakes hands with before their last lowering. Kent also openly confronts Lear in saying “...be Kent unmannerly,/When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man?” (1.1.144-145). It is again a fine parallel, Starbuck also calls Ahab “old man” (450), both men even risk their position in order to save their masters, and both love and feel sincerely sorry for them even after it is obvious that madness has conquered them utterly.

Lear turns mad in a memorable storm, being abandoned, a toy of the terrible elements, he is obliged to face himself and what he discovers in his innermost self is unbearable for him. This drama is echoed in Pip’s fate in Moby Dick, where Melville gives a candid explanation as well: the “dead calm” of the open sea, “the awful lonesomeness is intolerable” (396). Ahab’s madness affects the whalers in a paralysing way, they are unable to withstand him but they strive to avoid him dreading his madness. It is the same fear Hamlet warns the others of: “For, though I am not splenitive and rush, / Yet have I
something in me dangerous,/ Which let thy wisdom fear...” (5.1.266-268).

Interestingly, the great Hungarian poet, Vörösmarty can be connected to both Shakespeare and Melville. Vörösmarty translated *King Lear* into Hungarian after the fall of the Independence War, and his heart-broken pessimism radiates through every line, *King Lear* being a perfect choice for his mood (Mészöly 66-67). Vörösmarty’s poem ‘Prologue’, written in the same year as *Moby Dick*, dispenses the same disillusionment, and most astonishingly, it is done with almost the same unusual metaphors and shocking expressions. Vörösmarty speaks about the earth losing its colour, spring as “makeup-mistress”, even “wrinkled prostitute” who is “pretending youth and faking happiness” (Peter Zollman’s splendid translation). Melville, meditating on the blankness of white, states that it is “the visible absence of colour” and Nature is nothing but “subtle deceits”, mere “mystical cosmetics”, and the world itself is described without euphemism: “the palsied universe lies before us a leper” (196-197).

Shakespeare often put some kinds of fools in his plays, whose task is primarily to entertain the audience. Of course Shakespeare is not that superficial, foolish characters usually have more meaningful roles as well as serving as comic reliefs. In tragedies, when the main hero, on the edge of madness, is coupled with a fool, a thought-provoking contrast is set up. Doubt and confusion are born in the audience since nothing is sure any more, one cannot decide who is the real fool or whether they are fools at all. *Hamlet*’s fool, named as clown, seems abnormal because he is shamelessly singing while digging graves. However, as Horatio points out, “Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness” (5.1.72), and Melville comes to the same conclusion regarding the dangers surrounding the oarsmen:
“... habit - strange thing! what cannot habit accomplish?...” (276). There is even an explicit allusion to this graveyard scene in *Moby Dick*, Ahab addressing the carpenter: “Hark ye, dost thou not ever sing working about a coffin? ...the gravedigger in the play sings, spade in hand.” (494).

The Fool in *King Lear* stands even closer to *Moby Dick*’s story. Pip, also mad, but in a significantly different way from Ahab’s madness, has the same role and effect on the main character as the Fool. “Though Pip could not save him he did bring back Ahab’s humanities” says Olson, also giving some examples of Ahab’s humanization (275). “For the first time Ahab spontaneously offers to help another human being” (Olson 276) with the sentence “Hands off from that holiness” (489). Here Ahab also admits that Pip “touches his inmost centre”, wanting to rivet their hands together (489). Their madness already bounds them together, they understand and support each other, forming an alliance against the ‘normals’, the world. It is Pip who says the last words to Ahab from the ship, right after Starbuck’s unsuccessful attempt, these two, the first mate and an insane black lad, standing by the doomed Ahab until the very end.

The main symptom of and, at the same time, reason for Ahab’s madness is his monomania. In this sense he is very similar to Hamlet, especially that their only and exclusive aim is to take a complete and bloody revenge for an unendurable insult. Concerning *Macbeth*, several parallels can be found between the ambitious Scot and Captain Ahab. It is their confident belief in supernatural forces and their prophesies that direct them towards their destiny (Olson 272). “[T]he seemingly impossible things that must happen before Ahab can die is reminiscent of Birnam wood and Dunsinane” observes F.O. Matthiessen in his essay (292).
What is most dangerous in their monomania is that neither Macbeth nor Ahab can think of the harmful consequences of their obsession on the people around them. Macbeth’s hunger for power costs not only his reputation and later life, but the life of his wife, his best friend, many excellent patriots and their innocent families, but he is unmoved. Even his wife’s death leaves him rather indifferent, only contemplating about life being “a walking shadow, ... a tale ... signifying nothing” (5.5.25,27,29), although she sacrificed her sanity in order to help her husband. Ahab is well aware that the men on board came to catch whales and make money out of it, that many of them have families, but he, as their captain, can afford himself not to care and subordinate everyone and everything to his perverse cause.

The line “signifying nothing” (5.5.29) returns in the same form in Moby Dick, quite unexpectedly in the end of a long chapter dealing with cetology (149). Melville very sensitively describes the process of Ahab becoming mad, telling us that his soul fled in horror from his frantic mind, and “the mind does not exist unless leagued with the soul” (202). The same could happen to Lady Macbeth after her passionate prayer to the spirits asking them to unsex her (1.5.46). Another compelling example of similarities is the Pequod’s meeting with the Samuel Enderby. Here we learn that the English captain was the same way attacked by Moby Dick, still his attitude is just the opposite of Ahab’s: “he’s welcome to the arm he has, since I can’t help it, ... but ...no more White Whales for me; I’ve lowered for him once, and that has satisfied me...he’s best let alone...” (420). Seeing this opinion, Ahab’s monomania is even more striking just like Macbeth’s immediate faith in the Weird Sisters’ promises is the contrary of Banquo’s doubtful calmness. As the word ‘mono’ indicates, Ahab is absolutely
self-centered, he not only ignores his fellow-beings but thinks himself superior to every material thing as well. However, this boosted self-confidence makes him lonely, “damned in the midst of Paradise” (171), and develops a “fatal pride” (487) in him, expressed best with his cry “I’ll, I’ll solve it, though!” (525).

Although Doctor Faustus is not a work of Shakespeare, but of another genius of the era, it deserves mentioning in this context. Marlowe’s drama inspired many works of art since the Renaissance, the most famous among them is by the German Goethe. The ‘pact with the devil’ motif is a popular idea in many genres, even for example in folk tales, and there is an implicit allusion to it in Moby Dick as well. There is on the one hand a hero so obsessed with an idea or plan that he feels earthly means unsatisfactory, even insufficient; and on the other hand a weird, suspicious character able to help him, though at a drastic price. Doctor Faustus, coupled with Mephistopheles, gets what he was longing for, though at the same time he is doomed, and the question remains, whether the sacrifice was worth. But as for Ahab, although he expects Fedallah to help him in catching the horrible white whale, his attempt is absolutely in vain, what is more, the Parsee dies before and because of Ahab, leaving him despairingly alone, abandoned by heaven and hell alike. As Olson says, “Melville’s assumption is that a league with evil closes the door to truth” (274).

Evil occurs not only theoretically, however. Now and then the characters themselves discuss its perceptible presence on the ship. Beyond the superstitions about Fedallah carrying his devilish tail coiled away in his pocket, Stubb senses the aim of the devil as well: “... the old man is hard bent after that White Whale, and the devil there is trying to ... get him to swap away his silver watch or his
soul, or something of that sort, and then he’ll surrender Moby Dick” (305). Ahab himself does not deny his supposed supporter, “deliriously” baptizing his new harpoon with the words “Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!” (462). As another allusion to the hideously working evil forces the narrator describes their ship with several frighteningly infernal images: “...the rushing Pequod, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander’s soul” (403-404). “Such a crew, so officered, seemed specially picked and packed by some infernal fatality to help him to his monomaniac revenge” (188).

Though the most obvious similarities are between Ahab and the great tragic heroes of Shakespeare, there are also beautiful instances of more hidden parallels. They prove that Shakespeare’s other plays are equal to his most famous tragedies in the sense that they also could inspire another great work of literature. In As You Like It, for example, not only the world-widely known half-sentence is interesting from our point of view, but its articulator, Jaques as well. Taking a closer look at them, it is evident that Ishmael is very much like Jaques. They are prone to melancholy and as half-outsiders, they hold an important function. Not being in the centre of the events, they can point out less apparent, maybe hidden phenomena, they can contrast or even question the behaviour of the mainstream characters. Jaques refuses to join the merry celebrations, he leads his life in his own way. Ishmael as narrator is the only

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3 Of course Stubb’s placing one’s soul on the same level with a silver watch is another thought-provoking idea, and again proves Melville’s fantastic ability to put several different layers in one situation.
door for us readers to get to know and understand what is happening with the Pequod and its men. Though he cannot be a fully objective story-teller, being part of the community he speaks about, and occasionally he even disappears from the narrative, still it is his experiences that form the bond between the book and its readers. As the only survivor, he eventually becomes an outsider. Although he confesses his voice was one forming the enthusiastic cries taking the oath for Ahab, with time moving on, he is able to see clearly and describe Ahab’s special character and the others’ different treatment of the captain’s more and more evident madness. Despite the strong similarities in their roles, there is an important difference as well: while Jaques remains static throughout the drama, Ishmael’s worldview gradually changes. He does not lose his basic values, but his judgements are being reshaped, for instance regarding the question of faith. While in the chapter entitled “The Whiteness of the Whale” he calls himself a “wretched infidel” and earlier as a real open-minded person, he even takes part in Queequeg’s pagan rituals, as he grew more experienced, he slowly takes up a more allowing attitude. He admits to be “...neither believer nor infidel, but ... a man who regards them both with equal eye” (359).

*Moby Dick* is full of enchanting descriptions of nature: sometimes it just means a phrase found in the middle of a philosophical passage, sometimes a whole paragraph tries to present us the unutterable charms of the ocean. Nature is often part of Shakespearean plays as well, but perhaps it is found in the most easy-going, still not superficial way in *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. When reading about “girlish air” (131), “serene valley-lake” or “smooth satin-like surface” (370) in *Moby Dick*, it is not difficult to remember the playful and magical scenes in the Athenian forest. Expressions like “warmly cool, clear,
ringing, perfumed, overflowing, redundant days” of “the eternal August of the Tropic”, which are like “crystal goblets of Persian sherbet” suggest an almost mystical atmosphere, brilliantly preparing the way for the strange calmness which so powerfully affects the sailors on the unlimited oceans. There are however more refreshing phrases, more familiar to our European and North-American climate, which again lead us back to the world of midsummer’s night: “... when the red-cheeked, dancing girls, April and May, trip home to wintry, misanthropic woods, even the … most thunder-cloven old oak will at least send forth some few green spouts…” (131).

The continuous renewal of nature more than once appears in the novel, usually as an undercurrent of the main events, but its significance is not negligible. At the same time, Melville also several times meditates on the eternity of nature that it existed and will exist always in the same way, unperturbed by mankind, however much the latter tries to overpower it with violent attacks or simply careless behaviour. It is proved in Moby Dick through the desperate and catastrophic efforts of Ahab in pursuing the white whale that nature is like a phoenix, it is always reborn no matter what forces want to rule its ancient rhythm. Moreover, nature has its own tools of defence in case of undue intervention on the part of humans. The detailed descriptions of sea in Moby Dick present us an unpredictable nature, sometimes malignant, sometimes a peaceful unity of elements, which can be harmed but never utterly conquered. The desire to rule over nature is probably as old as mankind, and Melville was not the first to get inspired by this conflict. Though The Tempest is an especially multi-layered, complicated play of Shakespeare, a farewell worthy of the great author, the relation of nature and Prospero is beyond doubt a stressed element. Besides
Caliban, who considers Prospero an enemy and for this reason is a favourite of postcolonial studies, even Ariel, a faithful servant feels Prospero unjustified in ruling the island despotically: “Let me remember thee what thou hast promised, / Which is not yet perform’d me” (1.2.240-241). The conflict is however smoothly solved in The Tempest, instead of a tragedy around the globe we get a peaceful, righteous ending from Shakespeare, which does not underestimate the problems focused on but refuses to leave the stage drowned in pessimism. Of course we cannot state that Melville’s message was a totally pessimist one. On the contrary, Moby Dick is far too complex for being able to summarise it in one word, and, though the Nature vs. Man dilemma is radically differently dealt with, the famous celebration of mankind by Miranda—“How beauteous mankind is!” (5.1.189)—is echoed in Moby Dick through a whole enthusiastic paragraph, including “… man, in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, … a grand and glowing creature…” (123).

A ‘disputed’ comedy, Measure for Measure also offers a good opportunity for contrasting it with Moby Dick. Actually, here no contrast can be found, at least from the point of view of the main characters. First, both Ahab and Angelo are unusual heroes, they are not essentially positive, immaculate characters. Secondly, their most distinctive trait is that they abuse their power without hesitation. Both are in a position where they can influence other people’s lives, and they do influence them, unfortunately in a damaging way. What makes them disagreeable leaders is the fact that they do not take into consideration the other factor of power, which is responsibility for the lives they have power over.

Humour, especially irony is all-pervading in Moby Dick, and it also provides several episodes that can serve as comic reliefs, similarly to certain scenes in Shakespeare’s
great tragedies. It is rather obvious, however, that for instance the character of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* or the Fool in *King Lear* and their sometimes funny behaviour bear deeper messages as well. The sudden betrayal of the Nurse, the only confidante of Juliet, is a huge disappointment for the young girl and makes her discover that finally she can count only on herself. Also, readers and audience may laugh at the bold and witty Fool, but in fact he is a very important stepstone in Lear’s self-discovery. *Moby Dick* contains many similar reasons for a hearty laugh with serious undertones. The figure of the carpenter, who “now comes in person on this stage” (441), is significant because his even formally surprising dialogue with Ahab on the deck and the following monologue point out such seemingly tiny things that bring us closer to the old captain’s character. Such ironic paradox is his statement: “Yes, now that I think of it, here’s his bedfellow! has a stick of whale’s jaw-bone for a wife!” (447). At the same time it is undeniable that the whole situation is very funny, thanks to the carpenter’s peculiar style and his continuous sneezing during the conversation. Fleece is another particularly good example for the twofold humour of Melville. The cook’s verbal battle with the lofty Stubb, and especially his preaching to the sharks entertain the reader, but the background cannot be easily ignored. Stubb’s arrogant behaviour is disturbing for the reader, shows the shadows of the mate’s cheerful character. Is it because of the master-servant hierarchy? Or because Fleece is black? On shore he probably would be a slave, and he does not deserve a better treatment on board either? To the modern mind, none of these explanations are satisfactory enough for humiliating a fellow human being. However, Melville tactfully signals to those who can understand that Fleece is the real winner of their battle, and thus calms down any bad feelings that were
created by a basically humourous episode. Another episode that is a source of humour also places Stubb in the centre of action. Meeting the Rose-Bud, a French ship with an inexperienced captain offers a fantastic chance for making fun. Stubb’s and the Guernsey man’s interpreting game first seems innocent, though even Stubb admits he diddled the French captain, but somehow one cannot help feeling that the American whalers are too proud of their superiority in the business and they tend to despise other nations, and consequently, make the most of their weaknesses unscrupulously.

Shakespeare and Melville also proved their genius by being far ahead of their own time. They neither shared nor accepted the common prejudices of their social class, what is more, they often openly questioned them, undaunted by outrageous audiences. Jews or people with a darker colour of skin were no less degraded persons of the Renassaince society than during the following centuries. Yet it did not hinder Shakespeare in making heroes of them, Shylock and Othello both belong to his greatest and most famous creatures. His innovation is even more highlighted by the fact that the audience, including Samuel Coleridge for example, refused to see a coloured actor on stage as Othello, they simply could not imagine it for centuries (Riding 345). The true love of Othello and Desdemona, unsuitable for the society they lived in, returns in *Moby Dick* with the friendship of Queequeg and Ishmael, unusual both in its closeness, and in the cultural differences of the partners. Melville was not willing to follow the sacred rules of his contemporaries, and attacked the institute of slavery several times in the novel ten years before the Civil War broke out. One of these occasions is the bitterly ironic description of Stubb’s attitude towards poor Pip: “‘I won’t pick you up, if you jump; mind that. ... a whale would sell
for thirty times what you would, Pip, in Alabama.’... Hereby perhaps Stubb indirectly hinted that though man loved his fellow, yet man is a money-making animal, which propensity too often interferes with his benevolence” (359). Melville’s open-mindedness is probably due to his firm belief in men’s equality based on the fundamental, but interestingly too often forgotten Christian principle. At least this is what the writer suggests us in a passage overflowed with joy upon the greatness of man: “... that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God: Himself! The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality!” (123).

A paramount part of Shakespeare’s genius and popularity is his ability to touch upon essential problems of man’s innermost soul. His thoughts were incorporated into everyday speech, he is quoted world-wide argumentatively or humourously, even uneducated people may use his famous lines without knowing where they are from, and this is the best proof for Shakespeare’s eternity. He discovered and expressed universal feelings in a manner that is no way outdated in spite of the passed centuries or the change in language. Lines like “I am determined to prove a villain”(1.1.32), “the rest is silence” (5.2.359) or “that which we call a rose/By any other name would smell as sweet” (2.1.85-86) can be applied to various situations even apart form their original context. Moby Dick’s complexity, its numerous conflicts also present dilemmas, possible solutions, questions without answers and emotions as pressing for today’s people as they were in 1850. Starbuck’s realization of their severe situation makes him feel for the first time the “latent horror in” life and the “phantom futures” waiting for him (172). “A thin joist of a spine never yet upheld a full and noble soul” is a statement truer than
ever (337). Melville also makes us see that *Moby Dick* is not merely an adventure story with a madman, he regularly widens the horizons of novel, making it a universal tale, expanding the validity of the problems to everyone. We all have our own white whale, “that, some time or other, swims before all human hearts” and Melville does not leave room for illusions, warning that these chased phantoms “either lead us on in barren mazes or midway leave us whelmed” (235). Even the very last sentence (not considering the Epilogue) underlines globality and eternity: “and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago” (535).

It can be said in a nutshell that Melville used the inspiration from Shakespeare consistently and creatively. Emphasis is on the latter: though Melville set up many obvious parallels between his figures and Shakespearean characters, he is on no accounts a mere imitator of Shakespeare. There are many instances where only a slight reminisence can be discovered or where Melville turned the given Shakespearean basis inside out, let alone the innumerable allusions to other literary works such as the Bible. In conclusion, *Moby Dick* is a truly modern masterpiece, with intertextuality on a high level. Melville had many sources he admired but instead of copying them, he thought their and his own ideas over and over, until his imagination reshaped the material into something new, into a great synthesis, which is *Moby Dick*.

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The Confessor Speaks to No One: Ahab, Starbuck, Confessions, and Travel Narratives

Will Norton-Mosher

Starbuck is the most important character in *Moby Dick*. It might not seem like it at first glance, but pay attention. Most of what goes on in Ahab's mind is spoken to Starbuck who listens to, argues with, and then ignores. Starbuck's character does this because of his roots in travel narratives, which as you will see, define his motives and add a finer layer of understanding to *Moby Dick*.

Starbuck's character, the violent Quaker, is taken from eighteenth century travel fiction. Travel fiction played a vital role in *Moby Dick*. Even though *Moby Dick* was hardly about travel, and it was hardly a narrative, there was a great deal of the travel narrative tradition present in Melville’s novel. *Moby Dick* is part travel narrative, and it takes many of the themes and ideas from travel narratives and it turns them around. Melville's first novel, *Typee*, was a travel narrative, his second novel, *Omoo*, was a travel narrative, and so were almost all of his subsequent novels including *Moby Dick*. Because Melville was a participant in the travel narrative tradition all of the allusions to travel narratives that litter the text are just as important as the biblical and Shakespearean allusions that Melville makes.

The travel narrative was a genre. They had certain tropes, traditions, and formulas that they adhered to which defined the genre. Travel narratives began to become popular in the 18th century during the rise of the English novel; the most popular genre of novel was the travel narrative. During this period England was at the height of its colonial game, and the exotic adventures of seafaring adventurers excited the reading public.
However, there was a problem with this sort of fiction, and it was plagiarism. Most of the novelists never went to sea because a voyage at sea could last for years and it could be lethal, so when they wrote their novels they generally cobbled them together from other travel narratives. As a result certain accounts of faraway places began to echo other accounts of the same faraway places. Certain characters began to appear again and again as authors looked at the works of other authors and added their own spin.

This established a foundation for the genre that died out years later as travel became easier and faster with the invention of engines and airplanes. Now the travel narrative is a historical curiosity, but it is important for creating a foundational understanding of *Moby Dick*. *Moby Dick* is part of the travel narrative as well. Melville invents the same kinds of people and places that other authors create. The island of Tranquo is not a real place, but it is the island where Ishmael finds the remains of a whale god and he measures its skeleton. Melville was not innocent in his participation in the travel narrative genre. Although Melville did travel and his first books were based on his own experiences; *Moby Dick* was a work of fiction. Melville had read the other travel narratives. He knew the genre and participated in it. In order to understand what these twists are it is important to know what Melville is twisting. Because a genre is a nebulous thing we need to create an experimental framework for the allusions that *Moby Dick* creates. The book *Captain Singleton* is perfect for this.

*Captain Singleton* was written by Daniel Defoe in the 18th century. It is the story of a dread pirate, his crew, his good friend, and their adventures in pursuit of treasures and eventually Captain Singleton's redemption. Daniel
Defoe was the canonical travel narrative writer, he wrote Robinson Crusoe, too.

However, the story of Captain Singleton is the most appropriate for creating an experimental framework for *Moby Dick* because it contained all the archetypal characters and the narrative arch meshes with *Moby Dick* in an interesting way. But before delving into how the travel narrative fits into *Moby Dick* it is important to understand why it fits into *Moby Dick* at all. In travel narratives there is always a goal that has to be reached, there are always storms, the supernatural, exotic locations, symptoms of mutiny, and other events. There are also characters that appear with a certain amount of regularity in travel narratives.

The characters from *Moby Dick* can be grouped according to where they get their character traits. There are two categories of characters in *Moby Dick*. There are characters from the Bible, and there are characters from travel narratives. Characters like Queequeg and Starbuck come from travel narratives. They have traits that are similar to characters that appear in travel narratives. In travel narratives there are always noble savages, anonymous shipmates, crafty blacksmiths, incompetent foreigners, friendly pirates, and strict Quakers. Most of these characters appear in some form in *Moby Dick*. Biblical characters represent the other group. The biblical group is composed of characters like Elijah, Ahab, and Ishmael. The biblical characters are more complex, and they are uncanny compared to the travel narrative characters. There are also characters such as Fedallah, but he is not important for this interpretation of the text.

The most important character from the travel narrative group is the violent Quaker. The violent Quaker is a character that appears with some regularity in travel
narratives, and the Quaker always attempts to save the
Captain. This is extremely important for *Moby Dick* because
the rising action depends on Captain Ahab's personality. In
travel narratives the Quaker always succeeds and the
Quaker always ushers in the ending of the novel.

In *Moby Dick* the most important character is
Starbuck. It seems unlikely, but the Quaker character is
immensely important. In the final scenes Ahab talks to
himself and the world, but the last character that he has a
crushing conversation with is Starbuck. Starbuck is one of the travel
narrative characters, and his interaction with Ahab is very
telling. As will be described once the formula for the violent
Quaker is established. The significance of this final
interaction can be unraveled using this experimental
framework.

*Captain Singleton* loosely mirrors some of the
elements of *Moby Dick*. The parallels were not deliberately
made by Melville, but they exist because *Moby Dick*
participated in the travel narrative genre. Starbuck followed
a formula. The main character in *Captain Singleton* was the
title’s namesake: Captain Singleton. The second most
important character was his best friend William the Quaker.
During their adventures Captain Singleton and William the
Quaker would capture boats, take their treasure, and then
release their crew. Under most circumstances Captain
Singleton always wanted to release the crew unharmed with
just enough supplies so that the crew could return to port.

Whenever Captain Singleton did this William the
Quaker would interrupt and tell him to kill everyone.
Whenever he did this Captain Singleton would ask William
for an explanation, and William would give him a
convoluted answer. William used the Bible and clever
doubletalk to justify his actions. In the more memorable
episodes William the Quaker "sold all his Negroes" (139) to
a group of planters for a quick profit. Later William the Quaker went onto an island because he had a dream that the island was full of gold. Instead he found that the island was full of hostile natives. When the natives killed some of the anonymous crewmembers William went berserk and decided that the best course of action was to kill all of the natives.

One of the things that the violent Quaker is good at doing is finding a novel way to meet his goals. When William the Quaker landed on the island with the natives who attacked his crew he thinks of a novel way of killing them. He cannot go in because he will be ambushed, so instead he packs the mouth of the cave with gunpowder, sets fire to it, and blasts all the natives into bloody scraps. Captain Singleton describes the scene like this "for some of them had no arms, some no legs, some no head" (179). Everything that William does, he does for profit, when he killed the natives with gunpowder he was still sure that there is gold there. Then when he realized that there was no gold on the island he decided that killing the natives was unjust, and he left immediately. Starbuck has these qualities as well. He kills whales, but it is for a profit. Starbuck goes into the center of a shoal of whales and he is not swayed to mercy when he sees whale pups nursing with their mothers. On the contrary: Starbuck is swayed to violence because he sees easy prey.

The violent Quaker had other discerning qualities as well. The character followed a formula, and that formula is important because, later as we will see, Melville reacts to this formula and actively works to subvert it for his own reasons.

The Quaker was also a very moral character, and at the end the Quaker always attempted to convert the captain at one point of the narrative. At the end of Captain
Singleton William the Quaker gets the captain to "repent" (219), and gets the captain to marry his widowed sister, and they go into hiding with all of their wealth intact as rich and pious men.

He causes the Captain to realize the error of his ways while the captain remains set in them. William the Quaker paved the way for other characters that were like him. His character appears in Starbuck in *Moby Dick*. Starbuck is “a Quaker with vengeance.” When he is described his better qualities like valor are painted as a function of how well they serve Starbuck.

So to summarize the violent Quaker has several qualities. First the violent Quaker character is devout, second, the Quaker character uses his religion in order to justify his actions, and third, the Quaker tries to convert the captain at some point in the narrative.

On some levels Starbuck is as bloodthirsty as William is, but he is not so dangerous that he trades slaves or commits genocide. Starbuck kills whales, and as Ishmael puts it in the chapter entitled “The Affidavit”, killing a whale is a greater deed than killing a man. Ishmael compares hunting whales to great martial feats many times. The harpooners and whale men are compared to a great number of princes, emirs, and biblical figures. To a character like Ishmael, killing a man would seem petty in comparison to hurling a lance into the hide of a great Leviathan. For instance, in the chapter entitled "Schools and Schoolmasters" the crew is followed by a group of Malay pirates as the whalers shoot after a group of whales. When this happens Ishmael describes the pirate attack as a minor event. He says that the whalers are indifferent to the pursuit of bloodthirsty pirates when there are whales to be slain.

There is something about how mortal men do not measure up to whales that needs to be mentioned. This is
where the parallel continues. What has happened is that the character has been blown up. Starbuck is the character of William the Quaker transposed into an immensely huge, deep environment where even the smallest action holds deep philosophical significance. This means that the parallel has not been diminished. William the Quaker kills natives, sailors, and pirates, and Starbuck kills whales who are natives, sailors, and pirates all wound up into one.

Starbuck does not seem as sadistic as the other characters, and it raises questions about the authorial motive for introducing a character that was meant to be bloodthirsty, and then portraying him in a way that makes him seem like the voice of reason. This was intentional. Starbuck is just as violent as William the Quaker but he is not as deranged as the other characters like Stubb and Ahab. Ahab and Stubb are many, many times more dangerous than he is. Starbuck blanches in comparison to the reckless and reasonless monomania of Ahab, and he pales in comparison to the belligerent and senseless violence of Stubb. The importance of this was his interaction. When the bloodthirsty character represents the voice of reason it means that the characters he interacts with are many times more violent than he is.

However, despite his environment Starbuck still cleaves to the character formula that was set up by previous Quakers. He tries to stop Ahab because the pursuit of the white whale seems overly dangerous to him. Starbuck is a character that is characterized by how economic he is and how his religion gives him reason to pursue economic gain.

Starbuck tries to follow the formula, but Ahab interferes. In one scene where Ahab and Starbuck interact Starbuck tries to sway Ahab from hunting Moby Dick. He calls Ahab's monomania "Vengeance on a dumb brute!" (178) and he tries to sway Ahab from chasing the whale.
When he tries to sway him with his rhetoric he fails miserably. When he does this Captain Ahab subdues him. Captain Ahab has a soliloquy and he says "something shot from my dilated nostrils, he has inhaled it in his lungs. Starbuck is now mine" (179). This is the first place where the formula breaks. When it breaks the meaning is significant.

It means that Ahab is more powerful than the tradition that made Starbuck who he is. When Starbuck fails to do what his character was made to do, and had done in every book before, it was a huge break. Something like this is momentous. If Melville were writing a story based on the Genesis it would be like God had a heart attack on the seventh day, fell from heaven, and died.

However, Starbuck is not god. Starbuck is a violent Quaker and he follows the character formula. He is subdued, but he continues to resist Ahab's influence. Starbuck continually attempts to get at Ahab. He tries to convince him that his pursuit of the white whale is a fool’s errand, and every time that he tries to do it he is rebuked by Ahab; sometimes violently. Once Ahab threatens to kill Starbuck and he levels a musket at him.

This does not deter Starbuck from attempting his conversion. It drives him to desperation. At one point he even thinks of killing Ahab, and eventually he resigns and stops attempting to save him. This is especially important, because during the last few chapters of *Moby Dick* Ahab has an epiphany. He seeks out Starbuck and tries to tell him about the error of his ways. He confesses to how wrong and unholy his quest for revenge has been, and he tells Starbuck that he sometimes even thinks of going home.

During this confession Ahab is looking out at sea, and halfway through Starbuck leaves Ahab. This is a major break in the character formula. He should have remained
behind for Ahab if he cleaved to the character formula, but he did not. Something happened to Starbuck that made it impossible for him to stay.

The travel narrative is genre fiction. These characters are from genre fiction, like the genre fiction that comes from fantasy novels or romance novels, and these character types can be categorized. For instance, almost every fantasy novel in America has the wizard character, but not all wizards are the same in each novel. They have a few defining characteristics. They are old, and they have access to supernatural abilities.

The violent Quaker also has a set of defining characteristics. The Quaker must be driven by a profit motive. The Quaker must be devout, but only to the degree where it serves him, and once the Quaker has filled his profit motive he must have a moral epiphany and he must attempt to convert the captain.

Starbuck's purpose is to be a backdrop for the more sinister characters. When this epiphany happens, Starbuck walks away because Ahab is so far away from everything canny that he even drives away the stock character who exists to hear his confession. Starbuck tries to stand up against Ahab. He, the genre character, is interacting with the outside influence of the biblical character. Ahab is motivated by revenge, not profit, and Starbuck tries to stop him. This is another break.

Starbuck is the violent Quaker. In the very beginning of *Moby Dick* when Ishmael and Queequeg are finding a boat they encounter Peleg and Bildad. Bildad is a Quaker "with a vengeance". This is the first time that a Quaker is introduced into the narrative, and the way that the Quaker is introduced shows the connection between the travel narrative Quaker and the Quakers on the Pequod.
Ahab is not the stock character captain. Often in travel narratives the captain had to follow a certain set of rules. They had to be flexible, and creative. They needed to seek treasure, and they were also often the most human and they were the kindest of all characters. Ahab is not a part of the travel narrative tradition. He is an invention that Melville created for *Moby Dick*. Ahab is not one of these friendly captains. Ahab is one of the biblical characters, and his biblical name means that he comes from a narrative that is outside of the more traditional travel narrative. His elements are alien. Because of this Starbuck's reactions to him give us a glimpse into his mind.

No character can exist in a vacuum. In order for a narrative to exist there must be conflict, and for conflict to exist there needs to be an interaction between characters. Starbuck's purpose was to behave like a sounding board for Ahab's monomania. Ahab does something insane or bizarre, and Starbuck gives his reaction. Without an interaction the novel would be a giant soliloquy. Dialogue requires two speakers, and in each case of Ahab's monomania, there is a reaction from Starbuck.

Here is an example of this in action. At the end of *Captain Singleton* Captain Singleton confesses to William the Quaker and they decide to settle down, become devout, and spend the rest of their lives living comfortably. William the Quaker lets Captain Singleton marry his widowed sister who is on the brink of poverty, and this saves her from losing her home.

Each time when William the Quaker attempts to reason out why killing someone is a reasonable idea he has to reason it out with Captain Singleton. In one particularly comic episode he wants to kill a group of traders that Captain Singleton finds off the coast of Japan. He reasons that it's courageous to kill all the people instead of taking
their things and leaving them alone. He says that it is more noble to kill people in combat than to leave them humiliated. At the end of *Captain Singleton* William the Quaker converts the captain and they return to land forever after. They start a family, they live together, and everything is fixed. Captain Singleton confesses to William and the narrative ends.

Ahab also has a confession, but his confession is nothing like the ocean narrative confession that takes place between William the Quaker and Captain Singleton. Ahab’s confession comes at the end of a long string of interactions between Ahab and Starbuck where Ahab and Starbuck grasp at each other’s throats and come within inches of killing each other over and over again. Starbuck opposes Ahab's monomania from the start. He thinks that Ahab is going to doom the entire crew, and he tries to stop him from chasing the whale because of his profit motive.

Ahab thinks about his wife and children on shore and feels remorse for leaving his young wife and newborn babe. Ahab tells Starbuck this, but instead of receiving Ahab's confession and ending the hunt, Starbuck leaves the scene. It is not clear when Starbuck leaves Ahab while he is speaking because Ahab is having a soliloquy about his life as Starbuck listens. Because of this, the details of what Starbuck is doing while Ahab is speaking are not written down. If Starbuck had remained, listened to Ahab, and if he had taken the opportunity to attempt to convince Ahab that his monomania was wrong, then the novel *Moby Dick* might not have had the same climax. Ahab's death is as much Ahab's fault as it was Starbuck's.

Also in Ahab's confession is a yearning to return to land and his family. This mirrors the motive behind the characters in the ocean narrative. Captain Singleton and Ahab have that much in common. The difference between the two
characters is that Captain Singleton returns to land and starts a family, Captain Ahab does not.

In the narrative Captain Ahab begins to change Starbuck. He has a certain contagious effect on him. At one point Ahab says to himself that he has exhaled something from his nostrils that Starbuck has inhaled. This is the first of many times when Starbuck begins to act less and less like the Quaker that comes from the travel narrative tradition and more and more like Ahab. Starbuck ceases to think about the profit motive as the narrative of *Moby Dick* continues. Starbuck is consumed by Ahab's overpowering character. He is threatened by Ahab, and then later Starbuck seriously considers killing Ahab, but he is unable to do it. If Starbuck had been following the travel narrative formula for the violent Quaker then he would have had no qualms about blasting Ahab and pitching his corpse over the side of the Pequod. However, for whatever reason, Starbuck is unable to murder him.

Starbuck has been broken by his first encounter with Ahab. When he inhales the humour that Ahab shoots out of his nostrils he becomes like him. Ahab takes something from Starbuck and Starbuck knows it. When Starbuck begins to reflect on what has happened him during the soliloquy section, he says that "He (Ahab) drilled deep down, and blasted all my reason out of me! I think I see his impious end; but feel that I must help him to it" (184). Again this is a huge break. Starbuck has begun following the opposite track. He has begun to feel sympathy for Ahab. He is underneath Ahab's spell. This continues onwards until a supernatural portent shakes the entire crew. Then something seems to come out of Starbuck that alters the way he thinks.

In the chapter entitled "The Candles" nature turns against the Pequod and Ahab, in a very King Lear like
moment, argues with the storm. Electrical phenomenon lights the Pequod with supernatural light. The crew thinks that it is an ill omen, and Starbuck thinks that this is madness. "God, God is against thee, old man; forebear! t’is an ill voyage!" (522). Before that Starbuck was at Ahab's mercy, but there is something about the godlike omen that frightens him out of it. Ahab replies and he curses Starbuck and the crew. The last thing that glows is Ahab's harpoon, which Ahab blows out like a candle. This is a very Shakespearean moment. Shakespeare often used weather-based events to indicate that something was very wrong with the universe. These events placed characters at the mercy of the elements, but in this scene Ahab puts the elements at his mercy. He blows out the glowing harpoon. This is where travel narrative allusions crash into Shakespearean allusions. Starbuck tells Ahab that he needs to turn around as he repeats his plea to get Ahab to repent and return to safety. This image butts up against the Shakespearean device of weird weather that represents the state of the universe in natural phenomena.

Ahab defies Starbuck and the storm and he blows out the glowing harpoon like it was a candle. Again there is the image of Ahab exhaling order to control the elements and people. This becomes more important later. Starbuck continues to attempt to prevent Ahab from completing his quest to kill the whale. He goes into Ahab's cabin and he picks up Ahab's musket. He seriously considers killing Ahab, but he cannot do it.

William the Quaker would never be able to do something like this unless he were underneath Ahab's spell. When Starbuck considers killing Ahab something in him has changed. He would not have been able to even consider killing the captain unless he were underneath dire pressure to act. "Shall this crazed old man be tamely suffered to drag
a whole ship's company down to doom with him?" (528) but then something stops him from killing Ahab. It's something that Starbuck cannot control. When he aims the musket at Ahab's sleeping body he begins to shake as if he was wrestling with an "angel" (529).

Whether or not Starbuck is wrestling with an angel that wants him to kill Ahab or an angel that wants him to spare him is uncertain. Though if Starbuck were under the influence of Ahab then it is arguable that Starbuck is wrestling with an angel that wants him to kill Ahab, and that Starbuck is wrestling against a religious force that wants him to stay away from the search for the all consuming whiteness of the whale.

Then comes the climax and Ahab comes to Starbuck to repent for his wicked ways. In travel narratives the Quaker always converts the captain and it always ends happily. Here, however, is a reversal. Towards the end Ahab seeks out Starbuck and he tells Starbuck that he has made a terrible mistake. Starbuck listens intently, and then leaves to be replaced by Fedallah. When this happens Ahab is frightened for the first time in the entire book. Ahab becomes blanched "to a corpses hue" (558) when he finishes his soliloquy and discovers that no one heard him except Fedallah.

Fedallah is called the devil by even the most blasphemous characters, and here Ahab's confession is heard by the character that most symbolizes the otherness of the whale without being the whale. The formula has broken and Melville has substituted Starbuck the Quaker with Fedallah the devil. There is a huge amount of irony in the moment when Ahab turns and, expecting a response from Starbuck; is met with the character who represents everything that Starbuck is not.
Then again Ahab tries to confess to Starbuck at the last minute. On some level Ahab wants to go back to land. He wants to leave the whale, but each time he attempts to reach through to Starbuck he fails. Ahab is in the boat heading out after the whale and he begins to speak about the whale at the very last moment. Starbuck tells Ahab that what he is doing is stark madness and Ahab replies: "Starbuck, of late I’ve been moved to thee" (575) but then he says that his fate has been decided a long time ago. This is strange considering the character of Ahab who is a godlike figure and a testament to his own willpower. Ahab is making excuses. He feels like he might be able to turn around, but will not because of his pride. All of the things that Ahab has said and done this far show that Ahab would be able to defeat fate if he wanted to, but he decides not to. Then just before Ahab seeks out the white whale Starbuck pleads with him one last, final, time. He says that "not too late is it, even now, the third day, to desist. See! Moby-Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him!" (582). Ahab ignores him and continues. The whale does not seek them.

And then, finally, after seeking after Moby-Dick for more than a year and then chasing the whale for three solid days, the whale comes crashing in on them. At this moment when the whale comes flying out of the ocean and onto the Pequod Starbuck speaks. When doom hovers over everyone Starbuck has only one thing to say to Ahab as he shouts orders to the crew and it is "'Oh, Ahab, Ahab, lo thy work" (585).

This particular statement is not shouted. In fact the word ‘oh’ makes the sentence much softer. The word ‘oh’ comes from two sources and it is used in two different ways. First the word ‘oh’ is a corruption from the Latin salutation ‘O’ that is used in a respectful sense at the
beginning of long poems or when addressing gods. The word ‘oh’ is also an onomatopoeic word that represents the noise a person makes when they sigh. Judging from the other words in that sentence the word ‘oh’ could mean either one, but it is more likely that it means the Latinate word ‘O’. The word ‘lo’ is a biblical word and it invokes the antiquity of the language.

Starbuck is saluting Ahab in a way that shows a combination of pity and ancient awe. He pities Ahab's insane quest, and he is afraid for his own life. Again Ahab turns the character formula inside out and he influences Starbuck. Starbuck should pity Ahab, but instead he finds something admirable in him during his last moments. He invokes the Bible with the word ‘lo’ like his character should, but he does it while saluting Ahab.

Starbuck repeats Ahab's name twice in this final salutation. He says this either to get Ahab's attention, or to add an ornamental flourish to the sentence. This raises the question of Starbuck's intention. Starbuck's sentence is not ornamented. The language is old, but the moment that he speaks is full of tension. It would be an inappropriate place for Starbuck to add ornament to his speech. Starbuck would have to get Ahab's attention during this last salutation because it would be hard for Ahab to pay attention to anything other people are saying or doing. The repetition is more of a call from Starbuck. It is his last attempt to communicate with Ahab.

This communication fails completely. Ahab does not respond to Starbuck. This failure to communicate is another thing that changes Starbuck as the narrative continues. Starbuck fails to reach Ahab. He turns his back, and then eventually he is unable to talk to him during his last moments.
Breath is a huge part of the image landscape that creates *Moby Dick*. Breath is symbolically connected to speech, and speech cannot exist without breath. This is repeated throughout the text. It appears in many of the interactions between Ahab and Starbuck, and it reappears at the end of the book. When Ahab dies he is symbolically strangled. The line that connects the boat to the harpoon and the whale becomes wrapped around Ahab’s neck. Then it drags him out of the boat and into the endless ocean. This action literally drags the breath out of him. When his breath is taken away it does not just kill him, but it takes away his voice.

The role that Starbuck was meant to fill was cut off. The characters cannot communicate towards the end. When they do communicate Starbuck inhales Ahab as he argues. Ahab's presence takes over the character formula of Starbuck. The image of Ahab exhaling something from his nostrils is also biological. It is like Ahab has infected Starbuck with what was making Ahab sick.

When Ahab finally meets the white whale face to face after a three day chase and is then dragged off his boat is not the climax. When Ahab was drawn off into the endless ocean it was really only the ending of a long series of interactions with Starbuck who, even though he was a violent character, had been trying to stop him from chasing the whale. Eventually something about Ahab changes Starbuck so much that when Ahab gives Starbuck his final confession Starbuck leaves. Instead of witnessing to Ahab like Quakers always do in travel narratives Starbuck lets Ahab continue to hunt the whale. Ahab changes Starbuck so much from the character he was meant to be that no one hears his confession but the mute ocean.
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“I fear the Lord the God of Heaven who hath made the sea and the dry land.” (Jonah 1:9; “The Sermon”)

I feel this sentence said by Jonah is very characteristic of the characters in the novel. Most of them have a connection to God, even if in their own way. Melville uses several Biblical allusions in Moby Dick; most of them are the characters’ names themselves. Their names are not so different from the names in the Bible and neither is the outcome of those characters so different.

The first allusion appears in the first line of the novel. “Call me Ishmael.” Ishmael was the Biblical son of Abraham and his servant Hagar, his Egyptian bondservant. He was cast out in favour of his brother, Isaac, and in the process disinherited. The name was commonly used to signify an outcast, which is appropriate since he is inexperienced when it comes to whaling and he was also viewed as an outcast to the other sailors on the Pequod. He seems to be a drifter, a fellow of no particular family other than mankind. Ishmael confirms us that he seeks no special rank aboard the ship and would not want to be either a cook or a captain; he says he has enough responsibility just taking care of himself. In Hebrew his name means ‘God hears’, which means that God is with Ishmael throughout his journey, and in that way it is providence which helps him to survive the fatal journey. He is picked up by another whaling ship Rachel, which while “searching after her missing children, only found another orphan.” (Epilogue).
When Ishmael decides to spend two nights in New Bedford before heading over to Nantucket, he notices an inn, and chooses to stay there. There is a hint of Euroclydon in the description of the place. “Euroclydon was a Biblical name of the tempestuous east wind that shipwrecked Paul off the coast of Malta” (“Euroclydon Definitions”). This story is an indication of the novel’s fatal end.

In the ninth chapter we get acquainted with Father Mapple’s speech when Ishmael visits the chapel, which is a usual habit among the fishermen who are shortly bound for the Indian or the Pacific Ocean. In the beginning of the sermon Father Mapple climbs up to the pulpit that has no stairs and it is substituted with a perpendicular side ladder. Ishmael says the following when he observes the Father in the chapel:

“At my first glimpse of the pulpit, it had not escaped me that however convenient for a ship, these joints in the present instance seemed unnecessary. For I was not prepared to see Father Mapple after gaining the height, slowly turn around, and stooping over the pulpit, deliberately drag up the ladder step by step, till the whole was deposited within, leaving him impregnable in his little Quebec.” (“The Pulpit”)

This description of this scene shows us the strong faith which is represented by the Father. Strong faith means isolation, alienation. To be isolated or alienated is to be set apart from the crowd, to be different. Father Mapple is one of the truest believers in the novel. He sets himself up at a higher, distant, protected place. He assumes that he is the direct messenger of God. The pulpit is built unlike any other. The way he climbed into it is similar to boarding a vessel, which is probably what the Father wants. Outside his church he behaves like a normal whale man, but once he withdraws his ladder he is in an isolated world created of
his own. The possible explanation of the necessity of that kind of separation is that the real world is no longer a place in which one can communicate with God. His real home is the chapel, the ship where he can freely keep in contact with God, maybe this is all that is left of religion in the long run. This can be taken to mean that man is alone on his vessel with nothing but silent emptiness surrounding him. Mapple has to climb the ladder upward toward heaven, in order to escape the land of the sinners and to communicate with God. Then, he pulls it up, preventing invaders, visitors, or any distractions. He stands on that vessel as “the pilot of the living God”, looking down from that height on the congregation, he seems to be superior. In his speech the Father addresses the crowd and says:

“But all the things that God would have us do are hard for us to do- remember that- and hence, he oftener commands us than endeavours to persuade. And if we obey god, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists.” (“The Sermon”)

Here, Father Mapple refers to Jonah whom God called upon to become a prophet. Jonah refused because he didn't desire a life of servitude. Knowing that he had committed the ultimate sin, Jonah fled to the ocean, risking hundreds of crew members' lives, believing that God would not be able to follow. In the sea, Jonah was swallowed by God in the form of a whale and in the whale's belly, he repented and prayed for forgiveness. He was spit out by the whale upon dry land and all was forgiven. On an opposite note, Job is later mentioned in the novel, he was an upright, God-fearing and good man of Uz, who was made to suffer greatly when God tested his faith and loyalty by allowing Satan to have his way with him. Despite his undeserving misfortunes, Job remained steadfast and faithful. In the end, God restored his
substance to him and granted him happiness and prosperity. Job's patience in the face of suffering is proverbial.

Another Biblical allusion is the prophet Elijah and Captain Ahab. Elijah warns Queequeg and Ishmael of Ahab. Ishmael says he and his friend are boarding the Pequod so they are not set to change their plans and do not care about his warnings. Elijah appears to be an insane old bum who will not stop trailing Ishmael and Queequeg. He first implies that by signing the Pequod's papers, Ishmael and Queequeg have in effect, signed away their souls. He then talks of a prophecy concerning Ahab's fate. Elijah claims Ahab is a dangerous person, of whom it is best to beware. The conflict between Elijah and Ahab goes all the way back to the Bible. Ahab was a king in Israel who led the people further away from God. God sent two prophets, Elijah and Elisha to Israel during the time of Ahab. With his warnings Elijah brings a sense of pessimism before the journey even begins.

He states: "Any how, it’s all fixed and arranged a’ ready; and some sailors or other must go with him, I suppose; as well these as any other men, God pity ‘em! Morning to ye, shipmates, morning; the ineffable heavens bless ye; I’m sorry I stopped ye’" ("The Prophet"). He points out that this journey is against God’s will, and since Ahab is the one who wants the journey the most he also stands against God. His behavior appears to be blasphemous. When Ahab confirms that his real aim with the journey is to kill Moby Dick by all means Starbuck cries out loud: "Vengeance on a dumb brute! cried Starbuck, that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab seems blasphemous" ("The Quarter-Deck").

In response to Starbuck’s warning Ahab says: “Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I’d strike the sun if it insulted
me." And "Who’s over me? Truth has no confines" (“The Quarter-Deck”).

But it is not only Elijah who warns us against believing Ahab, in the Jeroboam story Gabriel also cautions us about Ahab, he exclaims: “Think, think of the blasphemer-dead, and down there!—beware of the blasphemer’s end!” (“The Jeroboam’s Story”).

Ahab knows well that Gabriel’s words refer to him, because he “solidly turns aside” and comes up with a different topic towards Captain Mayhew; he is not even willing to think the meaning of the words over. “Gabriel is a high-ranking angel of God. His name means man of God, which well-indicates his loyal and trusted status before the Lord. He identified himself simply as, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God." (Luke 1:19 RSV)” Gabriel is that person who conveys towards Ahab.

By the end of the hunt (just like Elijah and Jonah), Ishmael is left to his fate of spreading his tale to those he felt fit. He is the mariner. His voyage paid the price, leaving Ishmael alone in an empty ocean with only a coffin as a life buoy. In all likeliness, God will not allow Ishmael to shake this off or move on. The tragedy will consume him for the rest of his life. The cycle will never end because there will always be Ishmaels and their Pequods.

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Biblical Allusions and the Question of Blasphemy in
Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*

Zsófia Szabó

There is no other literary work that has been referred to more often in Western literature than the Bible. It is rooted deep in the culture and the minds of the people enabling the writers to use it as a common source for their stories and characters. In the 19th century, the reception of the Bible underwent a great shift; it was no longer considered exclusively as the Holy Scripture but also as a piece of literature.

*Moby Dick* was first published in 1851 and later made Melville one of the most read American writers. It is usually described as part adventure story, part allegory depending on the point of view the reader takes. The themes and motifs that come forward in the novel are all that of an epic; Melville discusses philosophy, religion, mythology and the nature of mankind in the book frequently using Biblical allusions either as symbols or as concrete storylines.

In *Moby Dick*, all the Biblical references can be inscribed to either the writer, Melville or the narrator, Ishmael. Melville created characters with Biblical names using them as living symbols trusting his readers to pick up all that is hidden behind the names. Ahab, the seemingly cruel captain of the Pequod was named after the notorious king of Israel who worshipped a pagan god and was punished severely. Elijah, a prophet in the Bible during Ahab’s reign and Elijah who warns Ishmael and Queequeg before they board the Pequod also bear similarities. Ishmael,
the narrator and the protagonist of the story also received his name from the Book of Genesis.

By representing his characters with names that were familiar to his readers, Melville ensured that his story would not be read only as an adventure story about whaling. He named his characters deliberately and therefore created a new level on which the book could be read.

At the beginning of the novel, Melville gathered together quotations from various literary texts that either mention whaling or deal with the subject of whales. The first five examples he cites are from Genesis, the Book of Job, the story of Johah, the Psalms and Isaiah. The fact that the very first quotes about whales are from the Genesis creates the allusion that the book itself will deal with the subject which was first mentioned in the Bible.

Melville also represented his characters with knowledge of the Bible. Even though most of them are sailors and can be hardly typified as educated people in the sense of academic knowledge, they very often quote the Bible and refer to events and situations from there. In some cases, Melville abstains from indicating the exact source where the characters quote from, expecting the readers to recognise it for themselves. In Chapter 16, Captain Bildad – known by Ishmael as a “well-to-do, retired whaleman” who “had […] been originally educated according to the strictest sect of Nantucket Quakerism” – quotes the Bible without seemingly realizing that he had done so: “‘Seven hundred and seventy seven,’ again said Bildad, without lifting his eyes; and then went on mumbling –’ for where your treasure is, there will your heart also be.’” (cf. Matthew 6:21).

It is not only Melville who intends to use Biblical allusions but also the narrator of the book, Ishmael. He stands out of the seemingly barbaric crew of the Pequod which consists of all kinds of sailors and whalers and
Ishmael, being on his very first whaling voyage, has a unique perspective on the events. He is the one who knows the Bible well enough to be able to use examples from it to support his philosophical contemplations – “the truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows, and the truest of all books is Solomon’s, and Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered steel of woe. ‘All is vanity.’ ALL. This wilful world hath not gold hold of unchristian Solomon’s wisdom yet” - and to characterise the actions of his fellow whalemen with the help of it, like in Chapter 44 describing Ahab as someone who suffers just like Jesus did whose palms were also bloody caused by nails used at the crucifixion: “Oh God! what traces of torments does that man endure who is consumed with one unachieved revengeful desire. He sleeps with clenched hands; and wakes with his own bloody nails in his palms”.

Even today, anyone reading a story about sailors cruising the oceans for years without ever having any contact with other people seems to have the expectation of experiencing a very cruel and primitive life. It was even more so in the 19th century because most of those who had the opportunity to buy books and had the time to read did very rarely know anything about the reality of sailing and whaling. Those who did did not bother reading about it. The stereotype was that the sailors are all either unfaithful Christians or they belong to some other religion that was unknown and therefore not respected by the readers. One of the best examples of the mysticism of other religions in Moby Dick is the character of Queequeg. In Chapter 17, Ishmael assumed that he was sitting his Ramadan when he shut himself in his room but in reality he was praying to his wooden idol, Yojo. Queequeg is without doubt one of the most important characters in Moby Dick. He is the first member of the crew who Ishmael meets and they form a
very special bond that consequently leads to Ishmael’s better understanding of the differences between cultures and religions.

The fact that the crew of the Pequod spends months on the sea facing many dangerous, even life-threatening situations, it is unavoidable that the whalemen seek for some kind of reassurance in spirituality. It may not be necessarily explicit, but it is always present in the novel. In Chapter 36, when Ahab first informs the crew that their first and foremost task is to capture and kill Moby Dick, Starbuck is the only one who dares to argue with him: “Vengeance on a dumb brute! [...] To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab seems blasphemous.” Ahab’s answer is in accordance with his description being a “grand, ungodly godlike man”; he challenges Starbuck when he says “talk not to me of blasphemy, man: I’d strike the sun if it insulted me.”

One of the most often used Biblical allusions in *Moby Dick* is the story of Jonah. Not only are the readers familiar with it but also the characters due to the fact that it directly relates to their personal life. Early on in the novel, we witness a unique sermon about Johan in Nantucket. Father Mapple uses the story of Jonah to bring the Bible closer to the shipmates as much as he can: “Shipmaets, I do not place Jonah before you to be copied for his sin but I do place him before you as a model for repentance. Sin not; but if you do, take heed to repent of it like Jonah.” In Chapter 83, we see another interpretation of Jonah’s story, that of an old whalemen. He is trying to find reasonable explanation for many inconsistencies he had discovered in the story of Jonah’s escape. Ishmael argues that the mere fact that he questions the plausibility of the Bible shows “evidence of his foolish pride of reason” and “his devilish rebellion against the revered clergy.” It can be argued that Ishmael
means this remark sarcastically but the fact remains that questioning the truth of the Holy Scripture has always been regarded as blasphemy by the Church no matter how much the meaning of the term itself has changed and even lost its all-negative connotation.

The very end of the novel—Ishmael being the only survivor member of the Pequod’s crew—is also very symbolic. Ishmael escapes by using Queequeg’s coffin; this is the second time this coffin serves as an allusion of resurrection, the first time being Queequeg’s ‘death-scene’ in Chapter 110 where he is described as someone whose death “was a matter of his own sovereign will and pleasure”. Finally, Ishmael is being rescued by a ship, named Rachel completing the novel’s comprehending Biblical allusion.
The Search for American Identity in Melville's Moby-Dick

Lilia Maldonado

Literature is often a vessel that transcends the art form in order to create a national identity. From Keats, Byron and Shakespeare to Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, authors are grouped as having nationalistic characteristics as a part of creating a unifying identity. Herman Melville is often celebrated as creating the center of an American identity with his novel *Moby-Dick*. This epic story encompasses many traditional modes of the epic, but the characters and setting make it uniquely American. This then raises the question of whether or not the American identity is defined in Melville's work. The images of Queequeg and Ishmael especially in the beginning of the novel are distinguishably American and correspond to early American canonical writings in the way they adhere to similar values and work ethic. What early-American writings fail to address, however, is that other definition of American that is so often overlooked - the Native American aspect. Therefore, we are presented early on with the problem of identifying what American is, whether it is the descendants of the Mayflower or the numerous and vast tribes that inhabited North America for years before Puritan conquest. To further explore what it means to be American, excerpts from the works of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine are considered as well as others in order to gather a sense of any sort of consistency in the writings of an emerging nation. When we are presented with these typical American values, Melville then turns them on their head and satirizes in order to make a social commentary. Many critics of this time
denounced Melville for his controversial passages, but Melville is in fact drawing attention to the discrepancies between the type of society we like to believe we inhabit and reality. By doing this, Melville creates a sense of discomfort, which causes either a want to address such discrepancies or an unyielding need to protect it, no matter how unsavory. The latter is best represented with the character Captain Ahab, whose uncompromising hatred of Moby-Dick drives the story. Through the course of the novel, we are presented with an entire chapter dedicated to this Leviathan and another one that describes the horror of its whiteness. It is in this latter chapter I believe that is most telling of what the whiteness represents to Ahab and why it fuels his need to kill the whale. However, Ahab's failure to do so is representative of the impossibility to adhere to this singularity of identity. It only underlines the infinite nature of indeterminacy not only in trying to create a national identity but also for life itself.

The term "American" is usually thought of as describing the citizens of the United States but also encompasses the Native Americans who inhabited the continent before European settlers arrived in the seventeenth century. The first OED entry under "American" is 1. An American Indian. The second is “A native of America of European descent; esp. a citizen of the United States. Now simply, a native or inhabitant of North or South America (often with qualifying word, as Latin American, North American); a citizen of the United States.” It is a term that encompasses a vast range of people, cultures, and histories. Even if one were to focus solely on the United States, it would be an exhausting task to attempt to define it in absolute terms. By focusing on some representative texts, however, we can hope to become less vague and more concrete in our
attempts to get a general idea of whether Melville attempts to define the American identity in his own right.

Considered to be one of the greatest of the American forefathers, Benjamin Franklin's prolific writings are essential to the canon of early-American Literature. As the Norton Anthology of American Literature contends, "He offered his Poor Richard's Almanac for sale in 1733 and made it an American institution, filling it with maxims for achieving wealth and preaching hard work and thrift." His autobiography also included guidelines for the best way to live an efficient and fulfilling life. These included thirteen virtues he said were essential for a healthy life: Temperance, Silence, Order, Resolution, Frugality, Industry, Sincerity, Justice, Moderation, Cleanliness, Tranquility, Chastity, and Humility. As Franklin notes, “My intention being to acquire the Habitude of all these Virtues, I judg'd it would be well not to distract my Attention by attempting the whole at once, but to fix it on one of them at a time, and when I should be Master of that, then proceed to another, and so on till I should have gone thro' the thirteen” (592). While reading Moby Dick, it is not difficult to draw parallels between characters Ishmael and Queequeg and these values outlined by Franklin. As we are introduced to Ishmael in the Chapter entitled "Loomings," he states that when I say that I am in the habit of going to sea whenever I begin to grow hazy about the eyes, [ ... ] I do not mean it to be inferred that I ever go as a passenger. For to go as a passenger you must needs have a purse, and a purse is but a rag unless you have something in it. [ ... ] No, I never go as a passenger; nor, though I am something of a salt, do I ever go to sea as a Commodore, or a Captain, or a Cook. I abandon the glory and distinction of such offices to those who like them. For my part, I
abominate all honorable respectable toils, trails, and tribulations of every kind whatsoever. (20)

It is evident that Ishmael values hard work and is not afraid of it. He also likes to point out that while going to sea can mean being pampered, as passengers are, he does not wish to be a passenger. And though he is knowledgeable about the ocean, he would not want to be a high-ranking official on a ship since he has no desire of the glory those types of jobs come with. Indeed, Ishmael seems to be a humble and hardworking person right from the beginning. He also seems to be representative of American capitalism, but not the negative aspects of it, but mostly the rewarding feeling of having earned money.

Again, I always go to sea as a sailor, because they make a point of paying me for my trouble, whereas they never pay passengers a single penny that I ever heard of. On the contrary, passengers themselves must pay. And there is all the difference in the world between paying and being paid. The act of paying is perhaps the most uncomfortable infliction that the two orchard thieves entailed upon us. But being paid,—what will compare with it? The urbane activity with which a man receives money is really marvelous, considering that we so earnestly believe money to be the root of all earthly ills, and that on no account a monied man can enter heaven. Ah! How cheerfully we consign ourselves to perdition!

(21)

Here, Ishmael's discussion of money and earning his own wealth harkens back to the writings of Franklin, specifically the virtues on Frugality and Industry. Ishmael even goes on to consign to the fact that men who love money are said not to inherit heaven, yet he still seems all right with this. Ishmael also goes on to say that being bossed around in
order to earn one's money "touches one's sense of honor" (20) if you come from a well-established family and then goes on to list several European families of power. This is done in an effort to distance the American and European identities. Even though one may have come from a powerful aristocratic family in Europe, one must continue to work to make a living and there is nothing dishonorable in doing so.

Queequeg is considered to be a savage, though through his skill as a harpooner, he is readily accepted into the world of whaling. This embodies another facet of the American experience, which is a somewhat more neutral ground for opportunity regardless of class. Queequeg is an exceptional harpooner and since he is in the right kind of trade, his nontraditional appearance is not an issue since he can throw a harpoon with point-blank accuracy. In fact, Peleg offers Queequeg (or Quohog as he mistakenly calls him) "more than ever was given a harpooner yet out of Nantucket" for his service aboard the Pequod (85). Queequeg and Ishmael's friendship is also borne out of this unique circumstance of being in a place that puts less of an emphasis on class and more of an emphasis on the ability to work. Because Queequeg and Ishmael are both in a place (especially in an industry such as whaling) that is only concerned with one's skill, their friendship is able to flourish. It is interesting to note how Melville incorporates the traditional American New England identity and that of the Native American ancestry. He does this by naming the ship Ishmael and Queequeg go whaling on the Pequod, and as Ishmael tells us, "was named of a celebrated tribe of Massachusetts Indians, now extinct as the ancient Medes" (69). Starbuck, Stubb, Flask, and Ahab are all described as "Quakers with a vengeance," an interesting juxtaposition of words since Quakers are historically thought of to be conscientious objectors to war and other conflicts. This sense of
foreshadowing in the name of the very ship itself alludes to the fact that escaping one's destiny is inevitable, and that history is never irrelevant to the present.

After presenting his readers with this view of archetypal American values, Melville then does the unexpected. Instead of continuing on with a story of valor, action, and ultimate victory, we are then presented with several instances where the archetypes that support this identity are criticized or questioned. One of the first tastes of this in the novel is when Ishmael meets Queequeg for the first time at the Spouter-Inn, and, after narrowly avoiding an altercation, comments that it is better to "sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian" (36). While the humor in this line is obvious, it also lends itself to multiple readings. It is especially ironic that Ishmael says this after nearly an entire chapter dedicated to the fear he feels when Queequeg is unaware of his presence in the room, and the uncertainty he feels in how to make himself known without scaring Queequeg. The innkeeper even mentions that Ishmael's roommate has been out on the town selling shrunken heads, yet ultimately, Ishmael feels more comfortable with Queequeg than with any other potential roommate. Ishmael concludes the chapter by stating he never slept better in his life. Again, we question why Ishmael agrees to sleep with a known cannibal and skilled harpooner and more importantly, why he makes the analogy that it beats having a drunk Christian as a bedmate. We can only surmise that it is Melville playing with these sorts of ideas not necessarily in an attempt to shock his audience, but to make them re-evaluate prejudices.

We are further introduced to Queequeg in the chapter entitled "A Bosom Friend." Ishmael writes

With much interest I sat watching him. Savage though he was, and hideously marred about the face-
at least to my taste-his countenance yet had something in it which was by no means disagreeable. You cannot hide the soul. [ ... ] He looked like a man who had never cringed or had never had a creditor. [ ... ] It may seem ridiculous, but it reminded me of General Washington's head, as seen on popular busts of him [ ... ] Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed. (55).

This description of Queequeg being like George Washington can certainly raise eyebrows. To compare the first President of the United States to a cannibal who sells shrunken heads in his spare time is almost unheard of, even if it is done through the veil of humor. Here, Melville is obviously making the point that human beings, though having distinct customs and beliefs, are not distinct species and those who consider themselves civilized members of a society should realize that what separates an iconic figure and a savage is a matter of happenstance. This notion of the relativity of civilized culture is also underlined when Queequeg rescues a man from the water. Ishmael imagines Queequeg saying to himself "It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians" (64). Comparing the world to a company-like entity with stockholders is quite unparalleled. It is only surpassed by Queequeg's (and by extension, Ishmael's) realization that people in the world are not so different from one another and should help one another despite apparently disparate cultural and national identities. Here, Melville makes a case against national identities as a unifying force by claiming that instead, as humans, we are all unified in the same struggle.

Perhaps the clearest example of this is when Ishmael discusses Queequeg's Ramadan. At first, he insists that he
has "the greatest respect towards everybody's religious obligations" so he would never dream of mocking anyone's religious preference or custom. He continues on to say

.. we good Presbyterian Christians should be charitable in these things, and not fancy ourselves superior to other mortals, pagans and what not, because of their half-crazy conceits on these subjects. There was Queequeg, now certainly entertaining the most absurd notions about Yojo and his Ramadan; [ ... ] let him be, I say: and Heaven have mercy on us all-Presbyterians and Pagans alike- for we are all somehow dreadfully cracked about the head, and sadly need mending. (79)

This passage underlines Ishmael's belief in being open-minded about other cultures, yet also shows his inability to do so. It's an interesting paradox that Melville cleverly uses to in fact make a commentary on the inability to be completely objective. While Ishmael claims he is objective and supportive of other's beliefs, he still goes on to call them "half-crazy." To be fair, he says that everyone is "cracked in the head" to some extent. Melville's usage of this passage highlights the discrepancies between what is preached and practiced. According to the United States Constitution, there is no state-mandated religion and people are free to practice (or abstain from practicing) the religion of their choice. However, the majority of Americans during this time practice some form of Protestant Christianity and are wary of those who don't (one need only look at the terrible treatment of Irish Catholic immigrants during the nineteenth century to see that this is a valid point). By making us aware of our own prejudices, Melville shows that having or trying to obtain a singular identity is hypocritical and goes against our own doctrine.
This scene from *Moby Dick* finds its parallel in the writings of another early-American author, Thomas Paine. Perhaps best known for his Revolutionary War brochure *Common Sense*, Paine has the rare honor of being both celebrated and then basically despised. In his pro-Revolutionary War pamphlet, Paine was essential in creating a unifying call for an end to British rule. Through his direct yet eloquent prose, Paine was heralded for his efforts.

This new world hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe. Hither they have fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster; and it is so far true of England that the same tyranny which drove the first emigrants from home, pursues their descendents still. (Norton, 708).

Later, when Paine writes on his personal views on religion, he is almost instantly a pariah. Paine asserts that he does not believe in the Christian, Jewish, or Turkish (Muslim) Churches. It is because of this statement that Paine is accused of being an atheist and which arguably garners him most criticism. This accusation is clearly unfounded as Paine mentions God numerous times throughout *Common Sense* and *The Crisis*, and even throughout the hotly contested *The Age of Reason*. He states in *The Age of Reason* that he believes in "one true God" but not in the Church. Paine does criticize the validity of the Christian Church by reasoning that because he did not witness the virgin birth of Christ, he was entitled to disbelieve it. In *The Age of Reason*, Paine famously states that his mind is his own church and that he is not convinced by "third-hand accounts" of the Bible (723). Through Paine, we can see the positive response to having a unifying identity of
Americans as proponents of freedom, but the negative response when he breaks away from the accepted societal norm.

So far we have been witness to Ishmael and Queequeg’s fulfillment of this American role as constructed by early American writers such as Ben Franklin. They embody the resourcefulness, work ethic, and abilities that Americans tend to value as they try to break away from aristocratic European society. Also, Melville both celebrates this identity but thrusts it into the spotlight for criticism. By using humor as a veil, Melville creates some interesting juxtapositions in images and word play. He likes to blur the lines between civility and savagery in order to demonstrate the relative randomness in which both are created. By showing the discrepancies in the American identity, Melville invites his audience to acknowledge such discrepancies. Through Captain Ahab and Moby-Dick, Melville introduces a plurality of identities that is embodied in the whiteness of the whale itself.

Chapter 42 of the book is dedicated to the horror of being faced with the whiteness of such a massive creature. Ishmael explains in this chapter that although whiteness has the possibility of being beautiful and pure, there many negative connotations of it as well. “The elusive quality is, which causes the thought of whiteness, when divorced from its more kindly associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds” (160). Here Ishmael states that although the color white can have positive associations, to link the color to a creature such as Moby Dick is nothing short of terrifying.

What is it that in the Albino man so peculiarly repels and shocks the eye, as that sometimes he is loathed by his own kith and kin? It is that whiteness which invests him, a thing expressed by the name he bears.
The Albino is as well made as other men - has no substantive deformity - and yet this mere aspect of all-pervading whiteness makes him more strangely hideous than the ugliest abortion. Why should this be so? (161).

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the Milky Way? Or is it, that as essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows - a colorless, all-color atheism from which we shrink? (165).

Melville describes the repulsion of the color white in albinos as due to the fact that it is the visible absence of color, yet it is really every color at once. He seems to suggest that humans are either incapable or unwilling to deal with the infinite nature of possibility, and so shrink from those things which embody that. One can relate this to the reason why Ahab is so obsessed with killing the whale. Not only does he need to extol his revenge on the whale for his previous attacks, but Ahab must also kill this thing that symbolizes the plurality in meanings that is inherently repellant for humans. We can read Moby Dick as this enormous creature who is representative of these infinite modes of meaning and how it is threatening to modes of identification. Indeed, Moby Dick is the embodiment of all the neglected histories and other things excluded from the American identity, and Ahab, much like us, is unable to see beyond the fascinating, terrifying whiteness that is indeterminacy and infinity. “[S]o the wretched infidel gazes
himself blind at the monumental white shroud that wraps all the prospect around him. And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?” (165). This passage is foreshadowing the end of Ahab's quest to kill Moby Dick. Ahab ends up going blind before the whale kills him and destroys the Pequod. We are left with a line that suggests that there is no question why Ahab wants (or arguably needs) to kill Moby Dick, as humans feel the need to adhere to a singular view and cannot face the possibility of infinite modes of interpretation.

From the beginning of Melville's *Moby-Dick*, we are presented with instances of evolving American identity. From the line where Ishmael says he needs to "take to the sea" whenever he feels the need to knock people's hats off, we can make the connection between that and European settlers taking to the sea as well in search of a new home. Later, through analyzing some representative texts of early American Literature, we can see how the characters Queequeg and Ishmael exemplify such traits as resourcefulness and thrift. Also, we can see how in a less class-conscious society, a strong friendship can develop between two incredibly different people. After presenting us with this image of two strong Americanized characters, Melville then changes the direction of the story and to underline the discrepancies within that supposed singular American identity through humor and eyebrow-raising claims. By exposing these incongruities, Melville challenges his audience to accept that there is no center and no one all-encompassing definite meaning. To believe that there is a center and a sole meaning of Americans is to go down the path of Ahab, who cannot accept the infinite whiteness of the albino whale, where the whale comes to symbolize all the elements that are left out of this American
identity. It drives him to madness and obsession, ultimately culminating in his death by the monumental white shroud.

Works Cited


Moby-Dick: A Critique of the Corrupt Nature of Institutionalized Religion

Mark Smith

Through the analysis of religion's common tenants and man's manipulation of its virtues to subjectively benefit himself, Herman Melville's text, Moby Dick, illustrates the corrupt nature of Christianity, and more notably, institutionalized religion as a whole. Melville affords this critique through the establishment of a set of characteristics common to all institutionalized religious systems, and through the consequent homogenization of the multiple spiritual viewpoints apparent in the text: Christian, Pagan, and Oceanic, is able to analyze: the failings of man to operate these systems without subverting their selfless hallmarks with selfish aims. Using what some critics have labeled blasphemetic comparisons between Christianity and the other systems, Melville illustrates to the reader how similar they are when the entire overlying minutia is stripped away and the core elements that comprise every religion are revealed. Melville furthers his critique in the tale of Ahab and Moby-Dick, which represents a fictional religious system and the monomaniacally self-centered nature of the person in charge of it; the exact situational component of many institutionalized social structural manifestations.

In order to provide an overarching analysis of the religious system and man's fallibility there within, a set of requirements or prerequisites as to what constitutes a religion must be designated in order to provide a basis for judgment. For Melville's purpose, the Merriam-Webster definition of religion offers a solid index of central features: "a personal set or institutionalized system of religious
attitudes, beliefs, and practices ... held to with ardent and
faith," in, "worship of God or the supernatural" (Religion
985). The systems of Christianity, Paganism, and Oceanic
worship are all characteristic of this outline, and
consequently, the author provides homogeneity to the set
through comparison and tolerance by the narrator: "I say,
we good Presbyterian Christians should be charitable in
these things, and not fancy ourselves so vastly superior to
other mortals, pagans, and what not," states Ishmael, "for
we are all somehow dreadfully cracked about the head, and
sadly need mending" (Melville 79). This tolerance and
comparison allows analysis from a single standpoint
without having to account for differences or assumed
superiorities in the specific detail of each system.

First and foremost, in all religious structures worship
is always based around a figure or object that is ascribed
with power that transcends the abilities of man and benefits
those who follow its creed. Melville's text makes certain
that the reader is able to observe these holy figures and
objects as they function in each religion early on in the text.
This is to begin to outline the prerequisite characteristics
apparent in each religion present: the Christian God or
Jesus, Yojo, and the Ocean.

The Christian God is represented in the biblical
language of the text as well as in the focus of most of the
characters that the reader encounters. New Bedford, just like
Nantucket is a, "Christian town," in which the word of God
is fervently observed (Melville 33). Melville uses biblical
allusion in much of his language to intimate the Christian
faith in God as one under scrutiny throughout his work.
Allusion to the presence of this figure is integrated into
the text most notably in the sermon preached at the Whaling
Church by Father Mapple in which his presence and will are
shown to be rigid and not open to interpretation: "God is
everywhere ... top gallant delight is to him, who acknowledges no law or lord, but the Lord his God" (Melville 53-54). In other words, specific institutionalized religious values must be observed in order to be loyal to God.

Just as in the Christian faith, Paganistic religious worship centers around a figure that requires respect and attention. Yojo, Queequeg's wooden idol, represents this figure. Queequeg's Pagan God is portrayed with the ability, like the Christian Deity, to positively benefit those under its command and function on a plain not accessible to common man: "Queequeg placed great confidence in the excellence of Yojo's judgment and surprising forecast of things; and cherished Yojo with considerable esteem, as a rather good sort of god" (Melville 68). This trust and ascription of foresight is explicitly evident in Queequeg's assertion to Ishmael that, "Yojo purposed befriending us," and that according to Yojo, Ishmael should choose the boat that they are to sign on to (Melville 68). The author is illustrating through both examples that the object of religious devotion holds power and influence over the zealot's life and can affect change in both the positive and negative ends of the spectrum.

The ocean is representative of the third object of religious fidelity in Melville's text. Whaling is a profession whose participants are acutely aware of the power and impact that the sea can enact: "the sea dashes even the mightiest whales against the rocks, and leaves them there side by side with the split wrecks of ships. No mercy, no power but its own controls it" (Melville 224). This power, coupled with the time and diligence these men spend out upon it, inspires a respect and worship that rivals any present day deity: "in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God" (Melville 97). The
institutionalized religion of whaling and the consequent worship of the power of the ocean breeds respect and superstition. The rituals and precautions that the sailors participate in to inspire kindness and placidity are a testament to how serious they take the divinity of the sea.

Although there are instances of Christianity being voiced as the dominant religious practice, Melville is careful to represent each religion equally and not incite a hierarchical value judgment through the give and take narrative attitude of Ishmael. This is concretely portrayed in the comparisons in practice and ritual that are given throughout the text, such as the assertion that both Lent and Ramadan are equally ludicrous behaviors do to the fact that, "fasting makes the body cave in; hence the spirit caves in; and all thoughts born of a fast must necessarily be half starved" (Melville 82). In this statement, no individualized value judgment is alluded to, but rather an overarching one is presented in which Christianity and Paganism are brought to the same level. Through Ishmael, Melville is able to emphasize, "the greatest respect towards everybody's religious obligations," individually, and in doing so, analyze their imperfections cohesively (Melville 79). The supposed blasphemetic likenesses in practice that Melville asserts between Christianity and the other religious systems portrays to the reader a second base on which all religions can be likened: ritualistic worship. The text provides abundant examples of ritual participating in the multiple religions present, and although they differ in detail, is asserting they are very much alike in their core elements.

Isolation and contemplation characterize the first of these elements of ritualistic worship. Melville's portrayal of Father Mapple ascending to his pulpit represents a clear, intentional, symbolic disconnect between Mapple and the everyday world in order to facilitate a closer and more pure
worship of his respective God: "by that act of physical isolation, he signifies his spiritual withdrawal for the time, from all outward worldly ties and connexions ... for replenished with the food and wine of the word, to the faithful man of God, this pulpit, I see, is a self-contained stronghold" (Melville 47). Isolation provides a space in which spirituality can be the sole focus of the observer and he is, "impregnable in his little Quebec," rather than being distracted by the trite happenings of mortal man (Melville 47). Queequeg's observance of Ramadan, a period of fasting and withdrawal from everything except worship, is also characterized by isolation and penance to his specific God.

For example, when Ishmael sees Queequeg in the middle of his reflection his sole focus is on an invisible contemplation and is as a result completely mentally and spiritually removed from his surroundings: "there sat Queequeg ... holding Yojo on top of his head. He looked neither one way nor the other way, but sat like a carved image with a scarce sign of active life" (Melville 81). Although Queequeg is not physically removed from the world, his mental isolation provides the same type of barrier. This barrier is commented upon by Ishmael: "all I could do - for all my polite arts and blandishments - he would not move a peg, nor say a single word, nor even look at me, nor notice my presence in the slightest way" (Melville 81). Lack of communication is key because all discourse is supposed to be with the God one is praying to. Like both instances of isolation represented by Christianity and Paganism, the whalemen's worship of the ocean is also shown to be isolatory: "meditation and water are wedded forever," but takes a much more literal approach to spiritual connection through isolation (Melville 19).

The sole act of stepping onto a boat frees the sailor from anything but direct interaction with the ocean. Due to
the very nature of being on a boat, like the symbolic isolation of Christianity's crier, disconnect from land and humanity as a whole is the sailor's seclusion: "the pulpit is its [the boats] prow" (Melville 47). It allows the sailor to feel every vibration and utterance of the sea, and in that way, directly communicate with it. Concurrently, the profession of whaling requires that, "the sum of the various hours you spend at the mast-head would amount to several entire months" (Melville 133). The whalemens's prescribed, institutionalized practice of isolation again leaves time for nothing but contemplation and, "here, tossed about by the sea," the sailor is in direct connection with the object of his seclusion (Melville 133). Every storm, gale, wave, and bit of scud is an interaction with the deity of the ocean and its immense power.

Communication between the physical and the ethereal has so far taken shape in isolation from the everyday world, but also takes the form of verbal prayer. Christian, Pagan, and Oceanic devotees are all depicted participating in this hymnic expression of religious devotion. The Christian version of the practice is readily apparent in the first portion of Mapple's sermon. "Nearly all joined in singing this hymn," states Ishmael, "the concluding stanzas, burst forth with appealing exultation and joy" (Melville 48). This passage is representative of a joyous celebration of God incited by the leader of that faith. Melville represents the religious observation of whaling in the ocean in the same group inspired way: Stubb, while, "sermonizing," preached, "the religion of rowing," to his men as they backed down on a whale (Melville 182). "He would say the most terrific things to his crew, in a tone so strangely compounded of fun and fury, and the fury seemed so calculated merely as a spice to the fun," states Melville illustrating that in the joyous nature in which the religion is preached, "no
oarsmen could hear such queer invocations without pulling for dear life" (Melville 182).

Conversely, the low grunting nature in the attitude which Queequeg prays offers an interesting, but intentional counterpoint: "All these strange antics were accompanied by still stranger guttural noises from the devotee, who seemed to be praying in a singing song or else singing some psalmody or other" (Melville 35). The attitude that Melville presents in relation to these instances of verbal prayer is a key point in the homogenization of the multiple religions in that, regardless of how the song or verbalization takes form, each religion has its own version of verbalized prayer. This foundational outline of what constitutes religion establishes the common tenants of religious systems and homogenizes the distinctions between Christianity, Pagan beliefs, and the whalenmen's religious devotion to the ocean. With this homogenization an overarching investigation into the corrupt nature of institutionalized religious systems and their participants can now be attempted.

The inherent flaw in any religious organization is the inevitable fallibility of man to the self-serving tendency to subjectively adhere to, or alter, religious doctrine to fit his desired aim. In that, the usurpation of selflessness and devotion to the lord that religion represents is inevitable. With religion comes a responsibility to wield influence effectively and fairly in an unbiased manner, but as one can deduce from historically documented corruption and abuse of religious power, purity within the system is simply unattainable. King Henry VIII's separation of the Church of England from Roman Catholicism so that he could divorce his wife represents the most well known abuse and selective adherence to religion in history. "Henry, as Supreme Head of the Church of England," could now void his marriage through the abuse of religious power and continue on in his
pursuit of a male heir (King Henry VIII, Britannia). As can be inferred from this historical example, people can and will exploit religion's power and aims to achieve their own end.

For instance, Melville's text presents the subjective adherence to and interpretation of holy decree in his text explicitly. Ishmael represents a key Christian figure within the text succumbing to this flaw in human nature as he participates in Queequeg's ritualistic worship of his Pagan idol:

I was a good Christian; born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church. How then could I unite with this wild idolator in worshipping his piece of wood ... But what is worship? - to do the will of God - that is worship. And what is the will of God? - to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do to me - that is the will of God. Now, Queequeg is my fellow man. And what do I wish that this Queequeg would do to me? Why, Unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must then unite with him in his; ergo, I must turn idolator (Melville 57).

This instance of subjective interpretation and adherence to the religious value structure is in direct opposition with the statement by Father Mapple that you may acknowledge, "no law or lord, but the Lord his God" (Melville 54). This declaration is confirmed in Exodus: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me ... For I the Lord thy God am a jealous god" (Exodus 20:3-5). Ishmael's non-compliance with these statutes is due to the want to continue a friendship with Queequeg rather than actually performing the will of God. Queequeg's, "certain signs and symptoms," made him feel guilty after the generosity the savage had shown him, and accordingly, he felt obligated to comply (Melville 56).
Ishmael's creative and self-serving interpretation of Christian doctrine illustrates a tendency to use religion as a means to your own end and predictably, Queequeg also falls into the same trap. His initial aim in coming to the, "Christian lands," was to be able to learn among its inhabitants so that he would be able to make his people smarter and better than they were currently (Melville 60). In his reasoning lies the inevitable self-serving tendency of man. His purpose was not to give himself over to the lord and worship him for that reason, but rather to take something from the religion to use with his own people. Moreover, once he realized that, "Christians could be both miserable and wicked," he decided that he would revert back to his old beliefs and, "die a pagan" (Melville 60). Queequeg's selective adherence to both religions concretely illustrates man's flaw. This is solidified in the fact that even after reverting back to Paganism he still attends Father Mapple's church because, "few are the moody fisherman, shortly bound for the Indian Ocean or Pacific, who fail to make a Sunday visit to the spot" (Melville 43).

Opportunism plays heavily into the system of organized religion. Like Queequeg's schizoid adoption and rejection of religious systems so that he and his people may benefit, the whalemen are equally as fair weathered towards their deity, if not more so, than either of the bosom friends. As the above quote clearly illustrates, they hedge their bets in attending church before they leave: "a man's religion is one thing, and this practical world quite another. This world pays dividends," and like religion, must be heeded as well (Melville 74). In other words, while on land they remain Christian, but once at sea they, "whale it too much a' lord's days," essentially opting for the route that will most benefit themselves at that time: "Ex officio officers of Sabbath breaking are all whalemen" (Melville 96, 244). Regardless
of their true love for the sea, they would not be out there if they were not receiving something for it, just like they would not be praying unless they were anticipating receiving some help or salvation in return: "I always go to sea as a sailor, because they make a point of paying me for it" (Melville 21). Just as Queequeg wanted to take something from Christianity to better his situation and then reverted back to Paganism, they do the same (Melville 96). In these examples it is blatantly apparent that religion, both subjectively interpreted and in itself, represents a selfish pursuit.

The notion of an afterlife negates any claims to selflessness and piety that a religious system can assert. Religion then becomes something that one must do in order to receive something, like a job, rather than the celebration of a God. This mundane expression of worship can be witnessed in the way that Queequeg replaces Yojo in his bag after his ritualistic tribute: "At last extinguishing the fire, he took the idol up very unceremoniously, and bagged it again in his grego pocket as carelessly as if he were a sportsman bagging a dead woodcock" (Melville 35). He is simply going through the motions to appease the little God. Religion isn't something that people want to do, but rather something that they have to do in order to stay out of Hell, Davey's Locker, or not making it to the place where, "uncontinented seas, interflow with the blue heavens; and so form the white breakers of the milky way" (Melville 364). Religion has a use value, and that use value translates into the attainment of spiritual, as well as monetary, wealth and prosperity.

Religion's use value also carries over into the power of those in charge of its execution to influence and control their followers both positively and negatively. The priest, leader, or vessel that represents a conduit to the God being
worshipped has the ability to falsely inspire faith and behavior in order to suit his own purposes. The captain of a whale ship holds this kind of indisputable power, which he can use without contestation: "you must jump when he gives an order," regardless of whether it is the right decision or not (Melville 87). As can be observed in the previous examples of man corrupting the virtues of religious systems, again Melville illustrates the inability of religion to remain pure and untainted so long as a mortal man remains in charge of it. Subjective bias influences interpretation, breeds opportunism, and through the undemocratic nature of religion's political breakdown, places the execution of its values in the hands of one person. This creates the same problems apparent in the rule of a nation by a dictator: "Yes, their supreme lord and dictator was there," who must be obeyed at all costs (Melville 107). Moreover, the ultimate corruption of religion takes place in the person that preaches God's word taking on a Godlike quality to his followers, and in doing so, illustrates the crucial flaw in the system being controlled by a mortal person. The object of religious devotion becomes that person rather than the God itself. This transference of divinity further allows the head of the religion to control and influence his followers to facilitate whatever end he desires. The captain of a whale ship is a prime example of this shift in worship because he is the most experienced, and therefore most respected, sailor on the boat. The respect and the power that a captain wields over his subordinates is expressly illustrated in the assertion that, "there is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one Captain that is lord over the ... deck" (Melville 362). The men look to him for every need and question creating a system that as Melville portrays later in his text, can lead to the downfall of both the captain and his crew.
Man's exploitation of religion to achieve his desired result, and the consequent destruction that this pursuit breeds, is the heart of the corruption that Melville's text is critiquing. After careful analysis and close reading of the text to uncover the author's outline of what constitutes a religion, the homogenization of all religion into a coherent, singular conceptual system, and finally the illustration of man's inability to operate within that system without corrupting it with selfish aims, Melville provides the reader with an overarching and fluid critique of religion's fatal flaws and the resulting consequences these flaws create: "there is no folly of the beasts of the earth which is not infinitely outdone by the madness of men," for, "what is the principle of religious belief in them but a Loose-Fish," (Melville 300, 310). He furthers this evaluation and provides tangible examples of its analytic points in the narrative of his text through Ahab's quest for Moby-Dick.

As outlined by Melville throughout his text, all religious structure focuses its efforts on a central God figure that has power that supercedes that of a human. The Sperm Whale is that powerful force in Melville's fictional religious system: "waving his bannered flukes in the air, the grand god revealed himself:" "in the great Sperm Whale, this high and mighty god-like dignity .. .is immensely," apparent (Melville 409, 274). The Sperm Whale is in many ways superior to all the other species of whale that the crew of the Pequod encounters, and as such, commands the respect and worship of the crew: "the great Sperm Whale now reigneth" (Melville 116). As a result, the text's supreme incarnation of the fury and power of this species of whale, Moby-Dick, represents the God figure in Melville's fictional religious system: "The white whale is their demogorgon" (Melville 144).
Moby-Dick's materialization as a whale and the immense strength that leviathans wield provides the first ascribed characteristic that surpasses that of a human. A whale's power must be respected and as witnessed throughout the text, "Could annihilation occur to matter," it would absolutely take the form of the massive Sperm Whale Moby-Dick (Melville 294). With one swat of its tail, one bump of its forehead, with one surge of its fury, an entire boat crew can be vanquished from the life and sent to, "Davey Jones" (Melville 280). The white whale is consistently described as having the greatest intelligence and fury of any Sperm Whale encountered:

Nor was it his unwonted magnitude, nor his remarkable hue, nor yet his deformed lower jaw, that so much invested the whale with natural terror, as that unexampled, intelligent malignity which, according to specific accounts, he had over and over again evinced his assaults ... For, when swimming before his exulting pursuers, with every apparent symptom of alarm, he had several times been known to turn round suddenly, and, bearing down upon them, either stave their boats to splinters, or drive them back in consternation to their ship (Melville 155).

With the whale's abnormally vicious malignity and decidedly intelligent purposed pursuit of his pursuers, the notion that he is representative of the God figure in Melville's text is advanced.

Furthermore, Moby-Dick is also declared to be an ever present being with a plurality of presence: "linked with the White Whale ... was the unearthly conceit that Moby-Dick was ubiquitous; that he had actually been encountered in opposite latitudes at one and the same instant of time" (Melville 154). Like the notion that the Christian
incarnation of God, as well as the Pagan idol Yojo, is a knowing and encompassing presence, the great albino leviathan also exudes many of the same inhuman characteristics and abilities. These are important because they separate the whale from its comparatively weak human counterparts, and also from the mortal spectrum of the world. A God is an omnipresent and everlasting force that operates in a realm in which it is the ruler, a realm in which its presence is always warranted and never absent. In this ever presence, Moby-Dick encompasses the most important feature of any God, immortality: Moby-Dick is, "not only ubiquitous, but immortal (for what is immortality but ubiquity in time) (Melville 155).

Thus far Melville has established a God like figure on which to center worship, and now continues on to illustrate the prerequisite religious ritual that the crew and Ahab participate in. These rituals consist of adaptations of standard religious practices of isolation, tribute, and verbal declaration. Again, the author's intent in relating common traits is to concretely illustrate to the reader that all religious systems, however obscure and wandering, still fall into the same all encompassing category of institutionalized religion. As such, all the concurrent downfalls there within will be illustrated by his fictional representation of Moby-Dick's religion, and in doing so, will complete his critique.

The isolatory aspect of the religious worship of Moby-Dick is clearly presented to the reader through the character of Ahab and his seclusion from contact with the ship and crew both before and after its launch, and also his stalwart, solitary presence upon the quarterdeck. The first instance of this isolation is alluded to as Ishmael asks Captain Peleg if he can see Captain Ahab: "ever since he lost his leg last voyage by that accursed whale ... he keeps close inside his house" (Melville 78). It is stated that he has gone a little
mad since losing his leg on the last voyage and as a result, is taking leave in seclusion. The implication that Melville is alluding to is that since the voyage where he lost his leg, Captain Ahab has become obsessed with the White Whale, and is therefore worshipping its memory. Religious language is added to the allusion as Ishmael is informed that, "Ahab remained invisibly enshrined in his cabin" (Melville 93). The, "sacred retreat of his cabin," will represent the second object of isolation for Ahab, and he remains there until he addresses his congregation of sailors from the quarterdeck, his pulpit, once the voyage takes the boat sufficiently out in the seclusion of the ocean (Melville 108).

"Send everybody aft," cries Ahab as, "the entire ship's company were assembled," creating his congregation (Melville 137). He calls for order and cohesion just as Father Mapple does at the start of his service: "Father Mapple rose, and in a mild voice of unassuming authority ordered the scattered people to condense" (Melville 48). This point in the text is representative of the official beginning of the religious worship of Moby-Dick and the first instance of outright religious ritual being enacted; more specifically, the verbal declarations and sermons witnessed in the other religious systems. Ahab cries out for the crew to tell him what they were to do should they see a whale and receives the answer in a signified response: "sing out for him" (Melville 139). Ahab further goes on to ask similar questions and receives the same group chant. He has become their minister and priest and like Mapple, leads his followers into worship of their religious deity, "that white-headed whale with a wrinkled brow and a crooked jaw" (Melville 138). The religion of Moby-Dick is furthered in the acts of tribute and sanctification that Ahab next has his group participate in. Drinking from the harpoon and the
appointment of his harpooners as his, "sweet cardinals," shows the creation of a hierarchical, institutionalized system in which the religion is to be instituted (Melville 142).

In this institutionalized religion the consequent fallibility of man is irrefutably represented. Melville makes it blatantly apparent that the creation of this religion, like King Henry VIII's schism from the church, is an offshoot of the whaling religion to serve Ahab's personal desired end: "the prophesy was that I should be dismembered; and Aye! I lost this leg. I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer" (Melville 143). Ahab will exploit the virtues of his crew at all costs even though he is supposed to be keeping them safe at sea as their captain. His monomaniacal aim exploits the power structure of the whaling religion into something that he can use to benefit himself at the cost of others: "Whatever pale fears and forebodings some of them might have felt before; these were not only now kept out of sight through the growing awe of Ahab, but they were broken up and on all sides routed, as timid prairie hairs that scatter before the bounding bison" (Melville 414). Ahab's power as not only their whaling Captain, but as their priest of Moby-Dick allows him to influence their decisions even while having doubts: "all the individualities of the crew, this man's valor, that man's fear, guilt and guiltlessness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which, Ahab their one lord and keel did point to" (Melville 415).

In the crew's altered relationship with Ahab, the ultimate portrayal of the corruption of religion is shown. That, "grand, ungodly, god-like man," truly does become a God to his men (Melville 78). They start to see him as inhuman and start to worship him as something supernatural and omnipotent: "hidden beneath that slouching hat, they could never tell unerringly whether, for all this, his eyes
were really closed at times: or whether he was still intently scanning them," "they dumbly moved about the deck, ever conscious that the old man's despot eye was on them" (Melville 401). Ahab starts to take on an omnipotent, ever seeing watch over his crew and like a God, never ceases to be in the thoughts of those he commands. Like the omnipresence and ubiquity of the Gods, Ahab appears to join their ranks in the eyes of his crew for, "Nor, at any time, by night or day could the mariners now step upon the deck, unless Ahab was before them" (Melville 401). In this omnipresence and ubiquity he is able to wield the ultimate power and submission of a God, and drive his crew into the jaws of his obsession.

Ahab is representative of the pinnacle flaw in the institutionalized religious structure. He is therefore Melville's ultimate example of the corruption of religion while in control of a man, but the author is also careful to include examples of the crew succumbing to selfish aims as well. As is apparent in the examination of the fair weathered nature of the sailors' relationship with Christianity and whaling, and also in Queequeg's selective adherence to Paganism and Christianity, Melville shows the same opportunistic qualities in the crew of the Pequod. This is explicitly illustrated in the reasoning for offering the doubloon as an incentive for finding the white leviathan, as well as in Ahab's willingness to lower for whales that aren't Moby-Dick:

In times of strong emotion mankind disdain all base considerations; but such times are evanescent...while for the love of it they give chase to Moby-Dick, they must also have food for their more common, daily appetites. For even the high lifted and chivalric crusaders of old times were not content to traverse two thousand miles of land to fight for their holy
sepulcher, without committing burglaries, picking pockets, and gaining other pious perquisites by the way. Had they been strictly held to their one final and romantic object—that final and romantic object, too many would have turned from in disgust. I will not strip these men, thought Ahab, of all hopes of cash—aye cash. They may scorn cash now; but let some months go by, and no perspective promise of it to them, and then this same quiescent cash all at once mutinying in them, this same cash would soon cashier Ahab. (Melville 178)

As can be deduced from the prior examples of opportunism in the other religious structures, the attainment of some reward or wealth from adherence to the institutionalized religious structure is man's primary incentive for observance. Melville explicitly portrays their selfish aims to further illustrate the corrupt nature of all religion due to its inherent use value in the attainment of various forms of wealth.

Melville's text is a commentary on the institutionalized religious system, but also on institutionalized social constructions as a whole. Any system in which an individual is given control is bound for failure simply due to the inevitable fact that that system's power and influence will be abused for the individual's personal gain. Melville concretely illustrates this notion in the homogenization of multiple religious standpoints through the establishment of a base of common tenants in which they all participate, and the simultaneous portrayal of the self-serving behavior of individuals within each. Ultimately, the story of Moby-Dick and Ahab illustrates to the reader that man is a selfish and self-serving creature that will exploit even the most sacred forums to achieve a desired end.
Works Cited


Mothers, Babies, and Images of Birth: The Feminine Presence in *Moby-Dick*

Clover Wellish-Katz

While there is an absence of important female charterers in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, the presence of the feminine: images, personifications, pronouns, are abundant throughout the novel. One of the recurring images of the feminine is that of birth, and subsequently, that of mother; although often the specified mother is not who or what we would normally associate the figure of mother with. The mother is not necessarily female, nor does she (I use the female pronoun here because even if the mother is not gendered as female, what else can a mother be? The very definition of mother is the female parent) always give birth in the anatomically correct way. Despite the somewhat gender and physiologically confused ways in which these birth images are presented in the text, there is nevertheless ultimately an omnipresent female aspect pervading the pages of *Moby-Dick*. I think it is not too big a leap to take one step farther and say that even though the ocean is not definitively gendered as female, there is a female personification of nature both in chapter 42: “The Whiteness of the Whale” where nature is referred to as a "harlot"(165) and called "her"(165), and in chapter 88: "Schools and Schoolmasters" where nature becomes the wife of the old, solitary sperm whale. This feminine nature could also be seen as Mother Earth and the oceans as her salty amniotic fluid. Because the concept of birth insist also upon the concept of mother, who is always female even when she is not designated as such, and because these natal images are repeated frequently throughout, the feminine becomes a major presence in Melville's novel. The sermon given by
Father Mapple in chapter nine contains one of the first birthing images in the novel; it is a retelling of the biblical story in which a whale symbolically gives birth to a man, Jonah:

Then God spake unto the fish; and from the shuddering cold and blackness of the sea, the whale came breeching up towards the warm and pleasant sun, and all delights of air and earth; and 'vomited out Jonah upon the dry land'; when the word of the Lord came a second time; and Jonah, bruised and beaten—his ears, like two sea-shells, still multitudinously murmuring of the ocean—Jonah did the Almighty's bidding (53).

While this whole passage is suffused with the images of birthing there are two specific instances of birth that occur, the first being that the whale itself is born from the ocean, and the second being that the whale gives birth to Jonah. The whale is forced from the "shuddering cold" womb of the earth, the ocean, out into the "delights of air," which is also the first thing an infant encounters upon being born, oxygen which she must fill her lungs with. Since the whale is born from the sea it follows that its mother must be none other than the sea itself, or more broadly the planet earth of which the sea is a part, albeit a large part, but a part nonetheless. Here already we have the earth, the sea, placed in the role of mother.

This first birth, the birth of the whale, is slightly inverted; the whale is born from a "cold and black" sea into a "warm and pleasant" world. This birth is backwards in that usually the womb is associated with warmth and comfort; it is the space of safety and contentment, where all needs are taken care of and it is the removal from this space into the cold hard real world that one is pushed into upon being born. In this passage the whale, our mock baby, goes
from a frigid, void like womb into a joyous earthy space. But in a novel where the ocean, including the creatures that inhabit it, is often a violent and destructive force this view of it as "cold and black," as a place not included in the warmth, comfort, and ease of land seems only natural. This description of the pre- and post-natal environments is not the only inversion connected to this birth; the whale is also born backwards, or butt first instead of head first. This is a breech birth when the baby is born the wrong way around, referring to the butt and legs not the head coming first. The word for when a whale leaps out of the water and up into the air is breach, phonetically the same and only one letter different from breech, the word Melville uses in this passage to describe the birth of the whale. This must have been a conscious decision on Melville's part, choosing the word breech with its obvious birth denotations over the word breach, which would correctly describe the action of the whale, and so there is no mistaking the fact that this is a birth of sorts, despite the unconventional nature of it.

The second birth in the passage is the birth of Jonah, who is also born in an inverted way not breech as the whale is born, but born through the mouth of the whale as opposed to the anatomically correct way, through the vagina. It is upon this expulsion from inside the whale's belly that "the word of the Lord [comes] a second time" to Jonah. Thus giving the impression that Jonah has now been reborn; having had "the word of the Lord" and lost it, Jonah had to come into being anew in order to gain "the word" again. He had to be physically reborn into the world as a new and different person, one that heard and accepted the power and importance of God's word. Jonah through the process of being born again is "vomited out...upon dry land", from the inside of the whale, or the "fish's belly" (52), he is heaved out through its mouth. The vomiting, in this case, is similar
to giving birth in that it is a forceful expulsion from the body through an elastic orifice. In a way this could also be seen as a kind of breech birth, only it is not Jonah, the baby, who is positioned backwards but the whale, the mother, who is having the baby backwards.

If Jonah is represented as the baby in the second part of this passage, which I think he most definitely is, than the whale, even though it is a male whale, is Jonah's mother. Perhaps it is not necessary in an instance of rebirth, of symbolic birth, for the mother to be female; it is not necessary for the baby to be an actual infant. Yet the description of Jonah's ears after he is born very much invokes the image of a new-born baby. His ears are described as “two seashells, still multitudinously murmuring of the ocean”; sea-shells have a ribbed and wrinkled appearance as if they had been confined in too small a space and once freed are still endowed with creases, souvenirs of their previously cramped life, like the ears of a newborn upon first being liberated from a space no longer sizably appropriate. It is not just the appearance of Jonah's ears as sea-shells, but also the fact that they still hear the soft rhythmic sound of the sea like a reminder of the watery confined space, similar to the amnion which houses a baby, in which he was held.

The fact that there are two births in this passage, the whale's birth from the sea and Jonah's subsequent birth from the whale, invokes the Egyptian Mythological goddess, Nut, to whom Melville makes allusion to in chapter 24, “The Advocate”. In this chapter Ishmael endeavors to make known “the injustice” (97) afforded to the business of whaling and those who participate in it. He claims that whaling has been centrally involved in many events and that many things would not have happened, or exist as they do, if not for whaling. This is so much the case that "whaling
may well be regarded as that Egyptian mother, who bore offspring themselves pregnant from her womb" (98). While the note on this excerpt explains that Melville was not entirely correct, Nut the "Egyptian mother", actually had twins, Osiris, the male who impregnated his sister, Isis, while in the womb. Regardless of how Isis became pregnant, the story nonetheless is reminiscent of the way in which in the sermon of Father Mapple the whale is born from the earth and then Jonah is born from the whale; a birth producing another birth. And if we view whaling, as Ishmael does, as a mother who bore many wonderfully important things, then we have to see the feminine as being ever more present in the novel for whaling is essential to *Moby-Dick*.

There are other instances in Moby-Dick in which a whale, or in the case of this next passage part of a whale, acts as the birth mother of a man. While obtaining the spermaceti from the head of a whale, Tashtego falls into the head, which falls into the ocean, but all is not lost for Tashtego is born from the head and revived again aboard the Pequod:

> Now, how had this noble rescue been accomplished? Why, diving after the slowly descending head, Queequeg with his keen sword had made side lunges near its bottom, so as to scuttle a large hole there; then dropping his sword, had thrust his long arm far inwards and upwards, and so hauled out poor Tash by the head. He averred, that upon first thrusting in for him, a leg was presented; but well knowing that that was not as it ought to be, and might occasion great trouble;—he had thrust back the leg, and by a dexterous heave and toss, had wrought a somerset upon the Indian; so that with the next trial, he came forth in the good old way—head foremost. As for
the head itself, that was doing as well as could be expected. / And thus, though the courage and great skill in obstetrics of Queequeg, the deliverance, or rather, delivery of Tashtego, was successfully accomplished (272).

Here the head of a dead sperm whale becomes the mother out of which Queequeg delivers Tashtego; again the circumstances here are of a backwards, or breech in the sense of wrong way around, birth taking place as Tashtego is born from the top, or the head, as opposed to the bottom, or the vagina, of the whale. This birth, though, is not through the mouth in an expulsion if vomit, as Jonah's birth was, but here Queequeg has to create a birth canal with his sword in order to remove Tashtego, almost as if he had preformed a cesarean section. In this action he cuts through the head "near its bottom", like the incision for a c-section, made low down of the abdomen, closer to the bottom, or buttocks/genitals, of a woman. It is thanks to Queequeg's abilities in "obstetrics" that this mock c-section is preformed.

It is also thanks to these same obstetric skills that the delivery of Tashtego could be seen not as completed by c-section but actually resembling more closely a natural birth in which he was in the breech position. Queequeg, upon first trying to deliver Tashtego, finds that it is his legs which present themselves first in emerging from the birth canal, this being a position that is "not as it ought to be" for a successful natural birth. While the action of this passage is a rescue sequence where Tashtego is saved from drowning in the enormous head of a whale, the language used to describe it is the language of birth. Tashtego becomes the infant struggling for life in a dangerous position, the whale-head the mother, taken into consideration after the rescue/birth has been successfully completed as a mother is
often said to be "doing as well as could be expected" after she gives birth, and Queequeg the midwife who is able to feel out the situation and adjust it accordingly.

A midwife is defined as the person, usually a woman, who assists women in childbirth, but the word itself is a combination of two middle English words, mid and wife. Mid meaning with and wife meaning woman, hence the meaning of the word: with woman, or a woman who is with expectant mothers. While the term midwife is used in this passage, so is the word obstetrics, which comes from the Latin word *obstetrîx*, meaning something similar to the English term midwife. *Obstetrîx* was created “from the verb *obstâre*, 'to stand in front of,' and the feminine suffix -*trîx*; the *obstetrîx* would thus literally stand in front of the baby” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*). Neither the role of midwife nor that of mother is played here by a female character, but the feminine is nonetheless invoked through the language and circumstances of such a birth-like rescue.

Queequeg, quite literally the figure of the midwife in this passage, recalls another midwife alluded to in chapter 31 entitled “Queen Mab” Queen Mab appears in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet as the mythological midwife of the fairies who delivers dreams to sleeping people and has a name that resonates with mother whale-head's midwife Queequeg. The first syllable of Queequeg's name is unmistakably similar in its spelling and its sound to the word queen, also the first syllable in Queen Mab's name. Queen is also a word which is difficult, if not impossible, to separate from the feminine; like the word mother, queen is by product of its definition female, even the use of the word “queen” to describe a homosexual man draws on the idea of a drag queen, a man dressed as a woman, and is a derogatory term implying that a gay man is less masculine and more feminine than a heterosexual man.
Standing interestingly in contrast to this use of the word queen as denoting a male as other or lesser, is that the queen in the game of chess is the most powerful piece, being the sole piece on the board that is able to move any distance in any direction. Queequeg is most definitely marked as other, he is not white, his teeth are sharply filed, and he is covered in tattoos which near the beginning of the novel Ishmael compares to a patchwork quilt, an item associated with the domestic and feminine sphere, Queequeg's arm "looked for all the world like a strip of that same patchwork quilt...I could hardly tell it from the quilt, they so blended their hues together" (37). Queequeg's arm here becomes part of the quilt, part of the feminine thing with which it has the same "hue". Queequeg is linked to femininity through his name, through being marked as other in a way that resembles a quilt, and through the position of midwife he occupies in the birth/rescue of Tashtego, and yet he is in no way made less powerful, less important, less of a man by this. If anything, like the queen on the chess board, Queequeg seems to be a character with immense power and strength; he is the only one brave enough to attempt the rescue of Tashtego which he accomplishes successfully for he is the only one qualified to attempt such a delivery and his midwifery skills are likened in importance to the very masculine skills of "fencing and boxing, riding and rowing" (272).

Ishmael, or perhaps more properly Melville, makes the distinction between deliverance and delivery when considering what happened to Tashtego, claiming that it was a delivery and not a deliverance, thus implying that he was given birth too as opposed to rescued or liberated. In her book *Nineteenth-Century American Romance*, Emily Budick she writes that "Ishmael is right to note that this is not spiritual ‘deliverance’ but bodily ‘delivery’" (117), but I am not sure that this is the distinction he is making for he
concludes the paragraph by asserting that "[m]idwifery should be taught in the same course with fencing and boxing, riding and rowing" (272). The distinction he is making is between being saved and being born, being brought, or on Tashtego's case brought back, into existence. Making the distinction between rescue and birth, and then choosing the images of birth to describe what is clearly a rescue situation produces an atmosphere in which the feminine is very much present for it is so much entwined in the concept of pregnancy and birth that the two cannot be separated.

This connection is explicit in chapter 87, "The Grand Armada", which is the first one in which we get actual female mothers with their newborn infants:

For, suspended in those watery vaults, floated the forms of the nursing mothers of the whales, and those that buy their enormous girth seemed shortly to become mothers. The lake, as I have hinted, was to a considerable depth exceedingly transparent; and as human infants while suckling will calmly and fixedly gaze away from the breast, as if leading two different lives at the time; and while yet drawing mortal nourishment, be still spiritually feasting upon some unearthly reminiscence…. One of these little infants, that from certain queer tokens seemed hardly a day old...though as yet his body seemed scarce yet recovered from that irksome position it had so latently occupied in the maternal rectitude; where, tail to head, and all ready for the final spring, the unborn whale lies bent like a Tartar's bow. The delicate side-fins, and the palms of his flukes, still freshly retained the plaited crumpled appearance of a baby's ears newly arrived from foreign parts (303).
This is the maternity ward and nursery of the grand armada of sperm whales; is it by coincidence that it is located directly in the center of mass and commotion? Besides being the safest, most protected location, fenced off from predators, if whales have predators besides humans, it is the central space from which all else emanates; it is the "innermost heart" (302). The heart being the most vital, that without which one cannot survive. As the central point of an argument is fundamental, so, by virtue of being in the center this nursery space is essential, both literally for the survival of the shoal and symbolically in the novel. The concept of the feminine here represented by images of reproduction, the carrying and delivering of offspring, occupies the most important space.

In a book so full of the images of birth and of mother this is one of the very few places in the narrative in which females are present; here the babies are actually babies, not just representations of babies, and the mothers are actually mothers. In Camille Paglia's essay "Moby-Dick as Sexual Protest" she claims that throughout all the "epic catalogs" (697) of the book "give[s] every name to the great whale but one: mother" (697). I think this is just not the case. Considering both Jonah and Tashtego and the instances of rebirth they experienced the whale, while perhaps not called mother in so many words, was explicitly given the occupation of mother by being the body out of which each was born. And here, in this passage, the whales are literally mothers—the word is used twice to describe them—who furnish from their breasts their babies with “mortal nourishment”. These are not whale heads symbolically giving birth to grown men, but are actual female whales engaged in the business of being mothers.

Perhaps it is the very concrete presence of the infants attached to these particular whale mothers that helps
differentiate them from the other whale mothers we have experienced in the novel, the ones not literally given the name mother, for can one truly be a mother without a baby? Or maybe more appropriately the question should be, if one has a baby, or in the cases of Jonah and Tashtego, if one gives birth, emulates giving birth, whether to a literal baby or a figurative one, is one automatically a mother? Is it the baby that determines the mother? When considering both the births of Jonah and Tashtego it is primarily the images of them as babies, as those inside some womblike chamber of the whale in need of being expelled that brought the mothers into existence. It is through having a baby that one becomes a mother. In this passage I think that the babies are the main determinant of the mothers, if not for the nursing newborns the men would have no way of identifying these whales as mothers.

These baby whales have a strange resemblance to "human infants" in the way they look out on the world while nursing and seem to be engaged not with what they see in their immediate line of sight, but with “some unearthly reminiscence”, as if there is a realm somewhere in which babies, human and nonhuman alike, exist before birth. One of these whales Ishmael believes to be not even one day old due to what he calls “certain queer tokens” of its appearance. One of these “tokens” is the baby whale's fins which, like the ears of newborn human babies, have a "pleated crumpled appearance". This image of the pleated fins invoking the image of smooshed and crumpled ears recalls the first passage I discussed in which Jonah's ears were described as being like sea-shells and still held the sounds of the ocean, or the sounds of the place of existence he occupied before being born, as the whale calves are still remembering the otherworldly place they inhabited before birth. We are reminded again that Jonah is the figure of the
infant newly born from his whale mother. If being a mother designates one as female, and if it is more than just being the agent in the process of giving birth that classifies one as a mother, if it is also dependent on the presence of the baby, then I think there is no doubt that the whale who vomits Jonah out is his mother.

In this same section of the "Grand Armada" chapter there is an instance where Queequeg looks into the water and sees what he thinks is a rope or line connected to a whale leading him to believe that that whale has been "struck" (303) and is so connected to the boat. What he thought was rope turns out to be “long coils of the umbilical cord of Madam Leviathan” (303). Thus it is difficult even for an experienced harpooner like Queequeg to distinguish between the umbilical cord of the whale and the rope used to capture whales; they are such similar objects. Like an umbilical cord connecting the mother to the baby the harpoon line on the whaling boat is what connects it to the whale it is trying to catch and kill. And like the umbilical cord being vital to the life of the baby who could not survive without it, so is the line vital to the business of whaling without which the line would be not be able to kill as many whales, obtain as much oil, or make as much money. Thus if the line is so compared to an umbilical cord the boat must be the mother, or perhaps this speaks to the idea that the business of whaling itself is a mother and the harpoon line is what connects it to the whale, its unborn baby.

The novel ends with another birth, or rebirth of sorts, that of Ishmael, born out of the wrecked sinking of the Pequod:

So, floating on the margin of the ensuing scene, and in full sight of it, when the half-spent suction of the ship reached me, I was then, but slowly, drawn
towards the closing vortex. When I reached it, it had subsided in a creamy pool. Round and round, then, and ever contracting towards the button-like black bubble at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve. Till, gaining that vital center, the black bubble upward burst; and now, liberated by reason of its cunning spring, and, owing to its great buoyancy, rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot length wise from the sea, fell over, and floated by my side. Buoyed up by that coffin, for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirge-like main...On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after he missing children, only found another orphan (427).

There is no mistaking the birth images contained in this final passage of the novel; the emergence of Ishmael through what could be seen as the experience of birth through the perspective of the one being born or the baby. Ishmael claims to be on the "margin" of all that is being sucked down into the ocean and while a baby is by no means on the margin of its own birth, actually playing a very central role, it is, as an actor, on the periphery of the action. A baby has no choice but to be born and similarly Ishmael can do little more than float and observe the wreckage, hoping not to be sucked down as well into the "closing vortex" which has taken everything into the sea. And he is not; he is born out of the destruction of the Pequod, annihilation, taking the form of the ocean, is his mother.

There are many circular words in this passage and they create an atmosphere of cylindrical roundness which intones the feminine. Women and especially pregnant and nursing
women have round breasts, bellies, and hips; one of the characteristics attributed to women's bodies is that of curviness like the concept of an hourglass figure, basically two roundish balls attached in the center by a narrow waist. The ocean in this passage takes on a semblance to a woman's body among the round, circular, tubular images from the cylindrical whirlpool of the vortex that wheels around and around to the small bubble residing at the center. This ocean is female; it is she who gives birth to Ishmael, she who is his mother. And it she who is all around, the mother figure stretching as far as one can see in all directions.

Ishmael starts the birth process by "floating" as a fetus in close range but not a direct part of the actions of the world around him. He is then "slowly, drawn towards the closing vortex," a vortex being a whirling mass that takes the shape of a column or perhaps a tube, a confined passageway that forces matter through it like a baby pushed through the birth canal. While the sinking of the ship may have been a forcefully quick process the aftermath of events in which Ishmael is unharmed and subsequently rescued is far more dilatory. The whole occurrence is characterized by a slowness in which everything including Ishmael moves as if "half-spent" like the natural birth process which takes time and is a drawn out affair. As he reaches what had been the vortex of the sinking Pequod Ishmael finds himself in what is described as a “creamy pool”, the word creamy invoking those mucusy bodily fluids that act as lubricants, or perhaps this “creamy pool” could be the discharging of the mucus plug—the seal that blocks the opening of the cervix prior to giving birth—which is often a sign that labor is on its way. After the appearance of this "creamy pool" the contractions start and Ishmael moves with the force of ocean “ever contracting towards the button-like black bubble at the axis
of that slowly wheeling circle". This "circle" can be seen as
the remnant of a whirlpooling tunnel created by the vortex
with the "button-like black bubble" at the end of it like the
birth canal as seen through the eye of the fetus, who, while
in the birth canal, would have a view much like that of
being in a tunnel that's opening appears far off and small,
much like a button.

Like any good birth which is succeeded by the afterbirth,
this one is no different. After "wheeling" towards that
"black bubble" it "upward burst" or opened up as if emerging through, finally, the far off end of the tunnel and
bursting forth into the world, Queequeg's coffin is expelled
from the vortex created canal of ocean. The coffin is
"liberated by reason of its cunning spring"; this language is
reminiscent of a baby whale described in chapter 87, "The
Grand Armada", who seemed, in the imagination of
Ishmael, to dwell just prior to birth "bent like a Tartar's
bow" (303) in preparation for "the final spring" (303) from
the womb into the world. Like the baby whale whose
delivery was a release from too tight a confined space, so
the coffin is "liberated" or freed from the tight suctionsal grip
of its mother, the ocean. The coffin could be the afterbirth
or perhaps it could be considered Ishmael's twin brother as
it is born from the same mother as Ishmael and at the same
time. After being "shot lengthwise from the sea" the coffin
comes to rest at Ishmael's side, two newborns floating side
by side. The coffin is almost a reincarnation of Queequeg
who had a kind of brotherly relationship with Ishmael. After
he decided to live Queequeg carved into the lid of his coffin
a "copy" of the "twisted tattooing on his body" (366) so that
the coffin becomes almost a picture of Queequeg. The
coffin is his only surviving companion from the destruction
caused by Ahab and his white whale; they have had the
same experience, Ishmael and the coffin, and they spend their first day in this new solitary ocean world together.

The "coffin life-buoy" is also Ishmael's cradle. After his delivery from the "closing vortex" of a destructive ocean the coffin is where Ishmael rests, held or cradled in a wooden bed until he is rescued. The coffin is where Ishmael is supported at the very beginning of his newborn life and although he does not explicitly say that he was nourished by the supplies in the coffin it is quite possible that he was. The coffin was designed with the idea that it look and function like a canoe and it was outfitted with biscuits, fresh water, and "a piece of sail-cloth (was) rolled up for a pillow" (365) so it was almost more like a life-boat than a coffin to begin with, or with the pillow it resembles somewhat a bed albeit a smaller than normal bed and not flat but fitted with wooden walls on all sides so as to be completely enclosed, like a cradle. In this coffin cradle Ishmael floats on an open ocean that is "soft and dirge-like". The word soft has a comforting feel to it and I suppose a dirge, or funeral hymn, would be, while mournful, also somewhat comforting as music so often is. As I am claiming that the coffin can also be taken as a cradle I think the dirge can also be taken as a lullaby, especially considering the word soft as being attached to it. A lullaby is meant to be soft and comforting for an infant and as Ishmael has just been reborn from the ocean it makes sense that the ocean, as his mother, would softly rock him in his coffin cradle and sing him a lullaby.

And so *Moby-Dick* ends with a birth, that thing which is the beginning of life; the life of Ishmael the narrator of *Moby-Dick* is brought into existence and consequently the story itself is born or at least given the ability to be born, to exist, for without Ishmael there would be no firsthand account, nothing but rumor, myth perhaps of the one-legged captain and his perilous journey after a phantom whale. It
ends even more so with a mother, not the mother from whom Ishmael is reborn, but the whaling vessel called the Rachel, which the note about this ship claims that its biblical name refers not to the "wife of Jacob but [is] to mean (symbolically) the mother of all the Hebrews" (396). Here she may be more specifically the mother of her crew, she who nurtures and sustains them while at sea or perhaps more broadly her name could refer to the whaling ship in general being like a mother to the whalers who reside on her. But she is not so much a birth mother as an adoptive mother, one who takes in those children who are in need of a mother, orphans like Ishmael. With the novel closing around a birth and the subject of the final sentence being a mother the reader is left with the aura of femininity.

Perhaps it is more than just the continual images of birth and consequently of mother and child throughout *Moby-Dick* that contribute to the overall presence of the feminine. Perhaps it is the generalized whale itself, or should I say herself that takes on throughout the novel the role of mother over and over and so becomes inseparable from the feminine. Emily Budick claims that "the sperm whale, albeit a symbol of masculinity on the literary axis, is, within the physical dimension of the text, linked to the natural and therefore the feminine" (117). The title character of the novel is a whale and the plot is centered around a whaling voyage. Whales are inescapable through the story they are so vitally important to the action, to the descriptions, and to the meaning of the story itself; to link the whale so closely to the feminine is in essence saying that there would be no *Moby-Dick* without it, for there would be no *Moby-Dick* without whales. Or perhaps this is going too far and it would be best to stick to my original argument, maybe it is not the whale who creates the female presence, it is the mother who is sometimes whale and sometimes not: the
mother, who is everywhere invoked by the language of birth and whose integral power is undeniable, for without her none of us would exist.

Works Cited


The plot of *Moby-Dick* comes full circle. The ending scene is as the first painting: the ship goes down with the whale. Where first we see a still frame, with a ship sinking in a tempest and an angry, dark sperm whale hovering above it in the frozen moment before its impaled death on the trident of the mast (Melville 26), we last observe the three mast heads of the *Pequod* disappearing in the descending wake of the white demon, with the sky hawk of her captain nailed flying to her highest, choking spear (Melville 427). The sea rolls over it all and goes on. And from the vortex where the possibility of meaning disappeared, in its spite for trying to be understood by mortals, rises a dark coffin. This is your answer, Ishmael, the white whale seems to say, none of you will ever know and this is the punishment for trying. Like in many of the postmodern novels, there are no given answers to the questions of meaning. It is simply the question, the center. And things fall apart when we realize that the center of our postmodern novel really is something that is a question, and a question of that center. So, the center of the novel is a question of its own existence. This can be seen in *Moby-Dick*. At the center is the whale and his whiteness. And with that comes the question of: What does it mean? Is Moby Dick the manifestation of God and the Devil? Or is he only a whale who will not be destroyed? The whiteness provides Ishmael with two distinct and opposite possibilities: white as the total absence of colored light - blankness; or white as the manifestation of all colored light together, something which is blinding. The former represents the possibility of
no meaning. The latter represents the possibility of all meaning, and the consequent inability of a mere individual to grasp it - it is so bright the onlooker is blinded and may only glimpse a sliver of what is there. The only answer the whale gives us is what he leaves of the Pequod, its coffin and its life boat; one and the same. Now, if it had been either a coffin or a lifeboat, either might have provided some symbolic answer to the question. But, since that coffin is the lifeboat (as the lifeboat is the coffin) it is both full of meaning and meaningless, just like the whiteness of the whale.

In 1851, the year when Moby Dick was published, the Crystal Palace was completed in London's Hyde Park. It was the first time that building materials had been used to construct something purely aesthetic. Wrought iron, something which had previously only been used in the functioning construction of railways, was combined with glass in the formation of a huge, greenhouse-like palace to display 14,000 specimens of the Industrial Revolution's latest technologies for the Great London Exhibition of that summer. This marked a turn in architecture: from now on architecture's main priority would not be restricted to the construction of buildings for function, but oriented around the quest for new materials for use in creating those buildings. Architects were no longer interested in who would inhabit structures or what they would be used for; architecture became purely a titanic struggle of the architect with the material. The building was the architect's conquest, his trophy of triumph over his materials. This was the era of modernism, and it was reflected in the musical, artistic, and literary worlds which sought mastery of their own materials, namely composition and instruments, paint and language, respectively.
In literature, modernism manifested itself in details. How could one put an image into words and stamp it onto the page? How could one master language? The encyclopedic novel was born where those who sat in parlors and carriages all day could experience first hand the wonders of the world in all of their details. The priority was to re-create actual life on the page, using language to translate it - something which would naturally influence the artist's drive to absolutely master that language and its vices.

So, if modernism is the struggle between the artist and his material, what happens when one of them loses the war? It has happened. The artists have won, and postmodernism is born into this world. It happened as WWII proved its capability of destruction. With the creation of nuclear weapons came the ability of man to conquer and destroy his own world. Literally, the United States dropped the atom bomb on Japan and vaporized two of its cities. Hundreds of years of building and construction, the latest hundred years or so dedicated to mastering the materials of that construction, annihilated to dust at the drop of a metal shell. Material lost the war. Man became master of earth, so earthen constructs fell apart. In architecture, the builders mastered their materials - the sky scraper grew from the ramparts of fallen societies of old. The question was no longer how to build something, but what to build, and what to do with it. When the city of Tokyo commissioned the tallest building in its history to be built, the architect submissions were not building plans, but various statements to the commission of: Well we -the architects- can do anything with any material, what do you want us to do?

Suddenly fighting with the material was meaningless. A hundred years of architecture, meaningless. In literature, the construct of modern realism fell apart as genres stopped mattering. Any material could come from any place to
create whatever it was that the artist wanted to create. Fundamental to this principle is the notion that the material no longer provides any resistance to the will or the genius of the artist. The resistance is elsewhere now - in society, culture, the minds of people - rather than in the material. The only thing restraining oneself anymore is that very oneself. In the postmodern genre of literature, anything can happen if the artist doesn't restrict himself.

Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* is demonstrative of a postmodern mastery of literary materials as well as a postmodern construct of its watery world. Like the ocean, genres do not exist for Melville - his masterpiece is encyclopedia, enlightened philosophical discourse, adventure, a critique on religion - and it asks the metaphysical question common to contemporary postmodern texts: What, now that the human race has mastered the materials of its world, is the central meaning of that world and, most importantly, does that central meaning even exist? Melville, or Ishmael, ponders such a heavy task in the text of the novel, when he writes

*How, then, with me, writing of this Leviathan? Unconsciously my chirography expands into placard capitals. Give me a condor's quill! Give me Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand! Friends, hold my arms! For in the mere act of penning my thoughts of this Leviathan, they weary me and make me faint with their outreaching comprehensiveness of sweep, as if to include the whole circle of the sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and mastodons, past, present, and to come, with all the revolving panoramas of empire on earth, and throughout the whole universe, not excluding its suburbs. Such, and so magnifying, is the virtue of a large and liberal theme! We expand to its bulk. To*
produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme. No great and enduring volume can ever be written on the flea, though many there be who have tried it (349).

Since material is mastered, the only thing left for the postmodern to be puzzled by is this very question. It is the last thing that the genre cannot conquer, and revolves around its apex like a shark to its prey, darting strikes but missing or simply passing through. It cannot get its jaws to hold. It is a ghost, this apex; this specter of meaning.

A more concrete definition of postmodernism in literature is described by Robert Berkhofer, who states that postmodernism "challenges the claim that language provides an unmediated access to an external reality ... Not only is there nothing outside of the text, but the meaning of the text is indeterminate. Stable meanings are an illusion created by ideologies that effectively work to obscure and conceal the tensions within the texts" (Cornell, 351). Furthermore, in postmodernism, attention is drawn to the fact that all understanding is filtered through the lens of language, which actually functions as a kaleidoscope, "What we see is not reality, but a constantly shifting set of patterns that only exist when one holds the kaleidoscope up to the eye. Remove the kaleidoscope and the patterns disappear. This view does not deny reality, but merely asserts that reality is not knowable outside of language" (Cornell 353). The above statement of Ishmael on the no small task of defining the Leviathan is demonstrative of this. Ishmael is baffled by the vastness of the concept he is attempting to conquer with language, and admits to the near impossibility of the battle. In this passage Ishmael states it as necessary to tackle all aspects of time, - past, present, and future - and everything in between, the whole universe throughout, in order to express his theme.
Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, a postmodern work, examines the relationship, or restriction, that language has with human understanding. Oedipa Maas lives in a world seemingly leached of meaning. There is nothing left in the languages of the world. Meaning can no longer be expressed through words because it no longer exists in culture or society. Yet, Oedipa searches for it elsewhere. Oedipa searches for meaning outside of language. The frustration comes from the fact that she is a product of language, deeply immersed and compacted to highest density within its black hole, yearning desperately to escape it, to pull out of it so she can see the big picture; to stand on the Schwarzschild Radius and look back to watch the light disappear without being sucked down with it. Mike Fallopian's assessment of Peter Pinguind's confrontation with Russia on the Pacific coast is that, "Attack, retaliation, both projectiles deep-sixed forever and the Pacific rolls on and on. But the ripples from those two splashes spread, and grew, and today engulf us all," (36) is an example of the subtle relationship between language and history. That moment in history happened. It is tangible. But the ripples that "engulf us all" are not. They can only be explained through comparison to another thing, water, of which they are definitely not made. Oedipa is affected deeply by these ripples and begins linking them together to form her "Trystero". But she is never fully outside of language. In the digital world that our history has produced, says Pynchon, only God or a digital machine can figure this out.

So it is in Melville, but the ocean itself becomes the catalyst for the loss of meaning or meaning to be gained. First of all, there is a constancy to the sea, as well as an ever-changing quality. Historical moments do not remain in one place at sea, because all water is the same water, so all historical moments are one single moment. For Ahab and
the *Pequod*, the ocean is as it was and has always been because, "The first boat we read of, floated on an ocean, that with Portuguese vengeance had whelmed a whole world without leaving so much as a widow. That same ocean rolls now; that same ocean destroyed the wrecked ships of last year. Yea, foolish mortals, Noah's flood is not yet subsided: two thirds of the world it yet covers," (224). Robert Berkhofer's principles of postmodern thought also demonstrate that history in postmodernism confronts the defining metanarratives of historical inquiry (349). Berkhofer himself says, "no longer can any single master interpretive code be privileged over another as if one were somehow more correspondent to the 'real' past than another" (350). All moments are blended at sea, a truth that not even the epic story of the *Pequod* can escape. The image of the Pacific's ripples in Pynchon is taken from the last paragraph of *Moby-Dick*, and is the final proof of the singular moment of the sea. Once the ship collapses beneath the waves, "the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago," (427) and the reader is left with Ishmael in the ocean of Noah's flood; the same ocean as it was then and the same ocean it will forever be. The tragedy of Ahab is a moment consumed by it; that moment is over; all that is left are waves.

Berkhofer's next principle is Deconstruction, where "Not only is there nothing outside of the text, but the meaning of the text is indeterminate. Stable meanings are an illusion created by ideologies that effectively work to obscure and conceal the tensions within texts" (Cornell, 351). The postmodern rips the genres, races, histories, and all other distinctions of the modern apart and strings them back together in different orders and added dimensions with spider webs. To open up the future, Pynchon takes the stance of remixing the past. In the world of Oedipa Mass,
the center cannot hold. There is the possibility of no center at all. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, multiple people observe the Trystero sign, the muted horn, for different reasons. Oedipa is faced with four possibilities at the end of the novel, a fact which also demonstrates the postmodern. There is not one answer. There are four. None of them are guaranteed. And the novel ends before the "crying of lot 49" even begins. Either she has "stumbled indeed ... onto a secret richness and concealed density of dream; onto a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating ... " or she is simply hallucinating it, or it is a plot mounted against her by Pierce Inverarity to drive her crazy, or she is simply hallucinating the presence of a plot against her (141). Pynchon does not give an answer. There is no answer. Oedipa is trying to find the connection between it all; the center. One can only say that the spider webs of the quest hold everything together. All are united in their search for a meaning that is potentially not there and, therefore, the possibilities are endless and forever undefined.

In Melville, it is the ocean which connects this united pool of searchers. And that ocean is consumptive. Melville's work is imbued with oceanic reveries on the part of Ishmael's ponderings. Borders and genres are so unimportant to the ocean that they are simply disregarded. The sea is the sea; and it is everything. Its power of dissolving borders extends itself over human beings. One may easily lose oneself in it, as Oedipa Maas lost herself in the ocean of the Trystero's signs. Melville explicates the effect that the sea has on a green sailor who is charged with the lookout post at the topmast. This sailor is supposed to be looking for whales, but is lulled into such an "opium-like listlessness" that his identity is blended with the ocean and consequently he
takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly discovered, uprising fin of some undiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it. In this enchanted mood, thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space; like Wickliff’s sprinkled Pantheistic ashes, forming at last a part of every shore the round globe over... slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. (136)

It is this listlessness that troubles all of Ishmael’s and the postmodern world's thoughts. When man comes into contact with the universal, he cannot fully grasp its magnitude; it is too big and he is spread too thin across it to make any sense of it, or himself within it, as a whole. In the white whale, that indefinable magnitude is embodied.

This notion of blankness is clearly seen in many postmodern texts. Joan Didion's *Play It as It Lays* uses the desert as the catalyst for meaning, her assertion being that it does not exist; that the modern world has lost its ability to mean anything. In the printing of her novel, she made sure that the publishers kept wide blank margins on the sides of each page to emphasize the blank meaninglessness that it is her purpose to convey. The desert is a blank place and, for Didion reflects the soul of all man, just like the ocean in *Moby-Dick*, but it is not a question for Didion. She does not allow for the possibility of that desert meaning anything. Maria, a disillusioned Hollywood actress, when she needs to escape the horrors of life, closes her eyes and imagines a needle dripping truth serum into her arm, which does not calm her down. So instead she pictures herself driving the
freeways and losing herself in the desert, "straight on into the hard white empty core of the world," (162). This same theme is represented *Moby-Dick* with the possibility that the whiteness of the whale is true blankness; the absence of all color. Ishmael sees in the whale the potential for an answer of: No, this world means nothing; there is nothing more than what is here; what is here means nothing; everything is alone. Maria is absolutely alone out in the sand. She does not ask it to mean anything.

But what if Maria did ask the desert what it meant? What would it give her? Consequently, what of the other possibility that Ishmael sees in the whiteness of Moby Dick - the possibility of white as "the concrete of all colors", emitting a beam of meaning so profound as to be blinding to mere mortals (Melville 165)?

The culminating lines to Yeats' "The Second Coming" are, "twenty years of stony sleep/ Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle/ And what rough beast, its hour come round at last/ Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" (Yeats). Joan Didion's conception of the postmodern world view is taken from the beginning lines: "Things fall apart, the center does not hold," (Yeats) but it is important to take into account the ending for the relation of the postmodern to history. This poem is an alternative history of sorts. It is taken from the Christian notion that the messiah will come again, the predicted time of arrival being the dawn of the 21st century. At the close of WWI the world found itself in a state of disrepair. The vortex fell apart. The gyre widened, and the world's meaning fell into it. Now, when this world looks towards the second coming of Christ for an answer to the future, it is searching for its meaning. It is waiting for its own soul – Christ – God - to be made manifest so that it can move forward. Yeats ponders this and asks a very important question: What form will the savior take on his return to a
world such as this, meaning the one of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century? In other words, to what extent will the state of the current era have a mutating effect on the son of God? In further words, what meaning of the world will be reflected by its savior's face?

The soul that this world produces is something horrific, and it emerges from Didion's very own empty white core of the world: the desert. Somewhere, out in its sands, "A shape with lion body and the head of a man/ A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun/ is moving its slow thighs, while all about it/ Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds," (Yeats). This creature is the manifestation of meaningless human suffering; its gaze is empty and uncompromising; it is the evil that has come out of the world that created it; it is Moby Dick, according to Captain Ahab.

Moby Dick took something valuable from Ahab when they met in the water on that fated voyage before this story even began. Moby Dick took Ahab's manhood; made him a cripple; destroyed his dignity in one bone-crunching swipe. But the whale also left something with Ahab - knowledge of and contact with that meaning, whatever it is. After his encounter with the whale, Ahab is changed; there is something inside of him which cannot be contained, but what it is he cannot say. Ahab, "lived in the world, as the last of the Grisly Bears lived in settled Missouri. And as when Spring and Summer had departed, that wild Logan of the woods, burying himself in the hollow of a tree, lived out the winter there, sucking his own paws; so, in his inclement, howling old age, Ahab's soul, shut up in the caved trunk of his body, there fed upon the sullen paws of its gloom!" (Melville 131). In feeding upon its paws in contemplation of his contact with the whale, Ahab's soul is driven mad and, in that madness, driven to such power that his "caved trunk" of a body struggles to hold it in. Madness, asserts
Ishmael, "is oftentimes a cunning and most feline thing," and Ahab is able to compress his powers of madness into a useful and containable form, so "his special lunacy stormed his general sanity, and carried it, and turned all its concentrated cannon upon its own mad mark; so that far from having lost his strength, Ahab, to that one end, did now possess a thousand fold more potency than ever he had sanely brought to bear upon anyone reasonable object" (Melville 157). In his anger at the impossibility of comprehending his lost limb he concludes that one Leviathan as the root of all the world's evil. And, where lesser beings would fall down to worship it in fear, Ahab lets his anger hurl all of itself against Moby Dick and "He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it," (Melville 156).

But the meaning is misinterpreted by Ahab in his madness, only to be truly revealed to him at his moment of leaving the world. The blinding meaning that a troubled Ishmael can only glimpse in the profundity of the whale's hide is revealed to Ahab in a single beam of light at the end of his life's long tunnel. This world has no center, says the white whale to the captain, it is but a combination of poles and, in those poles, of wholes. Everything is but what is not and because of being everything that it is not, something is the last and only thing that it can possibly be. Nothing exists without its opposite; in fact, nothing can exist without its opposite. Please allow an explanation:

Parallel to the phantoms of underlying oversoul-like meaning, fly migratory birds from pole to pole. Melville sets up a theme of opposites at the offset of Moby-Dick, something which continues to surface throughout and culminates in the realization of Ahab of the meaning of his
The theme surfaces early in the work, as Ishmael and Queequeg share their all night vigil at Coffin's Inn. Ishmael ponders the absolute importance of having some part of one's body cold, preferably the top of the head, while warm under blankets in bed, as well as keeping one's eyes shut tight, to better appreciate that warmth. This is important he says, "for there is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast ... no man can ever feel his own identity aright except his eyes be closed; as if darkness were indeed the proper element of our essences, though light be more congenial to our clayey part" (Melville 58). Thus, something is defined by its opposite; and cannot be understood unless in terms of its opposite. This idea can be developed further, and one can say that something is defined along a range bounded by its opposing poles - everything between is but the diffusive reactions of those two poles towards each other. At times there is little to no mixing in between. This principle can be seen in Ishmael's description of the unjust custom, in England, of the King and Queen to be presented with the head and tail, respectively, of any whale to be captured along their coast. The loss of justice comes with the dividing of the whale because, it "is much like halving an apple; there is no intermediate remainder" (Melville 310). There are two parts to the whale: the tail, which is the tail simply because it is not the head; and the head, which is the head simply because it is not the tail; and together they make the whale - the whole. This idea can also be used to bound different individuals as one, as seen in the chapter entitled "The Monkey-rope". Queequeg, as harpooner of the boat that killed this day's whale, is supervisor of the blubber stripping and is consequently obliged to remain on the whale's back with the hook secure while the process is taking place. Ishmael, as Queequeg's bowsman, is in charge of his safety.
- the two are attached by a rope at each waist, Ishmael on the ship's deck, Queequeg below with the blood and the blubber and the biting sharks. Honor demands, Ishmael reflects, that if Queequeg should slip and be drowned or devoured, and Ishmael unable to save him, then Ishmael must allow himself to be pulled after his friend by the fate of the cord. The two are one, for all intents and purposes of life or death. In this system, Queequeg and Ishmael are the opposites of one whole and the diffusing middle is the rope between them - in life or death it will not be cut. Ishmael writes of his feelings then that, "So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that while earnestly watching his motions, I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two ... I saw that this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes; only, in most cases, he, in one way or another, has this Siamese connection with a plurality of other mortals" (Melville 255). And so, since every one thing can only be defined by what it is not, nothing can exist without the additional existence of the entire world outside of its self; every thing is connected in this complex networking system, which all together makes up the globe.

Henry Alonzo Myers examines Ahab's final realization in light of the above argument: "The meeting between man and whale results in the loss of Ahab's ship and of his life. Yet his spirit is unbroken, and at the end he has his flash of insight, the discovery that his topmost greatness lies in his topmost grief, that his unconquerable spirit and his unyielding will are meaningless without the suffering which brings them out and gives them significance" (30). This is what it is all about. This is the whole of life - the two halves of sorrow and joy; intimately connected. Ahab's revelation proves the presence of this whole, but only to him. There is
not a center of meaning to the white whale - it is but the symbol of all opposites manifested together, a lid that is the center; and it is not a center, but a whole. Myers goes on to say that

Every earnest reformer of the nineteenth century should have recognized himself in Ahab the monomaniac. For the one error of judgment of the otherwise good and capable captain -- an error compatible with his intense nature -- was his assumption that he could by one heroic act stamp evil out of the world. Once he had identified the whale as the cause of evil, his fierce, proud spirit refused to accept the necessity of defeat and suffering; and the consciousness of his own powers led him to believe that he could trace all sorrows to a single cause, pursue that cause to the ends of the earth, and in one last, Titanic struggle rid the universe of evil. So it has been in society for two hundred years; the pursuit of the white whales - ignorance, clericalism, slavery, alcohol, capitalism, war, Fascism -- has busied many an Ahab. Moby Dick is well suited to be the tragedy of an age. The whole romantic world has made Ahab's mistake again and again .... (27)

Ahab, therefore, is a symbol for the world. Since the whale is both Ahab's deepest grief and his highest joy and the cause of that grief is that joy, then the evil that Ahab sees in the whale is simply his projection of his innermost feelings of despair and his relish in that despair. One cannot rid the world of evil, because it is inherently present in oneself, a presence which is actually the cause of evil in the world. Ahab could not kill Moby Dick without destroying himself because he is intimately entwined in the evil that it represents to him. Ahab set out to destroy all evil in the
world without addressing its cause, which is the evil of every man that he casts out from himself because he cannot own its consequences. The real evil comes from man, represented by Captain Ahab. In leading his ship to destroy the denizen of hate, something he thought to be all-pervading evil, he comes to see that he is the cause of that evil in himself, not the whale. Man is the cause of that evil, not the whale. The whole world sets out to destroy its white whales, be them evil or representative of the question of the meaning of life. "Or is it," asks Ishmael, "that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color atheism from which we shrink?" (Melville 165). Thus are the two disturbances of the one thing. But there is a third potential for the color white, one which none but Ahab could experience, and that can be demonstrated by looking at either pole of our one whole world. There is a thing called "planetary albedo", a scientific term for the reflexivity of our planet; that thing refers to the ability of a given surface of the earth to reflect electromagnetic radiation from the sun; that is, natural light. Light is absorbed by land and sea alike all over the globe, until it reaches the poles, where the whiteness of snow reflects most of it back into space. Thus the color white acts as a mirror and reflects, absolutely, the projections of whosoever may be gazing upon it. When we attribute white whales as the causes of our sufferings, be them worldwide or individual, failure comes when we do not look into the mirror because what each and everyone of us would behold there would be the spectral reflection of that very white whale.
This is Ahab's discovery - his realization of Moby Dick as himself and himself as Moby Dick, his insight that the causes of his life's purpose and his life's suffering are one and the same, and his acceptance of his own death as the actual purpose for this voyage. Driven by the joy of his suffering, he set out to destroy the evil that had wreaked havoc upon his life and in destroying himself he wholly did. His was the projection of the symbol of evil onto the white whale so, with him that projection died - as well as the evil it represented, because that evil lived in Ahab. His recognition of himself as the white whale allows him to welcome death gladly and see in it his answer and achievement of purpose: Ahab sees that there is no vortex of good or evil at the center of all things -- there is no center of all things; good and evil are two parts of the same thing - that is, the world; and all of man's inherent suffering is both the cause of and compliment to his uttermost joy.

The last image of the novel, the sinking Pequod, offers the symbol of Ahab's realization as

A sky-hawk that tauntingly had followed the main-truck downwards from its natural home among the stars, pecking at the flag, and incommoding Tashtego there; this bird now chanced to intercept its broad fluttering wing between the hammer and the wood; and simultaneously feeling that ethereal thrill, the submerged savage beneath, in his death-grasp, kept his hammer frozen there; and so the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship, which, like Satan, would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it (427).
Thus, one may add "Tragedy" to the list of genres that Melville employs to tell his great tale. Like Oedipus himself, Ahab intensifies his own grief by attempting to destroy the evil of the world. Oedipus seeks to end his city's woes by finding the old king's murderer, thus ending the plague of Thebes. But he only brings about his own end in discovering himself as that murderer. Ahab thus, "intensifies his grief by his attempt to destroy the cause of evil, discovers the meaning of his fortunes in the end which his vengeance brings upon him," (Myers 22). Melville's work is a panoply of the postmodern.

The lofty places of this world are but the reverses of its deepest chasms, symbols of the triumphs and disasters of man, which create each other. They are the bounds of experience, a rolling sphere diffused with all human action and interaction, and only through each other are they translated and bestowed with meaning. And the "center", the meaning, the white whale, is simply the human realization of this principle.

**Works Cited**


Humor and Irony in Melville's *Moby-Dick*: Necessary and Cathartic Devices

Stephen Johnson

Humor is a necessity of life, and humans have evolved the capacity for a reason. Whatever the method (and vast distinctions have developed over time): verbal, as in satire, parodies, or sarcasm; or non-verbal, as in slapstick, absurdity, visual irony, or practical jokes, humor is an essential method for humans to cope with life. Without the ability to step back and laugh, we as sentient beings would likely be driven to extinction by stress and depression.

Through Ishmael, Melville weaves comedy into his telling of *Moby-Dick* to simultaneously convey the emotional tempest of life at sea for the whaling comrades, and present a narrative that succeeds on all accounts - providing an adventure story, a philosophical discourse, and natural history on the subject of whales. A difficult task indeed, as Ishmael notes: "In the tumultuous business of cutting-in and attending to a whale, there is much running backwards and forwards among the crew. Now hands are wanted here, and then again hands are wanted there. There is no staying in any one place; for at one and the same time everything has to be done everywhere. It is much the same with him who endeavors the description of the scene" (Melville 254).

"Ship and boat diverged; the cold, damp night breeze blew between; a screaming gull flew overhead; the two hulls wildly rolled; we gave three heavy-hearted cheers, and blindly plunged like fate into the lone Atlantic" (Melville 96).
Merriam-Webster provides several distinct uses for the word 'humor', all of which at some point make an appearance in *Moby-Dick*, and oftentimes can conflict or be ambiguous making it difficult to distinguish which use is meant. Apart from the more common "something that is or is designed to be comical or amusing", there is the antiquated middle ages definition: "a fluid or juice of an animal or plant; specifically: one of the four fluids entering into the constitution of the body and determining by their relative proportions a person's health and temperament". Quick examples range from the documentary-like chapter 32 on cetology, "It was the idea also, that this same spermaceti was that quickening humor of the Greenland Whale which the first syllable of the word literally expresses." to a more simple description of demeanor in 91: "The sailors, in tasselled caps of red worsted, were getting the heavy tackles in readiness for the whales. But they worked rather slow and talked very fast, and seemed in anything but a good humor." This shall be touched upon in detail later as these fluids are disturbed and make an appearance, for now we shall deal with the more familiar feelings of amusement. A good precedent for the upcoming connections and to justify Ishmael's musings lies in chapter 58, which, along with many other cues, ensures the reader is aware that the events of *Moby-Dick* and especially those characters on board the Pequod represent the Earth and all humanity, and connect man to nature. "Consider all this; and then turn to this green, gentle, and most docile earth; consider them both: the sea and the land; and do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself? For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life. God
keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return!" (Melville 225)

From the beginning we are treated to Melville's wit in the presentation of "a late consumptive usher to a grammar school", who spends his days dusting old books with a "queer handkerchief, mockingly embellished with all the gay flags of all the known nations of the world" (Melville 7) and the "poor devil of a Sub ... Sub", who has graciously and mechanically provided us with an extended catalog drawing from a vast variety of works that merely hint at the subject of "whale". The array of references foreshadows the variety of the text to come, and the lengths to which Ishmael will stretch to allude. Some, listed among the Bible and the words of Shakespeare, are quite odd for a chuckle: "'Spain - a great whale stranded on the shores of Europe' -Edmund Burke'" (Melville 12). These failure characters provide a sort of pathetic comedy, setting the stage for many more ironies involving wild, varied, and mostly mediocre men. A major aspect of Moby-Dick's humor lies in self-deprecation, primarily executed by Ishmael upon himself and his fellow white Protestants. Much of this humor inevitably leads to charges of blasphemy when the subject of ridicule becomes the narrator's own religion. For examples of this, irreverent remarks such as referring to Adam and Eve as "orchard thieves" appear in the first chapter. The Norton edition's footnote tells us "The Whale (October 1851) omitted this humorous biblical allusion along with many other jocular or merely disrespectful sallies throughout the book" (Parker & Hayford 21, no. 7). This reinforces the assertion that Melville's craft far exceeded the sensibilities of his own time period, dooming his work, like hordes of other great artists, to censorship and ridicule. Fortunately texts and their bounty of ideas have the ability to be revived. He even makes several attempts at describing the horrific and cruel
nature of his own work while participating in it, sometimes rather sarcastically.

In the 45th chapter, Ishmael questions "Why such a whale became thus marked was not altogether and originally owing to his bodily peculiarities as distinguished from other whales; for however peculiar in that respect any chance whale may be, they soon put an end to his peculiarities by killing him, and boiling him down into a peculiarly valuable oil" (Melville 171). Further insight into Ishmael's thoughts on animal rights appear soon.

Comic relief is important for the reader in a lengthy novel filled with narrative horror, fear, and tension - in addition (and perhaps contrast) to extended encyclopedic insights on the field of whaling. Ishmael's philosophical insights are bountiful when we are first introduced on land, and those on humor arrive with haste. In the beginning of chapter 5 he details the immense value of humor: "However, a good laugh is a mighty good thing, and rather too scarce a good thing; the more's the pity. So, if any one man, in his own proper person, afford stuff for a good joke to anybody, let him not be backward, but let him cheerfully allow himself to spend and be spent in that way. And the man that has anything bountifully laughable about him, be sure there is more in that man than you perhaps think for" (Melville 39). Ishmael's outlook is optimistic: life is harsh and a good laugh should always be savored, one should always take a chance to be merry, even (and especially) at the expense of oneself. He carefully cautions that if one is to be exclusive - to joke at the expense of others, to be quite sure there are often still beneficial qualities unseen or unheard. In other words, his is a healthy policy of moderation wherein one balances humor with seriousness.

There are a multitude of instances depicting comical or amusing situations, and Melville's ironies are numerous
to discover. While we shall not discuss every humorous figure of speech or play on words in Melville's novel, nor even attempt to include all events of laughter at religion, class, or race's expense, there shall be an attempt to describe specific passages which reinforce humor's importance and function not only in the scheme of the plot, but in the meta-contexts of Ishmael's narration of said events, and then of the reader's interpretation. The subject of what exactly is humorous is among the most contested, for it is as subjective as the question of what is beauty in the art realm. Discussion thereof is, like the novel itself, highly contested as the narrator upsets the reader's expectations of wit. This can result in exquisite laughter or grievous offense entirely depending on the subject's upbringing, their society and environment, heredity, and a variety of other factors dictating their level of comfort, or, where exactly they'll claim one has "crossed the line".

Here is one of the whimsical chapters, which like certain others whose subject is based entirely around chowder (and contains the only woman in the novel, whose nagging existence is only to ask "Clam or Cod?") does indeed have a fitting place in the novel. Their purpose, it would seem, is to provide a much needed light-hearted recreation from the surrounding drama. Chapter 25 - Postscript is masterfully penned in a such a way that it is humorous in this fashion of narrative spice, alludes to the subject at hand of whaling, and is blasphemous in that special kind of way which is purely American, whose right is granted in the first amendment to the Constitution. This, of course, is about trashing Britain and its monarchy, and in turn all things non-democratic. Not only does Ishmael liken a king's head to a salad, he makes sure it is known that he and his fellow men are those who allow such a ridiculous ceremony to occur by providing the sperm whale oil.
"Think of that, ye loyal Britons! we whalemen supply your kings and queens with coronation stuff!" (Melville 101). As is to be expected, freedom of speech is not a totally honored right, as the footnote exclaims: "The first English edition solved the problem of the disrespect toward royalty shown here by omitting this little chapter" (Parker & Hayford 101, no. 1). This healthy disrespect and distrust will reappear, and most importantly, not always be directed at others.

In the time since this novel was published, 1851, many of society's expectations have changed, weakening the shock value of Melville's work somewhat. In the past casual talk of demons or witchcraft was downright horrifying and carried a sort of power. Now, jokes at the expense of Catholic priests, for example, are commonplace in the everyday and in the media. Although a certain segment will still find such jabs uncomfortable, the comedic aspect of Moby-Dick is likely much easier to digest today and thus slightly less powerful as a rebellious work. Other entries, such as Ishmael's commentary upon entering "The Trap", describing "a black Angel of Doom" whose "text was about the blackness of darkness" (Melville 24) could horrify the modern reader with Melville's seemingly racist remarks, while a reader of the past could have unfortunately found the phrases quite truthful. Considering the context of the rest of the novel showing the author's apparent commitment to the acceptance of alternative races and cultures (which shall be greatly expanded upon later, mostly in terms of Ishmael's relationship with Queequeg), these lines should more carefully be approached as a dry, ironic pass at an uncomfortable situation: easing the tension of entering an exclusive Church while simultaneously mocking the fear others in his society held towards black people.

Stereotypes (essentially rumors covering a specific group of people or land), while spawned in some sort of
truth, end up being so inaccurate or trivial that they become a multilayered joke - humorous for those who the stereotype is exacted against and those who realize its folly, and retold at the expense of those foolish enough to believe in any form universal application. Regrettably, a majority of those fools were (and in some cases still are) average citizens. Ishamel verifies this, "Nor did wild rumors of all sorts fail to exaggerate, and still the more horrify the true histories of these deadly encounters. For not only do fabulous rumors naturally grow out of the very body of all surprising terrible events, -- as the smitten tree gives birth to its fungi; but, in maritime life, far more than in that of terra firma, wild rumors abound, wherever there is any adequate reality for them to cling to" (Melville 153). He places himself and his fellow whalers at the forefront of such "ignorance and superstitiousness hereditary to all sailors", and in realizing this, concurrently realizes his ability to combat them. Much of Ishmael's humor could be deemed subversive, in the sense that his off-color jokes and blasphemies encourage a revolution in thought, a change in what should no longer be revered and taken seriously, and which cultural and societal norms should be uprooted and exposed to comedy.

Stereotypes exist for things far and wide, not only the readily apparent assumptions of physical racial characteristics. In chapter 65 the reader learns of a sort of culinary relativity concerning the value of eating whale. It is generally frowned upon in England, but has found its place among the French and Dutch, and most especially the "Esquimaux". Ishmael questions what, precisely, makes a dish civilized. He finds it is not the particular flavor, of which the sperm whale is excessively fatty, no; this has nothing to do with the distinction. It is "that a man should eat a newly murdered thing of the sea, and eat it too by its own light." This is where the problem lies, and this is where
Ishmael takes offense. He fumes, "But no doubt the first man that ever murdered an ox was regarded as a murderer; perhaps he was hung; and if he had been put on his trial by oxen, he certainly would have been; and he certainly deserved it if any murderer does.

Go to the meat-market of a Saturday night and see the crowds of live bipeds staring up at the long rows of dead quadrupeds. Does not that sight take a tooth out of the cannibal's jaw? Cannibals? who is not a cannibal? I tell you it will be more tolerable for the Fejee that salted down a lean missionary in his cellar against a coming famine; it will be more tolerable for that provident Fejee, I say, in the day of judgment, than for thee, civilized and enlightened gourmand, who nailest geese to the ground and feastest on their bloated livers in thy pate-de-foie-gras" (Melville 242). This speech is important for several reasons: it makes a joke at the cannibal "salting down a missionary" stereotype, elevates such a transgression to be in fact more noble, since he is eating the missionary to ensure his own survival, and once again goes against the word of God by claiming, against Genesis, that man in actuality does not have complete domain over the animal kingdom and is in truth guilty of murder, if only the animals had a say. The stereotype of the cannibal is chipped away every time a human bites into another animal of the Earth, for what is more savage than the cruel overstuffing of geese for a mere treat? This is especially interesting because it wholeheartedly justifies the rebellions of Moby Dick and other whales against the whalers, and erodes Ahab's sentiments of malevolence to a more acceptable self-defense.

The reader is exposed to the awkward situation of Ishmael being forced to share a bed at the Spouter-Inn during chapters 3 and 4 - and the jokes played at his
expense by the landlord over the meaning of the harpooner "peddling his head", which are actually rather macabre embalmed New Zealand heads. These are an example of several whimsical chapters to come containing what can best be described as "slightly off" minor characters, such as the innkeep who grins while planing away at a bench for Ishmael to sleep on. This is also where we get an introduction to Ishmael's rather tolerant attitudes towards outsiders, and experience the writer's ability to instantly soothe a dramatic situation with humor. Melville keeps the reader on edge by carefully describing the dark, eerie, and exotic bedchamber filled with Queequeg's unusual belongings, and maintains this tension while describing the cannibal's wild and astonishing appearance and heathenous religious ritual. It soon falls into humor, especially considering narrator Ishmael's relative dispassion in recounting the event, with reassurances that "It's only his outside; a man can be honest in any sort of skin" (Melville 34). What was at first a horrible startle is now a civilized young white man cowering under his bed sheets at the boogyman. The footnotes give a hint towards this otherwise hard to notice shift in mood, informing the reader that "The humor arises from Ishmael's difficulty in defining Queequeg's garment" (Parker & Hayford 35 #6). As soon as Queequeg and Ishmael are introduced by the landlord, tensions are suddenly at ease, a skillful and dramatic turn on Melville's part. We are then treated to the memorable line, "Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian" (Melville 36). Blasphemous, funny, and most likely astute advice.

What happens the next morning is shocking, but likely not in the same fashion as when the novel was first received. A modern reader is mildly upturned to find a grizzled cannibal, charged with killing whales for a living,
capable of such affection - and the ensuing situation is highly whimsical. One can only imagine what wrath was brought upon Melville in the Victorian era. His description of the embrace, "Upon waking next morning about daylight, I found Queequeg's arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife" (Melville 36) is heavily and obviously laden with marital diction, so as to leave no doubt in the suggestion that men could bond and love as equally as a man and wife. The fact that the grasp is a man does not disturb Ishmael so much as the intense reminiscence of a childhood trauma. His outlook on life dictates a good laugh, and so it is. "But at length all the past night's events soberly recurred, one by one, in fixed reality, and then I lay only alive to the comical predicament. For though I tried to move his arm - unlock his bride-groom clasp - yet, sleeping as he was, he still hugged me tightly, as though naught but death should part us twain" (Melville 38). Queequeg, with his myriad of exotic features: apparently from the South Seas, with an idol that looks like "a three days' old Congo baby", participating in Ramadan, and wielding a Tomahawk, shall be symbolic of any number of non-Christian cultures, with all of which Ishmael has become at peace.

Undoubtedly the subject carried some sense of unease for Melville as it still does for much of society today, and transforming the situation not only from sinful and degenerate, but from awkward to playful and loving is a step towards negating the stigmas behind male relationships. The treatment of whaling, or sailing in general, which is consistently portrayed as a macho and uneducated field, is a continued source of humor when contrasting Ishmael's learned diction with those of his comrades, and displaying his more intimate relation with Queequeg. The subject of male bonding and homosexuality
is humorously revisited repeatedly throughout the novel, but always with a sense of hopeful sincerity and mirroring the same allusions to marriage. This theme is then bonded to Ishmael's numerous additional criticisms in a sort of stacking effect which greatly increases the overall impact. In chapter 10 Ishmael interrupts Queequeg's "pagan ceremony" and comments in jest that he "was George Washington cannibalistically developed" (Melville 55). The comparison of a non-Christian man, bearing unacceptable tattoos and the like to a founding father is a truly American blasphemy. He continues, eventually rationalizing his way around the first commandment and participating in the worship of Yojo - all to the tune of the true commandment of man, the golden rule. To top this all off, the two "undressed and went to bed, at peace with our own consciences and all the world." In other words, without a shred of remorse the two, like a married couple head to sleep. "How it is I know not; but there is no place like a bed for confidential disclosures between friends. Man and wife, they say, there open the very bottom of their souls to each other; and some old couples often lie and chat over old times till nearly morning. Thus, then, in our hearts' honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg--a cosy, loving pair" (Melville 57).

Another example, which continues perfectly this theme, and ties it to the overall goal of medicating danger with humor, is chapter 72 - The Monkey-Rope. For Ishmael, "It was a humorously perilous business for both of us" to be tied fast to his bosom friend Queequeg. We learn from Melville's note that Stubb engendered the grand idea, and that "it was only in the Pequod that the monkey and his holder were ever tied together." This would "afford the imperilled harpooneer the strongest possible guarantee for the faithfulness and vigilance of his monkey-rope holder."
Ishmael takes this stressful situation with a hearty laugh and once again takes an aside to philosophize. The whole thing is once more treated in the age-old story of war brothers - intense times call for intense relationships, and Melville alludes to the most intense of all: Christian wedlock. "So that for better or for worse, we two, for the time, were wedded; and should poor Queequeg sink to rise no more, then both usage and honour demanded, that instead of cutting the cord, it should drag me down in his wake. So, then, an elongated Siamese ligature united us. Queequeg was my own inseparable twin brother; nor could I any way get rid of the dangerous liabilities which the hempen bond entailed" (Melville 255).

Despite his lofty claims of the rope signifying a highly humanistic link between all men, a revelation that all human society is dependent on one another to survive and flourish, Ishmael still has time for a somewhat crude remark while explaining the harpooneer's situation on the dead whale's back during the cutting-in: "On the occasion in question, Queequeg figured in the Highland costume -a shirt and socks- in which to my eyes, at least, he appeared to uncommon advantage; and no one had a better chance to observe him, as will presently be seen" (Melville 255). Not only are we made well aware that man must set aside his differences and work together, we become perceptively tuned to an image of Queequeg's "uncommon advantage" under his skirt as he flails about among the whale, the sharks, the blood, and the sea. Dramatic omission aside, Ishmael does make an excellent point that we rely on hundreds of people each day to ensure the safety of our lives; doctors, engineers, and more. Here again we are reminded that the lessons learned of this voyage are universally applicable, "Well, well, my dear comrade and twin-brother, thought I, as I drew in and then slacked off the
rope to every swell of the sea - what matters it, after all? Are you not the precious image of each and all of us men in this whaling world? That unsounded ocean you gasp in, is Life; those sharks, your foes; those spades, your friends; and what between sharks and spades you are in a sad pickle and peril, poor lad" (Melville 256).

Stubb's boisterous humor is dramatically altered from Ishmael's dry, educated wit and his sensibilities are more in tune with the average sailor archetype. As soon as Queequeg is hoisted back aboard and released from the Monkey-Rope, Dough-Boy hands him -gasp"a cup of tepid ginger and water!" Stubb's reaction to the temperate drink exemplifies his mischievous reputation as he ensures Queequeg receives the booze he rightly deserves, against the wishes of Aunt Charity and Starbuck. Like an advocate, Stubb fights for the right for his brave men to drink the "good stuff", with a flurry of wordplay that proves irresistible. He spouts, in a pattern soon to become familiar, "'Ginger? ginger? and will you have the goodness to tell me, Mr. Dough-Boy, where lies the virtue of ginger? Ginger! is ginger the sort of fuel you use, Dough-boy, to kindle a fire in this shivering cannibal? Ginger! -- what the devil is ginger? sea-coal? firewood? Lucifer-matches? - tinder? -- gunpowder? -- what the devil is ginger, I say, that you offer this cup to our poor Queequeg here." In essence, he defies prohibition of a substance which is well documented in easing a cold and wet man's spirits, a substance which a grown adult can moderately consume under his own responsibility. The ginger is a laughable substitute for grog, even Starbuck eventually admits the ginger is "poor stuff". The result can be put no better nor more succinctly than Melville himself wrote: "When Stubb reappeared, he came with a dark flask in one hand, and a sort of tea-caddy in the other. The first contained strong
spirits, and was handed to Queequeg; the second was Aunt Charity's gift, and that was freely given to the waves" (Melville 257).

For detail behind the nervous laughter these men feel having narrowly escaped Davy Jones' locker, one need look no further than the Hyena. The footnote of this chapter puts it thus, and forms a direct comparison to another seemingly vengeful and taunting beast. "The unnerving 'laugh' of the vicious African and Asian carnivore sets the mood for Ishmael's view of the universe here, as 'a vast practical joke'" (Parker & Hayford 188, no. 1). After being nearly given up by the ship for dead, Ishmael is confounded by how such a thing could happen, and upon consulting his shipmates finds "that such things did often happen", nobody else is quite so confounded, and are rather composed about the whole affair. Ishmael is forced to assume, like his comrade Mr. Stubb, a nihilistic sort of approach that greatly diminishes one's agency upon the world, but is also strangely reassuring. He says, "There is nothing like the perils of whaling to breed this free and easy sort of genial, desperado philosophy; and with it I now regarded this whole voyage of the Pequod, and the great White Whale its object" (Melville 188). Important is the term desperado, which carries the connotation of the old adage "desperate times call for desperate measures". Here, faced with certain death any time the boats are dropped to give chase, there is nothing left to do but jump in head first. Ishmael sets off with his new philosophy, unknowingly gaining a fair bit of confidence, noting "Now then, thought I, unconsciously rolling up the sleeves of my frock, here goes for a cool, collected dive at death and destruction, and the devil fetch the hindmost" (Melville 189).

Humor is of utmost importance for the crew and its very survival when faced with death. An excellent example
can be drawn from chapter 48 on the subject of Stubb's exordium: "He would say the most terrific things to his crew, in a tone so strangely compounded of fun and fury, and the fury seemed so calculated merely as a spice to the fun, that no oarsman could hear such queer invocations without pulling for dear life, and yet pulling for the mere joke of the thing" (Melville 182). Today, one could claim Stubb has an excellent command of black or morbid humor, which often includes a sense of irony and fatalism. He asks, "Why don't you break your backbones, my boys?" then moves to blasphemy, "never mind the brimstone - devils are good fellows enough." and proceeds to rewards: "the stroke for a thousand pounds", "the stroke to sweep the stakes", and "the gold cup of sperm oil". This leads to sarcasm, "Easy, easy; don't be in a hurry -- don't be in a hurry.", name calling, "dogs" and "ragamuffin rapscallions", and continues his sermon of satire - with Stubb finally brandishing his knife and clamping it between his teeth, and ordering his men to do the same.

This barrage implements both verbal and non-verbal humor, and is awkwardly inclusive. While Stubb seems to berate his rowers, they are all quite literally in the same boat. He may be more experienced, but near-equivalent fears and dangers apply equally to him. This experience is what allows him to so casually orate in the face of certain doom. Stubb is capable of perfectly assembling a visage impenetrable by his men, who are incapable of determining his true emotion, a sense of truth, nor the state of affairs (especially since the rowers faced backwards). They are calculatedly left in limbo, their thoughts massaged exactly to perform one goal: maximum performance in the "religion of rowing". This system of control and/or support is delivered purely through speech, no threats or actual physical assaults required, exactly like a preacher. By
employing this method, Stubb maintains a sense of camaraderie, leaning the scale towards support, avoiding authoritarianism and therefore lifting morale. This juggling act is imperative to the officers of any establishment in order to survive, an essential part of which is humor - easing stress and distancing the crew from an otherwise grueling and deathly occupation. This is where Stubb equalizes with Ishmael, in their capacities to utilize lightheartedness as a tool of stabilization, of sanity. While Ahab wants merely to appease his men, or rather as shown in chapter 46 - Surmises, "To accomplish his object Ahab must use tools; and of all tools used in the shadow of the moon, men are most apt to get out of order" (Melville 177). Ahab hunts other whales for oil only so the men have a reward in mind so as not to mutiny, to maintain his monarchic system of control against rebellion. Starbuck is a sober, conservative Christian man, and Flask is *out* for the pure excitement of hunting whales - but not for the pure, cold, calculated revenge of Ahab. Yes, Stubb, like a figurehead of democracy, works with the people and for the people in an attempt to console them - albeit with a tough love repartee. His humor finalizes the loyal attachment, and his long days of whaling flying the flag of fatalism seem to have benefitted his survival - so far.

The primary elements of Stubb's chant, the fun and fury, seem undeniably mutually exclusive until a second revisiting: the thrill of danger does exist, and these two extremes of human emotion are intricately related. They are, like the hierarchy of control on a ship, most carefully balanced. This duality, drawing back to 'fun and fury', complements those timeless comparisons of philosophy and great literature: life and death, blackness and whiteness, love and hate. Each requires the other to exist, and draws men to gamble their fortunes. We are led on to this
realization early in the novel when Ishmael introduces his thoughts on the draw to the ocean and its reveries. Ishmael notes on the sea's magnet-like draw: "If they but knew it, almost all men, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me" (Melville 18). "There is magic in it. Let the most absent-minded of men be plunged in his deepest reveries .... " The endless horizon of water instills a vast sense of wonder. "As everyone knows, meditation and water are wedded forever. Why is almost every robust healthy boy with a robust healthy soul in him, at some time or other, crazy to go to sea? Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity? The tormenting image of Narcissus that we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans: it is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all" (Melville 19). This ungraspable phantom of life is worth repeating, for it is the extremely complex range of humanity that drives people to explore the uncharted, to discover new truths, and essentially, to live. Again, Ishmael defies traditional sentiments in favor of something perhaps more intuitive, a strong connection with his fellow man and nature. The marriage of meditation and water brings many associations - the sea is an uncharted place of wonder, excitement, and beauty; yet, it is simultaneously an isolated and dangerous abyss almost entirely out of man's control. It is also a religious experience, an entirely transcendental ideal, something intuitive with nature and entirely outside of religious doctrines or otherwise traditional church experiences. It is why fun and fury not only are able to coexist; it is why that is essential.

These contrasts are transferred down to everyday items, like Queequeg's harpoon in chapter 4, where Ishamel comments: "I was watching to see where he kept his razor, when lo and behold, he takes the harpoon from the bed
corner, slips out the long wooden stock, unsheathes the head, whets it a little on his boot, and striding up to the bit of mirror against the wall, begins a vigorous scraping, or rather harpooning of his cheeks. Thinks I, Queequeg, this is using Rogers's best cutlery with a vengeance. Afterwards I wondered the less at this operation when I came to know of what fine steel the head of a harpoon is made, and how exceedingly sharp the long straight edges are always kept" (Melville 39). The weapon's utility is apparent but its status as an object out of place makes the whole scene clumsily comical. Thus begins one of the many examples of the "noble savage", a concept grown in reaction to centuries of brutal colonialism, where a native human uncorrupted by (European) society turns out better than the so-called civilized man; in this case Queequeg solves a problem in a more efficient manner than Ishmael could, using his tools at hand. Another example of this reversal is seen in chapter 13, which explains the cannibal's inability to use a wheelbarrow. Never having seen such a device used before, he ties the thing up and throws it over his shoulder. Ishmael responds to this laughable anecdote: "'Why,' said I, 'Queequeg, you might have known better than that, one would think. Didn't the people laugh?''' (Melville 61) which is in turn responded with another story. Here a "very stately punctilious gentleman, at least for a sea captain" receives a lesson in cultural norms at Queequeg's sister's wedding, when he believes himself, ironically, "being Captain of a ship - as having plain precedence over a mere island King, especially in the King's own house" and mistakes a ceremonial gourd for a finger-glass. "'Now,' said Queequeg, 'what you tink now? Didn't our people laugh?''' (Melville 62). These examples serve as an acceptance of cultural relativity, as well as a jab at the fallacy of common sense. Interactions like these are Melville's hope that humanity can
come together to understand each other, without violence, but in the spirit of teamwork spiced with a healthy sense of humor.

Stubb's speeches are conveyed with diction and improvisation unanticipated from the commander of a whaling boat in such an intense situation, so this - the upsetting of expectations - is what makes the scene humorous to both the reader and the fictional crew. In the crew's case, this humor provides necessary psychological relief and distance from the stressful and dangerous situation. The rest of the passage highlights the opposition: "Besides he all the time looked so easy and indolent himself, so loungingly managed his steering-oar, and so broadly gaped -- open-mouthed at times -- that the mere sight of such a yawning commander, by sheer force of contrast, acted like a charm upon the crew. Then again, Stubb was one of those odd sort of humorists, whose jollity is sometimes so curiously ambiguous, as to put all inferiors on their guard in the matter of obeying them" (Melville 182). The prospect of such a sloth-like commander who, like a professional athlete or master craftsman excels at their trade to such a degree as to make their efforts seem effortless, has the effect of instilling almost certain simultaneous dread and awe. The use of "humorists" in the last sentence is complicated for the modern reader, who may assume Stubb is a jester or joker. We are corrected by a footnote, however, explaining that the use is in fact the archaic one, "Not 'comedians' but those subject to a peculiarity of character because of the proportions of the four bodily fluids (according to medieval physiology), in Stubb's case his jollity" (Parker & Hayford 182, no. 2).

Here we are confronted finally with our second definition and usage. Humor used in this fashion is connected to a past of pre-psychology and pseudoscience
known as Humorism, theorized by the Greek physician/philosopher Hippocrates. He defined these four fluids - blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm, which were perfectly balanced in a healthy person. When disturbed, the imbalance was said to be the cause of all disease, and was also attributed to a variety of effects upon temperament, resulting in corresponding dispositions: sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic respectively. These four elements corresponded to several other tetrads: the four ancient elements (air, fire, earth, and water), the seasons, and organs of the body (the liver, gall bladder, spleen, and brain or lungs). While the scientific basis for these temperaments is surely obsolete, the psychological demeanors of people mapped by it exist today, and our modern use of the term derives from the ability of outside forces to affect our emotions. Humor helps us to digest the major themes of the novel - monomania and its associated obsessions, primarily revenge, and 19th century society's issues with racism, nationalism, religion, and American identity.

Moby-Dick is of course a complex work, and that is what grants the text its staying power and status as a classic. Interpretations and insights surge forth like the endless waves of the sea. While the main conflict, Ahab vs. the Whale, is obvious, perhaps the more interesting subject is Ishmael's conflict with himself. The man is a liberal of his time, maintaining a constant vigil at moderating his beliefs and accepting alternate points of view. His outlook on life is admirable, and his status as the lone survivor is perhaps a toungue-in-cheek hint that asking one's self "What would Ishmael do?" is perhaps the more correct question to submit.
Works Cited


Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* is one of the best novels of all time without a doubt. The author builds up the story by applying various devices such as different narrative techniques, allusion, observation, humor and irony, keeping up the reader’s attention and interest throughout the novel. He is a master of depicting events, characters and sights in a brilliant manner that they are easy to visualize making the novel come alive. Though it has this effect, the filming of the story is hardly imaginable, it is so elaborate that no attempt on screen can reflect the near translation of the epic. Putting it in a sequence of series, of exactly 135 episodes, could be a solution, but only a feeble one.

While reading the text our senses of taste, smell and touch will be affected, apart from sight and sound. Strange, but this book is capable of working on these senses as well. Before joining the crew and embarking the Pequod, Ishmael and Queequeg stay at the Try Pots, recommended by the landlord of the Spouter-Inn, for a couple of days. It is not only the best kept hotel in Nantucket, but serves delicious chowder too (chapter 15). The landlady, apparently, the only one female character appearing physically in the novel, is in charge of the inn, serves them supper. Ishmael complains about her “rather cold and clammy reception in the winter time” for hastily taking an order, “clam for two” to eat. Then comes the pleasant surprise, “a warm savory steam” smoking chowder is served at their table. Ishmael exclaims addressing the reader: “Oh, sweet friends! Hearken to me. It was made of small juicy clams, scarcely bigger than hazel nuts, mixed with pounded ship biscuit, and salted pork cut up into little flakes; the whole enriched
with butter, and plentifully seasoned with pepper and salt.” Not only their appetite gets sharpened, but that of the reader’s even if they have never tasted chowder before. No wonder that Ishmael wants some more. As cunning as he is, he tries a little experiment, so this time “in a few moments the savory steam came forth again, but in a different flavor, and in good time a fine cod-chowder was placed” on the table. Chowder is served all day at the Try Pots for any kind of meal, be it morning or evening. In Nantucket everything is absorbed with fish, and a less pleasant observation is that even milk tastes of fish.

In chapter 91, the Pequod meets the French ship. “‘Button de Rose’ […] was the romantic name of this aromatic ship.” Long before the watches could report the sight of the ship, the noses of the crew could detect from far away by its odor, which was not in the least pleasant. Melville perfectly describes how disgusting this stench is by contrasting it to that of the image of a rose-bud. There is the ship with the name Rose-bud, but smells nothing like it. The unsavory smell comes from the so called “blasted” whale that is tied to the ship. Its smell was “worse than an Assyrian city in the plague, when the living are incompetent to bury the departed”. Later it is recognized that there is a second whale on the other side that “seemed even more of a nosegay”. What makes this chapter comic is how Stubb ridicules the ship by his comments filled with flowery allusions (apart from his talk to the French captain interpreted by the Guernsey-man). The reader can picture the French crew how they “would drop their work, and run up to the mast-head to get some fresh air”. Some of them dipped oakum in coal-tar to smell, and others smoked their pipes having broken off of its stem that filled their nose in order to avoid inhaling the stink. Only Stubb suspects that there is still something more valuable than oil in the second
whale, so he tricks the French and keeps the whale. He is proved to be right, he finds “something that looked like ripe Windsor soap, or rich mottled old cheese; very unctuous and savory withal”, the ambergris. This is the essence for producing perfume. In the Ambergris chapter, Ishmael introduces this substance and highlights what kind of ferment is gained from a sick whale. In the previous part the smell was described by the contrast of the rose-bud and the stench, now from this stink the pleasant scent is attained. Ishmael tells that the whales in general are “by no means creatures of ill odor”. He describes the scent of the whales by a splendid simile, he says “the motion of a Sperm Whale’s flukes above water dispenses a perfume, as when a musk-scented lady rustles her dress in a warm parlor.” The reader, probably, falls in love with the whales after having imagined getting close to the huge elegant creatures.

Melville also succeeds in producing result in the reader’s sense of touch. Upon reading Ishmael’s account (chapter 94), everybody knows what the spermaceti is like. If the sperm is taken out from the head of the whale it quickly cools and crystallizes into lumps. It was the crew’s duty to squeeze these lumps back into liquid form. Ishmael became extremely keen on squeezing these lumps, his “fingers felt like eels, and began, as it were, to serpentine and spiralize.” He kept his hands “among those soft, gentle globules of infiltrated tissues, […] as they richly broke to my fingers, and discharged their opulence, like fully ripe grapes their wine”. The material of this substance not only felt really good to his hands, but it also cleansed his heart from the “horrible oath” that the crew took to hunt down Moby Dick. Bathing his hands in the sperm made him feel “divinely free from all ill-will, or petulance, or malice, of any sort whatsoever.” He squeezed it till he almost melted into it not realizing that he was squeezing the other
whaleman’s hand that he mistook for the “gentle globules”. This experience is just as self-indulging for him as being lost in a sweet reverie, it brings out his very sentimental side, he wishes he could keep squeezing that sperm forever, he would love to involve everybody into this avocation saying “let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness.” After these enthusiastic lines who would not like to place their hand into a bowl of spermaceti? Of course, every single reader would do it, especially when they envisage those “long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti” as Ishmael fantasizes about it. It is beautifully exemplified; the reader knows what this essence feels like.

Melville’s spell is the ability how he can describe various things to the very details that are easily identified making the reading of the novel so enjoyable. He is able to depict taste, odor and touch that catches the reader’s imagination. Not even mentioning the different allusions to religion, mythology and philosophy that can be revealed throughout the journey on board of the Peaquod.
… lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some indiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it. In this enchanted mood, thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space. (162)

Upon the uppermost point of a mast, Herman Melville’s hero, Ishmael, presents a necessary vacuum, a peculiar conceptualization of time. In such a state, where one becomes diffused through time and space, apperception transcends spatial boundaries and a unique state of mind, an “unconscious reverie” overcomes the absent-minded youth. What Melville describes here is a process entailing both the loss of spacio-temporality and the loss of identity, a process analogous to the act of reading a literary text in numerous aspects.

“A novel is not, as M. Poullion thinks, a way of reproducing time; it has its own time, it is a unique way for time to temporalize (Levinas, *Collected* 10).” In its nature, a
literary work of art is characterized by a potential diffusion, a loss of time in its traditional sense. The aesthetic experience of the interplay of Text and Reader creates an ever-moving, ever-altering point of reference, whereby Text and Reader are said to be everywhere and nowhere, neither in the past, the present, nor in the future. The Text is subject to the interpretation of the Reader by which its present is never completed, its past is constantly altered and its future is forever withheld. By way of explanation, when time is out of joint,

[a]n eternally suspended future floats around the congealed position of a statue [as well as a literary Text] like a future forever to come. The imminence of the future lasts before an instant stripped of the essential characteristic of the present, its evanescence. It will never have completed its task as a present, as though reality withdrew from its own reality and left it powerless. In this situation the present can assume nothing, can take on nothing, and thus is an impersonal and anonymous instant. (Ibid.)

To what extent Melville intended to venture into the unique way of time where ocean reverie takes place is difficult to tell. His descriptions, however, inevitably touch upon philosophical questions, such as the notion of infinity, identity or transcendence.

The “howling infinite” whereby Melville describes landlessness inevitably suggests that a necessary vacuum, a possible infinitude characterizes the ocean, and thereby ocean-reveries: “in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God—so, better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety” (116). However, as seen from Levinas’s words, the instant which hosts reverie is
rather a series of ungraspable moments—*now-here, now-here* (see my endnote 1), using Martin Heidegger’s terms. This unique way of time is yet also the fusion of the two subjective entities of Text and Reader through the act of reading. It is in the blending of the temporality of the two and the longing for a mutual interaction that produces a state of diffusion, an ever-altering negation of a certain point in time. And since both parties share temporality, and their temporality presupposes a being established, the negation of time must exclude infinity. Thus, it may be said that the act of reading takes place in such negations of time, and that “negativity is incapable of transcendence” (Levinas, *Totality* 41; see my endnote 2)

Infinity (see my endnote 3) and metaphysics do not coincide with negativity, argues Levinas, since negativity presupposes a being established, placed in a site where he is at home […] The idea of the perfect and of infinity is not reducible to the negation of the imperfect; negativity is incapable of transcendence. Transcendence designates a relation with a reality infinitely distant from my own reality, yet without this distance destroying this relation and without this relation destroying this distance, as would happen with relations within the same. (ibid.) Is then Melville wrong in presupposing that the object of reverie, along with the act of reading is infinity? Couldn’t the answer lie in the fact that the soul is attracted to the “howling infinite” in the indefinite dissolution of time and space?

“Why is almost every robust healthy boy with a robust healthy soul in him, at some time or other crazy to go to sea? Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were now out of sight of land?” (Melville
What Melville realizes here is a universal desire in the human soul. This is the same desire which drives one to go to sea or to undergo an aesthetic experience. However, when discussing the idea of infinity, Levinas points out that “infinity is not the object of contemplation, that is, is not proportionate to the thought that thinks it. The idea of infinity is a thought which at every moment thinks more than it thinks. A thought that thinks more than it thinks is a desire. The idea of infinity is a desire” (Levinas, *Collected 56*). By its nature, what draws us to infinity is then necessary a desire, and by the lack of its satisfaction (as “it is unquenchable, not because it answers to an infinite hunger, but because it does not call for food” (ibid.)), it must also remain a desire, the “ungraspable phantom of life”. Thus, to speak of infinity as the metaphysical stage where the act of reading takes place would mean that either the Text or the Reader had transcended its spatial and temporal boundaries and that the “spirit [had truly] ebbed away to whence it came” (Melville 162; see my endnote 4), by this however, we would claim that the desire is quenched and we have achieved a state of perfection.

Levinas argues that the “characters of a novel are beings that are shut up, prisoners” (*Collected 10*). According to him, narratives bind beings in a fate despite their freedom. “Their history is never finished, it still goes on, but makes no headway” (ibid.). The time, which is an “eternally suspended future […] forever to come” is prone to stop dialectics and time, creating what he calls the *meanwhile*. This place is where “the horizon of the future is given, but the future as a promise of a new present is refused; one is in the interval, forever an interval” (11).

He then brings up a literary example as well:

The characters of certain tales by Edgar Allen Poe must have found themselves in this empty interval.
A threat appears to them in the approach of such an empty interval; no move can be made to retreat from its approach, but this approach can never end. […] Art brings about just this duration in the interval, in that sphere which a being is able to traverse, but in which its shadow is immobilized. The eternal duration of the interval in which a statue is immobilized differs radically from the eternity of a concept; it is the meanwhile, never finished, still enduring—something inhuman and monstrous. (ibid.)

As seen, for Levinas, art is an interval, a *meanwhile*, where one experiences loss: possibly a loss of future, of satisfaction, of freedom, and the loss of identity. It is a petrification, not of a certain point in time, but an empty interval. Though Levinas portrays this “eternal duration of the interval” as inhuman and monstrous, I must argue that this emptiness does entail the potentiality to be mobilized. What seems immobilized in art is in fact ever-moving—“never finished, still enduring”, as Levinas *does* say it—when acted upon. In fact, this emptiness leaves room for opportunities of interpretation and what is called inhuman is rather something “impersonal” or “anonymous”. Melville recognizes this impersonality, however, the term here refers to the loss of identity: “lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity” (162). The loss of identity, whereby one “takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul” (ibid.) may be referred to by the word *death* as well, since it is an instant similar to the eternal duration of the empty interval. It is also a state of emptiness—or emptying oneself to be able to intake and accept a mutual interaction and interplay.
Levinas also recognizes the connection between *meanwhile* and *dying* (see my endnote 5): “The time of *dying* itself cannot give itself the other shore. What is unique and poignant in this instant is due to the fact that it cannot pass” (Levinas, *Collected* 11). Death, which is “sublated” (ibid.), is a state of loss—in the act of reading it is primarily the loss of identity.

At first sight this state inevitably seems *petrifying*, in the frightening sense of the word. John Wenke, a professor of English, describes Ishmael’s experience the following way:

As ‘unconscious reverie’ reels within, ‘Descartian vortices’ swirl below. [A]t last, Ishmael reports, ‘he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature’. […] In *Moby Dick*, Ishmael’s cosmological considerations on the relation between visible and invisible domains, with all attending questions regarding human and divine natures, reinforce his belief in the non-transcendent capacity of human consciousness, the brute factuality of phenomena, and the implacable inviolability of ‘that howling infinite’.

If this state were truly a place of horror (see my endnote 6), Melville would not have written: “better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety” (116). Though there is a certain loss, what Ishmael encounters is not brute factuality, but “the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul”. It is an interspersed image, an image of his soul reflected in the mystic ocean; the image of the ungraspable phantom of *life*. Thus, the loss of identity is in fact an altered identity regained—a “situation [where] the present can assume nothing, can take on nothing, and thus is an impersonal and
anonymous instant” (Levinas, *Collected* 9). Quoting Melville’s words: “There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life imparted by a gentle rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God” (163). In this metaphoric death, life is regained, as if one, like Ishmael after the Parsee’s disappearance, had buoyed up by a coffin. For “all men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever present perils of life” (276).

“But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all, and your identity comes back in horror” (163). The horror, therefore, lies not in ocean reveries, which by definition alludes to dreams, but in life without such an inspiring experience. As Dr. Géza Kállay points out in an analysis of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, since Freud we know that we do not have direct access to [dreams] at all; we rather remember our “translations” of it into thoughts or speech, and part of the analyst’s work consists precisely in trying to get to the “original” thought deciphering the “dream-meaning” (“Treumdeutung”) in an—as Paul Ricoeur would argue—ultimately hermeneutical process. (10-11)

This experience of translation and interpretation in relation to dreams, as well as to the act of reading is a metaphorical Moby Dick, “the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it” (Melville 162). This white whale, comprises the whiteness, which is “the absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors” (Melville 196; see my endnote 7). It is a double-edged sword, the potentiality of horror and
aesthetics. In Levinas’s comparison, art and dreams share the same nature too. However, he concludes that the “instant of a statue [and perhaps literature] is a nightmare. Not that the artist represents beings crushed by fate—beings enter their fate because they are represented. They are enclosed in their fate but just this is the artwork, an event of darkening of being, parallel with its revelation, its truth” (Levinas, Collected 9). The enclosure of the self and the artwork is certainly a deprivation of freedom. In the suspended instant of meanwhile, however, the interaction of Text and Reader creates the measureless oceans of interpretations and a desire for aesthetic pleasure rooted in infinity is provoked. In such a vulnerable condition of acting upon one another, whether it will be a dream or a nightmare is a matter of a hermeneutical interplay as well as a matter of moving a foot or a hand.

In discussing the infinity of time, Levinas remarks that memories, seeking after lost time (see my endnote 8), procure dreams, but do not restore the lost occasions. Thus true temporality, that in which the definitive is not definitive, presupposes the possibility not of grasping again all that one might have been, but of no longer regretting the lost occasions before the unlimited infinity of the future. It is not a question of complacency in some romanticism of the possibles, but of escaping the crushing responsibility of existence that veers into fate, of resuming the adventure of existence so as to be to the infinite. The I is at the same time this engagement and this disengagement—and in this sense time, drama in several acts. (Totality 282) (my emphasis)

Recalling Melville’s words on the mast-head, “lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded [Reader] by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity…” (162). The Reader is not only forced to engage
and disengage, seeking after lost time, but he is also to fall into a dream-like reverie. Since Levinas gives a parallel argument, I feel the need to quote him here at length:

An image is musical. [...] The idea of rhythm, which art criticism so frequently invokes but leaves in the state of a vague suggestive notion and catch-all, designates not so much an inner law of the poetic order as the way the poetic order affects us, closed wholes whose elements call for one another like the syllables of a verse, but do so only insofar as they impose themselves on us without our assuming them. Or rather, our consenting to them is inverted into a participation. [my emphasis] Their entry into us is one with our entry into them. Rhythm represents a unique situation where we cannot speak of consent, assumption, initiative or freedom, because the subject is caught up and carried away by it. The subject is part of its own representation. It is so not even despite itself, for in rhythm there is no longer a oneself, but rather a sort of passage from oneself to anonymity. This is the captivation or incantation of poetry and music. It is a mode of being to which applies neither the form of consciousness, since the I is there stripped of its prerogative to assume, its power, nor the form of unconsciousness, since the whole situation and all its articulations are in a dark light, present. Such is a waking dream. (Levinas, Levinas 132)

A waking dream, the definition of reverie, as seen from Levinas’s deduction is possibly a mysterious participation, an anonymity, a dissolution that is experienced in the act of reading. Although apparently Levinas mentions only two branches of art, namely music and poetry, I must argue that the idea of rhythm shall be found in the act of reading (see
my endnote 9) and therefore in the aesthetic experience of any literary genre. *(Moby Dick* is in many respects a fitting example, as Richard H. Brodhead also indicates, “*Moby Dick*’s always renewed thrust toward ultimate statement gives it its distinctive rhythm as a meditation in prose” (5).)

Since “an image is musical”, a novel, filled with images is necessary musical too; and there is a rhythm, a measured flow and symmetry which lulls us into an opium-like reverie, embedded into a unique sense of time, or rather, existence. However, in the case of reading literary texts, this existence is necessarily created in the very act, so as the lost and regained identity is to be interpreted as a certain meaning. The state of *meanwhile*, similarly to Wallace Stevens’s poetic stage, has to be constructed:

> [The theatre of modern poetry] has to be constructed.
> It has to be on that stage,
> And, like an insatiable actor, slowly and
> With meditation, speak words that in the ear,
> In the delicatest ear of the mind, repeat,
> Exactly, that which it wants to hear, at the sound
> Of which, an invisible audience listens,
> Not to the play, but to itself, expressed
> In an emotion as of two people, as of two
> Emotions becoming one. (11-19)

On such a stage, actor and audience experience a unity, in which both open up to the other, allowing the two emotions to alter and conjoin. Yet, openness on this stage equals vulnerability, as in this state one is defenselessly exposed to the impact of the other. In this quest and diffused state, in this enchanted mood, do Text and Reader dream vulnerably. For

> in vulnerability […] lies a *relationship with the other* which causality does not exhaust, a
relationship antecedent to being affected by a stimulus. The identity of the self does not set limits to undergoing, not even the last resistance that matter “in potency” opposes to the form that invests it. Vulnerability is obsession by the other or an approaching of the other. It is being for another, behind the other of a stimulus. (Levinas, Collected 146)

Vulnerability in this sense is then an aid, which provides unlimited opportunities to form under the “obsession” of the other. With each encounter with this other, there is a potential developmental shaping, which may be called co-construction—the construction of the stage of reading, together with the construction of a potential meaning under the collaboration of Text and Reader. This vulnerable state is as if two were attached to one another by Melville’s monkey-rope (see my endnote 10)—as if down there, some ten feet below the level of the deck, half on the whale and half in the water as the vast mass revolves like a tread-mill beneath, the Reader were wedded to another, vulnerable and dependent.

“We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men”, said Melville revealing a truth that may be applied to literature as well. For as Roland Barthes points out, “the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (877). The text in its nature bares the essential characteristic of interdependence. And not only does it entail intertextuality, but it also denotes an inseparable condition of Text and Reader. Ocean reverie, as a possible allegory of the act of reading may then be said to be such an interrelation between water and sailor or between the whale and the whale hunter. The result of the experience—whether the encounter happens to be horrible or pleasant; whether
we identify with Ahab or Ishmael; or whether we get a stiff drink of grog or ginger—which will depend on both the Text and the Reader. “And perhaps, at midday, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek [we] drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever” (Melville 163). *Meanwhile*, the drama has just begun, for although the last chapter of the novel ends by saying “the drama’s done”, in a creative reading process, *meanwhile* is the point where the drama possibly begins.

**Endnotes**

1. Space itself *for itself* and thus emerges from the indifference of subsistence. Posited for itself, it distinguishes itself from this or that point; it is *no longer* this one and *not yet* that one. In positing itself for itself, it posits the succession in which it stands, the sphere of being-outside-of-itself that is now the negated negation. The superseding of punctuality as indifference signifies that it can no longer lie quietly in the “paralyzed stillness of space”. The point “rebels” against all the other points. According to Hegel, this negation of negation as punctuality is time. If this discussion has any demonstrable meaning at all, it can mean nothing other than that the positing of itself for itself of each point is now-here, now-here, and so on. (Heidegger 393)

2. “The idea of the perfect is an idea of infinity. The perfection designated by this passage to the limit does not remain on the common plane of the *yes* and the *no* at which negativity operates; on the contrary, the idea of infinity designates a height and a nobility, a transcendence. [...] The idea of the perfect and of infinity is not reducible to the
negation of the imperfect; negativity is incapable of transcendence. Transcendence designates a relation with a reality infinitely distant from my own reality, yet without this distance destroying this relation and without this relation destroying this distance, as would happen with relations within the same….” (Levinas, Totality 41)

3. “Infinity is characteristic of a transcendent being as transcendent; the infinite is the absolutely other. The transcendent is the sole ideatum of which there can be only an idea in us; it is infinitely removed from its idea, that is, exterior, because it is infinite” (Levinas, Totality 49).

4. Although Melville characterizes reverie as a returning to an original, infinite state, and a diffusion through time and space, the soul is incapable of achieving such a state, hence the desire, which presupposes a state of denouement.

5. “Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded forever” (22), wrote Melville. The truth of this statement is justified in the fact (in reality, only one of the facts) that “Mnemosyne (personification of memory) was also the name for a river in Hades, counterpart to the river Lethe, according to a series of 4th century BC Greek funerary inscriptions […]. Dead souls drank from Lethe so they would not remember their past lives when reincarnated. Initiates were encouraged to drink from the river Mnemosyne when they died, instead of Lethe” (“Mnemosyne.”). But what is it that draws us to great bodies of water? What are we longing to remember of to forget? “Memory, after the event, assumes the passivity of the past and masters it” (Levinas, Totality 57). In this sense of the word, memory interlocks with mastering, hence we
may interpret “vacant, unconscious reverie” as a vulnerable condition when one is not in control — one is not the master.

6. Lawrence Buell in “Moby Dick as a Sacred Text” also points out the possibility of such horror when encountering the White Whale.

The response leads ultimately to a reading of Moby Dick as about an encounter with the realm of the transcendent that dramatizes parallel failures of human striving (Ahab) and knowing (Ishmael). In this reading, Ishmaelian mockery of the kind just noted starts to look like self-protective compensation for the frustration and anxiety of failing to grasp the elusive, mysterious, and therefore threatening Other. (61)

7. Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color; and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows- a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink? (Melville 196)

8. Lost time may be interpreted as a state of diffusion though time and space.

9. “As already observed, rhythm is an important element in reading because reading the rhythm is reading the rhythm of reading. Rhythm is the investment of words by the voice, the way an individual psychophysiology informs a verbal
string. Rhythm is the medium of an intersubjective communication, principally between a text, itself treated as the centre of a subjectivity, and a reader. Expressed another way, rhythm is something both read out of a text and into a text; rhythm is something which 'belongs to', is generated by, a text and a dynamic, a mode of being, breathed into a text by a reading consciousness. In speaking of rhythm as a dynamic, we mean the combined dynamic of a self in discourse and a production of meanings. 'Le rythme d'un discours se produit en meme temps que le sens' (Bourassa, 1993: 72). By a ‘dynamic’, we also mean the shape of time in linguistic experience, in the experience of linguistic being. This time is always the present of enunciation, but it is a present of enunciation which includes the present of the past (memory) and the present of the future (anticipation, fantasy)” (Scott 8-9).

10. “So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that while earnestly watching his motions, I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two; that my free will had received a mortal wound…” (Melville 310).

Works Cited


"The waves, too, nodded their indolent crests; and across the wide trance of the sea, east nodded to west, and the sun over all" (230).

When reading and writing of and about *Moby-Dick* we learn about our own life journey, we learn about adventure and discovery, but most often, we learn about that which we cannot understand because the search for one true meaning is a never-ending struggle. When reading about Ishmael's journey, the journey within us is what matters most; never knowing ourselves our greatest discovery, and this is what interests me. Perhaps the most interesting travel narrative that I can think of is Cristóbal Colón's, *Diario de a bordo*; a historical account documenting the discovery of the Indies’ America; and perhaps the most fantastic, Marco Polo's account of his travels to a mythical and mystical China. As is often the case in travel narratives, whether fictional or not, there is a difficulty in differentiating from the imagined and real because these are found in worlds that travelers visit but can never truly call their own; because traveler's identities are so often bound to another time and place. The traveler's time travels with him and only after time has finished its own journey can the traveler reconcile his thoughts and re-construct the fragmented anachronisms being stored and aged in the barrels of thought that overflow with potential, and lie waiting for the “Season-on-the-line” (168). Ishmael's time catches up with him at various times throughout the novel as invisible and ungraspable fragments that are broken down by the timelessness of ocean waves.
If we look into the sea we will find that a "strange dreaminess" does there reign, and proliferates all over the ship that sails over it. If we look at everything liquid on this ship, we find the "strange dreaminess" there too, as if one were threaded to the other we feel the vibration of these interwoven threads that give shape and form to everything (179). Look into the oil barrels and you discover a liquid thread there too; look in, closely, and you find your reflection looking back at you. Next to one barrel, you would find more, one after another, spoils of a never-ending thread viciously woven by the timelessness of death. Ishmael the writer opens those barrels in order to give his thoughts some kind of space and place, and to shed some light on the ungraspable darkness that he himself seems to disappear into, and reappear out of. While looking into these barrels, Ishmael finds an absence of shape, an abundance of newness, and an infinite clarity; he finds the lumps of space and place that his generation has been searching for.

However, as he dips his hands into the lumped spermaceti and squeezes the lumps back into liquid, he himself almost melts into it, his thoughts and visions of night find the substance with which to tell the Truth that all men seek (323). In the squeezing of sperm, Ishmael finds a single fulfilling form of Truth and a greatness that is in need of substance, of "attainable felicity" (323). Unsubstantial as his Truth may be, Ishmael the writer ultimately finds that in the absence of a liquid substance there is an opportunity and a possibility for all probabilities leading to one lumpy certainty. This single attainable certainty is shared with every man who looks into the barrels and then towards the ocean with him (18).

“I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. That is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a
philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon the sword; I quietly take to the ship" (18).

While Ishmael is in search of his own Truth, Ahab finds himself alone at the invisible bottom of an empty barrel, breaking through “pasteboard masks”, tracing courses “over spaces that before were blank,” and on his boat being "drawn. up towards Heaven by invisible wires” (140; 166; 417). In relation to Ahab's Truth, Ishmael's Truth is a freeborn secret that he does not know of himself but can perceive in others. Ishmael's secret is the singular puzzling slobgollion “most frequently found in the tubs of sperm, after a prolonged squeezing, and subsequent decanting” (323). Ishmael sees in the fragments of the whale a decanting of the sea into the word, the sentence, the paragraph, and ultimately the text. The cadence of the sea is written into every line so that one line flows along the sea of lines that must at some point crash on our minds and shape them with their force.

Ishmael the narrator's Truth is a telling and secretive account of the uncertainty and difficulty he faces when seeking a “wisdom that is woe”; a wisdom always coming as the consequence of life at sea (329). Ishmael's woe is like every other man's woe who like an oyster observes the sun through the water, “thinking that thick water the thinnest of air” (45). Thinking is Ishmael's woe, and knowing that he thinks is a greater woe still. Ishmael's wisdom is the self-discovery of a young adventurer on an odyssey that leads back to land, his voyage never complete but rather still on its way out (47). Ishmael's woe is that there is no end to the journey. This woe is evoked when Ishmael says,

[…] poor fellows, [...] are startled by the cry of "There she blows!" and away they fly to fight another whale, and go through the whole weary thing again. [...] hardly is this done, when — There
she blows! — the ghost is spouted up, and away we sail to fight some other world, and go through young life's old routine again (331).

Ishmael's woe is being a "poor fellow," startled by life, going through the cyclical motions of battle; which is a senseless vengeance-driven chase and a never-ending fight with "some other world" for "some other world" whose own woe is fighting “some other world”. Of this woe Ishmael says, "Oh! my friends, but this is man-killing! Yet this is life" (331). In this way Ismael links man, death, and life to one another and to all others, one man's death feeding the other man's life, one man's invisibility becoming another's visibility, which is synonymous to survival. The ocean becomes the infinite witness of this life and death struggle between men and whales; it becomes the battlefield and deathbed of every soldier and "simple sailor" who takes to an aged American wood ship.

The origins of departure exist as multiple negative hermeneutics, which are as visible to the narrator as they are invisible to the reader whose untrained eye strains to discern the indiscernible absence of color or concrete presence of all colors; both myths that hide nothing (165). Ishmael's objective is to reveal the blankness of the page and give it the black color of words. Blackness is not only seen in the ocean's depths, but on the surface of the page. Ishmael the writer sees the blackness as a contrasting color, one that gives visibility to that which is not there. Blackness is the absence of all light, and the occupation of all white space. In order to discover what blackness wants to reveal we need only look at the outline of what it darkens.

The dark lines that give order and form to the text are dividing lines between shades of gray, blue, white, and black; lines that sway from side to side on the surface of the ocean and the surface of the page. As the Pequod takes
flight, the point of departure becomes less and less visible to the men who look back at it. Likewise, the reader's original point of departure is made a distant memory invisibly visible through the heavenly margins of poetical passages designed with a kind of teleology that sacrificially defies its own rhetorical force. Ahab defies his own purpose by going after the White Whale when everyone and everything tells him that it will lead to his demise. In a sense, the Pequod also partakes in a sacrificial defiance as it sails on, against all adversity, its sails filled by the same wind that lifts the white surf and makes it crash on the Pequod's collapsing sides. However, the force behind the ship's sails is not simply the wind but also the men that it transports; men whose lives are lived on the ocean and may ultimately be ended on it. The Pequod's and its crew's sacrificial purpose is to kill a White Whale for the glory, vengeance, and wealth in it; a wealth that is measured in barrels of oil.

At the end of the novel we find that Ishmael is the only one left and it is through him that we learn of such a voyage, in a sense he is the last driving force; the force that lives to give the pen dampness from within. Ishmael's sacrifice is living to see his comrades being pulled under by the vortex of the sinking Pequod, and through his narrative seeing them rise from the depths of the ocean that consumed them. Ishmael's survival story, having been experienced long ago, is revived by Ishmael's narrative voice; a voice that guides us through what will become our own journey. His narrative voice is the polyphony of visible, as well as invisible, selves, our-selves included, that passionately give life to the story. The visible and invisible selves whose identities were drowned under the waves and layers of time are carefully unveiled by Ishmael the narrator. At the culmination of his journey, Ishmael finds himself alone, trying to put together the pieces that made up the Pequod
and its crew, and holding on to a line that ties him to all men. The line that ties Ishmael to all men survives by guiding itself through the danger of the ocean and going in search of the other survivors. Ishmael extracts the sailor's voices from their watery graves; re-casting a lifeline that is at all times in search of an imagined identity. Ishmael's narrative voice, like a wave, crests at an angle, along nameless beaches, perhaps unnamable. The narrative makes up for the emptiness that inevitably comes with memory, which is always selective and retrospective.

For Ishmael, the writer, writing is the act of giving visibility to language. Language has its ancient oral tradition, that which comes from the music of the sea and the heartbeat of the land. In writing about the invisibility of things, Ishmael is essentially writing the invisible. With the opening line, “Call me Ishmael” the narrator names the invisible, gives it visibility. The name “Ishmael” pulls the reader from his known world and throws him/her into the freezing foam of the ocean where he swims unconsciously like a dog, unaware of the heroism he/she will partake in (64). The journey that Ishmael embarks on inevitably becomes our own journey, a beginning in the middle. It is necessary to begin in medias res if Ishmael is to tell the story of the White Whale, a whale without origin, without visibility. Reading the story in such a way means entering blindly; means being put there without knowing what to expect. Thus, we embark on a blind search for the White Whale that invisibly haunts and hunts Ishmael his crew, and us from within. Moby Dick's origin, like Ishmael’s, is a recovered past that begins with Ahab and literally ends with Ahab. Where the story ends or begins, we find that even in this we are deceived, for we have “Etymology” and “Extracts” as two possible beginnings, two accounts of intertextuality documenting the complexity of language and
the impossibility of a singular national imaginary. Ishmael's language is our own, and in order to tell the story we are to become like the Nantucketer who lives at sea, hides among the waves, climbs them, and for years knows not the land; so that when we come back to it at last, “it smells like another world, more strangely than the moon would to an Earthsman” (66). Ishmael's voice grows in us and reverberates through us with the force of ocean waves; crashing on the rocky shore of our imagination.

However, what is important here is not the telling of the story, but rather discovering its meaning through its formlessness. The formlessness of the narrative lies in its apparent disorganization, which is in fact the writer's conscious act. The act lies in the admitted search for truth, a search that at times makes the reader question his/her own hermeneutic of truth. Throughout the novel, Ishmael seems in constant reverie over the significance of the ocean and the insignificance of man. The insignificance of man lies in the delusion that man has free will and the belief that motives come from a combination of fate and chance (22). Ishmael is chosen to narrate the story that Melville constructs from what appear to be disorganized thoughts; what Ishmael calls “careful disorderliness” (284). In Moby-Dick, I found unconventional meanings attributed to a subaltern language that appears to be that of the White Whale; a language that is translatable in the ungraspable whiteness, blackness, darkness, blankness, blue, black, yellow, red, white, and brown; every color as seen through Ishmael's critical and imaginative eye. The language that Ishmael spoke to me was that of Moby Dick, a character whom we know nothing about, except that he is white, a characteristic that sets him apart from all other Sperm Whales. Moby Dick's language is that of whiteness and invisibility. The meanings attributed to whiteness are to be
understood within the context of the world in which they were created; within their reflexive reasoning, so that when we dive into the depths of this kind of meaning, the possibility and probability of interpretation is expanded and multiplied with every dive.

The unconventional nature of the text is such that it gives it a transcendent quality, something characteristic of all great works of literature. To see the plurality of meanings in languages is to blend the material and the metaphysical. In *Moby-Dick*, to see is to close one eye and look at a kaleidoscope of shapes and colors; all symptoms and symbols born as consequences of the literary/ideological, natural/material, domestic, and mysteriously cosmetic world; a world seen through the narrative consciousness and unconsciousness. The narrative unconsciousness is a galaxy that when seen from earth is said to form part of a celestial constellation, one among millions of others (our own constellation one among, and simultaneously apart, from the others). The symptom of the symbols is diagnosed by the writer who sees the constellation and identifies its meaning. The writer sees this as a process of oscillation and recreation; he finds himself always looking up at the sun's true light, as opposed to an artificial light.

When light travels through water it bends, this is called refraction; this bend is similar to a wave's refraction, except, a wave's refraction is produced by a combination of friction and velocity. The same refraction that is created by light traveling through water can also be created through narrative. The communion of words and meaning results in optical and mental illusions which in *Moby-Dick* gets projected as chaotic ejaculations of whiteness and blackness. The wonder of this book is that the essence of words can be found when shadows are born upon clarity, grayness upon grandness, and abysmal darkness upon
mortality. It is easy to see, there, just beyond the horizon, from where the sun is seen rising or into what it is seen falling, receding or contracting. Like the ink laid down on the surface of this paper; like light deployed into the sky; the bright blue day; or dark and starry night, always something unimaginable and unattainably lost in the meanings of words or sometimes half hidden by "blood-muddled water" (256). This double-sided illusory quality is what makes the reader involuntarily turn the page and mechanically delve into the light with one eye open and the other shut, one looking and the other imagining; simultaneously observing Ishmael's stylized form and visualizing his organized asymmetry (263). It is every reader's responsibility to seek the other side of the page (whether that side be a polarized, reflexive, reflective, inverted, or otherwise unknown other); the concealed and ungraspable side of knowledge; to move "[...] through that infinite blueness to seek out the thing that might destroy them!" (415). As Ishmael might put it: we are but monkeys on a monkey-rope and our individuality is merged with that of everyone else's.

As sun, earth, ocean and land converge, so does time and space, day and night, something always in contrast with the moving other. In the other, man encounters something that he himself cannot encompass. Something so great that when weaving the threads that make up his blanket, the architect discovers that a pyramid of words, like a tent made of glass, confines him from within, for he is inside the belly of a great whale; the blanket now a layer of skin which is no skin at all. This symbolic pseudo-blanketing is alluded to by the implied author who in "Etymology" tells us that, "While you take in hand to school others, and to teach them by what name a whale-fish is to be called in our tongue, leaving out, through ignorance, the letter H, which almost
alone maketh up the signification of the word, you deliver that which is not true" (7). The importance here is not what is said but how it is said; not what is concealed or left out but rather how it is concealed or left out. What we should look at closely are the "others," "them," "ours," and the "you," all leading to the absent "I," or in this case the "H." The narrator delivers a distant image forming one whole image; an image composed of graceful streams. This is the art of Ishmael the writer. Ishmael attempts to grasp greatness; to grasp his own image in the water; an image that is not truly there but is extracted or birthed when he dips his hand into the stream of meaning. Ishmael, the writer gives us a bird's eye view because that is all he can afford if he is to survive, if he is to keep himself from being sucked into the vortex, and from unveiling his own secret, his own mortality.

Ishmael says, "what the White Whale was to them, or how to their unconscious understandings, also, in some dim, unsuspected way, he might have seemed the gliding great demon of the seas of life, -- all this to explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go" (158). This is how Ishmael the narrator communicates the way in which others perceived Moby Dick, but Ishmael's own understanding of Moby Dick is provided as he squints through the frosted window, what he sees on the other side is whiteness. Ishmael the narrator’s task is to provide the reader with the same white image, from the same white side so that we can see from the entrails of his own reality what lies on the other side of his imagination.

Our ship, the Pequod, sets sail across the sea, a sea into which Ishmael plunges, a sea of magnificent magnitude and mysterious magic that weds "meditation and water" forever. Here, at sea, is where man finds himself absent-minded, and as he perishes in his deepest reveries, adventure becomes
translated into both gain and perdition. At sea he is as a boy with a "robust and healthy soul in him" who must go in search of the world only to find himself looking inward and discovering an image; an image which Ishmael tells us is the “image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all” (19-20). On land Ishmael is a simple sailor.

As Ishmael tells us, "Take almost any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down in a dale, and leaves you there by a pool in the stream." If there then what? Is water our final destination? Is this magnetic force alone enough to satisfy man's curiosity? But what of the terror that lurks within the waves, or is that terror what we whet, what we yearn for in our deepest reveries? Whatever it may be, "There is magic in it" (19), there is a mysterious energy that pulls and pushes us closer to the edge of a slippery cliff; a rhetorical mass of land that protrudes and is carved into by water. From here, we look down and, as if with a bird’s eye view, we are able to see the narrator's design. From beyond the cliff, Ishmael the narrator holds out a hand, and pulls us down into the waves; the same invisible/supernatural hand that Ishmael feels as a child, and later again as a man. The hand slowly starts taking us under, submersing him with us, until his head and ours are under water and the last breath has left our lungs, and his last willed thought has left his mind and entered ours. Then, "Let the most absent-minded of men be plunged in his deepest reveries — stand that man on his legs, set his feet a-going, and he will infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in tall that region" (19). Then, let his eyes and our mind, under water, become as one with him, sailors on one ship. Yes, he casts his line; yes, we take it; yes, line by line; yes, day by day, until “Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever” (19). It is under this premise that we must partake in the journey, for we have lost sight of ourselves on shore and
now become fish under the obscurity of night, involuntarily returned to the coast. These are the perils of Melville's generation and of American modernity; the peril of an imaginary nation in search of an imaginary identity; a people in search of themselves; and the realization that mortal man's mind may have been pushed down from the unknown heavens. Such is the case today, for Ishmael continues to pull readers down into the depths of an unknown ocean in search of a White Whale.

If meditation and water are wedded, then so too is man's image wedded to his identity, and similarly wedded are his sense of self to his consciousness and unconsciousness. Ishmael's self image is what he calls “the ungraspable phantom of life”; a visible thing which is not there as we see it, but rather as we imagine it; as we interpret it; and as we unknowingly internalize or forcefully and imposingly extract it from within us. The image is invisible because it is everything living, the oversoul that we do not see in ourselves but look for in others. The story that Ishmael tells is a tale of meaning, of interpretation, and of the unknown. At any moment the reader, much like a loose-fish, may be captured by the text. *Moby-Dick* can be understood as a shark in the sea; its jaw, a half hidden reflection of meaning; and every reader, a Queequeg swimming in blood-muddied water, presumably praying to his Yojo (256). In this society of sharks and savages, Ishmael, like Don Quixote, is not really a character at all, but rather a mythical figure that acts as the connecting thread to a much larger work. Ishmael is a thread holding many different types of anecdotes together in a single form so that we as readers can find meaning in its finished form. Ishmael's function is to assimilate other pseudo-characters into his work and into his own character so that he is no longer himself but the character he would like to be identified as.
Ishmael's story, as he narrates it, is foreign to him; it is a reflexive extraction of consciousness acting, or being projected, as the voice of his character. With every line he comes a step closer to his asthmatic fate; a fate that at every instant becomes a gasp for air, which puts him in a dark and blurred state of mind, or a spell. It is the same air that he gasps for when dealing with the invisibility of feminine characters. About his fate Ishmael says,

I cannot tell why this was exactly; yet, now that I recall all the circumstances, I think I can see a little into the springs and motives which being cunningly presented to me under various disguises, induced me to set about performing the part I did, besides cajoling me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased freewill and discriminating judgment. (22)

In his story, Ishmael sees himself as a performer, an actor in a dream. After his encounter with Moby Dick, Ishmael is able to see a little into the springs and motives, but he is still only half aware of why he survived and others perished. In the Spouter-Inn he sees shades and shadows in paintings and from them extracts images which are put in motion by his imagination.

A painting is like the ocean in the sense that it attracts Ishmael's imagination and involuntarily blows the spirit of creativity into his eyes; eyes which are but two sunsets on two horizons, east and west. Ishmael's fascination with the unknown is in a sense his own willed and unwilled fate. Through Ahab, Ishmael is able to live the willed terror and demonic madness that drives Ahab to self-destruction or perhaps willed sacrifice (143). Ahab's obsession with his own demise, that which has been prophesized, leads us to believe that his is an artificial death, one with artistic qualities. Ishmael then is part of that art, part of the
paintings that he interprets and dives into, magnetically attracted by the mystery in it. Ishmael lets us know that he should not be separated from Ahab and the rest of the crew when he says,

I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine (152).

Ishmael and Ahab's pills of violence and revenge are taken blindly, and now their adversary, Moby Dick, gives rise to new terrors in their entrails, "new terrors unborrowed from anything that visibly appears" because they remain beneath the surface, formless, colorless, and invisible (153). The mystery or superstition that surrounds Moby Dick declares him "not only ubiquitous, but immortal (for immortality is but ubiquity in time)” (155). Moby Dick's prominent features are a "peculiar snow-white wrinked forehead, and a high, pyramidical white hump," with these "he revealed his identity, at a long distance, to those who knew him (155). The reality in this is that no one, not even Ahab himself knows Moby Dick. Ahab's ignorance is akin to the fear that digs into him from within, a fear that inhabits a part of Ahab that is larger, darker, and deeper than any identity that Ishmael can see with his eyes (157). The implied narrator says "What the White Whale was to them, or how to their unconscious Understandings, also, in some dim, unsuspected way, he might have seemed the gliding great demon of the seas of life,—all this to explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go" (158). Ishmael's performance has its limits; it is bound to survival, and cannot be returned to the time and place that has been abandoned (158). In Moby Dick's whiteness lies the impossibility of death, the
possibility of killing that which is not visible is ungraspable.

I say: your whales must be seen before they can be killed; and this sunken-eyed young Platonist will tow you ten wakes round the world, and never make you one pint of sperm the richer. Nor are these motions at all unneeded. For nowadays, the whale-fishery furnishes an asylum for many romantic, melancholy, and absent-minded young men, distinguished with the carking cares of earth, and seeking sentiment in tar and blubber (134).

The young Platonist's asylum is the ocean; an ocean that captivates the romantic, melancholy, and absent-minded young men in trances of whiteness (164). However, this would be a pessimistic point of view about an optimistic youth. The youth seeks fear, which is where the invisible spheres are formed (164). Yet, in Queequeg and Starbuck we have two different kinds of youth; Queequeg, "the savage stood erect there, and with intensely eager eyes gazed off towards the spot where the chase had last been descried. [...] Likewise, [...] Starbuck himself was seen coolly and adroitly balancing himself to the jerking tossings of his chip of a craft, and silently eyeing the vast blue eye of the sea" (184). In Queequeg and Starbuck we find the same kind of romantic absent-mindedness of the young Platonist, with one exception. Sentiment is not in the tar and blubber that they need to kill for, but in the ocean for which they live. Their silent gaze is a sentiment directed towards the sea, and the sea's blue eye looks back at them, perhaps also searching for this sentiment of life. The same sentiment that they see in the centre of the lake where the sailors are greeted by the fearless and confident young whales (302).

There is a supernatural hand that seems placed over his minds eye allows him to be darted by what he calls a
deceptive idea, or phantom (26). This "nameless, unimaginable, silent form or phantom" is meaning; a meaning that leads to one portentous something in the paintings (37). This painting is his own interpretation of life, his own struggle with the demons within him. He is like the tumbler that the poison is pored into because he deceives himself in trying to explain that which he fears, the unknown through cylinder without—within (27). Ishmael is deceived by the language of whiteness, for "But all in vain; those young Platonists have a notion that their vision is imperfect; they are short-sighted; what use, then, to strain the visual nerve? They have left their opera-glasses at home" (136). Ishmael's performance is to be an affected horror, a young child woken up from a nightmare. Ishmael tells us, "while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch, slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror [...] with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever" (136).

"So, floating on the margin of the ensuing scene, and in full sight of it, when the half-spent suction of the sunk ship reached me, I was then, but slowly, drawn towards the closing vortex" (427).

Ultimately, Ishmael is rescued from the vortex towards which he is slowly drawn; however, his original identity has been lost or transformed in the process. The ending of this novel is a continuous display of violence, in this sense we can say that the book knows its place, a place that gives us its facts and waits for us to "come in and supply the thoughts" (333). My thought is that Ishmael has been orphaned by the Pequod, which carried and protected him and his crew from the elements throughout the story. The Pequod's old wood mothered these sailors while the ocean and the wind propelled them through life's perils, and its
never-ending woe. As the Pequod disappeared into the ocean, the white surf continued beating on its sides and Ahab's own side beat along with it. Man and everything manmade collapsed while the "great shroud of the sea rolled on", triumphantly, "as it rolled five thousand years ago" (427). If this novel tells the story about the struggle between the Pequod's crew and, Moby Dick, then the irony of this novel is that the victors of this story have no voice to tell of their victory, perhaps this is why Ishmael is left alive, so that he can tell the story of the victors. In this sense, Ishmael's own identity comes second to that of Moby Dick, despite the fact that Moby Dick's identity can never truly be known.

Nevertheless, the great survivor and victor of this journey is not Ishmael, nor the White Whale, but the Whiteness of the sea; the same whiteness that gave birth to Moby Dick and death to the Pequod and its men. The whiteness of the surf represents all the invisible forces that drove the Pequod's crew to their doom. In the whiteness of the ocean, we see the blurred reflection of immortality, we see the end result of Ahab the isolato's self-destructive madness, we see woe's secret wisdom, and we see the end of Ishmael's battle with the elements; in. the whiteness of the sea we find peace. The sullenness of the white surf points to the ocean's deadly nature, brooding sorrow, silent, and gloomy tone. In the ocean, we find another orphan, one of the many who have left the safety of land in search of their identity. At the beginning of this essay, we set out to discover meaning of the invisible and instead we have discovered the power of invisibility. Ultimately, we discover that the visibility that Ishmael creates attracts us to ourselves by letting us see reflections of ourselves in the transparency of words.